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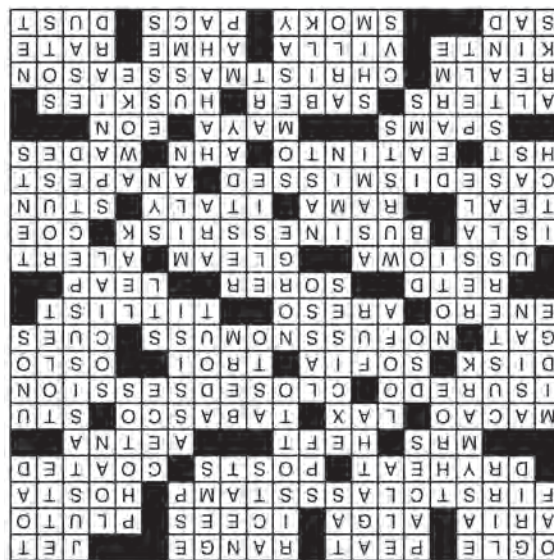
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Answer to crossword puzzle on page 21

ON THE COVER: John from Le&G Farms is a member of Got To Be NC as are all the farmers and vendors at the State Farmers Market. Stop by to find plenty of locally grown, raised, and caught products. The Farmers Market is located at 1201 Agriculture Street in Raleigh and is open 5am to 6pm daily.

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Forty years of community, sustainability, and farm-to-fork at Irregardless Cafe

BY BRIAN ADORNETTO, FOOD EDITOR | PHOTOS BY CRASH GREGG

A few minutes into our conversation with Arthur and Anya Gordon, the owners of Irregardless Cafe and Catering, their passion, intellect, spirituality, and genuineness were obvious. This husband-and-wife team gave Raleigh its first vegetarian restaurant and has been serving farm-to-fork cuisine since the day it opened in 1975.

In recent years, their menu has grown to include seafood, poultry, and beef, but it still remains plant-based. “We wanted the lion and lamb to be able to eat together without eating each other,” says Arthur with a smirk.

The Gordons have always stayed ahead of the curve: they began offering vegan and gluten-free options decades before anyone else, and in 1985, the café became North Carolina’s first completely smoke-free restaurant, twenty-five years before the state ban. In 2011, the Gordons installed ten solar thermal panels on the roof of the café to heat its water with renewable energy, and in the spring of 2012, they purchased an urban garden three miles from the café. This one-and-a-half acre garden on Athens Drive, renamed the Well Fed Community Garden, has an old well that enables the Gordons to grow sustainable organic vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers, as well as produce honey and eggs. The garden’s bounty provides the café and catering facility, garden volunteers, and low-income members of the community with fresh, seasonal foods, while the café and catering arm supplies the garden with compost via kitchen scraps and coffee grinds. To further promote community engagement, the Gordons also offer monthly workshops, workdays, and garden tours. Plans are even underway to build a kitchen and outdoor pizza oven in the garden as a way of offering a more authentic farm-to-fork experience to the community. “Since day one, our purpose has been to promote healthy living and sustainability while giving back to the community. We are what we eat and we are what we do,” explains Arthur, who is also Irregardless’ executive chef.

The always-busy café is charmingly eclectic. Watercolor paintings, vintage

Irregardless ads, and glass block windows separated by mirrors fill the walls. The bar is in the back next to a fish tank, and in a nook on the left sits a stage that presents live music 365 days a year. Large, pendant-lit booths line the other two walls, while smaller tables are packed in the center. Each table in the carpeted dining room is adorned with fresh-cut flowers and pocket-folded napkins filled with utensils.

Irregardless’ menu caters to a wide array of tastes and various levels of hunger. There are Appetizers, Salads, and Small Plates, all of which feature vegan and vegetarian options. The Small Plates are larger than an appetizer, but one on its own might not be enough to sate a hearty appetite. Entrees are either listed under the headings of Vegetarian and Vegan or Meat, Poultry, and Seafood. Additionally, the entire menu is studded with gluten-free offerings.

We began with the Vegan Sex (vegan and gluten-free, \$11), Butternut Squash and Potato Latkes (vegetarian and gluten-free, \$7), and Pesto Pizza (vegetarian, \$10). While it might be a little embarrassing to ask your waiter for “Vegan Sex,” it’s well worth any awkwardness. This colorful salad brought together quinoa pilaf, roasted and mashed sweet potatoes, sliced avocado, orange segments, and red wine-orange vinaigrette. With creamy, crunchy, chewy, and tender textures, and

flavors shifting between sweet, tart, earthy, and acidic, it’s a “don’t miss” dish. The crisp latkes, paired with mango salsa and pea shoots, were light and bright with a touch of heat — perfect for rousing the palate. The oblong pizza was slathered with pesto, loaded with sweet, roasted onions, strewn with mozzarella, topped with diced fresh tomatoes, and sprinkled with basil. This tasty pie is big enough to be an entrée or shared starter.

While the Chicken Kabobs (\$12) are listed under Small Plates, we opted to have them as an entrée along with the Stuffed Eggplant (vegan and gluten-free, \$17), Paella



Arthur and Anya Gordon



The vegetarian Pesto Pizza was slathered with pesto, loaded with sweet, roasted onions, strewn with mozzarella, topped with diced fresh tomatoes, and sprinkled with basil.



The abundant Chile Relleno was stuffed with Spanish rice and ratatouille, and rested on a bed of creamy black bean cake and roasted tomato sauce.

(\$29), and Chile Relleno (vegetarian and gluten-free, \$17). The “small plate” featured two grilled kabobs — one chicken and one vegetable — served with warm pita triangles and Chef Arthur’s famous hummus. The juicy chunks of chicken were bathed in a bright, luxurious lemon-tahini sauce, and the crisp-tender vegetables (zucchini, red onion, yellow squash, and bell pepper) had a pleasant char. A roasted medley of tomatoes, squash, onions, and peppers surrounded the quinoa-stuffed eggplant and provided another example of Chef Arthur’s adeptness at juxtaposing textures. The hearty, sweet paella teemed with shrimp, mussels, bay

scallops, marinated baked chicken wings, vegetables, and, of course, saffron-scented Spanish rice. One taste and I understood why it’s Irregardless’ longest-running dish. Stuffed with Spanish rice and ratatouille, the abundant Chile Relleno rested on a creamy black bean cake, which was encircled by a roasted tomato sauce. Smoked Gouda, pico de gallo, crème fraiche, and a balsamic reduction completed the colorful presentation. For a vegan version, just ask that the Gouda and crème fraiche be left off.

Irregardless’ frequently changing dessert menu always includes several gluten-free choices as well as a

vegan option. We sampled the Triple Chocolate Cake (\$8), Apple-Sour Cherry Cobbler (\$8), and Lemon “Cheesecake” (vegan and gluten-free, \$8). After alternating milk and white chocolate mousses between layers of dense chocolate cake, Chef Arthur covered the treat in dark chocolate ganache and drizzled it with hazelnut caramel sauce. It was rich and, surprisingly, not too sweet. The tart cobbler was served hot in a mini mason jar and topped with sliced strawberries and vanilla ice cream. The sweet, lemony “cheesecake” with blueberry sauce, also presented in a mini mason jar, was excellent. Just don’t expect it to be like a traditional >>>

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It might be humorously awkward to order, but the Vegan Sex is a must-have dish at Irregardless.

cheesecake; it's creamier and considerably less set. It was by far my favorite dessert; however, if you have nut allergies, beware: it's made with cashews.

For over forty years, the Gordons have been serving farm-fresh food that's not only good for you but also sustainable. Their commitment to our community, local farmers, and the environment is unparalleled. Their standard of service and support of homegrown musicians has distinguished Irregardless for decades. So, when you grow tired of chasing trends, head over to Irregardless; your body and soul will thank you. 🍷



Brian is a food writer, culinary instructor, and chef. His business, Love at First Bite, specializes in private cooking classes and intimate dinners. For more information, please visit www.loveatfirstbite.net. Contact Brian at brian@welovedowntown.com.



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Lunch: Tues-Fri 11am-2:30pm

Dinner: Tues-Thur 5pm-9:30pm, Fri 5pm-10pm, Sat 5pm-12am, Sun 5pm-9pm

Brunch: Sat & Sun 10am-2:30pm

Cuisine: Eclectic comfort food with a spotlight on vegetables

Atmosphere: Quirky and energetic

Price: \$\$\$

Service: Friendly and knowledgeable

Dress: Casual

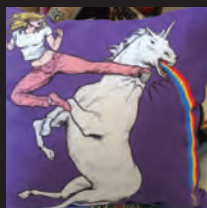
Noise Level: Moderate to loud

Reservations: Accepted, recommended on weekends

Parking: Private parking lot across the street; look for the Irregardless parking sign next to the crosswalk.

Features: Many gluten-free, vegetarian, and vegan options; Seasonally changing menu with weekly specials; Creative cocktails; Craft beers; Global wine list with twenty wines-by-the-glass; Live music daily; Monthly cooking classes with Chef Arthur; Bar dining; Take out; Catering (offsite and at the Glenwood Club, Irregardless' event venue); Major credit cards accepted

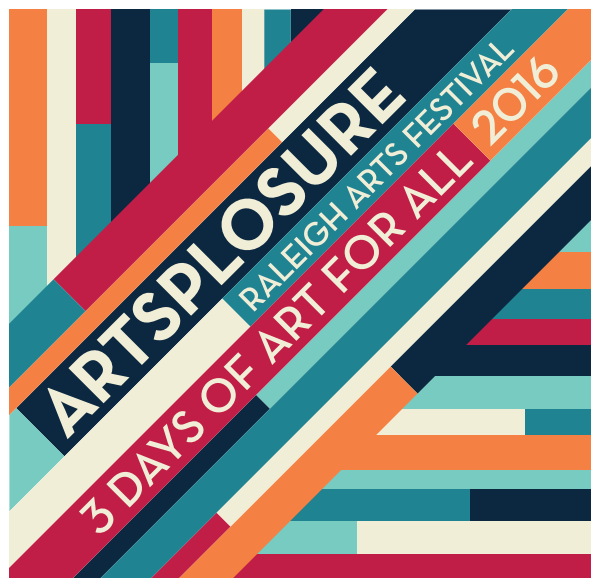
Downtowner Tips: Good for groups, kids, and families as well as late night drinks and live music. If you go to www.irregardless.com and sign up for their newsletter, you'll receive a complimentary bottle of wine for your birthday and anniversary dinner.



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From the Publisher



WE WANT YOU! We're growing again here at the *Downtowner* and at our sister publication, *BOOM! Magazine* (for young-at-heart baby boomers), and we're looking for talented sales staff and writers for both magazines. If you're passionate about helping small business owners, championing community and local charities, meeting new people, and promoting all the great places throughout the Triangle, you'll fit right in. Prior sales experience preferred but not necessary. To apply for sales, please send us an email with resume and quick letter why you'd make a great salesperson to

sales@welovedowntown.com. Want to be a writer? Drop us an email to writers@welovedowntown.com and include sample articles and your typical writing rates (or, let us know if you're interested in becoming a contributing

writer. We'll make sure we hook you up with free tickets, special access to events, and all kinds of good swaggy stuff). Article assignments include artist and performer profiles, nightlife, retail, fashion, history, music, wine, gallery shows, events, and most anything else you're interested in writing about (except politics and negative articles, because who really needs those, right?).

The Best of Downtowner Awards is coming! We're excited about our next issue, which will highlight all the Award winners for the past year. Best Burger, Best Pizza, Best New Restaurant, Best Food Truck, Best Craft Beer, and Best Sushi are just a few of the reader favorites that receive thousands of votes each year. Be sure to check out all the winners to discover lots of great, new places to visit, all voted for and recommended by you, our awesome readers.

Cheers,

Crash

CRASH GREGG
 Publisher, *Triangle Downtowner Magazine*
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BY CRASH GREGG

With more than 59,000 square miles, the state of North Carolina ranks 28th in the U.S. in size, right after New York. Spanning from the Appalachian Mountains and the tallest elevation in North America (Mt. Mitchell) on the west to the Atlantic Ocean on the east with the Piedmont region in between, our state boasts one of the most diverse habitats and climates for produce, livestock, and seafood. We're lucky as residents to live so close to much of the food we eat on a daily basis.

To help promote all the agricultural products grown, raised, caught, and made in the Old North State, the NC Department of Agriculture launched Got to Be NC in 2005, which is an extension of the Goodness Grows in North Carolina program.

"We created the Got to Be NC marketing program more than a decade ago to help consumers identify local products no matter where they shop," said Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler. "I'm proud to say that Got to Be NC still stands for quality, local agricultural products grown, raised, caught or made in North Carolina."

Over the past 10 years, Got to Be NC has expanded into all of the state's grocery store chains and many,

many restaurants across the state display the Got to Be NC logo to tout the fact that they're using North Carolina food on their menus. The number of farms and companies that belong to the program has increased tremendously as well. Goodness Grows in North Caro-

\$76-billion agriculture industry."

Nello's Sauce founder and CEO Neal "Nello" McTighe use local N.C. ingredients "to reduce our carbon footprint, build and foster local partnerships, strengthen our local economy, and create even greater pride in what N.C. can produce agriculturally. By seeking out products that are part of Got to Be NC, consumers keep money in our local economy, help reduce their impact on the environment, get to experience the treasures of our state, and build confidence in our local partnerships and businesses." Their Biodynamic Heirloom Marinara, which is shipped to over 140 Whole Foods stores, uses all NC products.

Apart from all the supermarkets and groceries (yes, even Walmart and Harris Teeter), you can find plenty of NC products at the State Farmer's Market and the Downtown Raleigh Farmer's

Market. The Angus Barn, Irregardless, and Neomonde are just a few of the locally owned restaurants that participate in the program.

Look for the Got to Be NC logo wherever you shop or eat, and you'll know you're getting a quality product grown, raised, caught, or made in North Carolina.



Mann Mullen and Karl Hudson of Rare Earth Farms



Neal "Nello" McTighe of Nello's Sauces

lina began with 14 members in the 1980s. Today, Got to Be NC has 3,000 members representing farmers, ranchers, fishermen, and food businesses across the state.

NC Marketing Manager Jamie Hall emphasized, "We work with farmers and food businesses of all sizes throughout the state to help them promote their products. It's all in an effort to continue to support the state's

Celebrate with the **Got to Be NC Festival**

The Got to Be NC Festival has celebrated the best of North Carolina agriculture for nine years. This three-day event features a food and wine expo, the Southeast's largest antique tractor display, tractor pulls, carnival rides for the whole family, and live entertainment. Gate admission and parking are free, but a few events have a separate admission fee. The 2016 Got to Be NC Festival will be held May 20-22 at the State Fairgrounds in Raleigh.

"Too many people are two or three generations removed from the farm," said Got to Be NC Festival Manager Jim Knight. "We want to show festivalgoers where the food on their plate comes from, and the wealth of agriculture and agricultural products that are available in North Carolina."

Lowes Foods has been a proud sponsor of the festival for the past two years, and really improved the selection in Homegrown Fare, the food, wine, and beer expo. More than 100 N.C. food, wine, and beer companies participate



Come check out the rides and more at the Got to Be NC festival.

in the event. For \$3, visitors can sample their favorites, discover new items, and purchase products to take home. Admission is free for children under 12.

The Agri-Plaza and Kidz Corral offer younger

festivalgoers a chance to see farm animals up close. There will be milking demonstrations, an egg hatchery, and plenty of animals on display. There's also a rabbit show and cavy (guinea pig) competition. On Friday and Sunday, ride lovers can purchase an unlimited-ride wristband for \$20 that gives access to more than 30 carnival rides. BMX bikes will take over the iconic arena Saturday and Sunday for the Raleigh Trans Jam BMX contest. The event features park, flat, and street competitions, along with jump contests, bike displays, and more.

The Festival is a great way to spend the day, but it's definitely worth staying a little later Friday and Saturday for the fireworks. Brinkley Entertainment will set off a brilliant air display at 9:15 Friday and Saturday. The Got to Be NC Festival runs May 20-22. The gates are open Friday from noon to 10 p.m.; Saturday from 9am to 10pm, and Sunday from 9am to 8pm. Visit www.gottobenfestival.com for more information.



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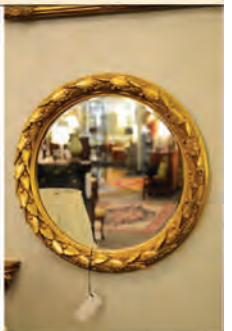
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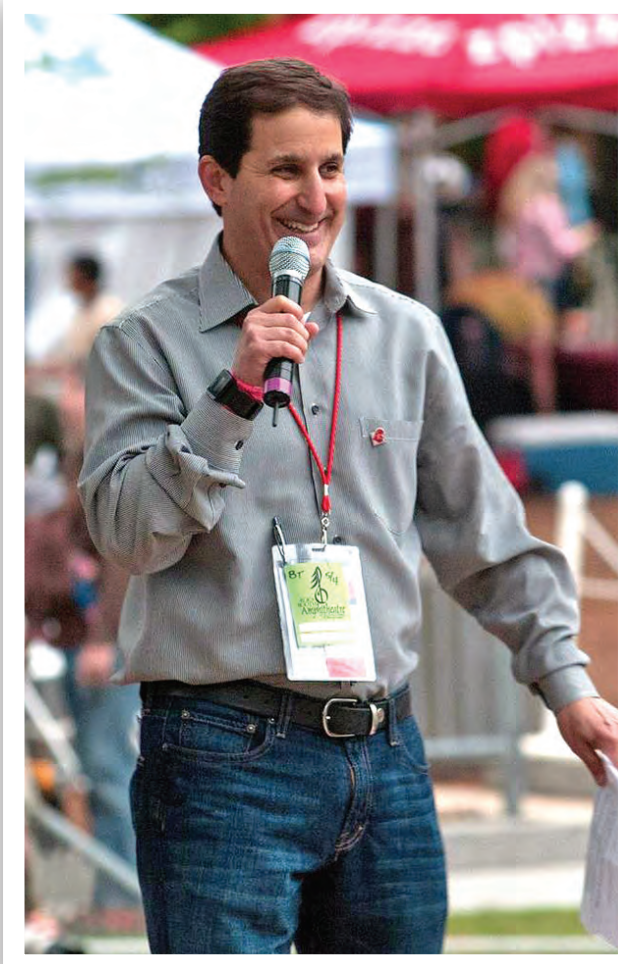
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10 Questions with Danny Rosin

By MATT LAIL

I really feel like there's no need to write an introduction here because Danny Rosin seems to know everyone in Raleigh. Nonetheless, I'll introduce him anyway. By day, Danny is the co-president of Brand Fuel, a local promotional products agency. His responsibilities include managing sales and marketing, employee recruitment, and providing tactical counsel to clients. By night (and, honestly, also by day) he is the co-founder of Band Together, a local nonprofit that uses live music to support the great work of local nonprofits. Band Together has donated over \$5.5 million to the Triangle community, to diverse nonprofit community causes. Danny is married to Niccole and they have two daughters, Brooke (11) and Tyler (9). If you don't know Danny, connect with him. You'll be glad you did.

1 Tell me a little bit about your background and your childhood? Where'd you grow up? Was music always a big part of your life?

Danny Rosin: I was raised in the Norfolk area. I was into sports and, in particular, I loved my banana seat Schwinn. It gave me the freedom to get away from my large, wonderful, and dysfunctional family. That dysfunction presented lots of unique opportunities as well, so I really don't shortchange that now that I'm able to look back.

With respect to music, I was always energized by it and interested in it. I was exposed to a classic rock station in Norfolk. My friend knew a DJ there, so we hung out at the station whenever we could.

As I got older, I was always trying to call in and win tickets to see shows that my parents wouldn't allow me to see, much less by tickets for. I finally won tickets to see Joe Walsh and Stevie Nicks. I remember being asked

by security to leave Scope Arena long after the show was over and the lights had come on. I was in awe of the spectacle I had just witnessed.

As a teen, I "borrowed" my older brother's ID to sneak into The Boathouse, a music venue on the water in Norfolk, so I could slam dance at Ramones concerts. I'm in my 40s now and I still love to slam dance. That familiar mosh pit is a metaphor for my life in so many ways. And I think it keeps me feeling young and alive.

2 What exactly is Band Together, what does it do, and where did the idea for Band Together come from? Was there a singular moment that sparked it?

Danny Rosin: Band Together's mission is to use live music as a platform for social change. We pick a different nonprofit partner each year and raise a lot of dollars and marketing awareness through concerts and our unique "Partnership Philanthropy" model.

Band Together was born out of the ashes of 9/11. It was a response to our desire to help victimized families we didn't even know, during one of the darkest periods in our nation's history. The singular moment occurred that day, after I kicked around several ideas with the other founders (Phil and Shellie Gruber, Skip Mangum, and Tom Lyon). We thought that live music might bring the community together during difficult times and remind us that, in times of tragedy, good things can happen.

3 Talk a little about some of the early struggles you may have had with Band Together?

Danny Rosin: Early on, we struggled because we were an all-volunteer group. Having no overhead was

magical, but it was also hard. We put pressure on donors and ourselves. We also gave all of the money that we raised to the causes we supported and didn't invest in our own organization. We wanted to keep overhead to a bare-bones minimum and deliver more services to those in need. When we began, we responded to natural calamities (9/11, Hurricane Katrina, and the Tsunami of 2005 to name a few) and we burned out and almost faded away. Keeping perennial donors interested was a bit of a struggle because we changed our cause every year. Last, having street parties was very hard. Imagine all that goes into creating something from scratch. It took us many years to earn the opportunity to take on the major venues in the area like The Red Hat Amphitheater. That part makes me proud.

4 Was there a moment in those early days where you thought, "You know, this might just work." And, of all the acts that have performed for Band Together, is there one that really stands out?

Danny Rosin: I feel like we arrived when donors reached out to us proactively, wanting to donate to whatever we were going to do in response to a tragedy or community need. Sponsors trusting us with their dollars gave us confidence as well as an incredible privilege and responsibility.

As to the second part of the question, yes! The 2009 George Clinton and Parliament Funkadelic, HOBEX, and Yo Mama's Big Fat Booty Band event – to raise funds and awareness for SafeChild – had all of the attributes of a success. The concert made good money. We had an incredibly diverse crowd. We supported local music. Most of the folks from Parliament Funkadelic joined the other bands on stage and hung out and celebrated



and partied with the local fans. Most importantly, we all had a blast. Dirty pink feather boas and all.

5 As far as Band Together making a charitable impact, is there a moment that stands out where you thought to yourself, "THIS is why we do this."

Danny Rosin: There are way too many moments to share. And they come in the most spontaneous ways. But there's one I'll never forget. At our third event, we were raising funds for Operation Smile. We had a young girl onstage who received cleft palate surgery from Operation Smile. She spoke about her very personal experience and you could have heard the proverbial pin drop – at a rock show, no less. The tears welled up in everyone's eyes as she explained that, because of our hard work, she would grow up to be a confident woman. She could be someone who would go to school and not be ridiculed anymore. She could be someone who would get a job. Sing. Kiss. Get married and have children.

We often have to remind ourselves why we do what we do. Band Together is so much bigger than any one person. We have an incredible group of committed volunteers and donors with massive hearts who love to have a good time. We call them the "mulletts" – they're "business in front" and "party in back."

6 How has Band Together changed over the years? I know the concerts have gotten larger, but what else has changed?

Danny Rosin: There have been many changes. We're proud of our evolution and of trying new things. The biggest change is that we began as an urgent call-to-action group. Then we began to raise money for specific nonprofits. Now, we raise money WITH nonprofit partners. We make bigger decisions, so we assume a lot more risk. We have a stronger focus on giving back to the music community. We're now able to support our

in-kind donors instead of asking for handouts all of the time. We have brand power and are a trusted community resource. Last, our most recent, heavy-duty change was the hiring of Matt Strickland as our awesome Executive Director. Last year, we hired our second full-timer, Fraley Marshall, as our very sharp Program Manager. That's exciting because it shows our investment in an organization as well as the community we truly believe in.

7 I bet you're offered a lot of free drinks around town from promoters and bands wanting to get on your band list.

Danny Rosin: I never want to be seen as someone who represents our organization and takes a free drink in payola fashion. Integrity is critical to our brand and that starts at the top. We choose to be a bright spot in the often-slim shady music industry. I love investing dollars into local music and, as an organization, we embrace paying bands versus asking them to play for free like many other organizations do. Our Last Band Standing event – in which the winner takes home \$3,500 and earns a spot on our main event ticket to open for an international act in a large amphitheater in front of thousands – is a good example of how much we respect the music.

8 At a panel discussion about the music scene here in Raleigh, you raised the question of what types of infrastructure are needed in town, not only for the local music scene to survive, but to thrive. From your perspective, what would you like to see happen?

Danny Rosin: We need to get the musicians and venues immersed in the city's decision-making process. The city needs to really listen, think long term, and do as the Kinks once said, "Give the People What They Want" on some levels. We need to start simple with things like making it easy for street musicians to get permits. Music can and should be the heartbeat of our city.

9 That same discussion made a lot of comparisons between the scenes in Raleigh and Chapel Hill. You're a die-hard UNC guy who is now deeply rooted in Raleigh. Do you see differences between the two? Is it really that divisive?

Danny Rosin: I know there are differences and I love a good rivalry, but more and more I am trying to embrace the idea of regionalism (or, the idea that working together for a larger common purpose is important to the area's success). We should fuel each other's growth instead talking so much trash about each other; however, I do love the fact that there are different roots and incredible diversity in each city's music scenes.

10 Can you give a sneak peek of what we can expect next with Band Together?

Danny Rosin: We feel like our soul is in downtown, so we're moving this year's event to Red Hat Amphitheater, our fourth venue in five years. We're attempting to raise \$1 million for our partnership with Kidznotes. If your jaw didn't just drop to the floor when you saw that number, I'd be surprised. Those funds are going to help a LOT of people. The event date is May 14 and features Trampled by Turtles, The Devil Makes Three, and the winner from our Lincoln Theatre Last Band Standing event on April 16. These Band Together events bring new meaning to the term "feel good music." 🎸

Where you can find Danny:
www.linkedin.com/in/dannyrosin
www.twitter.com/dannyrosin
www.facebook.com/danny.rosin



Matt runs www.raleighphilosociety.blogspot.com in his spare time, where readers can find news, interviews, posts, and photos, all centered on the City of Oaks.

Around Town in the Triangle

Photos below are from the 29th Annual Toast to the Triangle fundraiser for the Tammy Lynn Center. Over 1,000 attendees and 20 restaurants helped raise more than \$200,000 for the Tammy Lynn Center for Developmental Disabilities. The *Downtowner* was proud to be a Gold sponsor this great event. www.atoasttothetriangle.org



LEFT: Bella Monica: Kyle, Chef Corbett Monica, Daria, Ben, and Ashley. CENTER: Downtowner interns Andrew Brown and Cristina Rangel. RIGHT: Neomonde Restaurant & Bakery: Saida, Brittany, Matt, Laura, Chris, Betty, Sam, Joe, Elvira, and DeGaulle.



LEFT: N.C. State University: Carrie, Stacey, Aidan, Bill, Gerry, Keith, and Loretta. CENTER: ABC-11 news anchor and Toast MC & Honorary Chair Steve Daniels and Holly Richard, President and CEO of the Tammy Lynn Center. RIGHT: 18 Seaboard: Jason, Serge, Brandy, Rusty, and Alex.



LEFT: The Angus Barn: Suzanne, Rob, Van, Tony, and Alonnie. CENTER: Barbara and *Downtowner Magazine* food editor Chef Brian Adornetto. RIGHT: *BOOM! Magazine* health and wellness editor Anne Barrington and husband Barry.



LEFT: Joann and Shiki/Tasu GM Steve Famiglietta. CENTER: Azitra: Harman, Narinder, Anil, and Melo. RIGHT: Anne and sister Linda.

Around Town in the Triangle



LEFT: Chris Corchiani and daughter Annabelle with Mr & Mrs Wuf. CENTER: Congrats to Sherif and Leslie on the opening of Raleigh Raw's brick and mortar shop on Hargett Street in downtown Raleigh. RIGHT: Charlene and Sharon at the opening of the Best of NC show at Gallery C.



LEFT: Owners Zack Medford and Ben Yannessa (center) and crew at the soft opening of Isaac Hunters Tavern. CENTER: Nancy & Deanna at the anniversary party for Synergy Spa. Congrats Anna! RIGHT: Brian Burnett, clothing designer Justin LeBlanc, and *Downtowner* publisher Crash Gregg at a gallery opening at the Contemporary Art Museum.



LEFT: DJ Chaperone (aka Eddie T) spinning the vinyl at Cafe Helios. CENTER: Steve and Jon installing new equipment at Little City Brewing + Provisions Co in the West at North condo building. RIGHT: Drew & Kevin at the soft opening at Hadley's Cafe in the Dawson building.



LEFT: Mayor Nancy McFarlane and granddaughter Mattie at the St. Patrick's Day parade. CENTER: Congratulations to John Tang on the opening of International Breakfast & Burger Company (Amber, Todd, John, and Emily). RIGHT: Celebrating Joey's birthday at the Black Flower with Jamie Sir Scruffy.



CASUAL DINING

La Farm Bakery

A Love Letter TO LA FARM

BY CHRISTY GRIFFITH | PHOTOS BY NANCY THOMAS



This is going to be total fangirl mail to Lionel Vatinet, locavore, James Beard Foundation semifinalist, and owner of La Farm Bakery in Cary. I can't help it. Everything that comes out of his kitchen is going to be the most magical thing you've ever put in your mouth and you're going to be the opposite of those people who evangelize gluten-free living; you're going to be shoving bread in any mouth that will stay open long enough to shove bread into.

Just kidding. YOU WILL BE EATING ALL THE BREAD. No sharing. No matter if they bring you a tray full of scones or Scandinavian rye or Epi with a beautiful latte to wash it down with. I'm speaking from experience.

So, here goes...

Dear La Farm,

I love you so very, very much. Although I have been ordering the same two things for years, they have never disappointed. Ever. And now for this article, I've been forced to eat other things you make and HOW AM I EVER SUPPOSED TO DECIDE WHAT TO ORDER AGAIN? Each and every single thing I took a bite of was the best thing I'd ever had, and not a smear of mayonnaise was in sight.

I stand by my decade-old order of a Croque Madame



(\$8.95) to dine-in, and a White Chocolate Baguette (\$3.89) to eat on the way home. It's what I'll always tell people to order who just don't know what to get. (How can you expect them to know what to order? Your menu is a culinary harlequin novel, and I'm all hot and bothered by the many prospects.) Obviously, it's fun to order a Croque Madame; you feel way more grown-up than when you ask for a Doritos Locos Taco aloud. But it's even more fun to eat a Croque Madame than it is to order one because, well, eating is

always going to beat out spoken word.

Your signature La Farm bread, with its light sour-dough flavor, all crusty and chewy, is the perfect vehicle to top anything with. But when *anything* is ham, Gruyere, mozzarella, mornay sauce, and a fried egg? It's my *everything*. The champagne vinaigrette-dressed salad that comes with it is a nice way for me tell people, "I ate a salad for lunch today, so stop looking at me like that when I'm eating my White Chocolate Baguette on the walk to my car."

The Baguette is very popular because it is a mini-baguette (serves: one Christy) studded with white chocolate chips. I'm very possessive so, no, you can't have any of mine. It probably could serve more Christys if I weren't wearing my stretchy pants but fresh-baked bread deserves the respect of being eaten before others have an opportunity to ask for a slice.

La Farm, you are an exceptional bakery and café, and even the things that come with minimal baked goods are simply exquisite. For those who have the misfortune of low-carbing it, the Asian Tuna Salad (\$12.95) is an excellent choice. The salad is artfully plated with bright peppers, carrots, and edamame atop cabbage and mixed greens. Seared, sesame-crusting tuna tastes as delicious as it is pretty, and the Asian vinaigrette ties everything



The creamy Tomato Basil soup, served in its own bread bowl



Just a few of the many varieties La Farm breads

together like a sequined clutch that goes with the little black dress that I'm never going to fit in again because of #WhiteChocolateBaguettes.

Just when I thought things couldn't get any better, you brought out your Avocado Toast (\$10.45). The slice of multigrain, as big as my very large head, was deliciously hearty without being bossy in a way that some multigrain breads are. (No one likes to be told, "I'm a healthier option...eat me!") In fact, as a general rule, no one really likes anthropomorphic breads.) Covered in a thick spread of avocado puree, far more buttery than

any avocado has a right to be, the toast could stop here and I'd still be gushing. But. But! You, La Farm, dare to top it with not only a black bean and corn salsa, but also a fried egg with a lovely, runny yolk. This girl doesn't even find fault with the chia seeds scattered on top that will eventually get stuck in her teeth; it's evidence that she ate one of those superfoods that *Marie Claire* is always going on about and that means that you can eat a white chocolate baguette afterward and the chia seeds will make sure you absorb none of the calories. (I am pretty sure that's exactly how it works.)

The Soup du Jour was a creamy Tomato Basil (\$5.95), slightly sweet and well balanced with a faint acidity that made me want to... do things. Specifically, do all the actual eating of all of the soup, order a white chocolate baguette, and then maybe (probably) eat more soup. I fear you have ruined me for life, Lionel. I just will not eat any more soup that does not come in its own bread bowl, specifically baked by you, La Farm. The soup was perfection. The bread was perfection. The perfection was all in my belly.

At this point, I need to tell you that the Mediterraneo (\$6.95) and I were making eyes at each other. It's the perfect sandwich to welcome the warm weather with, although I would happily engage with this sandwich knee-deep and barefoot in a snowdrift. The focaccia, and I cannot stress this enough, is one of the most heavenly things you are going to put in your mouth. Could it be the world's finest sandwich bread? I don't know- I'll have to come back to La Farm and do more research, BUT initial findings suggest that when two pieces of focaccia surround thick slices of fresh mozzarella, roasted tomatoes, basil, and balsamic vinaigrette, your



La Farm owner, chef, and master baker Lionel Vatinet

tongue will reach the zenith. Then you have the nerve to serve it with house-made potato chips and a garlicky buttermilk ranch dip and MY MOUTH IS SO STIMULATED WITH FEELINGS AND THEY DIDN'T TELL ME HOW TO HANDLE THIS IN HEALTH CLASS!

When I was absolutely certain no other sandwich could be so titillating, out comes the Reuben (\$7.45), hereinafter known as The Best Reuben I've Ever Eaten. (Anyone would be firstly shocked and secondly disgusted to find out how many Reubens I've consumed in my life.) You are so very smart to put the corned beef and Gruyere on the outer layers, keeping the house-made sauerkraut (seriously, what CAN'T you do, La Farm?) from making the earthy rye bread soggy. Serving Russian dressing on the side for my dipping pleasure also makes this The Neatest Reuben I've Ever Eaten. (It's a one-napkin sandwich!) This Reuben is more than most of us deserve and on behalf of everyone with good taste in the Greater Triangle area, I thank you many times over.



The Reuben with corned beef, Gruyere, and house-made sauerkraut on an earthy rye bread

The Quiche Lorraine (\$7.95) is most definitely the most wonderful quiche I've ever tasted. The crust, so flaky and rich, holds a bacon, cheese, and onion custard that is firm yet velvety. It is definitely the most >>>



The flaky and rich crust of the Quiche Lorraine holds a delicious and velvety bacon, cheese, and onion custard

question. I never regret anything, unless if you asked me if I regret not eating the rest of the loaf. Yes, yes I do. Your rotating seasonal bread options are what keep me hanging on when we lose an hour of sleep from daylight savings time and the pollen returns. You just make life worth living, even when it's hard. Melodramatic? Then you obviously haven't had the Boston Crème Challah.

You are so generous to host classes where we can step into your kitchen as you demystify the art of breadmaking. I have a copy of your book, *A Passion for Bread: Lessons from a Master Baker*, and when we've been iced in, I've pulled it out and attempted to recreate the magic that I can buy at La Farm. (It turned out about 85% as magical, which is better than 0% as magical, I suppose.)



The seared, sesame seed crusted Asian Tuna Salad with bright peppers, carrots, and edamame atop cabbage and mixed greens

luxurious way to eat eggs, short of eating eggs in a bathrobe on the veranda of a penthouse while a butler pours champagne. But then again, you wouldn't be able to smell those white chocolate baguettes cookin', so I'll just eat quiche here with my regular clothes on.

And just when I thought I couldn't get any more verklempt, you bring out this big, beautiful Boston Crème Challah (\$7.99). Holla! Enriched with so much butter and eggs to make it the most sumptuous of breads, challah would be delightful on its own; however, you fill this baby up with pastry cream and then drizzle it in Belgian dark chocolate before sprinkling it with coarse grains of rock sugar and WOWZA. This is the end-all, be-all. Could I eat three-fourths of a loaf? Yes. Did I eat three-fourths of a loaf? Yes. Do I regret eating three-fourths of a loaf? That's a silly, silly



The Avocado Toast arrives with a hearty slice of multigrain covered in creamy avocado puree, a black bean and corn salsa, and a perfectly cooked fried egg

But I'm happy to know that you already have a white chocolate baguette baked and ready when I need it. Which is anytime I'm on your side of Cary. Until next time, I remain...

... thankful to have no gluten intolerance,

Christy.
xoxo

La Farm Bakery

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We Food Trucks



Stuft Gourmet Baked Potatoes

BY RUSSELL PINKSTON

Stuft is one of those purist food trucks, the kind that has created a single menu item – something no one else is doing – and then has perfected it. This is a fairly straightforward concept, yet it's also one that many food trucks struggle with. Often, I come across very small food trucks that try to offer too broad a range of complicated menu items to their customers – things like 'dry-aged veal osso buco paninis' with a side of 'artisan sage garlic aioli truffle sweet potato croquettes.' While I can understand the desire to create something interesting and original, some food trucks seem to fall victim to restaurant envy. They offer items that not only can be a confused mouthful to order, but also can be very difficult to maintain with a small staff on-board a tiny truck miles away from the nearest kitchen. The key to Stuft's success might be the fact that they make one thing and one thing only... the best damn baked potato you've ever tasted.

I visited with Stuft in early March at a food truck rodeo in Durham's Central Park. It was a nice day – mid 70s with a spring breeze – a good day, I thought, to be on a food truck. Little did I realize that Stuft is basically



one giant potato oven. It's like an assembly line of spuds, which can make things a little warm inside. "We go through about 300 potatoes a day," Stephanie Ruggiro, the owner, tells me, "on a 30-minute rotation." As I talk with her, she and her staff are continuously gutting and

buttering an endless procession of Idaho russet potatoes and then stuffing them to order. "In the summer, it can get up to about 120 degrees in here," she tells me – a temperature that doesn't seem unbelievable at all.

Stuffing potatoes wasn't always Stephanie's day job. After college she moved to Manhattan, where she worked for an ad firm. But it didn't take her long to realize that the 9-5 grind was not for her. She admits that being laid-off was probably the best thing that could've happened to her. In an effort to find a new career, she got some sage advice from her parents. They suggested she rekindle the family business.

You see, when Stephanie's parents were first married, they used to run a similar potato business at a flea market in New York. In creating Stuft, Stephanie took some of their old recipes and invented some new ones of her own. We're not just talking sour cream and chives here. Each potato is about 12-16 oz and stuffed full of enough tasty ingredients to constitute a full meal on its own. "We like people to leave here Stuft," says Stephanie; however, they do offer a few sides for those aiming for suicide-by-carb.



Stuft owner Stephanie Ruggiro

Stuft fills their potatoes with a range of ingredients, from short ribs to vegan and gluten free items, all for around \$7-9. A few of their most popular offerings include an Al Pastor potato with pork that roasts for about 12 hours, a Buffalo Chicken & Ranch potato (gluten free) that is totally smothered in buffalo sauce and mozzarella, and the classic Bacon Cheddar Ranch potato (gluten free) that is absolutely overflowing with bacon. “We go through about 30 pounds of bacon a week,” Stephanie says, “and around 25 pounds of butter.” They also have a Loaded Beef Taco, a Barbecue Chicken & Cheddar (gluten free), and something called the Cheddarella, which is a blend of cheddar and mozzarella cheeses topped with sour cream. The vegans out there will rejoice in their Garlic Roasted Veggies potato that is ridiculously overgrown with broccoli, cauliflower, and carrots (for a nice change, the vegan item in this particular profile is probably the most filling on the menu). They also offer a Meatball Parmesan stuffed potato that is made from Stephanie’s grandfather’s secret recipe.

For sides, they sell Jalapeno Habanero Bullets, which are breaded and deep-fried mashed potatoes full of peppers and cream cheese; Bacon Maple Cheddar Bombs, which are also breaded and deep-fried, filled with >>>



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bacon, maple syrup, and cheddar; and Cajun Wedges, which are their take on French fries made with their own special spice blend.

If you're in a rush, Stuff will also sell you a 'Take & Bake' potato that you can take home with you and zap in the microwave.

Stuff gets all of their potatoes from the Raleigh Farmer's Market, sourced from Idaho and sold by local distributors. The truck sets up shop at various locations all over the Triangle and their schedule fluctuates constantly with no recurring spots to speak of, so follow



them on social media or check their website for updates indicating their location.

While they may not be the most extreme food truck on the block, Stuff has set out upon the noble mission of perfecting the time-honored standard that is the baked potato. Theirs are hot, fresh, and filled with delicious ingredients that you simply won't find anywhere else. So the next time you see their spud-o-rific truck parked nearby, try one for yourself and get Stuff! 🍟



Russ is a photographer, brewer, author, and screenwriter. He's a Raleigh native who has returned home to NC after a decade of writing (and drinking) in NYC and Los Angeles.



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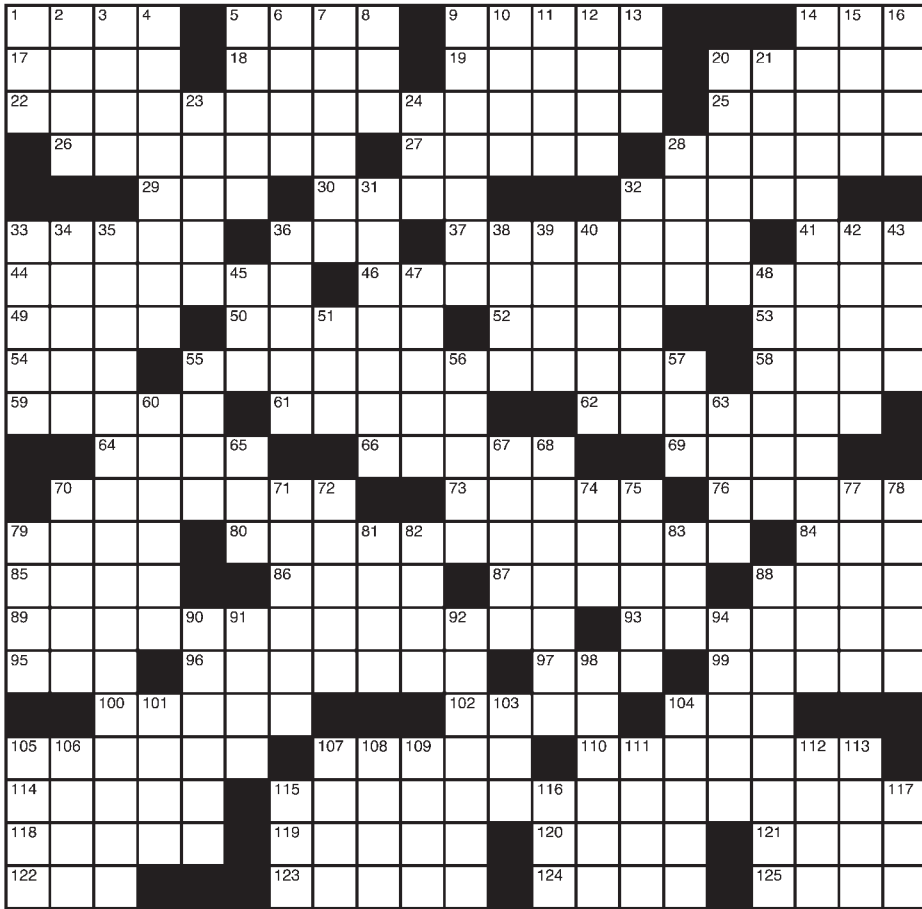
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- “SQUAD”**
- ACROSS**
- Check some figures?
 - Mulching material
 - Hot spot
 - It leaves trails
 - Song often sung in Italian
 - Tiny tank plant
 - Brain freeze-causing drinks
 - Photo subject for NASA's New Horizons
 - “Forever” purchase
 - Broad-leaved ornamental
 - Desert climate feature
 - Blog updates
 - Like easier-to-swallow pills
 - “__ Miniver”
 - Strain to lift
 - Humana rival
 - Chinese gambling mecca
 - Sloppy, as security
 - Sauce with a kick
 - “The Simpsons” disco guy
 - “Suits me fine!”
 - Government meeting for delicate subjects
 - Storage medium
 - Bulgarian capital
 - Enterprise counselor
 - Capital with a Viking Ship Museum
 - Prohibition era gun
 - Simple to use, in adspeak
 - Reminders on cards
 - “Feliz año nuevo” time
- DOWN**
- Clumsy type
 - Electrical system
 - New York MTA-owned commuter line
 - Patsy
 - Treasure map units
 - “__ Enchanted”: 2004 film
 - Aunt in P.G. Wodehouse's “Jeeves” stories
 - Prof's aides
 - Ristorante rice dish
 - Play times?
 - Trim
 - Peridot and garnet
 - Claim subject to debate
 - “Aha!”
 - Relative of -let
 - Pond hopper
 - Instagram fodder
 - Wells Fargo product
 - Pain usually pluralized
 - UV-blocker rating syst.
 - Gospel singer Winans
 - Takes out
 - St. Clare's town
 - Tiny biting fly
 - Like most people
 - Great Sioux War of 1876 event
 - Sponge made from a vine fruit
 - Regarding
 - Highway noise barrier
 - Score after deuce
 - Vacancy sign
 - Pizzeria chain, familiarly
 - Brit. military award
 - Loop on the range
 - Get-together
 - What a Sphinx cat lacks
 - “Don't look at me!”
 - 53-Across locale, to natives
 - Cardinal cap letters
 - Flea market deal
 - Reporter's source
 - Bio info
 - Borden spokescow
 - Tour de France downtime
 - __ directed
 - Lousy sausages?
 - “Ditto”
 - Altar up above
 - 87-Across fashion center
 - Stir
 - Places for cots
 - Sign of a recent bite
 - Hacker's cry
 - Harper's Weekly caricaturist
 - Bawling, for crying out loud: Abbr.
 - Don Quixote, for one
 - “Gosh!”
 - Brand with a paw print in its logo
 - “The rumor is ... “
 - Got up
 - “Very funny!”
 - Hit with hail, say
 - Museum pieces
 - Twisty turns ... and the “quad” in each of this puzzle's eight longest answers
 - Torah holders
 - Luke's twin
 - Thin strip of wood
 - Woody's son
 - Take for a ride
 - “Semper Fi” org.
 - Biblical name meaning “hairy”
 - They're often pickled
 - Walgreens rival
 - Hiking guide
 - Ping-Pong need

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The Annual Best of North Carolina Exhibition at Gallery C

BY LINDA KRAMER



Left to right: Vic Higgins, "Salter Path", Acrylic on Canvas, 1996; John Adams Spelman, "Blue Ridge Scene", oil on canvas, 1924; Elliot Daingerfield, "Nymph on a String", oil on panel, c 1900; Horace Farlowe, "Egg Walk", Carrara Marble, 2002

Charlene Newsom, art historian and owner of Gallery C in downtown Raleigh, has been enhancing the Raleigh art community for almost 30 years by presenting thought-provoking exhibitions with the expertise and sure-footed balance of a master curator.

Charlene spends much of each year traveling the state searching for landmark works by known NC artists and assembles her finds in an annual Best of North Carolina showing that is eagerly anticipated by collectors and connoisseurs alike. She says, "The Best of NC exhibition combines two of my great loves, history and art. I get an enormous amount of personal satisfaction in collecting and presenting artworks that are historically significant and show the development of art trends in our state."

This year's collection of "The Best" paintings and prints survey the rich history of art throughout the centuries in North Carolina. The 32 artists in this year's exhibit represent some of the finest artistic examples dating as far back as the 17th century with the most recent from the mid-20th century when artists were transitioning from realism to the abstract. This rare time capsule into NC's artistic history provides plenty of wall power. Some of the highlights include works by Willem J. Blaeu (1571-1638), one of the world's greatest mapmakers who lived during the 'Golden Age' of cartography; William Frerichs (1829-1905), best known for his landscapes and winter scenes and travels to inaccessible parts of the western NC mountains to paint their rugged beauty; Horace Marlow (1933-2006), an internationally-shown painter and sculptor who alternated between the two throughout his life, with commissions

including the NC Zoological Park in Asheboro and the Cumberland Country Public Library; and Fanny Highsmith (1911-2007), whose contemporary, Cubist-inspired still lifes and interiors have been shown in such prestigious settings as the Boston Museum of Fine Art, the Modern Museum of Art, and the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

The Best of North Carolina showing includes works from the following influential artists:

Joe Cox, Hobson Pittman, Claude Howell, Willem Blaeu, Bellin, William Frerichs, Sara Blakeslee, Francis Speight, Bayard Wooten, Henry Pearson, George Bierline, Louis Orr, Robert Broderson, Jo Chris Robertson, Horace Farlowe, Edith London, Tucker Cooke, Keith Rose, Eugene Brown, Walter Thrift, Vic Higgins, John Bailey, Burk Uzzle, Clare Leighton, Eliot Clark, Elsie Popkin, Mary Ann Jenkins, Elliott Daingerfield, Charles Quest, John Adams Spelman, Fanny Hillsmith, and Minnie Evans.


Art always tells a story and sometimes it does more than simply engage the eye. This storied history of art in NC, told at Gallery C in its regional vernacular with style, knowledge, and sensitivity, provides a narrative embedded in a cultural consciousness that has the power to transform us. It makes us better as patrons and as residents of our state.

There will be a special reception of this landmark collection of historic pieces for the public on Sunday, March 29, from 1-4pm at the gallery location in the historic Russ-Edwards house at 540 N. Blount Street in Raleigh. The gallery will also be a host for First Friday on April 3 from 6-9pm. Don't miss this comprehensive



Fannie Hillsmith, "Interior Window", oil on canvas, 1958

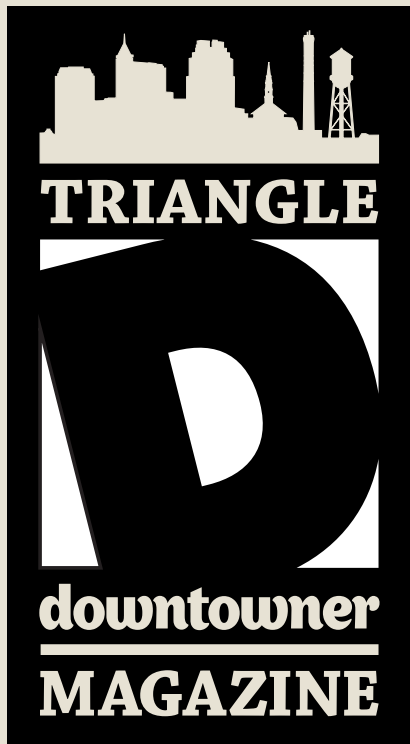
showing that dramatically opens the vibrant, visual world and the artistic spirit of NC over the years and reminds us of the importance of preserving our historic and artistic legacy.

Beginning in April, patrons of Gallery C can sign up for a guided group tour of the exhibit led by Charlene Newsom. Tours will take place on Sundays for a nominal \$5 fee and will provide a close up and intimate insight into this important and historic showing. 

Gallery C

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- Two sets of tickets to any shows with **NC Theatre, Theatre in the Park, Raleigh Little Theatre, and NC Symphony**. With a wide variety of shows to choose from, each has something to offer almost everyone. Visit their websites for more information on shows and tickets: www.raleighlittletheatre.org | www.nctheatre.com | www.theatreinthepark.com | www.ncsymphony.org

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