

*"I saw in their eyes something I was to see over and over in every part of the nation—a burning desire to go, to move, to get under way, anyplace... They spoke quietly of how they wanted to go someday, to move about, free and unanchored... I saw this look and heard this yearning everywhere in every state I visited. Nearly every American hungers to move."*

—John Steinbeck,

*Travels with Charley: In Search of America*

As we all allow ourselves to begin contemplating our future in a post-COVID world, one thing is certain—a year of cabin fever makes one eager to get out of Dodge for a few days or more. Over the past few months, I have gotten into a habit of starting my many Zoom meetings with a simple question: what is the one activity you have most missed, and you are most looking forward to restarting when it is safe? The answer is always nearly unanimous—we all miss traveling!

We miss the kinds of trips we used to take for granted—a long weekend to visit the grandkids or a college reunion, for example. But it also seems being cooped up has caused us to fantasize about more elaborate adventures too. Even if it's merely armchair traveling, I hear a lot about Bali, Tuscany, and elsewhere (and that's just me talking to myself).

While we look forward to our change of scenery, the rest of the country is contemplating their escapes as well. Hopefully, many will plan their visit here in 2021. We have the good fortune of living in a place that people want to visit—for its beauty, its historical significance, and of course, for its food and wine.

Charlottesville and Albemarle County's hospitality industry is a critical economic engine that has arguably been more negatively impacted by COVID than any other sector. The devastating impact on our restaurants, hotels, retailers, and support businesses has been swift and severe, and as our community recovers, we hope they will too.

This industry creates jobs and eases the tax burden on residents. Visitor spending generates state and local tax revenue that offset infrastructure and public services costs for locals. Visitors to Albemarle County and Charlottesville contribute to our community's economic prosperity



**Elizabeth Cromwell, President and CEO of the Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce**

by fueling the lodging, transportation, retail, restaurant, arts, entertainment, and recreation industries while indirectly impacting a wide variety of suppliers providing goods and services.

In 2019, Charlottesville/Albemarle's travel industry helped produce \$683 million in direct visitor spending, 6,125 jobs, and nearly \$23 million in local taxes collected. These statistics for 2020 will be sobering as we begin to address the full impact of the pandemic.

Courtney Cacation, Executive Director of the Charlottesville Albemarle Convention and Visitors Bureau, stated: "The tourism industry reflects what we all love about our community: what makes us unique, the activities we love to do, the food we love to eat, and the beverages we love to sip. Visitor demand is pent up after being quarantined at home for the past year. By the spring, we project that visitors will once again be staying in our hotels and eating in our restaurants, supporting the local businesses our neighbors own and that we enjoy. I'm hoping this community will continue to support these businesses in the meantime to ensure they're still around come spring."

So when you're considering a change of scenery, perhaps you can become a tourist in your own community for a weekend. Support these businesses, and you'll be supporting all of us.

In other news, at our recent Rebound Ball virtual celebration, we offered COVID-related awards for businesses that have selflessly helped out others during the pandemic. Liza Borches was named Charlottesville Regional

Chamber of Commerce 2020 Business Leader of the Year. Thirteen local individuals, businesses and nonprofits nominated by the business community received awards for their collaboration, innovation and determination during this challenging year.

Sober Pierre and Javier Figueroa-Ray of Pearl Island Café and Catering received the Christopher Lee Small Business Person of the Year Award, recognizing their business success and contributions to the community.

Quinton Harrell of Heritage United Builders and Wilson Richey of Ten Course Hospitality received Alley-Oop Awards recognizing outstanding assistance to other businesses.

Animal Connection, Bright Ideas, Brooks Family YMCA, Chick-fil-A at Fashion Square, Culinary Concepts AB, Jefferson Area Board for Aging (JABA), King Family Vineyards, Michie Tavern and Virginia Institute of Autism (VIA) received Pivot Awards recognizing resilience in adapting their operations to the pandemic.

I would also like to recognize Red Light Management + Bama Works Fund of Dave Matthews Band, Skyline Tent Company, Martin Horn, and Riverbend Development. Some of these individuals are Chamber members, some not, but all deserve our praise for assisting the Blue Ridge Health District to launch a COVID vaccination clinic site at the former Kmart parking lot in Charlottesville. Thanks for demonstrating your dedication to our community!

For further and updated information, visit [cvillechamber.com](http://cvillechamber.com).

Charlottesville Albemarle Convention & Visitors Bureau (CACVB) [visitcharlottesville.org](http://visitcharlottesville.org)



Project Rebound, A Blueprint for Economic Resiliency and Reinvention in the Greater Charlottesville Region is available on the Chamber website at [cvillechamber.com/rebound](http://cvillechamber.com/rebound).

**Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce** 434-295-3141 [cvillechamber.com](http://cvillechamber.com)

The Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce advocates, convenes, and engages to strengthen business in the greater Charlottesville Region.