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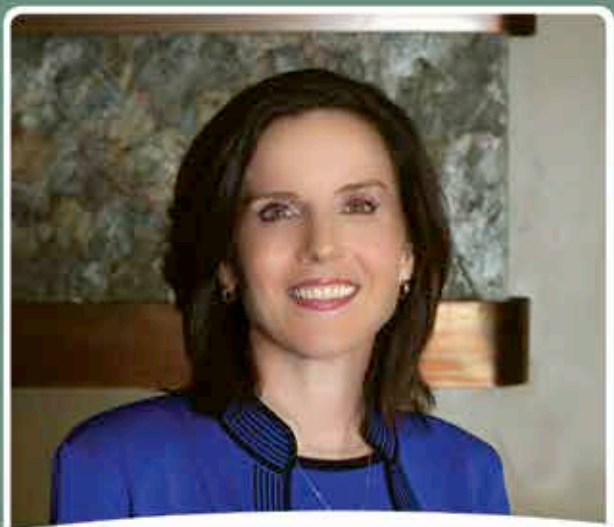


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**ON THE COVER:** Rick French of French | West | Vaughn and Paatrick Shanahan of Denim Buffalo Films have partnered to create Prix Productions, a new firm that will focus on the acquisition, development, and production of feature films and documentaries. Their first major film together will be Clear Lake, which follows the racially-charged late 1950s as Rock and Roll Hall of Famers Buddy Holly and Clarence Collins tour together in 1958.

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Prix Productions partners, Rick French of French/West/Vaughan and Patrick Shanahan of Denim Buffalo Films

# WHEN FRENCH MEETS THE BUFFALO

Raleigh duo form Prix Productions to develop film and documentary projects



Shanahan's recently-completed film *The Fox Hunter* stars local icon Ira David Wood III and Hollywood's Reece Thompson and Madison Iseman.



Raleigh's Prix Productions upcoming movie *Clear Lake* will focus on the 1950s music sensations Buddy Holly and Clarence Collins.

BY CRASH GREGG AND ERIK MOSS

Two Raleigh creative executives have partnered to form a new film production company that will focus on the acquisition, development, and production of feature films and documentaries.

Rick French, Chairman & CEO of Raleigh-based advertising and the Southeast's largest PR firm, French/West/Vaughan (FWV), and Patrick Shanahan, founder and president of Denim Buffalo Films have teamed up to form Prix Productions. French will serve as Managing Partner and focus on intellectual property acquisition, financing, and production, while Shanahan will focus on writing and directing. Check out our Local Filmmakers interview with Shanahan in Issue 126: [www.bit.com/TDM126](http://www.bit.com/TDM126).

The duo recently worked with local Raleigh actor and icon Ira David Wood III as well as Reece Thompson and Madison Iseman on the drama *The Fox Hunter*, which was shot in Raleigh and funded by multiple Triangle-area investors, including French, Hibernian Hospitality Owner Niall Hanley, Highwoods Properties CEO Ed Fritsch, and former Epic Games executive and Gear of Wars developer Cliff Bleszinski. Shanahan wrote and directed the film, which is in final post-production and its highly anticipated release is expected later this year. Regarding his decision to invest in the project, Bleszinski explained, "I knew Patrick was a talented individual when I viewed his *No Hand King* documentary. He takes his craft seriously and really is a modern version of the Renaissance man. I noticed Atlanta and Canada

seemed to be gobbling up all the film productions lately, so when an opportunity arose to help fund local filmmaking, I took it. I hope to remain friends with Patrick and help produce future projects."

French is also an executive producer of the recently-completed *The True Don Quixote*, shot in New Orleans and starring Tim Blake Nelson as well as the survival drama *Not Without Hope*. This film is currently in development and tells the story of four friends who embarked on a fishing trip on February 28, 2009 near Clearwater, Florida with only one man returning. Among the deceased is former NFL defensive end Corey Smith, who once played at NC State. French has been nurturing the project, based on the NY Times best-selling book of the same name written by the incident's lone survivor, Nick Schuyler, for the better part of the last decade. A-list actors Mark Wahlberg and Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson had been attached at various times. The bankruptcy of independent studio Relativity Media, which held the rights to the film, put the project on ice for several years before French regained control of it last year and re-optioned the story to a new production company. French has said he is optimistic that principal photography will begin soon, with director and casting announcements forthcoming.

Long before founding Denim Buffalo Films, Shanahan started making films as a young film school graduate through his own film collective, which he called "Minds of the Independent Screen." Although the collective

eventually dissolved, Shanahan didn't stop his work, going on to produce feature films such as *The Carolinian* and *Empirica* through Denim Buffalo Films, which was formed with his friends from his first organization.

Shanahan has written and directed nearly a dozen independent projects including *The No Hand King*, a critically-acclaimed documentary about Raleigh's Rodney Hines, whom many locals might recognize from his American-flag-decorated-bicycle performing seemingly endless wheelies in and around Southeast Raleigh. During his long career in film, Shanahan has never lost his passion for independent filmmaking and continues to regularly produce various short films. Additionally, Shanahan and Hanley are partners in the popular Watts & Ward cocktail lounge nestled underneath Caffè Luna in downtown Raleigh.

In our sit-down interview with French and Shanahan, they mentioned that their new company has already begun developing two new independent projects that are on fast-track production schedules. *Clear Lake* will begin shooting in early 2019 and follows the racially-charged

late 1950s as Rock and Roll Hall of Famers Buddy Holly and Clarence Collins – founder of Little Anthony & The Imperials tour together in support of the 1958 “Biggest Show of Stars Tour.” The announcement of this important film has already garnered major media coverage in NYC, LA, and in film circles throughout Europe. French and Shanahan are collaborating on the story with Shanahan writing the screenplay, and the film is being produced in association with Holly’s widow Maria Elena Holly, The Buddy Holly Educational Foundation, and BMG Rights Management, which manages the Holly Estate intellectual property and U.S. music publishing rights.

Widely-read film industry trade journal *The Hollywood Reporter* recently wrote that while rock may not be dominating radio as it once did, it is seeing a massive resurgence onscreen, with biopics planned or recently completed about Queen, the Ramones, and Mötley Crüe. Meanwhile the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, of which French has served as a national trustee for the past 12 years, has also joined the party, announcing a deal with NBCUniversal to develop a docuseries that will pair a director with their favorite musician for each episode.

Production of *Clear Lake* will begin in February to coincide with the 60th anniversary of Holly’s death outside Clear Lake, Iowa following his final concert at the Surf Ballroom. It was 40 years ago that Gary Busey starred in *The Buddy Holly Story*, a \$1.2M film

that garnered two Academy Award nominations. A \$12M budget is planned for *Clear Lake* and casting will begin this fall. Shanahan said that pop musician Shawn Mendes and *Baby Driver* star Ansel Elgort are two of the people topping his wish list to play the role of Holly.

Prix is also producing a documentary on the world hunger crisis and United Nations’ goal of feeding the world by 2030. The project will shoot on multiple continents with production beginning next month.

“Patrick and I have been talking about creating a film production company for quite a while that focuses on high-quality dramas and documentaries and we chose our first two projects very carefully to catapult the new venture, and show the diversity within our slate,” said French, who already has a third film in mind and the rights to it under contract.

“From our earliest conversations, Rick and I were in complete alignment about the type of projects we want to take on and our desire to work with studios as well as produce our own independent projects,” said Shanahan. “Having our own team of in-house producers, writers, and directors will allow us to move our projects along quickly and give rights holders the confidence their stories will be properly documented for posterity.”

Prix will be headquartered in downtown Raleigh with an office in Los Angeles that Shanahan will helm. When asked if Prix plans to shoot more films locally

in and around Raleigh or in North Carolina, French left the possibility open and said it would be his preference, but only if the state legislature improves the state’s tax credit program. Presently, it is 25% of qualifying expenses and purchases made while production is in state but with a \$31M cap on rebates annually for ALL productions shooting in NC, and many of the rebates are already spoken for. “We would love to shoot some of these bigger budget films at or near home, all things being equal, but we’re not able to when we compare North Carolina to Georgia or Louisiana’s tax credits. We’ll have to look at each film on a case-by-case basis and hope that the legislature here in our state can make much-needed changes soon that will could make a big difference in the local economy.”

*For information regarding major investments in the production Clear Lake or about other Prix Productions opportunities, please email Crash Gregg at [prixinvest@gmail.com](mailto:prixinvest@gmail.com).*

*The Downtowner will follow up with a future article consisting of interviews with local filmmakers, investors, and legislators to discuss historic and current film tax credits in NC, what this has cost in terms of lost statewide revenue, jobs, and exposure, and what it will possibly take to have them reinstated. Please contact us if you are interested in working on this article (and political initiative) with us. [www.triangledowntowner.com/pages/contact](http://www.triangledowntowner.com/pages/contact)*


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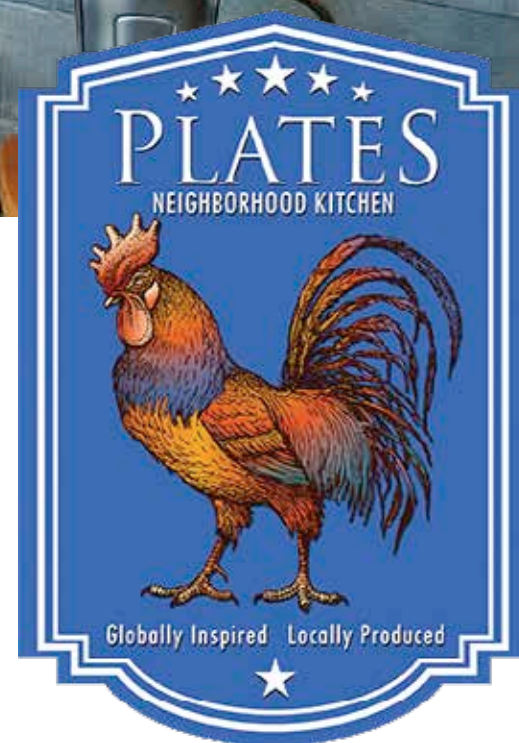
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# PLATES NEIGHBORHOOD KITCHEN



BY CHRISTY GRIFFITH • PHOTOS BY CRASH S. GREGG



Blistered Shishito Peppers



Lobster Mac and Cheese

If you have the opportunity to dine outdoors in downtown Raleigh one evening, make a point to do it at Plates Neighborhood Kitchen on Glenwood Avenue.

We were fortunate enough to enjoy dinner on a warm summer night, while the spacious patio glowed with the romantic light cast down by the bulbs strung overhead. I think the outdoor space at Plates is one of the best in Raleigh. You won't regret dining in this large, yet intimate setting surrounded by planters of fresh herbs you may see on your plate after you make the near-impossible decision of what to order.

The menu is printed daily to reflect an ever-changing bill of fare, with ingredient seasonality dictating what owner Steve Day and his talented band of chefs present to diners. Whether you're visiting for lunch, dinner, or weekend brunch, you're sure to be blown away by the attentive staff from both the front and back of the house. To complement the dynamic menu, the interior features a different local artist each month, their works displayed on the walls throughout.

To fill in a bit of the restaurant's backstory, Steve and his family moved to London for his wife's job transfer. It was here that he was exposed to a world of culinary delights

and he discovered he had a natural love for cooking. He decided to pursue this newfound passion and enrolled in Le Cordon Bleu. He found himself working with multiple prestigious European chefs, whose influences are clearly visible in Steve's food philosophy of globally-inspired dishes made with locally produced southern ingredients. Upon returning to the United States, Steve worked as a chef at the Umstead Hotel in Cary before bringing Plates to life.

The food at Plates is thoughtful but not overly complicated. It makes this kitchen the little black dress of restaurants – simple, always classy, and never out of style.

Do you like playing Russian roulette with your food? If the Blistered Shishito Peppers (\$7) are still on the menu when you visit, you can take turns with a friend biting through delicious charred peppers until one of you finds the one packing the heat. There's no way to tell which pepper is going to do the calypso in your mouth since they are indistinguishable from their mellow brethren. If you're as lucky as we were, you might get a plate with more than one rogue shishito. The sweet unagi sauce was a lovely complement to the green stars of the show, with a light dusting of salty queso fresco to balance out the dish. The peppers go amazingly well

with a craft cocktail, so be sure to check out their drink menu and ask your server for pairing recommendations.

Summer's official sip is the crisp, clean gin and tonic. You'll find the Tonica (\$10) a great twist on the classic G&T of balmy evenings past. A drink popular in Spain, their version of the Tonica changes much like the food menu. On our visit, the Beefeater and Fever-Tree tonic took on an even more refreshing tone when studded with fresh orange and mint in an unusually wide glass that accentuates the wondrous symphony of scents. The Moment of Grace (\$12) is strong and sweet, a mix of vodka paired with lavender and prosecco limoncello and bitters. It tastes like a martini with the edges rounded out. It can still knock you for a loop no matter how smooth, so be sure to order more food to keep from ending up on your table singing Don't Stop Believin' in a moment of carefree inhibition. I've seen some of y'all in public... Behave or order some sweet tea if you can't be trusted to indulge responsibly!

The Lobster Mac and Cheese (\$15) was chock-full of beautiful crustacean throughout, its sweet flavor penetrating every bite of pasta. It's grown-up macaroni and cheese, and no matter how fast you want to inhale it, you'll find yourself unconsciously slowing down to savor mode, complete with requisite moans of bliss, the volumes of which are dependent on whether you ordered a Moment of Grace or an iced tea.

The last starter we feasted on was the Charcuterie Plate (\$14), an impressive board which featured unassuming but delectable discs of halibut mousse, assorted salamis, delicately pickled vegetables, and an apple butter-like spread so insanely silky that you would do regrettable things for the promise of another bite. Everything is made in-house, from the pickles to the smoked and cured meats. It's easy to taste the talent in the kitchen.

Our first entrée to arrive was the Cacio e Pepe (\$14), comprised of homemade ribbons of perfectly cooked al dente pasta and sugar snap peas bathed in olive oil, parmesan, and a heavy hand of fresh cracked black pepper. It's a simple dish but each ingredient was so lovingly sourced and prepared that the sum was indeed greater than the parts, even though the parts were pretty damn impressive on their own.

Another vegetarian option we sampled was the Mushroom Fritti (\$15), a bowl of assorted and locally-foraged fried mushrooms that compelled me to slow down and taste the differences between all these sexy fungi. The oyster mushrooms were my favorite, not that you were wondering so you could surprise me with some. However, if you did, please make sure to include a ramekin of unagi sauce, because unagi + umami is both fun to say and fun to eat. Of >>>



Charcuterie Plate



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Cacio e Pepe with Shrimp

course, it's more fun to eat because OVERWHELMING DELICIOUSITY!

If you want to add some animal protein to these meatless dishes, chicken is an extra \$6 but I'd recommend splurging for the fresh NC shrimp (\$7). The only way to enjoy these sweet, briny gems could any fresher is to actually be on the boat. I don't own a boat and the extent of my shrimpery training is 100% from Forrest Gump, so I'll stick with the ones from Plates.

Our Pan Roasted Chicken (\$17) was a perfectly-cooked skin-on thigh flavored with fresh rosemary and lemon. Served alongside the only zucchini and yellow squash noodles I've ever had that don't taste like

keto sadness, this dish is hearty yet sophisticated. It's farm-to-table sex appeal, smothered in tomatoes and pesto, tastes of a fleeting summer moment complemented by the lingering flavor of garlic. Garlic is so good/I want to eat garlic now/Spicy breath for an hour. #GarlicHaiku

If you visit Plates and see Pork Ossobuco (\$19) on the menu, DO NOT HESITATE, GET IT IMMEDIATELY. A southern spin on the traditional Italian dish, veal shanks are swapped for braised pork surrounded by jus with the fall-off-the-bone meat collapsing into a mound of velvety sweet potato puree. Gilding the lily is a crown of charred okra surrounding

the meat and potatoes, arranged in a formation reminiscent of a standing rib roast. It's a stabbable meal. Like, I would stab anyone who tried to steal a bite. You will have naughty dreams about this dish, so I hope you are able to catch it on their ever-changing menu!

We finished our meal with two of the Plates dessert offerings. First was the White Chocolate Crème Brûlée (\$7), and it's just as marvelous as you would imagine. The second – which is somehow even better than the first – was the Sticky Toffee Pudding (\$6), which is so incredible that it's the one item that is ALWAYS on their menu. It's a sponge cake sweetened with dates and swimming in caramel, served warm with vanilla ice cream that melts into a pool of sweet cream atop the deep, malty pile of four days' worth of calories.

Steve's daughter Alex recommended a glass of Madeira to go with the pudding, and the dessert wine made absolute and complete sense as an accompaniment. So trust your server, because never have I ever ordered a dessert wine, and after my first sip I was automatically 15% cooler than before. I have to go all-in on Madeira because I never could board that Rosé train, which has always tasted like a first college hangover.

Check out Plates Kitchen's online presence because you can find out about a lot of the totally rad events they have each week. Tuesdays are Pairings on the Patio and for \$19 you can enjoy food and drinks selected to harmonize better than Boyz II Men. Wednesdays are for Wine features an opportunity to learn about a mystery red or white without any preconceived notions (I thought I was entirely too young to like Madeira but turns out it's not only for Golden Girls.). Your server will describe that night's mystery wine, and then the varietal will be revealed after. And don't forget Sunday Roast (\$19), where you'll get to enjoy the British-inspired tradition of a big ol' hunk of meat (alternates between Prime Rib, Pork, and Chef's Choice) with a starch and sides: a perfect storm of comfort to end the week. 🍷



Pan Roasted Chicken



White Chocolate Crème Brûlée



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*Downtown Raleigh skyline from Salisbury Street (photo by Randy Bryant)*



*DRA President & CEO Kris Larson*

# Meeting the Needs of Today's Downtown

BY KRISTOPHER LARSON, AICP

Hey, y'all. Kris here – the newish President & CEO at Downtown Raleigh Alliance. In partnership with the Downtowner, the DRA will provide regular columns to share behind-the-scenes insight into the goings-on around Downtown Raleigh. In this first column, we'll talk a bit about the DRA's newly adopted mission and strategic plan, and what it means for our favorite Raleigh neighborhood.

Our new strategic plan is a reflection of the most important building block of our downtown community – its people. During the plan's 16-month development process, we collected thousands of comments, perspectives, and ideas from more than 1,200 citizens. That collective body of intelligence and insight helped provide the DRA with clarity regarding our new mission and strategic direction.

The development of the new strategic plan couldn't have come at a better time. Although a change at executive leadership is a compelling motivation, the reality is that our downtown has changed so much since the DRA's founding twenty years ago (particularly during the last five years), and we need change to go with it. For those readers who haven't been along for the ride, I'm happy to indulge with a few highlights below.

Twenty years ago, the ground floor of buildings along the Fayetteville Street Mall were 90% vacant, and after 5pm; the mall was home to only a few koi living inside its murky water feature. It took the idea of re-establishing a beloved main street to this city – Fayetteville Street – to reverse the trend. During the 2000s, the DRA helped motivate political support for the project,

and facilitate buy-in from the business community to support the transformation. Today, ground floor occupancy along Fayetteville is a remarkable 90%.

Similarly, the DRA has long been a recruitment agency in support of growing the downtown residential base. Our efforts have focused on both the supply and demand sides of the equation, recruiting developers to build and helping fill buildings by demystifying the prospect of downtown living. The residential base has nearly tripled over the last fifteen years, growing to a current unit count of nearly 6,000. This demand is critical, because it relates to some of our more recent work in recruiting downtown retail.

For years, downtown residents have beckoned for a grocery store. While the economics of grocery are straightforward (retail always follows rooftops), it was the addition of each score of new residential units that moved the feasibility of a downtown grocer incrementally forward. Last year, the hard work in growing the supply of housing fell into opportunistic balance with our strong partnerships with the City of Raleigh and Kane Realty. Just like that: violá! Not one, but two grocery stores are under construction in downtown.

As these examples illustrate, downtowns are never done. They are evolving, dynamic, and comprised of ever-changing stakeholder constituencies. The DRA, an urban place management organization, must adapt to meet the needs of today's downtown and should deploy an approach that pro-actively influences stakeholders' awareness and knowledge regarding its purpose and initiatives. Two decades of unprecedented growth and

investment have delivered thousands of new stakeholders to Downtown Raleigh. While the history of the DRA includes strong partnerships between the public, private, and non-profit sectors, the focus of our new strategic plan intends to offer a more intentionally human-scaled, inclusive focus. This plan is about the people inside the buildings that shape our skyline, and creating a downtown that provides everyone with an opportunity to pursue happy, healthy experiences. To that end, we believe that the DRA should be advancing the vitality of Downtown Raleigh for everyone. As a matter of fact, we believe this idea so strongly that we've made it our mission.

To learn more about the new strategic plan, read about it online at [www.downtownraleigh.org/strategicplan](http://www.downtownraleigh.org/strategicplan). On behalf of the staff and Board at the DRA, we look forward to working with you. 🏡



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# Around Town News in the Triangle

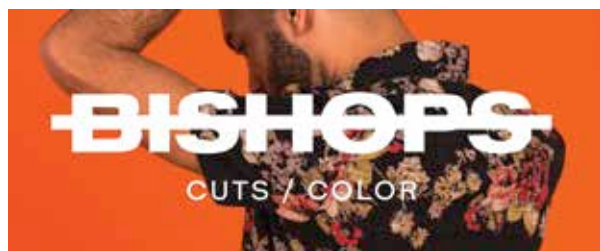
We love hearing about new local businesses and sharing it with our readers. Please keep us posted on any new locally owned restaurants, bars, retail shops, or business opening in downtown Raleigh, Durham or across the Triangle. Send an email to [news@welovedowntown.com](mailto:news@welovedowntown.com) and clue us in. To say "Thanks Y'all," we'll pick a couple of random tipsters each month to win a free Downtowner t-shirt.

P.S. We're looking for writers who want to help us report on what makes the Triangle a great place to live, work, play, and shop for both our print issue and our new website [www.TriangleDowntowner.com](http://www.TriangleDowntowner.com). Email us at [writers@welovedowntown.com](mailto:writers@welovedowntown.com) if you're interested. Be sure to include a few writing samples and we'll get back to you asap. Much thanks to some of our blogger friends for helping to spread the news on all the great new businesses, restaurants and bars in the area: Triangle Food Guy, Ashton Smith, and the wonderfully tongue-in-cheek WFIV.

To keep up with news between issues as well as lots of event and food photos, be sure to follow us on all of our social media pages: Facebook [www.facebook.com/triangledowntowner](http://www.facebook.com/triangledowntowner) • Instagram [www.instagram.com/triangledowntowner](http://www.instagram.com/triangledowntowner) • Twitter [www.twitter.com/welovedowntown](http://www.twitter.com/welovedowntown)

## SHORT WALK WINES

**Short Walk Wines** is a new wine shop to the downtown area, found over at 123 E Martin St across from the coffee shop 42 and Lawrence. They offer bottles for purchase and a small bar for tastings. Short Walk is dog-friendly making it the perfect new place to stop by to have a glass and unwind with Rover. They just opened on June 18th by owners Cindy and Lewis Sheats. <https://shortwalkwines.com>



**Bishops Cut & Color**, a unisex barbershop at The Dillon in Raleigh, has opened for business. Bishops are found in seven states with a continued expansion across the US and local franchise owners Kelly and Forrest brought Bishops' affordable prices, laid back atmosphere, and mantra of where people can be "different together" to Raleigh. Not only is it a great environment to get a haircut, but Bishops is also known for its commitment to charitable causes. They have donated over \$50,000 in cash and services to local nonprofits and schools. Bishops is located at 207 South West Street. Other new Dillon tenants will be Weaver Street Market, Heirloom Brewshop, Urban Outfitters, and Barcelona. Info at <https://bishops.co>

Jason Howard and Dan Murphy, owners of The Cardinal, are now opening a new private lounge this summer. **Atlantic Lounge** will be located at 620 North Person Street below Crawford and Son. With access by key-carrying members – similar to the Rhino Club that existed in Glenwood South in the 90s – only 500 keys will initially be distributed to its members with the door remaining locked at all times. The bar has room inside for a few dozen patrons. Jason and Dan have shared that this is a concept they have been working on for a few years. Recruiting for membership has started and the opening is scheduled for about a month or so.

Oak City Meatball Shoppe and Calavera Empanadas & Tequila owner Ken Yowell has joined with Anna

Holland to open the newest Asian-inspired restaurant in Raleigh, **Kaiju Bowl and Bao**. Although only lunch will be available for the first month, they will expand to dinner service later. Kaiju will be located at 170 East Davie St with hours from 11am to 3pm. <https://www.facebook.com/kaijubnb/>



Summer is in full swing and visitors will find many fun outside events including one of our favorites, **Outdoor Movies**. You can find movies under the stars at many locations across the Triangle including Joyner Park, Apex Historic Depot & Nature Park, Gardner's Lake Benson Park, and others. Free screenings also take place at Raleigh Little Theatre while enjoying the beautiful surroundings of the Municipal Rose Garden. They also will offer food trucks and local beer. Koka Booth Amphitheatre and North Carolina Museum of Art also present outdoor movies in the area and require a small admission fee. Purchasing advanced tickets is recommended for popular movies. All locations allow and encourage lawn chairs, blankets, or cushions for the perfect movie night! You can find more information regarding films, dates, and times at <https://www.visitraleigh.com>.

Cary will be hosting the **Beer, Bourbon & BBQ Festival** again this summer from July 27-28th at Koka Booth Amphitheatre. This event is offering an "all you can taste" sampling of beer and bourbon and a wide variety of BBQ vendors. There will be 40 bourbons and 60 beers on tap. BBQ options will con-



sist of whole hog pulled pork, ribs, brisket, chicken, and sausage. For those who are bacon lovers, there will be over two tons of bacon cooked. Live music, seminars, and souvenir glasses are part of the experience! Tickets are already available online and have been selling out fast. Military discounts are available. Part of the proceeds from this two-day event will benefit Spirit of Hope Children's Foundation. For more information and purchasing tickets you can use their site [www.beerandbourbon.com/cary/show-info](http://www.beerandbourbon.com/cary/show-info)

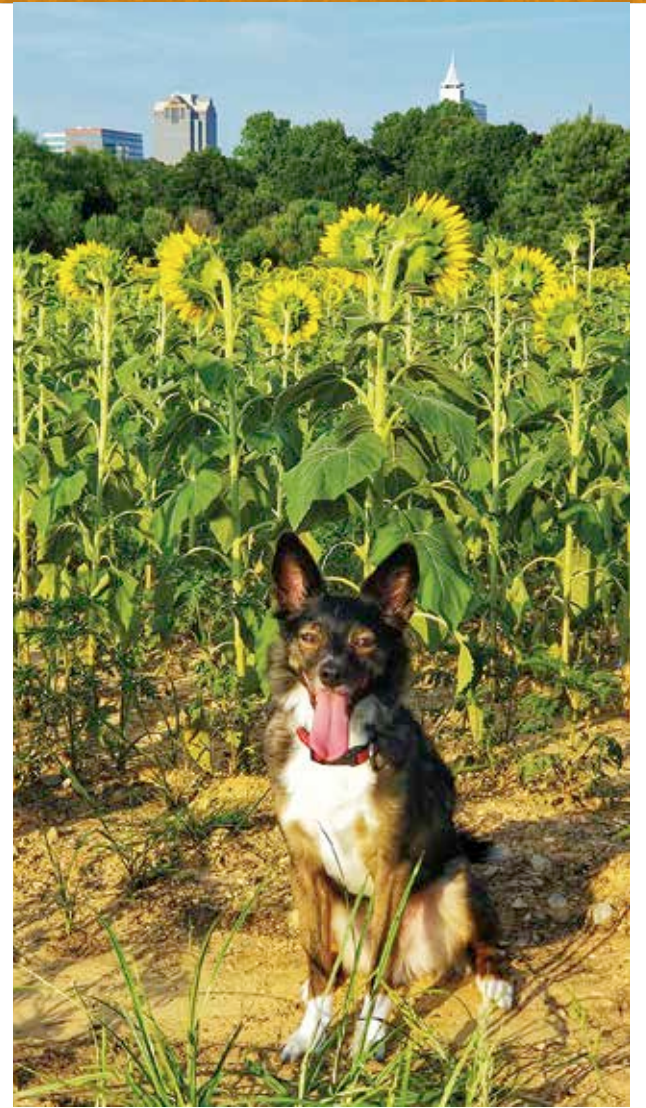
Attention all Superhero fanatics, **Raleigh Supercon** will be taking place July 27th- 29th at the Raleigh Convention Center. This event is open to all ages and features special celebrities and guests for anyone who is a fan of superheros, science fiction, video games, comics, or just simply looking for something exciting to do that weekend! Events held will include costume contests, tournaments, wrestling, and more. There is also no need to worry about parking or admission, with over 14,000 parking spots available and day passes as cheap as \$20. The best part is that kids under age of 9 are free! Doors open at noon Friday, and 10am Saturday and Sunday located at 500 S Salisbury St. <https://raleighsupercon.com>



**Buku** will be leaving downtown Raleigh and heading over to Cary after an eight-year run. The restaurant will move to the former An Cuisines space. The rapid expansion of building owner and tenant, Red Hat, has necessitated the need for the restaurant space for employee growth. Fortunately a deal has been made to keep Buku in place until the end of 2018 with a farewell New Year's Eve bash on their last day. The owners have recently opened a Wake Forest location and are already working on plans for a new fusion concept to open near Fayetteville Street. [www.bukuraleigh.com](http://www.bukuraleigh.com)



John Tang, owner of Sushi-o has now opened **Glenwood Seafood Kitchen and Bar** located at 222 Glenwood Avenue, Suite 103. A great interior atmosphere, daily specials, patio seating, and reasonable prices are just a few reasons to head right over. <https://glenwoodseafood.com>



## Welcome to Dix Park!

If you're on social media at all, you've probably seen a few thousand sunflowers in your feed the last few weeks. In case you haven't read much about the sunflowers, here's a little backstory: The City of Raleigh Public Utilities, in partnership with the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources (PRCR) and Office of Sustainability decided to plant five acres of flowers at the 308-acre Dorothea Dix Park to help garner interest in the park as well as to promote the SunFest Festival. The more than 125,000 sunflowers and their seeds will be harvested by the City and converted to biodiesel fuel to use in their fleet vehicles. The sunflower plants themselves also act as a cleanser for the soil in which they're planted, which happens to be the former site of a landfill (which is why the City urged folks not to eat the seeds). If you want to google it, the soil cleaning process is called phytoremediation.

SunFest drew a wonderfully diverse crowd of a few thousand people from all across the Triangle to the park to enjoy food trucks, local brews, vendors, crafts, live music from Shiloh Hill, and more. If the past events at Dix Park – which have all drawn large crowds – are any indication of the park's future popularity, we'd have to say the decision to purchase the Dorothea Dix property from the State was a home run idea.

We wanted to join in on the fun, so we've included a few here taken by our publisher Crash Gregg while the sunflowers were at their peak.

Sunfest is past and the sunflowers are probably gone, so what's next? There are upcoming events taking place at Dix over the next month, and here are a few you can

check out to enjoy spending time at the park. More info on all park events at <http://dorotheadixpark.org/park>.

- **Explore Dorothea Dix Park: Bug Safari, Thur, July 19**, 11am-noon for ages 2-6. Children will enjoy games, stories, songs and crafts that feature those six-legged creatures called insects. The Big Field at Dix Park, 101 Blair Drive, Raleigh.
- **Yoga at the Park: Free Yoga every other Wednesday** from 6 to 8pm at Williams Field (on the corner of Blair Drive and Umstead Drive. The nearest building address is 101 Blair Drive, Raleigh). Certified yoga instructor Dana Lindquist leads you through yoga poses to increase strength and flexibility. July 25, Aug 8, Aug 22, Sep 12, Sep 26, Oct 10.
- **Explore Dorothea Dix Park - Feathered Friends, Wed, Aug 8**, 11am-Noon for ages 2-6. Little ones will have great fun as they learn about the feathered creatures of our world. This program includes games, stories, songs, bird nests and eggs to see and touch plus children will create a birdhouse to take home.
- **Dreamville Festival, Sept 15**, Grammy Award-nominated platinum-selling Fayetteville rapper J. Cole, in partnership with Dreamville Records and ScoreMore Shows, is hosting the new Dreamville Festival. A limited number of tickets priced at \$109 and up and are on sale now, available at [www.dreamvillefest.com](http://www.dreamvillefest.com).
- **The 2nd Annual Sir Walter Smoke-Off, Sat, October 6, 1-6pm**. Two dozen BBQ teams come together for a day of barbecue, music and cold beverages. Teams

are competing for the coveted Sir Walter Smoke-Off Golden Pig Medallion as well as \$500 in prize money. Best of all, they're raising money for the Oak City Outreach Center and the Partnership to End Homelessness.

In future issues of the Downtowner, we'll keep you up to date on decisions and plans made by the Dix Park Executive and Advisory Committees, Dix Park Conservancy, the City of Raleigh, park landscape architects, Michael Van Valkenburgh, and other participating organizations. We'll also include quotes and short interviews with some of the decision makers, visitors, vendors, and government officials; history about the Dix campus; photos of past and present; and info on any upcoming events happening at the park. With Dix, we have the extraordinary opportunity to create an amazing public space unlike any other across the country. The end result will be a tremendous island of rolling hills and valleys, skyline views, centuries-old oak trees, groves, and prairies, all surrounded by a distinctly urban setting; not unlike Central Park in New York. Once completed, Dix Park will be a place for everyone – a common ground to escape, relax, exercise, learn, celebrate, and enjoy. Stay tuned and we hope you head out soon to enjoy Dix Park! 📸

Learn more about the Park on the City's official site, [www.dixpark.org](http://www.dixpark.org). Be sure to tag us in any of your social media park photos. FB: Triangle Downtowner Magazine, Insta: @triangledowntowner, Twitter: @welovedowntown.

# Michele Weathers

Carolina Ballet Executive Director

*In this issue's Triangle Leaders interview, our publisher Crash Gregg sat down with Michele Weathers, Executive Director for Carolina Ballet.*

## **Tell us a little about your personal and professional background.**

My family – my parents and two sisters (my third sister was born in NC after we moved here) – moved from California to a small town just north of Winston Salem when I was eight (my dad is originally from Henderson, NC). I knew my opportunities would be greater if I went to college. It was the mid-1980s and there was an intentional push for women to get a college education and enter the work force. I received a full scholarship to Meredith College, so I moved to Raleigh in 1986. I graduated with a degree in Political Science and Spanish, but began to feel that a liberal arts degree was not going to be enough. I had lots of friends who attended NC State, so I applied to the civil engineering school in 1991. I was accepted and got a scholarship from Barnhill Construction. I was working at a local bar on the weekends where I met Wally Jones. He and his mother De Ann, started NC Theatre downtown. Wally would bring casts from different shows in to the bar all the time and they always looked like they were having the best time. We became friends and one night he told me there was a job at the theatre that he thought I'd be really good at. I didn't know anything about the theatre since we didn't have a movie theatre or a drama group or anything remotely resembling the arts where I grew up. He told me, "Don't worry, De Ann and I can teach you everything you need to know about the theatre. We just need someone to help us stay organized who is also good with relationships and you look like someone who can do those things." I didn't think the job was for me. He asked me to do one thing and that was to come to a show. So I went to see *Little Shop of Horrors* in November 1991. Watching that show, I experienced the transformative power of the arts. I was sitting in a dark room having a shared experience with 2,000 other people who were escaping the stresses of everyday life and forgetting, even if only for two hours, about work, traffic, school, whatever may take up their time. It was amazing. I started the next week and became what the theatre industry calls the Company Manager. Luckily, I was indeed super organized and got promoted up through the organization as I learned the business aspects of theatre. I wound up staying for thirteen years and left in



February 2004 after I got married and moved to New York. There, I was connected with a producing partner through a mutual friend and we started general managing and developing shows. I was fortunate to work on shows like *In The Heights* and *High Fidelity* along with some really great plays off-Broadway. In 2009, when our daughter was about two years old, we decided it was time to go back to NC. My husband at the time was a dancer in the Broadway company of *Hairspray* and they had gotten their closing notice. He was also battling a brain tumor diagnosis and still recovering from his first surgery. From my time at NC Theatre, I knew Lisa Jones at Carolina Ballet so I worked on the development team for three years. From there, I took the Managing Director's position at Lauren Kennedy's Theatre Raleigh where I experienced first-hand what it meant to transition from a commercial business to a non-profit organization. In 2014, I was recruited to join PlayMakers Rep in Chapel Hill as its interim Managing Director helping to shepherd that organization through a big transition in artistic and administrative leadership. Following the gig at PlayMakers, a friend asked me to consider joining the Google Fiber project for the launch phase of the product in the Triangle. It was a thrilling experience. In 2017, I was recruited once again to assist in shepherding a theatre company in Massachusetts through a senior leadership transition. In June of last year my friend,

Jill Diaz, encouraged Ricky Weiss (Founding Artistic Director/CEO) to talk to me about the Executive Director's position back at Carolina Ballet. I am honored to be a part of the organization again and excited for our future. This fall, we are opening the School of Carolina Ballet and we just celebrated our 20th season.

My daughter is getting ready to start 6th grade at Moore Square Middle School downtown. Her dad and I remain great friends and live about 10 minutes from each other. We are very fortunate to have the relationship we do because co-parenting is tough. In some ways, it demands better cooperation than when you are married!

## **What's a typical day for you at work?**

My responsibility is to manage different aspects of the organization which include sales, marketing, development, finance, and working closely with the artistic director and CEO to meet the goals and mission of the company. So my job is the day-to-day management. Over the years, I have learned to put together a solid operating budget and Ricky has sharp business intuition which can be rare in artistic leaders. I work alongside some of the kindest and funniest people I know. It is a joy.

## **Do you have a favorite part of your job?**

My favorite part of the job so far is being more involved in the outward facing parts of our art form. A

## From the Publisher



We're proud to bring you Issue 138 of the Downtowner as we close in on our 13th year of publishing the most community-conscious, locally-driven magazine in the Triangle. We're adding a few new columns and features in upcoming issues, so we're looking for writers to help us document all the great people, places, charities, food trucks, breweries, and more in Raleigh, Durham, Cary, Wake Forest, and the surrounding areas. If you love writing and are passionate about your city, send us an email to [writers@welovedowntown.com](mailto:writers@welovedowntown.com) and include any writing samples you have. We look forward to hearing from you!

Dix Park! I've truly enjoyed attending the Dix Park Executive Committee

meetings and working with all the decision makers driving the park and the plans for its future. Each month, starting in this issue, we'll highlight some of these plans, hear from the people behind the park, and talk about some of the park's history and hidden details. Hopefully you were able to stop by and bask in the yellow glory of the acres of blissful sunflowers and perhaps enjoy the music, food, brews, and fun at the recent Sunfest event. We're looking forward to all the great events coming up this summer and fall at Dix Park and keeping our readers informed on all things park related.

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Cheers,



Crash Gregg

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lot of my previous experience was production related. Now it's being able to attend Chamber events and networking events and creating relationships with our patrons and donors. I love being able to talk about the ballet and the performing arts in a way that I've not done in the past because I was inside a dark theatre most of the time. I'm still finding my voice in what it means to communicate the organization externally, and that's the part I've enjoyed the most.

### ***If you had to choose a completely different career, what might it have been?***

I would have been a car mechanic. Ask anyone who has known me for long time. I love taking things apart, putting them back together, and problem-solving. Another career I considered for a really long time (and it could be a career choice but at the time wasn't) is teaching practical life skills. How to bounce back from tough times, manners and office etiquette, how to know if clothes fit or not, how to negotiate and cook, things that empower people to survive when they find themselves in difficult circumstances. I honestly believe the lack of vocational and survival skills contribute to issues with self-esteem, integrity, and simple common courtesy.

### ***What would be on the plate of your favorite meal?***

My favorite meal is steak and salad. The contents of the salad are not important, though. It's really all about the steak. A rib-eye steak with all the fat in it.

### ***What's the weirdest food you've ever eaten?***

The weirdest food I've ever eaten would be a chocolate-covered cricket at Bugfest, a NC Science Museum event.

### ***Do you have a favorite movie or TV show?***

My favorite movie on Netflix is Wreck-It Ralph (really!). I love the message of tolerance and personal discovery, but mostly it's about the funny play on the word "duty".

### ***Is there a particular theater show you love?***

I've seen lots of Broadway shows and I have loved them all. I really don't think I can choose. Like everyone else, I love *Hamilton*. Many of the same people who created *In The Heights* also worked on *Hamilton* so they hold a special place for me. Oh, *Evita*. I love *Evita* too.

### ***As a parent, what wisdom do you hope to impart on your daughter?***

I had to write this one down, because I do think about this a lot. Don't let fear being your starting position. It makes you risk averse and contributes to feeling overwhelmed. When I was younger, fear drove a lot of decisions in my life. I work hard to recognize when I am operating from a place of fear and then seek out the views of trusted mentors and family who help bring me back to center.

### ***What activities do you enjoy in your downtime to relax?***

There are two activities that I really like. I love to read and spending time with my friends who think differently than I do. Regardless of whether I agree with their views or not, I learn something about myself and how others think. I really do seek out different views to find out what I might be missing about a particular topic. I encourage people to try it.

### ***If you could go back in time to meet anyone in the world, who would it be and why?***

That's a really hard one because I think for every person who has come before and embodies a characteristic I admire, I truly believe there is someone alive today who has that same characteristic which means I should find that person and actually meet them. I respect the past because it informs our future but, when it comes to people, I think the present is a good place to start.

### ***What's one item on your bucket list you'd like to check off in the next few years?***

I've been considering getting my MBA for several years. Learning is really important to me. When I started in the performing arts field, I had this tremendous learning curve and then I plateaued. Lifelong learning is what keeps you interested and interesting. 📖

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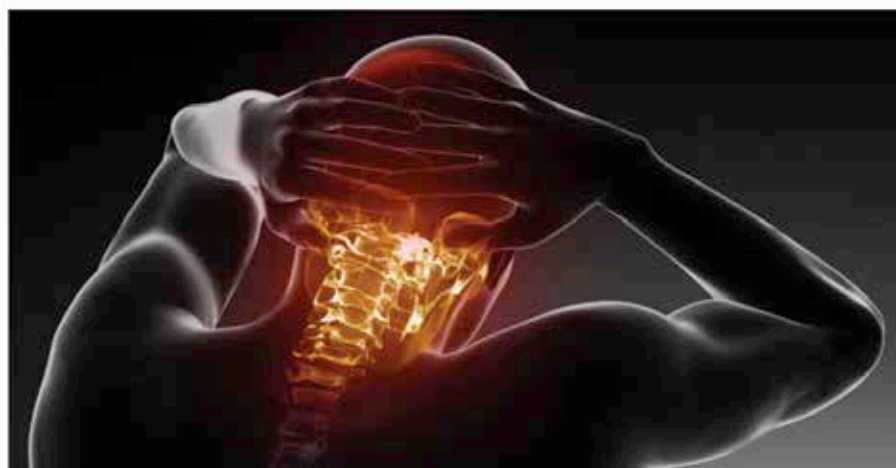


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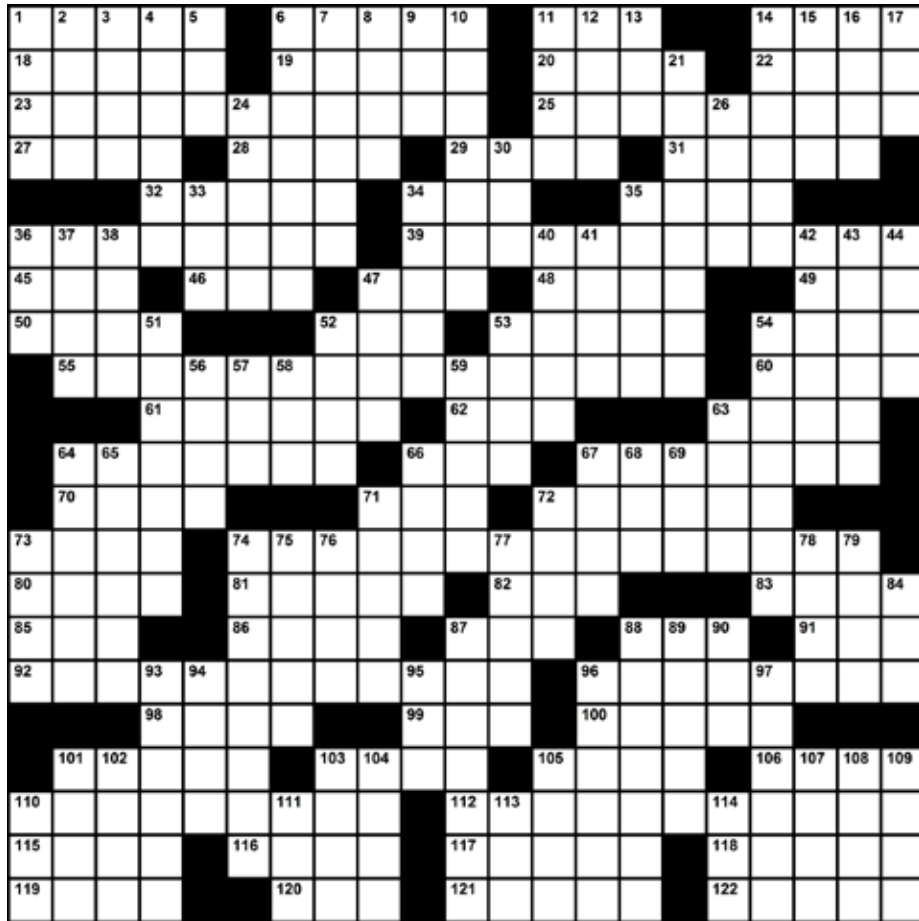


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Want to win a Downtowner T-shirt? Email us a photo of your completed puzzle to [xword@welovedowntown.com](mailto:xword@welovedowntown.com). We'll pick a random winner each month. Need a hint? Visit our website for the answer key: [www.welovedowntown.com](http://www.welovedowntown.com). No cheating!



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"Cities"

**ACROSS**

1. Receded
6. Refuse
11. Musical "G"
14. Cream additive
18. American astronaut
19. Seed scar
20. Axillary
22. Earring site
23. Mexico city famous for Spanish architecture
25. Beatles' hometown
27. Legendary humanoid
28. Timeline divisions
29. "Do \_\_\_ others..."
31. English Channel feeder
32. Prophet-like
34. ID item
35. Attention \_\_\_
36. Kelley product
39. Emit a glowing light
45. Swallow
46. Red \_\_\_
47. Butter portion
48. Hammer type
49. Thaddeus, for short
50. Dashboard feature
52. Last word of a dead end road
53. Face-to-face exams
54. Top-rated
55. Virginia city which hosted two Presidents
60. City on the Rhine
61. Crow's home
62. Summer month
63. Guru
64. Lack of faith
66. High spirits

**DOWN**

70. Far East weight measure
71. Buffoon
72. Pizza ingredient
73. Blend together
74. City close to the Rockies
80. Golf targets
81. Exempting none
82. Powdery evidence
83. Mouthful
85. Alicia of "Falcon Crest"
86. Some offspring
87. Reliable craftsman
88. Curious George, e.g.
91. Cry audibly
92. Rural retailer
96. Knee length trousers, to Dickens
98. Nefarious fiddler
99. Old operating system
100. Antsy
101. Appliance with a timer
103. In \_\_\_ of (instead)
105. "True \_\_\_" John Wayne film
106. Big sleep
110. Destination of many pilgrimages
112. Tanzania seaport
115. All excited
116. PBS science series
117. Pack carrier
118. Affect
119. Not just one
120. Training room
121. Aden's land
122. Contents of some urns

**DOWN**

1. Like an omelet, e.g.
2. Chip or Shield?
3. Vanquished
4. Salad green
5. Genetic code
6. Old two-wheeler
7. "Captain Phillips" described one
8. "Sad to say ..."
9. "Away" partner
10. Full of, with "with"
11. NaCl
12. Hodgepodge
13. Head, for short
14. Like Swiss peaks
15. "On Golden Pond" bird
16. "O" in old radio lingo
17. Slippery creature
21. Answer
24. Admit what you know
26. Backside
30. Liberal leader?
33. Lawyer's org.
34. Quickly
35. Pretend company
36. Four-poster, e.g.
37. Secular
38. Great Salt Lake locale
40. Bit of parsley
41. Toll
42. Dummy
43. Film festival city
44. Place of bliss
47. Top of the head
51. Suds
52. Spoon handle
53. Reproductive cell
54. Letting up
56. Film unit
57. Pacific ring
58. They may be black
59. Goatlike antelope
63. Half
64. Adjust
65. Highly venomous snake
66. Be different
67. Long cut
68. Piz Bernina, e.g.
69. Disfigure
71. Most faulty
72. Just O.K.
73. Heroin (slang)
74. Surgical birth
75. Kind of molding
76. Microscope part
77. Takes a chance
78. Spew
79. Plum variety
84. Ken Burns collaborator
87. With self respect
88. Cabinet-maker, e.g.
89. Ancient people of Britain
90. Ending of the Bible
93. Alright already!
94. Ministers, abbr.
95. Lyric poem
96. Ancient galley
97. Repeating sequences
101. Bell-flowered plant or its root
102. Move along
103. Tax
104. Mosque V.I.P.
105. Fraction of a kilo
107. Sworn declaration
108. Pal
109. Old Testament book
110. Boxer's punch
111. Piece of lumber
113. Pale \_\_\_
114. Civil leader title (Turkey)

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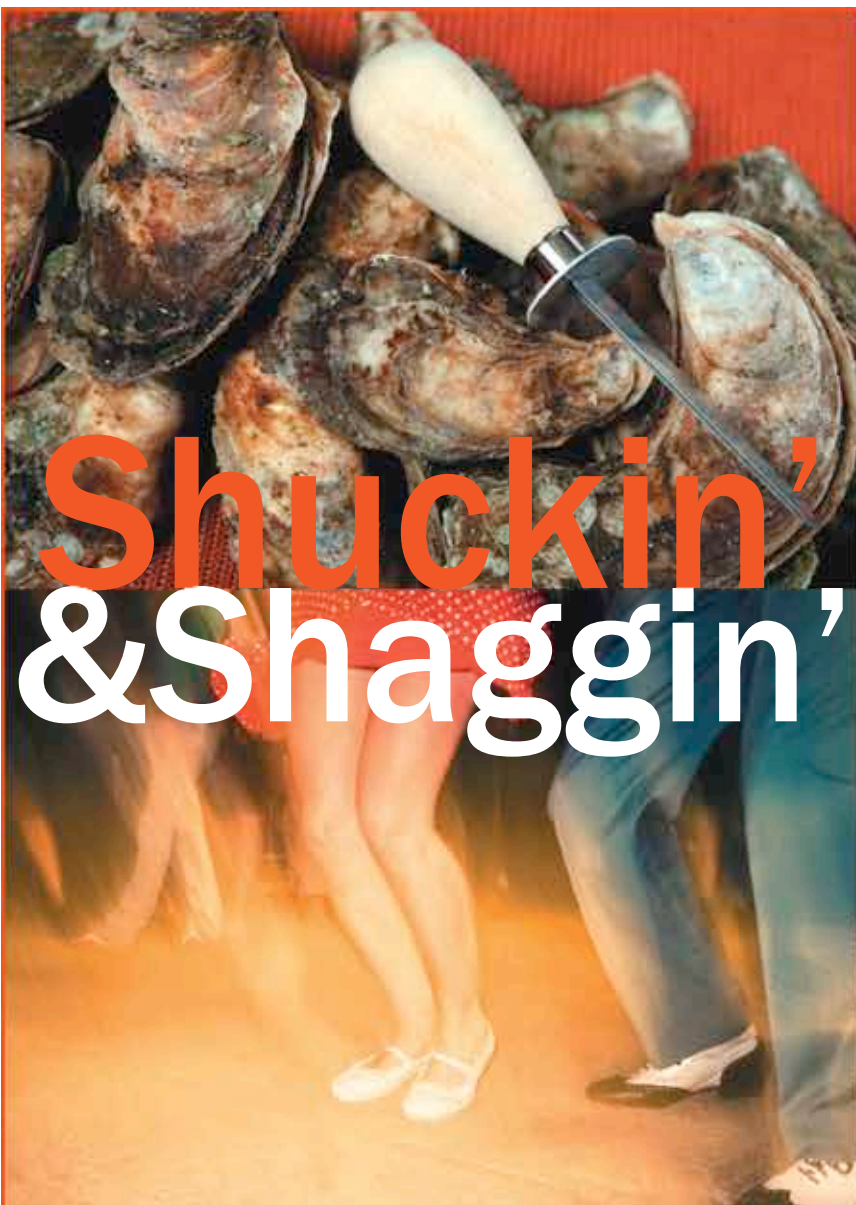


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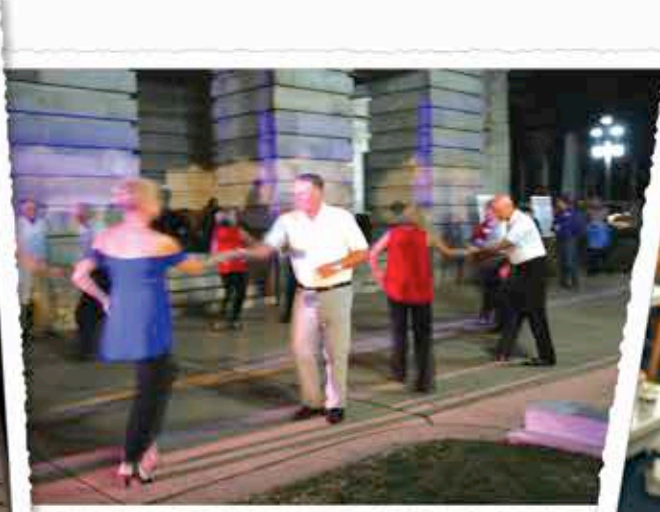
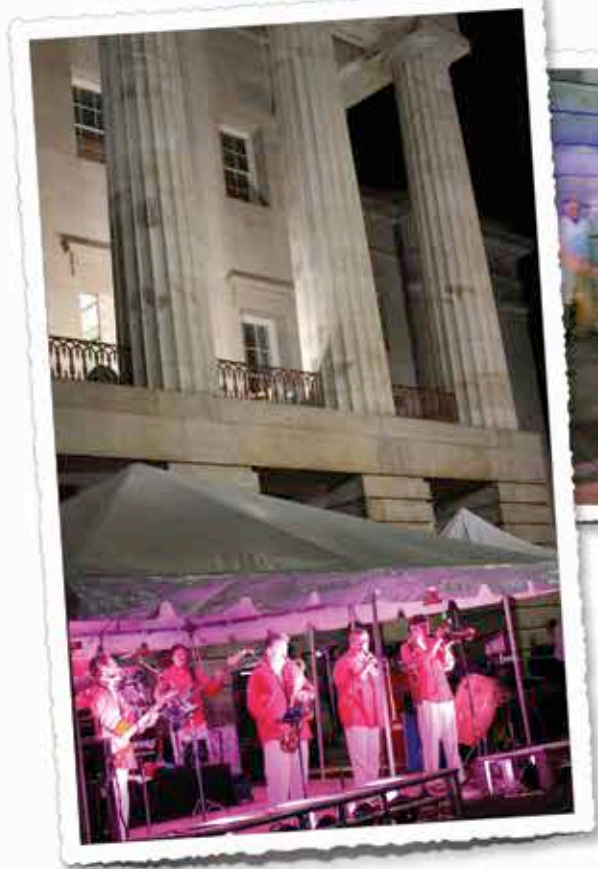
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