

WE ARE WINCHESTER

MARCH 2025

# OLDTOWNIST.COM



FREE



 SUBSCRIBE

PHOTO CREDIT  
BRADLEY REID

## Winchester Book Gallery Recommends:



At rock bottom following her daughter's death, ex-Chicago detective Carrie Starr has nowhere to go but back to her roots. Starr's father never talked much about the reservation where he was raised, but the tribe needs a new marshal as much as Starr needs a place to call home.

In the past decade, too many young women have disappeared from the rez. Some have ended up dead, others just...gone. Now local college student Chenoa Cloud is missing, and Starr falls into an investigation that leaves her drowning in memories of her daughter—the girl she failed to save.

Starr feels lost in this place she thought would welcome her. And when she catches a glimpse of a figure from her father's stories, with the body of a woman and the antlers of a deer, Starr can't shake the feeling that the fearsome spirit is watching her, following her.

[WinchesterBookGallery.com](http://WinchesterBookGallery.com) | 3 N. Loudoun St

## LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

As winter finally loosens its grip, March in Winchester brings a renewed sense of energy—whether it's the lively beats of Irish dancers echoing through Old Town, the first blooms of spring peeking through, or the community coming together for events that remind us why we love this town.

In our visits with Byblos, a new Lebanese gem in Creekside, and Armstrong Irish Dance Academy, we found no shortage of passion and dedication shaping our city. We're also spotlighting those making a difference in other fields—like the 2 For 2 Foundation, working tirelessly to ensure every child has the opportunity to learn to swim, and the vision behind Patti's Place at Laurel Grove Wine Farm, where sustainability meets community in the most delicious way.

We'll see you in Old Town!



*Misty Weaver  
& Katie Jordan*

**WE ARE  
WINCHESTER**

## BYBLOS

Creekside Station has welcomed a new addition to its plaza—Byblos, a Lebanese restaurant nestled between Shenandoah Fine Chocolates and IJ Canns American Grille. Owned and operated by husband and wife Walid Boustany and Maya Hamdan, along with their son Ehab Atari, the family is thrilled to bring their beloved cuisine to Winchester. After successfully running their restaurant in Gainesville, VA, they have now opened one here to be closer to home.

We stopped by for lunch and were immediately impressed by the extensive menu, catering to a variety of tastes and dietary needs, including gluten-free and vegan options. As we browsed the offerings, we were welcomed with crispy pita chips and creamy strained yogurt—a light, tangy start to our meal.

To begin, we sampled the Byblos Mezza Platter, a well-rounded intro to Lebanese cuisine featuring hummus, tabbouleh, grape leaves, sambusek, and falafel. Each bite was a delightful balance of fresh herbs, spices, and textures.

For our main course, we chose the Mixed Grill Plate, a generous serving of kafta (beef), chicken kebab, lamb, grilled vegetables and rice. The aroma of the freshly grilled meats was matched only by the tenderness of the meats—so soft, a butter knife was all that was needed. The meal was hearty yet light, leaving us fully satisfied but not overly full.

The restaurant was bustling with diners excited to have an authentic Lebanese dining option in Winchester, exploring rich Mediterranean flavors.

Visit Byblos in Creekside Station at 3111 Valley Ave #108.



# ARMSTRONG IRISH DANCE: LOVE OF THE ART FORM



Sarah has worked tirelessly to ensure that Irish dance is accessible to all, regardless of financial circumstances. While formal scholarships are not yet in place, she has never turned a student away due to financial hardship. Through donations and event partnerships, the academy has been able to cover costs for families in need, ensuring that all children have the opportunity to experience the joy of dance.

The academy accepts students as young as three, though Sarah emphasizes that readiness varies for each child. There is no "missed window"—students of all ages and skill levels are welcomed. In addition to weekly classes, students have the opportunity to perform at local events, festivals, and senior living centers, bringing Irish dance to a broader audience.

March is the busiest and most exciting season for Armstrong Irish Dance Academy. This year, the school has a packed performance schedule, dancing alongside local band One Street Over and appearing at venues such as 50/50 Taphouse, The Barns of Rose Hill, and The River House in Capon Bridge. The energy of live music combined with the rhythmic precision of Irish dance creates an unforgettable experience for audiences and dancers alike.

For over two decades, Sarah Armstrong Rhodes, TCRG, has dedicated herself to the art of Irish dance. As the founder of Armstrong Irish Dance Academy, she has cultivated a space where students not only learn intricate footwork but also experience the camaraderie and confidence that dance can bring.

Sarah's journey began at a young age when her family attended a Celtic festival in Loudoun County. Enthralled by the music and movement, she and her siblings quickly immersed themselves in the world of Irish dance. After beginning lessons at Inwood Performing Arts, her training soon took her to a larger competitive school in Washington, D.C., requiring significant travel and commitment.

By the time she was a teenager, Sarah was not only training at an elite level but also teaching younger students to offset the costs of her own lessons. This early experience planted the seeds for what would later become her lifelong vocation. She began offering lessons in her parents' basement, later expanding to county recreation programs and local schools.

After undergoing a rigorous certification process—one with a notoriously low passing rate—Sarah earned her TCRG (Teagascóir Choimisiúin le Rinci Gaelacha), allowing her to present students for competition. Determined to create a positive and supportive dance environment, she opened Armstrong Irish Dance Academy in 2016, just six weeks after the birth of her first child.

Unlike some competitive dance environments, Armstrong Irish Dance Academy emphasizes personal growth and community over cutthroat rivalry. While students are encouraged to compete, the focus remains on self-improvement and a love of the art form.

The academy will again host an annual Open House on March 15, inviting newcomers to experience Irish dance in a welcoming, pressure-free setting. Attendees can watch a performance, participate in a short trial class, and learn more about class offerings. Those who sign up on the day receive a special discount, further reinforcing the academy's commitment to accessibility.

As Armstrong Irish Dance Academy continues to grow, Sarah hopes to expand its reach and encourage more diversity within the Irish dance world. She recognizes that historically, Irish dance has been a predominantly white sport and is committed to making it more inclusive.

Additionally, she has aspirations of hosting a competition, further solidifying Winchester as a hub for Irish dance in the region. But above all, her goal remains the same: to foster an environment where dancers feel supported, challenged, and valued.

For more information, class schedules, and event details, visit [ArmstrongIDA.com](http://ArmstrongIDA.com).



# PATTI'S PLACE AT LAUREL GROVE WINE FARM

Patti's Place at Laurel Grove Wine Farm is a testament to sustainable agriculture, community, and a deep respect for the land's history. Located at 3074 Laurel Grove Rd, Winchester, Virginia, the property spans approximately 450 acres, with a mix of vineyards, orchards, pastures, and carefully preserved wooded areas that serve as natural water filters. Committed to permaculture, the vineyard includes (or plans to include) hazelnut and walnut trees, raspberry brambles, blueberries, cider apples, and grapevines, all thriving together to create a diverse and resilient ecosystem. By planting a cover crop of 80 different species, the farm fosters a rich soil microbiome, eliminating the need for pesticides, herbicides, or fungicides and ensuring the health of the land for generations to come.

The market, named Patti's Place, is more than just a store—it is a tribute to Patti Williams, the late wife of Gary Williams, from whom Jaclyn and Dustin Mommen purchased the farm in 2021. Gary, who played an integral role in the farm's early development, was honored to see the market named after his beloved wife. The original structure, once the Mount Williams schoolhouse, had fallen into disrepair, so the Mommens rebuilt it in the image of the original, preserving its legacy. Inside, Patti's Place offers a thoughtfully curated selection of farm-fresh food, household essentials, and handmade goods, each carefully tested for quality and sustainability. The café, run by Jaclyn's mother-in-law, known as "Ouma," serves seasonal meals crafted from produce grown on-site or nearby, while the market also features products from local farms such as Liberty Hill Farms, Back to Basics Farm, Geraghty's Micro Farm, Willow Moon, Deep Roots Milling, and Lone Oak Coffee.

For Jaclyn Mommen, the farm is the realization of a personal journey shaped by her background in hospitality management,

high-end restaurants, and wine bars. After leaving the industry to become a high school history teacher and later stepping away to focus on her family, she became increasingly concerned about food quality and the prevalence of harmful ingredients in everyday products. Determined to create change, she set out to grow clean, nourishing food and embrace a regenerative way of living. Her husband, Dustin, agreed to the move under one condition: the farm had to include a vineyard. After researching the best grape-growing regions, they settled in Virginia, a place where valley-grown grapes thrive. Today, the vineyard includes seven acres of own-rooted vinifera, with another seven set to be planted in April, featuring varieties such as cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc, tannat, mourvèdre, grenache, and syrah. Wine production has not begun at the vineyard, but Patti's Place does offer a wine room with wines from around the world that have been farmed in the same organic, regenerative, sustainable, biodynamic way.

Beyond farming, education is a core mission at Patti's Place. The market hosts classes and workshops on regenerative agriculture, soil health, and sustainable living, as well as hands-on craft nights where participants can work on personal projects while sharing a meal and conversation. The Mommens are looking ahead to expanding public access to the farm, envisioning conservation forestry practices and eventually opening trails through their 250 acres of wooded land.

With sheep and chickens roaming the pastures, a planned market garden under the care of new manager Joy Horton, and a future tasting room on the vineyard side of the farm, Patti's Place at Laurel Grove Wine Farm is not just a business but a philosophy in action. It stands as a living example of how thoughtful land stewardship, regenerative farming, and a commitment to community can create something truly special.



Learn more at [laurelgrovetwinefarm.com/pattis-place-farm-market/](https://laurelgrovetwinefarm.com/pattis-place-farm-market/)

# SEE *March events* AND BE SEEN

## 4 MARDI GRAS MASQUERADE

Join the Winchester City Sheriff's office for this fundraiser to support Project Lifesaver, books for Reading with a Sheriff, and more! [George Washington Hotel](#)

## 8 SEED STARTING TALK

Learn about planting, caring for plants, soil, containers, lighting and more! Tickets include seed starting goodies to take home. [Weber's Nursery](#)

## 8 CELTIC FEST

Celebrate the rich Irish and Scottish heritage! This annual festival brings the community together for a day filled with lively music, traditional dance, cultural performances, and plenty of festive fun. [Old Town](#)

## 9 QUINCEAÑERA EXPO VA

This spectacular event is a vibrant showcase of Hispanic culture. Immerse yourself in a world of dazzling dresses, from timeless classics to the latest trends. [The Monument](#)

## 12 MARIO-KART COMPETITION

Ultimate showdown every other Wednesday! Nightly and quarterly prizes, spots limited! [Broken Window Brewing Co](#)



**10% DISCOUNT ON QUOTES IN MARCH**  
**Apple Blossom SAVINGS**

**STOOP**

**Reach Out TODAY**

**RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL**  
Curated Porch Decoration & Installation

Kaylie@StoopDesigns.net - 540.495.0852 - @StoopDesigns



**SUMMIT EVENTS**

**IT'S ALMOST PARTY TIME!**

**Trust a Professional INQUIRE TODAY**

summiteventsco.com

# THINKER TOYS: TREASURE TROVE OF PLAY

Since 2012, Thinker Toys has been offering a curated selection of toys that spark creativity and engagement, specializing in high-quality, screen-free toys that appeal to children and adults alike. Owner Aaron Bowman, a Harrisonburg native and James Madison University graduate, took an unexpected path from computer software to toy retail, finding fulfillment in building a business that fosters imagination and learning.

Thinker Toys began its journey at Creekside Station before moving downtown, where it has become a go-to destination for families looking for unique and educational play options. Bowman's background in toys runs deep—his parents owned a toy store when he was a child, giving him early exposure to the industry. While he never planned to follow in their footsteps, his knowledge and passion for toys ultimately led him to create a space where quality and play intersect.

The store's selection is carefully curated, avoiding mass-market, heavily licensed merchandise in favor of timeless classics and innovative new designs. Visitors can find brands like Melissa & Doug, Ravensburger, Lego, Green Toys, and Crazy Aaron's Thinking Putty. The focus is on hands-on play—puzzles, board games, building sets, and science kits—designed to encourage problem-solving and creativity. Over the years, Bowman has noticed a shift in families actively seeking alternatives to screen time, making toys that promote interaction and skill-building more popular than ever.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Thinker Toys experienced a surge in demand for puzzles and games as families looked for engaging activities at home. Jigsaw puzzles, in particular, saw an unprecedented rise in popularity, with manufacturers struggling to keep up with demand. While the initial craze has subsided, puzzles and board games remain a key part of the store's inventory, reflecting a broader movement toward unplugged, in-person entertainment.



**DAZZLING DIVA**  
FITNESS

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**

In addition to serving local families, Thinker Toys plays an active role in the Winchester community. While the store does not host its own events, it frequently collaborates with local businesses and organizations. From providing games for breweries and coffee shops to participating in downtown festivals, Thinker Toys continues to foster a sense of connection through play.

For those unsure of what to buy, the staff at Thinker Toys offers expert guidance. The store's inventory spans over 150 vendors, ensuring a wide variety of options for children of all ages. Whether shopping for a birthday gift or searching for an engaging activity, customers can expect thoughtful recommendations tailored to their needs. The emphasis is on discovering the right toy—not just a trendy one—making each visit a personalized experience.

Now in its seventh year on the Old Town Walking Mall, Thinker Toys remains a favorite among locals and visitors alike. With a mission to bring high-quality, engaging toys to Winchester, the store continues to be a cornerstone for families seeking thoughtful and creative play experiences.

Thinker Toys is located at 106 S Loudoun St, Winchester, VA 22601. Open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 AM to 6 PM, and Sunday from Noon to 5 PM. Visit [thinkertoysva.com](http://thinkertoysva.com) or call (540) 450-8780



# 2 FOR 2 FOUNDATION: SWIM LITERACY

For many, swimming is just a recreational activity—a way to cool off in the summer or a sport to watch during the Olympics. But for Shelly Lee and the 2 For 2 Foundation, swimming is a crucial life skill, a cognitive booster, and a means to break generational barriers to water safety.

When Shelly Lee moved to Winchester in the 1970s, she was hired by Winchester Public Schools in part due to her swimming background. Over the decades, she has witnessed firsthand how the lack of access to pools and structured swim lessons has left many children in the area at risk.

In many communities, particularly lower-income households, swimming has become an overlooked skill. National statistics show that 79% of children in households earning less than \$50,000 have little to no swimming ability. The disparities break further along racial lines: 64% of Black children, 45% of Hispanic children, and 40% of white children have little to no swimming ability. With ten people drowning every day in the U.S., these numbers represent more than just missed recreational opportunities—they highlight a critical public safety issue.

The 2 For 2 Foundation was created to address these disparities and increase "swim literacy," a term Shelly and her team use to describe not just the ability to swim, but also a generational shift in water safety awareness and education. Swimming is more than just an essential safety skill—it also has powerful developmental benefits. Research shows that early swimming engages multiple senses simultaneously, helping to stimulate both hemispheres of the brain, improving memory, and enhancing cognitive function. In essence, swimming acts as "brain food," supporting skills that are transferable to the classroom, such as concentration, following instructions, and problem-solving.

"Swimmers tend to be great students," Shelly says. "The discipline, the coordination—it all carries over into their academics. It's a cradle-to-grave activity that benefits people their entire lives." Despite its importance, access to swimming lessons has become more difficult due to the lack of public pools and structured programs. Unlike previous generations like my own where public pools were numerous and some schools had mandatory swim classes, today's children in Winchester don't have as many opportunities to learn to swim.

This is where 2 For 2 Foundation steps in. In 2024 alone, the foundation funded over 3,015 swim lessons for children in the area, ensuring that financial barriers do not keep kids from learning to swim. The foundation supports programs at the Valley Health Wellness Center, where early swimming lessons are being incorporated into childhood development initiatives, including a special focus on the Water Babies program.



"We're hoping to teach the entire fifth grade at Daniel Morgan Intermediate School how to swim through gym class," Shelly says. "Imagine a world where every fifth grader in our community learns water safety and survival skills. That's our dream." The program doesn't stop with kids. 2 For 2 also funds lessons for adults, addressing the generational impact of swim illiteracy. Parents who never learned to swim are now gaining confidence in the water and passing that confidence on to their children.

One of the biggest challenges 2 For 2 faces is the lack of facilities. While the foundation has worked tirelessly to fund swim lessons, the demand far outweighs the availability of pools. "The misconception is that we're just trying to build a pool. It's so much bigger than that," Shelly explains. "We will never own or operate a facility, but we are committed to developing and maintaining access to water and ice facilities in this region. It's about education, recreation, and public wellness."

With continued support from the community, donors, and local organizations, 2 For 2 is working on solutions that will provide long-term access to swimming for all ages. The foundation is also looking to incorporate swimming into school curriculum and push for legislative action on drowning prevention.

Shelly and the 2 For 2 Foundation are proving that change starts at the community level. Their upcoming Pot Of Gold fundraiser on March 15th at Piccadilly Brew Pub, as well as other events, and donations go directly to funding swim literacy programs.

For more information on donating, swim lessons, and event tickets visit [2for2foundation.org](https://2for2foundation.org)

Created and distributed by Dream Weaver Team LLC. Contact [otw@oldtownist.com](mailto:otw@oldtownist.com) for advertising and other inquiries.

**Get a FREE copy of OldTownist each month! Visit [OldTownist.com](https://OldTownist.com) to sign up!**

WE ARE WINCHESTER

519 SLEIGH DR



# 519 SLEIGH DR WATERFRONT UNDER CONTRACT



Our mission is simple: to turn your dream lifestyle into your reality. Real estate is an investment in your future, and experience matters. We have decades of experience as investors and agents.

## READY TO BUY, SELL, OR INVEST? CALL US!

- First time buyers, up or down sizing, vacation homes
- Estate sales, 1031 exchanges, short sales, divorce situations
- Investment properties, short term rentals, house hacking

## REACH OUT TODAY



Katie Jordan



Misty Weaver

VOTED #1 & #2 AGENT 2024 WINCHESTER STAR AWARDS

703-477-2988  
katielandijordan@gmail.com

540-999-8826  
misty@dreamweaverteam.com

