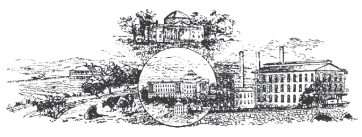
COMMENTARY

The Daily Progress
Established 1892



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BOTANICAL BRIEF

A garden grows in Charlottesville

With your support

This is the first in a monthly column from the Botanical Garden of the Piedmont, a public garden in Charlottesville. We will share updates about the local natural world as well as plant and maintenance suggestions that can be adapted to residential garden spaces, weather findings through our Kenneth Martin Brown Weather Station and upcoming garden programming. Stay tuned for Mr. Brown's personal story in July. We look forward to connecting with you.

JILL TRISCHMAN-MARKS

You may have noticed the Botanical Garden of the Piedmont sign at the corner of John Warner Parkway and Melbourne Road, but have you parked your car and walked down the mulched trail to discover what's happening here? If you have visited, you'll recall entering a natural area with trails and an assortment of gathering spaces, located next to Charlottesville High School and less than 2 miles from Downtown.

Since 2019, the garden has been actively stewarding this site, formerly the city's leaf dump and mulch pile, by removing invasive plants and planting native species. Our restored stream, completed in April 2024, stands as a testament to the collaborative partnerships we've cultivated locally. More than 700 newly installed native trees and shrubs, along with an understory of native grasses, forbs and perennials, have fostered a thriving aquatic habitat where a highly degraded stream corridor once existed.

As we've developed the site, we've sought feedback from community partners to enhance the garden's relevance. By providing access to a centrally located, safe and public outdoor venue, these organizations have been better equipped to serve their constituents and offer valuable insights into their needs for the future garden. This feedback has led to the installation of several rustic site improvements, creating more welcoming and usable outdoor spaces for discovery, peace and community now.

Increased access to the site also enabled us to develop onsite educational tours focused on identifying trees, birds, butterflies, wildflowers and more. In addition to tours, we offer diverse programs encompassing environmental education, arts, literacy, healthy living and more, serving participants from preschoolers to seniors. In the past year alone, the garden has hosted 180 events with more than 6,000 participants through our 35 educational programs.

The Botanical Garden of the Piedmont is a nonprofit 501©(3) organization with the mission to welcome all community members and visitors to engage with nature, inspire learning through the beauty and importance of plants, advance sustainability and promote human and environmental well-being.

As a 21st-century public garden, the garden is already a valuable community resource — a place that promotes inclusion, social cohesion and positive community outcomes. The garden offers a community retreat from the fast-paced digital world and a community resource for exploring the beauty of the Piedmont area and engaging in the transformative power of the natural world.

While the city of Charlottesville has dedicated the land to the project, the funds necessary to design, construct and maintain the garden are being privately raised by the garden. Our national award-winning master plan for the garden, driven by our community's input regarding their aspirations for the site, focuses on enhancing the existing ecosystems while providing gardens for interactive and immersive learning. Once completed, the garden will feature terraced gardens, meadows, a grove, an amphitheater, an event green, an aquatics garden, a pavilion and a visitors center. The Discovery Garden, with its natural play areas, is among the first gardens slated for construction.

We invite you to park your car along Melbourne Road and take the mulched trail from the sidewalk into the garden site to attend an event, walk, sit and find solace in nature. We look forward to seeing you in the garden soon! Please submit your questions about the natural world to us at: info@piedmontgarden.org.

Jill Trischman-Marks is a landscape architect with almost 30 years of experience in Central Virginia. After serving on the Botanical Garden of the Piedmont board for several years, in 2019, she became the first executive director and now spearheads the design of the future garden and stewardship of the current site to offer more than 35 different events and programming.

The Botanical Brief

This monthly column is brought to Daily Progress readers by the Botanical Garden of the Piedmont. The garden can be found at 950 Melbourne Road in Charlottesville. For more information, visit www.piedmontgarden.org.

Kenneth Martin Brown Weather Station Updates

We are pleased to share that through a generous donation, we now have a weather station in the Botanical Garden of the Piedmont in memory of local land steward, Kenneth Martin Brown. We look forward to sharing Mr. Brown's story in July. In the meantime, you may connect to the garden and local weather updates through the following website: ambientweather.net/share/8BhE3m.

The Bloom Report

As we move into the summer months, there are multiple things you can do to keep your garden healthy and thriving:

- June is a good time to spy passionflower, butterfly weed and purple coneflower in the Botanical Garden of the Piedmont.
- See our website to learn about native plants we have at the garden that you can add to your landscape too: docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1MV4KdxSq4XM_jbYbxurBGJqAq0h4qlOj/edit?gid=951189619#gid=951189619.
- Monitor irrigation system coverage and soil moisture. Make changes to ensure proper soil moisture. See our website about local rainfall accumulation. All plants need water, but how much and how often varies from plant to plant. See also: woodlandswater.org.
- Prune early flowering ornamentals.
- Inspect evergreens for mites and control as needed.
- Weed beds to remove invasives.

DINNER WITH SIMON

Nose to tail and farm to fire

All steaks shine at Black Cow

Why does Charlottesville have so many good restaurants? Per capita, few cities can match its quantity of quality eats. But why?

One reason is geography. Charlottesville sits amid a bounty that is the envy of chefs elsewhere. It's the region's farmers and producers who provide the delicious foods on restaurant plates.

SIMON DAVIDSON

One is Troy cattle farmer Rob Harrison, who, through his company Foods for Thought, distributes products for Roseda Farm, a Maryland processor of cattle from Harrison's farms, their farm and others. Roseda Farm's standards have gained it a reputation such that chefs and customers look for the name.

In Charlottesville, there are few better showcases for Harrison's products than Black Cow Chophouse, the West Main Street restaurant Daniel Kaufman and Gregg Dionne opened in 2023. While I have enjoyed many dinners there, the recent company of Harrison allowed a deeper dive into what makes it such a great place for local beef.

The restaurant is the brainchild of Dionne, who grew close with co-owner Kaufman while cooking at Kaufman's Public Fish & Oyster across the street. The idea for Black Cow came when Dionne left for a brief stint at Greencroft Club, where the frequency of tenderloin requests for catering events made Dionne wonder about the effects of consuming beef cuts so disproportionately. Since each cow has just two tenderloins, what becomes of the rest?

Dionne conceived of a restaurant that serves all parts of a cow, including popular tenderloins and lesser-known cuts that chefs favor. He pitched the idea to Kaufman, who, in the wake of the pandemic, had little appetite for another restaurant.

"There's only one human being in the world who I would have opened a restaurant with," said Kaufman. "Gregg."

The location they found at 420 W. Main St. was ideal — a onetime service station with garage doors which, when the weather allows, open to remove walls between the dining room and street-front patio. Harrison and I sat at a high-top with a view of the open kitchen. After cocktails, we dug into crab cakes — the same ones Dionne made at Public. In a nest of Louis sauce, plump crabmeat with no visible binder brought conversation to a halt. Steak tartare was no less delicious, with the mild flavor of raw tenderloin scraps getting a boost from Dijon mustard, shallots, capers and parmesan, topped with a Forrest Green Farm egg yolk to swirl it all together.

But, we were there for steak. The array of daily cuts allows a range of prices from $99 cowboy ribeye, to $25 hanger, to $18 happy hour steak frites. Harrison and I both chose Roseda Farm beef: picanha for him and, for me, bavette, a well-marbled cut just beneath the sirloin.

"Bavette is our best steak," said Dionne. "It's like a juicier flank steak, and takes to the grill really well."

While Dionne typically opts for medium-rare, for bavette he likes medium, so the fat has time to render on the grill.

When our steak arrived, conversation paused again while Harrison admired it.

"You just have to look at it," he said with the gaze of a proud father. "I really enjoy seeing what chefs do with it."

As Harrison swooned, he named three reasons for its excellence: the grill, the chef and the product.

From prior tenant Little Star, Black Cow inherited one of the area's only wood grills, which not only creates spectacular viewing but, Harrison said, a kiss of smoke on each steak. It's hard work to run the grill, and Dionne relies on right-hand man David Brichta, whom Dionne brought from Public to Greencroft to Black Cow.

"I intend to have him in my life wherever I am," said Dionne. "He has truly become an expert in how to feed the wood just right to cook steaks to char without burning."

And most importantly, there's the product. Dionne sources the best products he can find at the best value, which often means local. Among Roseda Farm's practices, Dionne cites their dry-aging as one difference-maker.

"You can tell the aging," said Harrison between bites. "From aging, it loses moisture, contracts and gives an intense beefy flavor."

With Kaufman's background in the front of house, the polish of Black Cow's service matches Public's. Enthusiastic but not overbearing, our server guided us to a delicious side of red potato smashers — small potatoes Dionne boils in salty water, coats in homemade Old Bay, flattens and fries. While steaks include a salad, sides are à la carte, and another menu section offers full dishes.

Dionne's talent means it's worth exploring the whole menu. But, for guests such as Harrison, it's hard to resist that steak.

Simon Davidson is a restaurant critic for The Daily Progress. He also is founder of the Charlottesville 29 food website. He has written about Charlottesville food for more than a decade. He lives in Keswick with his wife and two children.

Table setting

Black Cow Chophouse

Steakhouse

420 W. Main St.

(434) 270-0333

4:30 to 9:15 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday, closed Monday and Tuesday

TO THE EDITOR

Intimidating public defenders has no place in a democracy

As a law-abiding citizen of the Charlottesville area, I was pleased to learn that we have an FBI field office in our community to investigate federal crimes and to keep us safe from perpetrators of such crimes. I view this as a positive thing.

I do not, however, view it a positive thing when FBI agents wrongfully intimidate a local public defender and other local attorneys. This is nothing short of an abuse of power. These attorneys apparently had done nothing that would justify such behavior.

If you wanted to speak with these attorneys, why did you not simply request that they come to your office? Was it really necessary to visit their homes and awaken them and their families at 7 a.m.? This sort of behavior, which clearly was intended to intimidate the attorneys, is typical of authoritarian governments, but not typical of democracies. In fact, this behavior is antithetical to democratic rule and should not be condoned in a free society. We can only hope that this behavior was an aberration and that it will not be repeated.

Henceforth, please focus your time and energy on your important work of investigating and preventing serious federal crimes. Thank you!

John Smith
Crozet

David Shreve will do us proud

My full support goes to Dave Shreve to represent the Jack Jouett District on the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors.

Dave's background in history and economics, in civil rights, his work in tax reform and the Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee — his engagement in all these issues of Albemarle County solidify my endorsement of him.

I've worked with Dave on the James and Nellie Scholarship Committee for Albemarle High School Students. Dave is a consummate volunteer, serving in over a dozen positions over the years, all helping the people, the schools and the land in our county.

Dave will do our district proud.

Marjorie Shepherd
Albemarle County

The FBI is weaponizing its power to scare legal advocates into silence

I am outraged by the recent actions of the FBI toward public defenders in Charlottesville: waking lawyers' spouses in the early hours of the morning, showing up unannounced at their private homes, coordinating these visits to send a clear and chilling message.

Let's be honest, this wasn't about gathering witness statements. This was about intimidation.

These lawyers were doing their jobs: defending the constitutional rights of individuals inside a courthouse — rights guaranteed not only to U.S. citizens but to anyone on U.S. soil. That includes immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. These are our principles. The ones we wave flags for and claim to uphold.

Instead, we are watching law enforcement agencies, agencies sworn to protect those very rights, attempt to bully, silence and punish the people who are brave enough to stand up for them.

I stand in full support of Donald Bellah and the other lawyers being targeted. Public defenders are not the problem. Weaponizing federal power to scare legal advocates into silence is.

This is not just an overreach. It is a threat to the very foundation of the rule of law.

Renee Branson
Albemarle County

Greene County residents deserves answers after firehouse closes

The sudden closure of the Ruckersville Volunteer Fire Company in Greene County demands greater transparency and public accountability. As reported in The Daily Progress, the Board of Supervisors voted behind closed doors on May 13 to halt the department's operations — later barring its firefighters from responding to emergency calls.

This decision was made without advance notice to residents and with no public explanation beyond vague references to "unspecified claims" now under review by an outside agency.

Ruckersville was not just one of several stations. It was the county's oldest fire department and the only one equipped with a ladder truck. Removing this coverage adds critical minutes to emergency response times — especially in a 157-square-mile rural county.

In my previous work conducting fire and EMS studies in Nelson County and other rural parts of Virginia, I have seen the operational and staffing challenges volunteer departments face. But those challenges should be met with transparency and community engagement — not secrecy. Sudden decisions that affect lifesaving services must be clearly explained.

A firehouse is more than a building. It's a symbol of readiness, trust and community service. Greene County's residents deserve more than reassurances; they deserve honest communication and a plan to ensure their safety is never compromised in silence.

I say this not as someone who would ever run into a burning building, but as someone who deeply respects those who volunteer to do exactly that. They deserve our transparency. And so does the public.

Mohamed G. Abbamin
Richmond