

Art museum conducts sidewalk chalk contest

The Muscarelle Museum of Art's newest competition has artists flocking to sidewalks with chalk. The competition is open to anyone across the United States and runs through midnight July 31.

PAGE 4



THE VIRGINIA GAZETTE

WEDNESDAY, JULY 7, 2021 || Serving Williamsburg, James City & York since 1736

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Luke Schares, center, reads his poem for the patrons at the Chownings Tavern at Colonial Williamsburg on Aug. 5, 2016. STAFF FILE

'A useful, living and workable exhibition'

At 80, Chowning's Tavern continues mission to offer a look at life of middle-class Virginians

By Wilford Kale
Correspondent

Very little is known about Josiah Chowning, the operator of a tavern in Williamsburg from 1766 to 1768, and nothing survives to describe the tavern building, inside or out.

Nevertheless, in the 80 years since the tavern opened in the summer of 1941, Chowning's has become legendary for its food, entertainment and image as a significant 18th century-style Virginia tavern.

Historically, there are only four mentions of Chowning's Tavern in The Virginia Gazette. In Alexander Purdie and John Dixon's Gazette on Oct. 10, 17 and 24, 1766, and two years later on April 7, 1768.

Chowning's early notice said: "I hereby acquaint the Publick that I have opened tavern at the house where I formerly lived, and lately possessed by Mr. John Jeggitts; where all who please to favour me with their custom may depend upon the best of entertainment for themselves, servants, and horses, and good pasturage."

The later ad said William Elliot "has opened Tavern in the house formerly occupied by Mr. Chowning." Both of the advertisements were placed in advance of the General Assembly meetings in Williamsburg in November 1766 and May 1768, most likely to notify assembly members of the new establishments.



The familiar Chowning's Tavern sign was designed to depict a customer extracting a cork from a bottle. COURTESY OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER JR. LIBRARY, THE COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG FOUNDATION

As the restoration of the colonial town developed and in the late 1930s, Colonial Williamsburg wanted to restore the tavern on its Court House Green site (also known as Market Square). But how to do it? Colonial Williamsburg was still in its initial stage and the plans were ever expand-

ing.

"This was an evolutionary process. They were still figuring what people wanted and what the Historic Area was going to be," Matthew Webster, executive direc-

Turn to Tavern, Page 7

NEW KENT COUNTY

Colonial Downs racetrack prepares to have a full season of horse racing

By David Macaulay
Correspondent

When the horses return to Colonial Downs in early July it will feel like a homecoming for Jill Byrne.

The vice president of racing has always been around horses and held high-profile jobs in the racing world. She describes the make-or-buy 2021 season at Colonial Downs in New Kent that begins July 19 as her biggest challenge in three decades in the industry.

Byrne is a horse lover who "stalked" Secretariat at Saratoga as a young girl. She grew up in Barboursville in the heart of

Virginia's equine country. Her father, Peter Howe, was a rider and trainer who trained two Eclipse Award winners.

"My father put me on my first racehorse to gallop when I was 12 but I was riding show horses from the time I was probably 2 or 3 years old," she said.

Byrne spent her summers at Belmont Park and Saratoga racetracks in New York and went to work for famous trainers.

Her then-husband Patrick Byrne was the trainer of 1997 Horse of the Year and Eclipse Award winners Favorite Trick and Countess Diana as well as Awesome Again, the 1998 Breeders' Cup Classic winner.

Before she returned to Virginia to take

a position at Colonial Downs two years ago, Byrne worked as a host and racing analyst for TVG, the director of Broadcast and Programming at Churchill Downs Race-track in Kentucky, and the senior director of racing for the Breeder's Cup.

Her arrival in New Kent coincided with a new era at Virginia's only thoroughbred racetrack.

Colonial Downs was shuttered for five years from 2014 following disputes between the owner and the Virginia Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association. Peninsula Pacific Entertainment bought the

Turn to Season, Page 7

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

Art galleries got a boost in business

Presenting online exhibitions helped bring in an increase in sales, new shoppers

By Gaya Gupta
Staff Writer

It comes to no surprise that local businesses suffered during the pandemic — many industries, particularly those that relied on in-person support, took a hit. But owners of art galleries in Williamsburg say they thrived, finding creative ways to adapt to virtual environments.

The Williamsburg Contemporary Art Center, known for its blue building at 110 Westover Ave., was in the middle of one of its most successful exhibitions, "Untold Stories," before it had to close its doors in March 2020.

"It was a wonderful show, one of the best attended of the year," Janice Wood, president of the WCAC said. "It was so disappointing when we had to shut it down the third week of March."

The exhibition remained online, open for anyone to view. Normally, once a show closes, the paintings on display are not on sale anymore. But since the exhibition was online, the WCAC ended up selling about half a dozen more paintings, even after the show's closing date. And in the exhibitions that followed "Untold Stories," Wood found that people were still contacting them to see if the show's paintings were available for sale, which had never happened in their in-person shows.

Many art galleries, including WCAC, saw that presenting galleries online helped them expand their client base to other parts of the country and to people who were not already familiar with the gallery's exhibitions.

"I didn't have less business," said John Lee Matney, curator at Linda Matney Gallery in Williamsburg. "I just had different business. The people who bought art during COVID were different than the people buying art before."

The Linda Matney Gallery sparked the attention of buyers in the Midwest and the North, while the WCAC sent paintings to a buyer in Texas. Using social media, email blasts and newsletters, galleries sought out new customers who may not have been interested in art before the pandemic.

Another way the WCAC engaged their audience was to put on a virtual exhibition centered around COVID, called "Creativity Reigns During COVID-19." Many of the artists who participated sold their work.

Tom Trimble, founder and owner of the Trimble Collection located in the Village Shops at Kingsmill, didn't find his business to be impacted by COVID at all. In fact, he saw about three times more business than normal, especially after moving to a different display space more accessible to customers.

Trimble specializes in restorations, and he found that many people came in during the pandemic to refurbish art that had been sitting around, a task customers may have been putting off.

"I have as much business as I can handle," he said, adding that he has only taken one day off since the pandemic — and

Turn to Boost, Page 7

Coronavirus

As of 9 a.m. Tuesday, these are the number of cases of the new coronavirus in the state and Historic Triangle:

- 681,326 people in Virginia have tested positive for coronavirus
- 4,689 cases in James City County
- 768 cases in Williamsburg
- 3,808 in York
- 30,651 people across the state have been hospitalized
- 11,434 deaths in the state

Number of residents fully vaccinated

- James City County: 41,167
- Williamsburg: 6,333
- York: 31,484
- Virginia: 4,373,518

Source: Virginia Department of Health

Boost

from Page 1

that was only to move his gallery to a new location.

For Gulay Berryman, gallery director at the Williamsburg Art Gallery, the pandemic didn't affect her day-to-day operations, since she was used to working virtually. Her gallery had switched from a brick-and-mortar store on Merchants Square to a solely online presence in 2018 when she wanted to focus more on her own painting.

Berryman found that her business actually increased during the pandemic, as people put more effort into making their homes — where they were spending all their time — aesthetically pleasing.

"Most started to beautify their homes since they were working at home all the time," she said. "That's why they were more interested in changing their furniture, adding more paintings to their walls."

Matney agreed, guessing that many people were either tired of looking at blank walls or of the art they already had.

He also believes this influx in art sales also has to do with newfound resources to invest in their environment.

"Part of the money people didn't spend on eating out or vacation, they're spending on art," he said.

In addition to exhibiting galleries online, WCAC also moved their classes to Zoom — abstract art, watercolor painting, basket

weaving, and even cooking, which they introduced for the first time over the virtual format.

"The online classes were our success story," Woods said, adding that they helped support the gallery's business while they were closed.

While the WCAC only made about 60%-70% of what they would have normally, Wood is still pleased with how much they were able to accomplish given the circumstances. Putting on an online show was difficult in different ways than the WCAC was used to.

"You have to have a web designer, someone who knows what they're doing," Wood said. "It takes a lot to build a show like that, you have to have good images, you have to have an inventory ... it was a lot."

But she also believes that bringing galleries online helped make art more accessible, and the WCAC plans to continue featuring art and artists from exhibits on the website.

The WCAC is getting ready for their Annual Members show, open only to their members, on July 14, more than a year after it closed its doors to the public. Matney's gallery is currently showing a photography exhibit by Iris Wu, entitled "Echo Fragments," until July 19.

"We're ecstatic," Wood said. "People are so starved for an opportunity to be involved again."

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Tom Trimble, right, owner of The Trimble Collection, saw his art gallery triple business during the pandemic.

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