

COLUMBUS

March | April 2021

Survivor's Quest

Engineer Niyati Tamaskar
writes new chapters in
her life story

Food Trucks // Brisket Nacho Recipe // Critzer Home // Think Local Columbus

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COLUMBUS

MARCH | APRIL 2021

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HOME & FAMILY

Realizing a Dream

Critzer home builds on family ties to the land



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Niyati Tamaskar
photographed by
Angela Jackson

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COLUMBUS

March 25, 2021

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Hello, COLUMBUS

After a long winter, the only thing falling from the sky around here lately is sunshine, and it makes me so happy!

As I write this note, I am in the process of packing for a spring break getaway with my family to Disney World, one of our favorite places outside of Columbus. I remember when we first took our children to Disney several years ago, I had to practically drag my husband along. But since that initial trip, it seems like he is always the one planning our next vacation to the “most magical place on Earth.” We love the friendly atmosphere, the endless entertainment for the kids, and the fact that we can plan nearly every part of the experience months in advance.

So where is your happy place? Whether it's an amusement park, a sandy beach town or a little hideaway right here in Columbus, I hope you have a chance to reenergize there this spring. Get out and soak up some vitamin D while reading this new issue of Columbus magazine. I'm convinced sunshine is good for the soul!



Emilee

Emilee Miller

emiller@aimmediaindiana.com



Barney
Quick

WRITER

MEET THE TEAM

Barney Quick writes for Columbus magazine and myriad other Republic special publications. He's also written for indie-music.com, Arts Indiana and The American Thinker. He has a Substack newsletter called Precipice. He covers area government for Local News Digital. His novel, “High Cat the Sunset Terrace,” is set in Indianapolis in 1948.

Barney is also an adjunct lecturer in rock 'n' roll history and jazz history at IUPUC. In non-pandemic times he plays guitar in a roots-rock band called the Bodhi Coffel and in various jazz configurations.

He and his wife, Wilma, live with their two cats. He does 90 percent of the cooking and generally gets favorable reviews but can always tell when he's not.

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In each issue of Columbus, we ask people for their opinions on a variety of topics. This month's question:

What would be your dream job?



"I am living my dream job. I am fortunate enough to get to do what I love — dance — and the bonus is that I also get to teach others what I love to do and share my passion for dance."

— Ronda Byers



"I have always had a passion for aviation. Growing up, my dad, Eric, had an airplane that we flew around the country for vacations. I always liked to sit in the front with him to watch what he was doing. That turned into a dream of flying for a career."

I began my post-high school education in nursing school, as there were too many pilots for jobs back in 2014. But things turned around, and I thought it was a perfect time to start my flying career.

My dad became an instructor in 2018, and starting in May 2019, he was my instructor through me becoming an instructor in January 2020. Now I am not too far from my goal of becoming a commercial pilot, and my ultimate dream job is to fly transatlantic to Europe and back."

— Jared Bradley



"My dream job is the one I currently have. How lucky am I? As the new music teacher at Richards Elementary School, I get to teach, create, dance to and experiment with music for a living."

I have learned very quickly that my 450 students are creative, joyful and intelligent human beings. It is a privilege to teach them and to work in such a positive school community."

— Tiffany Pao



"My dream is to have a job in the performing arts, because being on stage and doing something that brings joy to people would be really fun."

— Sharon Andrews (with her husband, Patrick Andrews)



"My dream is to be a full-time musician. While I question my own abilities constantly, playing music is something that I've always enjoyed doing. Both of my parents have pretty strong musical backgrounds, and I play with my dad quite a bit still. I play drums and guitar mostly, but I've been known to play some harmonica and keyboards from time to time."

I have been playing at Ceraland regularly during the summer and venues in Bartholomew County and surrounding areas, including an upcoming scheduled gig at Hard Truth Distilling. If I could keep on performing and playing music for a living, it definitely would be my dream job."

— Ruben Guthrie

"My dream job would be in the film industry. I hope to write and direct many films over the course of my life. I want to create meaningful films that have an impact and inspire people to stop and think. I want to use the power of cinema to tell the stories I'm passionate about, especially those of forgotten or marginalized people.

Telling stories from history is also a passion of mine. I grew up from a young age believing that

history needs to be told or we are doomed to repeat it. In a way, my dream job is story-telling, and cinema, my medium in which to tell."

— Kathryn (Kat) Baylor



"The realistic dream job that I'm working on is becoming a mechanical engineer. I love to create and build things, and I think it suits me very well.

The other dream job I have is based on a show called "Top Gear" (or "The Grand Tour" now), in which three buddies review cars and go on adventures. If I could just review cars and go on adventures around the world with my buddies, then I'd think I'd have the best job in the world."

— Jerad George

"The loss of my previous job due to the pandemic allowed me time to refocus on my studies and what I want in life. My dream job would be a research/engineering role in the additive manufacturing and material science fields.

The interconnectivity these types of roles require spans chemistry, metallurgy, engineering, design and production. 3-D printing has the capacity to change the world, from the materials we use to the standard manufacturing

rules that we can now break, and to the complete supply chain revolution it causes."

— Sarah Franklin



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“The Midnight Library”

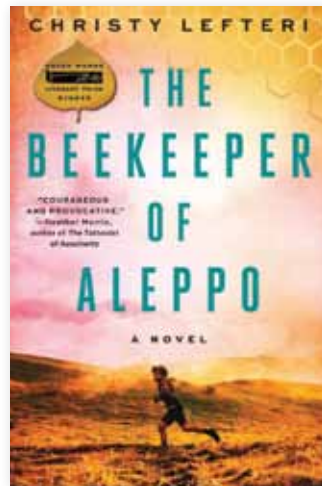
By Matt Haig

Nora Seed is tired of life, tired of regrets and tired of who she has become. After making the decision to end it all, she finds herself in a place between life and death.

In the *Midnight Library*, she finds an infinite number of books that offer her a chance to experience an infinite number of lives that she might have lived had she made different choices.

Haig deals with the serious issues of suicide, regret and depression with a deft hand and an empathetic voice. He takes what could have been a dark, sad story and, instead, takes the reader on a charming, hopeful and uplifting trip down roads not taken.

— Nanne Cutler



“The Beekeeper of Aleppo”

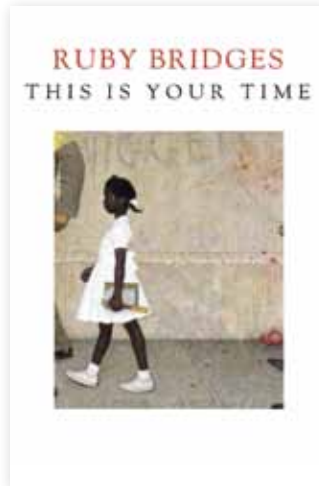
By Christy Lefteri

What does it mean to see? Beekeeper Nuri and his artist wife Afra's lives reflect that question. Having lost everything except each other when the Syrian conflict reaches them in Aleppo, they embark on a dangerous and costly journey to seek asylum in England.

Along the way they encounter the best and worst of human nature as they learn to see a future of possibility.

Lefteri deftly moves among the tragedies of war, the dangers of immigration and the possibility of new life. Because she writes from her personal experience as a volunteer at a refugee center in Greece, the fictional characters reflect the reality of the refugee experience that takes us beyond the daily news into a powerful story of the humans behind the headlines.

— Suzanne Fountaine



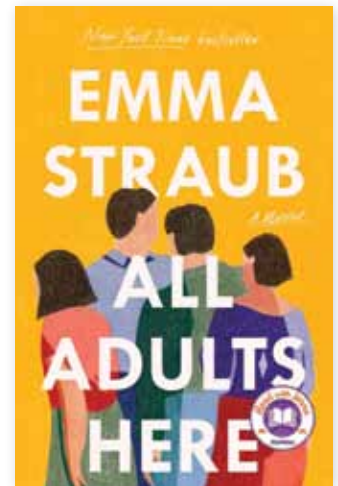
“This Is Your Time”

By Ruby Bridges

As a 6-year-old, Ruby Bridges was the first black student to integrate an all-white school in New Orleans. Sixty years later, the experiences she had and the lessons she learned are still all-too relevant.

Although written for children, this short biography is packed full of impact for readers of all ages. See the civil rights movement of the 1960s through the eyes of a child, then look sadly at the news of today. We can all continue to learn from the bravery exhibited by Bridges and her family.

— Angie Revell



“All Adults Here”

By Emma Straub

In her latest novel Straub tells the story of a moderately dysfunctional family living in Clapham, a fictional small town in New York's Hudson Valley. Astrid Strick is the widowed matriarch of the family, which consists of an unmarried daughter and two married sons and their families. The book focuses on Astrid's relationships with her adult children and one of her grandchildren.

Each of the main characters has a secret or problem that is revealed and eventually resolved through forgiveness, humor, kindness and love.

While touching on challenging topics such as marital infidelity, gender identity, coming out and abortion, Straub tackles them all in this entertaining, fast-paced read with well-developed characters.

— Linda Schmidt



“Invisible Girl”

By Lisa Jewell

This psychological thriller is written from three points of view. Cate Fours is the wife of Roan, who is a child psychologist. Owen Pick is a teacher who has been accused of sexual misconduct and is suspended from his job. Saffyre Maddox is a former patient of Roan's, and the mystery begins when she disappears.

Owen seems the obvious suspect since he was the last one to see her alive. As they are eventually revealed, the dark secrets of each character make it impossible to tell who is really evil and who is not.

I thought I had all the answers, but the author threw in so many twists and turns that I was shocked by the ending.

— Kelli Stricklin



“The Windsor Knot”

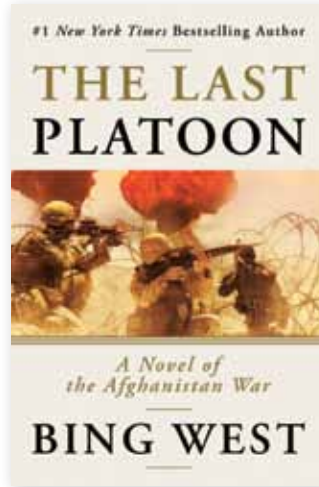
By S.J. Bennett

If you've ever imagined what occupies Queen Elizabeth's thoughts, pick up this fresh take on a uniquely British murder mystery that depicts her as a determined yet discreet behind-the-scenes investigator.

Set in 2016, around the time of her 90th birthday, the monarch's celebration planning is interrupted when a talented young Russian pianist dies at Windsor Castle. At first, investigators believe he committed suicide, but a badly tied Windsor knot soon leads them to suspect foul play.

Queen Elizabeth, unhappy with the mishandling of the case, secures help from her new assistant private secretary and ultimately contributes to solving the case. In this first book in a new series, the queen emerges as a real person; she is witty, worldly, wise and much more aware of what's happening around her than many of her advisers expect. It's fun to think that's exactly the kind of person she is.

— Beth Stroh



“The Last Platoon”

By Bing West

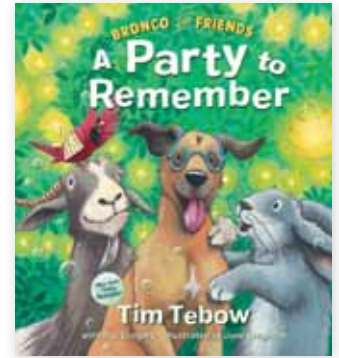
Capt. Diego Cruz doesn't get his promotion to colonel, and his mentor recommends that he volunteer for a special task force as a way to jumpstart his career. He leads a platoon of Marines and CIA operatives whose mission is to protect a tiny base in Helmand — the most violent province in Afghanistan. He must accomplish his mission in spite of an ambitious commanding colonel, fellow officers who do not trust him and young, inexperienced enlisted men — all of whom have no combat experience.

The American president has ordered the CIA to capture a drug lord. With a fortune in heroin at stake, the Taliban joins with the drug lord to wipe out the base. The novel provides a glimpse of the relationships among Afghan locals, Afghan military, American military, CIA, Taliban, drug lords and American politicians.

This exciting tale of moral conflict, savage combat, battlefield bravery and unreliable politicians is set in the context of America's longest war.

— John Stroh

Children's Literature



“A Party to Remember”

By Tim Tebow

You are unique. You are special. And you are wonderful. This is the message sent to children in this book. Many of you may be familiar with the annual global event, Night to Shine, hosted by Tebow. This event is a celebration of individuals with special needs and is the premise for this sweet story.

Bronco the dog and his group of friends, each with a different ability, make their way to a party that celebrates their uniqueness and reminds us all that it is those differences that make us special.

— Celia Allman Watts



MOBILE *Munchies*

Food trucks are popular choices for easy eating



As the food truck craze has continued nationwide in recent years, the Columbus area has certainly seen its own increase in mobile eateries. There's a lot to explore locally in the way of food truck flavor, whether sweet or savory. For your next lunch break, family dinner outing or special event in need of a unique culinary touch, give some fresh meaning to the phrase "to go" and give the following concepts a try.

BY JON SHOULDERS // PHOTOGRAPHY BY JANA JONES



Party Chef

317-331-6591
PARTYCHEFLLC.COM

In 2018 Greg Schmelz decided to launch a catering concept for parties and other types of private and corporate events. Fast-forward to October of last year, as the business continued to pick up steam, and he decided he was ready to purchase a trailer and add a mobile kitchen component to Party Chef.

"We've gotten a lot of good followers since then," Schmelz says. "I'm still kind of doing this part of the business as a side thing and wasn't looking to get real busy real quick, but once we started cooking, mostly at Hog Molly Brewing, it's been busy as we get the kinks worked out with the mobile stuff."

The menu typically features hamburgers, bratwursts and smoked pork chops, with dessert options like key lime pie, crème brûlée and homemade chocolate chip cookies.

"We want to keep it fresh and will keep trying to do new things, but the staples we've been offering like the brats and burgers have been getting good responses," Schmelz says.

Party Chef can handle a range of event or gathering sizes, typically with a \$350 minimum overall price.





Junkyard Barbecue & Ice Cream

812-521-1611

FACEBOOK.COM/JUNKYARDICECREAM

Back in 2015 Toby and Tiffani Calhoun began whipping up homemade ice cream as a fundraiser for the Relay for Life event, which benefits the American Cancer Society and other cancer-related organizations. Feedback was positive, and the couple decided to formalize the ice cream operation, setting up a commissary in their garage.

"After that we thought it was a natural next step to have a truck to sell off of, and it just kept snowballing," says Toby, who previously worked as a surgical tech before forging into the food industry full time. "I always did barbecue as a hobby, and we thought that if we want to be viable year-round, let's add barbecue and then we can do some catering. Then it just exploded. Once the product got out there, everybody loved it."

The couple committed to their business full time in February of last year, and they're now permitted for

business in Johnson, Bartholomew, Jackson, Scott and Jefferson counties. Junkyard's homemade ice cream comes in 8-ounce cups, with flavors like mocha, cookies and cream, imperial vanilla, maple pecan and peach cobbler. Toby says the pineapple flavor, offered in both dairy and non-dairy formats, is particularly popular when warm weather hits.

"We don't use any mixes or powders; it's all homemade," he adds.

The food menu typically includes barbecue sandwiches, pulled pork nachos, a pulled pork mac and cheese, and a grilled barbecue burrito that the Calhouns added to the menu a couple of months ago.

"We take our mac and cheese and our pulled pork and layer everything in a burrito," Toby says, noting that the Junkyard menu also includes low-carb options and soups like loaded potato. "We grill it up and serve it with a side of chips and cheese."

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Several years after opening their successful doughnut spot on Central Avenue in March 2017, the owners of Donut Central were interested in adding what Coleman McLeod, co-manager, calls a “second location on wheels.”

“It’s a half step toward a second location without quite as much investment required up front,” McLeod says. “There are a number of smaller communities inside and outside of Bartholomew County that wouldn’t necessarily be able to support a second brick-and-mortar location but will gladly come out for a food truck once a week or so.”

Thus the Donut Central Mobile Command was born, and it was operational by November of last year. It offers most of the full menu

of doughnuts available at the restaurant except for the gluten-free selections, as well as coffee, soda and milk.

“We’ve had a great response through the winter,” McLeod adds. “There’s a learning curve trying to figure out where to go every week, but we’re figuring it out.”

McLeod says the entire range of doughnut options, including the croissant doughnuts, have been popular with the truck’s customers, including classics like glazed yeast and chocolate sprinkled doughnuts, cream-filled long johns, as well as specialties like maple pecan, cream cheese cinnamon roll and apple fritter.

Check out the website to view a weekly schedule detailing the Donut Central Mobile Command’s whereabouts.

TaColumbus

812-343-1423 | FACEBOOK.COM/ELTACOLUMBUS



Patrons of Hog Molly Brewing Co. might have recently noticed the on-site presence of a mobile truck operated by TaColumbus, which makes occasional stops at the brewery. Owner Jonathan Rodriguez, who runs the TaColumbus brick-and-mortar restaurant on North National Road as well as the eatery's mobile business, plans to increase the truck's presence starting this spring and through the summer months.

"The truck has been something we've only done a little bit of, but I'm planning to do more when it gets warm and there are more places to go where people can be outside and get something to eat," Rodriguez says. "We do catering, and we like being at Hog Molly, and we've done some things with Donut Central. We don't have a normal place where we go, but we try to put it on Facebook when we're going to be somewhere."

Visitors to the TaColumbus mobile truck can sample a portion of the restaurant's full menu, including a range of tacos as well as burritos, sides and drinks.

"Our fried steak tacos are popular, because they're a little different, and we use brisket," Rodriguez adds. "Our Hawaiian tacos are very popular, too." ©

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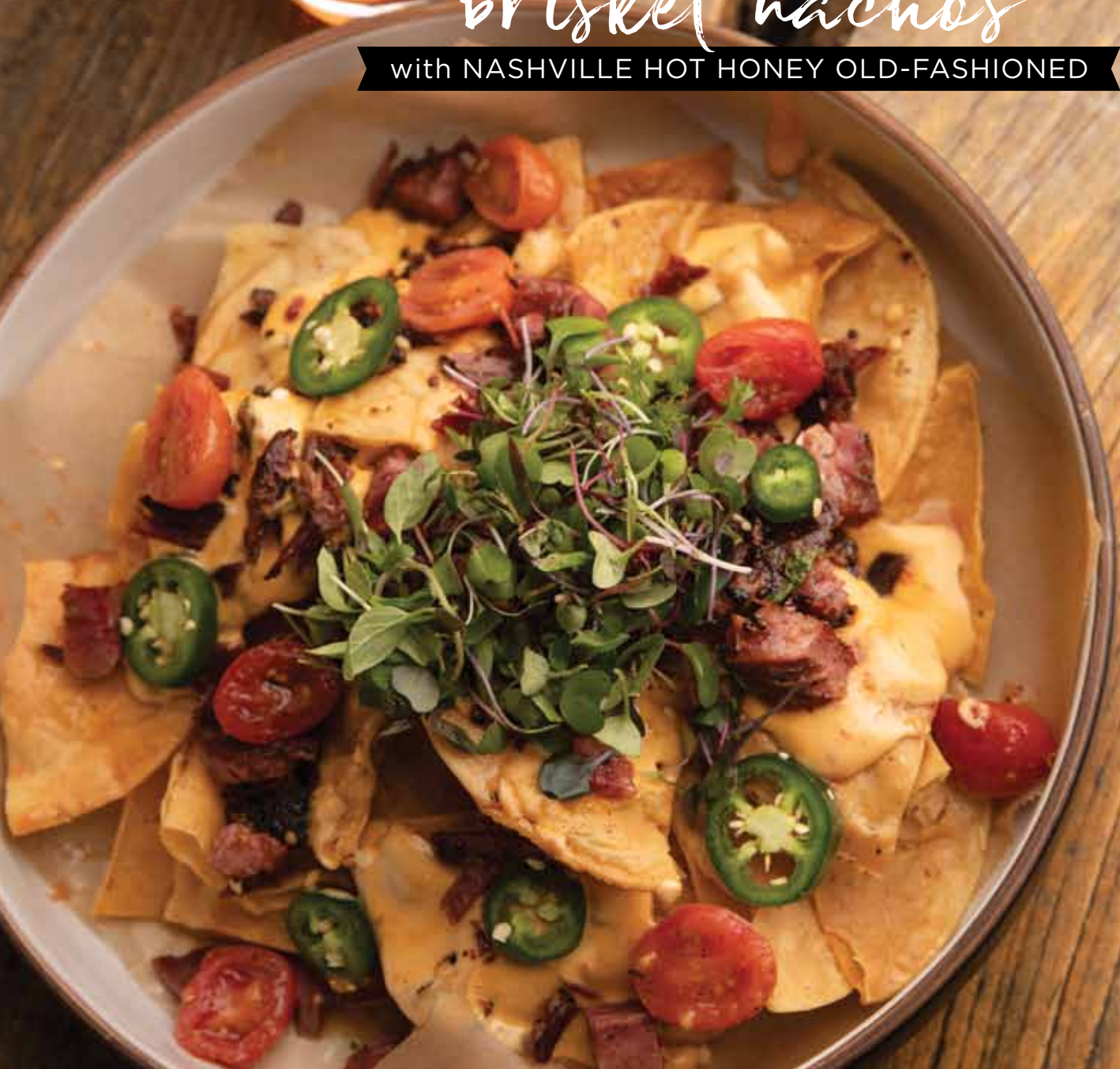


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brisket nachos

with NASHVILLE HOT HONEY OLD-FASHIONED



COURTESY OF THE ORIGINAL BY BIG WOODS RESTAURANT GROUP
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JANA JONES

BRISKET NACHOS

1 quart tortilla chips
*½ cup nacho cheese sauce**
6 ounces smoked brisket, cubed
*2 ounces grape tomatoes, grilled***
1 ounce jalapeños, sliced
¼ cup Sweet Baby Ray's Original BBQ sauce

Gather all ingredients. If you do not own a smoker, you can get smoked brisket from the grocery deli. Have them cut the brisket to a half-inch thickness.

Lay the brisket slices onto a cutting board and cut into half-inch strips, then cut across the strips to create cubes. In a saute pan, heat cubes on stove top until warm and set aside.

Add tortilla chips to bowl and distribute warm nacho cheese sauce over top. Add warmed brisket pieces to bowl. Drizzle Sweet Baby Ray's liberally over the entire surface of the nachos.

Top with charred grape tomatoes and jalapeño slices.

* Nacho cheese recipe makes 6 cups of sauce for up to 12 plates of nachos or for fewer plates and plenty of extra cheese for additional dipping.

**To grill tomatoes: Halve grape tomatoes lengthwise, place in a saute pan and cook on the stove until they are slightly charred and starting to wilt.

NACHO CHEESE SAUCE

1 quart whole milk
2 cups Velveeta cheese

On stovetop, place medium saucepan on burner set to medium-high heat.

Cut Velveeta into 1-inch cubes and set aside.

Add milk to the preheated saucepan. Begin to add cheese cubes a little at a time, mixing with whisk until cheese is fully melted before adding more.

Once all of the cheese is in and the mixture is smooth, the sauce can be served immediately or kept in a slow cooker set to warm for up to three hours. Store in the refrigerator for up to four days.



NASHVILLE HOT HONEY OLD-FASHIONED

*2 ounces Sipes' Straight
Bourbon Whiskey*
*½ ounce Jalapeño hot honey
simple syrup*
3 dashes Peychaud's bitters
1 dash Angostura bitters
*Bourbon-soaked cherry and
rolled dill pickle slice picked
together, for garnish*

Add all liquid ingredients to mixing beaker, then top with ice and stir with bar spoon for 10 seconds. Add ice ball to rocks glass and single-strain mixture into glass over ice ball. Place cherry and pickle slice in drink to garnish.



INTO THE WOODS



Critzers find themselves at home in the country

BY GLENDA WINDERS // PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANGELA JACKSON

Gary and Michelle Critzer had their home built in the western part of the county eight years ago. The story of the land is almost as interesting as the house itself. Gary's grandfather was a dean and athletic director at Columbus High School who also managed Columbus Youth Camp. He bought 100 acres in the country, created a lake and built a house there in the 1960s. Later two sons (one of them Gary's dad) built there, too. For many years the family operated Genth Christmas Tree Farm on the property.



"I sort of grew up out here — running, hunting and riding motorcycles," Gary said. "My parents waited until I was 16 and could drive before they moved out here so they wouldn't have to run me back and forth."

Age 16 was also when he met the young woman who would eventually become his wife. Both students at Columbus North High School, Gary

played football, ran track and swam, and Michelle was a cheerleader. After one of her girlfriends told him Michelle thought he was cute, he came to a game where she was cheering and invited her out for pizza afterward. During the ride home she asked him what they would do on their next date. He teased her by answering, "Oh, are we going out again?"

"I was embarrassed, but we just clicked," she said.

They dated through the rest of high school and college, even though she went to Purdue and he went to Vincennes University.

Meant to be

"We dated other people," Michelle said, "but we always communicated, and he came to visit me. I fell in love with him because of his morals and ethics. He loves his family, he loves nature and we're alike in our Christian spirituality. Neither one of us ever found anyone who matched up as well."

They married after college in 1984 and raised two daughters, Brelyn, now 33, and Bianca, 30. The women, both educators, are now married with families of their own.

When the couple decided to build their forever dream house, the family acreage seemed like the obvious place. But before they came to that conclusion, they had a lot of conversations to weigh their options.

"I love the outdoors, but I had never lived out of town," Michelle said, "so he was a little bit leery about me coming out to the country. I was more leery about the drive."

But there were also pluses. They wanted to be closer to Gary's now-widowed mother while not crowding her independence. Besides that, Michelle had noticed that since Gary had retired from the Columbus Police Department he stayed inside their Lafayette Avenue house when she knew he longed to be outside doing the things he loved — walking, hiking, hunting and cutting wood.

Once they made the decision, they began looking through catalogs, magazines and websites to find the plan they wanted to build, but nothing incorporated all of the special features they wanted in their home — a French country house like those they had seen in Europe with lots of room to entertain that would allow them to age in place. They told close designer friends about their frustration, and the friends said they would take a crack at the project. Three months later the Critzers had the blueprint they had sought.

A strong connection

The next step was interviewing several builders, after which they decided on Banister Construction. "Tom Banister said yes to everything we wanted," Michelle said. "He is an out-of-the-box thinker in his homes, and he was into everything we wanted to do that was so different."

Banister felt like it was a good fit, too.

"We enjoy new and unique and creative things to do," he said, "so it's a good opportunity for us when people bring ideas to the table that we can take and run with. They





had good vision of what they wanted, and we gave them feedback as a sounding board about what we might recommend. They had great ideas and true excitement throughout the project, which makes our job fun.”

The result was a home that checked every item on their list, starting with their organizing principle of simplicity. They had loved the “quaint” two-story, brick house they left in town, but it had been decorated with items that fit its architecture. Now they wanted sleek and modern, so they had a big garage sale before they left.

“We got rid of the stuff you move from one attic to the next,” Gary said, “and we

said never again. Unless it has sentimental value, if we don’t use it in a couple of years we’re going to get rid of it.”

Michelle added, “If you use simplicity as a value, it is so much easier to clean, and it clears your head and you feel more organized. As we have grown as a couple, simplicity has become more important to us.”

Natural views

Another reason for not having lots of tchotchkes was that they didn’t want anything to interrupt the stunning forest view that greets visitors the moment they enter. Eight sets of French doors — some of them stationary — face the woods.

“We want people to walk in and feel like they’re still outside,” Michelle said. “We want them to see the beauty that’s all around us.”

Most of the first floor of the 3,700-square-foot house is a great room, since one of the couple’s priorities is entertaining. They’ve hosted family get-togethers, bridal and baby showers, and holiday parties here. Since both of their daughters live in Columbus, their four grandchildren are frequent visitors, too.

A dining table that seats 10 leads the eye directly from the front door to the view. On out through the French doors is a long patio where they can set up extra tables and chairs for gatherings or let the grand-

children play while the adults sit on the steps and visit.

The interior design plan here and throughout the entire house combines Michelle's passion for black, gray, taupe, metallics, animal prints and fur with Gary's love of the outdoors. The wooden dining table is textured, as are many of the finishes throughout the home, and the two chandeliers over it are made from faux antlers. The eight chairs along each side are covered with black velveteen, and the captain's chairs at the ends are silver.

In their last house the Critzers had taken out a wall between the living room and kitchen so guests could congregate where the cook was. This time they planned for that in advance. The oversized island that divides the kitchen and dining area provides seating for six as well as plenty of room for the cook to work and space for buffet service. Hidden beneath the island is lots of storage space that opens with a touch, and on one side is a drawer that is actually a microwave.

Aging in place

"As we get older we won't be taking something out and maybe spilling it on ourselves," Michelle said. "We'll be lifting it up, which is easier." Ditto the induction range, where the pots get hot instead of the burners.

"I can turn the burner on and put my hand on it, and it won't burn because my hand's not magnetic," Michelle said. "It's great for older people and children. Even if I've been cooking something, it doesn't stay hot."

The all-electric home uses geothermal heating and cooling, which is environmentally friendly and reduces utility bills.

Instead of kitchen cabinets they installed sleek gray drawers so that as they age they can easily reach low items. Anything typically found on countertops — toaster, coffeemaker and the like — is hidden behind doors. Upper cabinets have frosted glass fronts.

The Critzers chose their flooring also with their lifestyle in mind. They had planned on hardwood but at

the last minute changed their minds in favor of pale gray, easy-care engineered wood.

"We were going to live in the middle of the woods," Gary said, "and I knew we were going to get mud and rocks and friends and family and chairs and dogs." In fact a new goldendoodle puppy, Filson, recently joined the household.

The utility room is just off the kitchen on this main floor, another lesson they learned from their previous home, where the washer and dryer were in the basement. Also here are a sink, large pantry,



cupboard for storing linens and closet for Gary's outdoor gear.

There is a basement that currently serves as a playroom for the grandchildren. Banister's team finished the walls in a brick pattern that was easy to paint and provided a more polished look for whatever they eventually decide to do with the space. Also down there are a guest bedroom and a full bathroom.



At the other end of the great room on the main floor is a comfortable living area with sofas arranged around the focal point — a huge concrete, Old World-style fireplace. Gary insisted on a fireplace insert that uses the wood he cuts, and in the winter the couple enjoy a fire every morning and evening.

Upstairs, downstairs

They decided to have two master bedrooms — one for now and one for a future time when they might not be able to negotiate the stairs to the second floor. The downstairs bedroom is currently a luxury guest room, where the shower in the full bath has river rock as its floor, and three sparkling chandeliers light the areas over the sinks and tucked-away toilet. The shelves in its walk-in closet house toys and games at the moment since the grandchildren are all still small and often play here instead of downstairs.

Outside the bedroom is a private covered patio, complete with comfortable seating, TV and fireplace — the other side of the one indoors. The beamed ceiling from the great room continues out here, and the flooring is stone pavers.

A smaller bedroom on this floor currently functions as a game room. It was formerly Gary's office, but he has downsized his operation into the closet, where he can close the door when it is not in use. One of the French doors is in this room, and when Michelle was working on her master's degree a few years back, she said it was a great place to study. It is also a sunny spot where her potted plants can safely winter. A black-and-white bathroom completes the

downstairs floor plan.

The second floor is completely devoted to a master suite. The French doors in the bedroom open onto a balcony where the couple like to have their morning coffee. In case they can't be outside, a pair of cozy chairs still allows them to enjoy the view. A mirrored chest of drawers is the only piece of furniture for storage in the entire house. In their effort to streamline, a massive walk-in closet with built-in shelves and drawers performs that function.

In this room as in others, wall space is limited because of the many windows, and they use what there is for family photos. The decor here, too, combines Michelle's love of lighting and shine with Gary's more rustic aesthetic. When the drum chandelier over the bed is on at night, the light that filters through its shade resembles sunlight coming through the leaves on a tree.

The master bath on this floor is the culmination of wishes they had when they lived in the smaller home, such as a long vanity with generous sinks and multiple mirrors. Accent tiles in the walk-in shower are metallic, and here, as in the other bathrooms, the shower has a bench in case they need it later. A soaking tub nestles in an alcove beneath a chandelier.

"We can stay up here all day if we want to," Michelle said. "I would recommend a retreat like this to anyone who is building a house."

Next steps

This year she is wrapping up her career as an elementary teacher with her kindergarten class at Parkside Elementary School. She has taught most



“We can stay up here all day if we want to. I would recommend a retreat like this to anyone who is building a house.”

— Michelle Critzer



elementary grades here and at Schmitt Elementary School, but after earning her master’s in reading she wanted to give younger children a strong foundation in that area.

She was eligible for retirement a year ago, but she said she felt like there was something still left for her to do. When COVID-19 struck, she knew what that was. She stayed on to help colleagues, students and their parents through the difficult time, but she says this year is definitely her last.

She is looking forward to being at home with Gary and doing the things they like to do. Her interests are hiking, exercising and flower gardening, while he said one of his free time loves is playing golf. They both said their favor-

ite pastime at the moment is spending time with their grandchildren.

But these two aren’t likely to take it easy for long. Gary already does some work in the public safety sector, and Michelle is toying with the idea of parlaying her love of fashion and design into a second career.

She said she has never regretted moving to the country and the place where Gary has so much history.

“I feel like when I’m driving out of town and coming toward the sunset, I’m decompressing,” she said. “The farther I come toward my home and the farther into the woods I get, the more serene and calm and peaceful I feel. This house is us. It’s our mark on this property.”©

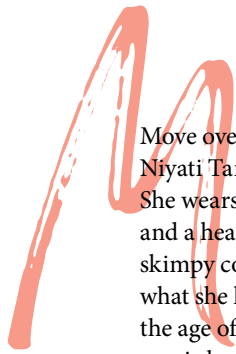


ENGINEERING *Change*

Niyati Tamaskar confronts challenges
with intelligence and determination

BY GLENDA WINDERS // PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANGELA JACKSON





Move over Wonder Woman! Niyati Tamaskar is in town. She wears a Cummins shirt and a headset in place of a skimpy costume and tiara, but what she has accomplished at the age of 37 would leave the comic book superhero shaking her head. And she has done it all with enthusiasm and quite a bit of nerve.

Tamaskar's story begins in Mumbai, a city of 19 million people on the west coast of India

where there is no concept of independent houses and the only way to expand is up. That being the case, she was brought up in an apartment complex by her physician mother and civil engineer father. Although the family was Hindu, she and her sister went to an all-girls Catholic school because it provided the best English education.

"It was important to know English if you wanted to progress your career, to have a stable future and

to play in the world market and be global," she said. "From the time we were young my parents had their priorities straight. Education was of the utmost importance."

Indeed, despite her father's death when Tamaskar was a

teenager, her mother took what she calls "a leap of faith" and allowed her to come to the United States so that she could study engineering at Ohio State University. One reason for choosing OSU was that she had relatives living nearby with whom she could spend school breaks and holidays. Another was that U.S. engineering schools have more funding and resources than those in India.

"Here's an example," she said. "I used to work in the electroscience laboratory on network analyzers — machines that help you process signals. In the early 2000s one single machine cost \$100,000. At OSU we had a lab with 10 of them. We used them in pairs, with two students working on one machine. In India one of those network analyzers comes to town and goes to each of the engineering facilities, and 50 to 60 students sit and watch the professor demonstrate."

Coming to America

In her senior year she went to a job fair and explained to each of the recruiters that she needed to join a company that would sponsor her work visa. When the representative from Caterpillar Inc. told her they reserved their sponsorships for exceptional students, she challenged him to give her an interview so that she could prove she was qualified. She got the interview and the job, which took her to Peoria, Illinois.

It was there that she met her husband, Nuwan Gallege, also an engineer at Caterpillar. A travel-lover who has been all over the world, she was preparing for a four-day hike to



Peru's Machu Picchu. She had some questions for someone who had already done the trip, so a friend introduced her to Gallege. While they were talking, she asked him what he would be doing for vacation, and he said he and a friend were going to Patagonia and Argentina.

"So then I wanted to one-up him," she said, laughing. "I said, 'This Christmas I'm going to Spain and Portugal by myself,' and he said, 'I'm taking my parents to Cambodia.' I thought, 'Just marry me now!'"

Marry they did, in two ceremonies that sound like scenes from a movie. Following the Hindu ceremony in India they arranged tours of the Taj Mahal and the southern state of Kerala for guests who had come from all over the world, including 30 colleagues from Peoria. Then they all went to Gallege's home, Sri Lanka, and had a Buddhist ceremony there. Afterward they rented a luxury, 50-seat bus and took their friends and relatives for a three-day tour of the island country.

"That's what we had instead of a romantic, intimate honeymoon," she said, "and I wouldn't change it for anything."

Another change

Not long after that came the opportunity to move to England, and the couple jumped at the chance. Their new home was in Royal Leamington Spa, part of the country's engineering and industrial hub. They bought a house built in 1824 and remodeled it, doing most of the work themselves in what Tamaskar calls "a good test of our new marriage."

During their stay in England she left Caterpillar and



joined Cummins, where she worked on 60- and 91-liter natural gas engines for power generators. After they had lived there for three years, her husband joined Cummins, too, and in October 2013 they arrived in Columbus.

A year later their next adventure began with the birth of their son, Vihaan, now 6. Their daughter, Aarini, arrived in 2017. But their roll of good fortune came to a stunning halt when Tamaskar was diagnosed with breast cancer a year after that.

"I thought it was mastitis," she said. "There was no way it could be cancer. I was 34 and breast-feeding."

Scientific approach

But it was cancer, so she took on this new challenge with a vengeance. Her treatment began with seven cycles of chemotherapy, during which she never missed a day of work.

"Cummins would have afforded me as much leave as I wanted, and they looked out for my well-being," she said. "But I wanted to occupy my mind with something other than cancer. With free time I would end up looking at statistics and prognoses, and I didn't need that in my life at that point."

She took her laptop with her to the infusion center, often putting on her headphones and



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plugging into meetings. When colleagues heard the “beep, beep” of the machines in the background and asked her where she was, she answered breezily, “Oh, I’m at the infusion center having chemotherapy.”

It was followed by a double mastectomy that also removed some lymph nodes, and after that came 28 sessions of radiation. Tamaskar says her recovery was in part because of the support of friends, neighbors and people she didn’t even know in Columbus.

“If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a bloody army to beat cancer,” she said, “and that’s what I had — an army of people, all locals.”

Unending help

A neighbor provided dinner every Wednesday throughout the many weeks of her treatments and recovery. A hairstylist refused to take payment after she realized the cut she was giving Tamaskar was because she was losing her hair. The photographer who took family pictures before the

surgery — because her client was afraid of not looking like herself later — also would not take money.

A neighbor told her church group about the situation, and they started sending notes telling her they were praying for her. An email that went to colleagues asking for people to provide meals got a big response, and none touched her more than when a complete stranger brought a meal to her door while his family waited in the car.

“When you have a pregnant wife and a toddler and you still go out of your way to prepare a meal and drop it off to a person you’ve never met, that is incredible,” she said. “It’s part of the Columbus community. People just step up.

“I think it’s a function of living in the Midwest,” she said. “In general I think people in small towns are friendlier. Time and again the community has come together to help me. It doesn’t have anything to do with your ethnicity or your race. I would say the kind of support I got is unparalleled. I cannot imagine anywhere else in the world where I’ve lived before that people would be that generous.”

Telling her story

With the surgery behind her, she still wasn’t able to resume her normal activities because of instructions to rest her arms, so she began writing about her experience.

“I was basically a T. rex,” she said, laughing. “But if I was idle, I started thinking about recurrence, long-term survival rates and lamenting about my newly disfigured, amputated body. Writing was cathartic.”

One of the experiences she wrote about was looking through the catalog her recon-





struction surgeon showed her of how her new body could look and noticing that there were no people of color in the book.

“When I don’t see pictures of a body that looks like mine, I’m not able to relate,” she said. “I don’t know what my future will look like. How do we insert minority women?”

Tamaskar said she has faced more gender than racial discrimination in her lifetime, however.

“If you think it’s challenging being a white woman, try being a minority woman. In a previous job I was told that I would not be considered for a role because of optics — meaning a white male engineer was selected for a customer-facing role.”

She hadn’t set out to write a book, but she realized that her experiences might help other

“If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a bloody army to beat cancer, and that’s what I had — an army of people, all locals.”

— Niyati Tamaskar

women be more open about theirs. As a Hindu, she had struggled with the idea her illness might be caused by karma and be her own fault. She said that in India cancer is a taboo subject that is so stigmatized that women are afraid to seek treatment for fear of bringing shame to their families, and doctors won’t even say the word or look at their patients.

In her typical get-it-done fashion she hired an editor and a cover designer and self-published “Unafraid: A Survivor’s Quest for Human Connection,” the earnings from which

she gives to the American Cancer Society. So far she has donated \$800. She also recorded the TED talk, “Cultural Bias and Stigma Associated With Cancer.”

Sympathy and support

The response has been greater than she ever expected.

“Women started coming out of the woodwork and telling me they were having treatments, but nobody knew,” she said. “They told me, ‘I need support,’ so I provide support. I go to chemo infusion with them, take a care package, talk

on the phone, discuss their symptoms — just be there.”

She respects these women’s privacy, but she encourages them to share their diagnosis and accept the help they deserve.

“How hard would my journey have been without all of the support I had?” she said. “For women going through that in isolation, that is next-level tough.”

She has also been contacted by a production team for www.breastcancer.org to tell the

story of her reconstruction surgery so that minorities and women of color can see someone who looks like them and has gone through the same process.

Her radiation oncologist, Kevin McMullen, applauds her advocacy for other women.

“Niyati is an outstanding, selfless and passionate advocate for patients who contact her after hearing her story,” he said. “She is the greatest example in my career of the

level of self-advocacy needed for patients to feel high levels of confidence in their care. Some patients are afraid to ask questions or raise concerns due to feeling like they are not qualified to challenge their doctors

or don’t want to seem like a ‘complainer.’ I encourage my patients to constantly ask questions and to feel comfortable doing so. I never had to encourage Niyati.”

Tamaskar said other diseases also carry stigma, such as lung cancer, where the assumption is that the patient was a smoker. The message she hopes to convey to the friends and family of people who are diagnosed is to support without judgment.

“Speculating about the cause of someone’s cancer inadvertently puts blame on the survivor,” she said. “The best thing you can say is, ‘I’m so sorry this is happening to you.’”

When it was time to return to work, she had doubts. “I told Nuwan I didn’t know if I could go back to work. I said, ‘I feel so empty. How am I making a difference?’”

His response was reminding her that the last engine she helped design was powering a village in Nigeria. Also about that time a Black physician friend told her what an inspiration she was to his daughters as a woman and an engineer.



Leading women

She works in the fuel systems department as a technical manager – new product development for Cummins Electronics. She also serves as North American leader for Cummins Women in Technology, whose goal is “to develop, recognize and inspire leaders while advancing gender inclusion in the Cummins engineering organization.”

Her objectives, she said, are “to champion personal development and build leadership skills, increase technical awareness on new technologies across the globe, and provide this team of women engineering leaders an opportunity to network and share best practices.”

She is clearly the woman for the job since she enjoys the high regard of her colleagues. One of those is Gary Johansen, vice president, power systems engineering.

“Niyati’s passion for her work and for getting things done is really impressive,” he said. “As a planner of future technology, she deals with uncertainty on a regular basis. The way she picks apart problems and attacks them is one of her key strengths. Watching her battle and conquer her cancer made it clear that she brings these same strengths to other significant challenges she faces.”

“She is a planner, and her background as an engineer has only strengthened those skills. What really is most amazing, though, is to see Niyati’s courage,” Johansen said. “As she began to address the jarring news of learning she had cancer, she quickly turned to her network of support, her skills, her medical care and her sense of humor to navigate her path amidst her fears.”

“She is the epitome of cour-

age, and now she has found a new voice within herself to advocate for others publicly and be a source of support for others going through difficult life challenges. I’m so grateful to be in her presence.”

Role model

Tamaskar also volunteers with Girls Inc., where she teaches science and engineering. “As a woman engineer in a profession that is typically male-dominated, I’ve proven that I can do it,” she said, “and another little girl looking at me knows she can do it, too.”

She’s teaching her children Hindi, a challenge since her first language is Marathi, her husband’s is Sinhala and they speak English as their common tongue. They try to get home every other year, which involves a sweep of India, Sri Lanka and Dubai to see relatives. She said it is important to them that their children know that part of the world. And she’s writing another book, this one about being a cancer survivor.

“All along through the treatment there’s an army of people helping you out,” she said, “and when you’re done you’re supposed to be fine. So now who do you call on? You don’t know how to be normal again. That transition takes some relearning to live your life.”

She also sees her life being one of increased advocacy.

“It’s so important for cancer patients to reach out to their community, loved ones, friends, managers and bosses to get that support. My purpose has become to help women of color and minorities to become self-advocates, to have the courage to ask their doctors about their treatment plans or seek a second opinion. Part of my own survivorship journey is to help others. It keeps me going.” ☺



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COMMUNITY FIRST

Think Local Columbus designed to boost pandemic-affected businesses

BY BARNEY QUICK // PHOTOGRAPHY BY TONY VASQUEZ



2020 was a rough year economically. While society tried to tentatively reopen for a while, it became apparent, as the second wave of the coronavirus got underway, that many kinds of businesses still had to take unusual and economically challenging steps to balance commerce and public health.

It exacerbated a trend that had already been underway for some time. People have increasingly shopped online for several years, and the pandemic gave them yet another reason to do so.

Fifteen volunteers organized by the Columbus Area Chamber of Commerce in late September

and early October were, according to chamber President Cindy Frey, “passionate about doing something to help restaurants, retailers and service providers” over the approaching holiday season. Discussions ensued about how to structure their campaign.

The name, Think Local Columbus, was intended to broaden the scope from getting people to spend dollars within the city to getting them to consider how many of their needs as consumers and social creatures can be met here.

It was going to be the kind of effort that would benefit from a brand. Columbus-based graphic designer Brooke Hawkins created a logo.

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Minash Boutique co-owners, from left, Ashton Swegman and Mindy Setser

Kaitlyn Suppes, one of the volunteers and an agent with Realty One, spearheaded the social media strategy.

“Given COVID regulations, the typical move of putting a poster on a store window wasn’t going to get us far,” she says. She soon established a presence for Think Local Columbus on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.

Kami Adams of the chamber created a website. Along with photos of local businesses showing off their products, the site provides a one-stop listing of community events, as well as a page devoted to business resources.

Sip and shop

The real launch occurred Nov. 5 in conjunction with the Downtown Wine Walk organized by the Downtown Merchants Association, of which the chamber is a member. That event has been held for a few years, and as the name suggests, it involves shops in the business district offering a

taste of the nectar of the grape to those stopping by.

“We had a great response that night,” says Suppes.

“It was crazy to see all these small businesses supporting each other,” adds fellow volunteer Maranda Maxie, who in her occupational life handles residential design and sales for Overhead Door of South Central Indiana.

A professional photographer

was enlisted to document the proceedings. That yielded some shots of shoppers interacting with store staff and restaurant staff that have proven useful in ongoing publicity efforts.

A month after the wine walk, Think Local was again on the scene for Not So Silent Night, another downtown event. That evening made Suppes realize the value of conversations with merchants and other shoppers.

“You value those relationships even more,” she says.

Crissy Riley, a volunteer who works at Aim Digital Media, took note of the number of shoppers who were toting bags from several stores, indicating that they didn’t just go downtown for one item.

The social media outreach became a way to engage in educational activities.

“For businesses that didn’t have the proper resources or assets to help themselves during COVID, we’ve provided learning opportunities enabling them to keep relevant and be able to stay on track to stay open,” says Suppes.



Beth Stroh, owner of Viewpoint Books

Online visibility

One such training she offered was showing businesses how to operate and leverage a Google My Business account. A Google My Business page shows those searching the web your location, hours of operation and reviews from customers.

"The point is to make sure the business is getting in front of the right clients," says Suppes. "We also did a class on setting up a Facebook page that showed people how to properly post videos. We offered tools and tips that allow people to successfully run these accounts."

"We've always thought of this as a two-pronged approach," says Riley. "We're promoting the businesses to get consumers to shop there, but we're also arming the businesses to meet the demands of growth."

Suppes cites My Mobility Plus, which sells home health products, as an example of a business that told Think Local that it had seen concrete benefits from taking training.

"The owner sent me emails afterward to follow up on various things, and by the time of its opening, it was clear she had heeded what we covered regarding what to put in a video and when to post videos" for maximum effect.

Maxie has lived in Columbus for only five years. One thing she's realized is that since the city is the largest community in a sizable area of south-central Indiana, it had no larger neighbors to rely on for economic support.

"All we have is each other," she says. "It's been so nice to see us coming together in the

wake of COVID. This group has business owners' backs, as well as consumers' backs."

Riley says the team's next area of focus is services. "A lot of people don't consider advertising agencies, dentists and realtors as part of a shop-local effort," she says.

She mentions using local hotels, which have seen a downturn in out-of-town patronage, as places to throw birthday parties during the pandemic.

Some new funding has allowed Think Local Columbus to take a longer-term approach.

"We were really kind of grassroots until the Custer and Nugent Foundations awarded us a grant to spend time and money in the media market," says Frey. "We're going to start with some radio."

Adams mentions that Think Local has launched a contest in which shoppers carry business-size cards for collecting signatures at local establishments. Accumulating eight signatures by March 1 makes the shopper eligible for prizes.

Jonas Howell, one of the volunteers, a chamber board member and vice president of business services at Centra Credit Union, stresses that even big box stores in the city qualify as local.

"They pay wages to local citizens," he notes. "That was a major contributing factor" for him to join the Think Local team. "Everything we buy here gets money back into our local economy and supports what we want to do as a community."

Says Frey, "The healthier our businesses are, the healthier our community is." ☺



"All we have is each other. It's been so nice to see us coming together in the wake of COVID. This group has business owners' backs, as well as consumers' backs."

— Maranda Maxie



Cruisers - Sports Bikes - ATVs

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432 S Cherry Street - Columbus, Indiana

Maintenance - Repairs - Diagnostics
Customizations - Tires

IN-3563086

Katie Luken & Nick Likens

*Ceremony at Irwin Gardens; reception at Factory 12 Event Loft
Sept. 25, 2020*

Katie Luken and Nick Likens were born and raised in Columbus. Katie is a first grade teacher at Southside Elementary School.

The couple met when they were students at Columbus North High School. They were friends and then officially started dating. Their first date was to the prom their senior year.

"After dating for eight years, we got engaged on Dec. 21, 2018. Although I had been anticipating this day for a long time, the actual engagement was a complete surprise to me," Katie said. She had finished her last day of teaching before Christmas break. When Nick got home from work, he asked her to come outside.

"When I opened the door, I saw a brand new Jeep Grand Cherokee with a red Christmas bow on top. As I was checking the car out, I turned around to see Nick down on one knee. After that, both families showed up to help us celebrate. It was such a special day," she said.

They had originally planned to get married in Indianapolis. They spend a lot of time in the city because Nick works there, and also a lot of the bridal party is from Indy. They set a date of June 13 and booked the Biltwell.

"We had all our vendors lined up and ready to go, and then COVID hit. After lots of thinking and praying, we decided to move our wedding day out a couple of months. This was not an easy decision. We reached out to Factory 12 Event Loft in Columbus, and they luckily had a Friday open in September. We chose The Loft because it had the same vibe that we fell in love with at Biltwell," Katie said.

They chose Irwin Gardens for the ceremony, picturing the seasonal colors.

"The decor was inspired from Pinterest. I knew I wanted a lot of greenery with some soft blush/nude colors. Pomp & Bloom really nailed my vision, especially after having to change some of the flowers due to the season changing from summer to fall," Katie said.

The couple had planned a honeymoon to St. Lucia but decided to postpone it.

"We want to be able to fully enjoy our honeymoon experience and therefore we are planning to wait until there are less travel restrictions/guidelines," Katie said.





Maranda Morgan & Mitchell Maxie

*Ceremony at St. John Sauers
Lutheran Church; reception at
Factory 12 Event Loft
Nov. 14, 2020*

Maranda Morgan and Mitchell Maxie have lived in Columbus for about five years. His family lives in Seymour and her family lives in Greenwood, so Columbus was the perfect fit for them.

They met through their families at a cookout several years ago. Mitchell proposed at Ruth's Chris Steak House in Indianapolis. Her mother had passed away when Maranda was 15, and he proposed on her mom's birthday.

"Popping the question on her birthday in front of my family really made it even that much more special," Maranda said.

The couple chose a classic look for the wedding with ivory, gold and a touch of greenery.

"I think one of the things that made it stand out for our guests was definitely our photo area with our personalized neon sign. So many photos were taken by it all evening," Maranda said.

She said they were excited and couldn't believe that their day had finally arrived. "Of course you have all of the wedding day jitters, but as soon as we saw one another, all the nerves just went away. It was an amazing day," she said.

The couple had planned a trip to London but postponed due to COVID-19.

"Instead, we took a 'fake honeymoon' to Fort Myers Beach for a few days. It was definitely a much-needed getaway after nonstop wedding planning for a year," Maranda said.







Botany Class

Spring is in full flower outside Columbus North High School.

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