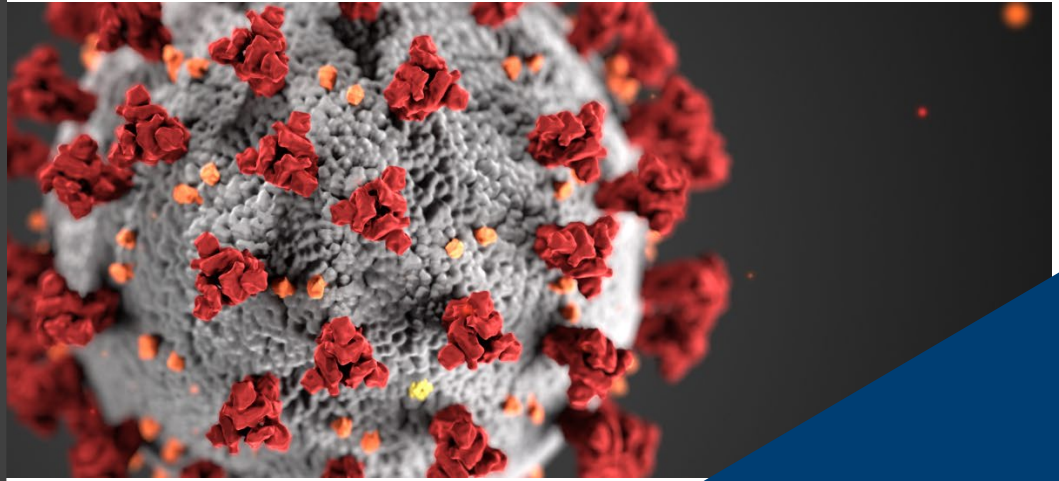


IN THE
TIME
OF
COVID-19



WELCOME

This is CHOIR's collective effort for expressing and documenting our extraordinary, lived experiences in the time of COVID-19.

#COVIDCREATIVITY
@VA_CHOIR on Twitter

Editorial Team: Rani Elwy,
Gemmae Fix, Keith McInnes
Designer: Elizabeth Maguire



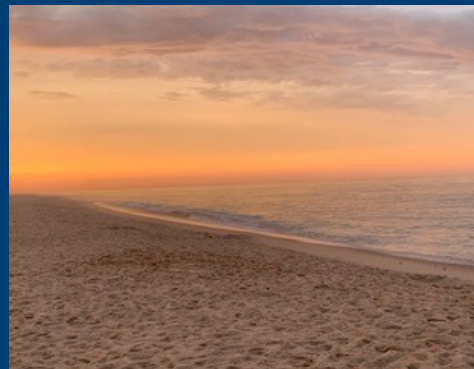
SEND YOUR
SUBMISSIONS TO:
RANI.ELWY@VA.GOV

NOTE: New schedule! Our next monthly issue will be out November 25, 2020. Please keep your submissions coming!



Baking has always been one my favorite ways to unwind. After going apple picking for the first time, I tried some new fall recipes with fresh apples and apple cider - apple crumble pie, apple cinnamon cupcakes with salted caramel frosting, and apple cider caramels! Wishing we were able to share treats in person in building 9!

LIZ SPITZER



When beauty finds you.

BARBARA BOKHOUR

This easy and almost healthy cake has become a pandemic staple for us.

LAUREN MOO

FRENCH ALMOND CAKE

¾ cup plain Greek yogurt
1½ cups granulated sugar
4 large eggs
1½ cups all purpose flour
¾ cup almond flour meal
3 teaspoons baking powder
¾ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon almond extract
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
¾ cup sunflower oil, grape seed oil, or
canola oil

For the glaze:

1 teaspoon finely grated orange zest
3 tablespoons fresh orange juice
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
½ teaspoon almond extract
¾ cup powdered sugar plus more for sprinkling
1/2 cups sliced or halved almonds (raw or roasted – unsalted either way)



1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Spray a 9-inch round cake pan (with at least 2 inch tall sides) with baking spray. Line bottom of pan with parchment paper and spray parchment paper lightly. Set aside.
2. If using raw almonds, place almonds in a small baking pan. Spread to a single layer. Bake for 15 minutes or until just beginning to turn pale golden brown, stirring every 5 minutes. Remove from oven and set aside to cool.
3. In a large bowl, combine the yogurt, sugar, and eggs, oil, and extracts, stirring until well blended.
4. Sift together the all-purpose flour, almond flour, baking powder, and salt. Stir to combine.
5. Add the wet to the dry and stir well. Don't worry, at first it will seem to separate, but keep stirring till smooth. This might take 2-3 minutes.
6. Pour the batter into prepared pan. Bake for 35-45 minutes, until the cake feels springy to the touch in the center and a toothpick or cake tester inserted into the center comes out clean. Cover loosely with foil if getting too brown near the end and cake is still not done*. Be careful not to over bake. Cool cake on a wire rack for 10 minutes; then turn it out of the pan onto the rack.
7. To make the glaze, combine the orange zest, orange juice, powdered sugar and extracts in a small bowl for the glaze. Stir with a whisk until smooth. Cover and set aside.
8. While cake is still warm, using a pastry brush, gently pat the glaze all over the cake. Just keep going over the cake till the glaze is gone. Some of it will drip off, but most of it will soak in. Arrange or sprinkle almonds over top of cake while glaze is wet and pat gently. Allow cake to cool completely (if you can resist). Sprinkle with powdered sugar and serve.

Many of us will explore the outdoors during this time of COVID as it's one of the few "safe" and healthy activities we can enjoy. Here is a photo I took in Wells, Maine on 9/27/20.



The next day I attended virtual services for the holiest day for Jews, Yom Kippur. It was a strange service. You are supposed to join the community to confess your sins, but this year we all joined by ZOOM or watching Facebook Live. We were connected yet disconnected. Immediately after, the rabbi gave his sermon, but even that was untraditional. The sermon began with this quote:

"I wish it need not have happened in my time," said Frodo.

"So do I," said Gandalf, "and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us." – JRR Tolkien, "Fellowship of the Ring"

It was an odd choice to begin a religious sermon, yet a powerful way to reflect on the times we are living in, in terms of COVID, the recent passing of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and the upcoming election. These are strange times. I'm grateful to be part of the supportive CHOIR community and encourage everyone to VOTE!

BETH ANN PETRAKIS