

RVA 100 | EXPLORING HIDDEN HISTORIES

# Ukrop's rainbow cookies celebrate Italian heritage

Ukrop's rainbow cookies have achieved iconic status in Richmond for their soft, buttery flavor and bright rainbow color.

A free rainbow cookie was given to every child at Ukrop's grocery stores, an independent family-run supermarket chain that operated for 70 years in Richmond before closing in 2010.

In 2020, Ukrop's Market Hall opened, serving Richmonders Ukrop's fried chicken, breakfast pizza, sides, salads and baked goods. And rainbow cookies, of course.

The rainbow cookies' origins date back to Italian immigrants who came to the U.S. and made sponge cake in the colors of the Italian flag to celebrate their heritage. Over time, the sponge cake evolved into buttery cookies.

Dot's Pastry Shop in Carytown was the original rainbow cookie maker in town. When Ukrop's purchased Dot's in 1976, the rainbow cookies became a part of Ukrop's bakery. Now, a free rainbow cookie is given to every child at Ukrop's Market Hall.

Ukrop's rainbow cookies can now be found in grocery stores such as Kroger, Publix and Food Lion in seven states. In 2023, nearly 10 million rainbow cookies were produced right here in Richmond.

— Colleen Curran



ALEXA WELCH EDLUND, TIMES-DISPATCH

Rainbow cookies and butterstar cookies line the shelves at Ukrop's Market Hall on Dec. 8, 2020, the hall's opening day.



COURTESY OF UKROP'S

Ukrop's rainbow cookies have achieved iconic status in Richmond for their soft, buttery flavor and bright rainbow color. A free rainbow cookie was given to every child shopping with a parent at Ukrop's grocery stores. Now, a free rainbow cookie is given to every child at Ukrop's Market Hall.

### About this series

This story is the latest installment of RVA100, our series that highlights the people, places and objects that define the Richmond region. We're exploring hidden histories and colorful backstories. Some will be familiar. Others you may learn about for the first time. For 100 days, we'll showcase a different quintessential Richmond icon in the newspaper and at richmond.com.



**VIEW:** To watch a video about Ukrop's rainbow cookies, point your smartphone camera at the QR code, then click the link. [NEWSVU](#)

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**Richmond Times-Dispatch**

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HANDOUT PHOTO

The Ukrop's store on Buford Road is seen around 1963. Generations of family ownership expanded to new locations and grew the business to 29 supermarkets throughout central Virginia.

# Ukrop's supermarkets have a long and storied history

While the grocery store that launched its name has closed, the Ukrop name can still be seen all over Richmond, from food products sold in local stores to sponsored events like the Ukrop's Monument Avenue 10K.

The family started its empire in 1937 when 22-year-old Joe Ukrop mortgaged the family farm to open up a market the size of a two-car garage on Hull Street. Ukrop's grocery stores were the highest volume independent food store in Richmond by the late 1950s. Generations of family ownership expanded to new locations and grew the business to 29 supermarkets throughout central Virginia.

In 1976, Ukrop's bought Dot's Pastry Shop, Richmond's premier bakery, which added fresh cakes, pies and an iconic rainbow cookie.

**About this series**

100 people, places and things  
**RVA100**  
that you should know about Richmond

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**VIEW:** To watch a video about the history of Ukrop's, point your smartphone camera at the QR code, then click the link. [NEWSVU](#)

The family sold all of its retail locations in 2010, though Bobby Ukrop and his two sons-in-law retained the manufacturing

side of the business to sell baked goods and prepared foods to retailers across the region.

Ukrop's Market Hall opened at 7250 Patterson Ave. in 2020, selling brand favorites such as fried chicken, potato wedges and pizza, for dine-in or carryout.

— Sean Jones

## RRHA

From A1

the authority's CEO. Still, the last-minute rush was a surprise.

"My staff said: 'We've got tons of people coming up, waving money orders and saying 'please, please, please can I sign up,'" Nesmith said. They could — and authority staff are still tallying up the numbers and the impact.

But at first glance, Nesmith said the authority is optimistic it can recover half of the unpaid back rent through the program.

One reason is that half of the 700 families who account for bulk of that — each owing back rent of from \$1,000 to \$30,000 — signed up for the program. The other 350 and counting who signed up as of Aug. 31 owe much less.

"I've heard people say '\$30,000, in public housing!' But remember, that's from three years of COVID," Nesmith said. But three years of unpaid \$830 a month rent — what a family with income of \$33,300, or less than the federal poverty line for a couple with three children, would pay — can reach the \$30,000.

RRHA volunteers knocked on doors in weekend waves in late June, after July 4 and in August, along with another political campaign approach — evening phone-banking, as authority staff volunteered evenings to get the word out. The effort uncovered some surprises. Some of the back rent was due on apartments that had been abandoned.

"We can open those up right away," Nesmith said.

And that touches the heart of the unpaid rent problem.



Nesmith

## Tracking the news

**The background:** \$3.9 million in back rent piled up during RRHA's eviction pause that began at the start of the pandemic and ends in October.

**What's new?** By Aug. 31, about 650 families had signed up for the authority's last-chance repayment plan.

**What's next?** First payments under the new plan are due on Oct. 31, which likely means the earliest that any missed payments would result in an eviction is February.

The authority has thousands of people on its waiting list for its units meant for lower-income Richmonders. They represent a huge share of the city's affordable units at a time when rents have ballooned out of reach for many.

"When people are staying in public housing and not paying rent and we're not doing lease enforcement, that clogs up the system and people can't move off the waiting list," Nesmith said.

### The repayment plan

Residents on the repayment plan have to make a down payment amounting to 10% of income, up to a maximum of \$100. Thereafter, residents would pay down their back rent with monthly payments, again at 10% of income, up to a cap of \$200.

They would be in default if they miss two months of repayment plan payments, at which point they would get a first notice of court action to begin the multistep path to an eviction. With a first payment under the new plan due on Oct. 31, that likely means the earliest any missed payments would result in an

eviction is February.

Formally speaking, two months of missed rent payments is supposed to trigger the first step toward eviction, although in the past the authority often did not make that first move in the multistep process to get the court order until it had made several efforts to talk to a tenant without a response.

But in tandem with the end of its eviction pause next month, Nesmith is planning a new early intervention effort when tenants start missing rent payments.

The authority will be hiring lease enforcement specialists, assigned to keep an eye out for missed rent payments and then to directly contact tenants.

This might just mean a reminder, or it could involve finding that a tenant's income or life situation has changed, and so their rent — which is set at 30% of income — needs to adjust. Sometimes, if tenants lose a job or see work hours cut, they cannot afford their current rent, but don't always tell the authority but simply let rent payments slide.

Sometimes, Nesmith expects early outreach might connect tenants with programs like the city's eviction diversion program or family crisis fund, which can provide grants to help out in a short-term crisis.

Sometimes, it may mean finding a different kind of housing. Nesmith wants to develop connections with supportive housing groups that can provide affordable homes with some of the supports and wraparound social services that may be part of the reason why a public housing tenant cannot keep up with rent.

"Life happens," Nesmith said. "But our job is to house people and help them stay housed."

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