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MOUNT VERNON'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER • A CONNECTION NEWSPAPER

DECEMBER 10, 2009



PHOTO BY JEFFREY AARON / THE GAZETTE

Nell McKeown and Catie Liebeck collected 460 pounds of pumpkins from neighbors and donated them to New Hope Housing.

Pumpkin Girls Help Feed 200

From neighborhood decorations to New Hope's kitchens.

BY JEFFREY AARON
THE GAZETTE

Contemplating how they could reduce food waste and earn credits toward an award from Girl Scouts, Catie Liebeck and Nell McKeown found it right at their doorsteps: pumpkins, which had been used as Thanksgiving decorations.

Liebeck, 16, and McKeown, 15, gathered their pumpkins and then enlisted their neighbors who had also used them as decorations to donate theirs as well.

Within days, the West Potomac High School

twosome had amassed 460 pounds of pumpkins that they stored in McKeown's garage.

The next logical question came: what were they going to do with all of those pumpkins?

Unsure if food pantries or shelters would take the pumpkins whole, preparations began to solicit organic ingredients from local suppliers and enlist a commercial kitchen so that the Alexandria pair could make pumpkin bread. But the likelihood of an owner allowing the duo to borrow a commercial kitchen appeared an unreasonable request, particularly during the holidays, said McKeown's mother, Debra. In stepped Chris Bramante, community outreach and volunteer coordinator for New Hope Housing in Alexandria,

SEE FROM NEIGHBORHOOD, PAGE 21

Preschool Celebrates 67 Years

Non-sectarian cooperative preschool dates to WW II.

BY GERALD A. FILL
THE GAZETTE

Many things have changed in the Fort Hunt and Hollin Hall community since World War II, but one thing hasn't: the Tauxemont Cooperative Preschool program. It now educates 65 preschool children from 2 1/2 to 6 years old.

The program has endured over a half century of continuous private financial and volunteer support by participating families. It receives no federal or state financial assistance. The school has had an almost iconic impact in the community for former students and parents, according to the staff. Parents and former students frequently return after decades to

SEE PRESCHOOL, PAGE 6

Less of a Mix

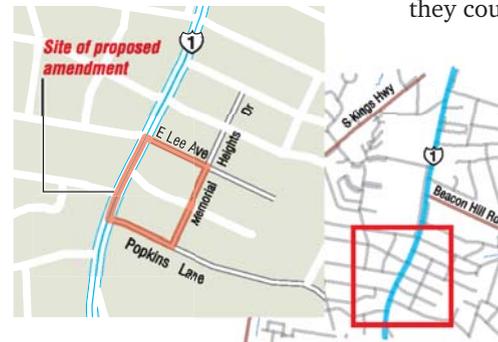
Developer of old Dairy Queen site freezes plans for intensive retail.

BY MICHAEL LEE POPE
THE GAZETTE

The demolished remains of an old Dairy Queen haunt a stretch of land along Richmond Highway just south of the Beacon Mall Shopping Center. For years, the property has been

vacant as plans for a development known as "Memorial Heights" languished. Now the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors might be lowering expectations for mixed-use retail at the site.

Some say the move could be considered a setback for revitalization efforts on Richmond Highway, although things aren't as bad as they could be.



GRAPHIC BY LAURENCE FOONG / THE GAZETTE

SEE COUNTY, PAGE 5

The 1.23 acre site at issue is located on the east side of Richmond Highway to the south of East Lee Avenue and to the north of Preston Avenue. The site slopes steeply away from its frontage on Richmond Highway and flattens out along its eastern edge.

Women's Group Honored

Victims of domestic violence find support in Route 1 corridor.

BY GERALD A. FILL
THE GAZETTE

In 2004 Mattie Palmore and Kari Warren, themselves victims and survivors of domestic violence, and who worked with victims of domestic violence and homelessness in their own places of employment, saw a need for a special kind of advocacy outreach program in the Route 1 corridor.

They wanted to assist women and children who were victims of violence and lacked the wherewithal to take advantage of support services in the courts, homeless shelters, social service coun-

WGMV Mission

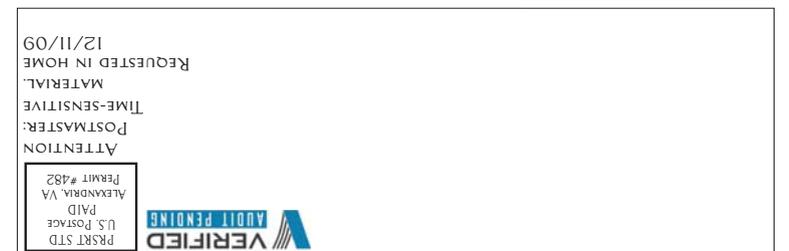
"Our struggles were meant to build us up, thus allowing us to be a blessing and healing comfort to other women until they, too, can love themselves."

seling, and other county and non-profit organizational help.

With grit and hard work and with the help of many others, the two women formed what is now a five-year-old organization that has assisted many women and children who are victims of domestic violence.

The Office of the Attorney General recently awarded the

SEE STATE, PAGE 7



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'Liberty Letters:' Series of Patriotic Monologues

BY MIKE MURDOCK
FOR THE GAZETTE

Justice is a human ideal that goes hand-in-hand with freedom, equality, and most of all, liberty. On Monday, Dec. 7, the 58th anniversary of the attacks on Pearl Harbor, Mount Vernon High School student Andrew McKellips displayed his knowledge of all of these human ideals, with his "Liberty Letters: A Series of Patriotic Monologues."

McKellips extracurricular performance was inspired by his family's 310-year tradition of service in the nation's armed services. The series of patriotic monologues began in 1755 with David McKellips, who served in the French and Indian war, and ended with Andrew McKellips portraying himself in 2014, as a Naval Officer prepared to fight and die for the ideals the country was founded upon and that his ancestors defended.



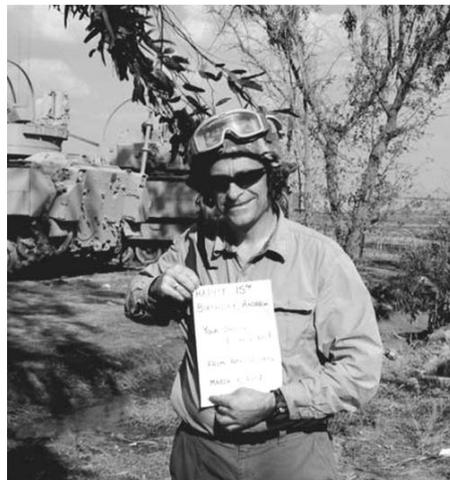
Andrew McKellips

The depiction of each McKellips family member and U.S. war they fought in was enhanced by Andrew McKellips' performance on the piano.

"Liberty Letters" is both historical fact and projected historical fiction. The six-act performance defines the principles of liberty, while the fifth scene captures the principles of love and family. Paul McKellips, Andrew's father (played by Andrew in the scene), e-mails his son on March 3, 2007, his birthday, from an outpost between Baghdad and Ba'qoubah. The e-mail came with an attached picture of Paul McKellips holding a piece of paper with the message: "Happy 15th Birthday Andrew, Your Daddy Loves You, From Baritz, Iraq."

Scene six was Andrew McKellips' view of his future four years from now, and he describes this time as his "turn to step into history and assume my role in the great cause of liberty." His aspiration to be a naval aviator and/or JAG lawyer will be funded by a four-year Navy Option Scholarship. His Harvard education and MIT Navy ROTC will be paid for in full.

When asked about the Navy scholarship



Andrew McKellips' father, Paul, holds the note that reads "Happy 15th Birthday Andrew, Your Daddy Loves You, From Baritz, Iraq."

he won, he replied, "I don't want it [this article] to be about me, I'd rather it be about the importance of standing up and delivering freedom where oppression seeks to disguise tyranny."

He stressed the importance of the message his show depicts: That "liberty is not something that we receive from the federal government. It's not some fancy blinking neon sign where we park ourselves and just wait for dinner to be served. Liberty is the dangerous and treacherous road that we travel in this life. Through free will we de-

termine our outcomes in life. Our outcomes may not be fair or equal, but they are ours."

THE PERFORMANCE ended with his personal letter to his parents, appealing to all Americans to stand with him in the fight against tyranny and oppression worldwide.

"The reason I feel like we have to be the policemen of the world is because we feel like it is necessary to share the liberties that God has given us," he said.

Of U.S. foreign policy, Andrew McKellips chooses "to stand for justice everywhere, even when someone else's injustice doesn't directly affect [him]."

The sense of service to mankind reflects Paul McKellips' principles. The father of three, volunteered as a civilian in the State Department to go to war and report the news as well as defend Iraqi journalists.

The show concluded with the playing of "God Bless the USA" on the piano, a salute from the future officer, and a standing ovation from the 50 or so in attendance. The crowd was so enthralled by the performance that afterwards, as they left the theatre, every person in attendance either embraced Andrew McKellips in their arms or shook his hand, to express their gratitude for the sense of patriotism and redefined idea of liberty he had instilled in an hour and 15 minutes.

McKellips next performance of "Liberty Letters: A Series of Patriotic Monologues" will be in the spring of 2010.

Hospital Renews Its 'Lights of Love'

BY GERALD A. FILL
THE GAZETTE

Mount Vernon Hospital Auxiliary celebrated the 28th anniversary of the annual Lights of Love Tree Lighting Ceremony Saturday, Dec. 5, in the Hospital Main Lobby, and later at a buffet refreshments reception in the 2nd floor cafeteria. The purpose of this annual kickoff holiday event was to honor the living, to remember those friends and family who have died, and to raise funds for the Auxiliary organization in support of the Hospital's needs.

The Auxiliary is now composed of approximately 350 volunteers who support the various programs in the Hospital.

Despite the cold rainy night, a crowd of about 150 people assembled in the lobby for the Auxiliary's program.

Marion "Jimmi" Barnwell, Auxiliary president, opened the evening with brief welcoming remarks and introduced Barbara Doyle, the CEO of Inova Mt. Vernon Hospital who greeted the assemblage. Jeri Fields of Mt. Vernon Presbyterian Church delivered the prayer.

Then three elementary students from the local elementary schools read school essays which were

selected in a contest for the occasion as the best of many submissions. The winners of the essay contest were: Natalie Hohman, Fort Hunt Elementary School; Lindsay Freewall, Waynewood Elementary School, and Bela Starinchak, Fort Hunt Elementary School.

The program then turned to traditional holiday music delivered by various vocalists and instrumentalists. This included the program performed by the

Bella Voce singers, Ron Spero who delivered several solo numbers, and a group of vocalists and instrumentalists under the musical direction of Dr. Cleve Francis, a practicing cardiologist at the hospital. Dr. Francis and his group performed several selections of traditional and modern musical numbers appropriate for the holiday season and the Lights of Love celebration. He was complemented by the following musicians and vocalists: John Georgio, Arthur Lisi, Tony Duncanson, Jeff Holdridge, and Dorothy Vanderhoff.

After the musical program was completed the assembled guests moved to the second floor cafeteria and balcony to witness the lighting of the decorated evergreens on the hospital grounds below. The lighting was performed jointly by Barnwell and Doyle. Everyone was then treated to light refreshments in the cafeteria.



A bulletin board shows the Lights of Love inscription at the top.



PHOTOS BY GERALD A. FILL/THE GAZETTE

Participants in the 28th anniversary of the annual Lights of Love Tree Lighting Ceremony sit in the hospital's main lobby.

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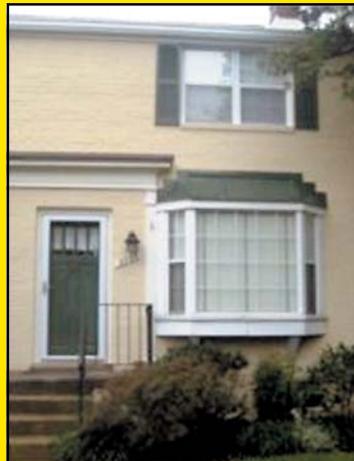
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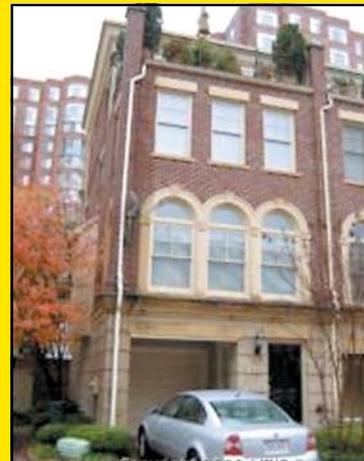
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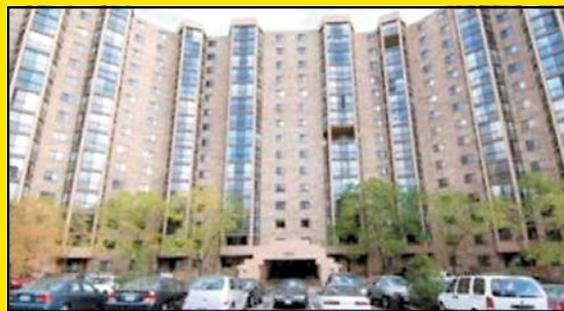
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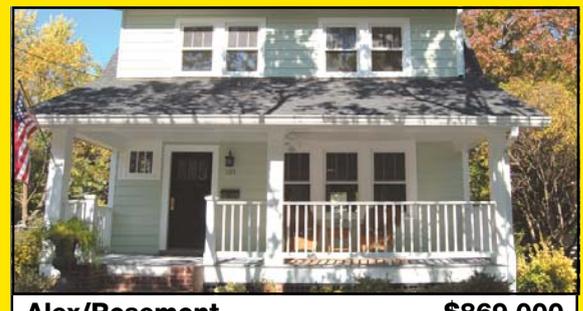
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PHOTOS BY MECHELLE SCHLOSS/THE GAZETTE

INOVA's Mobile Health Services van was on hand Thursday, Dec. 2 for free blood pressure and cholesterol screenings at Walt Whitman Middle School's Family Fitness Night. Registered nurse Judith Trent prepares to draw blood from Walt Whitman Middle parent Clyde McNally for the cholesterol screening.

Family Fitness Night

Having a ball at Walt Whitman Middle School's Family Fitness Night, standing, Joseph Bosely, from left, physical education teacher, Mrs. Pat Jennings, with 7th graders Sultan Hassan, Khave' M. Konteh, and Samone Walker.

County Weighs Site's Level of Retail

FROM PAGE 1

"I guess some retail is better than none," said Kahan Dhillon, chairman of strategic planning for the Mount Vernon Council of Citizens' Associations. "If this project had no retail at all, it would be a detriment to the revitalization effort."

County documents show that developers Anastasios and Anna Grypeos submitted the original plans for Memorial Heights back in 2004. The Planning Commission approved the project in July 2004, and the Board of Supervisors gave its approval in December 2004. Plans called for 24 units of multi-family residential development and retail use of 8,700 square feet. But the development lingered, and the property changed owners.

"In the intervening years, the project has not proved to be workable, and the owners now wish to

pursue less intense retail use on the property," wrote Mount Vernon Supervisor Gerry Hyland in a memorandum to the board. "I support examining this idea, provided that the adjoining residential neighborhood is buffered."

Now that a key review cycle for planning is under way, property owner Ray Mahmood is seeking an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan. The proposal would allow Mahmood to pursue a new plan that would have less intense retail use. But advocates for revitalization on Richmond Highway say that could jeopardize their long-term strategy for beefing up the area.

"We don't want to be stuck with a long-term lease on a low-density development," said David Dale, co-chairman of the Mount Vernon Council of Citizens' Associations. "So I would hate to see any weakening of plans for high-density development in this area."



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PHOTO BY GERALD A. FILL/THE GAZETTE

Children gather to learn at the Tauxemont Cooperative Preschool.

Preschool Celebrates 67 Years

FROM PAGE 1

Contact

TAUXEMONT COOPERATIVE PRESCHOOL

A Non-profit Non-sectarian Preschool
 Licensed by the State of Virginia
 Accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
 7719 Fort Hunt Road
 Alexandria, VA 22306
www.Tauxemont.org
 Tauxemont Cooperative Preschool Annual fund-raising event: Silent Auction, March 13, 2010.

see the school and visit the staff, grounds, and classrooms.

Located in the heart of Mt. Vernon on Fort Hunt Road, Tauxemont Cooperative Preschool is tucked away in the woods in the community of historic Tauxemont.

Parent volunteers characterize the school environment as "magical." It is run by teachers and parents in a natural environment which emphasizes "learning in a positive trusting environment which allows children to be children" as Barbara Bradley, the long-time — over 20 years — teacher and current director describes the school's approach to the children and families who participate. Architecturally and aesthetically, the building design — and the casual nature of the school atmosphere — defies any cookie cutter description typically associated with suburban school settings. The program offers camp, craft making, field trips, creative outside play, reading, writing, drawing, socializing — for parents too — and, because of heavy parental involvement, a clear signal to the children that learning is an important priority with mom and dad.

"We use the local community as part of their curriculum," Bradley said. "For example we take them out to the nearby shopping center at Hollin Hall, to the post office, to parks. We use the cycle of the year and the things they see in this natural and nurturing setting as they come and go and use indoor and outdoor play to spark projects, social interaction, and learning. Our classrooms have one basic rule: we are kind to one another. No worksheets, no flash cards, no memorization, but learning to learn, and growing to love to learn."

The Tauxemont neighborhood where the preschool building and grounds exist has always been and still is considered a non-traditional community by present day suburban standards. Homes blend in with the heavily wooded area. Young couples moving into the neighborhood during WW II saw a need for a pre-

school program of some kind. In response, the Tauxemont Community Association in 1942 founded the first preschool program initially as a playgroup and met in homes with basements.

In 1945 the school bought a pre-fabricated war surplus building from the Army for their first building. Then in 1948 the building was destroyed by fire. It was rebuilt by parents in 1949. In the interim the preschool program continued to meet in an upstairs room of what was at that time a Firehouse south on Fort Hunt Road.

Some call the current building and surrounding landscape reminiscent of entering a farm with a barn.

BRADLEY AND ASSISTANT DIRECTOR Dawn Matthews guide a regular staff of three teachers and two assistant teachers complemented by qualified volunteer parent-teacher aides — a mandatory admission requirement for parents is to contribute volunteer hours in some capacity. The school's teacher-pupil ratio is 1-4 for children 3 years of age, and 1-7 for children ages 4-6. The Virginia State teacher-pupil license requirement is 1-12 for early childhood education schools. Tauxemont is licensed by the state and is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

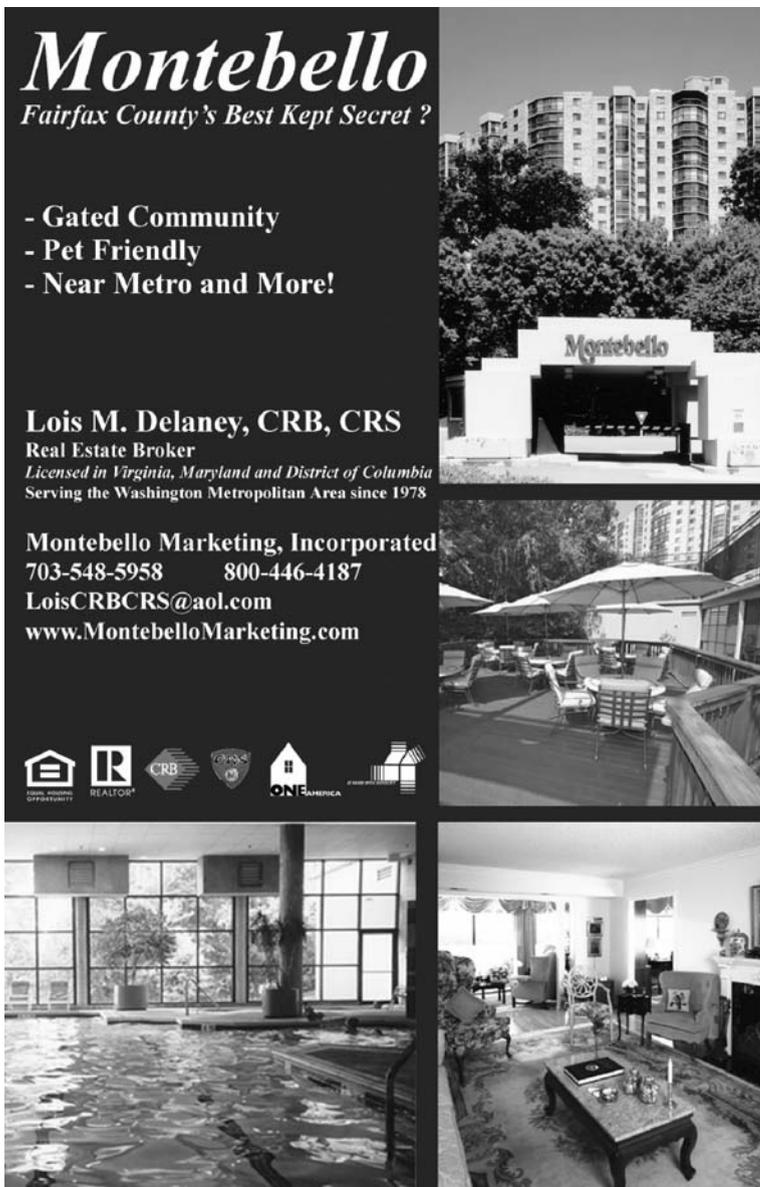
The Tauxemont pre-school building is also used by the Tauxemont community for meetings, social gatherings, a longstanding community tradition of hold

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State, County Honor Women's Group of Mt. Vernon

FROM PAGE 1

Women's Group of Mt. Vernon with a financial stipend in recognition of the work they perform in counseling victims in securing court protection orders, understanding the prosecution system, and how to seek safe and affordable housing.

On Monday, Dec. 7, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors presented its Certificate of Recognition to the local group for its work to keep victims of domestic violence safe and offenders accountable. Fairfax County Police Chief David Rohrer, Mt. Vernon Supervisor Gerry Hyland and Lee District Supervisor Jeff McKay praised the organization's growing importance as a strategic advocate for victims of domestic violence in the Route 1 corridor. In the past year, more than 200 women have attended the organization's bi-monthly meetings. Annually, the group organizes a Women's Day conference which provides speakers, seminars, counseling workshops, and motivational speakers. Last October approximately 130 women and their children attended the conference.

"The most important thing we do is provide peer support and counseling. To let women and children who are in a bad way know there are women who can help and support them in their time of need," said Co-founder and Director Kari Warren.

"We provide victims with help in obtain-

ing the essentials when they need it most: day care, safe housing, transportation, court counseling, and, perhaps most importantly of all, validation and empowerment. We help women to embrace themselves as they are and to move forward with their lives. The peer support is crucial in getting them on the road to recovery and independence," she said.

Warren works for Beth El Housing and Robert Pierre Johnson (RPJ) Families in Transition (FIT) housing when not volunteering for the WGMV. Palmore, the other co-founder and inspiration in forming and managing the WGMV was unavailable for comment. Palmore works for Good Shepherd Housing when she is not volunteering for the women's advocacy group.

Surviving Domestic Abuse

The Women's Group of Mt. Vernon provided the following case study examples of problems that they encounter and the kind of help they provide:
* "Wilma" came to us through the Families In Transition Program (FIT - RPJ Housing). Her abusive husband had left her and her three children homeless. They once lived in a home that she owned with her husband and she ended up on the streets. After gaining housing through FIT, she found out about The Women's Group. She was healing from her past abuse and was beginning to help others. Then, in one fell swoop she lost her job and one month later, her son was killed in a car accident while away at college (he was going to be their ticket out of poverty). Wilma was embraced from the moment she found out about her son's



Kari Warren, Attorney General Bill Mims, Anne Marie Warren, Cynthia Hatfield, Tamara Warren, Mary Graham, Irene Holland, Denise Thomas, Liz Hardy, Mattie Palmore, Mildred Corbin, Ayannah Palmore Arrington, and Deborah Graves-Alexander gather for the Attorney General's award.

death by the other women in our group and they helped her get through those initial few weeks. Day and night, someone was there for her ... either in person or by phone. Today, Wilma still grieves her son, but she has brought a deeper focus and faith in the human spirit to others in our group by her ability to deal with the death of her oldest son and still reaching out to others through faith to help them heal. Through connections to the Women's Group, Wilma also secured employment through the county's school system and her family is continuing on their journey of healing their loss. Wilma has also emerged as a leader of our group and spends hours with others offering support and fellowship on a personal level.

❖ "Rachel" is an immigrant to this country. She and her daughters have suffered brutally at the hands of her husband. Through the Women's Group,

we found safe and affordable housing for her through Beth El House so that she can leave her husband. When she came to our group, she had no job and nowhere to go. Her self-esteem was so low she thought she had nothing to offer her children and no other options for them. However, she was immediately embraced by the women of our group and offered unconditional support. Through a lead given in one Women's Group session, she has secured employment for her to support her family while she is in transitional housing. In the meantime, she has benefited greatly by being granted support, encouragement, and a sense of belonging. It was the lack of these factors that made her stay with her husband. She had nowhere to go and no one to help her. Now, she has support, housing, and employment. The possibilities are unlimited for her as she strives to leave an abusive relationship.

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OPINION

Choose Responsibly

Many families have paid dearly for the mistakes of others; SoberRide offers a safety net.

The season for holiday parties is upon us, and with it the increased incidence of driving under the influence.

The possible consequences of driving drunk and underage drinking are often hard to comprehend. But the stories and grief of local families who have lost loved ones to such accidents should provide a chilling cautionary tale.

William Cameron Schlifke, born in Fairfax and a graduate of Robinson Secondary School, died Monday, Nov. 24, 2008, less than three days after his Volkswagen Jetta was rear-ended in Newport News. He was 22.

Schlifke was serving as designated driver for friends in his fraternity at Christopher Newport University. The driver who crashed into him, Eric Fowler, 20 at the time and also a student at CNU, was arrested at the scene and charged with DUI refusal, reckless driving and underage possession of alcohol, and later with involuntary manslaughter.

Last week on Nov. 30, 2009, just after the one-year anniversary of Schlifke's death, Fowler was convicted of involuntary man-

slaughter in Newport News, according to court records. Fowler's bail was revoked and he will be in jail over the holidays awaiting sentencing in March.

Unfortunately, such tragedy is not rare. In fall 2008, a different young man from Fairfax was sentenced to three years in jail for involuntary manslaughter because of a drunk-driving accident on Dec. 3, 2007 that resulted in unspeakable tragedy for three families. One family lost a beloved daughter after she clung to life for five brutal days; one family has seen their active son reduced to 70 pounds and "unresponsive" and living in a nursing home; the family of the defendant has also seen life as they knew it change.

DON'T TAKE THE RISK. Plan ahead, arrange for a designated driver, or choose to abstain if a designated driver isn't available.

But if you find yourself in the unfortunate position of drinking without a safe way home on your own, the Washington Regional Alcohol Program has provided you with a safety net called SoberRide. Take their number with

Free Ride Home

WRAP's 2009 Holiday SoberRide program will be offered from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. nightly from Friday, Dec. 11, 2009 through Friday, Jan. 1, 2010. To receive a free cab ride home (up to a \$50 fare), call 800-200-8294. You must be 21 or older to use the SoberRide service. For more, see www.wrap.org.

you when you head out, and be sure any young adults in your family are similarly armed.

Founded in 1982, WRAP is a public-private partnership working to prevent drunk driving and underage drinking in the Washington-metropolitan area.

Parents are well advised to talk to their teens and let them know that if they find themselves without a safe ride home, that they can call their parents to be picked up. There are consequences of binge drinking for teens that go beyond driving under the influence. But it is also important for parents to let their teens know that whatever happens, it is not OK to drink and drive or to get into a car driven by someone who has been drinking.

Since 1993, WRAP has provided over 41,010 safe rides home. Call 800-200-8294. For more information, see www.wrap.org

WRAP's 2009 Holiday SoberRide program will be offered from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. nightly, from Friday, Dec. 11, 2009 through Friday, Jan. 1, 2010. To receive a free cab ride home (up to a \$50.00 fare), call 800-200-8294. You must be 21 or older to use the SoberRide service.

EDITORIAL

Moran Opposes Afghanistan Surge

BY JIM MORAN
U.S. REPRESENTATIVE

The war in Afghanistan is into its eighth year, yet an end to the violence and the establishment of just civil society remains far from reach. The president announced last week he will send an additional 30,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan to wage a counterinsurgency campaign, coupled with an exit strategy to begin reducing our military presence in July 2011. I appreciate the time and effort the president put into this major decision. His call for an exit strategy is the right move and took courage. I cannot, however, support an increase in troop levels in Afghanistan for the following reasons:

First, the cost, in blood and treasure, is too high. Even though there are only 20,000 Taliban in the country today, the American experience and that of the British and Russians before us, has shown that an increase in the total number of foreign troops in Afghanistan to over 100,000 will only harden and grow the number of insurgents and undoubtedly lead to more American and Afghan casualties.

How America would pay for the escalation has also yet to be explained. The entire Afghan economy is \$12 billion, only one-third the cost of this single incremental surge. The final tally for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars will approach \$2 trillion dollars — more than the cost of reforming our health care system and rebuilding our own nation's infrastructure. Every dime of it will be borrowed from our children and grandchildren. I have joined a handful of my

colleagues in supporting a "war surtax" to pay for the cost of these wars.

SECOND, al-Qaeda is a threat to our national security, not the Taliban. Eight years ago our mission in Afghanistan was to deny al-Qaeda the safe haven that Afghanistan's Taliban were providing it. Today, there is more al-Qaeda in France and Germany than in Afghanistan. The terror group has moved elsewhere, principally to the Pakistan border with Afghanistan, as well as Yemen, the horn of Africa, and Europe. We should be working with local governments to pursue al-Qaeda where it exists. Instead, we have opted to further embroil ourselves in the long simmering, decades old civil war that has once again engulfed Afghanistan.

Finally, history shows that without a credible government partner, counterinsurgency cannot succeed. To defeat the Afghan insurgency, we need a credible, legitimate partner in Kabul to work with; one that enjoys the loyalty and respect of its people when called upon to sacrifice for the common good. According to Transparency International, the Karzai regime is the second most corrupt in the world, ahead of only Somalia. Graft, bribery and cronyism have allowed President Karzai to remain in power, and I have serious doubts his government can clean itself up in order to win the hearts and minds of its own people.

INSTEAD OF ESCALATING the conflict, the U.S. should limit its mission and begin to bring our troops home. We can do this by focusing our efforts on securing Afghanistan's key stra-

tegic population centers, demanding significant reforms by the Karzai government in exchange for the continuance of U.S. development aid, and empowering the ascent of provincial leaders, especially in the Pashtun region.

America's military and civilian personnel have served this country valiantly in Afghanistan (and in Iraq). And they have achieved their mission, having largely cleared the country of the terrorists responsible for 9/11. Yet our soldiers remain in the land-locked country, fighting what has increasingly become a civil war. No surge of foreign occupying troops can permanently solve such a nationalist conflict waged between rural illiterate tribal members and urban educated (albeit corrupt) central government supporters. The cautionary lessons from the British and Russian failed attempts to incorporate Afghanistan's tribal people under a more modern central government are not being heeded.

For better or for worse, the future of Afghanistan must be decided by the Afghan people. Whatever the outcome of this mission it will not prove worthy of the dollars, let alone the lives, we commit to it.

Write

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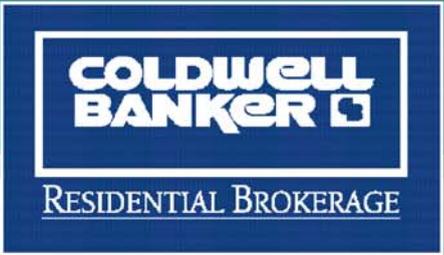
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LETTERS

Reminiscing About Oak Tree

To the Editor:

I am sad that I won't be able to attend the commemoration ceremony for the grand old oak tree on Sherwood Hall Lane at the intersection of Evening Lane. I have fond memories of the tree dating from 1957 when my family became one of the first to move into the then new subdivision of Hollinbrook Park on Evening and Middy Lanes. I still gaze at it in wonder when I

visit the area.

It has always been a tree to notice and wonder how much history has passed along beside it. My mother seemed to think it was a young tree when a corner of George Washington's Mount Vernon spread all the way to the intersection of Sherwood Hall Lane and US #1 — probably just a trail in those days.

The tree marked Evening Lane so well so we always knew where to turn. My school bus stop was at that corner — this was in the late 1950s through the mid '60s. There were so few of us in the neighborhood dur-

ing elementary school, before Hollin Meadows School opened, that the bus to Hollin Hills (now a retirement community) did not drive through the neighborhood. So, two or three of us, in the early years, and later, 10 - 12 for high school, waited at the corner of Evening Lane and Sherwood Hall underneath the spreading branches of the venerable oak.

A tree of this stature is a rarity, especially in the fast-growing neighborhoods that have turned once serene farmland into the bustling area now surrounding Sherwood Hall. We new residents of 50 years ago did not

even imagine the possibility that a hospital, a middle and elementary school and a library would one day dominate the landscape.

In December, and all winter long, that tree was a sentinel, as it is today — its large branches stark against the winter sky. Before Hollin Meadows neighborhood was built the tree marked the boundary between the neighborhoods and the Wilkinson farm, where we would go sledding when it snowed. Residents from as

SEE LETTERS, PAGE 11



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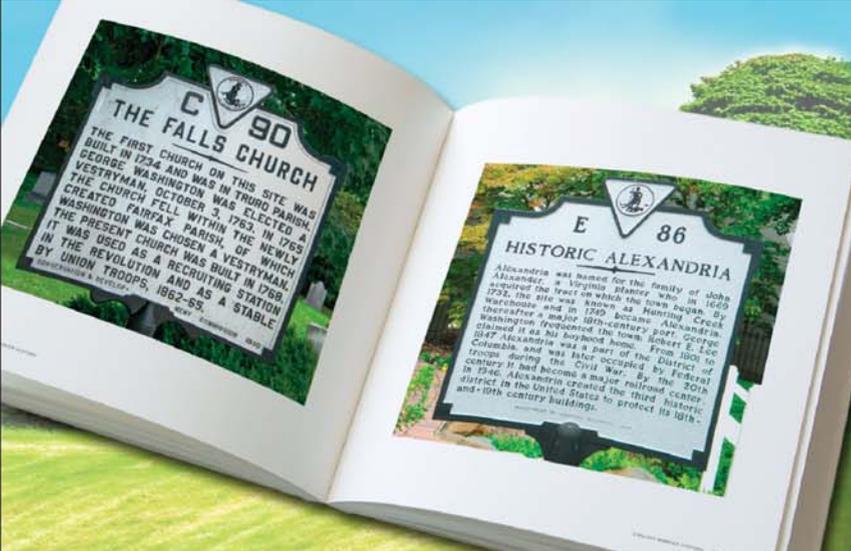
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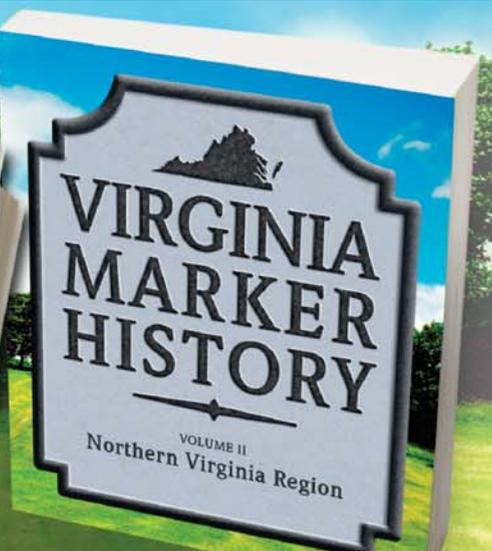
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LETTERS

FROM PAGE 10

far away as Hollin Hills and Hollin Hall would trek to the farm and climb under the fence next to the tree for what we thought were the best sledding hills in Northern Virginia.

Who will count the rings? Who will display sections of the tree as a memento of nature's greatness? I feel honored to have known this glorious tree for 50-plus years.

Karen terHorst Morris
Decatur, GA

Importance of Being Informed

To the Editor:

Karen Stallings' letter printed in the Dec. 3-9, 2009 Mt. Vernon Gazette makes a false charge. I did not engage in attacking elected officials or labeling Mr. Gerry Connolly or anyone else as big spenders but merely reported his and the two Virginia U.S. Senators' votes on spending bills disclosed in Mega Votes document emailed to me by the mail manager for Congress.org. Also in my letter I encouraged citizens to become informed about their congressman and U.S. senator's actions to par-

ticipate before votes are taken on bills and to help hold them accountable for their actions.

Let's set the record straight about Ms. Stallings' other comments. First, the Bush Administration did leave a \$400 billion deficit for FY 2009 and added to the national debt as Ms. Stallings contends. But, the current administration, with the help of congress, has gone on an unprecedented spending spree with a \$1.4 trillion FY 2010 budget deficit more than the deficits in the previous four years combined and increased the national debt to \$12 trillion and climbing. And, according to press reports, our dollar has decreased in value by 19 percent since the beginning of the year.

Second, it is very doubtful, as Ms. Stallings contends, that the House trillion dollar government-run health care bill, that Mr. Gerry Connolly voted for, will save money based on the government's past management experience with entitlement programs. For example, Medicare's estimated cost when established was to be \$12 billion by 1990 but the actual cost was \$98 billion. And, now it is in serious financial straits and so is Medicaid.

Finally, Ms. Stallings states "As

chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, Gerry Connolly balanced the budget every year." She fails to state that Fairfax County is required by law to have a balanced budget. The budget is balanced by the entire Board of Supervisors consisting of a chairman and nine members and not by the chairman alone whether it was Mr. Connolly when he was chairman or someone else.

It is not about making anything political but to report what our elected officials are doing so constituents can become informed and hold our congressional elected officials accountable for their actions. Letting a little sunshine in usually works wonders.

Again, I urge everyone to go to <http://thomas.loc.gov/> and obtain information to help you decide what to do regarding pending actions by your congressional elected officials. Also, you can email megavotes@mailmanager.net to receive mega votes for your congressman and U.S. senators. Let's work together to make our government better and more responsive to us.

Frank Medico
Mt. Vernon

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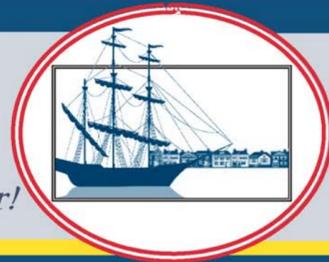


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1BR / 1.5BA + Den in Park at Courthouse. Highlights: light-filled living/dining rms, kit w/SS & granite, ceramic tile in Baths, HW floors, crown molding, abundant closet space, w/d, & 1 gar prkg space. Located just blks from Courthouse Metro & Clarendon.

Dayna Blumel / Kerry Adams
703.597.2252



1208 Tatum Drive
\$875,000
Villamay!
Magnificent Colonial in exceptional condition on one of prestigious Villamay's nicest streets! Three finished levels, large room sizes, updated kitchen and

baths, MBR suite has private balcony which provides panoramic vistas of the area with seasonal river views. Elevated grounds afford the ultimate privacy with gorgeous custom pool.



1810 Hollindale Dr
\$625,000
Gorgeous Setting!
Estate sale of spacious rambler on gorgeous 3/4 acre grounds in premier location just minutes from Old Town in prestigious Hollindale/

Mason Hill area! Home features five bedrooms, three full baths, large room sizes, open floor plan and oversized two car garage. Fabulous potential to remodel or build your dream home on this special site with rural ambiance in "close-in" location convenient to everything!



4816 Stillwell Avenue
\$525,000
Renovated!
Unique opportunity! Exceptionally large 5/6 BR home is located in a gorgeous setting on a 1/2 acre lot bordering acres of county parkland.

Renovated throughout, it features an updated kitchen, refinished hardwood floors, finished lower level, in-law suite and large deck. A recently remodeled home of this size in a premier setting creates a truly one of a kind value!



828 SLATERS LA #104
Alexandria
\$699,000
MAJOR PRICE REDUCTION!
Spectacular Condo! 1890sqft! 3BR, 2.5BA, 2 Master suites, gourmet kit, 9' ceilings, Gas

fireplace, Plantation shutters & hardwoods thru-out, handicap accessible + 2 inside parking spaces. City views from rooftop. Shops & rests.

Mary Bourke 703.906.5825
Shane Canny 703.346.2067



4105 FAITH COURT
Alexandria
\$799,000
SHOWS LIKE NEW!
2 story foyer, gourmet kitchen with granite, huge separate Dining room, family room w/ Fireplace off kitchen,

den/office on 1st floor, full finished walk-out basement and 2 Fireplaces. Luxury bath with jetted tub & separate shower, large deck. 4BR/3.5Ba and 2 car garage.

Gary Ansley 202.288.7946



116 ROBERTS LANE #301
Alexandria
\$330,000

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Susan Haughton 703.470.4545
Mindy Brubaker 571.242.9913



7501 Park Terrace Drive
\$1,150,000
Stunning!
Inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie style, this 1.13 acre property sits on a bluff overlooking acres of parkland with seasonal

river views! Heart of redwood features, large room sizes, high ceilings and expansive glass window walls capture the natural beauty of the grounds. Off GW Pkwy just 3 miles from Old Town. (Adjoining 1.18 acre available for \$975,000.)



8108 East Boulevard Dr
\$2,395,000
Premier Property!
Custom Boucher built classic on magnificent full acre lot just 3 miles to Old Town! Spacious residence with elegant Colonial detail, custom

brick exterior, 3 finished levels, handcrafted cabinetry and brick work, gourmet kitchen, 4.5 luxurious baths, high ceilings, 4 frpls and 3 car garage. Magnificent private setting on professionally landscaped grounds, convenient to everything!



9516 Mt Vernon Landing
\$2,900,000
Waterfront!
Waterfront homes rarely become available in Mount Vernon on the Potomac! This spacious custom Tudor was carefully crafted with

the highest quality materials and planned with three levels of Pella window walls to maximize water views. Six bedrooms, five baths, full walk out lower level and many rooms with dramatic river views.



1906 BELLE HAVEN RD
Alexandria - \$2,250,000
Brick center hall colonial w/ 7BR, 5.5BA w/@5,500sqft of living space. Top to bottom renovation includes new Anderson thermalpane windows, HVAC system, kit & baths. Attention to detail is evident throughout this beautiful home. Large lot backs to a lovely oasis full of mature plantings & trees. Garage parking.

BELLE HAVEN by appointment only



Call Suzanne for information or an appointment
Suzanne Backus 703.338.3594



1900 GLEN DRIVE
Alexandria - \$1,250,000
European style home is a Tuscan jewel w/large entertaining spaces. Constructed of concrete w/ mosaic tile inlay, James Early's design of 1932 still works for today's lifestyle. The home qualifies for designation in the National Register. Exceptional craftsmanship. 4BR, 4BA & 2 car garage parking.



2701 BELLFOREST COURT #204
Vienna - \$358,950

WALK TO THE METRO! Plenty of built-ins, closets, 4x10 storage space and 2 indoor garage spaces. Open & spacious LR & chef's kitchen, separate DR, full-size W/D, gas fireplace, & balcony all complimented by large windows for a bright airy feel. 2BR & 2BA.

Sharon Edwards 703.408.8144



CHRIS WHITE 703.283.9028

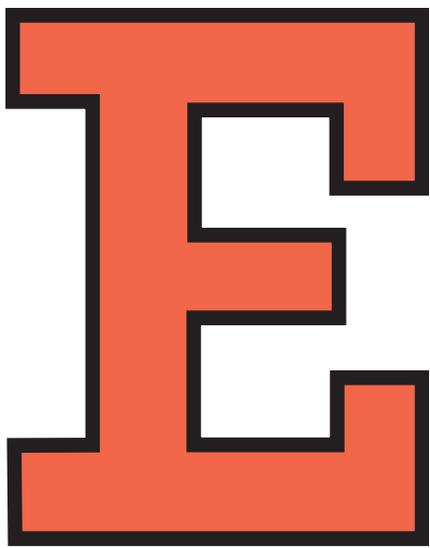
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ARTS ♦ ENTERTAINMENT ♦ LEISURE

Ornament Celebrates Restoration of the Friendship Firehouse

Celebrate the holiday season and Alexandria's firefighting heritage with the newest collectible ornament from the Office of Historic Alexandria. The 2009 ornament of the Friendship Firehouse reflects the cupola restoration completed earlier this year. The commemorative ornament features an etched brass-finish design of the museum entrance decorated with festive holiday greenery. Each ornament costs \$16 and comes in an embossed gift box.



Order the 2009 ornament online or stop by Gadsby's Tavern Museum, The Lyceum, or another Historic Alexandria museum gift shop. Call 703-838-4242 or visit www.historicalexandria.org.

The ornament shows the original color of the historic cupola of the Friendship Firehouse Museum, located at 107 South Alfred Street, which was discovered during a six-month restoration.

Through analysis of paint chips, consultants determined that the cupola was originally painted a shade of brown. As a result of this discovery, the white cupola was repainted with a custom color that matches the original paint.

When constructed in 1855, the firehouse was built and decorated in an urban Victorian manner. The brownish paint identified as the first finish was very commonly used during the Victorian era to simulate brownstone.

Further analysis revealed that the date of Friendship Company's founding, numbered "1774" on the street side of the base of the cupola, was also originally done in gold leaf. The 2009 ornament reflects both of these significant discoveries.

The Friendship Firehouse Museum, located at 107 South Alfred Street in Old Town Alexandria, is open Fridays and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sundays from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Arena Stage Hosts GrooveLily

BY BRAD HATHAWAY
THE CONNECTION

Is GrooveLily a rock band or is it a theater troupe? Does it matter? No! This becomes clear as the three-member ensemble performs their one-act concert musical "Striking 12" at Arena Stage's facility in Crystal City where they will hold forth through this weekend.

The blend of mod/pop/rock music led by a distinctive electric violin and inventive lyrics telling an entertaining tale with wit and clarity results in a fun evening of music, comedy, drama and charm.

The three performers are: electronic violinist Valerie Vigoda; her keyboardist husband Brendan Milburn; and inventive drummer Gene Lewin. All three help tell the story and sing the songs as the spotlight shifts back and forth among them. Their exchanges are bright, literate and fun as they work their way through a snappy version of an updated Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale.

The tale here is "The Little Match Girl" but the show uses that trifle of a story as the jumping-off point for a story of a "Grumpy Guy" who tries to avoid any celebratory gatherings on the last night of the year. A visit from a door-to-door saleslady peddling strings of lights as a cure for "SAD" (Seasonal Affective Disorder — depression due to the lack of sunlight) brings to his mind a parallel between the visitor's plight selling lights when everyone else is partying, and the Hans Christian Andersen tale — until he actually reads the story and finds its ending incredibly sad — which is not the same as "SAD."

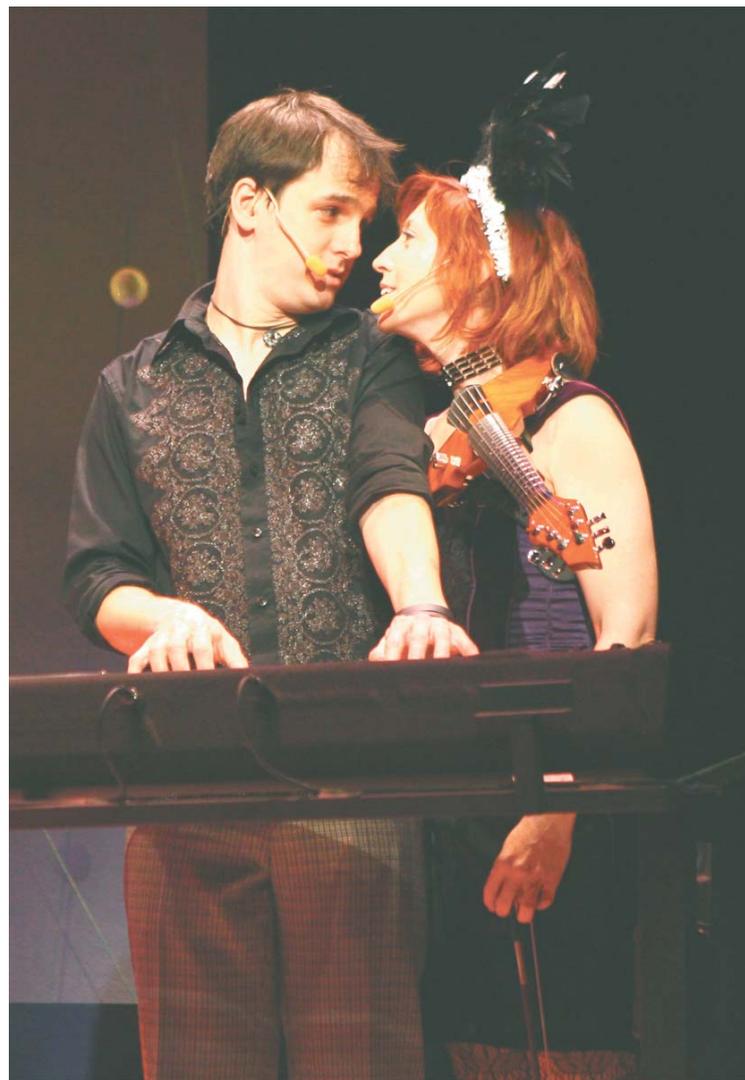
Vigoda's six-string electric violin provides a unique sound for the group. She can make it seem like a whole string section with its electronic reverberation and delay capability, and her vocals are lovely when that is called for and an all-out wail of rock for the harder moments. She plays the light saleswoman/match girl and provides some of the narration as well.

Milburn provides both piano-like melody effects and bass-like percussive figures from his electric keyboard, which is programmed for many effects triggered by his nimble fingerwork. He's the "Grumpy Guy" and helps out with the narration too.

The roles in the story have been carefully matched to the personalities of each of the members of the rock group. The drummer, Gene Lewin, whose personality is the most distinctive, provides a good deal of the humor that makes the piece so unique. He's no slouch as a drummer, either. His beat drives the group and his solos exhibit not only technical skill but impressive rhythmic logic, making them exciting and well worth the amount of time devoted to them.

Charm is at the heart of the appeal of this hour and a half, intermission-less concert show. The script is by Milburn, Vigoda and Rachel Sheinkin who won a Tony Award for her book for the musical "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee," which also relied a great deal on charm to make a slender story a satisfying evening of theater.

The group has been together for nearly 15 years and their collective career has been accelerating over the past five or so with their increasing involvement in theater. "Striking 12" was their first "concert musical" and it earned them an off-Broad-



Electronic violinist Valerie Vigoda and her keyboardist husband Brendan Milburn.

way run in New York. Since then, they have produced a score for a musical titled "Sleeping Beauty Wakes" at Deaf West in California, the company that had such a big hit with the half-hearing, half-signing staging of "Big River" a few years back. They have also provided the score for a production of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" at the Paper Mill Playhouse in New Jersey.

The group is only here for a short stay with performances this Thursday, Friday and Saturday but they have scheduled three shows for Saturday so it should be fairly easy to find a convenient time to catch this engaging concert musical.

Where and When

GrooveLily performs "Striking 12" this Thursday and Friday at 8 p.m. and Saturday at 1 p.m., 5 p.m. and 9 p.m. at Arena Stage, 1800 South Bell Street in Crystal City. Tickets are \$25-\$45. Call 202-488-3300 or log on to www.arenastage.org.

Old Town Merchants Open Late

Bring enjoyment back to holiday shopping. On Thursday, Dec. 17, the 26-member stores of the Old Town Boutique District will stay open until 8 p.m. to help hurried shoppers recapture the hometown experience the holidays once had.

"I think it's safe to say that most holiday shoppers feel pushed, hurried, stressed out," said Elizabeth Todd, owner of The Shoe Hive, a member of the Boutique District. "It didn't used to be that way. The holidays used to mean window shopping, strolling the sidewalks with Jack Frost nipping at your nose, then taking the chill off in a warm, friendly place where carols filled the air," she said.

The Old Town Boutique District shops will also offer customers free gift wrapping and hometown customer service. Many will also be providing refreshments to help celebrate the season.

Most of the Old Town Boutique District shops are located within a few blocks of each other, so one can park once and visit several local stores, restaurants and night spots. Visit www.oldtownboutiquedistrict.com.

DVP Children's Holiday Party

Every year the Alexandria Office on Women organizes a Holiday Party for children and their mothers who have been recently served by the Domestic Violence Program.

This year's Holiday Party will be held on Wednesday, Dec. 16. At the party, the families can reunite with past shelter friends and staff and take pictures with Santa Claus, among other events.

Each mother and child also receives a bag of gifts to place under their tree.

To participate, donate unwrapped gifts or gift certificates to area stores in denominations of \$25. This way each woman will have the opportunity to purchase something special for herself or her children.

Donations will be accepted at the Office on Women, 421 King Street, Suite 400, Alexandria, on Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m., except on holidays. The deadline for unwrapped gifts is Friday, Dec. 11 by 4 p.m.

Contact Shannon McGregor at 703-838-4911 or via email to Shannon.mcgregor@alexandriava.gov.

ENTERTAINMENT

Martinis & Mistletoe Contest

**Thursday, Dec. 17
at the Holiday Inn
Hotel & Suites.**

Mike Anderson had so much fun at last year's Martinis & Mistletoe event that he is coming back for more. He has divulged the drink that he is preparing — 'Partridge in a Peartini' but not the delivery method for the drink.

While most bartenders are content to mix the drink and hand it over, Anderson has other ideas. As some may recall, Anderson had an exotic igloo express rigged up to deliver last year's drink, so this year's method will be sure to surprise guests as well.

The ingredients for this year's drink are no secret; they will be Grey Goose LaPoire, amaretto, simple syrup and fresh lemon juice.

"I had a great time last year," said Anderson. "We're very excited about it and I encourage everyone to come down and vote for Mango Mike's, which, hands down, will be the best."

Last year was the first time for the Martinis & Mistletoe event, but it

was so successful that the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce is holding it again.

More than 230 people attended last year as 14 bars went head to head in a battle for the title of 'Best Martini in Alexandria.' The Carlyle Club sparkled with holiday cheer as smiling faces, old and new, speculated as to who they thought would win. Entertainment Sponsor, Simpson Development presented music by the Satin Doll Trio, who will be back again this year.

In the end, last year's runner up was Fernando Tejada of La Tasca with his Sangriatini. The third place winner, Andres Lazo of Mango Mike's picked up a \$100 gift certificate to the Carlyle Club with his delicious Havana Banana Split Martini; \$100 went to the second place winner, Las Tapas' Diana Morgan for her Sangritini. The winner of \$400 and the title of "Best Martini in Alexandria" was Clinton Terry of Restaurant Eve/PX with his Kissing Santa Martini.

According to Todd Thrasher, Clinton Terry will be back again representing Restaurant Eve.

"He will have a good cocktail — much different from last year," said

Thrasher. When asked if Restaurant Eve would be the winner again, Thrasher said, "It's no fun competing if you don't win."

Several other participants from last year have already signed up for this year's event, among them: Finn & Porter's, Jackson 20, Landini Brothers and St. Elmo's Coffee Pub.

Some new players are joining the competition: Vermillion, Columbia Firehouse, Federal City Caterers, Bistro on First, Ramparts, South Side and Redpeg Marketing will be collaborating on a drink with Guiffre Distributors.

Martinis & Mistletoe will be held on Thursday, Dec. 17, from 6-9 p.m. at the Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites at 625 First Street. To register for this event, visit www.alexchamber.bluekeyinc.com/view_events.php. The entrance fee is \$75 for members and \$90 for non-members. Any bar/restaurant interested in competing should contact Janelle Schmidt at jschmidt@alexchamber.com or 703-339-3808. The entrance fee this year is \$150 with prizes for the top three drinks totaling \$850. Sponsorships are still available for this event.

— GALE CURCIO

CALENDAR

NOW THROUGH DEC. 18

Toys for Tots. From 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

- Drop off toys to these locations:
 - ♦ The Campagna Center, 418 S. Washington Street, Alexandria.
 - ♦ Weichert, Realtors, 121 North Pitt Street, Alexandria.
- If you're unable to make it to either of these drop off locations, an agent from Weichert, Realtors will pick up the gift from your home. Contact Kim Sarina at (703) 549-8700.

DEC. 10-19

A Tuna Christmas. By Jaston Williams, Joe Sears and Ed Howard featuring Katherine Bisulca and Erin Gallalee. Presented by Zemfira Stage. Dec. 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 17, 18, 19 at 8 p.m.; Dec. 13 at 3 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Cost is \$15/adults; \$10 seniors, students. At The Lyceum, 201 S. Washington Street, Alexandria. Call 703-615-6626.

THURSDAY/DEC. 10

David LaFleur in Concert. 7 p.m.

David LaFleur performs a unique mixture of folk, Appalachian, blues and bluegrass. At The Athenaeum, 201 Prince Street, Alexandria. Call 703-548-0035 or www.nvfaa.org.

Chocolate and Shopping. 6-9 p.m.

Browse the open studios for holiday gifts. Target Gallery reception 6-8 p.m. Art League Gallery Reception 6:30-8 p.m. Free admission. At the Torpedo Factory Art Center, 105 N. Union Street, Alexandria. Visit www.torpedofactory.org or call 703-838-4565

Chanukah on Ice. 6-8:30 p.m. ice skating. In celebration of Chanukah, there will be a lighting of the 6-foot ice Menorah at 7 p.m. At the Pentagon Row Ice Skating Rink, 1201 S. Joyce Street, Arlington. Tickets are \$12/door, \$10/advance (includes skate rental). Visit www.ChabadAA.org or

call 703-370-2774.

FRIDAY/DEC. 11

Holiday Buffet Ball for Couples.

8:30-11:30 p.m. Join the Friday Nighters at their holiday ball and enjoy waltz, fox trot, cha cha, swing and more to live music on large wooden dance floor. This month's dance is a buffet where guests and members bring "fork-friendly food." Cost is \$15/person. Private club in Mount Vernon area; reservations required. www.fridaynightersdancingclub.com.

Holiday Concert. 7 p.m. Thomas Jefferson High School Chorus. At Market Square, 301 King Street, Alexandria. Afterwards, the chorus will move to the Torpedo Factory Arcade, King and Union Streets, for caroling at 8 p.m. Call 703-883-4686.

SEE CALENDAR, PAGE 16



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For the Holidays**

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Turducken/ Turkey/ Duck/ Goose/**

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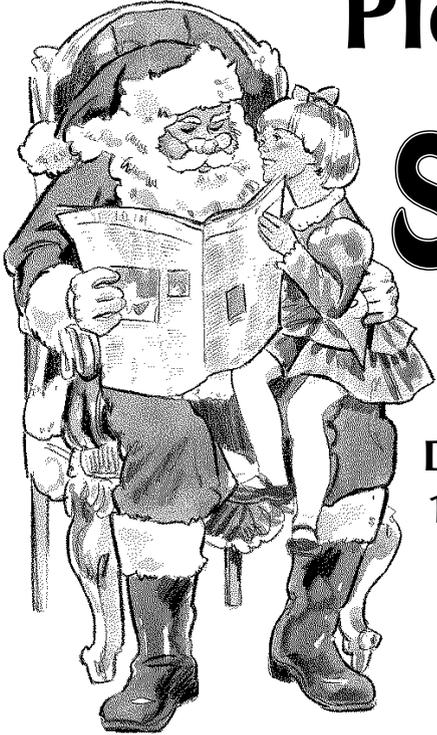
**Open House
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10 am - 2 pm**

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**Pictures
with
Santa**

**Saturday
December 19th
12:00-3:00 PM**

**Celebrate Holiday Magic
with the Merchants of
Bradlee Shopping Center**

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- New Brazilian KERATIN TREATMENT
- Spa Pedicure & Manicure • Waxing



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keratin
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CALENDAR

FROM PAGE 15

DEC. 11-12

Gunston Hall Plantation Christmas and Yuletide Dinner. Ride in a horse-drawn carriage, sip warm cider by the fire and sample period foods prepared in the colonial hearth kitchen. Costumed characters will greet you in the house and throughout the grounds. Friday, Dec. 11, 6:30 and 8 p.m.; Saturday, Dec. 12, 4:30, 6 and 8 p.m. Admission: Adults \$15; Children 6-18 years, \$8; Children 2-5 years, \$2. Yuletide dinner: adults, 11 and older \$49.95; Children 6-10 years, \$24.95; 2-5 years \$9.95. Reservations required. At 10709 Gunston Rd, Mason Neck. Call 703-550-9220, www.GunstonHall.org.

DEC. 11, 12, 13

Mount Vernon by Candlelight. 5-8 p.m. Mrs. Washington hosts 18th-century Christmas with candlelit walks, fireside caroling, and early American décor. Cost is \$18/adults, \$12/children under 11. At Mount Vernon Estate & Gardens, 3200 Mount Vernon Memorial Hwy., Mount Vernon. Call 703-780-2000 or www.MountVernon.org.

SATURDAY/DEC. 12

Christmas Concert. 7:30 p.m. With the Blessed Sacrament Adult Choir, the Folk Group, and The Bells of Blessed Sacrament. At Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church, 1427 West Braddock Road, Alexandria. Call John McCrary at 703-998-6100, or online at www.blessedsacramentcc.org

Choralis: A Classic Brass Christmas. 7 p.m. The full Choralis chorus; The Classical Brass Quintet; The Choralis Cantus Youth Choirs, Gretchen Kuhmann, conductor. Tickets are \$40/premium; \$25/general; \$5/students; children free. At Westminster Presbyterian Church, 2701 Cameron Mills Road, Alexandria. Go to www.choralis.org or call 703-237-2499.

Wreaths Across America. 11:30 a.m. Members of the Alexandria Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 609, with the assistance of the Alexandria Boy and Girl Scouts, American Legion Posts 24 and 1775, Vietnam Veterans of America, Patriot Guard Riders, and Alexandria's patriotic citizens will place wreaths at each grave marker in the Alexandria National Cemetery, 1450 Wilkes Street.

Craft Sale. 9 a.m. to noon. At Heritage Presbyterian Church, 8503 Fort Hunt Road. Proceeds go to support the women's outreach programs for children and women. Call 703-360-9546.

"Lion, Witch and Wardrobe." 10 a.m. Kaleidoscope Theatre presents "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe," in Old Town Alexandria. At the George Washington Masonic Memorial, 101 Callahan Drive, Alexandria. Free parking is available. Tickets are \$5. Call 703-912-4005 or email info@ktheatre.org to reserve seats. Visit www.ktheatre.org.

Hollywood Auction. 10 a.m. High-quality furniture and decorative objectives from Antique & Contemporary Leasing & Sales, a Washington staging company that provides furnishings for movie sets, diplomatic events, will be sold at auction at The Potomack Company. At 526 North Fayette Street, Alexandria. Visit www.potomackcompany.com or call 703-684-4550.

Barnes & Noble Book Fair Fund-Raiser. Hosted by Maury Elementary School PTA. Storytimes at 10 a.m. 11 a.m. and noon. Volunteers will be providing free gift wrapping and a portion of all purchases made that day



Conductor, Kim Allen Kluge

SUNDAY/DEC. 13

Alexandria Symphony Performs The Nutcracker. 3:30 p.m. Cost is \$25/person. Tchaikovsky's original and Duke Ellington's jazz arrangement. At the Alfred Street Baptist Church, 301 S. Alfred Street, Alexandria. Free post-concert reception for all immediately following. Visit www.alexsym.org or 703-548-0885.

will go to the PTA when the customer says "I support Maury" at the checkout. At the Potomac Yard Barnes & Noble Store. Contact Kelly Smith at 703-739-0983 or kellyandwill@aol.com

Christmas Radio Program. 7 p.m. Free. Bishop O'Connell High School presents their annual "WDJO 1939 Christmas Radio Program," an evening of one-act plays and music in a radio station format of the '30s. All proceeds benefit a holiday charity chosen by the cast. At Bishop O'Connell High School, 6600 Little Falls Road, Arlington. Visit www.bishopoconnell.org/theatre, or call 703-237-1448.

Holiday Concert. 1 p.m. Bell's Angels and the St. John's Lutheran Church Handbell Choir perform. At 2 p.m., the Alexandria Harmonizers perform. At Market Square, 301 King Street, Old Town Alexandria. Call 703-883-4686.

Opera Production. 7:30 p.m. \$20 admission/\$15 students. The Repertory Opera Theater of Washington presents Giuseppe Verdi's "Un Ballo in Maschera," a story about love, betrayal, and the fate that binds us all. At Immanuel Church-on-the-Hill, 3606 Seminary Road, Alexandria. For advanced tickets, call 571-403-0814 or email ROTW@live.com.

Used Book Sale. At Kingstowne Library, 6500 Landsdowne Centre, Alexandria. Call 703-339-4610.

Civil War Christmas in Camp. Learn how soldiers and families celebrated Christmas during the Civil War. Suggested donation \$2 adults, \$1 for kids. At Fort Ward Museum and Historic Site, 4301 W. Braddock Road, Alexandria. Call 703-838-4848, www.FortWard.org.

"Tis the Season" 8 p.m. Alexandria Choral Society concert with the ACS Children's Chorus. Program includes a wide range of holiday and winter-themed music, including Morten Lauridsen's Mid-Winter Songs, with opportunities for the audience to join in singing familiar carols. \$20/adults; \$10/seniors. At Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Alexandria. Visit www.AlexChoralSociety.org.

The Alexandria Black History Museum, 902 Wythe St., will host two free Kwanzaa programs. At 11 a.m., Brian Sales explores the history of Kwanzaa, performing the Libation Ceremony and leading a presentation of the holiday principles through illustrations and food samplings. At 4:30 p.m., filmmaker, M.K. Asante, Jr., presents his film, "The Black Candle: A Kwanzaa Celebration." Call 703-838-4356 or visit www.alexandriarchaeology.org.

Caroling for Cats. The Vola Lawson Animal Shelter stays open from noon till midnight to offer people more time to find and adopt cats. Festivities will include caroling for the cats, refreshments, crafts activities and holiday movies. At 4101 Eisenhower Ave., Alexandria. Contact Carrie

Drummond at 703-838-4774, ext. 245, or at cdrummond@alexandrianimals.org.

DEC. 12-13

Historic Candlelight Tours. Saturday from 6-9 p.m. and Sunday from 3-6 p.m. Tour Gadsby's Tavern Museum, Carlyle House, Lee-Fendall House and the Apothecary Museum by candlelight and enjoy seasonal decorations, entertainment and refreshments. Cost is \$20/adults, \$15/seniors, \$5/children. Call 703-838-4242 or go online at www.historicalexandria.org.

Christmas Tree Sale. Sponsored by North Ridge Civic Association. Beautiful, Fresh (cut since Thanksgiving), Affordable Christmas trees — Douglas Fir, Frazer Fir, Blue Spruce, a few Norway Spruce \$20-\$80 (over 10 foot). White pine garland \$16 per 25-ft coil or \$2/yard. wreaths \$15. Superior Tree stands \$20. Hours are Saturday 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sunday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. At Beverley Hills United Methodist Church, 3512 Old Dominion Blvd., off West Glebe Road, Alexandria. Call 703-548-9604.

SUNDAY/DEC. 13

Advent Lessons and Carols. 11 a.m. With the St. Paul's Choir, St. Cecilia Choir and Good Shepherd Ringers; Douglas Beck, conductor. At St. Paul's Church, 228 South Pitt Street, Alexandria. Call 703-549-3312 or email: douglas@stpaulsalexandria.com

Service of Lessons and Carols. 4:30 p.m. Sanctuary Choir and Festival Ringers with strings, organ, and harp; Melvin Goodwyn, Director of Music and Organist; Nick Hanson, Director of Bells. At Bush Hill Presbyterian Church, 4916 Franconia Road, Alexandria. Call 703-971-1171.

Lighting of Menorah. 6 p.m. Mayor Bill Euille and Del. David Englin will light the city's 6-foot Menorah in this Family Chanukah Celebration. At the Crown Plaza Hotel, 901 N. Fairfax Street, in Old Town Alexandria. Contact Rabbi Newman at 703-370-2774 or visit www.chabadAA.org.

Vesper Organ Concert. 6 p.m. Free. With Ann Carney, organist, playing on the new DiGennaro-Hart pipe organ. At Grace Episcopal Church, 3601 Russell Road, Alexandria. Call 703-549-1980.

Holiday Concert. St. Matthews United Methodist Church Youth Handbell Choir performs at 2 p.m., followed by the Alexandria Singers at 3 p.m. At Market Square, 301 King Street, Alexandria. Call 703-883-4686.

Holiday Children's Concert. 3:30-4:30 p.m. The Alexandria Symphony brings "The Nutcracker Suite" to Alexandria in two versions — Tchaikovsky's original and Duke Ellington's hip jazz-band arrangement. \$25 admission. With the Alexandria Symphony Orchestra and Maestro Kim Allen Kluge. At Alfred Street Baptist Church, 301 Alfred Street, Alexandria. Call 703-548-0885 or go to www.alexsym.org/buyTix.shtml.

Christmas Candlelight Service. 6 p.m. (doors open at 5:35 p.m., brass prelude at 5:45 p.m.) At Alexandria Presbyterian Church, 2405 Russell Road, in Del Ray, Alexandria. Call 703-683-3348 or go to www.alexandriapres.org.

DEC. 14-15

Journey to Bethlehem. 6-8 p.m. A Living Nativity and Living Bethlehem with live animals, live music and free guided tours. On the lawn of Aldersgate Church, 1301 Collingwood Road, Alexandria. Call 703-765-6555 or visit www.aldersgate.net.

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Preschool Celebrates 67

FROM PAGE 6

ing “dutch” suppers (food indigenous to different countries), and is the setting for fund-raisers that provide approximately 10 percent of the school’s budget. The remaining financial support is derived from tuition. Sixty percent of the students served come from the surrounding Mt. Vernon neighborhoods.

The other 40 percent of the students come from elsewhere in northern Virginia, including the City of Alexandria, Lorton, and Springfield. Bradley points out that each year the school provides tuition scholarships to families in need.

Approximately half of the parents who send their children to the school are two-parent working families.

THE CURRENT PRESIDENT of the governing board is Elizabeth Brokamp. Asked what is special about the school, Brokamp replied: “The teachers and parents provide the kind of consistent and loving way of interacting with the children that promotes a supportive learning environment indispensable in an effective early childhood education program.”

Tauxemont Cooperative Preschool also provides Summer Nature Camp opportuni-



PHOTO BY GERALD A. FILL/THE GAZETTE
Children pause for a photo.

ties to more than 400 children staffed in part by 50 volunteer summer intern teenagers. For many of the interns, it is their first experience in a work environment.

The Tauxemont preschool program is steeped in the history of the development of the Mt. Vernon community from the WW II to the present. For example, the nearby former Hollin Hall elementary school — since 1983 converted to a community center — benefited from the experiences of the parents of the Tauxemont preschool program. Their leadership and the attendance of their children in the Hollin Hall elementary school are chronicled in historic documents written by Tauxemont parents. Some descendants of the original Tauxemont residents continue to live in the community and use the Tauxemont preschool program for their children.

Bradley, on the school’s philosophy and goals for the children who attend Tauxemont: “We’re not really interested or concerned if your child makes it into some select program in elementary school, can read by the time their four, play select soccer, or is ever first chair clarinet. Our goal is to establish the basis for inquisitive responsible adults, with good mental health, that contribute to society and, of course, marvel at the world and the people around them.”

Details

Historical information for this article was obtained from the book “Tauxemont: Reminiscences & Recipes,” 1986. On the community and school name: Tauxemont is a name derived from the Algonquian Indian Tribe which existed until the 1600s in Northern Virginia. The Tauxemont community and the formation of the preschool began in March 1941 when 20 young families built homes and established a new settlement in what was called Tauxemont 1. These families and those which followed provided the inspiration, building construction and management of the Tauxemont Cooperative Preschool which exists today. The school building is officially designated on the National Register of Historic Places by the U.S. Department of Interior.

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Jones Leads Mount Vernon Past West Potomac

Majors' offensive aggressiveness leads to 32 free-throw attempts.

BY JON ROETMAN
THE GAZETTE

Skylar Jones jokingly exhaled. Sean Stewart laughed.

The Mount Vernon boys basketball teammates reacted to a question about Jones' sub-par performance during the Majors' season opener against Paul VI on Dec. 2. Jones, last season's National District Player of the Year and a Division I signee, fouled out after scoring six points and grabbing three rebounds.

Jones bounced back with 24 points and five rebounds the following game in a win over Woodbridge. On Saturday, the Majors faced rival West Potomac and Jones once again showed why he earned a scholarship to Niagara.

The 6-foot-4 senior scored 25 points and grabbed 11 rebounds as Mount Vernon defeated West Potomac, 68-51, at MVHS.

"[Paul IV] face guarded me and I didn't take opportunities to get open," Jones said. "I just came back the next day and got focused and prepared for the next game because you can't remember the last game. You've just got to move forward."

Jones scored 13 of the Majors' 14 first-quarter points, helping Mount Vernon overcome an early 12-5 deficit. He connected on 5 of 7 field goal attempts in the period, including 2 of 2 from 3-point range.

"We were having a hard time getting the ball in the basket," Jones said, "so I had to take over and

get us in the game."

MOUNT VERNON head coach Alfonso Smith said Jones realized saw the kind of aggressive defense he is likely to face much of this season.

"He's back where he needs to be," the coach said. "The thing that he's seeing: teams are going to be very physical with him. He's got to maintain his composure. ... The challenge that we issued him coming into this game is to pick it up rebounding-wise."

Two other Majors joined Jones with a double-figure scoring output. Jesse Konadu scored 15 points and Stewart added 10. As a team, Mount Vernon was rewarded for its offensive aggressiveness with ample trips to the free-throw line. The Majors were 26 of 32 from the free-throw line, including 11 of 12 from Konadu. West Potomac knocked down 11 of 19 free-throw attempts.

"They have some crazy athletes on that team," Smith said of West Potomac, "so we said if we attack the basket we've got to attack the basket strong and at least get to the free-throw line."

Defensively, Mount Vernon drew seven charges. Stewart said the Wolverines were being overly aggressive and the Majors took advantage.

"Taking charges, it shows our teammates that we've got their helpside," Stewart said, "so that makes us even more aggressive [with] man-to-man [defense]. It just shows we've got everybody's back on the team."

WEST POTOMAC coach David Houston III attributed his team being whistled for numerous charges, along with other problems, to first-game jitters. Houston said the Wolverines will improve with time.

"The things that we did wrong are correctable," the coach said. "That's why I told the kids in the locker

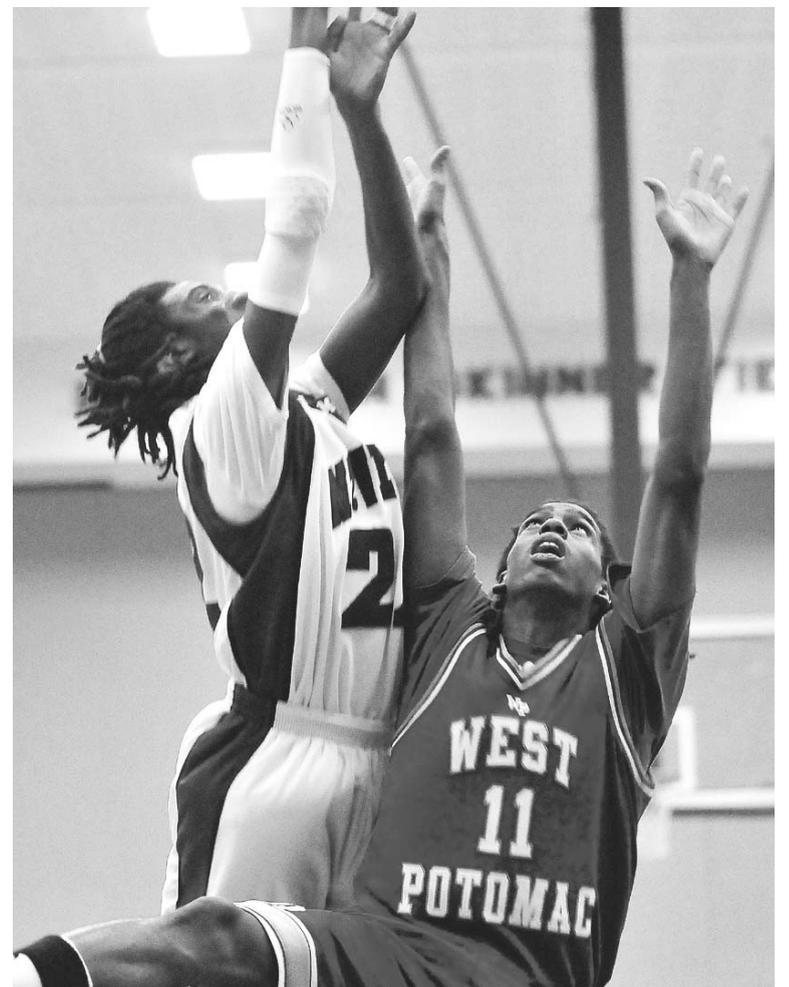


PHOTO BY LOUISE KRAFFT/THE GAZETTE

Mount Vernon's Skylar Jones goes up over West Potomac's Martez Redfearn during Saturday's matchup at MVHS. Mount Vernon won, 68-51.

SEE JONES, PAGE 20

MV Coach Henderson Wants More from McDonald

Majors defeat rival West Potomac in season opener.

BY JON ROETMAN
THE GAZETTE

Sixteen points would constitute a quality night's work for many high school basketball players. But after the Mount Vernon girls basketball team won its season opener on Friday, head coach Terry Henderson sat on the team's bench and said he needed more than that out of senior Jasmine McDonald.

McDonald's team-high scoring output helped the Majors beat rival West Potomac, 48-41, at WPHS for a 1-0 start to the season. Last year, 16 points would have been plenty for the second-team All-National District selection. But an injury to all-state forward Tracy King and uncertainty whether all-district point guard Jalinda Venable will play for the Majors leaves Henderson needing more from McDonald, whose primary role as a junior was defense.

"My expectations for Jasmine are a lot higher than probably what she has for herself," the coach said. "I know what she can do and somehow we as coaches need to stay on her and bring that out of her. She's a hell of a basketball player, but at times she's too unselfish. Once she starts being a little more selfish, I think she'll be OK. ... She didn't play bad, [but] with her being the only senior leader on the floor, she's got to do more for us."

King tore the anterior cruciate ligament in her right knee during the Majors' regional semifinal loss to Oakton in February. She is expected back in late December or early January. Venable, a first-team all-district selection last year, played with the Majors during a preseason scrimmage against Bishop Ireton, but was not listed on the team's roster Friday. Henderson declined comment on the situation but said Venable's return is questionable.

THE MAJORS have a trio of talented freshmen on the roster — Taylor Dunham, Kelly Loftus, Tiffany Webster — but McDonald will be leaned on for production.

"Last year, I had a role and I played that role well," McDonald said. "But now, more

of it's on me because we need a scorer. Yeah, they still want to use me for defense because that's what I was used for last year. But now I need to be used more for offense, too, because they know I can score when I want to. ... I feel I can do it, I just need to work at it."

McDonald scored 12 points in Friday's first half. Her basket with less than 3 minutes remaining in the second quarter gave the Majors a 13-point lead en route to a 27-18 halftime advantage. West Potomac pulled to within six after consecutive baskets by Danuelle Doswell early in the third quarter, but the Wolverines got no closer.

"I think [the Majors] played hard," Henderson said. "That's the only thing I can really say about the first game. They didn't quit. ... We've got a lot of work to do. [We had] too many turnovers, unforced errors. I like the fact they continued to work hard, they executed at times. There's some positives we'll take back and work with."

DUNHAM STARTED at point guard in place of Venable and scored 10 points in her first varsity game.

"I thought Taylor played excellent," Henderson said. "As a freshman, to come

into her first varsity game not knowing what to expect and to handle the ball the way she did [and] handle pressure [was impressive]. ... She had some freshman errors, some freshman mistakes, but overall I give her an A."

Loftus scored 13 points for the Majors. Webster finished with six points for Mount Vernon, Elizabeth Owusuwaa scored two and Lafatima Gray added one.

"I think people lost confidence in our team because of [King's injury]," Loftus said. "But we just had to keep in it and prove them wrong."

Doswell led West Potomac with a game-high 17 points. Ravyne McFail scored 12 points for the Wolverines, Caroline Kelly and Lindsey Sawczuk each finished with four points and Janisha Liverpool and Blossom Pierre each added two.

West Potomac, which has five freshmen on its roster, dropped to 0-2 with a 44-40 loss to Wakefield on Tuesday. First-year head coach Vincent Tate said he is looking for his three seniors — Kiara Artis, Liverpool and McFail to step up.

West Potomac travels to face Lee at 7:30 p.m. Friday. Mount Vernon hosts Forest Park at 7:45 p.m. Friday.

Jones Leads Mount Vernon Past West Potomac

FROM PAGE 19

room, 'I'm very confident in our season coming up, because these are things that can be fixed.' It isn't like they were just a better team than us and they just beat us down to the ground. We just made mistakes. Against a good team, you can't make mistakes."

West Potomac got off to a strong start, taking a 12-5 lead on the strength of a pair of 3-pointers by Daryl Copeland. But a 3-pointer from the corner by Jones tied the game at 14 near the end of the first quarter and the Wolverines never led again.

Copeland and Keevyn Hankins each scored 11 points for West

Potomac. Houston said he expects the duo, along with Martez Redfearn, to be the team's top scorers this season.

West Potomac rebounded Tuesday with a 60-52 victory at Wakefield. Redfearn scored a team-high 18 points and Copeland added 11. The Wolverines will host Lee at 7:30 p.m. Friday.

Mount Vernon travels to Washington-Lee on Dec. 18. Until then, the Majors can enjoy their win over a rival.

"It's always good to beat the person right down the street because they always talk trash," Jones said. "We just had to show them who had to go out and get a victory. Mount Vernon all day."

West Potomac Swim-Dive Teams Compete

The West Potomac boys and girls swim and dive teams competed against West Springfield and Woodson last week. The boys lost to West Springfield, 205-104, on Dec. 4 and lost to Woodson, 246-66, on Dec. 5. The girls lost to West Springfield, 182-133, and fell to Woodson, 217-98.

The West Potomac boys and girls will compete against Lee at 6:30 p.m. Friday at the Mount Vernon Rec Center.

Avengers Open Season Saturday

The Alexandria Avengers, a semi-pro basketball team and member of the Eastern Basketball Alliance, open their season at 7 p.m. Saturday against the Newark Patrons at Mount Vernon High School. The team is owned and coached by 1997 T.C. Williams graduate Dominic Manuel.

MVHS Dinner and Auction Approaching

Mount Vernon High School Girls Basketball 11th Annual Spaghetti Dinner and Silent Auction will be held on Dec. 19. Tickets are \$5. See a student athlete from the girls basketball team or contact Terry Henderson at 703-619-3146 or Terry.Henderson@fcps.edu.

Cheerleading Exhibition

The Alexandria Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities will host the Annual City-Wide Cheerleading Exhibition on Saturday, Dec. 12 at T.C. Williams High School beginning at 11 a.m. The exhibition features cheerleading teams from Charles Barrett, Charles Houston, Cora Kelly, Mount Vernon, Nannie J. Lee, Patrick Henry and William Ramsay Recreation Centers. There will also be special performances by the T. C. Williams High School cheerleaders and others.

The exhibition features teams in three divisions: the pee wee, junior varsity and varsity divisions. Teams will display their skills and enthusiasm as they prepare for the main event, the cheerleading competition, in April of 2010. The April competition will be an invitational event with teams from the Washington D.C., Virginia, and Maryland areas competing against the Alexandria teams.

Tickets will be on sale in advance of the exhibition at the neighborhood recreation centers as well as at the Lee Center Recreation Services Division Office now through 5 p.m., Dec. 10. Adult tickets for ages 13 and older are \$5; youth tickets for 6-12 years are \$2, and youth 5 and under are free. Tickets will be sold at the door for \$6 for adults and \$3 for children.

For more information on the cheerleading program and other youth sports programs, call the Youth Sports Office at 703-746-5402.

Winter Box Lacrosse Registration

The Beltway Box Lacrosse League is registering now for a boys high school and youth winter box lacrosse program beginning Dec. 19. Games will be played in Alexandria at the inline hockey rink behind Francis C. Hammond Middle School. Divisions are boys high school varsity and JV and youth U-9/U-11, U-13, and U-15. A seven-game season is planned. US Lacrosse membership is required. Information is available at www.BeltwayBoxLacrosse.com.

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From Neighborhood Decorations to Feeding 200

FROM PAGE 1

which provides shelter and housing to homeless families and single adults.

Bramante knew that the cook at two of the organization's main shelters, Mondloch House and the Eleanor Kennedy Shelter, could easily whip up something using the pumpkins as the main ingredient, just as she has done before when the shelters received a mass quantity of one type of food.

"We get pounds and pounds of produce" when in season from the Farmers' Market, bread from Panera, cakes and pastries from local supermarkets, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Papa John's Pizza, and Popeye's Chicken "can always be counted on for food donations," Bramante said.

BUT IN HER seven years at New Hope, she has never seen this many pumpkins donated.

"Turkeys, yes, but pumpkins? This is a new one for me," she said.

During the next few days, those pumpkins will become key ingredients for pumpkin pie, pumpkin soup, and mashed pumpkins — comparable to mashed potatoes — and will nourish about 200 people, she said.

Liebeck and McKeown, now in the 11th and 10th grade respectively, grew up together. They also started Girl Scouts together in elementary school. Through the years they were in and out of the same



PHOTO BY JEFFREY ARON / THE GAZETTE

Catie Liebeck and Nell McKeown load pumpkins to take to New Hope Housing.

troops, but have been together in the same troops since sixth grade, Liebeck said. They are now members of Troop 874.

"I've made a lot of good friends and doing projects together has given me some great memories over the years," said

McKeown.

This most recent project is one of two prerequisites to the Girl Scouts' "Gold Award," according to Girls Scouts of the Nation's Capital Team Program Specialist Caroline Schreiber.

Get Involved

To donate to New Hope Housing, contact the administrative office at 703-799-2293, 8407 Richmond Hwy., Suite E, Alexandria.

"It's a 'take action' project within a certain theme to make the world a better place," she said.

ONE SERIES is called "It's Your Planet — Love It," which is environmentally-focused, and the other is "It's Your World — Change It," a more politically-oriented advocacy program.

These two prerequisites are a "dress rehearsal" for the Gold Award.

"It makes girls think and respond to questions such as: 'How do you organize? How do you design? How do you get people to work with you to make a change in your community?'" she said.

And the time commitment is huge: 80 hours of work must be performed to qualify for the award. That commitment doesn't include the time spent on the other two projects.

Both Liebeck and McKeown agree that this project has changed their perspective.

"It makes me more aware of the problems people have. It makes you want to reach out and help in some way," said Liebeck. "It's a good experience to get involved in things. It's taking a different path," she said.

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Nancy Dunning was my friend. Thirty years ago, she envisioned Del Ray as a community full of active citizens, thriving businesses and excellent schools. Not only did she work tirelessly over the years to help create this community, but she inspired many of us to join in her effort. For those of you who did not know Nancy, read this beautiful tribute written by her daughter, Elizabeth. For those of you who did, join me in remembering her contribution to Del Ray and Alexandria.

—Jack Taylor, Alexandria Toyota



*Nancy
Dunning*

The Best Mom In The World

A Eulogy for Nancy Dunning written and read by her daughter, Liz

A lot of people, I think, have moments when they imagine that they have the best mom in the world. I was lucky enough, however, to be absolutely certain – for a long time – that I actually did. My mom was my best friend. We talked just about every day. And, anyone who knows her, knows a couple of things about my mom, one of which was that she was more or less always right. When I was a teenager, that pissed me off sometimes. I mean, seriously, when you're sixteen and supposed to be going through that phase where you know everything, it puts a crimp in it to live with someone who actually does.

But, another thing that you must know if you met my mom was that she wasn't smug about her omnipotence. Like any good superhero, my mom used her powers for good, not evil. To make other people – not just herself – feel good and be better. She taught my brother and I how to do that, too. I hope we were paying attention. I'm pretty sure we were.

My mom also taught me just about everything I know about optimism and joy. Those were things at which she excelled. It started, when my brother and I were kids, with crazy names for things. I bet that you thought that playground on Old Dominion was just the Beverly Hills Co-op. Nope. It was the Super Deluxe Playground. And, back when the Mt. Vernon school playground was that log-thing which is probably now illegal in most states, a trip to the Super Deluxe Playground was an adventure indeed. Every day was an adventure. Whether we were sneaking food into movies when I was younger, or she was singing hilariously bad opera while she made breakfast, my mom made clear that every day had something good in it, something to be happy about. Even if it was just that they'd just started selling Christmas Blend at Starbucks. These small events and details weren't small – they were big. They warranted a phone call. So did a great song on the radio. So did anything that made her smile. These were great calls to receive. Random, sometimes, but great. I mean, who doesn't want to know that she busted the person next to her at the last traffic light picking their nose in the car? Who didn't want to hear her joyful voice, her laugh? She loved to laugh and there isn't a better feeling than making my mom laugh. Because, if you really got her going – and there are lots of ways to do this – she'd just get to that level where she's crying because she's laughing so hard. That's when you know that you've really won. Bonus points are given if you do that while one of you is driving.

Her gift with joy, with optimism, gave her part of her gift with people. She had, what I jokingly called, her secret decoder ring. That was our short-hand – and there is always short-hand – for her ability to listen, really listen, to people when they talk. And, more than that, to understand what they're really saying and, who they are and where they're coming from. That's why she wasn't just people's neighbor, or real estate agent, or neighborhood activist, or columnist, she was their friend. It didn't take much to be my mom's friend. She didn't make you jump a lot of hoops. Or wear overalls and a baseball cap with the same aplomb that she did. (And thank god, because really? Who can pull off overalls and a baseball cap like my Mom? Nobody.) She wanted to learn more about people and know more people. So she lit people up when she talked to them.

And, as a consequence, people mostly did what my Mom wanted them to do, or what she asked of them. Because her ideas were smart. They were filled with the energy and the joy that she carried with her all the time. And they reflected an understanding and awareness of the thoughts and values of everyone involved. So, if you did what she wanted you to do, you were also doing the right thing.

But, mostly, she wasn't a superhero – complete with secret decoder ring – to me. She was my Mom. She was better at that than anything else. She told my brother, and me, and my Dad that she loved us at the end of every phone conversation. That's what our family does. And so, individually, knowing that the last words we said to each other were, "I love you," helps.

There wasn't a day of my life – and there won't be one – when I wasn't sure that my mom loved me, that she believed in me, that she was proud of me. And with or without a secret decoder ring, a cape, or a phone booth to change in, it truly takes a superhero to, in this crazy messed up world, love people so well and so much. So perfectly. It takes all that to be what I have – the best mom in the world.

On December 5, 2003, Nancy Dunning was murdered in her home in Alexandria, VA. Nancy's family, friends and co-workers have not forgotten her and celebrate her life daily.

We will not give up and believe that the person who murdered her will be caught and prosecuted.

A \$100,000 reward available for the individual who comes forth with information leading to the arrest and conviction of this murderer.

If you have any information, we urge you to please call the Alexandria Criminal Investigations Section at 703-838-4711 or e-mail them at <http://alexandriava.gov/dunning>.



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