Despite the gloomy weather, more than 100,000 people made it out to the 2013 Richmond Folk Festival held on the downtown riverfront from October 11th through 13th. Whether they came to hear folk bands play music from all corners of the world, sample unique cuisine from stands such as Goatocado and Gail’s Gumbo House, or peruse the many vendors selling handmade crafts, Richmonders and their families still came in droves for the annual festival.

Rocking a mean accordion on Saturday afternoon on the Community Foundation stage was Alex Meixner Band. The four-man band’s music was in the style of Austrian polka, but featured a wide array of instruments such as trumpet, guitar, saxophone, clarinet, and homemade hosaphone. The performance was topped off by an accordion-accompanied rendition of Guns N’ Roses’ “Sweet Child o’ Mine”.

Late Sunday afternoon, Christine Salem performed music in the maloya tradition on the same stage. Maloya is a genre of music from Réunion, a French island located in the Indian Ocean, originating from the songs and chants of African slaves. Salem and her band used traditional instruments such as a cylindrical drum and a rattle to produce a rhythmic and almost “bluesy” sound, characteristic of maloya music. Throughout her performance, Salem encouraged the audience to participate by singing along and engaging in call-and-response.

A featured exhibition was the creation of an alfombra, or Guatemalan sawdust carpet, by Ubaldo Sanchez and family. This Good Friday tradition uses dyed sawdust, rice, and other foodstuffs to create one-of-a-kind works of art depicting religious iconography – only to have it destroyed as churchgoers walk through it, symbolizing the destruction of the body of Christ.

(continued on page 2)
Discover Richmond’s Culture of Cuisine:

By ASHLEIGH WARREN

POSTBELLUM
Southern-Style Pub Fare

Postbellum is one of the newest additions to Richmond’s dining scene, with its grand opening in Mulligan’s former location on Main St. on October 6. I went shortly thereafter and was impressed to find an atmospheric restaurant perfect for a date night. Postbellum offers an eclectic menu, with options ranging from chicken wings and pork cracklins to kimchi. When asked about a specific theme for the menu, the bartender described it as “old American”, with the Asian influence coming from Asian railroad workers in the west after the Civil War.

We started off with fried fingerling potatoes with blue beer cheese dip. The dip was creamy and savory, but the potatoes left something to be desired. For my entree, I ordered the tofu banh mi, which was topped with cilantro, pickled radish, cucumber, and aioli. Although I’m not a vegetarian, this was by far the most tender and flavorful tofu I’ve had in Richmond. The sandwich delivered the perfect amount of spice and was paired with a mixed green salad. Unable to turn down the waiter’s offer for dessert, we ordered the corn bread pudding, which came with ginger ice cream, candied cashews, and truffle honey. This sounded like a non-profit organization that specializes in fair trade artisanal products, also showed their handmade jewelry and decorations from all over the world.

Echoing Richmond’s growing diversity, the Folk Festival highlighted the many different faces and cultures that make the River City a great place to live. If you missed it this year, be sure to come out next time around to see phenomenal musical performances, eat food from all the world, and check out the many different handmade crafts.

Richmond Folk Festival, cont.

(continued from page 1)

In addition to the musicians and exhibits, craft vendors from all over the area came to showcase their paintings, jewelry, traditional clothing, and eco-friendly items. A Folk Festival regular and local favorite, Row House Soaps, showed off their hand-crafted herbal soaps, as well as wine-stoppers made from antique doorknobs from the Church Hill area. Don Leister, a local violin maker, was also in attendance, displaying his hand-crafted violins and violas. Richmond’s Ten Thousand Villages, a non-profit organization that specializes in fair trade artisanal products, also showed their handmade jewelry and decorations from all over the world.

Richmond’s growing diversity, the Folk Festival highlighted the many different faces and cultures that make the River City a great place to live. If you missed it this year, be sure to come out next time around to see phenomenal musical performances, eat food from all the world, and check out the many different handmade crafts.
Get Involved with Volunteering!

By DANIELLE HONINGS

Whether you’re doing it out of the goodness of your heart, giving back to a cause that particularly strikes you, or trying to rack up hours for grad school, volunteering is a task every college student must face. However, before you jump in and pick an organization or push it off for another semester or two, take a moment to read these considerations.

ONE. You may prefer to volunteer with one organization on a reliable, routine basis or not as regularly with numerous mini-projects at different times. If you plan on pursuing any sort of post-undergraduate education, do some research about which route is better: to be heavily involved with one or two major organizations, or to participate in a diverse selection.

TWO. Some organizations require a contract or minimum shift requirement, so be sure you fully understand the commitment.

THREE. Consider the nature of the volunteer work. Are you a people person? Are you good with kids? Can you stand the sight of blood? Does outdoor work make you tired? You don’t want to pick an organization that clashes with your personality or habits.

FOUR. Reevaluate your motivations. Does the organization represent something close to home? Is it heart-warming to see little kids smile about something you’ve done? Don’t choose to volunteer with a group that you don’t care about. It will only make you feel tired of being there.

FIVE. Understand the training requirement. For instance, if you plan on entering the practical medical field, you will eventually have to know how to take a blood pressure. Some organizations require a short orientation only once, while others require that you take courses that last several months and cost $300 or more! Consider how long you are willing to go through training and how much you may have to pay for it.

Honors college for this year cannot decide on an agency route is better: to be heavily involved with one or two major organizations, or to participate in a diverse selection.

If all else fails and you still cannot decide on an agency with which to volunteer your time, here are some suggestions from your Honors college for this year and the following:

1. Color Run Richmond & Broad St. Mile
2. Fan-Free Clinic
3. Local Rescue Squads
4. VCU Blood Drives
5. Clean the Bay
6. Habitat for Humanity
7. The Daily Planet
8. Hands-On VA
9. Volunteermatch.org
10. St. Jude’s Children’s Hospital
11. Carver Elementary
12. MCV
13. Soup Kitchens
14. VCU Service-Oriented Student Organizations
15. Create your own!

Exploring Establishments in the Fan

Postbellum offers a unique fare, but fitting for Richmond’s southern flare. With dimmed lighting and a diverse menu for omnivores and vegetarians alike, this restaurant is a great spot for a special night out.

Postbellum is located at 1323 W. Main St. Hours are 3:30 p.m. – 2 a.m. daily.

BURGER BACH
New Zealand-Inspired Burgers, Shrimp, and Mussels

Picky eaters, beware -- Burger Bach is not your average burger joint. Before the New Zealand-inspired gastropub opened in February 2012, high quality burgers were a rarity in Richmond. The restaurant’s claim to fame is their grass-fed beef, venison, and lamb, all imported from New Zealand. They don’t use a freezer and all of their ingredients are natural, including those found in their “Aucklander” burger: avocado relish, mayonnaise, uncured bacon, New Zealand Egmont cheese, tomato, Dijonaise, and mixed greens. If you have any dietary restrictions, you will be delighted to find that they offer gluten-free buns, fantastic veggie burgers, and the option to have your burger bun-free on a bed of mixed greens.

When you walk in you’ll see that the seating is slightly atypical for a Richmond restaurant. Large booths line the wall, but instead of standalone tables in the center, one long communal table rests parallel to the bar. The communal table offers the opportunity to dine next to strangers, and perhaps meet someone new.

Very few complaints have been made about Burger Bach, but the most prominent is the price of their fare. Their competitor, Carytown Burgers, is much cheaper, with burgers around $6 whereas the average burger at the Bach is around $11. This is not to mention that these come without fries (all burgers come with a mixed green salad as a side). However, with natural ingredients, grass-fed beef, and fries that come with sauce so good they could be an appetizer on their own, Burger Bach lives up to their higher price point.

Burger Bach is located at 10 S. Thompson St., across from the Ellwood Thompson’s grocery. Hours are [B3] 11 a.m. - 10 p.m. Mon. - Thurs. and Sun., and 11 a.m. – 11 p.m. Fri. – Sat.
Diversity Spotlight
Who Are We, Really?
Honors Rams in an Infographic

By KELLIE MASTERS, POOJA MAGAVI, MEREDITH WILLIAMS, and ALISON TRAUTMAN

Have you ever wondered about who makes up the Honors College student body—where your peers are from, what they’re studying, what their interests are, or where they see themselves after college? Le Monde conducted an online survey to find out! Read on to learn a bit more about your fellow Honors Rams, based on the responses of 44 students.

In ten years, 87% of us imagine ourselves married while only 65% see ourselves with children.

Six out of ten of us have lived in Honors housing; about half of those who didn’t said it’s too expensive.

In ten years, 52% of us are from Virginia but only 52% plan on living here in ten years.

Instead, 33% of us plan on living in California.

Our favorite colors:

- Red
- Blue
- Green
- Yellow
- Purple

Our favorite on-campus restaurant:

Chipotle

“What are your interests and hobbies?”

- Reading, medieval reenactment fighting, Magic The Gathering
- I enjoy music (hip-hop and Korean pop right now), reading (philosophy and politics), and illustrating. I enjoy drawing everything from figure studies to painting landscapes in watercolor.
- I like to play viola and piano. I also like to knit and bake while watching Supernatural, How I Met Your Mother, and other tv shows. Outside of the dorm, I like to volunteer with and mentor elementary students.
Features

Academic Learning Commons: A New and Modern Addition to MPC

By JUSTIN JOSEPH

Students returning to campus this fall may have noticed a new structure that has emerged behind Cabell Library. Located at the corner of Floyd Avenue and Linden Street, this four-story building mainly consists of lecture halls, smaller classrooms, study areas and lounges, and academic offices.

Although the finishing touches were still being added up to the first week of school, the Academic Learning Commons (ALC) has already been heavily used, with classes held all hours of the day with barely any space available in the lounges on the first and second story. The third floor is the new home of the School of Social Work and the new Student Success Center. The Writing Center has also been relocated to the new building and is now located on the top floor. Less than two months into the school year, the ALC has become a fixture in the VCU student’s schedule.

Designed by KSS architects, the building is innovative in every sense of the word. Technology has been incorporated into every aspect of the learning experience. Professors can use tools to project two separate screens side by side, show work to the entire class using Mimio software, and use built-in cameras to teleconference and engage students. The study areas also include electronic sign-in for private group study rooms and printers connected to the VCU network.

The building’s green-friendly features are also remarkable. The vegetated gardens on its roof manage indoor temperature and improve aesthetics. The ground level also includes a large courtyard filled with plants and benches. The hallways and open areas are lit primarily by sunlight, decreasing energy usage. Upon finishing construction, VCU is planning on pursuing LEED Silver certification for the structure.

As VCU’s newest structure, the Academic Learning Commons represents the innovation and excellence that will typify the many new structures and renovations that will soon be constructed as part of the university’s “Quest for Distinction.” Though the plan will span many years into the future, current and future students will undoubtedly be able to enjoy all that the ALC and other soon to be constructed buildings have to offer.

Interior of the new Academic Learning Commons (Photos courtesy of Amy Thurston)
Opinion

VCU Transportation and Parking: The Pros and Cons of Common Solutions

By DANIELLE HONINGS, DOROTHY O’BOYLE, CARMEN SMITH, and KELLIE MASTERS

Buy a parking pass.  
Pros? You’ll always have a guaranteed parking spot, and reciprocal parking allows you to park in other decks or lots during certain times of the day at no extra cost. Additionally, VCU parking and transportation officers are helpful sources of information and can notify you about low tire pressure or even give you a jump.  
Cons? It’s really expensive! Residential plans have seen a $20 increase from last semester and are priced at about $300. Students and visitors pay $10 per day and temporary passes are also pricey at $55/month!

Take the bus. 
Pros? Overall, they are convenient, reliable, and the drivers are usually friendly. The VCU Campus Connector works well with students’ schedules and has WiFi! GRTC buses are larger, and go to more locations around and beyond the city.  
Cons? The drivers of the VCU Connector do not display their names; it is difficult to address them, or to report possible problems with their services. Also, GRTC passes used to be free for students and covered in the tuition, but are now sold for $100 per semester. However, the passes are valued between $700 to $1000 each year, so $100 is actually quite reasonable… they’re just no longer free.

Park on the street. 
Pros? It is directly on the curb of most VCU buildings… if you can find a spot. Depending on the location, it’s free in the evenings after 6 pm or 8 pm.  
Cons? In some areas, you’ll have to pay $0.75 per hour for up to two hours max. Sometimes, the pay stations are down but you still have to have the receipt in your window to avoid getting a ticket. (Good luck finding another pay station nearby!) Pay close attention to street cleaning days and hours! Those tickets can be pretty pricey!

Ride a bicycle.  
Pros? You’ll save money not paying for a parking spot, and you’ll save time not trying to find one. Getting from class to class is quick and painless, and it’s great exercise! The VCU Police Department offers a free bike registration program, and there are stations around campus that provide basic tools for minor fixes and places to inflate your tires.  
Cons? Riding a bike on the streets can be dangerous and requires knowledge of the rules of the road. In cold weather or rain, it can be downright miserable. Upkeep can be expensive and there’s always the chance that your bike might be stolen.

Is it worth it? 
For commuter students, yes. For others, it may depend on individual needs. Try carpooling or consider other alternatives, like Zipcars. Finally, don’t forget about RamSafe, the free transportation service between on-campus buildings and nearby residences and buildings. For more information about the transportation options described, visit parking.vcu.edu or bikes.vcu.edu.
VCU Website Gets a New Look: Did they meet their design goals?

By CARMEN SMITH

Earlier this semester, we were introduced to VCU’s new website design. Some people may not think this is news, but, in the design world, when a prominent institution makes a change to its online presence, it’s worth taking note. What did VCU seek to accomplish? According to VCU’s Web Redesign blog, the goals were as follows:

• Creating a fully optimized experience for mobile devices, including phones and tablets, to account for a 64 percent increase in monthly mobile visits to the home page
• Incorporating social media feeds to add a real-time element to the home page
• Showcasing bite-sized content blocks and more storytelling through video and large photos

For the sake of brevity, let’s focus on those. Did they accomplish their goals?

It doesn’t take using a mobile device to know they designed the new homepage with mobile users in mind. As is common with sites for tablets and phones, the buttons are larger and square for fingers’ easy access. However, there are some places that could use some work. For example, the News blog looks a bit run together with the headlines and images on the side with no clear separation. My personal tastes cry out for some type of delineation between the two.

Social media feeds, yes, we need more of those. That was my initial reaction. At first, it appears that only the Twitter module is present, but a small discreet link will guide the user to the rest of the social media rabble, if the user is so inclined. It also appears that the tweets are fairly relevant and cover a range of topics, which I say is a plus for people like myself.

Even though I ragged on the News section design before, it is a nice addition and helps get the “storytelling through video and large photos” feel that they intended. I don’t think it should be so prominent as to take up so much room on the front page, but it’s helpful for those who want to be integrated into the school’s culture.

It appears as though VCU accomplished what it set out to build: a mobile device-friendly website with social media elements and connections to university-related content. Did they do it well? There’s still room for improvement. The page should stop at the yellow block of brag -- we should be able to find out “Who we are” in a hyperlink rather than a black box, and for the love of the internet, make that grey box to the old site smaller.
From Blank Space to Personal Sanctuary

By BRITTANY ALLEN

My dorm room remained barren and depressingly undecorated throughout my entire freshman year. I thought I was keeping it clean, avoiding one of those disaster dorm rooms with towers of pizza boxes and carpets of dirty clothes that my mother had convinced me I would encounter practically every time I set foot in student housing.

Reality was far from my expectations. My room was a wasteland – devoid of color and personality. All of my friends’ rooms were verdant, sometimes overgrown, oases by comparison. Their rooms weren’t messy, just stuffed with books, blankets, food, and lots of reminders of home. But this year I found two Honors students who seemed to have found the perfect balance of comfort and style for their dorms.

“I don’t think I could ever have a blank wall,” Ameorry Luo, a sophomore communication arts major, said. The walls on her half of the two-person bedroom are covered in posters, but these aren’t your typical college poster-slay prints. All 18 of her posters are artist-created, some by herself, others by friends or acquaintances.

Luo explained, “Most of them are pieces by digital illustrators, and since I’m a digital illustrator myself, having these up gives me a sense of community that I can’t feel anywhere else since I’m essentially ‘among comrades.’ A movie poster is so broad and commercial, so detached from me personally, whereas my posters make me feel more at home even though most of them are also pop culture references.”

Luo acquired some of her posters by trading with artists she admired at conventions. She has also traded with friends whose work she enjoyed. Her favorite poster, a rendition of Dean and Castiel from the WB television series Supernatural, was created by an artist with whom she traded at a convention.

West Redington, a freshman computer engineering major, also decorates his walls with pictures with which he has a more personal connection. Instead of posters though, Redington has a wall plastered with photographs.

One distinctive shot captures a man walking eight tiny dogs at once. The man has tattooed arms, green camouflage cargo shorts, and an expression of grim determination on his face as he walks the fluffy lap dogs.

“This guy just looks like he’s in an action movie,” he laughed.

Redington’s most personalized feature of his room is probably his desktop setup. He built his desktop hard drive himself last spring.

“It’s a lot cheaper and you can get exactly what you want if you buy all the components and put them together,” he said.

His customized setup also includes a dual monitor display and standalone speakers. The amplifier for his stereo was “requisitioned” from his uncle, who used it in the ‘80s.

To complement the atmosphere of sleek luxury, Redington found a huge Oriental rug at an estate sale in his hometown. The rug completely fills his room, light blue carpet stretching from one wall to the other.

Both Redington and Luo’s rooms are great examples of students transforming blank spaces into personalized study and relaxation sanctuaries. These two Honors College students brought character to their rooms by bringing in objects with sentimental value and making them a part of their daily lives on campus.

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