

ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT, TRAVEL, FOOD, LIFESTYLE, PUZZLES, TV

# THE RHODE ISLANDER

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## Westerly's new direction



RIS  
R.I. SPOTLIGHT

By Jim Hummel  
The Rhode Island Spotlight

WESTERLY — They are alternately subtle and striking.

Take a stroll through downtown and you'll see a dozen murals painted on a variety of buildings, celebrating the rich history of this nearly 350-year-old community. Four more murals adorn buildings in neighboring Pawcatuck, Connecticut. Some are in plain sight, others you have to work a little harder to see — painted on the side of a building in an alleyway or several stories up from street level.

All of them tell a story.

From the Hurricane of 1938 and the century-old Westerly-Stonington high school football rivalry to Westerly Telephone, one of the first automated telephone companies in the country, and Wilcox Park, a 15-acre oasis in the middle of downtown. The murals combine art and history, with a dose of economic development mixed in.

Bricks & Murals, a nonprofit formed in early 2017, was the driving force behind the project, which drew more than 100 artists from across the country and as far away as Germany for a five-day painting festival in September 2017. The murals have been a conversation-starter ever since.

"This is about a community remembering itself, remembering its history and then putting it forward," said Jean Gagnier, a former town councilman who worked for years to secure buy-in from the community on putting up the murals. "If you go to a church, you see stained glass and it tells a story. These murals tell a story about this community and about the people who were involved or the institutions that were here at one time."

It is part of a larger revitalization of the downtown that includes a vibrant restaurant and music scene, the renovation of the YMCA and the

Ambitious public mural program promotes town history and inspires civic pride



A mural in downtown Westerly near Wilcox Park is the work of Bricks & Murals, a nonprofit that drew artists from across the country and as far away as Germany to beautify the town's public spaces.

### More online

For additional digital content about the murals program in Westerly and Pawcatuck, go to [providencejournal.com/spotlight](https://providencejournal.com/spotlight)

from Arizona in 2000, was the newly minted president of the Downtown Business Association in 2016, after relocating her real estate business to High Street four years earlier. Despite her doubts, Brown felt obligated to attend a presentation Gagnier made in 2016 at the library.

There, she learned about a group called The Walldogs, an international organization of sign painters and muralists who travel from community to community to work on projects like the one in downtown Westerly. Cam Bortz, a Westerly resident and Walldogs member for two decades, helped sell her that night.

"I saw the slides of what was the artwork that the Walldogs had done in the Midwest," Brown said. "I was very impressed with it, very impressed. And I said, 'OK, I'm in.'"

Brown would wind up becoming president of the Bricks & Murals nonprofit, which raised \$150,000. It was the Walldogs' first project in the Northeast.

"I think what's particularly cool about [the murals] is the local history," Brown said. "And for me, I got to learn a lot about Westerly that I had no idea. Even locals didn't know. All of a sudden, we're memorializing this history that makes this town unique in an artistic way permanently for all generations."

Gagnier said that not long after they were finished, a lifelong Westerly resident in his 70s approached him. "He said, 'Thanks for making me fall in love with my town again.'"

But Brown was also wearing her business association hat when she signed on.

"This is a way that we can single out Westerly

See SPOTLIGHT, E4



The Hurricane of '38 mural near Donahue Park in Pawcatuck, Conn., Westerly's sister city across the Pawcatuck River. From left are Wendy Brown, Jean Gagnier and Tim Lebling of the nonprofit Bricks & Murals, which is responsible for the mural program. [THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / BOB BREIDENBACH]

debut next year of the newly refurbished United Theater, which will be a regional hub for the arts.

"Public art can be an economic engine, it can make

a place interesting, it can differentiate one area from another," Gagnier said. He added that Westerly and Pawcatuck have adopted a theme: "Two states, two

towns, one community."

Wendy Brown was skeptical when she first heard about the mural plan. Brown, who moved to Rhode Island



PET OF THE WEEK | E2

MARGE THE DASHING TUXEDO CAT IS AWAITING ADOPTION IN PROVIDENCE.

Inventive drama about John Quincy Adams opens Thursday at The Gamm Theatre

By Susan McDonald  
Special to The Journal

Spinning historical politics against modern-day life certainly sounds like a familiar theatrical experience, but there are very few similarities beyond that when comparing "Hamilton" with a new look at the presidency of John Quincy Adams.

"JQA," which makes its New England premiere with a new staging at the Gamm Theatre this month, offers no music, rap monologues or dancing, unlike "Hamilton." What it does bring

If you go ...

**What:** "JQA"  
**When:** Oct. 24 through Nov. 17  
**Where:** The Gamm Theatre, 1245 Jefferson Blvd., Warwick.  
**Tickets:** \$34.25-\$66.25  
**Information:** (401) 723-4266, gammtheatre.org

is a timely — perhaps timeless — look at the connection of Americans to their government.

The subtitle of the play, written by Aaron Posner, is lengthy but prescient: "A Series of Fictitious Encounters between John Quincy Adams and Sundry Family Members and

See 'JQA,' E2



The cast of "JQA" gathers around a laptop to review some script changes in the production with playwright Aaron Posner, seated at bottom right. Standing, from left, are Helena Tafuri, Norman Beauregard and director Tony Estrella. Seated are Jonathan Higginbotham and Candice Brown. [THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / SANDOR BODO]



## HEALTH

# What's the best way to manage blood sugar?



Dr. Keith Roach

**Dear Dr. Roach,**  
I am 75 and have Type 2 diabetes. I take metformin and glipizide. If my blood sugar is high, should I lie down and rest or get up and move around? What is the best way to prevent high blood sugar?

— **K.P.**  
Type 2 diabetes is mostly a result of insulin resistance, which has several treatments. One is giving more insulin; insulin shots do that, but the glipizide you are taking signals your pancreas to make more insulin. Another is making insulin work better, and many of the newer drugs do this. Metformin tells your liver not to make sugar, and another medicine — canagliflozin (Invokana) — causes your kidneys to lose sugar through the

urine.

However, perhaps the two most important ways are to not take in so much sugar through sweets or starches such as bread, rice and pasta. Your body quickly turns these to sugar. The other is to exercise, which both uses sugar in the muscles but also acts against the insulin resistance.

If your sugars are consistently high, work with your diabetes specialist and a nutritionist dietitian to come up with a plan to keep your blood sugar from getting too high.

At age 75, it's also important to prevent blood sugars from getting too low, so your diet, exercise and medications need to be properly regulated together.

— Write to Dr. Roach in care of *The Providence Journal Features Department*, 75 Fountain St., Providence, RI 02902, or email [ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu](mailto:ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu).

## VOLUNTEER

### Norman Bird Sanctuary (Middletown) — Welcome Center volunteers

NBS is looking for volunteers to greet visitors, answer phones, ring in sales, and help with administrative tasks in their Welcome Center. The Center is open Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.; hours are flexible. If you're 16 or older, contact Becky at [bknight@norman-birdsanctuary.org](mailto:bknight@norman-birdsanctuary.org) or (401) 846-2577, ext. 11.

### Junior Achievement of Rhode Island (Providence) — JA Inspire volunteers

JARI needs volunteers for JA Inspire, a career exploration event at the Rhode Island Convention Center on Nov. 20 and 21 from 8 a.m.-1 p.m. They need greeters to board buses, provide an overview of the event and assist with disembarkation. They also need exhibit hall monitors

to prevent students from congregating, as well as individuals fluent in Spanish and Portuguese to translate for students if needed. Volunteers may sign up for one or both days. Contact Amy at [amy.craig@ja.org](mailto:amy.craig@ja.org) or (401) 331-3850, ext. 18.

### Stephen Hopkins House (Providence) — Volunteer tour guides

SHH is seeking volunteer tour guides to lead visitors through the 18th-century home of Founding Father Stephen Hopkins. Three-hour shifts are available on Wednesdays from 11 a.m.-2 p.m. year-round, and on Saturdays from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. through Nov. 30. Contact [shh1707@gmail.com](mailto:shh1707@gmail.com).

For additional volunteer opportunities, visit the *United Way of Rhode Island* at [UWRI.org](http://UWRI.org), call (401) 519-0380 or email [volunteer@uwri.org](mailto:volunteer@uwri.org).

## PET OF THE WEEK



Marge, a tuxedo cat with double paws, was rescued from a hoarding situation. She's awaiting adoption at Providence Animal Control. [KAREN KALUNIAN]

# Marge the tuxedo cat is a real beauty

By Karen Kalunian  
Special to The Journal

If this girl could talk, I'm sure she'd have a lot to say. Her expressive face is just beautiful. Marge is a stunning tuxedo, about 4 years old, with the cutest little dot on her nose and a sweet smile. She also has double paws — what's not to love?

Marge was rescued from a hoarding situation and now needs a loving home. She is awaiting adoption at

Providence Animal Control at 200 Terminal Rd./Adoption Way. Call (401) 243-6040 for more information. The shelter is open Tuesday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

If you've been looking to change the life of a very deserving cat, then Marge is waiting to share her heart with you.

If you know of an animal in need please contact Karen directly at [ilove-dogs1920@gmail.com](mailto:ilove-dogs1920@gmail.com)



A jazz band performs in the U.S. Capitol in June 1962, at the invitation of Sen. Claiborne Pell. [THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL, FILE]



## Sweet sounds of music

Rhode Islanders love music, and the Philharmonic is once again filling Veterans Memorial Auditorium with glorious sounds. It was founded in 1945, and even had comedian and musician Jack Benny as a guest violinist years ago. But orchestras and bands of all kinds have long existed in the state. The late Sen. Claiborne Pell even hosted a jazz concert in the U.S. Capitol building in Washington.

— Michael Delaney, director of photography and graphics



Funnyman Jack Benny plays violin at a benefit concert with the Rhode Island Philharmonic at Veterans Memorial Auditorium in Providence in April 1967.



The 1924 Cranston High School Orchestra. Arnold Skoog is at the piano. Front row: Lowell Merrill, concert master, and violinists Helen Williamson and Clinton Billson. Middle row: violinists Ruth Grant, Hugo Norden, Haig Baligian, Gwendolyn Pettis and Emily Millard. Back row: flutist Carl Malmberg.

[COURTESY OF CRANSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY]

## 'JQA'

From Page E1

Political Associates on the Subjects of Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of a More Rational Relationship with Government."

"I wanted to explore the nature of government and how we relate to it, trying to represent both points of view equally so there are exactly no answers," Posner said in an interview before working with The Gamm's four-person cast.

Commissioned by the Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., to write something that could be staged as part of its Power Plays series, Posner turned to politics.

"D.C. is the world of politics, and plays about American history, power and politics do very well," Posner recalled. He presented several ideas, mostly adaptations, because, to that point, that's all he had written (his take on Anton Chekov's "The Seagull" in "Stupid F----- Bird"). "I was both excited and terrified that they chose 'JQA.'"



Playwright Aaron Posner has made some tweaks to "JQA," his play about John Quincy Adams, for its run at the Gamm Theatre. [THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / SANDOR BODO]

He enthusiastically delved into the concept of government with his writing, focusing on a relatively "underappreciated" president who accomplished little during his term.

"John Quincy Adams was not a very charming person or well studied, but he was full of interesting contradictions, and I was interested in the journey of his life," Posner mused. "He was kind of like Jimmy Carter in that they were both deeply religious but open-minded people of unquestionable integrity."

Both men also had more

productive post-presidential lives, he added, noted that Adams was a long-serving member of Congress and a leader of the anti-slavery movement.

As the project progressed, Posner found that writing about contemporary issues in historic context allowed him to subtly pose questions and thoughts.

"If I wrote this as a contemporary play, everyone would know what they thought about it before they even saw it," he said with a laugh. "So I looked into history, kind of like Shakespeare dealt with issues contemporary to his time but set his plays in Greece or Italy."

Gamm Artistic Director Tony Estrella, who directs "JQA," said the production serves as a "pathway to engagement" in political discussions for the audience.

"Look at the events of the last three weeks, and we could talk about the idea of principles versus political expedience," he said, prompting Posner to note that Adams "viewed government as a duty, a responsibility."

"If there are any answers

in this play, it's that we should be pro-engagement, pro-integrity, pro-thoughtfulness," Posner said.

After directing the play in Washington, including Trinity Repertory Company actor Phyllis Kay, Posner said he made a few changes to the script and brought some tweaks to the Gamm rehearsal.

"Since there is no plot, just a collage of situations, it's much easier to change," he said.

The audience experiences Adams at different ages, at the hands of actors of varying genders and races. Posner said he arrived at that decision after seeing "Hamilton" and experiencing the way it pushed the boundaries of characters.

"I just want to keep the focus on Adams as refracted through different people," he said.

Estrella stressed the relevance of the story in today's society.

"It feels so of-the-moment," he said. "You just can't help building on the constitutional crisis of today. The play squarely looks at that, so I can't think of anything more relevant."