

the history

The Virginian Restaurant is lauded as “one of the South’s most famous eateries” in Coy Barefoot’s book, The Corner, a history of UVA’s commercial district. While we certainly agree, this Charlottesville landmark has been through a lot to get where it is today. From transforming into a soda fountain during Prohibition to temporarily “going under” during World War II, The Virginian has had quite an eventful legacy since its grand opening in 1923. This well-loved restaurant is proud to be the oldest one in town – and to have been a staple of Corner culture for multiple generations of ‘Hoos!

While small, The Virginian is packed with tradition. Its interior is decorated with photographs documenting the history of Charlottesville and of The V itself, while the wooden booths and pressed tin ceiling further enhance the restaurant’s historic feel. It’s a charming atmosphere, sure, but make no mistake – there’s more to love between these walls than just ambiance. The Virginian also features a fantastic menu full of classic American favorites. We’re especially noted for our incredible burgers and sandwiches, NY Strips, signature crab cakes, and our ever-illustrious mac ‘n cheese.

A remarkable facet of The V is its tendency to change atmospheres throughout the day – every few hours, it’s an entirely different scene. Bustling weekday lunches are usually dominated by businesspeople, UVA staff, and tourists looking for excellent service and delicious food; dinner lends itself more to families, students, and couples desiring an intimate but lively atmosphere; and after 10pm, The Virginian becomes one of Charlottesville’s most popular and dynamic nightlife destinations.

We hope you enjoy your visit as we continue to deliver the history, charm, and tradition that is The Virginian Restaurant.

Since its inception in 1923 The Virginian has remained in the same location, making it the oldest restaurant in the city of Charlottesville. The Virginian was one of the first tenants in the then-newly constructed Hildreth building at 1521 University Avenue. This building was named for its developer and was the first of many developments designed to stretch the Corner, UVA’s commercial district, westward toward the University. Billy Gooch and Ellis Brown, both alumni, were the founding owners of The Virginian. During Prohibition, The Virginian was no speakeasy, but instead “was known for its root beer, goose liver sandwiches, and small sporting goods shop,” writes Coy Barefoot. Upon Prohibition’s repeal in 1933, The Virginian, along with many other Corner restaurants, turned their soda fountains into draft taps. For roughly the first thirty years of the 20th century, tradition forbade first-year men from hanging out on the Corner. The most prized spots on soda fountain stools and on benches at the corner were reserved for fourth-year “Corner Kings.” But all that started to change around 1930 when bold first-years made The Virginian their own.

The restaurant has seen ups and downs, from meat and beer shortages in the ‘40s to social unrest in the ‘50s to debaucherous parties downstairs in the ‘70s. Through it all, one thing has remained the same: 1521 University Avenue has always been...The Virginian.

the company

The Virginian belongs to a restaurant group called The Virginian Restaurant Company (The VRC). The VRC is heavily focused on its employees being the driving force behind all of its success. There is a strong focus on training, management, and building loyalty. Through perks and rewards unique to the restaurant industry, like establishing a company minimum wage or shutting down and taking all of the employees to an outdoor party, The VRC has maintained an extremely low level of turnover and high level of employee loyalty.

the owner

I grew up in Alexandria and went to the University of Virginia and studied finance at the McIntire School of Commerce (graduating in 2001). While in school, I waited tables at local college restaurants to help support myself. I was an ok server, but I was a better debater, and after months of hearing how I would do things differently and joking about buying the restaurant, the owners of the tiny but venerable Virginian started to take me seriously. In August of 2001, at the ripe old age of 22, I became a restaurant owner. A consummate optimist and a burgeoning pragmatist, I actually spent the first year of ownership thinking I could work my finance job in New York and absentee own the Virginian at the same time. For any restaurateurs out there, they know how ridiculous that is. I wasn’t gone long, but when I came back restaurants became my life. The struggles of a small business owner are almost impossible to properly convey, but one could argue the more you’ve had to struggle, and the more you’ve had to sacrifice, the more you appreciate coming out on the other side, and I am not short on appreciation. The Virginian did take a long time to get on the right path, but eventually it allowed me to open a second restaurant, and then a third. After buying and selling another restaurant on the UVA Corner, all of this led to Citizen Burger Bar, a restaurant and concept I had wanted to try forever, and a place whose success and reception has been profoundly humbling. We have a number of other concepts in the pipeline and are always growing, especially with multiple amazing partners at this point. Overall, my company is employee focused. I believe the best restaurant and business owners realize that their employees are more important than they are. Finding and guiding good people makes this company what it is. I can’t thank all of my employees and all of my guests enough.

I am so grateful for all of those people who have helped me along the way, but particularly my family. My younger brother and sister who are always willing to lend a hand, and especially my older brother, who was the first GM this company ever had, my mother who never stops thinking of new ideas, and my father, whose wisdom and support and guidance are the only reasons I am even remotely successful.

—Andy McClure (Owner – The Virginian Restaurant Company)