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ALERT TOP STORY

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

## Short Pump couple author book series to help understand childhood diabetes

Thad Green

Jul 13, 2024

**W**hen Rhodes Ritenour was a 5-year-old with diabetes, there was no book on children growing up with diabetes.

There is now — he wrote it.

Ritenour, now 45, of Short Pump has lived with Type 1 diabetes for more than 40 years. Over the years, he and his wife, Alana, have worked to support those living with diabetes.



Need food for work?





At their residence in Short Pump on Tuesday, Alana and Rhodes Ritenour show their new children's book series that includes lessons about diabetes management.

AKASH PAMARTHY, TIMES-DISPATCH

The couple have coauthored a series of books called “**The Adventures of Rhodes & Alana.**”

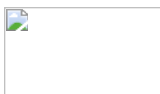
The books are geared toward kindergartners through fifth-graders and feature 8-year-old Rhodes, a character partly based on his real-life counterpart.

Instead of focusing the books on diabetes education, the couple wanted to tell the perspective of a kid living with a chronic disease.

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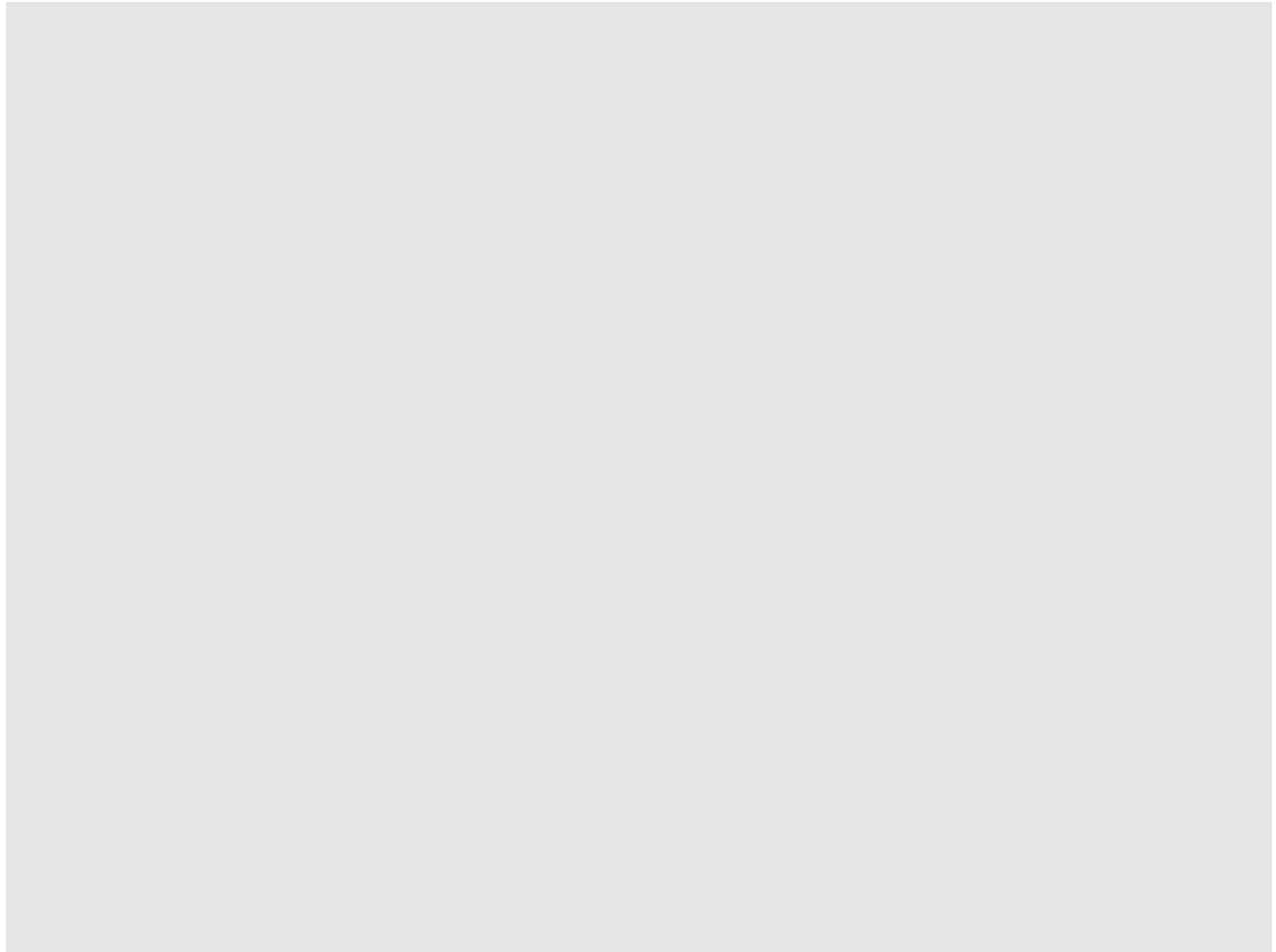
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“We didn’t set out to write another children’s book about diabetes,” Rhodes said. “We set out to write an adventure story where the main character happens to have Type 1 diabetes and is living life to the fullest.”



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This June, the second book in the series, "Bully Blues," was released. This time, Rhodes is dealing with a baseball teammate who makes fun of his diabetes. But with Alana's support, Rhodes and the bully eventually find common ground.

AKASH PAMARTHY, TIMES-DISPATCH

## Growing up with diabetes

On Oct. 10, 1983, 5-year-old Rhodes was just beginning kindergarten in the small town of New Market in Shenandoah County when he was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes, in which the pancreas produces little to no insulin.

"It was a shock when I was diagnosed," Rhodes said. "You never forget that day; it changes your life forever."

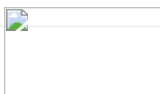
### About this story

Do you know an unsung hero? A friend or neighbor whose good deeds benefit the region? Or a colleague doing extraordinary work?

He or she may be featured in our upcoming "Making a Difference" feature that highlights the great community efforts of central Virginians.

Send your nominations to [david.ng@timesdispatch.com](mailto:david.ng@timesdispatch.com). Entries should include a brief description of the good deeds as well as contact information for you and your nominee. Please label entries with the phrase "Making a Difference" in the subject line of your email.

To learn more about "The Adventures of Rhodes & Alana" book series and receive information about diabetes management, visit [thediabetessupportgroup.org](http://thediabetessupportgroup.org).



Need food for work?

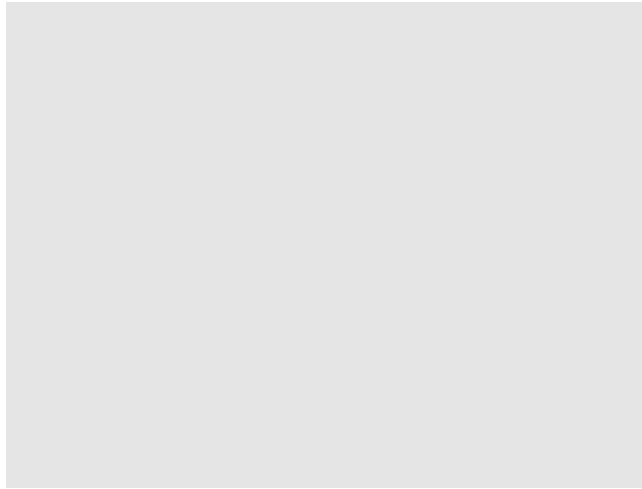


Rhodes was in the hospital for two weeks as he and his family learned from doctors how to manage his condition. At the time, Rhodes had to have finger pricks to test his blood sugar and receive insulin shots frequently. These days, Rhodes wears a continuous glucose monitor to help manage his diabetes.

While there were fewer educational resources when Rhodes was a child, he said he received incredible support from family, friends, coaches and teachers that helped him work through his diagnosis.

## Books with a message

Rhodes and Alana met as undergrads at the University of Virginia in 2005 and were married in 2008 after receiving law degrees, he from UVa and she from the College of William & Mary.



The Ritenours have coauthored a series of books called "The Adventures of Rhodes & Alana." They wanted to tell the perspective of a kid living with a chronic disease.

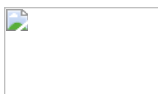
AKASH PAMARTHY, TIMES-DISPATCH

The Ritenours have two children: daughter Virginia and son Rhodes Jr., who are 10 and 8, respectively.

Both love to read, but their parents found that they were not learning how to be more compassionate and how to appreciate differences in people from the books they read.

"We were reading books to them that they were enjoying, but we were like 'what's the point of this?'" said Alana, 44. "Is there a lesson there?"

The couple decided to enter the children's book business and tie their diabetes story to it. "The Adventures of Rhodes & Alana" series follows 8-year-old Rhodes, a Type 1 diabetic, and his best friend, Alana, throughout their various adventures.



Need food for work?





Alana and Rhodes Ritenour's books are geared toward kindergartners through fifth-graders and feature 8-year-old Rhodes, a Type 1 diabetic, and his best friend, Alana, throughout their various adventures.

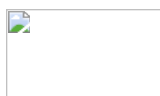
AKASH PAMARTHY, TIMES-DISPATCH

The first book, "School Bus Secret," was released in November 2022. In that story, Rhodes and Alana are trying to make their way to school after missing the bus. During their adventure, Rhodes must prick his finger to draw blood and test his blood sugar, which he worries will gross out Alana.

This June, the second book in the series, "Bully Blues," was released. This time, Rhodes is dealing with a baseball teammate who makes fun of his diabetes. But with Alana's support, Rhodes and the bully eventually find common ground.

While the books are fictional, they grab a few elements from Rhodes' childhood and add other scenarios into the stories. With each child with a chronic disease having unique experiences and challenges, Rhodes and Alana hope their books will reach them in some type of way.

In "The Adventures of Rhodes & Alana," the Ritenours created a main character who has a supportive friend and receives encouragement to speak openly about having a chronic condition.



Need food for work?





"The Adventures of Rhodes & Alana" series follows 8-year-old Rhodes, a Type 1 diabetic, and his best friend, Alana, throughout their various adventures.  
AKASH PAMARTHY, TIMES-DISPATCH

"Not only does it educate some about a chronic condition, but it also normalizes the disease and empowers people to talk about whatever they're dealing with, whether it's asthma, autism, an allergy or diabetes," Rhodes said.

Rhodes and Alana went straight to the source by having a focus group comprised of their daughter's then-third grade classmates to offer feedback. They received suggestions about dialogue, character clothing, illustrations and other details that helped them create books that appealed to that age group.

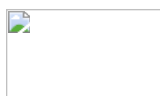
"We want the kids in the story, and an 8-year-old voice in a very natural conversation to tell their friends, 'Oh yeah, this is what I'm going through,'" Alana said. And our kids will say, 'I wouldn't say it that way.' They've really helped us to hone in."

## From patient to advocate

Rhodes began volunteering with the **American Diabetes Association** as a child and currently serves as chair of the ADA's National Board of Directors.

Alana serves on the Mid-Atlantic chapter board of **Breakthrough T1D**, a nonprofit formerly known as the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

The couple co-founded the **Diabetes Support Group** in 2010, providing resources about day-to-day diabetes management topics such as keeping a health journal, using insulin pumps and practicing good nutrition.



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“We think it’s really important to have a free resource to so many people in the Type 1 and Type 2 community who don’t have the ability to pay for resources,” Rhodes said. “We give practical knowledge based on what we’ve learned: me as the diabetic, Alana as the support person.”

The Ritenour family gradually learned how to live and communicate among themselves while dealing with Rhodes’ diabetes. Now, they are taking lessons from their home life and offering those tips not only to those living with diabetes, but also family and friends who are supporting them.



Alana and Rhodes Ritenour met as undergrads at the University of Virginia in 2005 and were married in 2008 after receiving law degrees from the College of William & Mary and UVa, respectively.

AKASH PAMARTHY, TIMES-DISPATCH

“We’ve worked really hard on that relationship and our dynamic where I’m supportive, but not naggy,” Alana said. “I feel like I can talk to the support people in the world and share my experience.”

The Ritenours hope to publish their next book in early 2025. That one is slated to chronicle Rhodes’ experience on a field trip with his new continuous glucose monitor, so his mother will not have to accompany him on the trip.

With Rhodes and Alana’s work with the diabetes community now extending to children’s books, they will continue going down that path to help children who may be struggling with an illness.

“I think that it’s important that we empower kids who are dealing with a chronic condition to talk about it and seek support,” Rhodes said. “We want to make people understand that they’re not alone.”



Need food for work?



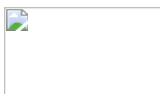
**Recognize Broad Street from these Times-Dispatch archive photos?**



03-20-1963 (cutline): Real Blooms Are Coming. These plastic flowers that have seemed to bloom in planters on the median strip of Broad St. in the past years will give way this year to real begonias--pink, red and white. Downtown Retail Associates announced today plans to replace the ivy in the planters with the begonias next month. The city will maintain the flowers until fall, when the ivy will be replanted. The group said it will continue this year the practice of having flower carts on sidewalks during Garden Week.

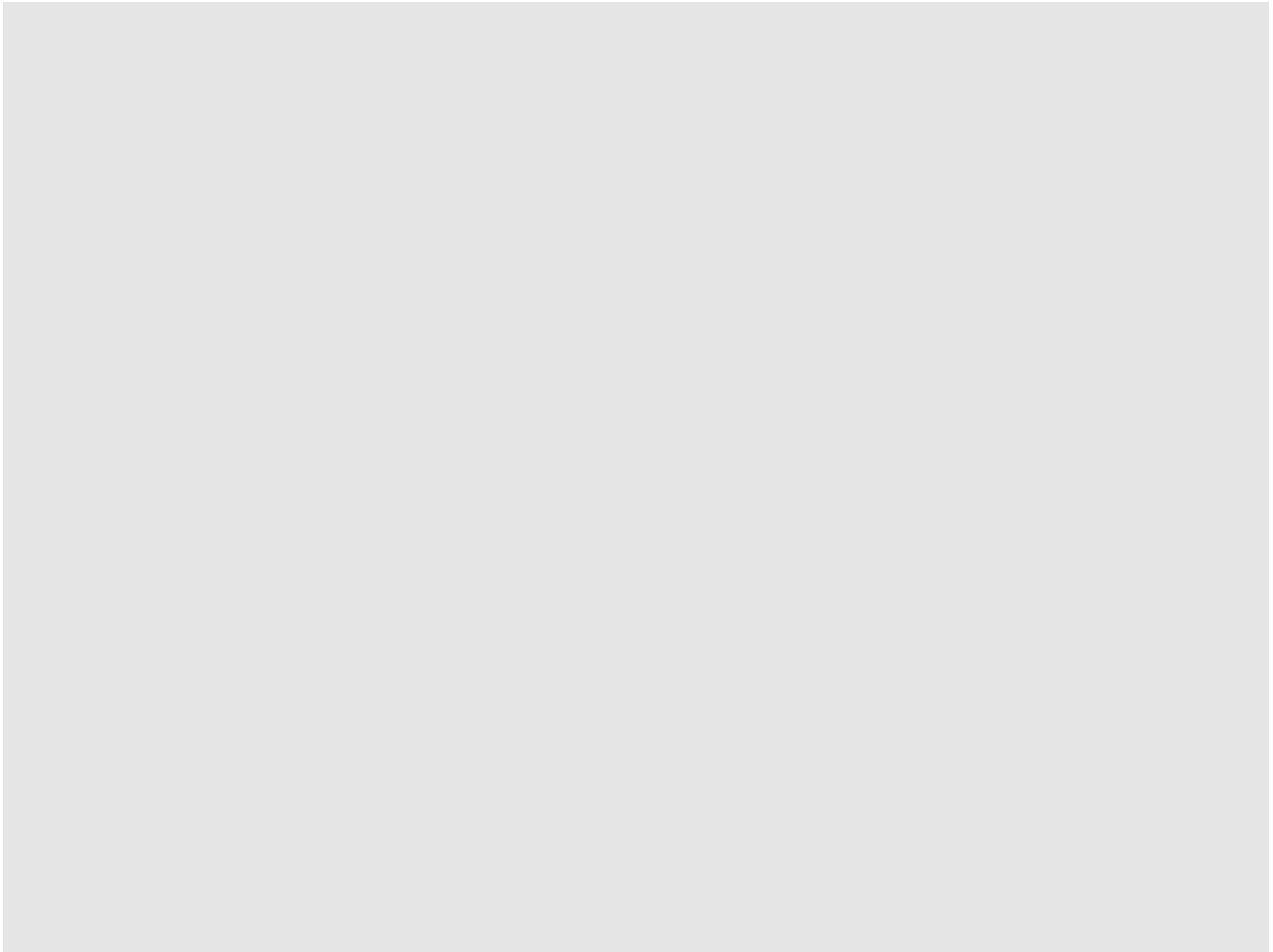
Staff Photo

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**Need food for work?**

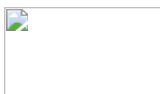




09-03-1954: Broad and Bowe Streets, looking west.

Staff photo

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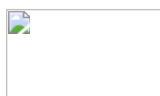
**Need food for work?**





02-22-1955 (cutline): New Motorists' Guide--this large sign recently installed at Ryland and Broad Streets, is designed to prevent accidents and help northbound motorists on U.S. Routes 1 and 201 in Richmond keep on the proper route. The "next right" part of the sign flashes constantly. The Traffic Engineering Bureau said that sign was installed to prevent accidents at Bowe and Broad, where drivers frequently discover they are supposed to turn but are in the wrong lane.

Staff photo



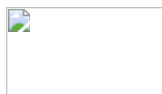
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08-15-1967 (cutline): New signal for Left Turns This type of new traffic signal to regulate left turns has been installed at the intersection of Bowe and West Broad Sts. The signal, which faces eastbound traffic on Broad, is designed to give motorists a chance to make left turns without guessing what westbound traffic is doing. If east bound motorists have a flashing green, west boung traffic has a red light. If eastbound motorists have a flashing amber, westbound traffic has a green light and left turns should be made at the motorist's risk.

Staff photo



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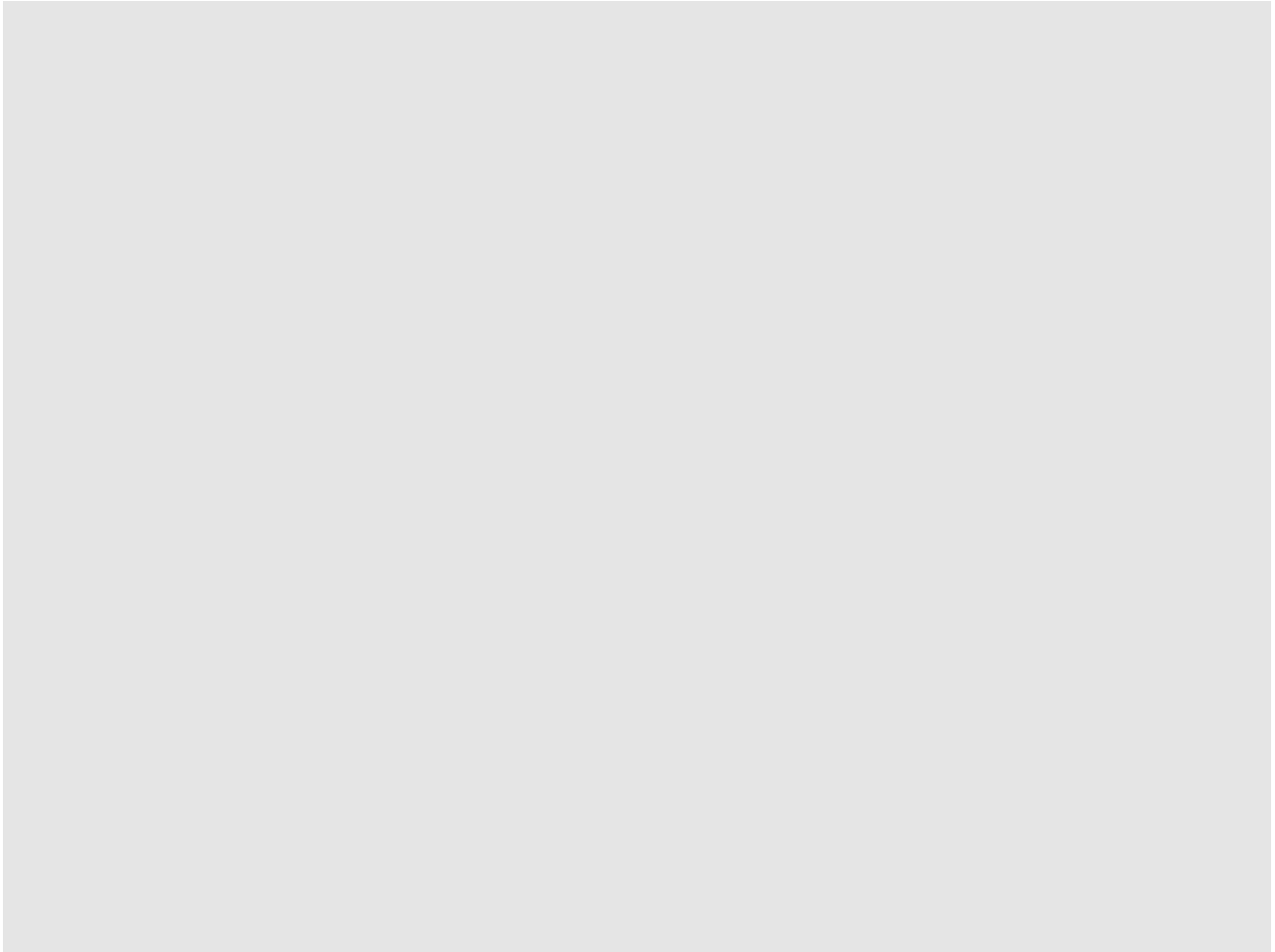
05-24-1957 (cutline): New Help for the Motorist Motorists headed west on Broad St. now find some helpful information in the form of new route markers hitting them right in the eye. The large markers, suspended over the street, give directions to Rts. 1, 301 and 60. City Hall is in the background. The new markers are at 11th and Broad Streets.

Staff photo



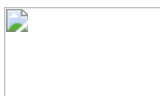
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11-27-1954 (cutline): Disputed passage--This performance at Sixth and Broad Streets wasn't unusual in the downtown traffic scene yesterday. Vehicle blocking crosswalk has attempted right turn from Broad but is blocked by traffic ahead on Sixth Street.

Staff photo



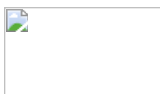
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01-07-1955 (cutline): Appraiser H.P. Slusser (left), with counter in hand, checks pedestrian traffic on Broad Street.

Staff photo



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06-03-1968 (cutline): A place to Relax on Broad Street W.E. Cash of Hopewell tries a bench placed on Broad Street today by the city of Richmond. Several benches were placed on the south side of Broad between Second and Fourth Streets on an experimental basis. If the trial proves satisfactory, more benches will be located in busy downtown areas, according to City Manager Kiepper.

Staff photo



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04-28-1966: In April 1966, Mrs. Arch Clegg inspected newly planted flowers on a median along Broad Street in Richmond. Two varieties of holly and more than 1,000 petunias were being planted on Broad that week between Adams and Eighth streets. The displays, sponsored by Downtown Retail Associates, were to stay in the planters until fall.

Staff photo

**Thad Green** (804) 649-6023

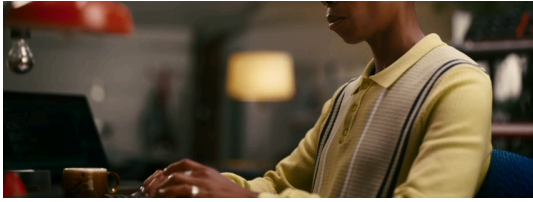
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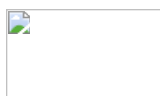


This New Portable AC is Sweeping the Virginia

Outfany

By Thad Green

Richmond and Chesterfield County Reporter



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