

WE ARE WINCHESTER

SEP 2025

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PHOTO BY
KATIE JORDAN

Winchester Book Gallery Recommends:



Mia Almas has a secret. By day, she works at a respectable job as a media fact checker—a position her conservative, Arab grandparents approve of—and, by night, she takes to the stages of New York City comedy clubs. She holds herself back in a lot of ways, especially in the romance department, but being on stage lights her up and makes being a wallflower the rest of the time more bearable. That is, until

Phaedra, her stylish and bold new neighbor, inspires Mia to take a few risks. As Mia pursues a forbidden romance with her boss, her standup gets better and bolder, leading to a surprise spotlight that exposes her secret gig. Horrified and worried that her rebellious act could mean big consequences for her reserved Palestinian-American family, Mia frantically dives into damage control. But all of her efforts to pull back from the spotlight expose a family scandal from the 1940s that could change everything...

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

This month, we're reminded that community doesn't have to be loud to be powerful.

It can look like a donated propane tank delivered before the next cold snap. You'll read about Kim Weisgerber Craig and her "Holy Cannoli" initiative—and we hope it reminds you (like it reminded us) that kindness doesn't need a business plan. Just intention.

We're also celebrating the people who keep showing up—whether it's in community theater, local food, history preservation, or simply volunteering when something (or someone) needs saving. This issue is packed with stories of folks who don't just love Winchester—they're building it, piece by piece, in their own creative ways.

We'll see you in Old Town!



*Misty Weaver
& Katie Jordan*

**WE ARE
WINCHESTER**

SAYING GOODBYE

This month, we say goodbye to two businesses that have meant so much to our community and to us personally.

The Quirky Closet, founded by Hillary Carter, brought something truly unique to Winchester: a boutique dedicated to stylish, fashionable clothing and accessories for plus-sized women. For five years, Hillary empowered her clients to embrace confidence and joy in their fashion choices, creating not only a shopping experience but a community of encouragement and celebration. With her impeccable style and heart for her clients, Hillary always put people first, expanding her vision into additional locations before the Winchester shop closed in August 2025. Hillary was not only a leader in local retail, but also our dear friend and client, and we will miss her shop deeply.

We also bid farewell to Fox Urban Farms, the innovative hydroponic farm created by Ann and John Fox. From inside two shipping containers, they grew the equivalent of five acres of fresh greens, herbs, and edible flowers, supplying restaurants, caterers, and families with clean, locally grown food all year long. Their forward-thinking approach inspired many, and even in closing, their legacy will live on as their

farming containers find a new home with Frederick County Public Schools for educational use. Ann and John were more than just business owners—they were strong supporters of our magazine, distributing it faithfully to their customers each month, and our friends.

Though their doors have closed, the impact of these businesses, and the friendships behind them, will remain part of Winchester's story. We are grateful to Hillary, Ann, and John for the passion, creativity, and generosity they poured into our community.



The Quirky Closet
PLUS SIZE WOMEN'S BOUTIQUE

WINCHESTER LITTLE THEATRE: BIG HEART

The first thing you notice when you step inside Winchester Little Theatre is that it *feels* like a community. Betsy Arnett, now President of the Board, first walked through the doors in 2016, after her son graduated high school and her evenings suddenly opened up. She saw a Facebook post about a set build and decided to show up. “I hadn’t built a set in... well, I won’t say how long,” she laughs. “But everyone was just so welcoming. No one was gatekeeping. They were ready to show me the ropes.” She’s been involved in *every* main stage production since.

Colette Sabbagh’s WLT story started a few years later, but it was similarly serendipitous. A lifelong theater lover, she moved to Winchester in 2019 for her husband’s job and quickly found her way to a production of *The Odd Couple*—the female version, no less, which she’d once performed back in Maine. “It just felt like a sign,” she says. She hadn’t even fully moved in before auditioning for a Reader’s Theatre production of *King Lear*. Since then, she’s helped with costumes, ushered, managed box office shifts, and served as board secretary before becoming Director of Development.

Winchester Little Theatre itself has been a fixture since 1929, making it one of the oldest continuously operating community theaters in Virginia. The company found its permanent home in the historic Pennsylvania Railroad Freight Station in 1974—a dramatic-looking brick structure built in 1894. It’s a building that has lived many lives, and one that’s been lovingly restored over the decades by dedicated volunteers.

In fact, it almost didn’t survive. Not long after WLT acquired the building, structural problems were discovered—trusses removed, ceilings at risk of collapse. “People stepped up,” Colette says. “There was just this groundswell of support to save it.”

Recent renovations have kept the momentum going. The stage was recently leveled, accessibility has been improved with a new ramp, and a wheelchair seating area is being added in the upcoming season. But the work never ends. Lighting upgrades, restroom accessibility, and paying off the mortgage on their massive Clark Street costume and prop storage facility are next on the wishlist.

Speaking of Clark Street—imagine 10,000 square feet of organized theatrical chaos: one floor of costumes, another filled with props and furniture. “That was actually my first volunteer gig here,” Colette says. “Helping Marion, our costume mistress, pack everything up and move. That was how I got my start.”

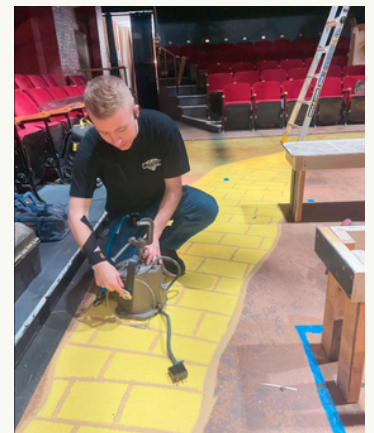


The process to choose shows for the season starts with the Play Reading Committee. Directors, volunteers, and members read through stacks of scripts throughout the year, weighing artistic merit against practical logistics: How big is the cast? What’s the tech demand? Will it draw a crowd? “We aim for a balanced season,” Betsy explains. “Comedies, dramas, maybe a musical. Something familiar to open strong, and something with name recognition to close. And in between, we’ll slip in something new, something challenging.”

There’s even space for experimentation in WLT’s *Reader’s Theatre* series—a low-commitment, high-reward opportunity to stage lesser-known or in-progress works. “It’s been a great way to test out new plays,” Betsy says. “And to give actors who can’t commit to a full run a chance to stay involved.” It’s also been an incubator for *local* playwrights—Betsy included. Her original play, *The Witness Tree*, was workshopped at WLT before making it to the main stage. She’s now pursuing an MFA in playwriting and hopes to launch another new script festival soon.

If WLT is known for one thing besides its hospitality, it’s the quality. Colette puts it plainly: “You can’t just walk in and say, ‘I want to direct a play.’ You work your way up. You stage manage, take workshops, assist on shows. It’s earned.” That professional mindset carries over into every corner of the production—from intricate set design to lighting and sound, to the thousands of costume pieces carefully maintained in that Clark Street warehouse. “I’d stack us up against a small professional company,” Betsy says, “and feel good about it.”

Continues on pg 7.



DAY TRIP: SHENANDOAH CAVERNS



Looking for an easy day trip that blends natural wonder with family-friendly fun? Just an hour south of Winchester, Shenandoah Caverns in Mount Jackson offers a cool underground escape packed with history, geology, and a touch of nostalgia.

Guided tours lead visitors through a mile-long underground pathway, where dramatic lighting highlights intricate formations with playful names like “Breakfast Bacon,” “Diamond Cascade,” and “Rainbow Lake.” The caverns maintain a steady 56 degrees year-round, so a light jacket is a good idea even in the summer months.

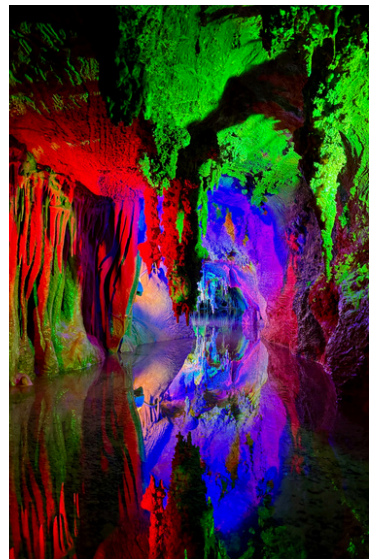
The experience doesn’t end once you emerge back above ground. Shenandoah Caverns is also home to several unique exhibits. American Celebration on Parade showcases massive, colorful parade floats once used in nationally televised events like the Rose Parade and Presidential Inaugurations. Main Street of Yesteryear displays vintage department store window scenes that once captivated shoppers in the mid-20th century. For younger visitors,

there’s gemstone mining and a playground for some hands-on fun after exploring underground.

A visit to the caverns typically takes a few hours, giving you time to enjoy both the cave and the exhibits. Comfortable shoes are a must, as the cavern floors can be damp and uneven. If all the exploring works up an appetite, visit Caverns Cafe or venture to nearby Mount Jackson which offers locally owned diners and restaurants where you can refuel before heading back to Winchester.

Whether you’re entertaining out-of-town guests, looking for a family-friendly outing, or simply craving something different, the caverns provide a fascinating glimpse into the underground world and a full day of activities to enjoy.

Learn more online at ShenandoahCaverns.com or visit in person at 261 Caverns Rd, Quicksburg, VA 22847.



Note: Shenandoah Caverns has elevator access, which makes getting inside simpler than taking stairs. Once you’re underground, however, the pathways are naturally uneven, with sections that are narrow or have low-hanging ceilings where you may need to duck.





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September events

5

26TH ANNUAL FISH FRY

Concern Hotline celebrates 26 years of the best fried fish dinner celebration in the area. Vendors, music, drive thru service! Fred County Fairgrounds

6

DINOSAUR ADVENTURE

Step into the world of prehistoric giants at Dinosaur Adventure. Jurassic scooters, themed obstacle courses, and more! Winchester Sportsplex

6

SHENARTS FEST

A juried, fine art festival, showcasing diverse offerings of sculpture, pottery, jewelry, photography, mixed-media, painting and more to suit every budget. Old Town Mall

7

COMMUNITY PICNIC

Join Winchester Co-op Market for the first appreciation picnic - bring a dish to share and enjoy yard games, yoga, art projects, and more! Willow Grove Farm

20

CELEBRACION

Celebrating and educating our area about Hispanic Heritage Month. Activities include arts and crafts, Latin dance performances, live music, and much more! Old Town Mall



We are proud to announce the first ever official vanity license plate commemorating the Shenandoah Apple Blossom Festival®. **SHOW YOUR PINK AND GREEN PRIDE** year-round with the floral design that is sure to turn heads wherever you travel, from the Commonwealth and beyond!

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.



PRESERVATION OF HISTORIC WINCHESTER

Back in the 1960s, a group of Winchester residents came together with a simple goal: save the Conrad House, an 18th-century home on North Cameron Street. The house was threatened with demolition to make room for parking, and although their campaign wasn't successful, the effort sparked something bigger. Those citizens went on to form Preservation of Historic Winchester (PHW), a nonprofit dedicated to protecting the city's historic buildings and the stories they carry.

From the start, PHW took preservation into its own hands. When city officials suggested that anyone who wanted to save a building should just buy it themselves, PHW did exactly that. They created a revolving fund to purchase endangered properties, restore them, and then resell them with protective covenants to make sure their historic character stayed intact. With just \$110,000 to start, PHW managed to turn that into \$2.7 million in financing—enough to save and safeguard more than 75 buildings across Winchester.

The first property they purchased was on South Loudoun Street, and since then, PHW has been part of many big projects, including work at 2 North Cameron Street. While the organization no longer buys and sells properties, its mission hasn't slowed down. Instead, PHW focuses on education and advocacy, helping homeowners care for their historic properties. One way they do this is through microgrants, which provide small but meaningful financial support to help cover the extra costs that often come with preservation projects. These grants may be used for exterior projects such as gutters, windows and siding.

PHW's office is located in the Hexagon House on Amherst Street, a unique six-sided home that reflects the architectural diversity the organization works so hard to protect. From there, they organize programs, share resources, and keep preservation in the public eye.

Their biggest annual event is the Holiday House Tour, a much-loved tradition that lets the community step inside beautifully decorated historic homes. Docents share information about the historical homes as guests tour the properties. Alongside it is the Bough and Dough Shop, which offers fresh greens, baked goods, and handmade gifts. The shop now takes part in the annual Winter Village on the Old Town Walking Mall.

With Wendy Kedzierski as Executive Director, PHW continues to be a voice for Winchester's history. While the tools of preservation have changed since the Conrad House days, the mission is the same: to make sure the city's historic buildings aren't just remembered, but lived in, cared for, and passed on to future generations.

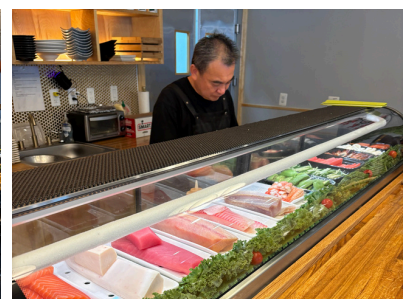
Learn more at phwi.org



UNCLE CHEN ASIAN FOOD

A flavorful new dining option has arrived at Creekside Station with the opening of Uncle Chen Asian Food. Owners Xian Chen and Xiangping Lin, who bring more than 20 years of experience in the Winchester restaurant scene, opened the doors earlier this year to share their passion for fresh, locally sourced Asian cuisine. The restaurant offers both lunch and dinner in a welcoming sit-down setting, adding another vibrant choice to the city's dining landscape.

The menu at Uncle Chen is both broad and thoughtful, blending traditional favorites with unique specialties. Diners will find signature entrées such as Kung Pao Chicken, Black Pepper Scallops, Hunan-style dishes, and Peking Duck, alongside a wide variety of fried rice, noodles, sushi, and boba tea. A dedicated vegetarian section ensures there are plenty of options for every palate. With daily combo specials rounding out the offerings, the restaurant has something to satisfy both adventurous eaters and those who prefer comfort classics. Visit them at 3035 Valley Ave



HOLY CANNOLI: HOLY WORK

Founded by Winchester local Kim Weisgerber Craig, *Holy Cannoli* is the public-facing name for No Fixed Address, a grassroots nonprofit with one mission—to meet people exactly where they are, especially if where they are is outside.

And Kim? She's the whole show. She funds it. She drives it. She delivers the coffee, the pizza, the propane, the toothpaste, and the love. "Most of what I do feels trivial," Kim says, "but it makes a difference. It's the small things we're used to having that you don't think about until you don't have them."

Kim's been showing up for people her whole life. She's not one to list credentials, but she could. She was part of one of the first Big Brothers Big Sisters matches in Winchester. She has served on the United Way executive board, and worked with CCAP, where she first began really noticing what life looks like when you're unhoused and no one sees you.

Holy Cannoli started as a little café Kim set up in a building she owned but hadn't developed yet. She opened the doors to let unhoused neighbors give back—serving coffee and baked goods to anyone who came in. A chance for the unhoused to feel connection and dignity by doing something most of us take for granted, the ability to help someone else.

The café space is gone now, but the mission lives, stronger than ever. These days, Holy Cannoli is mobile. It's wherever someone needs to be met with warmth—literal or emotional. It's where pizza gets delivered not to a house, but to a roadside meetup. Where propane tanks help heat tents under bridges. Where someone like "G" can receive a warm meal when his oxygen tank depleted his food budget. "Pizza delivery doesn't come to the woods," Kim says. "So we go."

Through partnerships with local businesses like Roma On The Go, and through the generosity of individual donors (some who just quietly drop off tarps or toothbrushes), Holy Cannoli operates as a true community pay-it-forward initiative.

Here's the thing: Kim doesn't ask for money. She never fundraises in the traditional sense. But still, support rolls in. "I believe in God," she says simply. "He sends the right people at the right time."

There's no overhead, no salaried staff, no glossy marketing materials. There's just Kim—and a textable phone number where you can reach her directly if you want to help.

Connect with Kim at 540-550-4086



WLT, continued



And while no one's willing to confirm *haunted* status outright, the old building *has* given up a few secrets over the years. Like the early 1900s shoes discovered under the floor during renovations, now on display in the lobby. "You never know what you'll find," Colette says. "But nothing spooky has happened to me—yet."

At the end of the day, WLT's greatest strength are the people. Over 100 volunteers contribute their time and talent each season—not just actors and directors, but costume stitchers, set painters, box office helpers, and stage crew. And they come from all over: Hedgseville, Edinburg, Sterling, and of course, Winchester. "This is a place that welcomes you in," says Betsy. "It doesn't matter if you're building a set, sweeping the floor, or stepping on stage, there's something here for you."

Whether you're an aspiring actor, a longtime theater-goer, or someone who just noticed the cars in the lot and decided to peek inside—Winchester Little Theatre is ready to say hello.

Learn more at WinchesterLittleTheatre.org

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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.

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Katie Jordan



Misty Weaver

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703-477-2988

katielandijordan@gmail.com

540-999-8826

misty@dreamweaverteam.com