

# COMMENTARY

## The Daily Progress

Established 1892



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### BOTANICAL BRIEF

## A fitting tribute

A few months ago, the Botanical Garden of the Piedmont received a generous gift from an anonymous donor to fund a weather station in the garden. The Piedmont region boasts a large following of residents who are weather enthusiasts. Knowing this, we installed instrumentation to follow weather patterns specific to the land we steward, creating multiple opportunities for our own planning as well as sharing with the community to adapt the information for personal use or public research.

**LAURA MCCALL**

In late May of this year, we excitedly installed our weather station in memory of Kenneth Martin Brown, a local resident and fellow land steward. Kenneth's story is one of passion, family and history. He was one of 12 children, born to Margaret and Edward Brown Sr., at the University of Virginia hospital in 1958. From a young age, Kenneth's passions were painting, fishing, landscape maintenance and gardening. Beginning at the age of 17, and for the next 47 years, he cared for a property that bordered Ivy Creek Natural Area in Charlottesville. Ivy Creek, now a National Historic Landmark, was purchased by Hugh Carr in 1870 after emancipation and became a thriving farm. Like the Botanical Garden of the Piedmont, Ivy Creek Natural Area, managed by the Ivy Creek Foundation, hosts children and school groups to engage with nature, learn about the environment and engage with conservation efforts. Perhaps this history inspired Kenneth to care for the very large neighboring property.

In his 30s, Kenneth endured a grand mal epileptic seizure, damaging his shoulders which required metal pins to repair. Despite recurring seizures, he managed his health, was physically strong and thus able to care for the land as if it were his own. The changing seasons with cold, rain and air pressure fluctuations affected his injury; thus, Kenneth became an avid weather connoisseur. He kept healthy habits, starting his day with breakfast while listening to the famed local TV weather personality Norm Sprouse. After hearing the report, he would step outside, judge the wind speed and humidity levels, and plan his day outdoors. On his drive to work, he would read the sky along with the clouds that frequently covered the Blue Ridge Mountains, predicting when the fog or heavy rain would be present. His judgments were rarely wrong. Above all, Kenneth was a professional who loved his work, his family and the land he cared for. Underlying all of this was his kindness. In 2023, Kenneth passed away while fishing. He was 64.

The addition of the garden's weather station will help us more accurately assess weather patterns, allow us to connect to national weather reporting sites such as Ambient Weather and Weather Underground, and track weather patterns over time. The garden is forever grateful for the opportunity to honor Kenneth and to our thoughtful donor for providing us with a weather station to learn from and to share with others.

Laura McCall is the director of development for the Botanical Garden of the Piedmont. Her passions lie in the sustainability of communities and the arts. She is the owner of a writing and editing service.

### 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.piedmont-garden.org](http://www.piedmont-garden.org).

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### FREEDOM AT A COST

## Our celebration of independence must extend beyond symbolism

The Fourth of July is the day America celebrates its creation. Escaping British rule through a bloody war, a culmination of the revolutionary independence movement, this date stands as both a tribute to the cost of freedom and a reminder that the fight for justice is ongoing. Much of this celebration is dedicated to the U.S. military, with parades, speeches and patriotic displays honoring the service of those who wore and those who still wear the uniform. However, a true honoring of their service is not just a display of gratitude, but rather concrete actions that lead to better access to compensation and health care for their services.



**CRISTINA JOHNSON**

While in military service, veterans exposed to numerous toxic agents are now suffering the effects of this exposure. Today, many military hazards are well documented, and protective measures against them have been implemented. Nevertheless, risks remain, especially for compounds that have yet to be fully documented, with effects on human health not yet fully understood. This phenomenon is not new, and as a result, these safety policies are constantly updated. One such example is the extensive use of asbestos by the military during the Atomic Era. At this time, over 1,400 million pounds of asbestos were used in the U.S., with minimal to no data on the disease-causing effects of this mineral. Many of those exposed worked in shipbuilding, making Navy veterans' asbestos exposure one of the most widespread and devastating occupational health crises in military history.

Today, veterans exposed to asbestos and other toxic agents can receive automatic compensation and free health care under the Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics, or PACT, Act of 2022. However, while the Department of Veterans Affairs is working toward developing a list of diseases for which compensation is provided without the need for additional inquiries, the list of toxic chemicals considered causal for these conditions has remained the same since the implementation of the act. Notably, veterans and active military staff are exposed daily to chemicals for which, presently, compensation is not provided.



**BILLY SCHUERMAN, THE VIRGINIAN PILOT**

The USS Harry S. Truman returns thousands of sailors from an eight-month deployment in the Red Sea to Naval Station Norfolk, Sunday, June 1, 2025.

### The Extent of PFAS and VOCs Exposure

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, are synthetic chemicals widely used in the military for their heat- and water-resistant properties. Across the United States, the Environmental Working Group has documented over 700 military sites with confirmed or suspected PFAS contamination. Among these, Camp Lejeune is the poster child of contamination, included in the PACT Act compensation scheme. Notably, while other sites are also known to be contaminated, military personnel who served at these sites are not automatically granted compensation. Current data links PFAS exposure with 13 diseases, including cancers, immune problems, neurodevelopmental issues and metabolic diseases.

Volatile organic compounds are another group of chemicals extensively used across military operations. VOCs are found in jet fuels, solvents and degreasers used for cleaning equipment and machinery, as well as in paints and coatings used by the military. Exposure to VOCs has also been connected with various diseases, including acute airway irritation, dizziness and more severe cases of organ failure and cancers.

### Toxic exposure in Virginia veterans

More than 600,000 former service members reside in Virginia, with 744 of these veterans living in Madison County and having served at nearby military bases. According to the Environmental Working

Group's interactive map, several of these installations are known to be contaminated with PFAS and are now superfund sites. VOCs exposure at these military sites has also been documented by the Environmental Protection Agency. The extent of exposure to military personnel across Virginia is thus substantial. All veterans who worked at these facilities now run the risk of developing various serious conditions, for which the VA offers support only after a lengthy evaluation process. Nonetheless, it is important to note that these veterans need to prove not only causality for compensation but also present a well-documented record of their exposure to these substances. This burden falls entirely on them, as neither the VA nor the Department of Defense has a registry for recording PFAS and VOCs exposure among their staff.

As thousands of veterans are affected each year by toxic exposure and are left to fend for themselves, Independence Day should inspire advocacy for those who served. Honoring the military's role in securing the freedom of this country must therefore extend beyond symbolism and demand bold policy reforms to expand protections against toxic exposure and ensure timely access to healthcare.

Cristina Johnson is a Navy veteran advocate for Asbestos Ships Organization, a nonprofit organization whose primary mission is to raise awareness and educate veterans about the dangers of asbestos exposure on Navy ships and assist them in navigating the Veterans Affairs claims process.

### DINNER WITH SIMON

## An American Dream come true in C'ville

Is the American Dream alive? Depends who you ask. Some say it never was — it's just a glossy term the privileged use to whitewash obstacles to immigrants' success. Others, including some immigrants themselves, say not only that it is alive, but that they are living it.

In Charlottesville, the food community stands on the shoulders of immigrants who came to the area for a better life. Their restaurants are a win-win — enabling pursuit of their dreams while enriching the community with new cuisines and experiences.

Among the most welcome is Peruvian, a cuisine so esteemed that a restaurant in Peru ranks first on "The World's 50 Best Restaurants." Peruvian food is now in Charlottesville thanks to a man pursuing his dream, and a community supporting it. Born in Peru, Eddy Moreno's American Dream began at a Costa Rica hotel. As a child in Peru, he had fallen in love with food while working at his mother's restaurant. So, he attended culinary school, and then



**Moreno**

moved to Costa Rica, where guests of the hotel where he cooked would tell him that in the U.S. he'd have the chance to open his own restaurant. In 2014, Moreno took the leap and moved to Miami where he became head chef of a popular sushi restaurant serving Nikkei cuisine (Peruvian-Japanese). The owners were immigrants, and Moreno recalls how their success helped him see that his dream could become a reality.

Pursuit of it took him to Roanoke, where in 2019, he and his brother opened Inka Grill. As Moreno puts it, "It's a place where we proudly share the flavors of Peru, with each dish telling a story of our heritage and the journey that brought us here." It did so well that they expanded to Charlottesville, opening a Corner location in 2021 and a Fifth Street Extended location in 2022.

I am a regular of the latter, and while I have enjoyed many meals there, none matched my most recent. The company may have helped — two American Dreamers themselves, Maria Salazar-Gil and Fernando Salazar, who came

### Table setting

#### Inka Grill

Peruvian cuisine  
365 Merchant Walk Square  
(434) 234-3196

11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday through Wednesday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Thursday through Saturday

to the area from Venezuela and now run Charlottesville's "Best New Restaurant," Arepas Steakhouse. They are also regulars, and Moreno gave them the royal treatment.

Part of Peruvian food's appeal is that, like America, it is a melting pot — fusing immigrants' influences to produce new cuisines like Nikkei and chifa (Peruvian-Chinese). An example of the latter is lomo saltado, a stir fry of sliced beef tenderloin applying Chinese touches such as wok cooking and soy sauce to Peruvian ingredients including aji amarillo, peppers and onions. Moreno served ours over tacu tacu, a fried patty of mashed beans, rice and aji peppers — an ideal vehicle to sop up Moreno's savory sauce.

Another highlight was a type of

Peruvian ceviche called leche de tigre. What distinguishes it from other ceviches is that the fish is not just marinated in citrus, it is part of the marinade. Moreno mashes corvina fish with garlic, celery, ginger, salt and pepper, and then blends it with lime juice and red onion. The liquid from the mashed fish yields a milky appearance, giving the dish its name, "tiger milk," and perfuming the marinade with the aroma of the sea. A topping of fried calamari clinched it as Salazar-Gil's favorite dish of the night. "The combination of citrus and crunchy squid tentacles is the perfect match," she said.

Salazar's favorites were grilled octopus and anticucho — high praise for a man who grills for a living. For the octopus, Moreno braises it in red wine and vegetables until tender and finishes it on the grill. Anticucho is cow heart, which Moreno slices thinly, marinates for 24 hours, grills and serves with chimichurri and huancaina, a creamy sauce made from aji amarillo and queso fresco. "I am a lover of all things grilled, and the octopus and anticucho are a must-try," Salazar said.

While Moreno, Salazar and Salazar-Gil all believe in the American Dream, it means dif-

ferent things to each of them. For Maria, it's "the sum of the satisfactions that come from the recognition of effort and hard work." For Salazar, "security, freedom and stability for the entire family." And, Moreno? "It's the opportunity this country offers to build a better life through hard work, determination and resilience."

If Charlottesville benefits from the restaurants of immigrants pursuing their dreams, it also deserves some of the credit, said Salazar and Salazar-Gil. "We're grateful for the community welcoming us, supporting us and allowing us to fulfill our dreams," said Salazar. Moreno agreed, and said it's not true everywhere. His first attempt at opening a restaurant, in Florida, failed because the community was not receptive to the flavors, he said. In Charlottesville, he has found the opposite. "I love the Charlottesville community because it is so hospitable and welcoming of new people," he said. "And flavors."

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.