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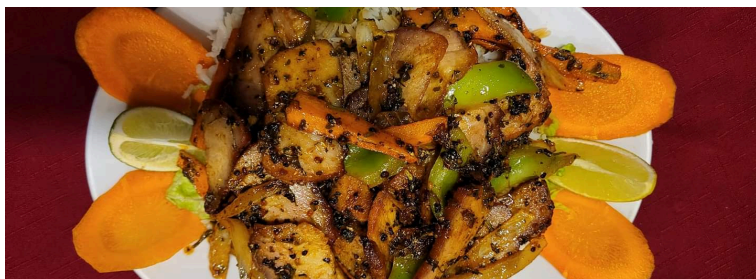
Within Winchester's Central Blocks Stands 9 Historic Churches Serving as Monuments to Winchester's Early Faithful Christians

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Thank You, Pastor Dan Nicholson  
Phone: 540-327-4693  
[www.genesisprimitivechurch.org](http://www.genesisprimitivechurch.org)



## SONA: CHEF SHIV



## LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Winchester natives and visitors alike are gearing up for the Bloom as we complete May's edition, and whether or not you attend the festivities, there is a true change in the air each year. To me it's the official start of spring, with alternating rain and sunshine, plenty of time on patios with friends, and roaming town meeting new residents!

New additions are popping up on the walking mall with a rooftop bar at the new Paladin location, Terri Hardin is bringing a cheese shop, the Monument has reopened and we look forward to the 18th Rebellion! So much to bring you this season!

We'll see you in Old Town!



*Misty Weaver & Katie Jordan*

**WE ARE  
WINCHESTER**

Like many, I was a picky eater as a child, and my children seemed to take after me. Until we met Chef Shiv. I recalled the dish he prepared that made them fall in love with cauliflower and branch out into other vegetables over a decade ago as Katie and I sat down to share a dinner recently.

Sona sits in an unassuming, stand-alone building on Valley Ave. Owner Shiv Kumar took his love of cooking for friends and family and turned it into a restaurant and social gathering space to celebrate Indian food, festivals, and culture. Special Bollywood and Holi dinners, Diwali celebrations, and wine dinners feature in special occasion meals at Sona.

Once inside, you are greeted as if you are a guest in Shiv's home. While you may choose to order off the menu, we suggest talking with Shiv about your food preferences and have him create something for you. We were delighted by the lamb and chicken dishes Shiv prepared for us. They were well spiced and tenderly cooked. As we spoke I recounted the cauliflower story and Chef Shiv made a beeline for the kitchen to recreate the dish despite it not being on the menu. It was as delicious as I remembered. Don't forget to order the naan to enjoy with your meal (we especially love the garlic naan)!

If you're wanting to expand your own culinary skills, Sona Restaurant offers cooking classes. You can join a scheduled class or book your own. Sona also has five course dinners for mother's and father's day coming up, and you can purchase Shiv's homemade chai to enjoy at home as well.

On May 24, Sona is hosting a five course wine dinner, offered at \$75 per person. You can make reservations by calling 540-662-9299.

Visit Sona at 2900 Valley Ave, Winchester, VA 22601 or go online to [SonaCuisine.com](http://SonaCuisine.com)

# JUSTIN KERNS: GROWTH AND COLLABORATION

Anyone who follows Justin Kerns, the Executive Director of the Winchester-Frederick County Convention and Visitors Bureau, online knows how much he and his family love to travel. Personally, I always look forward to seeing their plans each year as he outlines their path and interesting stops, followed by photos and videos while on the trip. He brings this same excitement to his role in Winchester, the results of which are evident in the increased tourism the area has experienced since his arrival in 2015.

Born and raised in Virginia, Kerns' journey back to Winchester was driven by a desire to raise his family in his home state. With a background in tourism and recreation, complemented by extensive professional experience in destination marketing, Kerns brings a wealth of knowledge to his role. He shared his vision for Winchester-Frederick County with us as we talked about what he would like to see added to the area. Expanding sports tourism, enhancing group travel, and developing community attractions through grant programs are on the top of his list currently.

Justin has already introduced new events, including the wildly successful Winter Village on the walking mall this past winter, a new beer trail promotion, and has installed historic signs highlighting history in the area, amongst his other accomplishments. He and his small team have also put together many guides to help locals and visitors explore the area based on interests. Guides have included the Winchester Mural Trail, Christmas lights, Black history, and architecture. All of which can be found on the VisitWinchesterVA.com website along with blog posts on coffee shops, homemade breakfasts, ice cream and more to help you discover the hidden gems of our area.

One of Kerns' primary goals is to educate both locals and potential visitors about the depth of experiences available in Winchester-Frederick County. The bureau's marketing strategies, leveraging advanced data analysis and targeting techniques, aim to attract visitors based on their interests and behaviors, rather than solely on demographic profiles. As a local business owner and real estate agent, Justin's commitment to the area is evident as he visits each business to truly understand their target market and gather feedback to improve outcomes.

Kerns encourages community engagement and participation in bureau activities, suggesting that locals and interested individuals attend the monthly tourism board meetings. These gatherings



provide an opportunity to learn more about the bureau's initiatives and contribute to the ongoing development of Winchester-Frederick County as a premier destination. Guests and board members alike have remarked it's their favorite meeting each month. In the past, we have been lucky enough to participate in ambassador programs developed by Justin that helped us learn more about the area and how we can promote it, giving us a sense of ownership in how well local businesses and attractions perform.

Kerns outlined the transition of funding models for the bureau, emphasizing the shift from a static contribution model to one that dynamically aligns with bed tax revenues in both the city and counties. This adjustment has significantly increased the bureau's budget, enabling more robust marketing efforts and destination development initiatives. The change came at a crucial time, as the onset of the pandemic required innovative marketing strategies to attract visitors once restrictions eased.

As many newcomers discover, the Winchester-Frederick County area is a product of intricate collaboration between the city, county, and Shenandoah University. This partnership has led to the establishment of a unique governance and maintenance structure that involves shared responsibilities across city lands, university-owned buildings, and county contributions. For instance, the Convention and Visitors Bureau operates from a building owned by Shenandoah University, on city land, showcasing the layered relationship between various stakeholders.

As Winchester-Frederick County navigates the challenges of growth and marketing, Justin Kerns' leadership and innovative approaches highlight the importance of collaboration, strategic funding, and community engagement in promoting the area's unique offerings. Through his efforts, the region continues to attract visitors and enhance its reputation as a vibrant and welcoming destination.

See all the guides, events, and other attractions at [VisitWinchesterVA.com](http://VisitWinchesterVA.com)

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# SUPER SPLASHERS: SUMMER WATER SAFETY



May brings warm weather, the end of school, and the opening of local pools. In anticipation of this mark of early summer, we spoke to the queen of pools, Noelle Callas. Noelle wants to give everyone a fundamental love of the water. With more than 70 percent of the earth covered in water, it's a good goal.

As a lifeguard, swim teacher, commercial pool manager, and owner of Super Splasher Aquatics (located in Delco Plaza), Noelle has dedicated nearly half her life making sure children are taught how to be safe around the water in addition to sharing her love of the water. Noelle believes learning how to swim is a life skill we should all learn just as we learned to look both ways before crossing the street. Noelle advocates not to think of swimming as a sport nor an extracurricular. Knowing how to swim can save your life.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more children ages 1-4 die from drowning than any other cause of death. For children ages 5-14, drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional injury death after motor vehicle crashes. In fact, the United States has an average of 11 fatal drownings per day! That's why all classes at Super Splasher Aquatics emphasize safety with safety reminders discussed at every session.

Noelle has developed her own swim school curriculum that gets kids over many common hurdles efficiently. For example, beginners often cling to a parent or pool wall. To overcome this desire, the classes use multiple floatation belts to give each child instant independence and mobility. As their skills progress, fewer belts are used until the student can confidently swim on their own. Super Splasher Aquatics also has the fortunate setup to have the pool on one side and the parent waiting room on the other, separated by locker rooms. Parents can watch the lessons live via an app on their phone. The setup removes a major distraction for the students, encouraging them to focus on their instructor and their lesson. It further removes the tendency to see if the parent is watching and/or approving. As a parent with a three-year-old enrolled in a Super Splasher class, it was initially difficult for me to be in the waiting room. I wanted to feel part of the action. However, I quickly realized my son made more progress without me in his sightline.

Noelle grew up with six brothers and sisters. Always good with kids, she grew up babysitting and signed up to be a lifeguard in high school. Her boss required all lifeguards to teach swim lessons. It became a passion she kept up as a side venture at local hotels and neighborhood pools starting in 2009. In 2020, when the opportunity to move into the old Body Renew facility in Delco Plaza arose, Noelle opened her first brick and mortar location of Super Splashers. She jokes that only she would open a new business during an epidemic. Through almost exclusively word-of-mouth advertising, Super Splasher Aquatics not only survived the pandemic, but thrived. Today Noelle employees 22 people and serves hundreds of families!

To learn more about Super Splasher Aquatics and its offerings, visit [Supersplasheraquatics.com](https://Supersplasheraquatics.com)

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# SEE AND BE SEEN *May events*

## 5 JAMES WOOD PLANT SALE

Annual plant sale features plugs, hanging baskets, and cuttings. All funds made from the sale will benefit the horticulture program for the upcoming school year!

JWHS

## 11 SHEN FESTIVAL OF IDEAS

Festival of Arts, Ideas & Exploration featuring a wide variety of exciting, innovative and provocative performances, presentations, roundtable discussions and other special events. SU Conservatory

## 11 WBW PICKLE DAY

The first annual Pickle Day will feature pickle beer cocktails, pickle slushies, pickle ice cream and more! Winchester Brew Works

## 16 BUTTERFLY CLOCHE

Attendees will learn how to spread butterflies and design cloche scenes with dried plants and natural elements to take home. Purple Fern Studio

## 17 FRIDAY NIGHT WEST OAKS

Sons of Liberty play at West Oaks, enjoy live music, food and all West Oaks amenities. West Oaks Farm Market



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# HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

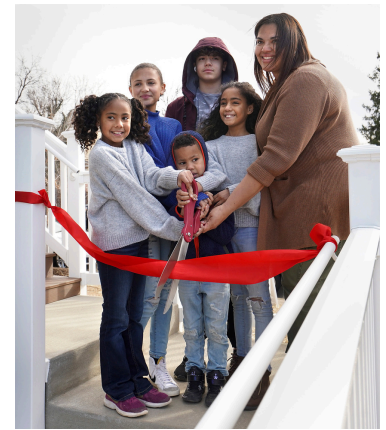
As real estate agents in our day job, we are intimately familiar with the rising cost of home ownership and the wealth it can bring. We recently sat down with Kim Herbstritt, Executive Director of Blue Ridge Habitat for Humanity, to discuss the pivotal role of homeownership in breaking the cycle of poverty. With the stark wealth disparities between homeowners and renters highlighted by 2022 Federal Reserve data—showing a median net worth of \$396,000 for homeowners versus \$10,400 for renters—the importance of accessible homeownership becomes clear.

Herbstritt emphasized the significance of homeownership not just as a financial asset, but as a stabilizer for families and communities. "Homeownership offers a stable monthly payment in contrast to the unpredictability renters face with potential steep rent increases," Herbstritt explained. She pointed out the contrasting appraisal and property tax models between states like Virginia and California, highlighting how policies such as California's Proposition 13 have helped make homeownership more manageable, particularly for the elderly, but can have unintended consequences that have to be dealt with down the road.

The conversation also delved into the mechanics of how Habitat for Humanity helps families become homeowners. Prospective homeowners must undergo a thorough application process, including credit checks and home visits, to ensure they are ready for the financial responsibilities of owning a home. "It's about more than just providing a home. It's about preparing families for long-term stability," stated Herbstritt.

One of the more innovative aspects of Habitat for Humanity's approach is their use of layered financing to make homes affordable without undervaluing the property, ensuring it does not negatively impact surrounding property values. This method includes various forms of financial assistance such as down payment aid and interest rate reductions, which are crucial for keeping the homes affordable. Habitat also integrates mandatory homeownership and budgeting classes into the process. These initiatives are designed to fortify the homeowners' ability to maintain their financial stability and home upkeep.

The impact of such programs is profound, not only on individual families but on the community at large. Herbstritt shared stories of families who, through Habitat for Humanity, have found not just housing but a new foundation from which to build a more secure future. Herbstritt also touched upon challenges such as the need for more innovative zoning and financing solutions to meet the growing demand for affordable housing. The potential for community land trusts and other mechanisms to reduce property tax burdens and keep housing affordable was discussed as a forward-thinking solution to the ongoing housing crisis.



You can learn more about Blue Ridge Habitat for Humanity and how to apply for a home or critical home repairs at [BlueRidgeHabitat.org](https://BlueRidgeHabitat.org).

## Winchester Book Gallery Recommends:



It's a blazing summer when two men arrive in a small village in the West of Ireland. One of them is coming home. Both of them are coming to get rich. One of them is coming to die.

Cal Hooper took early retirement from Chicago PD and moved to rural Ireland looking for peace. He's found it, more or less: he's built a relationship with a local woman, Lena, and he's gradually

turning Trey Reddy from a half-feral teenager into a good kid going good places. But then Trey's long-absent father reappears, bringing along an English millionaire and a scheme to find gold in the townland, and suddenly everything the three of them have been building is under threat. Cal and Lena are both ready to do whatever it takes to protect Trey, but Trey doesn't want protecting. What she wants is revenge.

From the writer who is "in a class by herself," (The New York Times), a nuanced, atmospheric tale that explores what we'll do for our loved ones, what we'll do for revenge, and what we sacrifice when the two collide.

[WinchesterBookGallery.com](https://WinchesterBookGallery.com)

| 7 N. Loudoun St



# WINCHESTER START TO RADIO STARDOM: JANET MICHAEL

Janet Michael's path to becoming the beloved host of The Valley Today on The River 95.3 and her own podcast has been anything but conventional. Beginning her career at the Winchester Star (the same building we interviewed Janet much to her delight), Michael discovered her love for advertising, a field she found as exhilarating and unpredictable as recess. Her knack for transforming mundane classified ads into must-attend events hinted at a creative spark.



Transitioning from advertising at the Winchester Star to various roles in the advertising world, including a stint at Impressions and as a sales rep for radio stations. It was during this period of exploration and self-discovery that she embraced the uncertainty of her path, allowing her interests and talents to guide her. The birth of her son and the practical challenges of returning to college prompted a pivot towards mastering different advertising avenues, ultimately leading her to establish Java Media, a venture born out of necessity and a desire to help business owners grow, which she continues today.

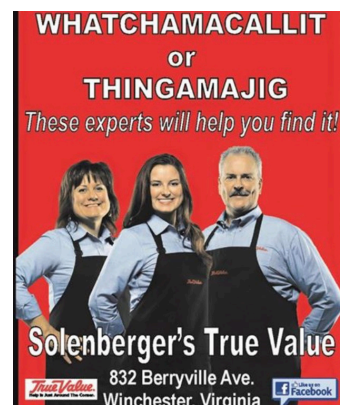
Michael's foray into radio was sparked by a consulting gig to revamp a radio station's website and social media policies. This collaboration unveiled her latent potential to host The Valley Today, a challenge she accepted with a blend of excitement and apprehension on a day she was supposed to be a guest and instead became the host. Despite her initial lack of experience with radio equipment and on-air hosting, Michael's adaptability and keen sense of community engagement transformed the show into a platform celebrating local stories, initiatives, and voices, aligning with her vision for a more inclusive and engaging community discourse.

Her tenure at The Valley Today has been marked by memorable moments, including live performances by the Piedmont Symphony Orchestra's rock band, which turned the studio into an intimate concert venue just for her. These experiences underscore her philosophy of leveraging media as a tool for community building and cultural enrichment.

The public has noticed her commitment, but she was still surprised when she was asked to host the Greater Goods Awards this year. Of course her signature orange would shine. The obsession started with one orange sweater she was gifted at Christmas, and has morphed into an entire wardrobe and beyond for which she is now known.

Michael's encourages guests to prepare their own questions and focuses on making the show beneficial for both listeners and guests. Despite the evolving landscape of radio and podcasting, her commitment to providing a platform for diverse voices and stories remains unwavering. With over 1,200 episodes under her belt, she highlights people and businesses, helps raise funds and collects food, toys and more for local charities, and gives residents easy access to guests in the government, on school boards, and services such as the police. Since the pandemic she's been able to use Zoom and reach out to guests who normally wouldn't be able to record a show in person, allowing her to cover a wider range of events and guests.

As Janet Michael continues to evolve with the medium, her story serves as inspiration for aspiring media professionals. It underscores the importance of embracing one's journey, with all its twists and turns, as a unique path to fulfilling one's professional and personal aspirations. Through her work, Michael not only entertains and informs but also fosters a sense of community, proving that with determination and a willingness to adapt, it's possible to turn a serendipitous opportunity into a lasting legacy.



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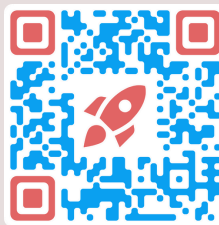
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