

MAR 31

Friday
5:30pm | Diamond Theater & Butz Lobby

VIRTUAL REALITY EXPERIENCE



TRAVELING
WHILE
BLACK

Traveling While Black
Closing Panel & Reception

ZOELLNER
ARTS CENTER
LEHIGH UNIVERSITY



2022.2023
SEASON

Zoellner Arts Center receives state arts funding support through a grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, a state agency funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.



PANELISTS

Vida Ali was born in Trinidad & Tobago, where her parents raised her with the philosophy that “it takes a village” and “always treat everyone as family.” In her own words, “We never closed our doors. As little as we had, we always shared.”

As a child, Vida moved with her family to the Washington, D.C. area. She began her work life at Ben’s Chili Bowl, the iconic Washington, D.C. restaurant that was opened in 1958 by Ben and Virginia Ali. In 1984, she relocated to Los Angeles with her husband, Sage Ali. Vida quickly jumped into the music business, first at Virgin Records and then at Capitol Records in Hollywood. In 1992, Vida left Capitol, and in partnership with Sage, she launched her own company, Vida Media Group.

As one of the entertainment industry’s most highly respected publicists, Vida spearheaded national and international media campaigns for numerous recording artists. Her work was critical to the success of superstar MC Hammer, and her campaign helped his career to explode. Over the years, Vida worked with many other legendary artists, including Rachelle Ferrell, Paul McCartney, Garth Brooks, Lenny Kravitz, Janet Jackson, Tina Turner, Prince, Bonnie Raitt, The Beastie Boys, Megadeth, Poison, Grover Washington, Jr., The Whispers, The Beach Boys, Bebe and CeCe Winans, and many more. Vida continued to work with her DC family business by setting up national media campaigns from her VMG West Coast office to bring special attention to the 40th, 45th, 50th and 55th Anniversary celebrations of Ben’s Chili Bowl. Also, we

worked with many non-profit organizations such as Make-A- Wish Foundation to help make difference.

After spending over 25 years in the entertainment business in Hollywood, Vida returned to Washington, D.C. in 2009 following the death of founder Ben Ali. She is currently working with the family to forward the expansion of the Ben's Chili Bowl brand as well as the continuation of its legacy in the D.C. community and beyond. Over the past 60 years, Ben's has been a significant part of D.C. history and culture, and Vida's impact on the brand has been tremendous in terms of publicity and media relations as well as operations.

With all her credentials and experience, Vida is best known for her great integrity and work ethic. Her positive attitude and deep commitment to excellence in everything she undertakes always inspires and brings out the best in those around her. Vida truly cares about people, and as a result, she is masterful at creating a cooperative and mutually supportive team environment in which everyone takes pride in excellence and everyone wins. She has often been referred to as being "the calm in the center of the storm" because she makes doing a great job look easy and fun. Vida strives daily to spread joy in people's lives. As Ghandi said, "In a gentle way, you can shake the world."



Virginia Ali is a truly incredible woman. Her earthly life began on her parents' Virginia farm on December 17th, 1933, and today she is as vibrant as ever. She smiles whenever recounting her fond memories of

childhood on the farm, her deep involvement in her family's country church, her college studies at Virginia Union University, and moving to Washington, DC as a young woman to find her destiny.

As her beloved DC community knows so well, Virginia's historic destiny found her the day she met Ben Ali, her husband and partner in life, love, family, and business. The dynamic newlyweds opened the doors of the now iconic Ben's Chili Bowl on August 22, 1958. Today, over 55 years later, this institution has become a place of fond memories for countless friends from DC, Maryland, Virginia, and all around the world.

Known affectionately as "Mom" or Mrs. Ben, Virginia has touched the lives of everyone she has encountered. Although she has achieved near celebrity status, her demeanor has never changed - with all her natural poise and sophistication, she still exemplifies the pure, wholesome values instilled by her parents. She lives a philosophy of giving love and kindness to everyone she meets, and as a result she is cherished and respected in a way that is very rare these days. In fact, at this point she is considered the "Matriarch of U Street" and countless DC residents call her "Mom."

In addition to all the hours she has put in at Ben's Chili Bowl, Virginia has also made time for many other meaningful endeavors. She has served on the Board of Directors of For Love of Children, The Thurgood Marshall Center for Service and Heritage, the Islamic Society of the Greater Washington Area, and Cultural Tourism DC among others.

Over the years, Virginia and Ben have received countless awards and accolades including the prestigious America's Classics Restaurant Award from the James Beard Foundation. They were inducted into the DC Hall of Fame in 2002 and were later given the Key to the City by Washington, DC Mayor Adrian Fenty. More recently, the Smithsonian placed Ben's Chili Bowl on its list of the 20 Most Iconic Food Destinations Across America.

With all that she has accomplished thus far, Virginia isn't resting on her laurels. As her family, friends, and employees will attest, she is a true dynamo who encourages those around her to live fully and strive for excellence in all areas of life. She gives generously of herself and her time, and despite all the recognition and accolades, she is perhaps best known for her kind, loving nature and her very sound wisdom. Virginia is truly a people person, and we are all very thankful for everything she gives us by simply being herself.



Courtland Cox began his long career as a civil rights organizer in 1960 when he joined the Nonviolent Action Group (NAG), which eventually became the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Several years later, he became SNCC's Program Coordinator, and today he remains involved as the Chair of the SNCC Legacy Project. He is also currently president of CCAP Consulting.



Jaciel Córdoba serves as morning and noon anchor at WFMZ-TV in Allentown, PA. It's a position he's held for 19 years. His broadcasts have won two Emmy Awards in the last two years. He's been active in his community through church, reading in schools, public speaking and emceeding events. Jaciel got his professional start in television behind the scenes as a production assistant at CBS2 Chicago. From there he moved to on air roles in Fort Myers, Memphis, Jackson, TN and Dayton OH. He's originally from Evanston, Illinois. In his free time he enjoys reading biographies and catching up on his favorite TV shows.

Thank you for joining us this evening. We would like to learn more about our audiences. Please tap the button below to complete an **anonymous, one-minute demographic survey** so that we can learn more about our audience.

If you are attending with multiple family members, **please complete the survey for every member of your family in attendance.** Thank you.

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