

WE ARE WINCHESTER

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KATIE JORDAN

Winchester Book Gallery

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Four days before Christmas, 8-year-old Bo loses his mother in a tragic accident, 28-year-old Brandon loses his job after a hostile takeover of his big-media employer, and 48-year-old Blue, a key witness in a criminal trial against an infamous now-defunct tech startup, struggles to reconnect with his family.

So begins Jinwoo Chong's dazzling, time-bending debut that blends elements of neo-noir and speculative fiction as the lives of Bo, Brandon, and Blue begin to intersect, uncovering a vast network of secrets and an experimental technology that threatens to upend life itself. Intertwined with them is the saga of an iconic '80s detective show, Raider, whose star actor has imploded spectacularly after revelations of long-term, concealed abuse.

Flux is a haunting and sometimes shocking exploration of the cyclical nature of grief, of moving past trauma, and of the pervasive nature of whiteness within the development of Asian identity in America.

WinchesterBookGallery.com

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

As summer fades and a new school year begins, Winchester is buzzing with fresh starts—and this issue celebrates them.

We look at Back to School season, exploring the stories behind the names of local schools, from Charlotte DeHart to John Handley. We also highlight Concern Hotline, where caring voices offer comfort and connection day and night.

Our business feature spotlights the Top of Virginia Regional Chamber, driving growth and community spirit. For food lovers, don't miss our look at Fuego Tacos & Mezcal, the vibrant new restaurant in the historic Sarah Zane Fire Hall. And we learn about plans for the Winchester Co-op Market, a locally minded, sustainable and accessible grocery market.

Enjoy the issue—and all the people and places that make Winchester thrive.

We'll see you in Old Town!



*Misty Weaver
& Katie Jordan*

**WE ARE
WINCHESTER**

FUEGO TACOS & MEZCAL

Fuego Tacos & Mezcal has brought bold flavors and vibrant energy to downtown Winchester, opening its doors in the beautifully repurposed Sarah Zane Fire Hall at 301 N Loudoun St. From the owners of the beloved Taqueria Guadalajara, this new spot offers a fresh twist on Mexican cuisine, with a menu designed for sharing or savoring solo—whether you're in the mood for small tapas plates or hearty entrées.

A standout starter is the Cozumel Ceviche, a refreshingly light mix of shrimp and rock fish, brightened with leche de tigre, mango, avocado, red onion, and cilantro. Taco lovers will find

favorites in the rich Chili Colorado and the melt-in-your-mouth Pork Belly Carnitas.

The atmosphere is as flavorful as the food, with colorful décor, a front patio, and a garage-style glass door that opens to create a breezy indoor/outdoor dining experience. Fuego delivers both in taste and vibe—making it a must-visit addition to Old Town.

Open daily for lunch and dinner.



CONCERN HOTLINE: FISH FRY LEGACY

If you've never heard of Concern Hotline, it's not because they're hiding—it's because they've been too busy answering the call. For nearly 60 years, Concern Hotline has quietly served the Northern Shenandoah Valley as a 24/7 confidential helpline offering compassionate, nonjudgmental listening and crisis support. And this September marks the 26th annual Fish Fry, their signature community fundraiser that's grown from a modest downtown event to one of the region's most anticipated gatherings.

At the heart of it all is Executive Director Rusty Holland, a lifelong Winchester resident (who can claim historical ties as his great-grandfather was President of the Union Bank during the Civil War), social worker, and tireless advocate for mental health. Under his leadership, Concern Hotline recently earned an international certification, placing it among just 100 helplines in the U.S. with this recognition. "It's not just a piece of paper," Rusty says. "It changed how we train, how we operate, how we think about service. It showed us how strong we already were—and where we needed to grow."

One of the organization's most impactful partnerships has been with Shenandoah University. Concern Hotline co-teaches a 400-level class called *Clinical Helping Skills*, training students in real-world listening and intervention techniques. After classroom instruction, students complete a semester of service on the hotline itself. The result? A younger, more diverse group of volunteers who are deeply invested in the community. "These students bring fresh perspectives, understand modern language, and connect with younger callers," Rusty says. "It's changing who we are in the best possible way." Many students stay on after graduation, continuing to serve the community and often going on to careers in mental health.

That growth includes getting ready to join the national 988 network—think of it as the 911 of mental health—offering critical suicide prevention and crisis services across Virginia. And yet, Concern's mission remains deeply local: "Most of our calls are about loneliness, grief, family struggles. We offer resources, yes—but mostly we listen."

It's that ethos that fuels the annual Fish Fry. First launched as the beginning of Old Town's First Friday event (Rusty, a former pub owner and Old Town board member, helped create First Fridays themselves), the Fish Fry has outgrown parking lots and pubs and now fills the Frederick County Fairgrounds with food, music, dancing, and, yes—a drive-thru serving over 600 meals in four hours.

"The fish fry might not be in the city," Rusty says, "but we're still here. We've always been about bringing people together." This year's event Sep 5th, will feature Innovation, a high-energy Motown band out of Richmond, and dancing under the stars.

With over 40 trained volunteers and growing partnerships with Shenandoah University and regional agencies, Concern Hotline's reach is expanding—but it still runs on community support. "We were started by locals: a psychiatrist, a Supreme Court justice, a mother grieving her cousin. It was about Veterans. It's always been about responding to what's needed right here."

And sometimes, what's needed is just someone to pick up the phone and listen.

Learn more or volunteer. ConcernHotline.org
Call Concern Hotline: 540-667-0145



BACK TO SCHOOL: THE NAMES BEHIND OUR SCHOOLS

As August arrives and the first school bells ring, Winchester students step back into classrooms filled with fresh notebooks, new routines, and a sense of possibility. Above those school doors are names that have become part of daily life in this city—names that represent remarkable people who shaped education, history, and community here.

Some of those names are instantly recognizable. John Handley High School stands as a monument to Judge John Handley, an Irish-born philanthropist whose generosity forever changed Winchester. Handley left a large portion of his fortune to fund public education. His endowment built Handley Library, Handley High School, and the Douglas School, the segregated school that served African-American students until 1966 when city schools were integrated. His financial gift has laid the foundation for generations of students.

Daniel Morgan Middle School honors one of America's great Revolutionary War heroes. Morgan, a frontiersman who lived in the Winchester area, became famous for his daring tactics and leadership in battles such as Cowpens. His name reminds students that bold ideas and bravery can make a lasting difference.

Frederick Douglass Elementary School reflects a national legacy. Douglass, born into slavery, rose to become one of the most powerful voices for freedom and equality in the 19th century. His name on a Winchester school reminds us all that education is not just about facts and figures—it's about empowerment and change.

Alongside these familiar names are others whose stories are woven more quietly into Winchester's fabric. Virginia Avenue Charlotte DeHart Elementary School celebrates the life of its first principal who spent decades shaping young minds. Known for her warmth and forward-thinking methods, DeHart helped countless students discover a love of learning that carried them through life. She is celebrated also as an animal welfare activist and humanitarian.



Garland Quarles Elementary School honors a man who devoted his life to both education and community heritage. A historian and author of several books on Winchester's past, Quarles believed that preserving local history helped strengthen a community's future. Quarles began as an English teacher at Handley H.S., became principal then superintendent. He served for 42 years, leaving as Winchester's longest serving principal and superintendent.

John Kerr Elementary School carries the name of a prominent local businessman and philanthropist who was the city's first public school benefactor. The cabinetmaker's bequest of \$7000 helped the city construct its first public school building. Up to that point, all schools in the city were held in rented spaces.

As students settle into their desks this fall, they are surrounded by these names—some famous, some lesser-known—all representing a legacy of generosity, courage, and commitment to education. In Winchester, every new school year is not just a beginning, but a continuation of stories that remind us why learning matters and how deeply our community values those who make it possible.



SEE *August events* BE SEEN

6

SILENT/BYO BOOK CLUB

Join us for a Silent/BYO Book Club - Bring your current or favorite book for a time of silent reading and then discussion. ARE Rise Center

16

WINC GREEK FESTIVAL

Sample our legendary Greek cuisine and experience our renowned Greek music and dance. Truly great fun for the entire family! Greek Church

20

ABSTRACT PAINTING

This series of painting classes is a dynamic exploration of different artistic techniques and approaches to abstract and intuitive painting. Purple Fern

23

NEWCOMER'S EVENT

Come get to know your community a little better! Whether you just moved here a few weeks ago or you've lived here for a few years and just want to know more about what is available in your own backyard. Welcome Center

30

PATSY CLINE BLOCK PARTY

Music, drinks, good trucks, \$5 tours and more in the old fashioned block party! Patsy Cline House



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The plate will be offered for an **ANNUAL FEE OF \$10** in addition to your standard registration. Please scan the QR code or visit the **THEBLOOM.COM** to access the pre-order form. Acceptable forms of payment are cash and check only.



TOP OF VIRGINIA REGIONAL CHAMBER

For more than a century, the Top of Virginia Regional Chamber has been the voice and backbone of the business community in the Northern Shenandoah Valley. Founded in 1916, this 108-year-old organization was born out of a simple but powerful idea: business leaders wanted their children to thrive and remain in the community. To make that possible, they knew they had to help build a viable local economy, foster a strong culture, and advocate for infrastructure and education.

The early efforts of the Chamber were bold and foundational. Members championed the creation of essential systems—a robust road network, clean and reliable water, and access to higher education. Under the leadership of Jim Wilkins in the 1950s and 60s, the Chamber was instrumental in bringing Shenandoah University to Winchester and helping to route Interstate 81 through the area, transforming regional connectivity. Wilkins also initiated the water system that would eventually evolve into the area's water authority, laying the groundwork for sustainable growth.

While the Chamber was once responsible for leading both economic development and tourism initiatives, those roles were spun off into separate entities in the early 2000s. This shift prompted a period of introspection: if the Chamber wasn't the central driver of those efforts anymore, what should its focus be? The answer was clear—continue to be the most influential and innovative supporter of the region's business community.

With the merger of Clarke County's Chamber in 2008, the organization rebranded as the Top of Virginia Regional Chamber to reflect its wider regional reach. Now headquartered at the Winchester Regional Airport—the geographical heart of the region—the Chamber is strategically positioned for visibility, accessibility, and innovation. From this hub, the Chamber serves as a connector, advocate, and catalyst for over 800 member businesses across Winchester, Frederick, and Clarke counties.

Today, the Chamber, led by Executive Director Cynthia Schneider, focuses on four pillars: Networking, Advocacy, Marketing, and Education. It hosts a wide array of programs and events that build strong professional networks, spark innovative ideas, and foster collaboration. Its Community Leadership Program cultivates future leaders, while events like the Valor Awards and the Greater Good Awards honor those making a lasting difference in the community. The annual Hob Nob in the Valley connects business leaders with local and state legislators, reinforcing the Chamber's role as a vital advocate for pro-business policies.

Digital outreach, including a robust website, regular newsletters, and targeted eblasts, offers affordable marketing tools to members while lending them credibility and visibility. These communications also keep members informed, connected, and engaged with regional developments.

Perhaps most importantly, the Chamber never lost sight of its core mission: investing in the community. As the fastest-growing region in Virginia for four years running, the Top of Virginia is poised for even more dynamic growth—and the Chamber is committed to ensuring that progress is thoughtful, inclusive, and rooted in a strong, interconnected business community.

In every initiative, from high-level advocacy to grassroots networking, the Top of Virginia Regional Chamber remains a champion for local businesses—and a builder of the region's future.

Learn more at RegionalChamber.biz



WINCHESTER CO-OP MARKET: FEEDING COMMUNITY

When Bertha Thomas first visited the Friendly City Food Co-op in Harrisonburg, she didn't just leave with groceries—she left with inspiration.

Originally from Mexico City, Bertha moved to Winchester in 2015 and later returned in 2021 after a few years in South Carolina and the birth of her daughter. By then, her personal journey toward a more holistic and sustainable lifestyle had already begun—and she wanted to bring that same sense of mindful community and fresh, local food to the place her husband calls home.

“I had never even heard of food co-ops before,” Bertha says. “But once I learned what they were, it just clicked. I thought, Winchester needs this. Not just a grocery store, but a welcoming hub—a place where people gather, learn, and support each other.”

With the help of connections from the Harrisonburg co-op and encouragement from Fredericksburg and Lovettsville co-op founders, Bertha dove in. She connected with others in the area who had tossed around the idea, pulled together a steering committee, and launched the Winchester Food Co-op Initiative in early 2024.

Since then, what started as a small Facebook group has blossomed into an energized board of nine volunteers and a community of hundreds of supporters. Their vision is clear: a brick-and-mortar, full-service grocery store owned collectively by the community. Anyone can shop there, but members have voting rights, board eligibility, and access to potential discounts and dividends. The co-op model eliminates outside investors—ensuring that profits stay local and decisions reflect community needs.

The planned store will prioritize locally sourced, sustainable, and accessible food, aiming to support local farmers, artisans, and producers. “We want to nourish the community while keeping the local economy strong,” says Bertha. “That means everything from Virginia-grown produce and baked goods to thoughtful sourcing of pantry staples through wholesale co-op distributors.”

Beyond groceries, the market will serve as a gathering space with a potential café, a made-to-order lunch counter, and room for workshops and classes. Picture grabbing coffee while your kids color at the corner table, bumping into a neighbor during bulk bin runs, or attending a fermentation workshop on a Saturday afternoon.

The group is currently in its organizing stage, working toward a key milestone: 500 founding members. That will unlock the next phase—feasibility studies, financial projections, and market research—all designed to determine the best location, budget, and timeline. Early support has already come from the EDA, which awarded the group a grant to conduct a survey. The results, showing significant local interest, will be shared publicly this summer.

In true co-op fashion, everything is community-led and volunteer-powered. “We’re doing this on our nights and weekends,” Bertha says. “We all have full-time jobs, but we believe in this project deeply. We’re building something together—something that belongs to all of us.”

So far, the co-op has appeared at community events like Juneteenth, Kids Fest, and First Fridays, and they’re hosting a rotating schedule of info sessions across the area. Keep an eye out for game nights, community picnics, and more—everything designed to connect people and spread the word.

Membership is a one-time \$200 fee per household, and it's open now. Whether you're a foodie, a localist, a community-builder—or just someone who misses that small-town grocery feel—there's a seat at the table for you.

Learn more at WinchesterCoop.market



Back: Mack Turner, Kay Hallett, Andrea Cosans, Michael Trainor, Christina McCarthy,
Front: Bertha Thomas, Michael Daryabeygi

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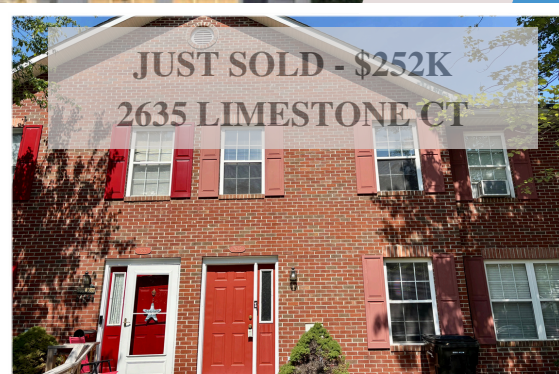
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Whether you're buying, selling, or investing, trust a local expert who knows Winchester inside and out. As highly involved members of this community, we bring not only deep market knowledge but also strong local connections to help you navigate every step with confidence. Let our experience and commitment open the right doors for you — in a place we both call home.

READY TO BUY, SELL, OR INVEST? CALL US!



REACH OUT TODAY



Katie Jordan



Misty Weaver

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