

# E | LIVING & ARTS

Museum has designs on 2014 lineup, E3

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THINGS TO DO



A Pink Pig sticker is among the memorabilia on exhibit at the Breman Museum. CONTRIBUTED BY WILLIAM BREMAN JEWISH HERITAGE MUSEUM

## Rich's history put on display

Role that store played in Atlantans' lives is on exhibit at Breman.

By Felicia Feaster  
For the AJC

When is a store more than a store? When is an institution so enmeshed in people's lives that the idea of an existence without it is hard to contemplate.

That describes Rich's department store, a beloved Atlanta institution that became intertwined with the lives of the people who shopped there during its remarkable 138-year run.

Rich's began as a dry goods store founded in 1867 by Morris Rich and his brothers until it was eventually absorbed by Macy's in 2005. But for decades, the store was a meeting place, destination, friend and comforting beacon in hard times to the Atlantans who worked and shopped there. Shoppers dressed up for special occasions to dine at the downtown store's Magnolia Room, celebrated with the store's revered coconut cakes and marked the holidays by riding the Pink Pig. They also took advantage of a return policy so generous, the urban legend was that Rich's would take back used snow tires. And Rich's didn't even sell snow tires.

Rich's continued on E7

myajc.com

Go to MyAJC.com/sundayliving to share your memories of Rich's department store and read what others are saying.

## What's inside

### Mystery unsolved

"Winter's Bone" author digs into his family's history with the tale of a tragic explosion in "The Maid's Version." E4

### Glorious greens

Mustard greens lend themselves to hearty veggie dishes, but don't call them the "next kale." John Kessler explains. E6

### Christmas at Biltmore

America's largest home has decked its halls with holiday grandeur. E18

## PJ Personal Journeys

An award-winning feature that spotlights the lives of extraordinary individuals and the stories that define our region and connect our community.



Tuyet Van Thi (Vivian) Trinh (right), and daughter Sophia Le, who holds the family chihuahua, Chocolate, want to tell the story of their son and brother, Victor Le, in hopes it will help other families struggling with mental illness. KENT D. JOHNSON PHOTOS / KDJOHNSON@AJC.COM

# His own worst enemy

Victor Le was a brilliant student who seemed destined for greatness. Until his mind turned on him.

By Josh Green  
For the AJC

It was a cool, clear night in September 2012. At 10:57 p.m., the dispatcher answered a call. "Gwinnett 911." "My cousin, he's threatening to rob a gas station." The complainant's voice was a youthful whisper. "OK. When?" "Tonight. He showed us a gun and he's threatening to go out and rob a gas station." "And he's there with you now?" "No, I locked myself in my room." "What is your cousin's name?" "Victor Le." "And what's your name?" "James Pham ... P-h-a-m ... Can you send help, right away?"

At that moment, Gwinnett County police Officer J.J. Smith was en route to a report of suspicious activity near Stone Mountain. Young and fit, he'd spent all of his five years with the department patrolling southern Gwinnett. A radio call went out about an Asian male with a gun in Lilburn. Smith changed course and raced to Southgate Drive, a manicured cul-de-sac of palatial homes. Smith parked his cruiser and walked over to a stacked



A photo of Victor taken during his graduation from Parkview High School in Lilburn is surrounded by dishes of his favorite foods.

stone mailbox looking for a house number. Behind it was a large home with a wide front porch. Light dew had settled on the sloping front yard.

The mailbox was unmarked. Smith opened it and found a piece of mail, confirming he was at the right location. Then he heard a voice. "What are you doing here?"

## 2

### Looking for a purpose

One sunny day in January, Victor's mother and sister walked into a Duluth coffee

shop and settled into a harshly lit booth.

Wearing a houndstooth jacket and billowy scarf, Victor's mother Tuyet Van Thi Trinh — she goes by Vivian — looked a little sleep-deprived. Her daughter, Sophia Le, a college freshman whose prettiness echoes her mother's, cracked nervous jokes.

They wanted to refute rumors that linger on the Internet — that some sort of fight between family members preceded Victor's actions that night. But mostly they wanted Victor's story to help troubled

## HOW WE GOT THE STORY

Josh Green first covered the Victor Le story for another newspaper in 2012. Haunted by the events that occurred that night in September, he longed to revisit the family and give a fuller explanation for what transpired. To tell the whole story, Green spent hours talking to Victor's family and friends, reading police reports and listening to audiotaped police interviews with the family and officer J.J. Smith. He also spoke to experts in the fields of law enforcement and mental health. The result is a sensitively told story about a tragic turn of events that underscores the capricious nature of life.

Suzanne Van Atten  
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people and to serve as a cautionary tale for other blindsided families.

Vivian, a job counselor with DeKalb Workforce Development, is no stranger to hardship. As a teen, she was separated from her mother, who paid in gold to evacuate Vivian from communist Vietnam.

She endured a "tough" marriage to a petroleum en-

Continued on E10

Next week: Danny McWilliams was so fascinated by the Nautilus, he built one in his front yard.



# A Sign of Quality for Real Estate.



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