

Photo exhibit is not the ills that trouble Petersburg

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To the Editor:

I was able to go downtown for the May "Friday for the Arts" on May 14th. I have lived in Petersburg for many years and I love this city and call it home. When I moved to Petersburg back in the 1960s the city was thriving, then there was a gradual decline, then in recent years, improvement.

"Friday for the Arts" is really good for the city, bringing people in and promoting tourism. The city can once again be prosperous if we continue to improve our school system and continue to renovate our inner city and all its wonderful historical buildings. We have the opportunity to capitalize on the Fort Lee growth and expansion. We must always support local business even as we seek to attract additional industry, whatever form that may take. I consider tourism to be the best industry/ business Petersburg can really count on to realize its full potential. We are not just a stop off the interstate or an extension of Richmond. We have a lot going for us, but we need to all work together.

We are, unfortunately, our own worse enemy. An example of this is the recent brouhaha over the "Old Towne Exposed" art exhibit, a collection of photographs by artist Mel Talley. I consider photography to be an art form in its own right; therefore, I prefer to call Mr. Talley an artist, or, if he prefers, photographer, as both titles are apropos. I saw the exhibit and considered it fascinating. There was drama, humor, mystery - all the qualities that make a moment captured in time remain forever.

The front page of the May 13th edition of The Progress-Index gave a good account of the exhibit and its intentions: to draw people to Old Towne and raise money for P.A.W.S. (the nonprofit Petersburg Animal Welfare Society). A petition to stop the exhibit, with more than 300 signatures, was submitted to City Council and the reasons cited by the petitioners were (I quote the following, verbatim, from the newspaper) "We do not want our city celebrated because of nudity, depravity, and the devastation associated with such a display."

I wish to say, first of all, nudity is in the eye of the beholder. Perhaps the opposition to "Old Towne Exposed" could enlist the aid of our Commonwealth's Attorney General Ken Cuccinellie, who gave his staff lapel pins depicting the state seal altered, i.e., covering the exposed breast of the Roman Goddess Virtue, with an armored breastplate.

The photographs taken by Mr. Talley gave no hint of depravity; the suggestion of that comes from two other headlines on the May 13th issue of The Progress-Index: "Girl gets off bus, is stabbed" and "Vigil tonight for Slaying Victim" ("He was one of two young Petersburg men shot to death in Shockoe Bottom").

If any of us want to "get up in arms" about the ills of our city, we need to address the real issues of poverty, guns, drugs and violence - all the ills that harm each of us, one and all. We have a duty to take care of the homeless, the mentally ill, who roam our streets. We have a duty to take care of the homeless and abused cats and dogs who roam our streets. I am very happy that I can use the "Mother's Day" money my children gave me to donate to P.A.W.S. and I can buy a poster of Mr. Tilley's photographs.

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Petersburg