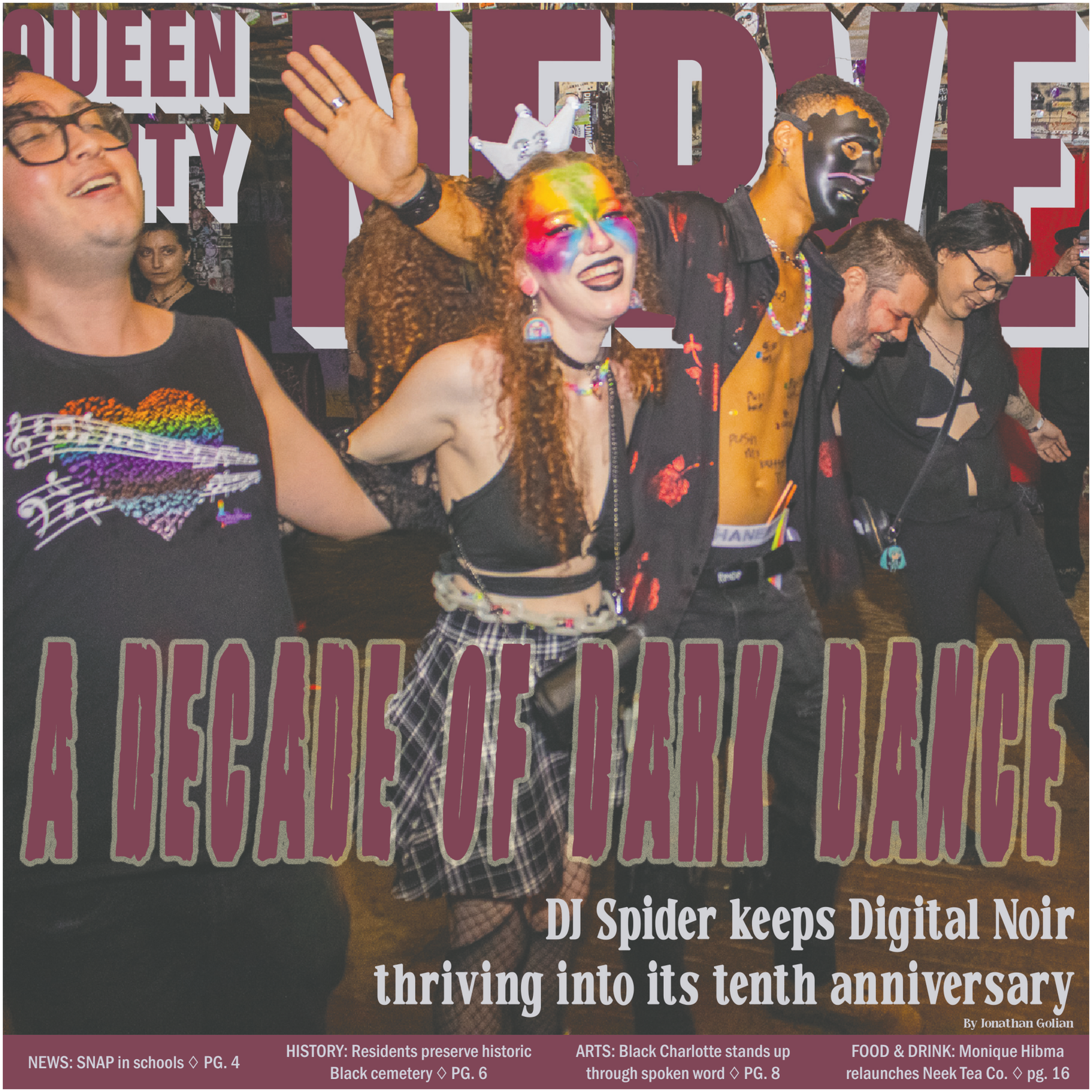
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QUEEN CITY NERVE



A DECADE OF DARK DANCE

DJ Spider keeps Digital Noir thriving into its tenth anniversary

By Jonathan Golian

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HISTORY: Residents preserve historic Black cemetery ♢ PG. 6

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SNAP benefits were cut off beginning Nov. 1 amid an already-existing hunger crisis in NC. AdobeStock

A SNAP IN THE SAFETY NET

Educators scramble to support students amid hunger crisis

BY ANNIE KEOUGH

For students in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS), Nov. 12 was always going to be a nerve-wracking time: Report Card Day.

Yet for the nearly 25% of CMS students who rely on the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), November has seen more pressing matters arise as families have had to consider where their next meal will come from amidst a government shutdown that has left them behind.

After Congress failed to agree on federal funding allocations for the new fiscal year on Oct. 1 — resulting in the longest government shutdown in U.S. history — the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) told state Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) agencies that the government would discontinue allocation of benefits for the program beginning Nov. 1.

In North Carolina, SNAP supports more than 621,000 children who automatically qualify for free school meals.

What's followed since SNAP benefits were cut has been a string of court rulings and callbacks that have left local leaders, community organizers and educators scrambling to ensure that our state's most vulnerable populations including children remain fed.

CMS educator Justin Parmenter pointed out to Queen City Nerve that it's not just students who are affected; many educators and other CMS staff rely on SNAP for financial assistance.

While CMS has assured families that the district will continue its school meals program uninterrupted, including free or reduced-priced meals for eligible students, that doesn't guarantee they'll remain fed outside of school.

As a member of the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE), Parmenter and others have been on the front lines of the fight to ensure that neither students nor staff are left to go to bed hungry each night.

"A year ago I probably wouldn't have even believed this was possible," told Queen City Nerve of the mess that has resulted from the extended government shutdown. "But here we are."

How we got here

On Oct. 28, Massachusetts Attorney General Andrea Joy Campbell, along with 22 other attorneys general and three governors, filed a lawsuit against the USDA for unlawfully suspending SNAP.

Following a court ruling that the USDA must use contingency funds to restore reduced SNAP benefits, North Carolina began offering partial benefits for November.

After issuing partial benefits on Nov. 7, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) was on track to issue the remaining full benefits over the following weekend. However, a decision by the White House to appeal a court ruling forced NCDHHS to pause its payout.

In a release that Friday announcing the dispersal of full SNAP benefits, US Rep. Alma Adams of Charlotte said North Carolina SNAP recipients would be issued 65% of their regular SNAP benefits immediately with an additional 35% expected to come as soon as the weekend. Her statement came before the issuance of that final 35% was halted.

"After weeks of fighting the Trump administration's unlawful actions, help is finally on the way for 1.4 million North Carolinians who rely on SNAP to make the ends meet, including 34,000 households in my district," Adams wrote.

"This funding was only administered because Democrats sued the USDA to release SNAP benefits and stop holding the American people hostage," she continued. "The Trump administration has made it clear that they have no desire to administer SNAP and will choose to let people go hungry unless they are forced to do so. This is far from the last fight SNAP faces and Democrats are ready to defend the lifesaving program because in the richest country in the world, no one should go to bed hungry."

In a Nov. 5 press release, the NCAE urged the Trump administration to fulfill its duty to protect families in need by fully funding November benefits, noting that the pause affects hundreds of thousands of children, veterans, individuals with disabilities and working families who rely on the program to put food on the table.

"The court decisions make clear that the administration has a duty to protect families in need, not use them as leverage in political disputes," the statement read. "By not funding SNAP in its entirety, the Administration is harming millions of Americans — including 1.4 million North Carolinians — by increasing food insecurity, straining family budgets, and disrupting communities across the state.

How food assistance programs impact educators and students

As a federal initiative that helps families, children and communities address food insecurity, SNAP plays a critical role in schools.

Under normal conditions, SNAP is one of the most effective anti-hunger programs in the U.S., according to the Food Research and Action Center. The program generates up to $1.80 in economic activity for every $1 spent, reaching 42 million people.

Of the 1.4 million North Carolinians that rely on SNAP benefits, an estimated 138,500 reside in Mecklenburg County, according to the county.

In Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) district, more than half of all schools are Title I, meaning the majority of students live near or below the poverty line, the nonprofit organization Communities in Schools of Charlotte-Mecklenburg reports on its website.

If at least 65-70% of a school's students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, that school qualifies for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), a program that provides free breakfast and lunch to all students. Eligibility is determined by data-matching households that receive SNAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Medicaid and/or are home to children who are certified as homeless or migrants, enrolled in Head Start, or in foster care.

Of the 186 schools in the CMS district, 115 participate in CEP.

On Oct. 31, the CMS Board of Education and Superintendent Crystal Hill issued a statement to assure CMS families that students will continue to have access to meals at school each day despite the government shutdown.

CMS is also providing students and families with additional support like counseling and student wellness support services. If a school doesn't participate in the CEP program, families can still apply for free or reduced-priced meals on a rolling basis.

"At CMS, we care deeply about every student and family we serve – and we want our students and their families to know that support is always available," the statement read. "We are one school district – one community – and together, we will continue to provide our students with Endless Possibilities."



The NC Association of Educators rallies for teacher pay. Courtesy of NCAE

There are more than 400,000 children in North Carolina who rely on SNAP benefits, according to NCAE President Tamika Walker Kelly. When those children cannot access food in their homes, they rely on school-provided meals for breakfast and lunch.

As the shutdown continues and children and families are unable to access their SNAP benefits, the families who are currently in the process of applying for free and reduced lunch at school will see delays in application approval for those programs, she said.

CEP schools may also run out of funds because of the federal government's interruption, with some at risk of shutting down altogether. Should that happen, schools will have to find other ways to support students and ensure they have access to breakfast and lunch on a regular basis.

"It's those interruptions of those programs that then impact a student's ability to focus on academics, to learn, to not worry about where their next meal is coming from throughout the day, which would have subsequent effects on their performance in schools," Kelly said.

The students aren't the only ones facing food insecurity.

"We also have employees who receive SNAP benefits based on their income," Parmenter said. "This is not something that's limited only to students. It's something that can impact people that work for our district as well."

When people's basic needs aren't met, they're unable to engage in the learning process, both on the educator and student side, Parmenter said.

"When people are focused on their hunger, when children are focused on feelings of hunger, it's impossible for them to concentrate on learning," he said.

It's clear to Parmenter when students are unable to focus on learning and he believes that schools will see more impacts on development in the classroom as the shutdown goes on.

"I think it's going to become more and more obvious who is suffering from the inaction of the federal government."

What happens now?

As this story is going to print, Congress appears to be nearing a deal that will end the government shutdown. All will not go "back to normal" when the shutdown is resolved, however.

Before the government abruptly cut off access to SNAP benefits for 1.4 million North Carolinians, reporting already showed that hunger in North Carolina was at its highest point in a generation.

The Trump administration has cut $30 million in federal funding for food banks and schools across the state to purchase food from local farms. At the state level, the $9.1-million allocation of funding that allows food banks to purchase locally grown fruits, vegetables, dairy and meat has been held up while Republican infighting delays the passage of a state budget.

Food assistance programs will continue to face deep federal funding cuts thanks to President Trump's so-called Big, Beautiful Bill, which was passed in July and called for a $186 billion cut in SNAP benefits by 2035.

Parmenter admitted that it's unclear what the need will be going forward from an educational standpoint. The dizzying pace that decisions are being made makes it difficult to keep up with.

"I think we just have to kind of wait and see how it plays out and what the school district and local county government has to do in order to try and prevent people from going hungry," he said. "Which, again … hearing those words come out of my mouth is shocking still to me that we're in a position of having to try desperately to prevent people from going hungry over politics."

The actions that NC schools have taken in the wake of the government shutdown, however, is a possible solution to how schools will continue to support students and families who are facing food insecurity once it is lifted, Kelly said.

NCAE's coalition of educators have seen increased collaboration and networking with food banks across the state's counties and regions, she said.

"We are seeing other community organizations and entities step up to provide food distribution times and days that allow our families to have access to shelf-stable items and meals that will help sustain them," Kelly said. "And then, of course, we're seeing communities pull together and do mutual aid fundraising."

Local restaurants and businesses have even started offering meal packages at discounted rates so that families are able to stretch their funds in ways that will sustain them through this time, she said.

Similar efforts are occurring on a broader level across the state. On Nov. 7, Gov. Josh Stein reported that, with the help of private partners, the state had raised nearly $22 million to support local food banks across North Carolina.

"This is about a basic necessity – food – being caught in the middle of political chaos," Stein said. "The hard-working people and families who rely on SNAP benefits deserve certainty, not confusion about whether they'll be able to put meals on the table this weekend and the rest of the month."

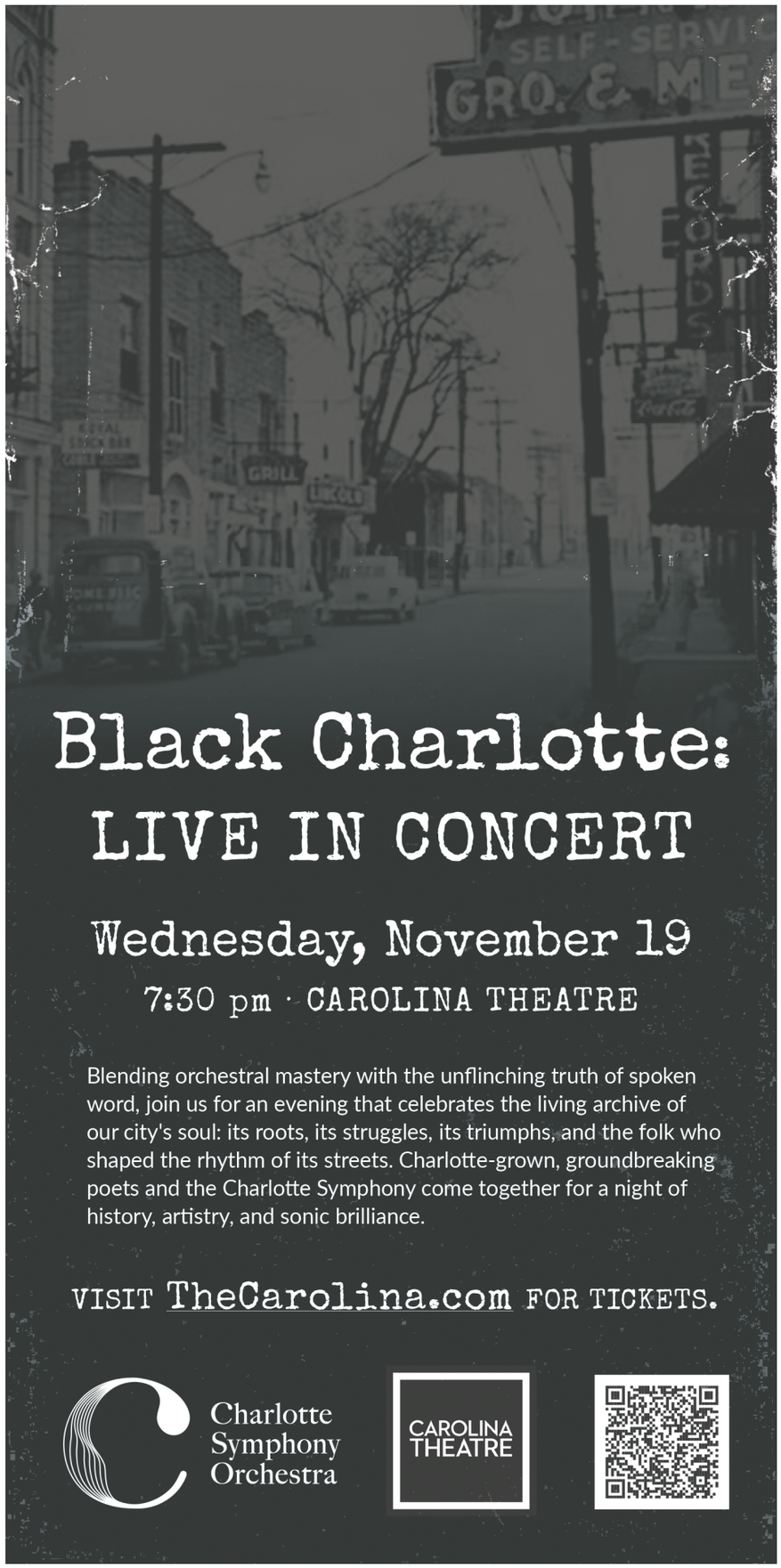
According to Kelly, NCAE's greatest tool is its advocacy as educators and as communities to ask the state legislature to do more to increase those efforts.

While she appreciates NC Attorney General Jeff Jackson and NC representatives in Congress' efforts to push the Trump administration to fully restore SNAP benefits, a large sum of duty falls on federal legislators.

"It is the responsibility of our federal government to make sure that they are providing for our citizens, whether it's here in North Carolina or across the country," Kelly said. "And we implore them, and it is part of their duty as elected officials to be responsible for the constituents in their care."

"We're talking about families and children in our communities and they should not be commodities in a political fight when we are trying to ensure that every student comes to school fed, that no family goes hungry and that working families have what they need in order to grow and thrive in our state."

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A LEGACY UNCOVERED

Preservation project aims to honor the legacy of historic Black church in east Charlotte

BY RYAN PITKIN

In a wooded area behind the Wallace Terrace Apartments in east Charlotte's Grier Heights neighborhood, there's a man who's been working on a grave for weeks.

Now 72 years old, Wayne Johnson has been coming to the grave of his great-grandfather Nelson Walker since he was 5 years old, when his dad would walk him and his brothers from their home on Ellington Street to the cemetery at St. Lloyd Presbyterian Church.

"We started to come up and clean up my father's grandfather's grave and his grandmother's grave every year," Johnson recalled on a recent cold November morning at the site. "Every different holiday, Christmas, Mother's Day, all those days we was here cleaning up."

The church, originally founded in 1868 by formerly enslaved residents living near Sharon Township in what is now the SouthPark area, had moved to Grier Heights in the 1920s as that neighborhood became a bustling Black community.

The church closed in 1966 and has long since been demolished. The St. Lloyd Presbyterian Church Cemetery became overgrown, but longtime residents like Wayne Johnson, referred to in the community as members of the "Legacy Family," never forgot it.

His work to restore the grave of Nelson Walker is a personal passion project of his, but it's also part of a larger project to preserve the St. Lloyd cemetery. That's the mission of the St. Lloyd Presbyterian Church Cemetery Foundation (SLPCCF), formed in 2023 to honor the legacy of the historic Black church by preserving cemetery sites related to it in its original SouthPark location as well as Grier Heights.

That mission marks a milestone on Nov. 12 when Johnson and fellow members of the SLPCCF gather at the site to celebrate the official transfer of ownership of the property into their hands.

Working simultaneously at the SouthPark site off Colony Road, where the foundation has identified 184 grave sites, and the Grier Heights site, which holds 62 graves, the foundation aims to build parks that will serve both as memorials to those ancestors who were laid to rest there and as community gathering spots.

Renderings of the park planned for Grier Heights by local urban design and land planning firm LandDesign show boardwalks and pedestrian paths cutting through the wooded area, with rounded structures and seating areas located in the middle.

"Envision vibrant colors flowing brightly in energizing whimsical circles and spheres that incorporate a seeds of growth theme," reads the SLPCCF website.

When it does come to fruition, the property will provide a lasting legacy not only for Johnson and his team but the ancestors and community members who came before them.

A church is raised

In October 1867, a group of African-American members of Sharon Presbyterian Church in what was then known as Sharon Township in south Charlotte appeared before the Church Elders and requested "advice and aid in building a house of worship for the colored people," according to the minutes from that session.

The names of the petitioners are lost to time, but it is believed that they became the founders of St. Lloyd Presbyterian Church.

On Feb. 18, 1868, five trustees of The Presbytery of Catawba of the United Presbyterian Church of America signed a deed to purchase a single acre of land in Sharon Township for $25, on which to erect the congregation's first church building and create a burial ground. Later on, a primary school was also established on the property.

In the mid-1920s, former governor Cameron Morrison and his wife Sarah bought the land where the church was located.

The five trustees of St. Lloyd at the time — James Rodman, Hall Price, Thomas Knox, Walter Davis and Frank Price — moved the church to a new location on more than 2 acres that they bought from E.W Wallace and Katie C. Wallace, two members of the church who owned land in the nascent Black community Grier Heights.

Originally known as Grier Town, Grier Heights originated as a farming community comprising just four houses in 1886. It's believed that Sam Billings, a formerly enslaved man whom Wayne Johnson proudly claims as a direct relative, became the first African-American to buy a plot of land in Charlotte when he purchased the 100 acres that would become the foundation of Grier Heights.

In 1907, Billings joined neighbors Arthur S. Grier, the funeral home director for whom the neighborhood was named; John Jackson; Lee Father MacDuff Dinkins; and Grier Heights' Antioch Baptist Church founder James McVay to purchase more land and build the community farther out.

In 1927, around the same time St. Lloyd Presbyterian moved into the neighborhood, community members requested to have a school built. The local board of education agreed only to provide a frame structure for such an establishment, so neighbors donated land and built it themselves. That facility has since been turned into the Grier Heights Community Center, where residents can access low-cost medical care, adult literacy tutoring and GED classes.

In the 1940s, Grier built 100 homes that were sold to Black soldiers returning from World War II. Born in 1953, Johnson still takes pride in this spirit of neighbors helping neighbors.

"You can't say there wasn't any Blacks involved in this community as families," he said when asked about the importance of preserving the story of Grier Heights' beginnings. "All the guys, because they knew trades, they was helping each other ... When they started to develop a community, everybody was happy to build up my house ... We come in, we pitch in and we help you to build your house, and you get your house built, then somebody else come in and so on. Because it was all family, so everybody was building ... That's the way it started."

A foundation forms

When we visited the site of the cemetery in Grier Heights in the lead-up to Wednesday's event, leaves covered the ground, making it hard at first to decipher where the graves were located.

As we walked deeper into the woods, however, towards the construction of new apartments behind it, depressions in the ground made clear where folks had been laid to rest decades ago.

Then there were gravestones, some of which still in good condition, showing last names familiar from the list of trustees who moved the church: Lucinda Davis (1881-1961), Virtgus Rodman (1888-1931), Private First Class Coatis S. Price, a medic in World War II (1913-1952).

Just 13 years old when it closed, Johnson still has memories of the church. He pointed to one gravestone of a woman named Fant, likely related to current board member Genora Fant.

"She was like the fire for the church," he said fondly of the woman whose gravestone sat in front of him. "You know how Black folks get in the church when the Holy Ghost get in 'em. That was her. She was a fire in the church. She warmed it up."

If not for residents like Johnson and his fellow SLPCCF members, this sacred site may have been long redeveloped and forgotten. The property was until recently owned by Thompson Child and Family Focus, which runs the Family Services Center located between the cemetery site and Wendover Road.

"When they bought it, bless their heart, it was like a trust," Johnson said of the company's commitment not to develop the land. "They were going to hold it, so nothing happened."

By 2019, as more apartments were approved on the land surrounding the site, Johnson and other descendants of the St. Lloyd Presbyterian Church members decided they should act.

Johnson said he just so happened to call Clay Grubb, CEO of local development firm Grubb Properties, for advice. He had known Grubb from his days on the Planning Commission and knew that he had experience with projects like this.

As it happened, Grubb had experience with projects exactly like it — he had bought the site of the St. Lloyd Presbyterian Church Cemetery in SouthPark around the turn of the millennium and had it designated as a historic landmark in 2004 with the intention of preserving it.

"I went to him to tell him what was going on," Johnson recalled. "[Grubb] said, 'Why don't we just merge the two together and create a foundation, which we need anyway?' So we agreed to do that."

Grubb helped organize a ground-penetrating-radar study at the SouthPark site in 2022 that found 184 grave sites compared to the 78 sites discovered in a 1993 study. The same test carried out at the Wendover Road site in January 2024 revealed 62 graves where just 14 had been previously reported.

Since then, Johnson and the rest of the SLPCCF have been going through the bureaucratic process to secure the land from Thompson. Now that they own both sites, the real work can begin.

The foundation will work simultaneously on both sites, but Johnson expects the SouthPark site to come to completion first.

"Thompson didn't have to do this, Clay [Grubbs] didn't have to do this," Johnson told Queen City Nerve. "But they wanted to preserve history, they wanted to keep our legacy going. So they said, 'No, we want you all to take it because it's here and we need somebody who's going to keep it up, maintain it, and give it the honor and respect that it really needs.' That's where we come in."

For Johnson, the importance of the preservation project is an educational one, an inspirational one, a spiritual one and a way to pay homage not only to the church that once stood nearby but the strong community he grew up in, built by Black families working side by side.

Having grown up considering all of his neighbors to be members of his extended family, his mission can be summed up more concisely in one comment he muttered in passing while we toured the site that morning: "I have to do this because this is my family."

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Wayne Johnson works to restore his great-grandfather Nelson Walker's grave. Photo by Ryan Pitkin

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Jay Ward performs at a previous Black Charlotte event. Photo by Daniel Coston

THE BLACK MIRROR

Poets present 'love letter' to Charlotte with all its flaws

BY RYAN PITKIN

A 15-year-old girl strides purposefully through a jeering, screaming white mob. Despite the maelstrom of malice that surrounds her, her eyes are fixed on what's ahead of her.

Many have seen the photo of Dorothy Counts becoming the first Black student to integrate Harding High School in 1957, but Jah Smalls' words dig deeper, going beyond high-flown, albeit accurate, rhetoric about lighting beacons and shattering barriers.

"Her assignment was simple: no escorts," Smalls' fine-grained baritone gently unfurls. "Eyes should never meet the pavement/ Baby girl, you are inferior to no one..."

Smalls' poem "From a Seed" gets under the skin of history, unveiling the fear, courage and love behind the iconic image.

It's just one of nine spoken-word poems, accompanied by music, that comprise *Black Charlotte: A Poetic Celebration of Place & Folk*, an album spearheaded by Jay Ward, Charlotte's first poet laureate, with Smalls as executive producer.

The collection, which came under consideration for a Best Spoken Word Poetry Album Grammy nomination, is the basis for Black Charlotte: Live in Concert, a performance that fuses the music of 24 Charlotte Symphony Orchestra musicians with the verses of 13 Black spoken-word poets from the Queen City sharing their unique perspectives on the city's paradoxical present, beckoning future and persistent past.

The event is scheduled for Nov. 19 at the newly restored Carolina Theatre, itself a symbol of Charlotte's history and future colliding.

According to Smalls and Ward, who are presenting and curating the performance, Black Charlotte is a love letter to the city — one that doesn't shy away from depicting its racist legacy.

"It's not love when you can't talk about the ugly things," Ward says about the project, which frequently views Charlotte history through a looking glass darkly. "Otherwise, it's just rose-colored glasses."

That determination gains added weight given the venue for the upcoming iteration of Black Charlotte.

Originally opened in 1927 and reopened in March 2025 after sitting shuttered for 47 years, the Carolina Theatre did not admit Black residents for the first four decades of its existence until 1963, when theaters around Charlotte began to desegregate. Even then, Black moviegoers were only admitted in small groups and required to reserve seating in advance.

Smalls sees the timing of the various iterations of the project — the initial live performance of the material at the Harvey B. Gantt Center in February 2023, the recording of the album in fall 2024, its release on Valentine's Day 2025; and a presentation essayed by 15 unaccompanied spoken-word poets at Carolina Theatre in April — as more than serendipitous.

"This [performance] could not have come at a better time," he says, noting America's current disturbing status regarding voting rights, freedom of speech and discrimination based on race and sex.

"[Black Charlotte] covers all of those things, leading all the way up to the Carolina Theatre reopening," Smalls continues. "Who would have thought [the theater] would reopen [at] the moment we are delivering a message to this city, to this world, saying, 'We've come this far. Let us still not forget where we come from, [and] what we had to go through to get to this point.'"

In that sense, the meeting of Smalls and Ward may also be seen as fated, given the two men's respective histories with poetry and storytelling.

Two poets team up for 'Black Charlotte'

Ward started writing poetry and developing an appreciation for rap while attending elementary school in Rich Square near the Roanoke River in northeastern North Carolina. His fifth-grade teacher Ms. Tudors had the class read to each other from young adult novels and Ward was immediately hooked.

"I fell in love with the sonic nature of words, also the images that would come to you ... [like] a movie in your head," Ward remembers.

Tudors also introduced Ward to Black writers of the Harlem Renaissance, including poet, writer and activist Langston Hughes.

"I realized that poetry can be anything I want it to be," Ward says.

A 2018 National Slam champion, a 2019 Individual World Poetry Slam champion and author, Ward stepped into the role of Charlotte's inaugural poet laureate in 2022 after being selected by a committee of city staff and cultural leaders.

In that role, he recruited world-renowned poet Paul Tran to work with LGBTQ+ teen writers at Time Out Youth, then teamed with Charlotte is Creative to establish a full scholarship for a local Black writer to attend the The Watering Hole Winter Retreat for poets of color.

Ward also developed a creative writing program for the Mecklenburg County Detention Center that is currently overseen and managed by Shane Manier.

Ward says he's currently in the post, though it's no longer affiliated with the city. He's working to find a new home for the program and hopes to name a successor to the poet laureate position as soon as he does.

In addition to being co-executive producer of *Black Charlotte* with Ward, Smalls is a poet, an author, a creative writing coach and founder/director of WordsRmagic, a nonprofit that teaches creative writing.

The eldest of eight brothers and sisters in a Brooklyn family of writers — his uncle, mother and aunt all composed verse — he grew up reading poetry.

In high school, he became a rapper and took part in rap battles throughout New York City. Smalls was working as a party promoter and DJ in NYC at age 19 when he was shot four times in a home invasion during which thieves tried to steal his DJ equipment. The robbery attempt left him suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and a partial loss of vision in his right eye. The bullet that damaged his vision is still in his jawbone today, as it can't be removed.

Smalls moved to Charlotte in 1997. After sustaining a head injury while working in 2012, he returned to writing poetry and prose. In 2013, Smalls and his brother, Mr. Witz formed a duo called Grannae's Boyz and started hosting open mics together.

To this day, the spoken-word duo performs and teaches writing classes and workshops. Smalls successfully competed for a spot on Charlotte's Respect Da Mic Poetry Slam team, and subsequently coached the team from 2015-16.

Grannae's Boyz were hosting an open mic at the since-closed Apostrophe Lounge in South End when Ward came in and stepped onstage.

"He just blew the night out of the water," says Smalls, who subsequently asked Ward to feature at further events he hosted.

In the meantime, Ward applied for a Cultural Vision Grant with Charlotte's Arts & Science Council to develop what he called a living exhibit. He pulled together a gathering of local spoken-word poets and asked each to compose a piece about some aspect of Charlotte's Black history.

"We wanted poets with a wide range of experience, and we wanted poets who actually felt like Charlotte was their home," Ward says.

He gave each of the participating poets a copy of *Legacy: Three Centuries of Black History in Charlotte, North Carolina*, written by Pamela Grundy and published by Queen City Nerve as a way to spur inspiration. The first iteration of the project that followed was performed at the Gantt Center during Black History Month in 2023.

The next step was to record an album comprising the material, for which he brought on Smalls to help. Smalls was already familiar with the project and had been itching to engage in some way.

Ward and Smalls worked with the poets to record their respective works at GrindHaus Studios. Studio owner and singer-songwriter Jason Jett produced the album alongside friend and collaborator Charlottean Tony "Tspoon" Witherspoon, who created the accompanying track music.

"Tspoon already had stuff in mind that he could use, but once he heard all the poems, he said, 'Forget all that, I'm going to do all this from scratch,'" Ward says. "Witherspoon put all the tracks together and married them perfectly with our voices."

Jett did the final mixing and arrangements for the material while Ward and Smalls took it from there, handling the marketing and organizing the coming performance at Carolina Theatre.

This fall the album was submitted and shortlisted for a 2026 Grammy nomination for Best Spoken Word Poetry Album, but did not make the final list of nominations announced on Nov. 7.

Every story has more stories behind it

The Nov. 19 Black Charlotte concert offers a fresh approach to the ever-evolving project. In addition to featuring Charlotte Symphony Orchestra plus 13 spoken-word poets performing their contributions to the album, the evening also spotlights the 2023 Founders Award-winning poet and storyteller Hannah Hasan, who will host.

One of the artists on the album who will sadly not be there that night is Leandrea Hill, who performed as Luvleeh before passing away in February 2025. The poem "Backbone" is a collaboration between Ward and Luvleeh.

The work originally consisted of two poems, one by Luvleeh casting the historic Black neighborhood of Brooklyn as the backbone of Charlotte. In the second poem, Ward speaks through the Brooklyn Grace Church, one of the last original buildings in Brooklyn, lost to so-called urban renewal in the 1960s and '70s, as it witnesses the changes occurring around it.

"This whole street was paradise/ I whispered



Journalist Mary C. Curtis chops it up with Black Charlotte contributing poets at a recent event. Photo by Daniel Coston

to every building/ I said, 'Wake up, the mayor coming'/ I said, 'Wake up, progress coming'/ I said, 'Wake up, the bulldozer's coming...'"

Boris "Bluz" Rogers' contribution to the Carolina Theatre performance is his poem "And the Next," in which he name checks music and arts venues across the city, both past and present:

"*Found yourself commonly rocking at Common Market never moved its Evening Muse/ Kept it in a Snug Harbor after the Fire and Ice had faded/ It stayed fluid in a Liquid Lounge, defied gravity in a Moon Room...*"

"The poem is dedicated to Charlotte's music scene, particularly hip-hop," Bluz says. "It ... sends a shout out to the artists, DJs and spaces who have helped shape [the] scene and provided the soundtrack to our memories."

Dionne D. Hunter and Kyla Alexis Jones will perform their shared poem "Representation Equals Power." Jones says her inspiration for the piece came in a quote from Edith Strickland DeLaine: "You do not hear our voices very much. But you cannot look at a picture and not see a female in it."

"*I am a mathematician, a hidden figure, angry, Black woman/ Captain at capacity, a true freedom I've never seen/ Still, you cannot captivate me with your shallow self esteem...*"

"As a Black woman, it's ironic how we are so often overlooked, while simultaneously leaned on." Jones notes.

"'Representation Equals Power' uplifts the stories of several remarkable women," Hunter adds. '[It] honors their history while building connection, awareness and pride within our community."

Jaycee Cowan will also take the stage to essay his poem "Welcome Home," inspired by the demolition of Charlotte public housing developments Earle Village and Piedmont Courts:

"*It's all about the draw, though/ Attracting higher incomes to low-minimum-wage cities, though somebody got to go/ That new QC that don't even include me/ My home, my roots are here...*"

Other poets who will take part in the event include Mr. Witz, Lady V Poetry, Sir Abstraxxx, Jordan Bailey, Lauren Chalaire, Porsha the Poet and A Poet Named Superman.

Despite their varied backgrounds and viewpoints, the poets who will command the Carolina Theatre stage on Nov. 19 have one thing in common: their conviction in the power of the spoken word. In this constantly changing city, poetry will continue to engage audiences' thoughts and emotions while hopefully moving them to action.

Jones believes the Black Charlotte project has done a phenomenal job of unifying the city's poets and spoken-word artists, but she hopes to see more women in leadership and hosting roles in the scene.

Similarly, Hunter says the city has an incredibly talented and collaborative spoken-word community that thrives on the creativity and connection that is fostered by events like Black Charlotte.

Bluz characterizes Charlotte's spoken-word scene as vibrant and growing.

"There are so many talented voices getting the space to be heard," he says. "It feels like we are pushing boundaries and creating real community around the work."

Cowan says spoken-word poetry is perhaps the most influential art form in the city.

"We have watched this city grow and exclude so many voices but they cannot ignore the voices of the spoken-word artist, because to this day they still hire us to tell someone's story," he notes.

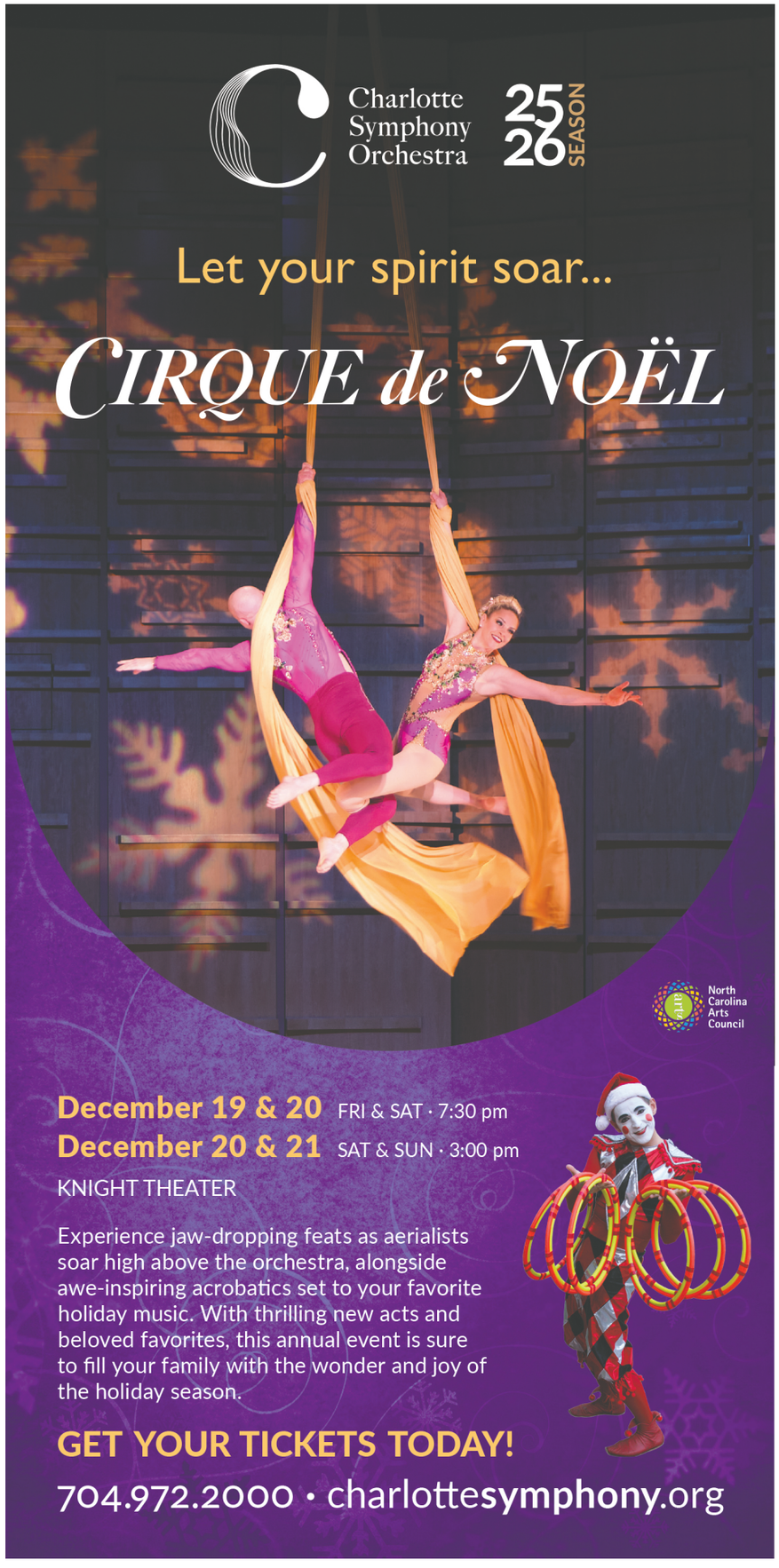
"What I'm seeing now in Charlotte is that we have many [spoken-word poetry] scenes, but they're not fractioned," Ward says. "The [scenes] are working together. They are feeding each other."

Smalls praises the collaboration and sense of community artists share.

"Even when there's competition here, there's love across the board, and I think that's the most beautiful thing about this work," Smalls notes.

Spoken-word poetry harnesses the power of compelling storytelling, enabling all of us to see ourselves through someone else's narrative. Smalls describes the impact as looking in the mirror through someone else's eyes and hearing a variation of your own story told with someone else's voice. That is a worthwhile trip to take through the looking glass.

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'EUREKA DAY'

Nov. 13-23 • times vary • The Arts Factory, 1545 W. Trade St. • $30-$35 • threebonetheatre.com

Tanya Bludworth directs Three Bone Theatre's Charlotte debut of Jonathan Spector's Tony Award-winning comedy about an upscale private school upended by a mumps outbreak. Consisting of a series of meetings in which well-meaning school administrators and parents unwittingly create a circular firing squad, *Eureka Day* is a needle-sharp satire on the vaccine debate that includes earnest debates about social justice and conspiracy theories. Posing pertinent questions about how society can preserve inclusivity when no one can agree on reality, it's particularly telling that a 2025 run of the show at Washington DC's Kennedy Center was canceled due to "financial circumstances" after Trump took control of the venue.

BOBCAT GOLDTHWAIT

Nov. 13-15 • times vary • The Comedy Club at Duckworths, 330 N Tryon St. • $29-$40 • thecomedyclubatduckworths.com

In his 1980's heyday, Bobcat Goldthwait presented himself as a hot mess delivering hilarious non sequiturs in a distinctive strangled and squirrelly voice. He's long since ditched the trademark spastic screech that helped rocket him to fame and has branched out into writing and directing movies, including brilliant and disturbing black comedies like *Shakes the Clown*, starring Goldthwait as the titular alcoholic clown, and *God Bless America*, in which a middle-aged man and a teenage girl go on a killing spree after bonding over their disgust of mainstream American culture. Goldthwait also wrote and helmed the not-so-comedic found-footage horror film *Willow*.

FALLLIFT SINGLE RELEASE PARTY

Nov. 14 • 8 p.m. • Visulite Theatre, 1615 Elizabeth Ave. • $12-$18 • visulite.com

Sweeping cinematic scope, introspective storytelling and social justice-forward lyrics converge in indie-folk duo falllift, comprising singer-songwriter Micah Cottingham and William Steven Hall, formerly of Charlotte alt-rock band Swim in the Wild. The band is celebrating the release of new single "All Salt" featuring poet Boris "Bluz" Rogers, who will have the chance to perform with the band as he's included on the bill for a full set of his own. Also look for appearances from Jason "Greazy Keys" Atkins, Low Groves, John Brewster, and Asheville folk artist/DEI coach/psychotherapist Elizabeth McCorvey, who will challenge Charlotte artist Emanuel Wynter to a violin duel.



The Magicians Table
Photo courtesy of Blumenthal Arts
Opens 11/19



CUZCO
Via Facebook
11/20

ERIN KINSEY, WILL MOSELEY

Nov. 16 • 7:30 p.m. • Amos' Southend, 1423 S. Tryon St. • $28-$34 • amossouthend.com

Like most overnight sensations, Erin Kinsey took 14 years to hit pay dirt. Playing guitar since she turned 11, the Texas songbird first earned recognition instead as a songwriter, co-writing "Pink," a tune that Dolly Parton contributed to a breast cancer benefit album. Initially specializing in a sunny, open-hearted brand of country pop that recalls early Taylor Swift, Kinsey turns (slightly) darker on her latest single "Blue Jean Baby." Here, a sexy, smoky-voiced come-on is set to ominously reverberating guitars and percussion, nonetheless promising fun rather than risk. *American Idol* alumnus Will Moseley crafts heartfelt tunes that draw on his small-town Georgia roots.

LEXA GATES, YAKIYN

Nov. 18 • 8 p.m. • The Underground, 820 Hamilton St. • $31 • fillmorenc.com

New York alt-rapper Lexa Gates made a big splash in 2024 playing tracks from her debut album *Elite Vessel* while enclosed in a glass box on a NYC street, but Gates' music stands out without the clever stunts. On the LP, she connects with listeners delivering rhymes that couple dry wit and an absurd sense of humor with her everyday life. Her latest single "Nothing to Worry About" flirts with abstract jazz-rap as Gates' sly narrative threads through what seems like a fractured R&B showtune. On tracks like "Spread Like Butta," Dallas rapper Yakiyn fuses futurism and Southern soul.

THE MAGICIANS TABLE

Nov. 19-Feb. 15 • various times • Blume Studios, 904 Post St. • $80-$150 • blumenthalarts.org

An up-close immersive magic experience, the North American premiere of London's *The Magicians Table* offers impressive sleight-of-hand, misdirection and mind-reading feats performed inches from patrons' noses by a cadre of conjurers. Throw in strolling musicians, a speakeasy and compelling fictitious backstory that casts the show as a soiree set amid a warehouse of tricks compiled by deceased magician Dieter Roterburg, and you have an atmospheric blend of cabaret, experimental theatre and side-show carnival. All players commit to the bit, particularly Roterburg's widow Calliope, who draws attendees deeper into the mystery and legacy of her departed husband.

LIFELINE

CUZCO, CATHOLICS, PRETTY BABY, SOMNIUM

Nov. 20 • 8 p.m. • Petra's, 1919 Commonwealth Ave. • $13 • petrasbar.com

When veteran Charlotte math-rock combo Cuzco launched in 2016, there wasn't anything remotely like the quartet's mix of strange time signatures, atypical rhythmic structures and mind-bending melodies on the scene. Nine years on and still few bands can match tunes like "We Miss You Clever Girl," a jazz-adjacent mix of drones, bubbling guitars and the sunnier side of Krautrock. Charleston's Catholics till a similar sonic furrow of switchback guitars and catchy hooks from surprising sources. Charlotte post-punk-and-hardcore combo Pretty Baby tangle plaintive melodies with sheets of noise. On tunes like "8-Bit Ocean," Queen City math rockers Somnium fuse skittering rhythms with sunny rippling melodies.

HISTORY BREWING CLUB BREW TASTING & COMMUNITY ACTION

Nov. 20 • 7 p.m. • Free Range Brewing, 2320 North Davidson St. • $48 • museumofthenewsouth.org

The Levine Museum of the New South presents The History Brewing Club series, which pairs craft beer with storytelling, community impact and civic conservation. A guided tasting precedes a screening of a short documentary about Charlotte's Legacy Commission, followed by a discussion concerning Charlotte's ongoing efforts to preserve the history and stories of local neighborhoods. After a session focusing on how residents can contribute to ongoing preservation efforts, participants will create a collaborative idea wall that delineates the city's hopes, solutions and next steps. It's an opportunity to mingle and exchange ideas with fellow enthusiasts of beer, history and community.

SHAME GANG, AUTUMN RAINWATER, TYMAIN ROBBINS, MAKEDA IROQUOIS, CUZO KEY

Nov. 21 • 9 p.m. • Snug Harbor, 1228 Gordon St. • $17 • snugrock.com

This impressive lineup features two recent Best in the Nest honorees. This year, our Critics' Pick selection for Best R&B/Soul Artist Makeda Iroquois contributed powerful soul-inflected vocals on Verbal Van Gogh's "It's On" and recorded her dazzling James Bond theme reimagining "Diamonds." Best Rapper honoree Cuzo Key's 2025 release *4 of Them Hoes* harnessed the rapper's laid-back style to adventurous soundscapes. On "IDWGH," Charlotte R&B artist Autumn Rainwater essays a sinister-sounding, disco-adjacent tale of dancefloor seduction. Raleigh-based rapper Shame Gang crafts a lyrical style that leans on soul and vivid storytelling. Brooklyn-based storytelling MC Tymain Robbins completes the bill.

AUTUMN R&B FOOD TRUCK FESTIVAL

Nov. 21 • noon-2 a.m. • Bo's on NoDa, 3701 N Davidson St. • $34 • tinyurl.com/RandBFoodTruckFest

This tasteful, tuneful and nostalgic neighborhood event is actually two parties in one, with a two-hour break between the festivities. The family-friendly Autumn R&B Day Party offers soulful music by DJ BLK Assassin; classic games including Uno, Spades and Jengaa; and a variety of mouth-watering dishes from a lineup of top food trucks. After that party wraps, the Autumn R&B All Night Party kicks off at Bo's On NoDa, a tiki-themed music, dance and party venue. Between foodies, revelers and music lovers, this is a fall celebration that can claim something for everyone.



Erin Kinsey
Promotional photo
11/16





Digital Noir cofounders DJ Spider (right) and DJ Price in 2016. Photo courtesy of Suzann Knudsen

QUEEN OF THE DARK SCENE

DJ Spider keeps Digital Noir thriving for a decade

BY JONATHAN GOLIAN

At around 5 or 6 p.m. on one assigned Saturday each month, Suzann Knudsen rolls up to The Milestone Club, the west side's most iconic music venue, and begins unloading a trunk full of trinkets and toys.

From the vehicle comes Knudsen's personal controller, mixer and laptop — normal enough equipment for a night of spins — then come the decorations. She covers the length of the main room with gothic and sometimes outright ghoulish ornamentation, oftentimes even setting out treats for those who will come through the door.

By 7 o'clock, The Milestone is transformed, and so is Knudsen ready to transition into the ever jovial and eccentric DJ Spider, host and featured act in one of the biggest regular nights for Charlotte's dark scene: Digital Noir.

The next event, scheduled for Nov. 29, will mark a full decade of monthly goth glamour, industrial alchemy and dark dance into the night.

Arriving on the scene in 2015, Spider, along with longtime collaborator and best friend Michael Price, who performs as DJ Price, were organizing electronic music nights spread across town.

Where Price had Installation, an industrial music-focused event, Spider was throwing Return of the Bats 2: Electric Boogaloo, weaving together a variety of set tracks with Spider's own touch of whimsy mixed in. While the two practiced their crafts in the same city, it wasn't until one autumn night that they considered sharing a stage.

Tiring of the work it took to run Installation alone at The Milestone, Price hit up his passing acquaintance Spider to see if she would be interested in co-hosting something new.

"'We've never actually DJed together,'" Spider recalled of her reaction to the inquiry. "'We know each other, we respect each other, [but] we've never actually DJed together or hung out or really done anything.'"

The idea of organizing a party at The Milestone, known more for its hardcore and punk rock shows than gothic dance parties, intrigued her. The two bounced ideas for a name back and forth for a good hour and a half before landing on Digital Noir, she recalled. Then it became real.

"We kicked it off Thanksgiving weekend because they happened to have an opening at The Milestone for that, and we just worked right," she explained. "The night was good, it was strong, it was fun, and we actually pair really well with each other."

Neither one of them could have guessed that the show would go for 10 years from there. After all, both of them had, unbeknownst to one another, recently sworn off hosting Charlotte shows.

"Running Installation at The Milestone was doing well, but running a night by yourself is tiresome, especially [with] the amount of lights and work, and you're on stage all night long," Price told Queen City Nerve.

His decision to reach out to Spider was a last-ditch effort to avoid burnout and it ended up pushing them each to new heights.

Price laughingly took credit for the fateful call. "I pulled her out of retirement, basically," he told Queen City Nerve.

A friendship built on a dark wave

Price and Spider no longer team up on Digital Noir, as Price moved to Wilmington shortly after COVID-19 clamped down in America. Still, their bond remains strong, which remains evident in the way they speak about each other in separate conversations.

"I call him my partner in grime because I can be silly and goofy and he kind of grounds me," Spider said of Price. "But then all of a sudden he'll do something ridiculous, and I'm like, 'Oh my God, you did not just do that.' So we have fun. We were silly. We work well together.

Like her tag, Spider's sound can be creepy but light. She described Price's strength as "the industrial crunchy stuff."

It's a mix that inspired Price to call Spider his "DJ wife."

"I definitely tend to be the darker, harder type stuff, which there's a market for, but she tends to be the lighter, 'get your fun' stuff. And I think you can't have just one or the other, so the blend of us worked really well."

While their collaborative creation feels perfectly at home in The Milestone's storied dance floor, staying there hasn't always been an option. March 12, 2020, would see the closure of the venue among so many others around the world at COVID-19's behest.

Fortunately, the online sphere was still open for business, so the pair took the show to Twitch to give some stability back to their regular fans. During those uncertain times, the two DJs gave any proceeds from the streamed shows back to The Milestone to help keep it running while ownership wasn't able to open.

They were the final performers to leave through the door before it was forced to close. At the time, there was no guarantee that another performer would ever set foot on that storied stage again.

"I always felt sort of a responsibility to The Milestone, having been the last ones there," Spider said. "So, during the pandemic, I made sure, if someone wanted to pay, like, a digital cover, don't give me money on Twitch. Here's the QR code. Give it to The Milestone. Make sure that they keep going, because they've been our home and our second home."

As regulations cooled down, business as usual started back at the venue and Digital Noir returned to its rightful place with the duo at the helm. Eventually, however, Price would get a call with a dream job offer on the other end ... one located in Wilmington.

Spider made the transition easy for Price, showing the support one would expect of a best friend watching her pal chase a dream. She never expected him to drive the 200 miles every month to help put on a show, but she did have one demand if she were going to keep the show going.



Hanging on The Milestone lawn during a Digital Noir event. Photo by Jonathan Golian



Live bands sometimes perform at Digital Noir. Photo by Jonathan Golian



Getting in line at Digital Noir. Photo by Jonathan Golian

"I'm like, 'Yeah, absolutely not going to hold you back … Just realize I'm going to drag your butt back here for the anniversary every year. So keep that on your calendar,'" she recalled. "So he's come back for all the anniversaries each November."

A decade of dark dance

This November anniversary show will be just Price and Spider on the boards, like the good old days. However, in the time since Price's move, Spider has used the opening to showcase a slew of great local, state and regional DJs.

Besides, the idea of playing with a partner was the reason she signed on in the first place.

"I can only play so many Sisters of Mercy songs before I have to go pee," she quipped before sharing some of her rotating roster.

Over the last two years, DJ Spider has recruited Carolina names like DJ Bavanova of Asheville's Sanctum and DJ Radio Priest of Winston-Salem's Devil Disco Darlings. Other guests include DJ Misstep of Club Terraform in Columbia, South Carolina and Atmosphere in Augusta, Georgia.

There was DJ Villainess from Washington DC's Fiction, plus veteran Charlotte names like Christian Hoefle and DJ Velvetine, who both run other shows in the city but tag in at Digital Noir semi-regularly. The next generation of Digital Noir DJs includes names like Dil3mma, Deathflower, and Squeaky.

Spider has on occasion made the monthly party into a hybrid event, bringing on bands like Dead Cool and Circuit Preacher to showcase new music in the dark- and synth-wave genres. Each new event builds on the other, with Digital Noir regulars getting to check out new sounds while rotating acts get placed in front of crowds that might not have ever heard of them.

"It's been exciting for me the last few years to bring in as many people from different places, both locally and outside of North Carolina, just to come in and play," Spider explained.

Part of Spider's interest in rotating her cast is selfish, there are plenty of people out there she wants to play with and she gets to invite a new one every month. Another of her goals, however, is more lofty.

During the pandemic, people got locked into their virtual silos or hyper-localized scenes. Running Digital Noir gives her a chance to open things back up and showcase the talent that is spread throughout the region.

"So many people made friends online and heard DJs from other places, because you could sit in your living room and go to four different countries in a single evening, just bouncing around on Twitch," Spider explained. "I wanted to bring a little bit of that to Charlotte."



The 10th anniversary Digital Noir party is scheduled for Nov. 29 at The Milestone. Photo by Jonathan Golian

The digital dark scene

A sprawling story in its own right, Digital Noir is just a piece of a growing movement called Charlotte's dark scene. Just as she is purposeful about her support for The Milestone and other acts, she's equally encouraging to her fellow showrunners at other venues.

Spider said she's in regular communication with counterparts such as Hoefle, who runs Shadow Play at Crown Station, and DJ Velvetine, who puts on Requiem at Tommy's Pub. They sync their calendars so as to avoid double booking as best as possible.

As of October 2025, Digital Noir has hit another milestone — a miraculous run that still shocks Spider every month: For two years straight, the event has sold out ahead of each night it's been held.

She still remembers the first few times in the fall of 2023 that Milestone owner Wyler "Buck" Boswell told her what had happened.

"He's like, 'Yeah, we had to turn people away at the door,' and I was like, 'I don't understand those words. Like you need to say that again. What do you mean? You had to turn people away?'"

In fact, for a showrunner who just wants everyone to have a good time, it felt unnatural.

"Nobody was leaving, so we couldn't let anybody else in, I just thought that was weird," she recalled.

As the faces up front rotate and change, so do the people lining the foggy dance floor each month. While the older crowd continues to support the dark scene events they grew up, the younger faces Spider affectionately calls "baby bats" have also discovered the camaraderie and inclusion that have been cultivated in the crowd over time.

Despite her reluctance to even take on the gig a decade ago, all signs point to many more years to come for DJ Spider & Co. at The Milestone.

Looking back on her 20+ years DJing in Charlotte, Spider marveled at the fact that folks she taught to DJ back at the long-closed Breakfast Club are now bringing their kids to shows where she's spinning — not by chance but because they know Spider hosts a safe, inclusive and jumping party.

Sometimes the darkest scenes are home to the brightest lights.

SOUNDWAVE

CHARLOTTE'S LIVE MUSIC CALENDAR * NOV. 12 - NOV. 25 *

WEDNESDAY NOV. 12

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
This Island Earth w/ Cheater's Rights, The White Horse, January Knife (The Milestone)
Dog Days w/ Javier Pizarro, Beacon & The Perseids, Camp Calico (Snug Harbor)
From Ashes to New (The Underground)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Kashus Culpepper w/ Landon Smith (Amos' Southend)
Graham Barham w/ Highway Home (Evening Muse)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Neil Carter (Comet Grill)
Josh Daniel, Jim Brock & Kerry Brooks (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
The Two Lips (Neighborhood Theatre)
JAZZ/BLUES
Jazz Night feat. DJAM Collective (Camp North End)*
Howard McNair (Middle C Jazz)
Lovell Bradford Trio Jazz Jam (VisArt Video)
FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
Fortunate Youth w/ Bumpin Uglies (The Music Yard)
The Motet w/ Sam Fribush Organ Trio (Visulite Theatre)
OPEN MIC
Singer/Songwriter Open Mic (The Rooster)*
Starlight Jams Open Mic (Starlight on 22nd)

THURSDAY NOV. 13

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Josh Daniel (Comet Grill)
FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
Groove 8 w/ Pam Taylor & the Flyin' V (Petra's)
Shana Blake's Musical Menagerie (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Jutes w/ Scarlet House (Amos' Southend)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
praise. w/ maximillian (Evening Muse)
Brandy & Monica w/ Kelly Rowland (Spectrum Center)
Dax (The Underground)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Country 103.7 Stars & Guitars (Ovens Auditorium)
JAZZ/BLUES
Mac Arnold: Rhythm & Roots (Carolina Theatre)
COVER BANDS
House Party James (Middle C Jazz)

FRIDAY NOV. 14

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Tomorrow's Problem w/ Fudge (Evening Muse)
Night Cap (The Music Yard)
Woody w/ Mantra, The Simplicity (Petra's)
The Fifth w/ Grindhouse (The Rooster)
Rikki Rakki w/ Flannelmouth, Jupiter2 (Snug Harbor)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Taylor Acorn w/ Wilt (Amos' Southend)
Nite Cult (Cue @ Blackbox Theater)
Jaenga (The Long Room)
Sidequest (The Milestone)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Chris Trapper (Evening Muse)
Walker Hayes (Ovens Auditorium)
Falllift w/ Bluz, Elizabeth McCorvey, John Brewster (Visulite Theatre)
JAZZ/BLUES
Paul Taylor (Middle C Jazz)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
Leon Thomas (The Fillmore)
Playboi Carti (Spectrum Center)
Rasheed Chappell w/ DJ Eclipse, Kil Ripkin, Grumpy Hustla, Jamaal Matters, Clinch (Starlight on 22nd)
Mac Ayres (The Underground)
CLASSICAL/INSTRUMENTAL
Charlotte Symphony: Respighi's Pines of Rome (Belk Theater)
COVER BANDS
Hey LA w/ Drew Nathan (Goldie's)
Avery Creek (Heist Brewery & Barrel Arts)
The Life and Music of George Michael (Knight Theater)

SATURDAY NOV. 15

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Nixil w/ Saidan, Valletta, Buried Asunder (The Milestone)
Camisole w/ Willingdon, Fullish (Snug Harbor)
Hollow Truths w/ Tiny City, The Bleeps (Starlight on 22nd)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Ray Volpe (Blackbox Theater)
Basic Printer w/ Leilani Kilgore (Evening Muse)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
D Smoke (The Underground)
JAZZ/BLUES
Paul Taylor (Middle C Jazz)
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
Indecision (Visulite Theatre)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Mama's Broke w/ Chris Acker (Evening Muse)
Lily Vakili w/ The Spyrals, Friend of a Friend (Petra's)
CLASSICAL/INSTRUMENTAL
Charlotte Symphony: Respighi's Pines of Rome (Belk Theater)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Ephraim Sommers (Birdsong Brewing)
Mike Strauss (Comet Grill)
My Better Half (Primal Brewery)
COVER BANDS
Tell Me Lies (Fleetwood Mac tribute) w/ Fix You (Coldplay tribute) (Amos' Southend)
Spiderwebs (No Doubt tribute) w/ Abbey Elmore (Goldie's)
Fast Timez (The Rooster)

SUNDAY NOV. 16

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Dying Wish (The Underground)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
OsamaSon (The Fillmore)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Erin Kinsey w/ Will Mosely (Amos' Southend)
CHRISTIAN/GOSPEL/RELIGIOUS
Terrian w/ Aaron Cole (Evening Muse)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
David Childers (Free Range Brewing)
Singer-Songwriter Shuffle 2 (The Rooster)
JAZZ/BLUES
James 'PJ' Spraggins (Middle C Jazz)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Bobby Nsenga (Blackbox Theater)
Hazy Sunday (Petra's)
Soul Sunday feat. Guy Nowchild (Starlight on 22nd)

MONDAY NOV. 17

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Koyo w/ Ben Quad, Restraining Order, I Promised The World (Amos' Southend)
Atreyu (Neighborhood Theatre)
VOILÀ (The Underground)
JAZZ/BLUES
The Bill Hanna Legacy Jazz Session (Petra's)
OPEN MIC
Find Your Muse Open Mic feat. Mooshie (Evening Muse)

TUESDAY NOV. 18

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Sexual Purity w/ Joshua Cotterino, Haunt3d (Snug Harbor)
CLASSICAL/INSTRUMENTAL
The Rock Orchestra By Candlelight (Ovens Auditorium)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
Dijon (The Fillmore)
Lexa Gates (The Underground)
JAZZ/BLUES
Menastree (Evening Muse)
OPEN MIC
Open Mic Night feat. The Smokin J's (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

WEDNESDAY NOV. 19

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Cold Steel w/ Violent Life Violent Death, Razorgrave, Conquer (The Milestone)
Certainly So w/ Brandon Tenney, Fueled by Ma (Snug Harbor)
Like Moths to Flames (The Underground)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Josh Daniel, Jim Brock & Kerry Brooks (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
JAZZ/BLUES
Jazz Night feat. DJAM Collective (Camp North End)*
Lovell Bradford Trio Jazz Jam (VisArt Video)
MIXED-GENRE/EXPERIMENTAL/FESTIVAL
Black Charlotte: Live in Concert (Carolina Theatre)
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
Crystal Fountains (Comet Grill)
LATIN/WORLD
El Alfa (The Fillmore)
OPEN MIC
Singer/Songwriter Open Mic (The Rooster)*
Starlight Jams Open Mic (Starlight on 22nd)

THURSDAY NOV. 20

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Pretty Pity w/ Out In Front (The Milestone)
Cuzco w/ Catholics, Pretty Baby, Somnium (Petra's)
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
Grady Spencer & the Work w/ Tennis Courts (Evening Muse)
Shana Blake's Musical Menagerie (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
The Lone Bellow (Neighborhood Theatre)
Carbon Leaf (Visulite Theatre)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Lisa De Novo (Comet Grill)
OPEN MIC
Music Matters Spark Session (The Rooster)
COVER BANDS
Jazzy Blu Lovers & Legends (Middle C Jazz)
Jam Mayer (Starlight on 22nd)

FRIDAY NOV. 21

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
The Lenny Federal Band (Comet Grill)*
The Steel Crows w/ Pageant (Evening Muse)
Lovejoy (The Fillmore)
Ego Death Machine w/ Wilde Green, Boy A/C, Creatures of the Sun (The Milestone)
My Gal Monday (The Rooster)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
Shame Gang w/ Autumn Rainwater, Tymain Robbins, Makeda Iroquois, Cuzo Key (Snug Harbor)
GoldLink (The Underground)
JAZZ/BLUES
The Royal Jazz and Jokes Experience feat. Will Downing (Carolina Theatre)
Edmar Castaneda Quintet (Stage Door Theater)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Kayla McKinney w/ Randy & Jesse (Goldie's)
Faculty Lounge (Visulite Theatre)
LATIN/WORLD
Gaelic Storm (Neighborhood Theatre)
MIXED-GENRE/EXPERIMENTAL/FESTIVAL
Grateful Grooves Friendsgiving Food Drive (The Music Yard)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Adventure Club (Blackbox Theater)
The Spooklights w/ The Local Boys (Evening Muse)
COVER BANDS
Be Kind Rewind (Amos' Southend)
Ruben Studdard Sings Luther Vandross (Knight Theater)
Satyr Black: The Ladies of Jazz (Middle C Jazz)

SATURDAY NOV. 22

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Caught Off Guard w/ Foundit, Colormekrazy!, Mind the Drive, Neptune Flyer (The Milestone)
Air Supply (Ovens Auditorium)
Emerson Bruno & the Undercurrents w/ Tiny City, Nathan Harris & the Flood (Snug Harbor)
Blind Guardian (The Underground)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Layton Giordani (Blackbox Theater)
FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
Bombargo (Evening Muse)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Young Mister w/ Fancy Gap (Evening Muse)
James Delco w/ The Raven and the Road, Wilson Morris (Petra's)
Steven Massey w/ Anna Holloway, AJ Herrick (The Rooster)
JAZZ/BLUES
Edmar Castaneda Quintet (Stage Door Theater)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Gravel Road w/ Southern Gothic Music Club (Starlight on 22nd)
HOLIDAY
Campana Sobre Campana: Christmas in Mexico (Carolina Theatre)
COVER BANDS
Bring Out Yer Dead (Amos' Southend)
The Carole King & James Taylor Story (Booth Playhouse)
Matone (Comet Grill)
Minutes & Years w/ Marcy Live (Goldie's)
Ruben Studdard Sings Luther Vandross (Knight Theater)
Soul Sacrifice (Santana tribute) (Middle C Jazz)
Jeremy's Ten (Pearl Jam tribute) (Visulite Theatre)

SUNDAY NOV. 23

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Auroras Hope w/ Lodis, Mojarra, Devine (The Milestone)
Sanguisugabogg (The Underground)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Sam on Someday (Evening Muse)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Soul Sunday feat. Guy Nowchild (Starlight on 22nd)
CHRISTIAN/GOSPEL/RELIGIOUS
Gospel Sunday: Christian Anderson (Middle C Jazz)

MONDAY NOV. 24

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Excide w/ Mile End, Dream Fatigue, Dazey Doom, Evelyn (The Milestone)
JAZZ/BLUES
The Bill Hanna Legacy Jazz Session (Petra's)
OPEN MIC
Find Your Muse Open Mic (Evening Muse)

TUESDAY NOV. 25

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Red Rocking Chair (Comet Grill)*
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Emo Night (Snug Harbor)
Ariel Pink (The Underground)
OPEN MIC
Open Mic Night feat. The Smokin J's (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

WEEKLY EVENTS THAT MAY BE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. VISIT QCNERVE.COM FOR THE FULL SOUNDWAVE LISTING



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Monique Hibma celebrated the relaunch of Neek Tea Co. on Nov. 5. Photo by Made Outside

STEEPED IN IT

Neek Tea Co. relaunches with organic designation and new selections

BY RYAN PITKIN

As a child growing up in Omaha, Nebraska, Monique Hibma has clear memories of sitting on the porch with her grandmother drinking peppermint tea.

Though not a "real tea" as it's not from the Camellia Sinensis and lacks caffeine, the sweet treat still brought a young Hibma to a place where she could relate with her refined grandmother and feel like she was one of the adults.

"I remember feeling like it whisked me away to this elegant, sophisticated place, like, 'Look at me with my tea cup and saucer,'" Hibma recalled. "I felt the sophistication ... feeling that warmth of the steam billowing in your face and cupping your hands around it and the warmth of the cup, all those sensory details that make you feel comforted when you drink a cup of tea."

As an adult, Hibma and her husband found a similar social quality in wine, but once she became a parent, she decided she would abstain. That left a certain void that needed to be filled, and a return to tea.

Using the ritual of steeping a cup of tea as a nightly connecting point during her husband's hectic medical residency brought Hibma back into the warm embrace of the beverage and inspired her to launch a business upon moving to Charlotte in 2020.

On Nov. 5, after pausing the business to pursue a lengthy organic certification from the US Department of Agriculture, Hibma relaunched Neek Tea Co., introducing a slate of new flavors and offerings.

She's also preparing to launch a new program called Tea for Teachers, a nod back to her previous career as a teacher, through which the company will gift a selection of its finest teas and a special ultimate gift bag to the teachers at a Charlotte-area elementary school each May.

Upon Neek Tea's relaunch, we talked to Hibma about how her love for the ritual of tea launched her into entrepreneurship.

Queen City Nerve: Tell me a little bit about what it was that inspired that nightly ritual with your husband and to be purposeful about that.

Monique Hibma: It started in the time when he was in residency. Those look like 80-hour weeks, and if you're not carving out intentional time when you have a spouse in the medical profession that's working seven days a week, you'll miss it.

So we just found a way to have tea be that anchor for our time, because contrary to popular belief, you don't need a lot of time to be able to select your leaves, boil your water, steep, sit and have conversation, enjoy an infusion if you have time for a second one.

So it created this kind of feeling like we're pretending there's nowhere for him to go in this 20-minute window, and we can just carve out this time where it's just us catching up before all the whirlwind happens all over again. So this was a really great anchor during such a busy time.



Monique Hibma shows off Neek Tea merch with her children. Photo by Made Outside

What made you move from enjoying tea into the idea of entrepreneurship?

Well, my background is in teaching, so I think that's where that love of education came in. So my master's is in teaching, my endorsements are in English and health.

And so being out of the classroom as a stay-at-home mom for many years, my kids are a lot older now, so whereas you're in the classroom a lot more when they're young and there's still opportunities for that, but just a little bit less once they grow up.

And then thinking about, where does my love of education take me? It's all things tea.

There's so much to learn. There's so many nuances to tea. And I just think it allowed me to slip back into an educator role with also curating my own schedule to show up for my kids in the way that I'm used to now.

What was the importance of the USDA organic designation for you?

It's about compliance. We always had organic offerings, but we wanted to not only be offering the best, but also have the certification that we are offering the best. And so it was being able to show that we are offering the best and be in compliance with what it takes to be able to say that you're organic, being able to put that on a label.

How involved are you and what does it look like when you are choosing sourcing for your tea?

I'm very involved. Mainly because I'm a solopreneur, I'm involved in everything — where it's coming from, the ethical sourcing of it, the seasonality. What is it that we are looking for?

It's different things that go into what our end goal for this cup of tea or this pot of tea is. I'm very hands on for every single piece of that. So it's multiple tastings, multiple real encounters with that tea to be able to say, "Yes, I think our customers will definitely enjoy this for a lifetime."



Monique Hibma connects with her family through tea time. Photo courtesy of Made Outside



Neek Tea's most popular style thus far has been Be Rosy. Photo by Made Outside

One of your mottos on the website is "Travel the world through tea." Where have you found yourself going in this journey, beyond what you might have imagined when you were just simply doing a nightly ritual?

I think number one, it's the people that I've connected to from all over the world, as well. Wherever I am, we'll go have tea, and you connect with people, you're social in the tea houses, you're doing global expeditions.

One of my most fond travels was to Sri Lanka. And on that trip I met so many different people from Kenya to China, Japan, India. You meet people all over when you're on a tea adventure.

And so I think it's taken me very far from Omaha, Nebraska at the age of 7, and it's made me definitely realize not only how vast tea is, but just how many people drink it in the different cultures and the different stories — just how rich the tradition really is.



Monique Hibma exploring the tea world in Sri Lanka with her husband. Courtesy of Made Outside

And next year you'll launch Tea for Teachers. How did that come about?

We're really excited about that because, again, that goes back into the respect I have for educators, formerly being an educator, and just having that moment of you to see what the day of a teacher looks like. There's planning periods, rarely are they actually getting to sit and do something, they're on the move, going to a planning meeting or meeting with a parent or doing all these things. They wear so many hats and they pour into our students.

So to just have a moment to say, "Hey, we see you, and we hope that this cup of tea can just serve as a small token, a small gesture to say, 'This not only is going to pour into your pause, but your well-being.'" Because there are so many health benefits to tea and we want to just give teachers the best.

So you do corporate events. What does that look like?

Think about team building and think about well-being days and how you can really elevate a team-building activity or just being able to have an employee appreciation day. Tea is a beautiful way to do that.

So we have a tea trolley where we can come into a business, we can set up for the day, we can offer different varieties of tea, we can do an educational portion, and really have a way for employees to step outside of the box for their wellness days or even or just a social gathering. We are so happy to be able to offer either private tea experiences or corporate activations.

And you will be going into stores, I believe, this holiday season?

Yes, that is the goal. So we want to be on the retail shelves. We want to be able to not only be able to have the website where customers can shop but also be able to be on the shelves where they can find us throughout Charlotte to shop in person.

I read on your website that you can tell a lot from somebody or learn a lot from somebody based on how they answer, "How do you take your tea?"

It's an icebreaker, right? We all have these really great memories. I was just talking to someone before we connected about it; she was sharing these beautiful memories that she had with her mother. And again, that feeling of elegance that she had when her mom would bring out her grandmother's tea set.

Talking about how you take your tea, it's really about getting to listen to someone's favorite memories. It's watching people light up. It's having people take a moment and think, like, "How do I take my tea?" It's such a connecting moment to have with another person. And I really enjoy that, in that glimpse, I really do get to learn about someone, and that's really great to be listened to these days.

So how do you take your tea?

I love a pure tea. I find that when you have a great tea, properly prepared, there isn't anything else that you need with it. So just give me an excellent steep and I'm happy.



Monique Hibma Courtesy of Made Outside

Is there a certain style that you all sell that is your favorite? One that's either a top seller or that you personally recommend?

Well, I'm excited to see what that becomes. In the first generation of Neek Tea Co., it was a style of green tea called Be Rosy, and that had notes of grapefruit and rose and people really enjoyed that one. So I'm excited to see in this relaunch what that becomes.

For me, I like to say that telling someone what my favorite style of tea is would be like telling which one is my favorite child. And so I really love to think about where it's meeting me, where a cup of tea is meeting me, and just really enjoying that particular cup at that particular time. So I don't have a favorite.

Are there any tips you have for folks on the perfect steep, whichever style it is that they do choose?

Absolutely. I think consistency is where it's at. So we're big on, with loose tea, it's about measuring grams. I think where you can have a great cup of tea is when you have precise grams and great water. And so with those two things, you're always going to have a consistent cup of tea. And again, that's where that education comes in and where we look forward to making sure people can have that consistent cup every time.

Visit neekteaco.com to learn more about Neek Tea Co.

RPITKIN@QCNERVE.COM



Block Love Charlotte holds free grocery giveaways every Friday afternoon. Photo by Grant Baldwin

A HELPING HAND

Resources and sustenance in the Charlotte metro

After Congress failed to agree on federal funding allocations for the new fiscal year on Oct. 1 — resulting in the longest government shutdown in U.S. history — the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) told state Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) agencies that the government would discontinue allocation of benefits for the program beginning Nov. 1.

In North Carolina, SNAP supports more than 621,000 children who automatically qualify for free school meals.

What's followed since SNAP benefits were cut has been a string of court rulings and callbacks that have left local leaders, community organizers and educators scrambling to ensure that our state's most vulnerable populations including children remain fed.

On Nov. 7, Gov. Josh Stein reported that, with the help of private partners, the state had raised nearly $22 million to support local food banks across North Carolina.

"This is about a basic necessity – food – being caught in the middle of political chaos," Stein said. "The hard-working people and families who rely on SNAP benefits deserve certainty, not confusion about whether they'll be able to put meals on the table this weekend and the rest of the month."

As this issue is going to print, Congress appears to be nearing a deal that will end the government shutdown. All will not go "back to normal" when the shutdown is resolved, however.

Before the government abruptly cut off access to SNAP benefits for 1.4 million North Carolinians, reporting already showed that hunger in North Carolina was at its highest point in a generation.

The Trump administration has cut $30 million in federal funding for food banks and schools across the state to purchase food from local farms. At the state level, the $9.1-million allocation of funding that allows food banks to purchase locally grown fruits, vegetables, dairy and meat has been held up while Republican infighting delays the passage of a state budget.

Food assistance programs will continue to face deep federal funding cuts thanks to President Trump's so-called Big, Beautiful Bill, which was passed in July and called for a $186 billion cut in SNAP benefits by 2035.

With that in mind and the holidays approaching, we've compiled a list of food drives, food pantries, resources and other efforts that are available across the county in the coming weeks and months.

COUNTY-SUPPORTED RESOURCES AND SERVICES

Mecklenburg County announced on Nov. 3 that it will devote $740,000 out of the FY2026 budget to support food resources to assist residents that rely on SNAP benefits.

The county has partnered with local community and food resource leaders to expand food pantry resources, approve new emergency food assistance, provide SNAP Double Bucks incentives at local farmers markets, expand community food distribution and collect emergency food resources.

Mecklenburg County's website included:

- Providing 28,000 additional seven-day food boxes to be distributed by Nourish Up.
- Providing about 400 weekly $50 food-only gift cards to any resident newly approved for emergency SNAP benefits.
- Providing around 2,000 one-time $50 farmers market vouchers to eligible SNAP households.
- Expanding mobile market food distribution's food supply and service time for SNAP-eligible seniors.
- A holiday turkey distribution event at the Ella B. Scarborough Community Resource Center on Nov. 22 will serve about 1,000 households.

EBT AND DOUBLE BUCKS AT PARTICIPATING FARMERS MARKETS

As part of Mecklenburg County's expanded efforts, folks that show an EBT card at participating local farmers markets will receive $50 in SNAP tokens to purchase any SNAP-approved foods from local vendors. Tokens do not need to be used on the day they are received.

Participating farmers markets:

- **Davidson Farmers Market**; *120 S. Main St., Davidson; Saturdays, 9 a.m.-noon*
- **Matthews Community Farmers Market**; *188 N. Trade St., Matthews; Saturdays, 8 a.m.-noon*
- **South End Farmers Market**; *Atherton Mill, 2000 South Blvd.; Saturdays, 8 a.m.-1 p.m.*
- **Uptown Farmers Market**; *300 S. Davidson St.; Saturdays, 8 a.m.-12:30 p.m.*
- **Charlotte Regional Farmers Market**; *1801 Yorkmont Road; Wed.-Sun., 8 a.m.-5 p.m.*

NOURISH UP

Nourish Up offers a variety of programs that provide access to nutritious groceries, including special diet options for specific health conditions, pick-up, delivery and in-person or online shopping where you can choose the items you and your family prefer.

Upon referral from a medical provider, clergy, human services agency, social worker or other professional, Nourish up will provide a week's worth of groceries up to 12 times in a rolling calendar year. If you need immediate food assistance, contact Nourish up at 523-4333.

FOOD PANTRIES IN CHARLOTTE

The Second Harvest Food Bank of Metrolina, located at 500 Spratt St. in north Charlotte, compiled a list of Charlotte food pantries that we're sharing here:

- **Berean SDA Community Center**; *1801 Double Oaks Road; 704-377-6313; Tuesdays, 9-10:30 a.m.*
- **Block Love Charlotte**; *2738 North Graham St.; 980-288-4895; Fridays, 1-4 p.m.*
- **Calvary Nazarene Church**; *4000 N Sharon Amity Road; 704-536-6485; 2nd & 4th Tuesdays, 2-4 p.m.*



A Second Harvest Food Bank of Metrolina food drive in September. Photo courtesy of SHFBM



Nourish Up offers free grocery giveaways by referral. Courtesy of Nourish Up

- **Care to Share Outreach Center**; *5232 The Plaza; 980-430-5913; Mon.-Thur., 1-2 p.m.*
- **Catholic Charities**; *1123 S Church St.; 704-370-3262; Tuesdays, 10 a.m.-noon & Thursdays, 1-3 p.m.*
- **Champion House**; *2230 West Sugar Creek Road; 980-415-8113; Mon.-Thur. 9 a.m.-2 p.m. & Fridays, 2-3 p.m.*
- **Christ the King Church**; *13501 S. Tryon St.; 704-587-0073; Wed., 5-6 p.m.*
- **Faith CME Church**; *457 Wellingford St.; 704-597-8249; Wed 4-5 p.m.*
- **Faith Soldiers Word Ministries**; *857 Eastway Drive; 704-567-2128; Mon., 2-3 p.m. & Tues, 11 a.m.-1 p.m.*
- **Feed My Sheep**; *6116 Vernedale Road; 704-537-5439; Fridays, 1:30-3:30 p.m. (appointment only)*
- **God's Lighthouse Outreach Church**; *4409 Hovis Road; 980-309-0881; Thursdays, 10 a.m.-1 p.m.*
- **Harbor Baptist Church**; *5801 Old Concord Road; 704-596-2992; Fridays, 1:30-3:30 p.m.*
- **Hearts United for Good**; *2920 N Tryon St.; 704-626-5980; Wednesdays, 5:30-7 p.m.*
- **Hope Street Food Pantry**; *4100 Johnson Oehler Road; 704-584-9073; find hours at HopeStreetFoodPantry.com*
- **If My People Mission Center**; *2511 Lucena St.; 704-756-5176; By appointment only*
- **Kings Church Inc. Outreach**; *7003 Beatties Ford Road; 704-858-7460; Saturdays, noon-1 p.m.*
- **Liberty Baptist Church**; *3000 Sam Wilson Road; 704-399-0142; Mondays, 9-11:30 a.m.*
- **Lion of Judah Outreach Corp.**; *3325 Donovan Place; 704-907-4076; By appointment only*
- **Macedonia Baptist Church**; *1401 Hateras Ave.; 704-392-8496; Call for details*
- **New Shiloh Baptist Church**; *2601 Elmin St.; 704-588-4140; Thur-Fri, 1-3 p.m.*
- **Oak Grove Methodist**; *6440 Old Statesville Road; 704-596-4084; Thursdays, 10 a.m.-noon*
- **Our Lady of Guadalupe**; *6212 Tuckaseegee Road; 704-391-3732; Wednesdays, 11 a.m.-4 p.m., Thursdays, 9 a.m.-noon*
- **Pineville Church of Nazarene**; *8614 Pineville Matthews Road; 704-542-3618; 2nd & 4th Thursdays, 8:30 a.m.-noon*
- **Reeder Memorial Baptist Church**; *3713 Beatties Ford Road; 704-802-9548 (appointment only)*
- **Sacred Souls United Church of Christ**; *2127 Eastway Drive; 980-301-5863; Thursdays, 9 a.m.-noon (call before going)*
- **St Mark's UMC; 917 Clanton Road**; *704-523-7483; Wednesdays, 10:30-11:30 a.m.*
- **Seventh Day Adventist Hispanic**; *4620 E. WT Harris Blvd.; 630-715-8041; Mon.-Tues., 3-4 p.m.*
- **Shalom Adonai Church of God**; *1148 N. Sharon Amity Road; 704-910-0450; Mondays, 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.*
- **Silver Mount Baptist Church**; *501 W. Arrowood Road; 704-522-1528; Tues.-Wed.; 11 a.m.-1 p.m.*
- **St Paul Baptist Church**; *1401 N. Allen St.; 704-334-5309; Every other Wed., 8 a.m.-noon*
- **Star Faith Ministries**; *3431 Rozzelles Ferry Drive; 704-209-4197; Wednesdays, noon-2:30 p.m.*
- **The New Antioch Church**; *8324 Idlewild Road; 704-315-0434, Tuesdays, 1-2 p.m.*
- **WeCare at Hickory Grove UMC**; *6315 Market St.; 980-500-9352; 2nd and 4th Saturdays, 10 a.m.-noon*
- **West Charlotte Spanish SDA Church**; *5600 Tuckaseegee Road; 980-722-0438; Thursdays, 2-4:30 p.m.*

To find the closest pantry to your location, go to SecondHarvestMetrolina.org, click "Get Food Assistance" and enter your zip code.

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HOROSCOPE

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NOV. 12 - NOV. 18

ARIES (March 21 to April 19) There could be an unexpected change in plans for your upcoming holiday travels. But keep in mind that a little flexibility goes a long way in resolving any disappointments.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20) A new relationship might not be responding quite as quickly as you'd hoped. Could you be expecting too much too soon? Try to ease up and let things happen at their own pace.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20) As we approach the frenetic pace of preholiday planning, take time out now to reconnect with the wonderful people who share your life, especially the one who also shares your dreams.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22) A misunderstanding should be resolved before you get caught up in the flurry of holiday preparations. Set your pride aside and deal with it, regardless of who might have hurt whom first.

LEO (July 23 to August 22) Being told that a colleague might have been trying to undercut your effectiveness might or might not be true. Get all the facts before you even think about acting on this so-called information.

VIRGO (August 23 to September 22) It's a good idea to start your holiday preparation plans early in order to avoid a time crunch if an unresolved workplace situation causes a problem. Meanwhile, an old friend might have some welcome news.

LIBRA (September 23 to October 22) A family member's actions continue to surprise you — but this time with positive results. Could it be that your wise counsel finally got through? It's like having an early holiday gift, isn't it?

SCORPIO (October 23 to November 21) Your reluctance to act in a current situation could be traced to your inner self advising you to take more time to study its complexities before you attempt to deal with it. Good luck!

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 to December 21) Soothing hurt feelings before they can ignite an angry outburst is the wise thing to do. And of course, when it comes to doing the "wisdom thing," you do it so well.

CAPRICORN (December 22 to January 19) Budget your time so that you can handle both your workplace duties and your personal holiday planning -- including travel arrangements — without burning out on either end.

AQUARIUS (January 20 to February 18) You might find that you still need to firm up one or two of those still-outstanding decisions so that you can finally move forward as you had planned. Weigh the facts, then act.

PISCES (February 19 to March 20) You usually don't carry grudges, but you might feel this is one time when you're justified in doing so. But aren't you spending too much energy holding onto it? Let it go and move on.

BORN THIS WEEK: You have a way of using your quiet strength to persuade people to follow their better instincts and do the right thing.

NOV. 19 - NOV. 25

ARIES (March 21 to April 19) You might feel like you have all the answers right now. But it might be wise to listen to other ideas before you decide to close the lid on other possibilities.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20) Bovines give and expect loyalty, so it might not be easy to reconcile with someone you feel let you down. Why not ask a neutral party to set up a clear-the-air meeting?

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20) Anticipating the holidays with family and friends fuels your must-do GEMINI energies. But try to pace yourself so that you'll be up for whatever comes along later.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22) More background information might come through regarding a decision you expect to make. Be sure to check the source carefully before you move.

LEO (July 23 to August 22) The strong, nurturing nature of the Lion comes through this week as you reach out to family and friends in need of your warm and loving support.

VIRGO (August 23 to September 22) A relationship that has almost totally unraveled could be close to being restored with more effort on your part to be more patient and less judgmental.

LIBRA (September 23 to October 22) Your sense of fair play is strong this week, which can cause a problem with a longtime relationship. But in the end, you'll know what decision to make.

SCORPIO (October 23 to November 21) You might not know all the facts behind an unwelcome development, so keep your SCORPIOn temper in check and resist lashing out at anyone.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 to December 21) This is a good time to reinforce relationships with family, friends and colleagues that might have been overlooked in recent years.

CAPRICORN (December 22 to January 19) Family situations continue to thrive. Business associations also improve. Some holiday plans might have to be shifted a bit. Be flexible.

AQUARIUS (January 20 to February 18) Avoid any influence of negative energy in this week's aspect by not allowing small problems to grow into large ones. Work them out immediately.

PISCES (February 19 to March 20) A friend might need advice on how to deal with a challenge to their moral values. And who better than you to give the honest answer? Good luck!

BORN THIS WEEK: You have a sense of honor and determination that is palpable and inspires others to follow your lead.

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.

9	-		÷		= 1
+		+		-	
	+		÷		= 11
÷		÷		×	
	+		-		= 3
= 3		= 3		= 6	

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

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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.

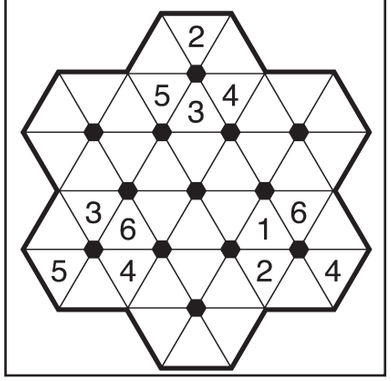
1. BLT ingredient	__ __ C __ __	Industrialist	__ __ R __ __
2. Traveler's inn	__ O __ __ __	Shelf	__ E __ __ __
3. Implant	__ __ S __ __ __	Turn inside out	__ __ V __ __ __
4. Tent user	C __ __ __ __ __	Monkey with	T __ __ __ __ __
5. Welcome	__ __ __ E __	Super-duper	__ __ __ A __
6. Nocturnal	N __ __ __ __	Vision	S __ __ __ __
7. Petition	__ __ __ __ __ L	Seem to be	__ __ __ __ __ R
8. 1000	__ __ __ __ D	Civil War general	__ __ __ __ T
9. Adobe	__ __ __ C __	Invigorating	__ __ __ S __
10. Strategy	__ __ __ __ __ Y	Law enforcement	__ __ __ __ __ E

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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.



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.

VE ZDGRW, R ZKURKIK,
RA NYK VSAN ZKGBNRJBU
MGDN SJ VE ZSHE.
— AYGCRDG

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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: **L** equals **T**

H LERSQRCF HJYRMSM PI
IMSCXE HMLVPMO VHDOSJ
RCLP H FHDDSMW HCJ XMRSJ
"FRQS YS HDD WPNM YPCSL!"

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TRIVIA TEST
BY FIFI RODRIGUEZ

1. SCIENCE: What is the study of clouds called?
2. GEOGRAPHY: Which country's highest mountain is called Ben Nevis?
3. ACRONYMS: What phrase does the acronym GPS stand for?
4. TELEVISION: What beer brand appears in "The Simpsons" animated TV show?
5. HISTORY: When was Earth Day first celebrated?
6. ANATOMY: What is a common name for the condition known as piloerection?
7. MOVIES: Which city was the setting for the movie "The Sting"?
8. MATH: How many yards are in a mile?
9. ANIMAL KINGDOM: What is a baby ferret called?
10. FOOD & DRINK: Which celebrity chef stars on the cooking show "Hell's Kitchen"?

SUDOKU
BY LINDA THISTLE

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

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.

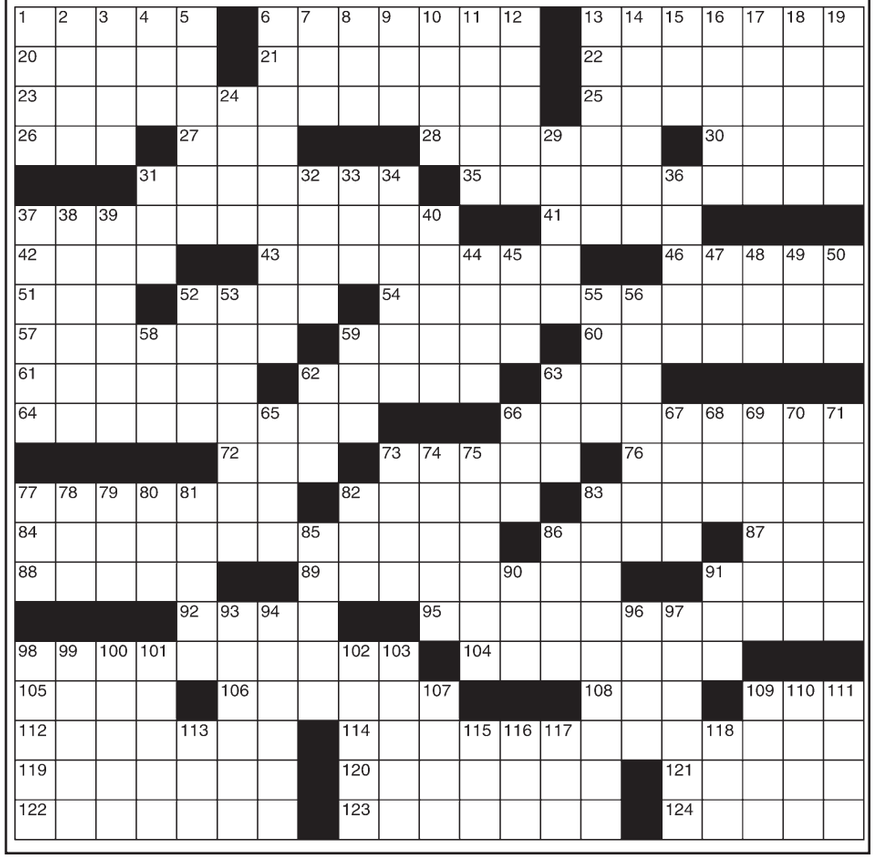


CROSSWORD
PONTIFICATION

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ACROSS
1 Stood for
6 Mountain peak topper
13 Place to keep cargo
20 Proprietor
21 Seat of Nassau County, New York
22 Holiday marches
23 1970 Best Actress nominee for "The Great White Hope"
25 Enigmas
26 Walk- — (tiny roles)
27 Rank above maj.
28 — acid (vinegar component)
30 Ruhr article
31 Desperately, informally
35 Country singer with the hit "Blue Ain't Your Color"
37 "Livin' La Vida Loca" singer
41 No, in Nuremberg
42 Ending for peek or bug
43 Making a comeback
46 Super angry
51 Month, in Mexico
52 Strong — ox
54 She won gold in the 200-meter dash at the 2012 Olympics
57 French term for unrefined works, as by untrained painters
59 Furry wrap
60 "It could be"
61 Make a phone call to
62 Film directors Joel and Ethan
63 Hour div.
64 He played Jesse Pinkman on "Breaking Bad"
66 "Rocket Man" singer
72 Poem type
73 Light bulb power units
76 Tot's injury
77 Adopt
82 Stuck in mud
83 Tolkien's hole-dwellers
84 He played Lieutenant Starbuck on "Battlestar Galactica"
86 Snips
87 — -fi film
88 British china
89 Oran native
91 "Be —!" ("C'mon, help me out!")
92 "Rebecca" actress Diana
95 Civil rights activist with the comedy album "In Living Black and White"
98 Best Supporting Actress winner for "The Fighter"
104 Woman of the future?
105 Resting atop
106 Threat ender
108 "Boo- —!"
109 Phased-out character on "The Simpsons"
112 Pre-book documents
114 "Who's Sorry Now?" singer
119 Cyclone's kin
120 Totally unknown by
121 Get together with alumni
122 Increase the slope of
123 Elk relative
124 10 featured last names in this puzzle are also the names of these

DOWN
1 Magic charm
2 He played Obi-Wan multiple times
3 Raggedy — (classic dolls)
4 Born, to Yves
5 Funnywoman Ullman
6 Suspect foul play
7 Vote down
8 — par with
9 — Ho Lee (name in 2000 news)
10 Sonata end
11 Smart —
12 French capital, in song
13 Elf
14 Chinese exercise system
15 City reg.
16 Angler's boot
17 Improvise
18 Actress Davis
19 Ruhr city
24 Rich soil
29 Sounds of small bells
31 "Citizen Kane" studio
32 Cereal husk
33 Fla.'s ocean
34 Grow wider
36 Join
37 Marriott rival
38 Portugal's peninsula
39 Sharer of top billing
40 Floss fiber
44 Woeful things
45 Dec. 31
47 Yank's foe
48 Bristol beer
49 "— a pity!"
50 Outer: Prefix
52 Make — for it
53 "What if ..."
55 Fail to put in
56 Futuristic tiny machine
58 Slo- — fuse
59 Note after fa
62 Billiards stick
63 FC Dallas' sports org.
65 Yemeni port
66 Takeoff abbr.
67 Wealthy Brits
68 Occupation
69 San Luis —
70 Stolen ride
71 In a meddling way
73 Actress Kristen
74 Bowed
75 Shape-fitting game
77 Mag workers
78 Imbibe slowly
79 Virtuoso
80 Assented to
81 App-ordered rides
82 Cato's 1,550
83 Desirous of
85 Aerie bird
86 Torte or baba
90 Drink cooler
91 Dept. of Justice chiefs
93 Tristan's love
94 Actress Greer
96 Posterior
97 Musical note equivalent to F
98 Necessities
99 Orlando theme park
100 Peter of "M"
101 Combined
102 Actor Dana
103 "— Mio"
107 City WNW of Tulsa
109 "Can I borrow — of sugar?"
110 Cone-bearing tree
111 Wields
113 Racing circuit
115 Actor Beatty
116 Suffix with hero
117 French for "summer"
118 — -noir film



NERVE ENDINGS

ALWAYS ON

North Carolina's municipal elections prove that there are no off years

BY MARCUS BASS

North Carolina joined New York and Virginia in making national headlines this month with historic municipal election results that should serve as a wake-up call to anyone who believes in the myth of "off-year" elections. What we witnessed across our state wasn't just a collection of local races — it was a demonstration of democracy's vitality at the grassroots level and a potential preview of what's to come in 2026.

Voters showed up in numbers that shattered expectations for municipal elections, and the message is clear; when people understand the power they hold in local elections, they vote.

During this election cycle, we continued to get closer to the people. Our organization reached more than 40,000 voters across the state, talking with them about the power they have in local elections. What we found was a deep hunger for meaningful participation in democracy.

What makes these results truly historic is who won. North Carolina has elected the youngest and most diverse class of municipal officials in our state's history. From college towns like Greensboro and Durham to smaller communities such as Enfield and Brunswick County, dozens of young candidates earned voters' respect and trust, defeating traditional incumbents and established challengers.

This wasn't about name recognition or political machinery. These candidates won because voters were hungry for change, and they could see that change reflected in a new generation of leadership.

We've seen races decided by fewer than five votes per precinct — races where the decisions that will be made about taxes, roads, policing, education and public safety will be made by officials whom voters will see in their local stores, churches and community events.

Many of the winners succeeded with limited resources, choosing authenticity over expensive campaign advertising. They opted for the streets and social media rather than flashy campaign swag, commercials and television advertisements. They knocked on doors. They had real conversations. They built trust one voter at a time.

This grassroots approach didn't just work — it outperformed traditional, well-funded campaigns. Voters value genuine connection and commitment to building community over polished messaging and big budgets. When our issues are framed by local people addressing local concerns — not national campaigns and party talking points — we exceed expectations.

According to recent data from the North Carolina State Board of Elections, voter turnout in this year's municipal election increased over prior municipal elections. There was also a strong showing in early voting and absentee ballots, further supporting people's desire to be a part of the solutions for our communities. Given the lack of resources and attention on odd-year elections, this year's turnout is a powerful indicator of opportunity.

For example, in Guilford County — one of our core organizing hubs — voter turnout reached 21.26%, a significant increase from the 2023 municipal election, which saw 17.70% turnout. That's a 20% jump in turnout, demonstrating that when voters understand what's at stake in local elections and see candidates who represent real change, they show up. Nearly 22% of registered voters showed up in Mecklenburg County compared to 15.54% in 2023.

As we look ahead to the 2026 midterms, this surge in municipal voter turnout could reshape North Carolina's political landscape.

The voters who turned out for these local races have proven they will show up when they believe their vote matters, that there are no off years, and that change is possible when people organize, engage and vote.

The question now is whether we can sustain this energy and expand it. Traditional voting patterns may be evolving. As white conservative voters become increasingly dissatisfied with corporate influence in the Republican Party, the use of race as a means to control a largely rural working-class base may be losing its effectiveness.

Real economic concerns — kitchen-table issues that affect most families and communities — are cutting through old political divisions. Decisions about federal funding for nutrition programs, health care and agricultural support affect North Carolina families daily, and voters will remember who stood with them when it mattered.

The 2026 midterms will test whether this municipal election surge was a one-time phenomenon or the beginning of lasting political transformation in North Carolina.

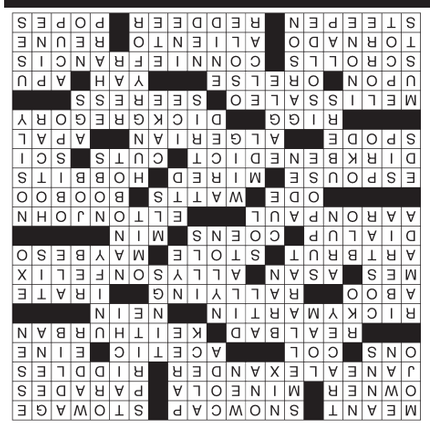
I believe it's the latter. The voters have spoken, and they've made it clear: There are no off years anymore.

Marcus Bass is the executive director for Advance Carolina. This was originally published by NC Newsline, part of States Newsroom, a nonprofit news network supported by grants and a coalition of donors as a 501c(3) public charity.

INFO@QCNERVE.COM

PUZZLE ANSWERS

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

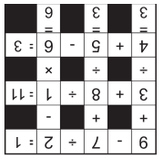


Even Exchange answers

1. Bacon, Baron
2. Lodge, Ledge
3. Insert, Invert
4. Camper, Tamper
5. Greet, Great
6. Night, Sight
7. Appeal, Appear
8. Grand, Grant
9. Brick, Brisk
10. Policy, Police

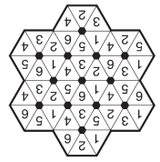
CryptoQuip answer

A thieving admirer of French artwork walked into a gallery and cried "Give me all your Monet!"



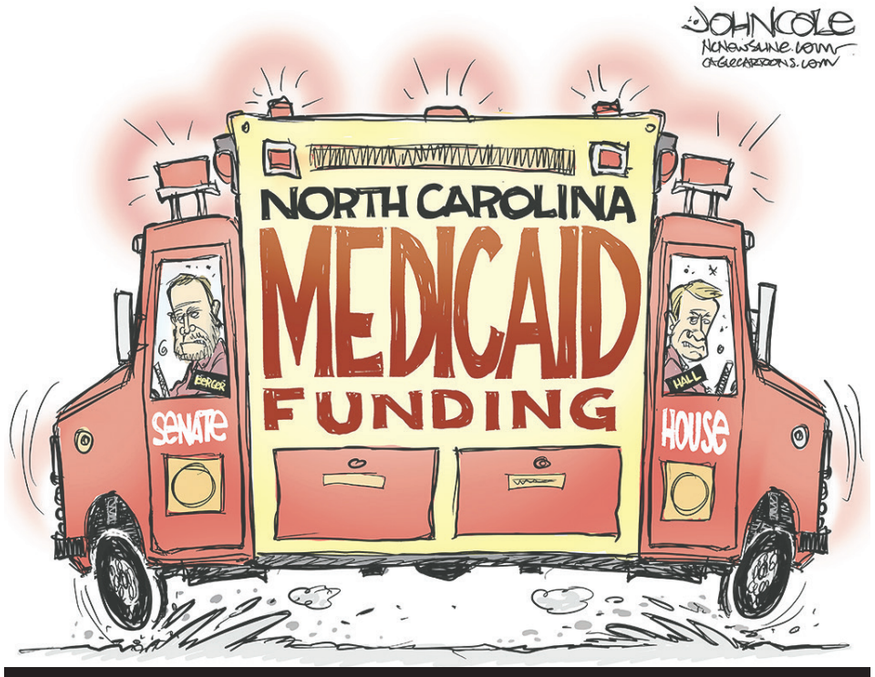
CryptoQuote answer

My brain, I believe, is the most beautiful part of my body.
— Shakira



Trivia Answers

1. Nephology.
2. Scotland, 4,413 feet high.
3. Global Positioning System.
4. Duff.
5. 1970.
6. Goosebumps.
7. Chicago.
8. 1,760.
9. A kit.
10. Gordon Ramsay.



"Help Is On The Way...?" by John Cole. Originally published by NC Newsline.

SAVAGE LOVE

INSANE ASSUMPTIONS

Snakes and bladders

BY DAN SAVAGE

I'm a straight male who is not well-endowed — I'm at the edge of the scale used to describe average penis size — and I watch porn both alone and with my wife.

I suddenly find myself becoming more and more fascinated with larger penises. Specifically: What is it like to have one?

Like most straight guys, I've never touched a penis other than my own. I've spent my entire life fondling one penis. I want to touch another penis but — and I mean this very sincerely — not for a sexual purpose. I want to experience what a well-endowed penis owner experiences daily.

What is it like to wash a large penis while showering? Or to hold it while pissing? Or to feel it in your hand while adjusting yourself? What does it feel like to stand at a urinal and pull a snake out of your pants and feel a stream of piss coursing through all that meat while you're holding it in your hand?

Is there a way I can do this? I imagine going into a gay bar and asking the bartender to point me to the patron with the biggest dick, then going up to that patron and politely asking if he would let me follow him to the bathroom when he needs to piss, stand behind him, and pull his huge snake out of his pants and hold it for him while he pees.

No sex. No implication of such.

I just want to know what it feels like to be the owner of a massive cock for a few moments.

Help me, Dan. What is the protocol here?

I've Been Shorted

Oh, there's a protocol — we'll get to the protocol in a moment — but first I'm wanna unpack the totally insane assumptions you're making.

Insane Assumption #1: Gay men will do anything.

Insane Assumption #2: Gay men are so into straight men — we're so desperate for the attention of straight guys — that we'll do anything a straight guy wants.

That includes letting random straight men stand behind us and hold our cocks while we're pissing because that's totally not something a serial killer or a jealous ex-boyfriend would ask you to do before slitting your throat and leaving you to bleed out on the bathroom floor.

Insane Assumption #3: Gay men disclose their cock sizes to the bartenders in gay bars when we buy our first beer and/or the bartenders in gay bars have fucked every man in the bar (okay, not an entirely insane assumption) and bartenders in gay bars are happy to direct random patrons — especially nervous straight guys giving first-time-in-a-gay-bar energy — to the gay guys with the biggest cocks (an entirely insane assumption) because that's a perfectly normal thing for a bartender who doesn't wanna lose his job to do.

While I don't want you going into gay bars and asking bartenders to point out the guys with the biggest dicks, IBS, I also don't want you — and I mean this very sincerely — to give up on your dream (or the pleasure) of holding a much bigger dick in your hand.

But to make your dream of holding another man's cock in your hand while he takes a piss, IBS, you're gonna have pay for the privilege like all the other perverts. That's the protocol here, IBS.

I know, I know: You're not a pervert! You want to hold another man's cock for him while he pisses for him, not for you! (So selfless!)

You will derive no sexual pleasure — none at all — once you're pressed up behind a man while he stands at a urinal while he takes the kind of long, leisurely piss that guys with massive cocks are famous for taking.

But since the guy who lets you hold his massive cock is, one, highly unlikely to believe you aren't getting a thrill from it and, two, highly unlikely to let you hold or wash or adjust his cock if there isn't something in it for him — and being fondled by a straight guy isn't something (it's not anything) — your search for a hung guy who'll do this for free is going to be long and fruitless.

So, paying for the privilege is your best bet, IBS, if you actually wanna make this happen. Direct your polite requests to your local male sex workers, traveling porn stars and other men who enjoy showing off the goods on social media. But open a Venmo account first.

P.S. I shared your question with Leo Louis, a gay porn star who is famous for his staggeringly huge cock.

"When you're gay and well-endowed, you get to pick and choose who you interact with sexually and rarely do I feel like doing volunteer work," Louis replied via text.

"That said, I'm often a sort of toy among my group of friends. They play with my cock and brag about my size as if my cock is an extension of the group. So, I've had multiple friends hold my cock while I piss — that and other bathroom stall activities — but a random straight man is on the bottom of my list of people to entertain. Maybe if you get me a drink or something I'd let you feel it. LOL."

P.P.S. Large or small, gay or straight, sex worker or sex volunteer, etc., we all get to pick and choose who we interact with sexually, as I'm sure Louis would agree.

P.P.P.S. I've touched a lot of penises other than my own — more men have allowed me to pull their cocks out of their pants than I can count — but I've never heard a gay man refer to his cock or anyone else's as a "snake."

So, best not to use that word while you're making your polite approaches.

Follow Leo Louis on Twitter @LeoLouis0.

I have a friend of many decades who has a kind of quirk. The drunker he is, the gayer he is.

If he is 100% sober, he is adamant that he is 100% straight. If he is a little drunk, he is a little bicurious. If he is blackout drunk, he will kiss men and fully admit to being bisexual and skewing towards men. Once when he was blackout drunk, he propositioned his wife's ex-boyfriend.

He doesn't seem to have any problems with gay people at any stage of sobriety, he is just adamant he is not gay when he is not intoxicated. My question is, should I tell him that absolutely everyone — wife, kids, friends, employer, coworkers — has seen him talk about liking men since, sadly, he gets blackout drunk fairly frequently?

We just want him to be happy.

Helping One Man Out

You have a phone, HOMO, and unless you're one of those modern Luddites, your phone has a built-in camera that records video — you just point it at someone and press record.

So, the next time your Not Gay Friend is drunk and hitting on men and telling on himself, I suggest you whip out your phone and make a video. Not to post publicly — not to shame or blackmail him — but to show him, HOMO, and only him.

Basically, the next time he denies being even the tiniest bit interested in men, pull him aside, open the video and press play.

Maybe seeing it will convince him to stop lying or stop drinking or both.

I am a straight cis woman in her early 40s who ended a 12-year sexless marriage a few years ago. I have recently met a wonderful guy and I am starting to be able to have fun in the bedroom again.

My dilemma is that I have been experiencing pleasure so intense it becomes discomfort and takes me out of the moment. Like I loved when he was going down on me, but the sensation made me want to push him away because it was too much. Am I okay? Is this fixable? Help!

Overwhelming Orgasmic Feelings

"This isn't a problem to 'fix' so much as an invitation to get curious about what's happening," said Rena Martine, an intimacy coach and sex educator.

"Sexual overstimulation is a real thing. Sometimes it's caused by too much repetitive friction or sensory sensitivity from neurodivergence, but in OOF's case, my guess is that it's about the good feelings feeling so good because she hasn't had them in a really long time."

We don't need to tell you this, OOF, but 12 years is a long time to spend in a sexless marriage.

And while your marriage ended a few years ago, you only just met the new man in your life, bed, crotch, etc.

"Just like water hits differently when you're dying of thirst," said Martine, "pleasure can hit differently when it's been a long time since your body's had a reason to remember what it likes. For all intents and purposes, this is new territory."

So, while you may not be a virgin technically — I'm assuming your marriage wasn't sexless at the start — it's been so long since you explored your sexuality with a partner (I'm hoping you were having good solo sex while your ex-husband neglected you), OOF, that you can think of yourself as a virgin in spirit.

(Recognizing, of course, that the concept of virginity is a problematic one and blah blah blah. But you know what I mean here!)

"When I work with clients exploring anything new sexually, my mantra is: baby steps, and keep yourself in the driver's seat," said Martine.

"There's a technique by Masters & Johnson called Sensate Focus that I often recommend to couples. It's essentially a scaffolded touch exercise where partners take turns showing and describing what feels good. It builds incrementally, and it's great for expanding your body's capacity for pleasure while learning each other's cues. And while there are times when discomfort warrants a medical check — like pain during orgasm (dysorgasmia) or penetration (vaginismus) — because OOF describes the sensation as overwhelming rather than painful, there's no need to sprint to the doctor's office just yet."

Follow Rena Martine on Instagram @_rena.martine_ and learn more about her work (and get her book The Sex You Want*) — at RenaMartine.com.*

Got problems? Yes, you do! Email your question for the column to mailbox@savage.love; or record your question for the Savage Lovecast *at savage.love/askdan; podcasts, columns and more at Savage.Love.*



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Wednesday, November 19

7:30 pm · CAROLINA THEATRE

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Charlotte Symphony Orchestra

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