

WE ARE WINCHESTER

JANUARY 2025

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PHOTO CREDIT
KATIE JORDAN

Winchester Book Gallery



Recommends:

Ta-Nehisi Coates originally set out to write a book about writing, in the tradition of Orwell’s classic “Politics and the English Language,” but found himself grappling with deeper questions about how our stories—our reporting and imaginative narratives and mythmaking—expose and distort our realities.

In the first of the book’s three intertwining essays, Coates, on his first trip to Africa, finds himself in two places at once: in Dakar, a modern city in Senegal, and in a mythic kingdom in his mind. Then he takes readers along with him to Columbia, South Carolina, where he reports on his own book’s banning, but also explores the larger backlash to the nation’s recent reckoning with history and the deeply rooted American mythology so visible in that city—a capital of the Confederacy with statues of segregationists looming over its public squares. Finally, in the book’s longest section, Coates travels to Palestine, where he sees with devastating clarity how easily we are misled by nationalist narratives, and the tragedy that lies in the clash between the stories we tell and the reality of life on the ground.

WinchesterBookGallery.com | 3 N. Loudoun St

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Happy new year, Winchester!

The new year is an opportunity to set new goals and reset your vision for the upcoming year. At OldTownist, our goal is to continue to share stories of our local businesses, community leaders, and non-profits. This year we aim to learn about groups and facets of Winchester that are lesser known. Winchester has so much to offer and we are determined to spread the word about it.

This marks our 26th edition of OldTownist, and we’ve barely scratched the surface. This month, we share a preview into Dawn Earles Design Studio (located in the pink building on E Piccadilly St), recount the 50th anniversary celebration of the walking mall, talk about making Winchester more bicycle and pedestrian friendly with Bike Walk Winchester, hear about the great work Love to NIC is doing to aid our homeless population, and appreciate the numerous murals around the city painted by Sarah Gallahan.



*Misty Weaver
& Katie Jordan*

**WE ARE
WINCHESTER**

DAWN EARLES DESIGN STUDIO

42 E Piccadilly St went through a facelift earlier this year, and now it holds a beautifully designed shop created by Dawn Earles, a home decorator and stager by trade. In the shop, you can find an array of home goods and gifts including candles, pillows, furniture, and more. Dawn and her team can help source items for your home too. As you’d expect of a home decorator, the space is elegant and inviting.

Within the studio, there is also an event space that can accommodate up to 40 people. The space can be rented for business events, bridal or baby showers, etc. Dawn is hosting this month’s Top of Virginia Regional Chamber’s Business & Breakfast Mixer on January 15 to showcase that space to the business community. She has plans to design the green space behind her shop in the coming months to offer additional options.

There are many other events offered - we are particularly excited about her vision board workshop coming up on January 10! Be sure to follow the studio on social media to keep up with its latest events and offerings: [Facebook.com/dawnearlesdesign](https://www.facebook.com/dawnearlesdesign).

You can visit the shop for yourself Wednesday-Saturday from 11-6pm and on Sundays from 12-5pm.

Until then, check out the video below to learn more about Dawn and the studio. What a wonderful addition to old town and Piccadilly St in particular!



**WATCH
THE VIDEO**



50TH ANNIVERSARY: OLD TOWN WALKING MALL



On a brisk December morning, the heart of Old Town Winchester was alive with warmth and nostalgia as the community came together to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Old Town Walking Mall. The Winter Village provided a festive backdrop for the occasion, embodying the very spirit of the mall—a place where people gather, celebrate, and connect.

The event kicked off with remarks by Mayor Smith, who set the tone by reflecting on the mall's historic journey. "Over the years, the walking mall has continued to innovate and reshape itself to meet the needs of our community," he said. "It's more than a place for products and services—it's an experience. A remarkable community that values its history, thriving small businesses, and vibrant events." The Mayor thanked the small business owners who have become the backbone of the mall, naming several key figures invited to speak. "To everyone who has invested in the walking mall, organized events, or supported First Fridays—I say to you, job well done. Thank you."

Irv Shendow, representing Bell's Fine Clothing, one of the two original family-owned businesses still on the mall, Wilkins Shoe Store being the other, shared a rich history of how the walking mall came to be.

"In the late 1960s, we knew something had to change to protect the vitality of downtown," Shendow recounted. The Old Town Development Board, with just \$8,000 in its coffers, dared to envision a pedestrian-only mall. After overcoming obstacles—including legal hurdles to establish a tax district—they raised \$600,000 for construction. "We believed in the idea," Shendow said. "And now, to see what it has become—a space for people, filled with light and life—it's just wonderful."

A panel of current business owners took the stage to share their experiences. Charlie Fish, who ran Murphy Beverage for years, reminisced about the community spirit that has defined the mall. "Showing up is half the game," she said. "And you all continue to show up to support the mall and its businesses. That's what makes this place great."

Heidi Hiller, the current owner of Murphy Beverage, praised the unique synergy between the businesses and the city. "Being on the walking mall allows us to be part of a community that works closely together," she said. "It's a driving factor in our longevity."

For Dan Kalber, chef and owner of Village Square and Water Street Kitchen, the walking mall was where his dreams came true. "I moved here from Nevada, lived above Wilkin's, had help from locals to open my dream restaurants, held my wedding on the mall, and raised my kids here. This place is home."

Janita Byrne, co-owner of Espresso Bar and Café, emphasized the strength of collaboration. "We are the heart of the city, and it's a thriving community because we communicate and support one another," she said. "We cross promote at every chance. People start here when visiting Winchester so we let them know about everything in the area."

Christine Patrick, owner of the Winchester Book Gallery, highlighted how the mall bridges local charm with far-reaching appeal. "We connect not just to Winchester but up and down the Eastern Seaboard. Regulars from Maine to Florida always stop here, and I'm proud to be part of that."

The morning concluded with a proclamation from Mayor Smith, commemorating the mall's establishment on November 21, 1974, as the first pedestrian mall in Virginia. The proclamation lauded its role in driving economic growth and attracting visitors, while honoring the resilience of its businesses and the passion of the community.

As the speeches ended, attendees lingered, warmed by the camaraderie that has always been the mall's defining feature. With lights twinkling on the trees, the celebration not only honored the past but also set a hopeful tone for the mall's next 50 years. Many reiterated what we felt that morning as we dispersed, the walking mall is not just a street; it's the soul of our city.



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BIKE WALK WINCHESTER: BRIDGING GAPS

Winchester is home to scenic streets, a walkable downtown, and charming historic neighborhoods, yet it's a city that often misses its potential for cycling and pedestrian connectivity. That's where Kara Capelli and Steve Policastro come in. As organizers of Bike Walk Winchester, this dynamic duo is working to bridge gaps—literally and figuratively—in the city's biking and walking infrastructure.

From their initial meeting in 2020 during a City Insight course, Kara and Steve discovered a shared passion for making Winchester safer and more accessible for cyclists and pedestrians. What started as casual brainstorming grew into a grassroots advocacy group now steadily building momentum.

When Steve moved to Winchester, he was struck by how bike-friendly the town could be—but wasn't. "This is a small town where you can bike to restaurants, the doctor's office, anywhere," he says. "I couldn't understand why more people weren't riding bikes." His background in commuting by bike for five years in Cincinnati inspired him to look deeper.

Researching the official designation of "bike-friendly cities," Steve connected with advocacy groups in places like Williamsburg, Virginia. He saw the potential for Winchester to follow suit, albeit on a smaller, more focused scale. Kara brought a complementary perspective to the effort. With experience in community engagement and a knack for building networks, she stressed the need to start building a community of citizens. "We wanted to build community, to bring as many voices as possible into the mix to understand where the greatest need might be," she explains.

The heart of Bike Walk Winchester's mission is addressing the city's disconnect. Winchester has made significant investments in bike and walking infrastructure, but these are often isolated from each other, making them less effective. Another critical aspect of their work is identifying barriers for pedestrians. From telephone poles planted in the middle of sidewalks to poorly designed intersections, Kara and Steve have heard—and experienced—numerous frustrations. "Accessibility is a big issue," Kara notes. "We're working to elevate those voices and connect them with city resources."

Bike Walk Winchester has approached change through two interconnected avenues: community building and long-term planning.

The group has organized popular events like community bike rides, helmet drives, and social media campaigns. "These events bring people together and show them that biking in Winchester can be fun and safe," Kara says. One standout example is their support of a local "bike bus"—a coordinated effort to help kids bike safely to school in groups. *We don't run the program, but BikeWalk provides resources, promotes it, and connects the organizer with donors and city officials,* Kara explains. "We hope one of our roles in this community is to be a resource to help uplift others."

On the policy side, Steve's expertise shines in combing through city plans, from strategic visions to capital improvement projects. Bike Walk Winchester collaborates with city officials to prioritize biking and pedestrian goals and push for a comprehensive 'Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan'. "The city is already prioritizing many issues related to connectivity, we're here to keep that momentum going," Steve says.

While the group celebrates small wins, they're playing a long game. "We're not naïve—we know this won't happen overnight," Kara says. "But without a plan, we'll never get there."

Their dream? A Winchester where biking and walking are not just possible but intuitive. Kara imagines bike districts—clusters of businesses accessible via bike-friendly routes. "Picture a family biking to a coffee shop, a brewery, and a bookstore without feeling unsafe," she says. For Steve, the goal is to see Winchester become a model for small-town connectivity. "Imagine moving to a new development on the outskirts of the city and being able to bike a scenic, tree-lined path straight downtown," he says.

Bike Walk Winchester is always looking for passionate people to join their efforts. Whether you're interested in biking, walking, accessibility, or community advocacy, there's a place for you. Looking ahead, the group is also working toward becoming a 501(c)(3) nonprofit to expand their funding and initiatives. "The more we grow, the more we can do," Kara says.

As Kara and Steve stress, Bike Walk Winchester isn't anti-car—it's pro-options. "We just want to make sure biking and walking are viable, enjoyable, and safe alternatives," Kara says. In Winchester, the road to a bikeable, walkable future is open. All it takes is people willing to ride—and walk—it together.

Find them online: BikeWalkWinchester.org



SEE *January events* AND BE SEEN

1 WINCHESTER BEER MILE

A Beer Mile is a drinking game combining running and speed drinking. The event takes place on a 1/4 mile running course.

[Escutcheon Brewing](#)

4 CAT YOGA

Come Yoga with adoptable kitties at the Winchester Area SPCA with instructor Jaime Haines. 1st Sat each month!

Register [SPCA](#)

10 HUNGRY FOR STEAK

Chef Blair Dolinar will teach you how to use a sous vide to make the perfect steak, plus the best baked potato, skillet corn bread, onion bleu cheese sauce, and a surprise dessert!

[Nibblins](#)

12 MONUMENT BRIDAL COLLECTION

An enchanting day dedicated to celebrating love and wedding dreams awaits! [Monument](#)

19 READER'S THEATRE: A DOLL'S HOUSE

In the character of Nora, we find human struggle epitomized against the humiliating constraints of social conformity.

[Winchester Little Theatre](#)

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LOVE TO NIC: NURTURE. INSPIRE. COMFORT.



Love to NIC was created from a mother's love and her commitment to honoring her late son, Nic, whose life was tragically cut short at 25 in a car accident. Nic battled with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, so to honor his memory, his mother, Holly Roberts, founded the non-profit with a mission dedicated to helping the homeless and spreading hope. With nearly 40% of the homeless community also grappling with mental illness, her work draws attention to these overlapping challenges. Locally, the statistics are even more striking, with up to 80% facing mental health struggles.

Nic's passion for sneakers inspired Holly to provide new shoes to those in need. This simple gesture has grown into a nationwide effort, distributing nearly 5,000 pairs of shoes alongside socks, gloves, and winter apparel. Every package includes a heartfelt note, encouraging recipients to seek help, stay positive, and reconnect with their families.

Holly and Nic shared a love for the Minnesota Vikings and a dream of visiting every NFL stadium by seeing the Vikings play in a new city the first Sunday of December, in conjunction with Nic's birthday on December 6. While the two of them were only able to see three games together before Nic's passing, Holly continues that tradition in his memory. While attending games, Holly and her board distribute shoes and warm clothing to homeless individuals in the host cities, combining their love for football with acts of kindness.

Locally, Love to NIC serves the homeless in Winchester, providing monthly meals on the third Friday of every month. Holly, leveraging her culinary training, personally prepares meals based on the recipients' requests. Majority rules and Holly says they appreciate the choice of what to eat more than we can imagine. Each meal includes a protein, starch, vegetable, fruit, dessert, candy, a family-friendly joke, and a note. Since Love to NIC's inception, Holly has served more than 3,000 meals, offering not just sustenance but also connection and dignity.

The organization ensures that 100% of donations go directly to helping the homeless, while Holly and her volunteer board cover administrative costs. All donated items are high-quality and waterproof, reflecting Holly's dedication to showing care and respect for every individual.

For Holly, this work is deeply personal. She believes the homeless community has given her more than she could ever give them, helping her process grief and find purpose. Through every shoe given and every meal served, Love to NIC not only honors Nic's memory but also provides a beacon of hope for those in need, reminding them--

and all of us—that kindness and connection have the power to transform lives.

The organization's logo, a forward-facing shoe print, symbolizes walking toward a positive and happy life, a legacy that Nic's story continues to inspire. You can learn more about the organization and find ways to contribute at www.lovetonic.org.



Warm coffeehouse with an authentic selection of espressos plus light snacks, soups and sandwiches.

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The area's premier pole + aerial studio is transforming into Fly Fitness! Fly Fitness will expand offerings like bungee fitness classes and more!

FLY FITNESS - open Jan 2025
234 Hope Dr, Winchester
DazzlingDivaFitness.com

FACES OF WINCHESTER: SARAH GALLAHAN



I walked into Espresso Bar in downtown and, although I had never met her in person, I immediately recognized Sarah Gallahan by her distinctive style and signature dreadlocked hair. I grabbed a coffee and sat down across from an incredibly talented artist, ready to pick her brain.

I did not know Sarah, but I knew her art work. It can be found all over town, larger than life. Her mural art graces the walls of many area buildings, both inside and out. It's bright, colorful and really cannot be missed.

Gallahan is largely self-taught. A graduate of local Sherando High School, she started by decorating book covers in school. Soon, she was asked to paint a mural in a friend's home, and it took off from there. With no formal training, just a passion that she continuously fed, Gallahan opened Sleepy House Studio in Old Town Winchester several years ago. She enjoyed having a studio open to the public but felt called to go out and work hands-on to create murals on commission.

One led to another and another, and word-of-mouth is her primary form of advertisement. That word is heard clearly, as she is currently booked through spring 2025 with commissions both locally and farther away.

She can see a "canvas" everywhere, smaller or VERY large, having recently completed her favorite work yet, on the exterior of Virginia Beach Aquarium. While the concepts and designs are hers, she often recruits the help of her mother to execute the ambitious designs.

Sarah spoke easily with me and time flew by. I was charmed by her love of life, and how she sees beauty and art everywhere, from cityscapes, architecture, and at her garden at home. She brings her skill home with her, living in a cabin with her family that is actively being renovated and she admits, may never be done.

The next time you are driving or walking around Winchester, take a moment to look for her work. You'll be so happy you did!



Amber Koehler has lived in Winchester for 22 years.

She owns Twice Is Nice Consignments in our downtown area and loves to support all things local.



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