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QUEEN CITY NERVE



Audrey Baran lands on her feet after parting with UNC Charlotte

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Renderings of park designs to be included as part of the I-77 toll lane project were released on May 4. Courtesy NCDOT

EXIT RAMP

City council rescinds support for I-77 toll lane project in surprise vote

BY RYAN PITKIN

Charlotte City Council met for a marathon business meeting on May 11 complete with a plot twist at the end.

The agenda included a presentation on data centers followed by a vote on whether to move forward with a potential moratorium on the facilities, a public hearing on the proposed Fiscal Year 2027 budget, and a decision on a resolution clarifying council's stance on the I-77 toll lane project, which turned into a surprise vote to rescind the city's support indefinitely.

Below, in the print version of our popular Council Quickies newsletter, we cover all the notable discussions and decisions from the hugely impactful seven-hour May 11 meeting.

Visit qcnerve.com/memberships to get recaps sent straight to your inbox after every meeting so you can stay engaged without having to sit through the monotony of bureaucracy.

Mayor Vi Lyles' big announcement

The May 11 meeting was Mayor Vi Lyles' first since announcing she would be leaving her office before her term is up.

In a news release on May 7, 73-year-old Lyles, who became Charlotte's first Black woman mayor in 2017 and is currently the second longest-serving mayor in the city's history, announced that she will resign effective June 30.

The Democrat easily won re-election last November with more than 70% of the vote and her term wasn't set to end until late 2027.

"As in all things politics, I am sure there will be speculation as to why I am making this decision now," Lyles said in a statement. "Simply put, I am going to spend time with my grandchildren."

As reported by WFAE, there have been concerns among colleagues and other people close to the mayor about her ability to do the job following awkward moments during public appearances including council meetings when she has become flustered.

"I am very proud of my record as mayor, but I also firmly believe that true leadership includes knowing when it is time to let the next generation of leaders take over," Lyles said in her statement.

During her tenure, Lyles has prioritized affordable housing, transportation and sustainable economic development. Charlotte City Council will appoint an interim mayor to finish out Lyles' term.

Lyles started the May 11 meeting by acknowledging all the support she had seen in the days since her announcement.

"I've got a little bit of a change in my life, and I just want to make sure that all of your are aware, and I'm just so grateful for the number of people who have been supportive of me making a decision that was probably the most difficult thing that I've ever had to do. But if you saw my little girls, oh my gosh, you'd just know that I was doing the right thing."

Lyles was met with a standing ovation by her fellow council members and others in the room following her short statement.

Data center presentation and vote

Kicking off the May 11 data center discussion, Deputy City Manager Alyson Craig pointed out that Senate Bill 382, which went into effect in December 2024, limits the city's ability to restrict land uses.

Craig said the legislature may consider changes to SB 382 during the current short session and city staff is hopeful to see some changes made that would better allow Charlotte to have more agency over its own planning.

As it stands now, Charlotte is home to a dozen data centers comprising 1 million square feet. There is a single rezoning petition currently awaiting approval on 58 acres near Reedy Creek and three that have already been approved and are in the permitting process. Those include a 156-acre project near Moore's Chapel Road in west Charlotte, 122 acres near Back Creek in northeast Charlotte, and 2.6 acres in Uptown.

According to Duke Energy, data centers account for less than 1% of the current share of statewide peak electric demand but are projected to account for 10% by 2030.

The AREP data center being built in northeast Charlotte will use 1.2 million gallons of reclaimed water (not drinking water) per day during peak season (when it's hottest out). Reclaimed water is often used for irrigation and other non-drinking uses.

The Moores Chapel facility will use 35,000 gallons of water per day, with lower demand due to using an electric cooling system rather than a water-based one.

Craig said that, because of Senate Bill 382, the city cannot revise zoning standards for data centers based on location, buffers or other standards.

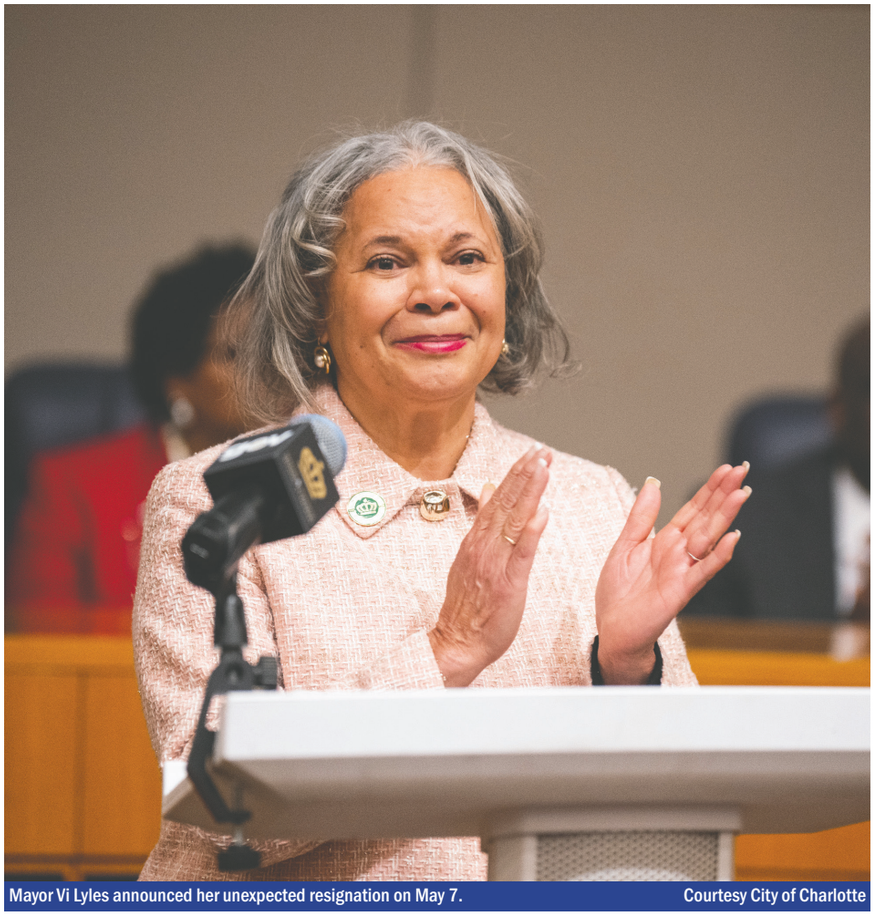
On the other hand, the city still could consider stronger application materials through the Research and Study process and/or implement a temporary moratorium on data center petitions as has been done in cities including Durham, Boone, Kings Mountain and others around the state.

Any moratorium would need to be preceded by a public hearing. Staff recommended a hearing be held on May 26, followed by a vote on a potential moratorium on June 8. The city is proposing a 150-day moratorium to give enough time to explore options for the city to create guardrails around data center development.

"This conversation is no longer hypothetical," said Dimple Ajmera. "This is about our children, this is about our health, and this is about whether families can peacefully live in their homes."

"We should have acted on this way before [now]," said JD Mazuera Arias, citing LaWana Mayfield, who brought up the issues with data centers in 2023. "As a governing body, we will always have legal risk ... But there is more of a human risk by not acting now to protect our residents."

Mazuera Arias said his research has shown that data centers using closed-loop water systems, which the city's presentation showed decreases water usage at a facility by about 70% on average, is often heralded as an environmentally friendly



Mayor Vi Lyles announced her unexpected resignation on May 7. Courtesy City of Charlotte

alternative but actually increases energy usage and greenhouse emissions while requiring the use of chemicals that need to be carefully managed to curb negative environmental impacts.

Council unanimously approved moving forward with a public hearing on data centers for May 26, followed by a vote on a potential 150-day moratorium on data center petitions on June 8.

Public hearing on proposed budget

Council moved into the chambers to hold its public forum for the proposed Fiscal Year 2027 budget, which was presented to council on May 4.

Terri White with the Charlotte Museum of History addressed council about arts funding, stating that the council appears to believe spending on the arts sector is frivolous and unnecessary until all other issues within our city are solved — a time that will never come.

"The arts should not become an afterthought when challenges arise," said White. "History has shown us that they matter more during difficult times than ever."

Community organizer Kass Ottley speaks in support of city workers, stating that the proposed 4% raise is not enough.

"We would like our workers to be recognized," Ottley said. "We would like them to get a 10% raise. We would like to see them thrive and be able to move up the economic ladder like anyone else in this city."

Dominic Harris, president of the Charlotte City Workers Union, said it was disrespectful to offer police a 10% raise, firefighters a 7% raise, and all other city workers just 4%. "Put some respect on our checks," he demanded.

Holly Savoy, executive director of Charlotte Trans Health, said the housing crisis impacts Black trans women the hardest. She asked that the city dedicate funding to train housing providers on nondiscrimination and affirming practices.

"When we invest in equipping our systems to serve everyone, we make Charlotte safer and stronger for all of us," said Savoy.

Shemika Robinson with the Charlotte chapter of the National Federation for the Blind discussed paratransit in the city, saying that people with disabilities and seniors who need transportation are treated like second-class citizens.

She claimed that paratransit buses are constantly breaking down on the highway because the "regular" CATS vehicles are given priority.

"Please think about us," Robinson said. "One day you're going to be here, a senior, and you'll think about how you were in a situation that you could've did something."

Carol Hardison with Crisis Assistance Ministry spoke in support of a $200-million housing bond, which is included in the People's Budget. The city manager's proposed budget includes a $125-million housing bond.

"We see the impact of mass displacement, when no matter how hard a family worked to provide stable housing it can be taken away on a moment's notice," Hardison said.

She added that eviction filings have surged recently, including 52,625 filings in the last fiscal year alone.



The proposed Transportation bond includes $10 million for cycling infrastructure Courtesy City of Charlotte

A number of leaders and survivors with local domestic violence and sexual assault organization Safe Alliance are called on the city to continue funding their critical work. The proposed budget includes no funding for the organization, which usually receives hundreds of thousands of dollars to carry out services and run a housing campus for women escaping domestic violence.

"This work remains essential to the safety and stability of our city," said Jamilah Espinosa with Safe Alliance. "This is the work that happens after that 911 call when the long-term safety outcome is actually determined. If community safety is truly one of the city's priorities ... then we cannot weaken one of the systems specifically designed to interrupt escalating violence before it becomes more lethal, more widespread and more costly to contain."

I-77 toll lane resolution and surprise vote

Council was set to vote on a resolution that would call for a pause to the controversial I-77 toll lane project so as to carry out due diligence, including a targeted reevaluation and design analysis of the project that would then drive timelines and decision-making.

"I seek acknowledgement of current and historical community harm of the I-77 corridor," said Kimberly Owens on why she was supporting a pause to the project. "I seek to provide acknowledgement of the true costs of this project. I hear it described as a $600-million project but we all know it's a $4-billion project, and the billions are not coming out of some developer's kindness or largesse. These funds are coming out of our pockets for the next 50 years."

Owens continued: "We cannot and should not absolve ourselves of the taint of decisions that affect the lives and livelihoods of our residents and the pockets and prosperity of our descendants. We need to lead on this. We need to challenge the narrative that NCDOT knows best when it comes to engagement with our region."

Renee Johnson seemed unconvinced that the resolution was a meaningful solution.

"This is not simply about pausing the process," Johnson said. "A pause keeps us moving down the same path. I believe that we need to start over and do this right ... We cannot continue making decisions of this magnitude using outdated analysis."

Council first voted on Mazuera Arias' substitute motion, which was already on the floor and included an amendment ensuring that a third party would carry out the analysis on the project. They approved that motion 10-1.

Before that vote, Dante Anderson said she was proud of the work council had already done for the community, getting NCDOT reps to come to Charlotte and listen to council members and community members, even standing up a community engagement center along the corridor.

Following that vote, however, Johnson moved for a full rescission of the council's original approval of the project, made in October 2024, so that the process could start from scratch with all that council has learned in the past year.

After a discussion with an NCDOT rep who was in attendance at the meeting, council approved Johnson's motion by a one-vote margin.

The 6-5 vote saw Renee Johnson, JD Mazuera Arias, LaWana Mayfield, Malcolm Graham, Victoria Watlington and Joi Mayo voting to rescind. Opposing votes came from Dimple Ajmera, James Mitchell, Kimberly Owens, Dante Anderson and Ed Driggs.

What comes next

Council's rescission of support for the project means Ed Driggs, as the city's rep on the Charlotte Regional Transportation Planning Organization, will be tasked with going to that body to try to get a majority vote among his fellow reps there to rescind the approval it voted on in 2024.

As for following up on other segments of the May 11 meeting, council members will get a chance to further discuss what they heard from residents during the public hearing in a budget adjustments meeting on Monday, May 18, followed by straw votes on June 1.

Council is then scheduled to vote on the budget's adoption on June 8.

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Participants in Dream.Org's Green Reentry pilot pose with Everblue instructors in Charlotte. Photo by Will Atwater

REENERGIZED

Second chances bloom in Charlotte's clean-energy boom

BY WILL ATWATER, NC HEALTH NEWS

Getting re-established is an uphill struggle for people who are coming home from prison or were otherwise involved in the criminal justice system. That was the experience of Candace Beverly, who was involved in the criminal justice system 20 years ago.

"My crime was not one that warranted me serving time, even though it left me with a scarlet letter," said Beverly, a 44-year-old Charlotte resident.

Beverly said people who've been involved in the criminal justice system often face employment challenges despite their best efforts.

Nationally, only about 37% of people released from prison manage to find a job within a year. In North Carolina, 41% of people found employment in their first year, according to 2023 data from the North Carolina Department of Commerce.

"When you make certain missteps in your life — and you learn from your experiences — far too often you're not given a second chance at being a productive citizen," Beverly said.

"As soon as they see that you were an offender, even though that was 20 years ago ... now you're deemed not worthy and you're not given a chance, which for some people — luckily, I'm not one of those — they give up, they give in."

For Beverly and nine other Charlotte-area people who were formerly incarcerated or involved with the criminal justice system, the odds for success may be slightly better thanks to a new employment training program.

In May, Dream.Org, a nonprofit that "sits at the intersection of climate, criminal justice and tech," launched a Green Reentry Incubator pilot in Charlotte to connect justice-impacted people with clean-energy jobs in solar, energy efficiency, EV infrastructure and green construction, said Jasmine Davenport, senior director of the organization's Green For All program.

"Charlotte is a growing hub," Davenport said. "There are so many opportunities we're seeing within clean energy. If this infrastructure is indeed continuing to grow, we can't leave out the individuals who are residents of the community and want to be able to write the next chapters of their lives."

As Charlotte helps anchor North Carolina's clean energy boom, with new grid and clean-tech manufacturing projects bringing jobs to the region, the Green Reentry pilot is a test of whether that growth can also reach people coming home from prison.

'Writing the next chapter'

To help participants take advantage of those opportunities, Dream.Org is teaming up with Charlotte-area organizations to provide job training. The pilot project lasts for eight weeks and includes a mix of virtual and in-person sessions.

Courses include "introductions to solar, the electric grid, electric vehicles and other green-economy topics, along with hands-on technical training," according to information provided by the organization.

The pilot offers wraparound support that organizers say is essential for people rebuilding their lives after incarceration. To that end, "we [offer] resume building workshops, finance, credit repair budgeting and budgeting courses," said Dani Thomas, Dream.Org's Green For All senior associate.

Beverly said Dream.Org's support is more than a ticket into a growing industry; it is a way for people with records to "step into their highest abilities" instead of feeling ostracized for life. She believes that when people are given a real chance to work, contribute and feel proud of what they do, it becomes far less likely that they reoffend.

Research has documented the health — and mental health — benefits of working, too, such as access to health insurance and improved mental health. Some research points to extended life expectancy and greater stability.

Dream.Org's Charlotte initiative comes as North Carolina engages with a broader wave of "fair chance" and reentry reforms. The state was one of the first states to sign on to Reentry 2030, a national initiative led by the nonprofit, nonpartisan Council of State Governments Justice Center and its partners. It calls on states to set bold goals for improving reentry outcomes — including a national target of reducing recidivism by 30% by 2030.

One of the four overarching goals in North Carolina's Reentry 2030 strategic plan is to improve economic mobility for people leaving prison, in part by expanding education and apprenticeships during incarceration and finding more employers willing to hire people with criminal records.

Each year, national analyses still find that more than a quarter of formerly incarcerated people are unemployed and that nearly two-thirds of people with records say they do not have quality jobs, according to Jobs for the Future's Fair Chance to Advance initiative.

Against that backdrop, Gov. Josh Stein has argued that reentry programs are vital — for people coming home and for the state's economy.

"People leaving prison [...] want a fresh start with their lives. They want a good job," Stein said during his keynote remarks at the 2026 NC Rehabilitation and Reentry Conference last month. "Employers want talented and motivated workers, and we all want to live in a safer, stronger state with more people contributing to their fullest potential."

Addressing energy burden, expanding opportunities

Everblue — a company that provides a weatherization assistance program — is one of the Charlotte-area organizations that Dream.Org is partnering with to help provide program participants with valuable job skills.

Through this course, participants are trained to conduct energy audits to "determine where the inefficiencies are," said Chris Sullivan, Everblue's project manager and head of the NC Weatherization Assistance program.

Sullivan said the energy audits offered through the state's weatherization program can be especially beneficial to low-income residents.

"For individuals that don't have disposable income and they're spending all their money on energy, [this program] takes the burden off of the grid, because if you help a home become more energy efficient, [it's] not pulling as much energy off of the grid, which helps everybody."

Tiffany Fant, founder of Sol Nation, one of Dream.Org's Charlotte partners, said in an email that "the certifications [participants] will receive, along with the training and understanding about energy burden and environmental justice, will allow them to be competitive in a workforce everyone is just getting skilled in. As a community, I believe it is our job to help remove barriers so that everyone will have the ability to thrive."

Research has also linked high energy cost burdens to worse health, including higher risks of respiratory problems, mental health conditions and tradeoffs with basics like food and medicine.

Thomas said the goal is to help participants lower their own energy use and bills while gaining nationally recognized certifications, such as Everblue's Weatherization 101, that they can use to find better-paying jobs in the green economy. Over the eight-week program, participants build skills, earn certifications, expand their professional networks and leave feeling more rooted in their cohort, their community and the broader green sector.

Participants receive a $3,200 stipend, free training and a laptop, as well as additional support services. The eight-week program ends in June and culminates with a graduation ceremony.

"We received over 52 applications when we were only able to take 10 folks," Thomas said. The message to participants, she added, is "no matter who you are, no matter what your background is, no matter what your interests are, there is a place for you in the green economy."

This article was originally published by NC Health News, an independent, nonpartisan, not-for-profit, statewide news organization dedicated to covering all things health care in North Carolina. Visit northcarolinahealthnews.org to read more.

INFO@QCNERVE.COM



The pilot program will provide eight weeks of job training in the clean energy space. Photo courtesy of Dream.org

OPINION



Duke Energy is awaiting approval from the NC Utilities Commission to implement a rate hike. Courtesy of Duke Energy

NICKELS AND DIMES

A Duke Energy rate increase would hit families like mine the hardest

BY KENDRA LUMPKIN BARBER

Last year, my fiancé and I were forced to live without electricity because we simply could not afford our utility bill. We had to stay with our grandmother for a week until the next pay period. No working family in America should have to live like that, in the richest nation on earth. Yet this is the reality for us and so many others in our state.

I'm originally from Jacksonville, North Carolina. However, I moved to Charlotte in 2021 and met my partner in 2023. We came out of homelessness together and, sometime later, had our first child. As a young mother, I am doing everything in my power to provide for my child. I am an IT student through a work program where I hope to begin my career in information technology.

I know what it means to work hard; I've worked in fast food, retail, warehouses and gas stations. I've always been taught that honest work is the pathway towards a good life in this country — that if you work hard enough, you will be able to sustain your family and even thrive.

But that hasn't always been our story. My fiance and I are on a fixed income and we do have to skip bills here and there. We have had to tighten our belts to the point where we feel suffocated, especially when it comes to essential things such as groceries.

If the cost of life's necessities weren't so high, I would use more money to buy more food and make sure my fiancé doesn't have to skip meals to feed our daughter. It's scary to have the possibility of homelessness thrown in our faces again, as if we don't matter. To know that everything we worked so hard for could be taken away with the slightest increase in bills is terrifying.

I've been a Duke Energy Carolinas (DEC) customer for years, and we are currently paying $65 per month for power. Of that, $14 goes to DEC as profit. That may not seem like much to a large company, but for families like mine, $14 a month makes a real difference. It feels like my bill has steadily gotten more expensive over time, and now DEC wants to raise rates by 15%.

This increase would raise my bill to $85 per month, and I honestly have no idea how my family will pay for this difference. We already forgo food as parents. Is Duke Energy asking us to starve our toddler to give investors more profit? That is the most selfish and inhumane thing that a company could do.

The North Carolina Energy Policy Task Force predicts DEC rates could climb up to 60% over the next 15 years. While squeezing its customers to make over 20% in profits, DEC spends thousands



Kendra Lumpkin Barber Courtesy of the author

of dollars on political donations, seeking to influence state lawmakers, avoid accountability and maintain its monopoly power.

I simply can't understand why DEC needs to take home even more of our money. I'm not the only North Carolina resident going through a similar situation. It's unfair that Duke Energy keeps adding fees and rate increases onto our bill with no clear explanation.

They keep piling more stress on top of us, even when they know the unfortunate circumstances that regular civilians like me are going through every day in the current economy.

The North Carolina Utilities Commission (NCUC), the public agency that oversees utility providers like DEC, will get to weigh in on Duke Energy rate increase, and their decision matters greatly to families like mine.

The NCUC has the power to stop this rate increase and spare North Carolinians another increase. But they're blocking people from speaking out and have added an arbitrary rule to cap the number of people who can register for public hearings.

I'm submitting a comment on the NCUC website to make sure they hear that I'm against this rate increase.

To submit a comment yourself, go to ncuc.gov and under "Consumer Information," select "Submit a Statement of Position."

We are working so hard to build a life for ourselves, but as costs continue to rise, it feels like it's becoming farther and farther out of reach. As parents, all we want is to give our daughter a good, stable life and that includes keeping a roof over our heads, keeping the utilities on and making sure there's always enough food on the table for all of us.

In America, working families like mine should never have to choose between keeping the lights on and putting food on the table. Yet that's the impossible decision that many of us often face.

I urge any fellow North Carolina residents to join me in advocating for our financial futures. Without us, the customers, they don't exist. Our voices matter and it's time we make sure NCUC hears us.

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COPLAND & KAHANE

May 15-16 • 7:30 p.m. • Knight Theater, 430 S. Tryon St. • $30-$112 • charlottesymphony.org

With bustling themes evoking a community coming together, Aaron Copland's "Appalachian Spring" is just part of Charlotte Symphony Orchestra's Copland & Kahane. Centered on the meaning of home, the program includes Jennifer Higdon's urban celebration "Skyline" and Gabriel Kahane's "emergency shelter intake form," a powerful oratorio that explores homelessness from multiple perspectives, with a choir of community members impacted by homelessness or housing insecurity. A pre-concert talk features Kahane, music director Kwamé Ryan, Roof Above's Liz Clasen-Kelly, and former Roof Above shelter resident Harrison Ervin. It's worth noting that "Appalachian Spring" interpolates the Shaker tune "Simple Gifts." There's no simpler, more meaningful, gift than providing people hearth and home.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SERIAL KILLERS

May 15 • 7:30 p.m. • Carolina Theatre, 230 N. Tryon St. • $47-$65 • thecarolina.com

John Wayne Gacy entertained children as a clown, Ted Bundy feigned injury so he could get close to young women, Henry Lee Lucas claimed he traveled with severed body parts in his car, and Jeffrey Dahmer confessed to cannibalizing his human prey. With analysis and case studies, forensic psychologist Dr. Rachel Toles investigates the criminal minds that capture our imagination. Seemingly ordinary, and predominately white and male, serial killers are our glimpse into the abyss. Dr. Toles examines the patterns, rituals and self-mythology that make them tick.

CLT ASIAN FESTIVAL

May 16 • 7:30 a.m.-5 p.m. • Ramsey Creek Park, 18441 Nantz Road, Cornelius • Free • charlottedragonboat.com

The Charlotte Asian Festival unites the city's Asian for a celebration of Asian-Pacific Heritage Month. The festival features cultural showcases from over 14 nations, where attendees can witness demonstrations of calligraphy and henna art while wellness booths spotlight tai chi, reiki and yoga. The fest's focus, however, is dragon-boat racing, in which teams paddle canoe-like craft adorned with dragon heads. (In Chinese mythology, dragons live in water and control the rain.) The tradition traces its origin to the 5th or 6th century AD, commemorating the poet and minister Qu Yuan, who drowned himself as an act of defiance against his king.



Queen City Fest
Photo courtesy of HandCrafted Market CLT
5/23

SHOW OFF YOUR CHARLOTTE YARD

Got a backyard you're proud of?

We're putting together a special Backyard Inspiration photo spread for our **Charlotte Outdoor Living Guide** and we want to feature real local yards — not stock photos.

We're looking for the spaces you actually live in and love:
lush gardens, cozy patios, killer grilling setups, kid-friendly backyards, fire-pit hangouts, porch jungles, and everything in between. If it's beautiful, creative, welcoming, or just the best spot to host your people, we want to see it.

How to enter:

- Snap a few photos of your outdoor space.
- Email them to info@qcnerve.com with the subject line "My Backyard."
- Optional: add 2–3 sentences about what inspired your outdoor space or what you love most about it.

Selected yards will be featured in our upcoming **Charlotte Summer Outdoor Living Guide** in print and online.

JOHN LEGEND

May 17 • 8 p.m. • Ovens Auditorium, 2900 E. Independence Blvd. • $98-$200 • boplex.com

While he was still in his teens, John Stephens was tapped by Lauryn Hill to play piano on her R&B hit "Everything Is Everything." Hill nicknamed her keyboardist John "Legend" and the moniker struck. In 2004, Legend dropped his debut, *Lifted*, a soulful fusion of R&B and hip-hop, featuring the singer's raspy, sophisticated vocals essaying secular hymns that update gospel's sinner/saint dichotomy with confident storytelling and more than a hint of salacious intent. Legend has produced songs for movies, stage and even children's music with 2024's *My Favorite Dream*. This intimate show weaves Legend's songwriting with stories about his life and career.

LORD JAH-MONTE OGBON, SAUTEED GRABBA, DJ PRAWN

May 19 • 9 p.m. • Snug Harbor, 1228 Gordon St. • $17 • snugrock.com

With a rave Pitchfork review and local billboards touting his latest LP *As of Now*, it seems Charlotte rapper Lord Jah-Monte Ogbon is having a moment — and it's about time. Whether balancing braggadocio and despair or traipsing the tipping point between complexity and relatability, *As of Now* is a hilarious and sobering masterwork. Ogbon never loses the ability to laugh at himself, especially when he's being dead serious. Electro-jazz combo Sauteed Grabba serves up sounds suitable for a Druidic space ritual. DJ Prawn runs the gamut from Jellowstoned, an intergalactic collaboration with Cosmic Collective and Trey Tarzia, to The Residents-meets-drum 'n' bass "INfinite healing."

MAYDAY: WOMEN IN DISTRESS WALK

May 20 • 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. • Bank of America Tower, 620 S. Tryon St. • Free w/ RSVP • tinyurl.com/MaydayCharlotte

Regardless of job title, social position or socioeconomic standing, any woman can be impacted by intimate partner violence. According to the National Organization for Women, 55% of all female homicide victims in America are killed by current or former intimate partners. Too often, women are murdered after reporting abuse. This is the price of inaction. The MAYDAY: Women in Distress walk and rally honors women murdered by their partners while amplifying the voices of those scared into silence and informing attendees how to support a loved one or community member. The walk culminates in a rally in front of First Ward Park, hosted by author-speaker Melody C. Gross and speaker-survivor Kristie Puckett.



Choncy
Via Facebook
5/26

TAYLS, HORSE ISLAND, KELSEY BLACKSTONE

May 21 • times vary • Petra's, 1919 Commonwealth Ave. • $19 • petrasbar.com

A furious burst of riff-driven vulnerability, Tayls' raging single "H8 Machine" is relatable because it expresses a universal message we all need to hear at one time or another: "You are not alone." The Nashville alternative rockers capture the melodic rush of the class of 1977 punk bands but also include swells of surf-rock guitar and a dramatic glam-rock coda. Charlotte emo-indie-rock four-piece Horse Island craft catchy, rampaging rockers like the clattering yet plaintive "For No One." With spare reverberating guitar and mellifluous scat singing, Nashville soul-pop enchantress Kelsey Blackstone kicks off "See You Never," a searing, soaring farewell to an unfaithful friend.

RUDIMENTAL

May 23 • 6 p.m. • The Music Yard, 2433 South Blvd. • $28 • musicyardclt.com

Hailing from London's East End, drum-n-bass trio and production team Rudimental burst onto Britain's dance scene with chart-topping collaborations like the aspirational electro anthem "Feel the Love" with English neo-soul singer John Newman, and the moody R&B and jungle collision "Waiting All Night" with vocal powerhouse Ella Eyre. Since then, Rudimental has kept to the song-based gameplan, teaming up with artists as disparate as Ed Sheeran, Bobby Womack, Macklemore and Khalid. In each case, Rudimental's fusion of house, soul and EDM uplift and propel powerful melodies. The trio's ebullient 2026 single "Love You More" refines the band's fusion of dance and pop.

QUEEN CITY FEST

May 23 • 5 p.m. • Levine Avenue of the Arts • Free • handcraftedmarketclt.net

Small businesses go big picture in this a full street takeover in the heart of Uptown. Hosted by event planner-shopping service HandCrafted Market CLT, Queen City Fest features a lineup of over 100 local makers, artists, boutiques and businesses with the personal touch drawn from across the Carolinas. Attendees are encouraged to bring friends, family and plenty of shopping bags to the five-hour long shopapalooza, one of the largest small-business events of the season. Patrons can spend the day exploring booths, discovering new favorite brands,and supporting the local businesses that make the Queen City special — all in the middle of a thriving, bustling metropolis.

CHONCY, PRETTY BABY, GENERAL PURPOSE, SOMNIUM

May 26 • 8:30 p.m. • Snug Harbor, 1228 Gordon St. • $14 • snugrock.com

The Cincinnati art punks of Choncy draw from a grand tradition of inspired Ohio weirdos like fellow Clevelanders Pere Ubu. On jittery, oddly moving avant-garage bangers like "Bypass," Chonchy eschews brute power for twangy guitars, off-kilter humor and bouncy paranoia. Bonus points for the song's video, in which the foursome windmill their guitars while standing in the middle of a wind farm. Charlotte post-punk-hardcore combo Pretty Baby tangles plaintive melodies with sheets of noise. Greensboro prog collective General Purpose essays multi-part, complex compositions like "Marionettes," which incorporates violin, sax and clarinet. On tunes like "8-Bit Ocean," Queen City math rockers Somnium fuse skittering rhythms with sunny, rippling melodies.





Baran Dance launched in 2012. Photo by Austin Byrd

MAKING MOVES

Audrey Baran lands on her feet after parting with UNC Charlotte

BY PAT MORAN

On April 18, Audrey Baran posted a selfie on her Instagram account in which she's extending her thumb-and-pinky in a "hang loose" gesture while standing in front of Robinson Hall for the Performing Arts on UNC Charlotte's campus.

"And like that ... she was gone," Baran's caption reads, paraphrasing a line of dialogue from the 1995 movie *The Usual Suspects*.

Baran has made many moves in her distinguished career. Her professional trajectory includes the roles of dancer, choreographer, founder and director of innovative troupe Baran Dance as well as UNC Charlotte professor and lecturer — but this is perhaps her most surprising move of all. After more than 20 years of involvement as both a student and faculty member, Baran has ended her association.

It began in 2000 when Baran first set foot on campus to earn a bachelor of arts in dance. She returned to UNC Charlotte in 2009 and since then has taught dance and yoga classes, choreographed student dance concerts, and set up a student internship program through Baran Dance.

The flashpoint for her separation from the institution is a new full-time faculty position the university created for the 2026-27 school year. Baran applied for the job but wasn't granted an in-person interview.

"It was a shock," Baran admits. "Not that I thought I was a shoo-in for the position, but I thought I had a strong chance."

Though the dance department's decision was a setback for Baran, the dance artist and educator is moving ahead. She's preparing to open a new business, East Side Yoga, and is currently in rehearsals for a collaboration that conjoins her dance company's abstract, kinetic vignettes with the immersive, enigmatic soundscapes of Charlotte rock four-piece Moa.

BDXM: Baran Dance and Moa goes up at Open Door Studios in the Eastway Crossing shopping center from June 5-7.

Doing academia's adjunct dance

After Baran's Filipina American family moved from New Jersey to Monroe when she was 4 years old, Baran promptly fell in love with dancing. She's been involved in the region's scene ever since and credits UNC Charlotte with introducing her to contemporary dance, influencing the kind of dancer and choreographer she would become. After graduating from the university in 2003, she returned to teach dance a few semesters over the course of 14 years.

In 2012, Baran launched Baran Dance. As its founder, lead dancer and principal choreographer tells it, the company's genesis was almost accidental. Baran was teaching contemporary dance classes at the company's now-permanent home, Open Door Studios, when she created a piece featuring some class members for a festival in Matthews.

"One of the dancers ... designed and printed a couple of t-shirts that said 'Baran Dance' and surprised me with them," she remembers. "I said, 'I guess we're a company now.'"

Baran Dance has since expanded to include a mentorship program with college-age students.

By 2017, Baran had earned a master of fine arts in dance at Hollins University in Virginia and returned to UNC Charlotte as an adjunct dance professor. Adjunct faculty often shoulder larger course loads than full-time faculty for far less pay, no benefits and shaky job security.

"As an adjunct, I taught as many as five courses in a semester. That's usually what most full-time [professors] teach in a year," Baran offers.

In 2019, she received the UNC Charlotte Distinguished Alumna in Dance award.

"My dad died two weeks before the ceremony and he was really proud," Baran says, her voice breaking as she recounts the memory. "That award sits on my mantle and reminds me about my accomplishments [at UNC Charlotte], but more so how proud he was of that."

In 2020, Baran was promoted to visiting assistant professor, a full-time position with benefits that included a lecturing role. In 2025, however, UNC Charlotte eliminated the position and Baran went back adjunct status.

In her stint at UNC Charlotte, Baran taught modern dance, beginning ballet and choreography. She also created powerful, enduring choreographic works involving social issues important to students including institutional racism, the environment, land ownership and gun violence.

In 2019, Baran's Luck of the Young encouraged dancers and audience members to process their still-fresh trauma from a campus shooting in April of that year, in which a student opened fire and killed two students while injuring four others.

Fall 2024's Open Wounds and spring 2025's Walls and Mazes addressed warfare, fueled by conversations about genocide, Gaza and the Holocaust. Along with teaching the choreographic process, Baran encouraged her students to do their own research about the topics they were making dances about.

"I think fostering this culture of reciprocal creativity was important," she says.

Bringing dance and yoga to east Charlotte

Baran says her department's chair Gretchen Alterowitz told Baran she wanted her to become a lecturer. A year later, in 2025, the department announced the creation of the Lecturer in Contemporary Dance and Creative Practice



BDXM will take place at Open Door Studios on June 5-7. Photo by Nick Sullivan



Baran Dance members rehearse for BDXM in June. Photo by Austin Byrd

position. Baran applied.

"The search committee has not selected you at this time to participate in campus interviews," a December 2025 email from Alterowitz to Baran reads.

"[Alterowitz] did not give me a reason why I was not selected for an in-person interview," says Baran, who decided not to pursue the issue any further.

She informed the chair she would not be teaching the yoga class she was scheduled to lead this summer, nor any classes beyond the spring 2026 semester.

"I was just so over this kind of dangling the carrot in front of me," Baran says.

Instead, she hopes to have East Side Yoga up and running by the end of the year.

"I've taught in just about every studio in Charlotte … [and] I've also taught yoga as a course at UNC Charlotte for the majority of the past decade," Baran notes. She says she's looking at locations in east Charlotte, primarily because the neighborhood has never had a yoga studio.

"The same dancer who made the Baran Dance t-shirt in 2012 just sent me a t-shirt that says 'East Side Yoga,'" says Baran. She intends to incorporate yoga philosophy and the practice's ethical restraints and recommendations in her classes.

"Even if it's just an hour once a week, you can still drop those little nuggets for people," Baran says. She currently has an Instagram account @eastsideyoga_clt, and a website littleyogithatcould.com where people can get updates on East Side Yoga's progress.

In a spirit of renewal and new beginnings, Baran Dance's current season is focused on reimagining and reshaping the company's older works into something new.

BDXM: Baran Dance and Moa looks back at a series of performances from 12 years ago, in which Baran Dance collaborated with Charlotte experimental band Sam the Lion. That group evolved into Moa, which is now composed of vocalist-keyboardist Lindsey Ryan, drummer-electronic mage Chris Walldorf, guitarist David Driscoll and Audrey's husband Mark Baran on bass.

"[The band] is different now and we're different now," Audrey Baran says.

Most of Moa's nocturnal, mysterious and luxurious music is brand new, with several pieces coming from the band's upcoming album *Ghost Notes*. Since the band is playing live to accompany live dancers, the performances promise spontaneity and surprises.

The performances at Open Door Studios will be in the round and Moa's Walldorf says rehearsals thus far have been like passing through a surreal funhouse mirror.

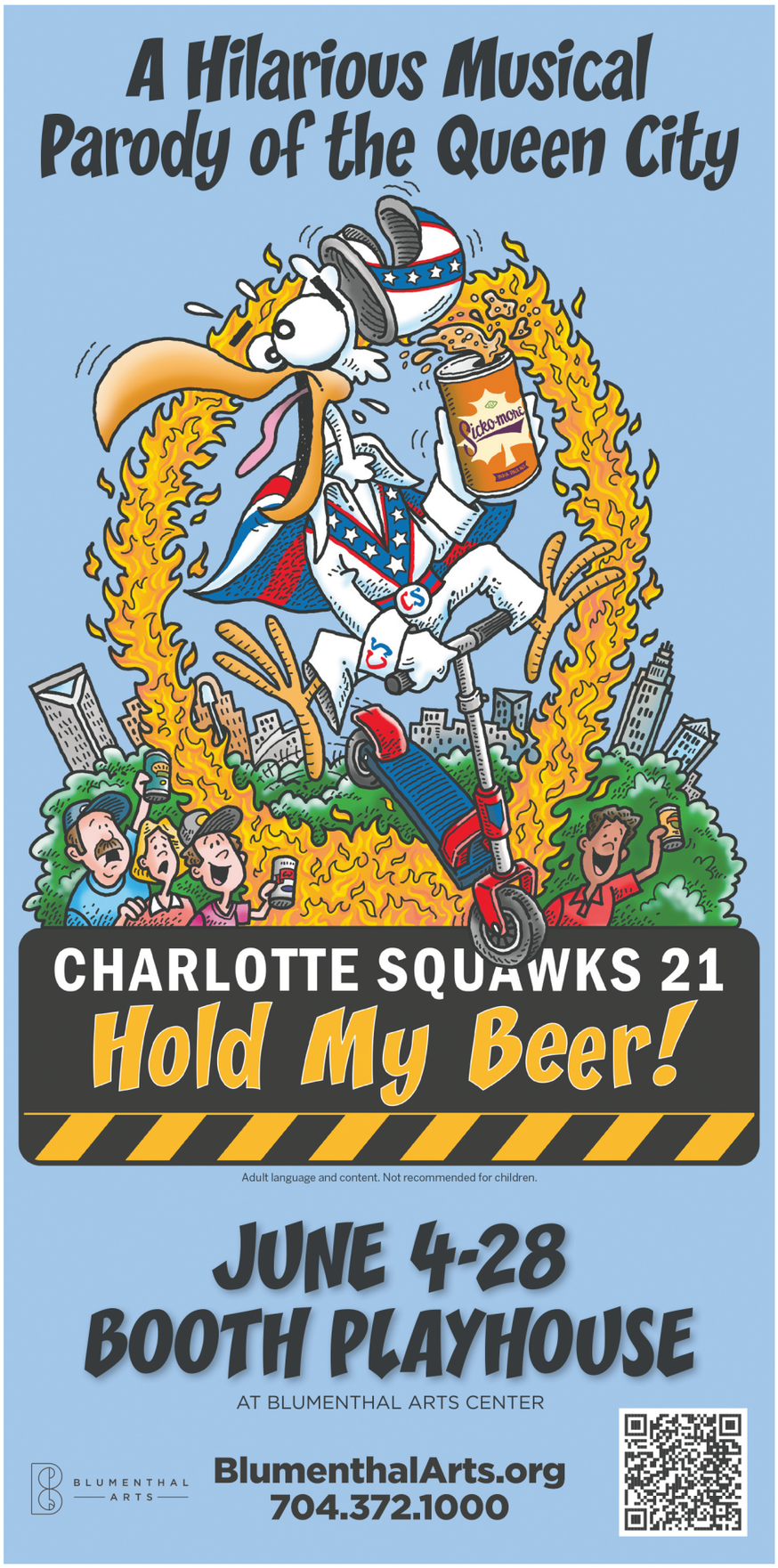
"They had [the studio] sectioned off into two parts," Walldorf says. "There's eight dancers working on a song and then you go through the curtain and there are eight more dancers working on another song."

Adding to the oneiric atmosphere are live digital projections by Ryan Persaud, who creates shifting dreamscapes as Sweat Transfer.

"Our music is relatively enveloping in the first place," Walldorf maintains. "[Sweat Transfer] adds another aspect of surrounding you and bringing you into this world that we're all creating."

After leaving 20-plus years at UNC Charlotte behind, more than two decades where creative triumphs vied with the economic uncertainty of the adjunct shuffle, Audrey Baran is ready to create new worlds.

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George Rodriguez at work. Photo by Ernesto Brett Dennison

AN OLD SOUL AT HEART

George Rodriguez opens Old Soul Tattoo Club in University City

BY ERNESTO BRETT DENNISON

Charlotte tattoo artist George Rodriguez considers his craft to be his wife. He loves tattooing unconditionally, and that love bleeds into the quality of his work.

Rodriguez recently opened a new tattoo studio with his friend and longtime partner Jose "Jay" Alvarado. Called Old Soul Tattoo Club, the space is located in The Arbors shopping center on West Mallard Creek Church Road.

In the lead-up to the opening, I went to meet with Rodriguez while he worked on a cover-up back piece using his mobile tattoo kit. I spoke to the old soul himself about the benefits of going mobile, his roller-coaster of a journey in tattooing, AI in art, specializing in scar tissue and more.

Queen CIty Nerve: You've turned your tattoo studio into a 100% mobile kit. Can you tell me about that process and why you value being mobile?

George Rodriguez: My go-kit is absolutely the same setup as my studio. Yeah, I can be sanitary on the go and that's super important, but it's really about the moment. At a moment's notice, I should be able to do this. If I get inspired, if I have the time, if the moment feels right. Because it allows me to do this all day every day and I always want to be able to.

What I do, it's bigger than me. It's not just for me. The money is cool but it's not why I do this. There are people out there who need something done and I wanna be as available as possible for them.

What are you working on as we speak?

So this piece I'm working on right now is a coverup of a coverup. At this stage, what I'm doing is more of a finishing than a covering. This second layer piece has good bones. I'm continuing where the last artist left off to completely cover the original. The first layer was done on a couch by an apprentice. We now know that we don't do that because of everything that can go wrong. That initial piece created a lot of scar tissue which I have to be mindful of as I work on her today.

Scar tissue sounds like a challenge. How does it differ from normal tattooing?

I personally want to go out of my comfort zone and specialize in scar covering. Partially, it's because I've realized that a lot of people in this industry avoid it. If there's one thing I've learned about tattooing, it's that people like being artistic in their own zone and that's totally cool and fine. If you're good at something, be good at that, but cover ups and scar covering are still a much-needed service. You have to be open to anything.

Scar covering isn't something that I started thinking I would be so passionate about, but growing into it I've come to understand that this niche is bigger than the art. It's for [the clients] in a way beyond money and visual satisfaction. They come to me with a challenge and I get to give new life to something on their body that they are unhappy with.

You've already mentioned a couple times how this business goes beyond the value of money for you. What can you tell me about that mindset?

The money is cool but it's not why I do this. There are people out there who need something done and I wanna be as available as possible for them. Money only holds value because people put value in it. I know that I'm going to be well-fed and successful over the years through consistency, so I'm not worried about it right here and now. If I chase the money and become a greedy person, I'll miss out on the better qualities of the tattooing experience.

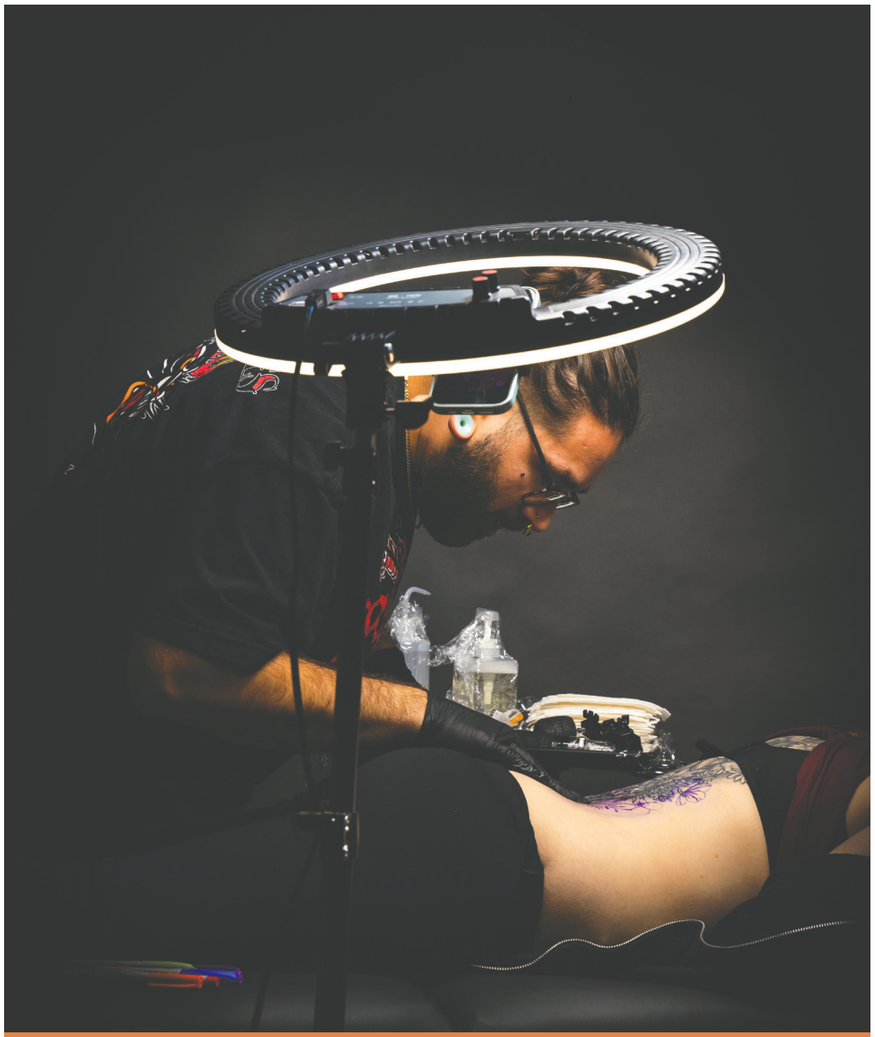
I feel like a lot of artists have said no to a lot of really good people over the years because they didn't want to take on a challenge or touch someone else's work, because they're not used to doing it. When I first started, I had to take any work that came my way because the alternative was to starve. I was lucky to spend my first few years tattooing next to a pizza shop. It got to a point where I started trading tattoos for pizza. We transcended the financial aspect altogether. I was hungry and they wanted art.

You've worked in many different locations before landing in Charlotte. Tell me about that journey.

In my very first year of tattooing I traveled to eight different states across the East Coast. I was in a limbo of figuring out what direction I wanted to go in. To stay in Charlotte or go to Richmond or to land somewhere completely different. I tried all of these options and still wasn't happy with the outcome. It wasn't where I physically was, it was about what I was trying to get out of it.

So in my second year of tattooing I started talking to a therapist and I stopped traveling. It did a lot of good for my mental state ... I realized through all of those experiences that maybe I should try to figure out what feels like home to me and spend a few years building that feeling for myself. I decided to give myself the opportunity to transform my current location into what's best for me.

In that first year, I went back to Richmond for a guest spot and started tattooing friends. Honestly, it was the best feeling to walk into that place and say "I'm ready to work" and the work just came. I knocked out 17 tattoos over three days. I



George Rodriguez partnered with Jay Alvarado to open Old Soul Tattoo Club. Photo by Ernesto Brett Dennison

slept there on the floor, woke up, and hustled all weekend. Everyone was impressed that I had been gone a few months and came back with the quality of a full time artist.

There were people two years into this just getting into full-time while I was four months into tattooing doing guest spots in Philly next to Myke Chambers. Myke is one of the biggest traditional names on the East Coast. I hit him up on Instagram and he gave me a warm welcome and a place to crash. That's the thing about this community; once you're in they treat you like family. No asking for credentials or checking at the door. I've only gotten warm welcomes except for maybe one or two cities.

It doesn't sound like you had much of a normal education when it comes to tattooing. What was your apprenticeship like?

I wasn't given what most would call a typical apprenticeship. Before coming to Charlotte, I had always talked about wanting to tattoo. I had tried internships and hanging out with artists but it never came together.

I moved down here as a mechanic and hurt my back to where I could no longer do that line of work. So I started bartending in Concord, which led to meeting the owner of a tattoo shop. I asked him for a chance to learn. His one and only question was if I spoke Spanish. Pretty much everyone in his shop spoke only Spanish. When I told him no he shut me down immediately. I was devastated. Knowing the language barrier was the only thing holding me back from my dream was a real low point for me.

So I took a shower, got in my car, and drove straight to his shop. He was shocked but he let me have a seat and hang around. I stood over people's shoulders for two to three months figuring out a list of supplies to practice with and got close with one of the guys who spoke a little bit of English. He was a bit of a loner, but we bonded over the craft. One day he told me I was ready to tattoo myself. This is a stunt he was notorious for. He gave me a gun and went home. He had decided that I had learned enough as an observer and left me to my own devices.

Obviously I started messing up real bad. Eventually, one of the guys who didn't know any English came over to correct me. He showed me how to hit the correct depth and that was such an "ah-ha" moment. It felt like the clouds rolled away and the sunlight came down. From then on, tattooing and I went together like bread and butter. That first piece was awful but I finally got it. Ten minutes later I called a buddy into the shop and started working on my next piece. After that it truly became one after another with random people I knew. My 10th piece ended up being a face tattoo.

What are your thoughts on the current state of apprenticeship in the tattoo community?

To be completely honest, the apprenticeship I was given showed me more than anything how to be self-reliant. Nowadays people look online and say that's good enough to open their own private setting. They never really get the understanding of what it takes to do this day in and out. They see a social media version of what this is. It's a sick job, don't get me wrong, but it pushes your social battery, your mental capacity, it's not for the weak.

There was once an apprentice I spent nine months on. What I learned in that time is that teaching someone else while I was teaching myself is not a winning combo. I'm a people person, but right now I can't see myself taking on another apprentice when I'm not at the point where I would bring someone any benefit beyond being a good tattooer. I can't teach them to market themselves or to connect with people because I'm still working on those things for myself. I also can't teach someone how to create art at the same time that I'm teaching them how to draw squares and straight lines.

Ultimately though, I can't do as much of my own work if I'm teaching someone else. It gets taxing. It's been cool to watch someone else grow into this, but I lost so much of my time stopping to train and help even on my off days. I wasted my patience for teaching on a kid who didn't really listen to my instruction, which kind of messed it up for any chance of taking on another student in the foreseeable future.

While we're keeping it current, how do you feel about the rise of AI in your field?

That's one thing as an American traditional artist that I do not tolerate. I see everybody and their mother using Pinterest or GenAI as their reference guide and to me that's a huge cop out that I will not do. It's not something that I can see myself or anyone benefiting from. I don't care how efficient it can be, it's the death of art. I think art will survive this, but it's gonna come down to the Matrix. Composition, execution, style and flare make art unique and worth doing. If you can't handle drawing a mock-up, how are you gonna handle tattooing it?

What would you like to tell the people of Charlotte about the studio you're opening this month?

Jay and I are opening a new space in University City. Old Soul Tattoo Club. We have worked hard to curate a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere for people. I knew I needed a place where I don't have to put myself in a box and that's how this studio came to be. Jay does black/gray realism and freehand Japanese pieces while I focus more on traditional and fine-line. Between the two of us we can pretty much knock out any style. We also frequently collaborate on back and leg pieces.

You can visit Old Soul Tattoo Club at 2015 E. Arbors Road. It's open every day but Wednesdays. George Rodriguez prefers to make appointments over Instagram DM.

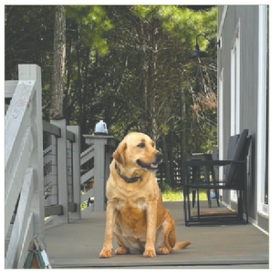
Follow him at @georgie.boy.tattoos. Follow Jay Alvarado at @official_jaytattoos.

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Organizers announced the official Carolina Bloom lineup on May 11. Courtesy of Patrick Wynne

IN BLOOM

Carolina Bloom Music Festival sowcases local, regional indie acts

BY BETHANY IVAN

As founder of Starbloom Music, an independent booking and artist management agency based in Charlotte, Patrick Wynne has seen the very heart and soul of the lively local music scene. Wynne's passion for live music has helped him build his company, which now represents acts based in South Carolina, New York, Georgia, Virginia and North Carolina.

Since founding the agency, Wynne has worked to help bring his bands on bigger stages, playing for larger crowds.

One of his biggest accomplishments was landing local indie rock bands Camisole, Weekend Friend and SOPHIA spots on the Carolina Ascent FC stage at last year's Lovin' Life Music Festival, sharing the spotlight with headlining names like Gwen Stefani, Benson Boone and Pitbull.

The Lovin' Life Music Festival was a quick success following its debut in Uptown's First Ward Park in 2024, mixing huge national acts like Stevie Nicks and Noah Kahan with local bands like nascent indie-pop band trio Oceanic and alt-rockers Modern Alibi.

However, this opportunity came to a sudden halt in December 2025, leaving concert-goers disappointed and confused when the Lovin' Life Music Festival's official Instagram page announced, "Due to circumstances out of our control, Lovin' Life will take a short pause in 2026."

Wynne is determined to ensure that indefinite absence of Lovin' Life will not dim the light of Charlotte's growing music scene. That's why he recently announced the launch of the Carolina Bloom Music Festival, scheduled for Aug. 22-23 at Blume Studios near Uptown.

The Carolina Bloom Music Festival sparked excitement when it was announced on the festival's Instagram account, first with a teaser post in April then with the official unveiling of the lineup on May 11. The fest will feature a wide variety of food trucks and local vendors while showcasing 20 musical acts — eight from North Carolina with 12 indie acts joining from other parts of the country.

"There are so many other great upcoming artists on the road today, so we wanted to keep the balance between local artists and giving out-of-town acts a place to shine as well," Wynne told Queen City Nerve.

Day one will feature Quarters, Illiterate Light, Oceanic, Hotel Fiction, Weekend Friend, Dogs With Hats, Camisole, Rohna, Te'Jani, and Shred Flintstone. Bands scheduled for Sunday, the festival's second day, include Ax & the Hatchetmen, Foxtide, SOPHIA, Hallpass, Deaf Andrews, The Band Solstice, Owen & the Smokes, Current Blue, Recess Party, and Bedroom Division.

Wynne added that the newly announced lineup is just the beginning, with other local bands likely to join at a later date and perform on a smaller stage within Blume Studios.

Prioritizing affordability in a monopolized scene

Wynne said he hopes the Carolina Bloom Music Festival can serve as a major spotlight for musicians at all levels, regardless of where they're based.

"We wanted to throw a festival with a lineup that the music community would want to attend," Wynne explained. "I'm lucky enough to have seen a lot of these acts in person and I know how dedicated the artists and their fans are and how incredible their live sets are. There's a lot of crossovers in the local community, so it just made sense to get a lot of these acts together in one place for a festival."

Wynne is also prioritizing affordability for the festival. Thanks to the resale sites and a Live Nation monopoly, live music has become increasingly inaccessible for music fans across the country.

According to Pollstar, the cost of a concert ticket has increased by about 38% since 2019.

Fans have also noticed a fluctuation of the cost of tickets. Concert tickets available at face value at the box office can also be different from the prices many fans see online.

On top of rising and fluctuating prices, it can be a headache for fans trying to purchase tickets. When an artist or a festival announces new dates, presale preparations begin. On the day of, fans rush to try and purchase tickets, anxiously waiting their turn in online queues for either a couple minutes or hours at a time, with multiple tabs on their computers open, only to be left defeated after either losing their spot in line or seeing the cost of each ticket.

The rising cost of basic necessities like food, gas and rent has already made living conditions difficult. For a live music fan, the cost to enjoy one night with their favorite artist can be both emotionally and financially draining. Instead of seeing a concert or even a festival as a lively, once-in-a-lifetime experience, live music concerts are now seen as something more exclusive and luxurious, rather than being inclusive for everyone.

"Overpriced tickets are frustrating," said Wynne. "Live music is all about bringing people together. Music should be accessible, not a luxury item."

One of the largest causes for rising ticket prices, which involves Live Nation having a stranglehold over live music in the United States and elsewhere, was the subject of a recent court case that involved North Carolina Attorney General Jeff Jackson.

After a seven-week trial, a jury found in favor of Jackson and 33 other attorneys general in their case against Live Nation and Ticketmaster in April, holding the companies liable on all counts for illegally monopolizing the ticketing and large amphitheater markets for live entertainment events.

"The verdict's in. We just won our case against Live Nation and Ticketmaster on all claims, and we're closer to breaking down their illegal monopoly over the live entertainment industry," Jackson stated in a press release.

The US Department of Justice joined the suit at its start but settled with the companies in March. Jackson and his counterparts did not approve of the settlement and continued to pursue the case.

"This was one of the biggest antitrust cases in years," Jackson stated in a press release. "When the US Dept. of Justice announced in March that it had cut a deal with Live Nation and Ticketmaster behind the backs of the attorneys general, I rejected their secret deal because it failed to address sky-high ticket prices for concertgoers. We wanted the jury to hear the evidence and see what consumers have known for years."

Nevertheless, the Department of Justice attempted to take credit for the ruling on social media.

"The DOJ was proud to lead a settlement in this matter that brings the American people instant relief," the department's antitrust division crowed.

Readers added a community note to help jog the DOJ's memory: "The DOJ settled separately with Live Nation ... on limited terms — no breakup, no liability admission, and reforms criticized as insufficient."

Jackson made sure to set the record straight, responding, "You bailed in the middle of trial after cutting a sweetheart deal with Live Nation, tried to pressure the rest of us to accept it, but we pressed on and won the trial without you. Congratulations to consumers, not you."

The case is now in its second phase, during which the judge will decide the appropriate remedies to break Live Nation's hold on the live entertainment industry and restore competition, according to Jackson.

A focus on inclusivity and accessibility

For his part, Wynne simply wants to bring back rare, memorable experiences for live music fans living in the greater Charlotte area who don't want to deal with the high, fluctuating prices of a Live Nation show.

"The rise in ticket prices, especially from major promoters, pushes real fans out and makes live music feel somewhat commercialized. I believe there is a strong community aspect behind live music and something everyone should have access to at a fair cost.

With at least 10 bands set to perform on each day of the festival, early-bird tickets will start at $55 for a one-day pass or $95 for a two-day pass. Wynne pointed out that the prices amount to just over $5 per band for a one-day pass and under $5 per band with the two-day pass.

The festival will also allow attendees of all ages, which can be lacking in a scene where most music venues are also bars.

"By keeping ticket prices fair, focusing on all-ages entry, working with local vendors, local staff and local food trucks, the goal is to make the community a part of the event," Wynne said. "It's not just about headline sets, it's about local discovery, community connection and giving people the chance to enjoy a weekend without breaking the bank."

He added that the goal for Carolina Bloom is the same as his vision for Starbloom upon launching that venture: to showcase the amazing music scene that's thriving in Charlotte and elsewhere in the Carolinas.

"This festival will make that undeniable to anyone who hasn't been paying attention," he said. "We have so much great local talent, and this festival wouldn't be possible without them. I've seen firsthand how much effort and dedication these bands put into their craft and it's our goal to give them the spotlight they deserve."

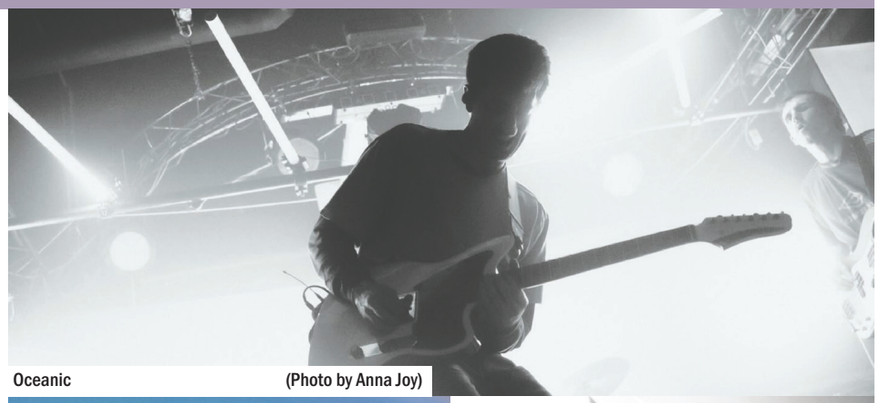
His rules for the festival are simple: Have fun, spread love, and be respectful.

"This event isn't about exclusivity; we are focused on inclusion," he said. "A few of the bands playing in the festival will be playing in Charlotte over the summer and we'd highly encourage you to attend a show, put your phone away, socialize with people around you and enjoy the music. You will be embraced with nothing but great energy, and that's what we're focused on bringing to an attendee."

For more of the latest updates on the Carolina Bloom Music Festival, be sure to follow them on Instagram @carolinabloommusicfest. Visit tinyurl.com/CarolinaBloom2026 to check out the Carolina Bloom playlist.

Ryan Pitkin contributed reporting to this article.

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Oceanic (Photo by Anna Joy)



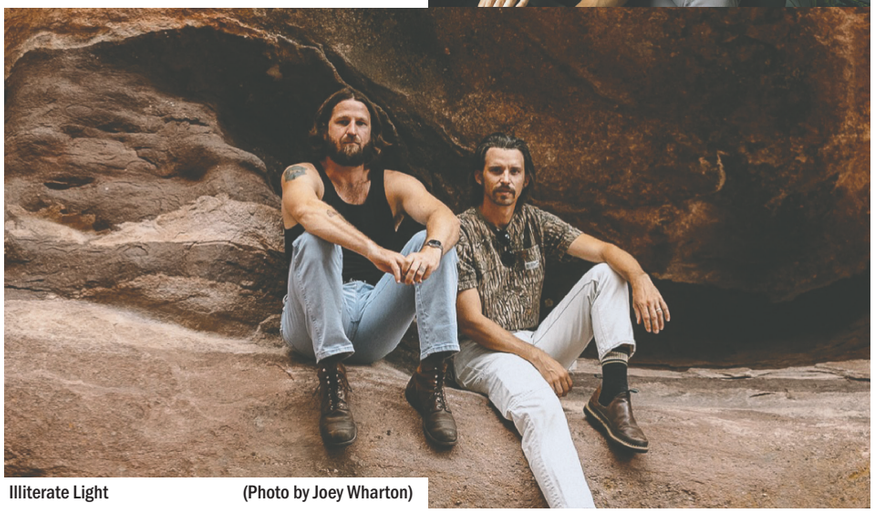
Weekend Friend via Facebook



Te'jani (Photo by Nick Will)



Deaf Andrews via Facebook



Illiterate Light (Photo by Joey Wharton)



SOUNDWAVE

WEDNESDAY MAY 13

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Patois Counselors w/ Signals, Etc.; Insight, Mozart's Bird, Catiline (The Milestone)
Jordyn Zaino w/ Pressure Pointe, Crow With No Mouth (Snug Harbor)
Thornhill (The Underground)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Shindig Does The '90s w/ DJs Blondzai (Tommy's Pub)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
Kid Cudi (Truliant Amphitheater)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
John Dungan (Comet Grill)
Matthew Alexander w/ Rob McHale (Evening Muse)
Josh Daniel & Friends (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
JAZZ/BLUES
Jazz Jam (Eighty Eights)*
Jon Cleary & the Absolute Monster Gentlemen (Middle C Jazz)
Wednesday Jazz Jam feat. Lovell Bradford Trio (VisArt Video)*
COVER BANDS
Killer Queen (Neighborhood Theatre)
OPEN MIC
Singer/Songwriter Open Mic (The Rooster)*
Starlight Jams Open Mic (Starlight on 22nd)*

THURSDAY MAY 14

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Restrictor Plate w/ Rectoplasm, Four Wheel Drive, Onyx, Hollow Body (The Milestone)
Godsmack (Truliant Amphitheater)
JAZZ/BLUES
Groove Masters (Eighty Eights)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Freddie McClendon w/ Kevin Daniels (Amos' Southend)
North State Grass (Comet Grill)
The Rough & Tumble w/ Flagship Romance (Evening Muse)
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
Shana Blake's Musical Menagerie (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
Kandi Burruss (The Fillmore)
Ashley Tanisha w/ Dekayla, Cara Watson (The Long Room)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Sean Diaz w/ Khallori (Petra's)
COVER BANDS
Martin Bejerano presents The Purple Project (Middle C Jazz)

FRIDAY MAY 15

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Lenny Federal Band (Comet Grill)*
Division Point w/ Circuit Circuit, Tower of Pines, Reality, Process // Sleep (The Milestone)
Sean O'Hara w/ Wilde Green, Time Parade (Petra's)
Earth Tongue w/ Pink Fuzz, Seismic Sutra (Snug Harbor)
The Local Odyssey w/ Eco Spaceship, Walter Boston (Tommy's Pub)
Toadies (The Underground)
JAZZ/BLUES
K. Omari Wilkerson (Eighty Eights)
Jacob Webb & Phylicia Rae (Middle C Jazz)
The Pszenny Project (The Rooster)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Ms Mada (The Music Yard)
LATIN-K-POP/WORLD
Haricharan (Blackbox Theater)
CLASSICAL/INSTRUMENTAL
Charlotte Symphony: Copland & Kahane (Knight Theater)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Andrew Marlin & Josh Oliver (Evening Muse)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Drayton Farley w/ Jimmy Teardrop (Neighborhood Theatre)
Ole 60 (Skyla Amphitheater)
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
Mojo Ruckus (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)
Aerodynamics (The Spoke Easy)
Dr Bacon w/ Hustle Souls (Visulite Theatre)
COVER BANDS
Queens of Country (Amos' Southend)
Hey LA w/ Caroline & Omar (Goldie's)
Cassette Rewind (TD Amp Ballantyne)

SATURDAY MAY 16

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Enemies & Allies w/ Mourning Lotus, Volition Impulse, Johnstown Flood (The Rooster)
Revel the Dash (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)
Beach Vacation w/ Mint Field, Redwood Sleeper (Snug Harbor)
Brown Oak Assembly w/ Lily Vakili & Band, Wilson Morris (Starlight on 22nd)
The White Horse w/ Leaving Echoes, Messy Stains (Tommy's Pub)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Jantsen (Blackbox Theater)
Digital Noir w/ DJ Spider (The Milestone)
Emo Night (The Music Yard)
Gravitate (Petra's)
Beatfreaq (Starlight on 22nd)
Cozy Worldwide (The Underground)
JAZZ/BLUES
Jazz Alliance (Eighty Eights)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
Eyes of the Elders (Evening Muse)
1900Rugrat (Neighborhood Theatre)
CLASSICAL/INSTRUMENTAL
CSO: Youth Orchestras Finale Concert (Knight Theater)
Charlotte Symphony: Copland & Kahane (Knight Theater)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Abbey Elmore Band (Comet Grill)
David Nail (Evening Muse)
FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
Dave Matthews Band (Truliant Amphitheater)
COVER BANDS
Thurston Howell Band (Amos' Southend)
Harvey Cummings & The Sol Ensemble present Smooth: The Sounds of D'Angelo (Carolina Theatre)
Electric Avenue (The Fillmore)
Kids in America w/ Rod Fiske (Goldie's)
Noel & Maria Celebrate Hall & Oates (Middle C Jazz)
Gin N Sonic (Primal Brewery)
Dark Star Orchestra (Grateful Dead tribute) (TD Amp Ballantyne)
School of Rock Spring Seasonal Showcase (Visulite Theatre)

SUNDAY MAY 17

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Shwayze w/ Surfer Girl (The Music Yard)
Hazy Sunday (Petra's)
Soul Sunday feat. Guy Nowchild (Starlight on 22nd)
JAZZ/BLUES
Omari & the Hellhounds (Comet Grill)*
Braxton Bateman (Eighty Eights)*
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Sam on Someday (Evening Muse)
David Childers (Free Range Brewing)
James Brock & Friends (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
John Legend (Ovens Auditorium)
Domani (The Underground)
EXPERIMENTAL/MIXED-GENRE/FESTIVAL
GCS Choral Benefit Show (The Rooster)
COVER BANDS
Justin Varnes: The Music of Thelonious Monk (Middle C Jazz)
School of Rock Spring Seasonal Showcase (Visulite Theatre)

MONDAY MAY 18

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Motocrossed w/ Porcelain Parrot, Aubrey Jane (Snug Harbor)
Sting (Truliant Amphitheatre)
JAZZ/BLUES
The Bill Hanna Legacy Jazz Session (Petra's)
OPEN MIC
Find Your Muse Open Mic feat. Anna La Mare (Evening Muse)

TUESDAY MAY 19

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Sevendust (The Fillmore)
Dollars, Taxes w/ Charlie Paso, Amber Waves (Petra's)
JAZZ/BLUES
Menastree (Evening Muse)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
CLT Bluegrass Allstars (Comet Grill)*
Punch Brothers (Knight Theater)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
Lord Jah-Monte Ogbon w/ Sauteed Grabba, DJ Prawn (Snug Harbor)
OPEN MIC
Crown Collab Funk Jam & Open Mic (Crown Station)*
Open Mic Night feat. The Smokin J's (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

WEDNESDAY MAY 20

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Blvck Hippie w/ Latchkey Kids (The Milestone)
Rickshaw Billie's Burger Patrol (Neighborhood Theatre)
Journey (Spectrum Center)
JAZZ/BLUES
Jazz Jam (Eighty Eights)*
The Boneshakers (Middle C Jazz)
Wednesday Jazz Jam feat. Lovell Bradford Trio (VisArt Video)*
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Charlie Lunsford w/ Laine Mansfield (Evening Muse)
Josh Daniel & Friends (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
LATIN/K-POP/WORLD
Fiïnka (Amos' Southend)
Pitbull (Truliant Amphitheater)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Hiram (Comet Grill)
Hardy (Coyote Joe's)
Gavin Adcock (The Fillmore)
Paisley Fields w/ Desiree Dawson, Mira Lazuli, Ryan Lockhart (Snug Harbor)
OPEN MIC
Singer/Songwriter Open Mic (The Rooster)*
Starlight Jams Open Mic (Starlight on 22nd)*

THURSDAY MAY 21

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Tayls w/ Horse Island, Kelsey Blackstone (Petra's)
JAZZ/BLUES
Familiar Strangers (Middle C Jazz)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Josh Daniel (Comet Grill)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
King Garbage w/ C.Shreve The Professor (Evening Muse)
Don Toliver (Spectrum Center)
Natalie Nunn (The Underground)
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
Shana Blake's Musical Menagerie (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
JAZZ/BLUES
John Shaughnessy Jazz Trio (Eighty Eights)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Pan!c Emo Night (Crown Station)
Solemn Shapes w/ Loum, Mostly Mesh (The Milestone)
All Your Friends: The Indie Party (Neighborhood Theatre)

FRIDAY MAY 22

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
The Lenny Federal Band (Comet Grill)*
Those Dogs w/ Peach Rings, Froggy Nights (Evening Muse)
A Separate Piece w/ A Life Worth Taking, Alaya's Curse, Mydas XXII, Executive Dysfunction (The Milestone)
Aunt Vicki w/ 6 Story Pyramid, Puppy and the Dogs (Petra's)
ANTiSEEN w/Hellfire 76, Queen City Rejects, Bellbox (The Rooster)
Council Ring (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)
JAZZ/BLUES
Skip & Co. (Eighty Eights)
Gerald Albright (Middle C Jazz)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Mak Marie w/ Scott Pittman (Goldie's)
Alexa Jensen (The Spoke Easy)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Bourbon Sons w/ Diamond Dixie, Julia Golden (Amos' Southend)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Enamour (The Music Yard)
Deep Fried Disco feat. ThatGuySmitty, VonFunkHauser (Snug Harbor)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
Chance the Rapper (TD Amp Ballantyne)

SATURDAY MAY 23

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Paul McDonald & the Mourning Doves w/ blankslate. (Evening Muse)
Big Backyard w/ Go For Broke, Normal People, Straight-jacket, Cordial Greetings (The Milestone)
Carolina Headbangers: Benefit for Ben (The Rooster)
Flatrock (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)
Camisole w/ Shred Flinstone, Aurora's Hope (Snug Harbor)
Lucid Dreams w/ DJ Christian (Starlight on 22nd)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Purgatory (Amos' Southend)
YDG (Blackbox Theater)
Rudimental (The Music Yard)
Ultraviolet Sapphic Dance Party (Petra's)
KPop Club Night (The Underground)
LATIN/K-POP/WORLD
Marisela (Ovens Auditorium)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Neal Carter (Birdsong Brewing) Dan Staton Trio (Primal Brewery)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Willie Nelson & Family (Skyla Amphitheater)
JAZZ/BLUES
Buff Dillard (Eighty Eights)
Gerald Albright (Middle C Jazz)
COVER BANDS
Silver Wings (Comet Grill)
Gump Fiction w/ Square Roots (Goldie's)

SUNDAY MAY 24

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Mike Strauss Band (Free Range Brewing)
Godseyes w/ Actor Observer, The Johnstown Flood, Suppressor (The Milestone)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Boileryard Brunch (Camp North End)
Hardcore Punk Vinyl Night feat. DJ Big E & DJ Levi Erickson (Tommy's Pub)
JAZZ/BLUES
Omari & the Hellhounds (Comet Grill)*
Braxton Bateman (Eighty Eights)*
UltimaNota (Middle C Jazz)
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
Quail P w/ Anella (Evening Muse)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
James Brock & Friends (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Ryan Trotti Band w/ Lola Grace (Goldie's)
EXPERIMENTAL/MIXED-GENRE/FESTIVAL
Queen City Awards Music Fest (Heist Brewery & Barrel Arts)

MONDAY MAY 25

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Moon Owl's Mages w/ Grocery Bag, Impending Joy (Snug Harbor)
JAZZ/BLUES
The Bill Hanna Legacy Jazz Session (Petra's)
OPEN MIC
Find Your Muse Open Mic (Evening Muse)

TUESDAY MAY 26

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Chancy w/ Pretty Baby, General Purpose, Somnium (Snug Harbor)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
CLT Bluegrass Allstars (Comet Grill)*
OPEN MIC
Crown Collab Funk Jam & Open Mic (Crown Station)*
Open Mic Night feat. The Smokin J's (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

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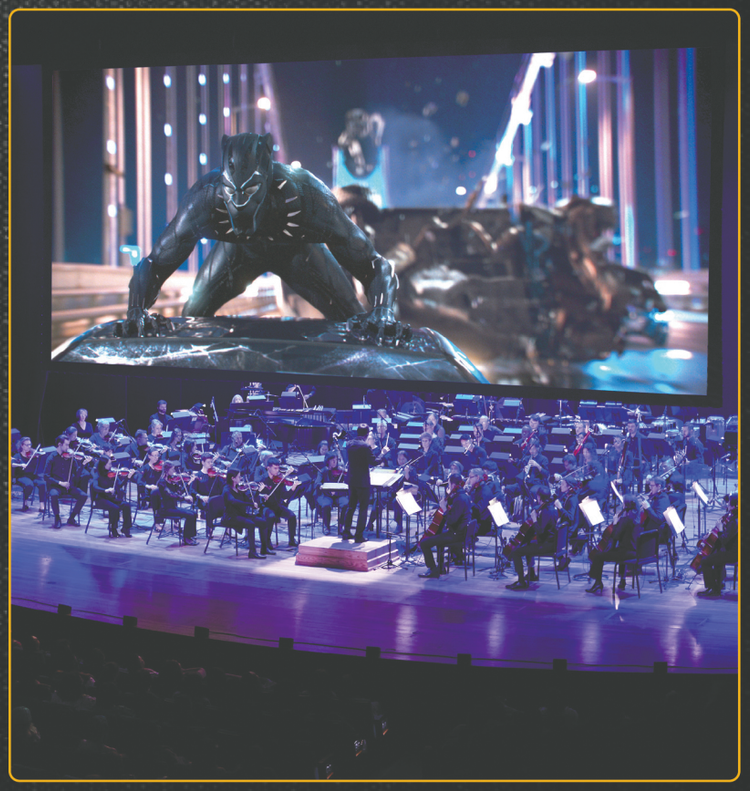
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Seared scallops with asparagus and lemon balm salad at The Artisan's Palate. Photo courtesy of The Artisan's Palate

A Fresh Start

The Artisan's Palate launches new spring menu following a rough winter

BY RYAN PITKIN

When I ask Christa Csoka what drove the creation of her new spring/summer menu at The Artisan's Palate, she starts to tell me before pausing mid-sentence and breaking into laughter.

"This is going to sound so fucking corny," she warns, explaining her hesitation to finish the explanation, "but the produce speaks to me."

For Csoka, who serves as owner, executive chef, bar director, gardener and any number of other titles at The Artisan's Palate, it all starts in the ground.

Sometimes the produce comes from the small garden next to her building on East 36th Street in NoDa, other times through special delivery from community partners like Deep Roots CPS Farm. Or it might come from spots like Bush-N-Vine Farm in York, South Carolina, by way of Charlotte-based third-party vendor Freshlist.

What's important to Csoka is that it comes from the Charlotte are ... and it arrives fresh.

And if the produce speaks to her, this season the strawberries have been screaming.

Csoka's new menu includes a strawberry-glazed Verlasso salmon with grilled purple asparagus, strawberry beurre-blanc, pickled asparagus and crispy salmon skin.

That pairs nicely with the new Rhuberry Fields Forever cocktail, which features Botanist gin, Zucca Rabarbaro, house-made strawberry basil shrub and strawberry cordial, egg white and rhubarb bitters.

Csoka knew as soon as the strawberries came in from Bush-N-Vine that she could build something around them.

"I don't know what it is, they're just plump and lush and super, super sweet, more so than they were last year," she tells me.

They're perfect for the Artisan's Burrata Salad, which she tweaks seasonally and currently includes brûléed strawberries on top, serving as a dressing of sorts.

"You get that little crunch and then the sweetness and it kind of drips into the rest of the salad," she explains. "They're just really, really juicy this year."

The new menu reflects a sense of springtime renewal for a restaurant that's coming out of a tough winter.

In December, Csoka put out a plea for help after equipment malfunctions created unexpected bills at a time when the restaurant was already struggling financially.

A crowdsourcing campaign raised just over half of what she needed to continue, and a surge of customers who showed up to support the business helped usher the Artisan's Palate team into spring.

Over the last six months, Csoka has worked piecemeal to fix urgent issues such as the air conditioning and plumbing. When I visited on a recent May afternoon, the ice machine was still down but she expected to have it finally replaced before the end of the month.

For Csoka, the rough winter was another obstacle in a line of issues The Artisan's Palate has faced. She opened the restaurant as an inclusive, femme-centered, LGBTQIA-affirming space where patrons of the arts and foodies could connect in 2019, and since then she's weathered COVID-19 along with repeated vandalism attacks and break-ins.

Then there's the struggle to get all those guests down the street along the main stretch of NoDa to visit her part of the neighborhood on the border of The Plaza.

While COVID-19 was harmful for obvious reasons related to restaurant shutdowns, it also put a halt on housing construction that had provided the promise of foot traffic when The Artisan's Palate opened.

For example, a townhome development on Latin Quarters Lane across the street from the restaurant was originally scheduled to be open by 2022 but only recently started moving residents in.

"The pandemic kind of just put a halt on so many things that were planned when I moved into this area," Csoka says.

She was glad to see her friend Chef Sam Diminich open Grey's Diner just a block over from her establishment, which may help bring some people to the area where Plaza Shamrock meets NoDa.

In the meantime, Csoka remains focused on getting the word out about her new menu. She said mixed messaging has resulted in many people not quite knowing what The Artisan's Palate is.

Upon opening in 2019, she heavily promoted the coffee program, which led many residents to think it's just a coffee shop. While she does open at 8 a.m. and serve amazing coffee, she doesn't plug that so much anymore.

Then there's the art gallery, which rotates local artists in and out every two months.

"I don't think I'll ever change that because it's just really important to me. It's always been," says Csoka. "My sister's an artist and that's my inspiration for a lot of what I do is from growing up with this idea of merging food and drink and art."

Still, whatever people may know The Artisan's Palate for, its strength is in its menu and the culinary mind of Csoka. Her new menu proves it.

Csoka's personal favorite new dish is the braised lamb rib with farro piccolo tabouleh, lemon oregano and Castelvetrano olive gremolata, pomegranate arils, and agrodolce.

"I had them a long time ago, but it's been a really long time and I just love lamb," she explains. "It's weird because you get a lamb shank, you get a lamb chop, but nobody really ever does lamb ribs and I was like, 'Well, we've got to figure this out.'"

She first served the dish during one of her popular Women of Whiskey events, a monthly food-and-spirit tasting for which she partners with distillers and mixologists to pair three cocktails with three dishes.

Her April 30 event brought Grace Gonzalez, fourth-generation master distiller with El Mayor Tequila, to Charlotte from where she's based in Jalisco, Mexico.

For Csoka, who often sees the young women who intern with her as students at Johnston & Wales University depart to other cities after graduation, it's important to bring in folks like Gonzalez to show what's possible while also encouraging her younger charges to stick around and help build Charlotte's culinary scene.

Looking forward, Csoka is hoping to launch an ice cream program at the restaurant by midsummer. The idea came from a Women of Whiskey event for which Csoka made a carrot ice cream in partnership with Deep Roots CPS Farm, a regular produce provider and collaborator with Csoka.

Deep Roots co-owner Wisdom Jzar was captivated by the flavor, as were many of those in attendance for the event. That lit a new fire under Csoka to start making ice cream and sorbetto regularly at the restaurant.

It will be yet another adaptation for the ever-evolving Artisan's Palate, but whether it's the coffee, art, cocktails or ice cream that brings you in the door, we suggest you stay for dinner.

This menu is worth it, and the produce can speak to that.

RPITKIN@QCNERVE.COM



Christa Csoka at The Artisan's Palate. Photo courtesy of The Artisan's Palate


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HOROSCOPE

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MAY 13 - MAY 19

ARIES (March 21 to April 19) Love rules the amorous Aries! It's time to make Sheep's eyes at someone you'd like to know better. (A loving Leo, perhaps?) And don't be surprised by what follows.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20) You might enjoy spending your time at home, decorating and redecorating all you like. But friends old and new won't accept "regrets" to their invitations. So, go out and have a great time.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20) You need someone who appreciates you. If this person is already in your life, congratulations! If not, don't settle for anyone who doesn't value you.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22) A previous problem is cleared up soon to your advantage. Meanwhile, give your self-confidence a much-needed boost by taking on a tough project that you know you can handle.

LEO (July 23 to August 22) You're often picked to lead in a group situation, but this can cost you time and energy that you might want to spend elsewhere. Feel free to decline. People will still love the Big Cat.

VIRGO (August 23 to September 22) You're usually the staid and steady sort. But the adventurous side of you emerges, and you feel like doing something different — and maybe a mite daring. Good for you!

LIBRA (September 23 to October 22) You need more preparation before tackling a poorly performing venture. Research possible solutions. The more you know when you start, the more likely that all will end well.

SCORPIO (October 23 to November 21) Your work is noticed with approval. A promotion could follow. Meanwhile, at home, there's some unexpected fallout from a family matter that you thought had been cleared up.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 to December 21) A relationship that you thought just needed time to ripen could be withering instead. It's not too late to save it with reassurances that it's still your priority.

CAPRICORN (December 22 to January 19) Your problem with accepting workplace-related changes will disappear once you accept the fact that — like it or not — change is part of progress.

AQUARIUS (January 20 to February 18) Don't feel guilty about indulging in luxuries like beauty treatments for yourself and beautiful things for your home. They bring joy to the soul, and you deserve them.

PISCES (February 19 to March 20) Don't keep a low profile about your project until you're sure that it can succeed. You'll achieve more if you allow others to know what you've done and to share in the work.

BORN THIS WEEK: You move with a natural grace and elegance that is found in those who (like you) were born to dance. Children take to you and want to be your friend.

MAY 20 - MAY 26

ARIES (March 21 to April 19) A temporary setback could work in your favor. Use this time to take another long look at a situation that you thought was absolutely foolproof. It's better to find the flaws now instead of later.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20) You divine Bovines could soon be scoring some impressive Bull's-eyes as you get closer to putting some carefully made plans into motion. Be patient. Time is on your side.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20) Balance the slightly overly romantic view of your current situation with a much-needed dollop of reality from your practical side. See it as it is — not as you would like it to be.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22) Your self-confidence continues to grow, but be careful not to overextend yourself. Go forward one step at a time. Meanwhile, a partner is ready to provide you with loving support.

LEO (July 23 to August 22) There's no time for on-the-job catnapping for ambitious Leos and Leonas. Changes are coming, and you won't want to miss out on any of the opportunities that go with them.

VIRGO (August 23 to September 22) Your adventurous side continues to play a dominant role in many of the decisions that you'll be making during the next few weeks. Enjoy the ride, but don't get carried away.

LIBRA (September 23 to October 22) Avoid distractions that intrude on the time you need to straighten out legal complications. Additionally, expect to do some work-related traveling during the next few months.

SCORPIO (October 23 to November 21) Be on guard against attempts to take advantage of your kind, caring nature. Also, a trusted friend can help you get the facts before you reach for your checkbook.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 to December 21) A recent unpleasant confrontation could soon flare up again unless all the areas of miscommunication are resolved. The sooner you start the process, the better.

CAPRICORN (December 22 to January 19) A recent workplace incident could continue to cause problems. Prepare yourself with the facts that you'll need if you're called upon to give your side of the story.

AQUARIUS (January 20 to February 18) This is a good time to speak up about a troubling situation. The sooner you do, the sooner others will realize what's been going on, and then they'll help you deal with it.

PISCES (February 19 to March 20) A change in travel plans could be the first of many that will occur during the next several months. Meanwhile, deal with a problem involving someone who's close to you.

BORN THIS WEEK: You have a bright, shining personality that attracts people to you. You also have a way of seeing two sides of every issue. You'd make a fine judge.

CHILL AT IPH

This summer series comprises a full schedule of short, multisession workshops for those hungry for community, intellectual stimulation, or just a place to get away from internet streaming during summer months. CHILL workshops cover topics with easy introductions to the biggest questions of our time or tap into your creative side.

All classes start at **10am** and are done by **12pm** and **take place at the Independent Picture House.**

Session 01: "A New Birth of Freedom: Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass and the Civil War and Reconstruction, 1861-1877"
June 1 and 3; June 8 and 10

Session 02: "Jesus at the Movies"
June 2 and 4; June 9 and 11

Session 03: "Writing Flash Memoir & Personal Stories"
June 15 and 17; June 22 and 24

Session 04: "Goodbye, Lenin! and Hello, Berlin!"
June 16 and 18; June 23 and 25

Session 05: "Barbie: An American Icon,"
June 29 and July 1; July 6 and 8

Session 06: "Wes Anderson's Elaborate Archaeology of Moving Pictures"
June 30 and 2; July 7 and 9

Session 07: "Silver, Hook, and Sparrow: Disney and the History of Caribbean Piracies"
July 13 and 15; July 20 and 22

Session 08: "AI: The Good, The Bad, And The Ugly In Charlotte And Around The World,"
July 14 and 16; July 21 and 23

Session 09: "What Does Pinocchio Still Have to Tell Us?"
July 27 and 29; August 3 and 5

Session 10: "Capitalism in Action,"
July 28 and 30; August 4 and 6

TRIVIA TEST
BY FIFI RODRIGUEZ

1. GEOGRAPHY: What is the capital of Belarus?
2. LITERATURE: Which Ken Kesey novel is set in an Oregon psychiatric hospital?
3. MYTHOLOGY: Who is the Greek goddess of discord?
4. ANATOMY: What is the longest bone in the human body?
5. U.S. PRESIDENTS: Which president was a commanding general in World War II?
6. MATH: What kind of polygon has three sides?
7. BIBLE: What is the last book in the Bible called?
8. ASTRONOMY: Which planet in our solar system is closest in size to Earth?
9. CHEMISTRY: What is the newest element on the Periodic Table?
10. MOVIES: Which Canadian actor/comedian starred in the movie "Uncle Buck" and died of a heart attack at 43?

SUDOKU
BY LINDA THISTLE

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	6				7			3
	5					6	7	
		7	6		5			1
2					1	9	8	6
		8	9	7	6	5		2
6	9	5			8			
		9					2	
		1			4	3		5
8		6	5	1	2			

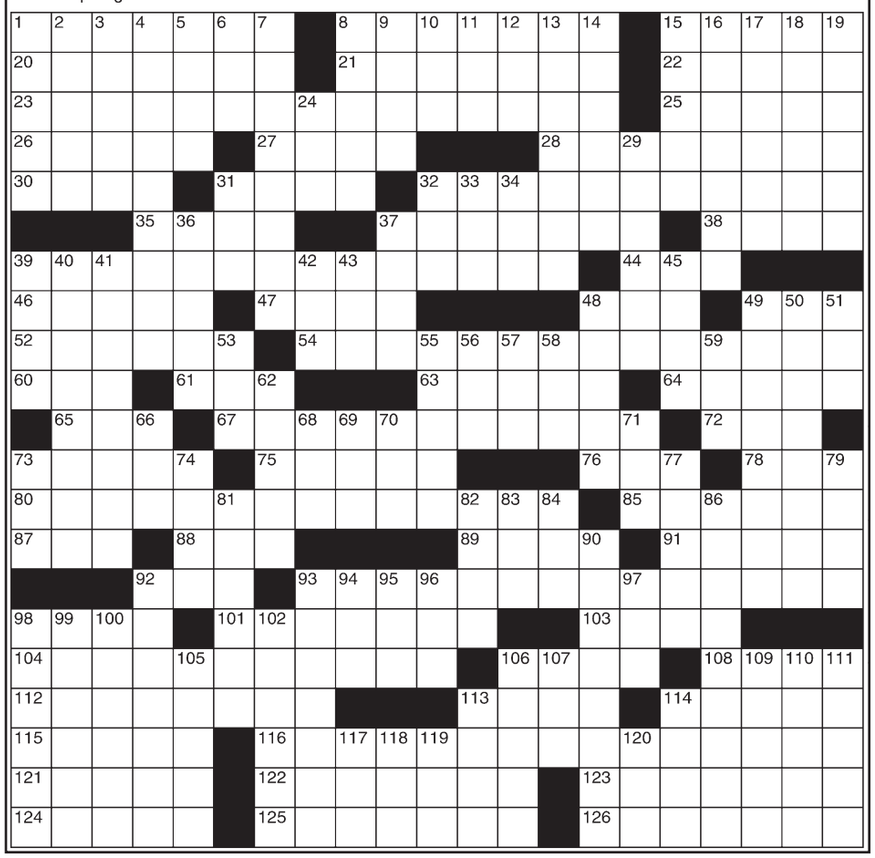
PLACE A NUMBER IN THE EMPTY BOXES IN SUCH A WAY THAT EACH ROW ACROSS, EACH COLUMN DOWN AND EACH SMALL 9-BOX SQUARE CONTAINS ALL OF THE NUMBERS ONE TO NINE.

CROSSWORD
REGRESSION ANALYSIS

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ACROSS
1 Bourbon brand
8 Belly area
15 Girlfriend, in Genoa
20 Pertaining to the womb
21 Spiced Starbucks selection
22 Autos for test-driving
23 Food, clothes or money [actress Danes]
25 Greek market of old
26 DC-10, e.g.
27 Lariat feature
28 Rushes about wildly
30 Marketed
31 Grain tower
32 Like a skimpy swimsuit [actor Perry]
35 Church area
37 Powders mixed into liquids, e.g.
38 Research ctr.
39 Shoes worn with tutus [designer McCartney]
44 Tenth mo.
46 Perjurer's confession
47 Fork prong
48 Pop singer Rita
49 Mai — (drink)
52 Young morays, say
54 Huge Asian mammal [justice Kagan]
60 Tijuana-to-Vegas dir.
61 Add- — (extras)
63 Olive — (military uniforms)
64 Small lakes
65 — Jima
67 Having supple arms and legs [jazzman Davis]
72 Nuptial vow
73 Moving spryly
75 Smoothly polite
76 Neighbor of TV's Homer
78 Surg. sites
80 Roomy place to house vehicles [actress Jones]
85 Vacation spot
87 Swallowed
88 Little fellow
89 Performs like Ice Cube
91 Initial venture
92 1040 info
93 Small, springy apparatus [director Scorsese]
98 Zenith
101 Almsgiving
103 Othello's false friend
104 Antipollution law [singer Grande]
106 — -Alt-Del
108 Major- — (butler)
112 Gives one's approval
113 Persia, today
114 Showed anew
115 Ellipses
116 What the eight featured celebrities in this puzzle are doing?
121 Edit further, perhaps
122 State of joy
123 Bones near tibiae
124 Bottom-of-barrel residue
125 Fabray of Broadway
126 Greek Week guy

DOWN
1 Vaults
2 Writer Calvino
3 Lead or tin
4 "I'm Sorry" singer
5 The Emerald Isle
6 Singer DiFranco
7 Most soft, dry and crumbly
8 "Solid Gold" host Marilyn
9 Breakfast chain, for short
10 Flow barrier
11 Discharge from the military, informally
12 Skater Midori
13 Minks' kin
14 Femme —
15 Modify
16 #1 song, say
17 "The Father" actress Poots
18 Tools for fruit preparation
19 How bedding is often packaged
24 IM chuckle
29 City near Bangalore
31 Booming jet of old, in brief
32 Jazz genre
33 Bitter brew
34 Karel Capek sci-fi play
36 Actor Pascal
37 Floored it
39 Good, in Nice
40 From dusk to dawn
41 Dynamo
42 52, to Flavius
43 Hotel cousin
45 Li'l Abner creator Al
48 Ashley or Mary-Kate
49 Cooked in a clay oven, as naan
50 Neighbor of a Spaniard
51 Part of TGIF
53 NBC skit show, in brief
55 Lazy sort
56 Meyers of "Kate & Allie"
57 "Rambo" site, for short
58 Decline
59 — polloi
62 "What a pity!"
66 Bullfight yell
68 Your and my
69 Droop down
70 Mendes of movies
71 Berlin article
73 — discount
74 Long, thin fish
77 Clear of mist
79 Eye sore
81 High-kicking French dance
82 Dilettantish
83 Long, thin fish
84 Org. enforcing the 104-Across
86 First post-band album, perhaps
90 Vodka brand
92 Marine snail with no shell
93 Cooking wine
94 Lyricist Gershwin
95 Actor Cage, to friends
96 "Addams Family" cousin
97 Compadre
98 Harmony
99 Shamrock, e.g.
100 Threat
102 Guys contracted by the Mafia
105 Bird hangouts
106 Wading bird
107 Tic — (mint)
109 Toothbrush brand
110 Region of China
111 In tune
113 "— Rhythm"
114 Country's McEntire
117 Mo. neighbor
118 Native suffix
119 Tiny objection
120 Space station until 2001



Even Exchange
by Donna Pettman

Each numbered row contains two clues and two 6-letter answers. The two answers differ from each other by only one letter, which has already been inserted. For example, if you exchange the A from MASTER for an I, you get MISTER. Do not change the order of the letters.

1. Derrick	_ _ _ N _	Wooden enclosure	_ _ _ T _
2. Meditation	_ R _ _ _ _	Actor or team member	_ L _ _ _ _
3. Gut feeling	_ _ N _ _	Pigeon enclosure	_ _ T _ _
4. Torrent of rain	_ _ _ _ G _	Hoodwink	_ _ _ _ D _
5. Aesop's specialty	F _ _ _ _	Kitchen furniture	T _ _ _ _
6. Modify	_ _ _ E _	Church platform	_ _ _ A _
7. Smallest finger	_ _ N _ _	Hard to please	_ _ C _ _
8. Energetic	_ I _ _ _ _	Attractive	_ O _ _ _ _
9. Clothes holder	_ _ _ _ E _	Airplane garage	_ _ _ _ A _
10. Underage person	_ _ _ _ R	North Dakota city	_ _ _ _ T

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CryptoQuip

This is a simple substitution cipher in which each letter used stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Solution is accomplished by trial and error.

Clue: **C** equals **R**

PT BI NCDFY CSAPKS P CSZMRS FD MRS FYLF YSCN ZCDB L JLMCSJ FCSS, ADTFCLCI FD KDKMJLC NLI JSLZ.

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CryptoQuote

AXYDLBAAXR
is **LONGFELLOW**

One letter stands for another. In this sample, **A** is used for the three L's, **X** for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each week the code letters are different.

OTDID'J DUNIVNLJ GNEDI — ANOT VNOZSMOZNUMW MUP OIMUJYNIVMOZNUMW GNEDI — ZU WNSD.

— AZJTNG VZXTMDW XLIIH

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GO FIGURE!

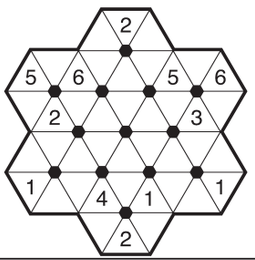
The idea of Go Figure is to arrive at the figures given at the bottom and right-hand columns of the diagram by following the arithmetic signs in the order they are given (that is, from left to right and top to bottom). Use only the numbers below the diagram to complete its blank squares and use each of the nine numbers only once.

	+		+		=	14		
+		-		+				
	-		+		=	14		
÷		×		×				
	+		×		=	44		
=		=		=				
5		36		56				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

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SNOWFLAKES
by Japheth Light

There are 13 black hexagons in the puzzle. Place the numbers 1 - 6 around each of them. No number can be repeated in any partial hexagon shape along the border of the puzzle.



AERIN IT OUT

SOMETHING OLD, NEW AND BLUE

Johnny Dollars keeps the dream alive in Lower South End

BY AERIN SPRUILL

As someone who recently completed her 36th trip around the sun, I find myself in a constant push and pull when it comes to Queen City nightlife. Some days, I still feel like I'm in my 20s, chasing the kind of adventure that doesn't end until sunrise, starved for creative concepts that burn themselves into your memory but require a boarding pass.

Other days, I feel like a crotchety "K-aerin," painfully aware of the moment when "too" becomes the adverb before every complaint threatening to fall out of my mouth. Too loud. Too busy. Too young. Too chintzy. Too new. On those days, I yearn for places that feel worn in, the kind of spots that embody if-these-walls-could-talk vibes from the outside in.

I found myself in just such a spot on a recent Sunday: Johnny Dollars in Lower South End, or "LoSo," as Charlotte continues its campaign to abbreviate every neighborhood into submission.

A staple dive that's managed to survive since 1999, Johnny Dollars looks exactly how a dive bar should. Day or night, its faded facade and unkempt exterior, complete with zero windows in sight, practically scream: "SeedyAF. Enter at your own risk."

And for once, the parking lot wasn't packed to the brim.

A selfish smile crept across my face as I watched a lone golf bro stumble out, squinting like he'd forgotten it was still daylight outside. Not only had we dodged the post-tournament crowd, but it was starting to look like we might actually have the bar to ourselves.

As we stepped through the entrance, it took my eyes a second to adjust to the dim haze of the interior. The smell of cigarette smoke drifting in from the back patio hung in the air, instantly reminding me of sticky naps on plastic-wrapped couches back when smoking inside the house was permitted.

For a split second, I wondered if Johnny Dollars had somehow been grandfathered in. But instead of ashtrays lining the bar, there were bowls of peanuts I dare not touch, though their presence satisfied my craving for a dive frozen in time.

The bartender emerged from the game of pool we'd clocked to our left wearing an easy-like-Sunday-morning smile that only exists when the bar isn't three deep. I'll admit, we were both shocked to learn PBR wasn't on draft and the only cider option was berry-flavored, but our disappointment quickly faded when the bartender asked, "You sure you don't want a pickle PBR?"

We looked at each other completely horrified before hearing someone from the corner: "Aw man, what'd they do to you? They don't deserve that."

The regulars devolved into laughter, collectively acknowledging the unholy union that is pickle juice and the patron saint of dive bar beer.

I'm not gonna lie though; once we were finally in on the joke, I was tempted to order one by round two (and yes, it is a real thing).

A few weeks earlier, Johnny Dollars hosted Picklechella, featuring a limited-edition collab between Pabst Blue Ribbon and Grillo's Pickles — a bittersweet reminder that even dives that stand the test of time eventually have to flirt with novelty to keep the lights on.

And while I hate to admit it, events like last year's viral "F*ck We Dated the Same Guy" night make it hard to argue with the formula. Johnny Dollars invited the scorned women of Charlotte to bring in a photo of the man who cheated on them in exchange for a free drink. And if that's not proof they've mastered the balance between dive bar messiness and modern chaos, I don't know what is.

The paradox of Johnny Dollars became even more apparent when we attempted to "retreat" to the back patio only to be met by the thumping bass of an outdoor sunset DJ playing to a crowd of approximately five people.

I giggled watching the angst spread across Boo's furrowed brow as he strained to hear anything I was saying over the music, silently accepting that he probably wouldn't last long enough for the after-dark jazz quartet, which honestly sounded far more our speed.

But even as apartment complexes close in and Johnny Dollars embraces a newer generation of nightlife culture, it's clear neither the bar nor its popcorn are going anywhere anytime soon.

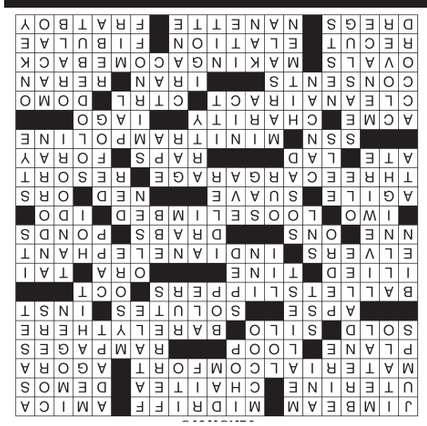
And while part of me misses the idea of experiencing it exactly as it once was, another part of me is just glad it's still here — and that on a perfectly dead, non-themed night, I'll still be able to sit in greedy nostalgia.

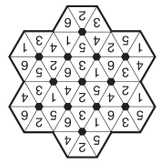
Maybe on a weekday.

INFO@QCNERVE.COM

PUZZLE ANSWERS

9	6	4	1	2	7	8	5	3
1	5	2	3	8	9	6	7	4
3	8	7	6	4	5	2	9	1
2	7	3	4	5	1	9	8	6
4	1	8	9	7	6	5	3	2
6	9	5	2	3	8	4	1	7
5	4	9	7	6	3	1	2	8
7	2	1	8	9	4	3	6	5
8	3	6	5	1	2	7	4	9





CryptoQuote
answer

There's enormous power — both motivational and transformational power — in love.
— Bishop Michael Curry

CryptoQuip
answer

In my broth recipe I refuse to use that herb from a laurel tree, contrary to popular belief.

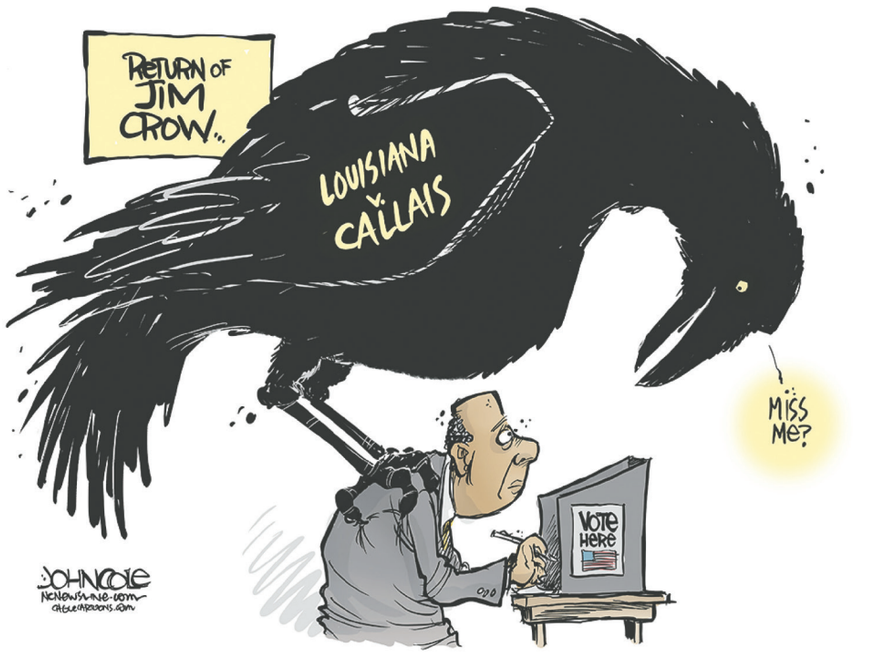
Even Exchange
answers

1. Crane, Crate
2. Prayer, Player
3. Hunch, Hutch
4. Deluge, Deluge
5. Fable, Table
6. Alter, Altar
7. Pinky, Picky
8. Lively, Lovely
9. Hanger, Hangar
10. Minor, Minot

3	+	5	+	6 = 14
+		-		+
7	-	1	+	8 = 14
÷		×		×
2	+	9	×	4 = 44
=		=		= 56

Trivia Answers

1. Minsk.
2. "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest."
3. Eris.
4. Femur.
5. Dwight Eisenhower.
6. Triangle.
7. The Book of Revelation.
8. Venus.
9. Ogeneson (Og).
10. John Candy.



"Return of Jim Crow" by John Cole via NC Newsline

SAVAGE LOVE

RUBBING RUBBERS

Quickies

BY DAN SAVAGE

My spouse and I haven't had sex for almost two years. No kids, jobs aren't stressful, and we still enjoy each other's company. (At least I enjoy theirs.) The subject of sex never comes up. I don't miss it, honestly, and I suspect they don't either. But I don't know.

It's possible your spouse doesn't miss sex either — it's also possible your spouse isn't missing sex because they're getting it elsewhere. Seeing as you don't have kids to worry about, I don't think raising the subject presents an existential risk. Tell your spouse you're content with your companionate/sexless marriage and you want to make sure they are too. If they are, great. If they're not, well, better to hear it from them now than to find out when they file for divorce. That doesn't mean you have to start having sex you don't wanna have and it doesn't mean you have to file for divorce; it just means that you will have to figure out (together) what needs to change so your spouse can live as happily within your marriage as you do.

About to start a Berlin/Vancouver LDR for three years. Is it monogamously possible?

Munich/Vancouver, yes. Berlin/Vancouver, no.

Do you have an opinion on whether there are therapeutic methods, such as CBT, which have a reasonable success rate in transforming unrequited love into friendship? I am a demisexual person who lives with the person I'm in love with. For reasons, it is difficult to move apart.

While cock and ball torture (CBT) might take your mind off your unrequited love, the effect would only last as long as the torture did. As for whether cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) has the power to turn unrequited love into friendship, that I couldn't tell you. But a little CBT (cognitive behavioral therapy) — unlike a little CBT (cock and ball torture) — couldn't hurt.

I'm 37-year-old cis woman from the NY metro area. For a long while, I've had this gut feeling I'm meant to be partnered with a trans man. Where do I begin? Where do I go to put myself in spaces to meet more trans men (whether dating apps, in person, etc.)? How do I go about getting over the nerves about trying something new and not making trans men I encounter feel as if they're being fetishized? As an ally, I want to approach exploration from a place of respect. Advice would be appreciated!

I shared your question with Nico Carney, a trans man and standup comedian based in New York City.

"Hello 37-year-old cis woman looking for a trans guy to love," Carney responded via email. "As a trans man, it certainly always feels good to feel like someone is looking for me specifically. The fact that you're already considering how your excitement could make a trans guy feel fetishized is a sign that your heart and head are in the right place. I think the key is to remember each trans person will feel differently about how they're being perceived. Some will be more anxious about being fetishized, while others may crave your complimenting of their specific body. It's all about communication and building to a place of mutual trust, respect, and care. And if you want to meet trans guys out in the wild, NYC is a great place to be! Check out your favorite gay bars for any trans-dude specific meetups."

Follow Nico Carney on Instagram @NicoCarney.

I'm right-handed, and I do everything with my right hand — except anything sexual. Whether it's touching myself or touching a sexual partner, my hand of choice is naturally my left. Am I the only one in this situation? Any thoughts about where it could come from?

No idea whether you're the only person out there using his non-dominant hand when touching himself and/or others in a sexual way … and no idea where this could come from. Perhaps you started using your non-dominant hand to masturbate because it replicated, in a low-key way, "the stranger," where someone intentionally puts their arm to sleep before masturbating. It's supposed to feel like someone else is touching their genitals — at least in theory. (I hear people talking about "the stranger," but I've never heard from someone who actually attempted it.)

A white male friend has had three serious girlfriends over the last five years and each one was an Asian woman. It's not as bad as it could be, as all three of his girlfriends were fully westernized, none were impoverished immigrants, and their relationships — from the outside — seemed egalitarian. So, it's not as bad as it could be. But it's still bad, right? Do I have a conversation with him about it?

If your friend had dated three white girlfriends in a row, you probably wouldn't have noticed — even though a case could be made that his preference for white women was shaped by racist beauty standards and cultural conditioning. So, maybe it was a coincidence that he dated three Asian women in a row … or maybe your friend likes what he likes and policing his dick isn't your responsibility.

I enjoy sucking dick, but I have an aversion to letting my partner cum in my mouth. There have been a few times where I've cut off what seems to be a very enjoyable situation because I'm not ready to get a mouthful. The thought of swallowing makes me nervous but spitting it out seems rude. If I were to ever be brave enough to let him finish during oral, what could I expect? Taste? Would I get a tummy ache if I swallow? Help!

There's a middle ground between spitting and swallowing; if you let your partner come in your mouth and you don't swallow and your lips aren't sealed around his shaft, his cum will run out of your mouth and — depending on the position you're blowing him in — onto his crotch or onto the floor or onto your tits.

P.S. You've seen your partner's loads, which means you already have a pretty good idea what to expect volume-wise and consistency-wise. As for taste, well, some tastes are worth acquiring. (Does anyone really like their first sip of beer?)

P.P.S. You might get a stomachache — you might even get the runs — because semen contains prostaglandins, which can have a laxative effect on some people.

I'm a Gen X woman. I have a really basic question for you that I have wondered about for my entire adult life: Why don't people (mostly straight men) who say they can't live without sex just masturbate? I would get it if what they wanted was closeness and intimacy and a relationship with another person, if only for a little while — but it feels like a lot of men just want to stick their dicks in someone. Anyone. But if you're not interested in women as human beings and you don't even *like* them — as is the case with a lot of men in my experience — what is the point of even bringing an actual woman into it? Why not just fuck the couch or jerk off?

I post a reader question every Thursday and let the commentariat at Savage.Love give the advice. Here's a sampling of what the group had to say in response to your question…

BiDanFan: "With all the drama of relationships, not to mention the inconvenience of babies, if masturbation were anywhere near as satisfying as partnered sex, the human race would have gone extinct millennia ago."

Ruby: "I think you have just had the unfortunate luck to come across a lot of men who just want to fuck and don't want a relationship with a woman. They're either just looking for a hit and run or they just don't have very good relationship skills. Or both. Yuck."

Randy: "Fucking people is a lot more fun than fucking couches or jerking off. When jerking off I've always fantasized about sex with other people, but I've never thought about jerking off when fucking a real live person."

Midcoast Person: "Another reason why society would be better off if we would just legalize & destigmatize sex work. The overly self-centered folks could have a legitimate place to go to satisfy that part of their sexual appetite which no amount of masturbation will sate. There'd be a lot less people pretending to be romantically interested in somebody when they only want to fuck."

Is flirting cheating if nothing physical happened?

It is not — but a distinction can be made between flirting with intent, e.g. getting on the apps, swapping pics, gaming out a time and place to meet, etc., and harmless flirting, e.g. flirtatious banter with an attractive stranger in a bar or a colleague at a work function. Now, some people who engage in flirt-with-intent behaviors have no plans to actually go through with it; those people are only guilty of fantasizing about cheating and wasting other people's time. And there are people who wind up fucking strangers in bars and/or colleagues at work functions because "harmless flirtation" has been known to escalate quickly at times. But as a general rule, if nothing happened … then nothing happened.

I'm a cis man in his late thirties living near Toronto. I have a leather fetish and love watching porn with women wearing leather leggings, leather dresses, leather corsets, all of it. I've noticed the majority of leather porn is Russian. Why is it? Are there other fetishes that are dominated by one place? (The reason I'm asking is because I also like dialogue in porn, and I don't speak Russian!)

I'm a gay man living in Seattle, and it took me all of two minutes — less than two minutes — to find porn featuring women in leather who were speaking English. The porn you seek is out there, and it's not hard to find.

I'm a circumcised gay top on PrEP. I find I don't usually cum when I'm a fucking a guy — maybe 10% of the time, unless I pull out and jerk off a bit to get closer. Is that a function of a less sensitive penis or is it situational? The last time I bred a guy's ass I was really turned on, so the situation clearly makes some difference. Thanks for any thoughts!

Look at it this way: Needing to pull out and give yourself a few strokes to get there — needing to get yourself to push yourself to the point of orgasmic inevitability before pushing back in and breeding a guy — means you'll always last as long as the bottom you're breeding wants you to. Whether it's a function of a less sensitive penis (due to having been circumcised) or not, you can choose to regard it as a superpower and not defect.

P.S. Please don't become one of those guys who is angry about being cut. I know lots of cut guys who can come without pulling out and giving themselves a few strokes, so your superpower may or may not be related to being circumcised. Cut guy to cut guy, please know that we can oppose the routine circumcision of male infants — which continues to fall in the U.S. — without being self-pitying, tedious bores about it.

THE INDEPENDENT PICTURE HOUSE PRESENTS



ONCE WERE WARRIORS

OPENS MAY 05 *DIR. LEE TAMAHORI 1994*



YELLOW ROSE

OPENS MAY 13 *DIR. DIANE PARAGAS 2019*



MISSISSIPPI MASALA

OPENS MAY 21 *DIR. MIRA NAIR 1991*



THE JOY LUCK CLUB

OPENS MAY 27 *DIR. WAYNE WANG 1993*

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