

The Hipp 1914 Theater Comes to Life in Richmond

The Hippodrome Theater will open this spring in Jackson Ward, a historic neighborhood in Richmond. The event caps a decade's worth of planning and investment and construction.

In a city that already boasts several downtown live-music venues, the Hippodrome stands apart. "The Hipp" is located in a National Historic Landmark. Jackson Ward has been a predominantly black community since the early 20th century, and became nationally recognized for its economic and cultural vibrance. In particular, 2nd Street boasted a number of theaters, earning the community the nickname "Harlem of the South."

In 1914, the Hippodrome Theater opened to the community, presenting both vaudeville acts and films. The theater was part of the "Chitlin' Circuit," a group of venues in the eastern and southern United States where

black entertainers could perform when racial segregation was prevalent. After its heyday in the 1930s and 1940s, the Hippodrome showcased popular acts such as Ray Charles, Ella Fitzgerald, Ethel Waters, and James Brown.

In 1945, the building caught fire, and it was rebuilt as a movie theater. In 1970, the Hippodrome became a church, and was rarely used after 1982. The historic venue was not completely forgotten, however.

Richmond developer Ronald Stallings inherited the property from his father. His dream has been to reopen the Hipp as an elegant nightclub, a venue for rhythm and blues, jazz, and soul artists. Stallings is the president of Walker Row Partnership, which has renovated or redeveloped dozens of properties in Jackson Ward. Its mission is to provide Jackson Ward with places to "work, shop, live, and play," all in keeping with "New Urbanism," an urban design movement that promotes walkable mixed-use communities.

After years of planning, Stallings secured financing for the ambitious project in October 2009. Construction took a year and was completed in February. The complex includes a theater, two restaurants, retail space, and 29 apartments. The project cost about \$12 million, with \$8 million of that going toward the theater renovation. The project received \$600,000 from the city and federal funds.

In early February, Richmond Mayor Dwight Jones delivered his second State of the City address in the newly transformed theater. For Jones, whose address promoted "creating healthy and sustainable communities," it was an ideal setting.

—BECKY JOHNSEN



The Hippodrome's new marquee brightens 2nd Street on the evening of Mayor Jones' State of the City address.

Snow Job Winter Can Cost, but Also Benefit

Everyone loves a snow day, except the people paying for the cleanup: taxpayers. Through the end of February, North Carolina had spent \$55 million clearing snow and ice from state roads. The annual budget for snow removal is \$30 million, more than enough in a typical year. But when big storms hit, as they have the last two winters, the state has to pull money from projects

such as pothole repair or tree trimming, according to Julia Merchant, spokesperson for the state's Department of Transportation. Those choices are tough, especially when money is already tight. The South Carolina Legislature passed a special bill this year that exempts school districts from making up all of the snow days; the districts can't afford them.

States pay for snowplows, salt for the roads, and overtime pay for the plow drivers. Virginia stocked up on 48,000 tons of sand and 281,000 tons of salt this winter. But the budgets don't come close to the total cost of a major storm.

The economic impact of a one-day shutdown includes lost wages, slow retail sales, and less tax revenue. The total can be in the hundreds of millions of dollars, according to a study of 16 states by IHS Global Insight for the American Highway Users Alliance. In Maryland and Virginia, IHS estimates the impact at \$183.5 million and \$260 million, respectively. The federal government loses \$71 million per day when it closes, as it did for an unprecedented four straight days during last year's "snow-pocalypse." And those estimates don't include property damage, crop loss, car crashes, repairing power lines, or flight delays, all of which add billions to the cost of winter storms.

When government offices are closed, people can't file for unemployment benefits. A major storm that hit Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina in January contributed to the biggest drop in unemployment filings in nearly one year, but when offices reopened the following week claims increased by 51,000. Bad weather may not affect the unemployment rate, since workers who were paid during any part of the survey period are



A snowplow clears the Cherohala Skyway in western North Carolina.

counted as employed. But it does affect the number of hours people work, particularly in the construction industry.

Not everyone loses money when it snows. "When weather is in the news, it is very good for business," says Scott Bernhardt, Chief Operating Officer of Planalytics, a company that models the economic impact of weather for retailers, manufacturers, and utilities, among others. Snowplow manufacturers and salt suppliers do well during a snowy winter, but some retail stores also benefit. "People grocery shop like crazy. People order pizzas. Convenience stores sell out of just about everything," Bernhardt says. Still, most of the lost sales due to a storm don't get made up, particularly in regions where snow is uncommon, according to Bernhardt: "When snow falls in the South, it's a net loss."

—JESSIE ROMERO

Urban Growth D.C. Population Reverses 60-Year Decline

In the 20th century, New Deal policies and World War II added to the federal payroll and propelled the District of Columbia's population to its peak of 802,000 people in 1950. After that, D.C.'s population declined for decades — until the most recent census, when D.C. grew by nearly 30,000 people, or roughly 5 percent.

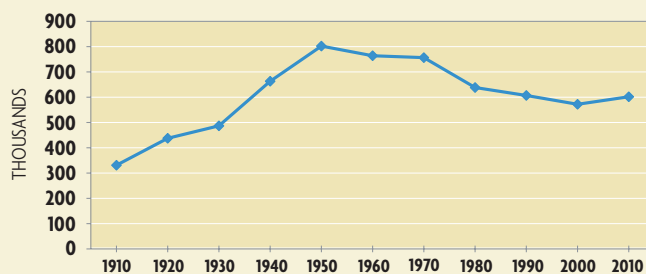
"The overall numbers have a story to tell us about exactly how much the population has increased and how rapidly," says Harriet Tregoning, the director of the D.C. Office of Planning. "We haven't seen growth like this since World War II and this hasn't been a time of remarkable mobility."

The population in 2010 reached 601,723. Fully

12,000 of those people came in the past two years, 10,000 in 2009 alone. Though the data explaining the growth have yet to be published, the rebound likely reflects multiple factors: government growth following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, as well as a general trend of young people and empty nesters moving into cities. From 2007 through 2009, some 4,685 people aged 25 to 34 moved into Washington along with 5,798 people aged 60 to 64, according to American Community Survey (ACS) data released late last year.

"This follows the anecdotal information we're getting," Tregoning says. "There are particular areas where we're getting growth, particularly Capital

D.C. Population Rebound



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau

Riverfront and Columbia Heights.” The riverfront neighborhood is in the southeast on the Anacostia River, south of Capitol Hill, and Columbia Heights lies in the northwest quadrant of the city. Across from the Columbia Heights Metro station, Target and Best Buy anchor a retail complex. Transportation and vibrant neighborhoods are what Tregoning calls the “pull” factors, elements that now attract residents. “We have so many neighborhoods that are now interesting to people and good transit; they’re increasingly served by neighborhood retail,” she says.

The city’s demographic composition has changed as well. ACS data indicate that the white population was estimated at nearly 39 percent in 2009, up from 34.5 percent in 2006, while the black population fell from 55 percent to 53.2 percent during the same period. (In 1980, black residents

comprised roughly 70 percent of the city’s population.) The Hispanic population remained about the same — rising from 8.2 percent in 2006 to 8.8 percent in 2009.

D.C. also grew the natural way — more births. Births have increased annually from about 7,600 in 2000 to more than 9,000 in 2009, with a natural increase (births minus deaths) of about 27,000 since 2000. D.C. also attracted more than 24,000 new residents from outside the United States since 2000. Possibly because of the city’s continued job growth, it also attracted domestic migration. Between 2008 and 2009, about 4,450 more people moved to the area from other states than moved away, according to the D.C. Planning Department.

The job mix in D.C. remains almost one-third federal — 29 percent of its 728,300 jobs — and that may have attracted people to the area. The private sector comprises two-thirds of jobs, and D.C. government and transportation-related jobs make up the rest.

While the District of Columbia’s population has increased, the U.S. population as a whole grew more slowly than during any decade since the Depression, 9.7 percent. The recession slowed immigration and birth rates, demographers say, and that may continue for the short term.

— BETTY JOYCE NASH

Art in the Office Businesses Learn Creativity

When times are tough, business owners need to get creative. At least three programs in the Fifth District boost problem-solving abilities through art-based activities: the Innovation Institute in Charlotte and Fun Days and Creative Meetings in Richmond.

At Art Works Studios and Galleries in Richmond, Fun Days classes serve to reinvigorate organizations. Co-owner Glenda Kotchish says the sessions provide a creative environment where teams can interact. Kotchish, a former computer system consultant and lifelong artist, understands the power of the combined analytical and creative sides of the brain. The Fun Days host small groups, tailored to each organization; past programs include crafting album covers while listening to music, painting a group mural, and assembling handmade books.

The Visual Arts Center of Richmond offers Creative Meetings. According to director of education Aimee

Joyaux, the program was created in response to recent buzz about creativity in the office. “Richmond has a thriving art community and a thriving business community, but there has not been a lot of overlap between the two,” she says. A former student is Jana McQuaid, director of graduate studies at Virginia Commonwealth University’s School of Business. McQuaid participated alongside members of groups from both nonprofit and for-profit sectors, and she says the class encouraged her to reorganize her professional life to encourage creative thinking.

“Our team was working on a new procedure for processing applications,” says McQuaid. “Previously I might have created a draft template and asked for everyone to submit individual written comments. Instead, this time we all met as a group with a large board and Post-It notes. We posted everyone’s ideas and we were able to really feed off of one another’s comments, coming up with a

process that is much better than submitting feedback in isolation.”

The Innovation Institute in Charlotte puts executives from multiple industries under the instruction of painters, sculptors, photographers, or printmakers. Barbara Spradling, the Institute’s Director and a retired bank executive, says that artists take risks. That means they fail, sometimes regularly, while corporations traditionally do not support failure. Consequently, artists have much to offer the business world, and in turn the business world pays artists to host creative classes, making this a “very symbiotic relationship.”

Spradling reports that the recession increased enroll-

ment in these courses as many business leaders increasingly encourage innovation. Art Works and the Visual Arts Center indicate similar success. Each has attracted well-known clients: Members of the Virginia Senate have had their own “Fun Days;” Creative Meeting has hosted Capitol One and Wells Fargo; and the Innovation Institute sent representatives to California to teach classes to Motorola employees.

The term “starving artist” was coined for those who depend upon their creativity as a livelihood. As more companies enlist artists to help stimulate innovation, creativity could become more lucrative.

—BECKY JOHNSEN

Coins for the Commonwealth Alternative Currency Proposal Fails

A resolution to study the possibility of an alternative currency for Virginia may have stalled out, but it’s an idea that’s also being introduced in other state legislatures.

Virginia delegate Robert Marshall, a Republican who represents parts of Prince William and Loudoun counties, recommended to the General Assembly that the Commonwealth adopt its own currency of gold and silver. The resolution went to a subcommittee, which voted to take no action, meaning that it will not come before the full legislature for a vote.

In his resolution, Marshall argued that the Federal Reserve’s monetary policies could lead to economic instability, including runaway prices. But it’s unlikely that the United States would face the kind of drastic hyperinflation that would imperil the U.S. economy, says Randall Parker, an economist at East Carolina University whose work has specialized in the causes and consequences of the Great Depression. “I don’t think that hyperinflation on the order of magnitude that would cease to have the dollar as a functioning medium of exchange is very likely at all.” For that to happen, Parker says, inflation would have to reach Zimbabwe- or Serbia-like levels. Inflation hit 500 billion percent before Zimbabwe abandoned its currency. The Federal Reserve and professional forecasting groups project inflation in the United States between 1 percent and 2 percent for the next several years.

Marshall joins legislators in about nine other states who have made similar proposals. Bobby Franklin in Georgia introduced an act that would require the use of pre-1965 silver coins and silver and gold “American Eagle” coins to pay all debts to and for the state. John Dougall in Utah says he will propose allowing residents to mint gold and silver coins in their homes that



These one- and 10-dollar notes were issued in 1862. Virginia issued a total of \$5.3 million in currency during the Civil War.

would be accepted as part of his proposed new currency.

The last time states issued their own currencies was during the Civil War, when Virginia and other Confederate states, including North and South Carolina, needed to fund wartime operations. Several Indian Territory nations, allied with the South, also had their own currencies. The Confederacy printed money to pay for the war because they were cut off from foreign trading partners and bullion deposits in the North. They had no gold or silver. By the midpoint of the war, Southern currency was a mix of state-issued notes, Confederate notes, and private bank issues (not to mention a healthy supply of counterfeits) — all of which were worthless when the war ended. But today, a Civil War-era 100-dollar Virginia note can be worth as much as \$5,000 to collectors.

Collectors may be interested in another of Marshall’s proposals. His bill authorizing the State Treasurer to mint gold, silver, and platinum commemorative coins passed both chambers and is on its way to the governor.

—JESSIE ROMERO