

One Artist Two Hashtags and VIRGINIA STRONG in Reston Public Art Reston connects community.



Anne Delaney, Art Reston Executive Director, points out the detail in local artist Ben Morse's chalk art of the Virginia State Bird and Flower, as Morse continues to work and Robert Goudie, Executive Director, Reston Town Center Association, looks on. Photo by [Mercia Hobson](#).

By [Mercia Hobson](#)

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It seemed right. In the first hours after dawn on the day Northern Virginia began to reopen, a masked artist knelt and chalked an image of the Virginia state bird and flower on the brick plaza in front of Mercury Fountain in Reston. Below, in vibrant blue block letters, he wrote VIRGINIA STRONG.

When the community could not physically be together for months given the governor's stay-at-home order, the community was Virginia Strong. Public Art Reston created #ATHOMECHALKART. The nonprofit organization virtually invigorated and connected artists and admirers of all ages through its Stay-at-Home Chalk Art event scheduled for each week in May. Coronavirus may have kept the community home, but on Public Art Reston's Facebook page and on driveways and sidewalks, chalk art connected people, whether on the nonprofit's Facebook or at a social distance.

Robert Goudie is the Executive Director of Reston Town Center Association, a partner organization to Public Art Reston. He said the work in front of the fountain came to be and it tied to Reston Public Art and more. "We thought... wouldn't it be even more powerful if RTCA actually created a piece of chalk art and become a part of the event as a way to help further promote it. So I immediately reached out to our friend, Ben Morse, a local artist who is a big supporter of the local arts... Ben was enthusiastic about doing something, so we were on our way."

Morse said that he chose the cardinal and dogwood because they would tie in the Virginia Strong theme.

According to Goudie, Morse being there on Friday coincided with the cautiously optimistic Phase One reopening of Town Center and elsewhere in Northern Virginia and promoted the final days of the Stay-at-Home Chalk Art event. He said they saw this as "a lovely triple play": sponsor a local artist in Ben Morse; promote the amazing community-unifying event that is Stay-at-Home Chalk Art by becoming a part of it; and celebrate through the event how "we are all in this together, Virginia Strong, as we inch our way into Phase One of recovery and beyond."

Anne Delaney, Executive Director of Public Art Reston, said while the chalk event culminated with Ben Morse's drawing, they were extending the event an extra week to celebrate South Lakes High School Class of 2020. According to Delaney, a parade takes place on Wednesday evening, June 3. "Public Art Reston is encouraging Restonians to participate in that community spirit event by doing a chalk art piece congratulating all 2020 graduates, whether from SLHS, Herndon High School, [or] college," she said.

"Stay-at-Home Chalk Art" is a partnership with Reston Town Center, Reston Community Center, Reston Association, Reston Historic Trust & Museum and Greater Reston Chamber of Commerce.

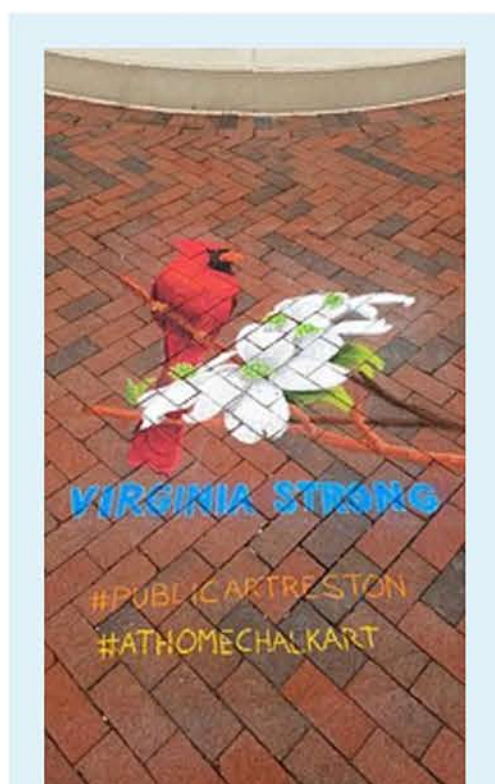


Photo by Ben Morse

Chalk art by Ben Morse of Reston at Reston Town Center.