Mount Vernon Gazette

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Photos by Mechelle Schloss/The Gazette

Mulan, Emily Whitworth, is surrounded by Chinese soldiers: front row: Nathaniel Billingsly, Julian Worth, Jake Crouse, Graham Defibaugh, Kevin O'Meara, Josh Turner, second row: Chris Corl, Emily Whitworth (as Mulan), Hunter/Austin Harlow, and Aubrey Blount, and, at top, William Havranek as Chi Fu.

Aldersgate Presents 'Mulan Jr.'

Final rehearsals are under way for the upcoming performance of "Disney's Mulan Jr." at Aldersgate Community Church. Actors and production team members fine tuned musical numbers, costumes, and lighting cues last weekend for this weekend's opening.

Emily Whitworth, as Mulan, sings "Reflections."

Show Times

- Jan. 15, 16, 22, 23 at 7:30 p.m.
- Jan. 17, 18, 23, 24 at 3:00 p.m.

Tickets may be purchased online at www.acctonline.org

Aldersgate Church Community Theater, 1301 Collingwood Road, Alexandria.

Julian Worth, as Chinese soldier Ling

Widening Route 1, Improving I-95 Exit

Officials call federal funding "a start" to addressing problems.

By Julia O'Donoghue
The Gazette

U.S. Rep. Jim Moran (D-8) appears to have secured funding to help mitigate the additional traffic congestion coming to the Mount Vernon, Lorton and Springfield areas as the result of a massive Department of Defense personnel and facilities relocation in 2011.

Moran expects the money will be used to widen Richmond Highway in the immediate vicinity of Ft. Belvoir Army Base's main post. It is also likely the funding will pay for a new high occupancy vehicle [HOV] "flyover" exit from Interstate 95 to Newington Road in Springfield.

"The move to a non-transit accessible military base should never have been agreed to. … [But] we now have people in the defense department who will at least listen to us," said Moran.

THE U.S. CONGRESS approved a military base realignment and closure plan in 2005 that included the transfer of approximately 19,100 people, mostly from Arlington County's transit-friendly Crystal City, to three more remote locations in Mount Vernon, Springfield and the City of Alexandria.

As part of the same facilities re

See Moran Close, Page 6

Able To Spare a Dime?

Countywide effort to earmark a 10-cent tax hike launched here.

By Michael Lee Pope
The Gazette

Hey, taxpayer. Can you spare a dime? That's what some concerned parents want to know. With the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors facing unprecedented cuts to the public school system, parents at Mount Vernon High School began wondering what would happen if a 10-cent increase to the tax rate could be set aside to handle the shortfall for the schools. The idea first emerged at an early December meeting of the Academic Boosters Club at Mount Vernon High School. The idea was then unanimously approved by the Belhaven Parent-Teacher Association.

Now it's spreading through a county facing its most difficult budget cycle in recent memory.

"This is a nightmare scenario," said Ron Fitzsimmons, president of the Academic Booster Club at Mount Vernon High School. "That's why we need to take action to save teacher positions and foreign immersion programs and freshman athletics."

Fitzsimmons plans to use his experience as a Washington lobbyist to spread the word, reach

See Can Taxpayers, Page 5

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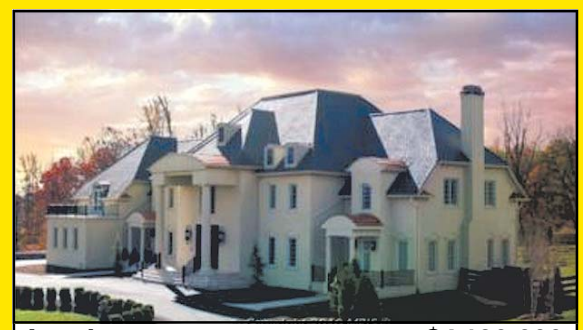

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Photo by LaShawn Avery/The Gazette

Story Telling

Historic interpreter and storyteller Roy Fields is giving a demonstration during a storytelling at the Mount Vernon Estate on Jan. 10.

Dale: $116 Million Shortfall

Families will feel crunch in next school budget.

By Julia O'Donoghue
The Gazette

Superintendent Jack Dale wants to ask the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors for an additional $57.8 million in funding to help meet Fairfax County Public Schools budget needs next year, according to a presentation he made to the school board Jan. 7.

Fairfax already allocates the school system approximately $1.7 billion annually, or about 53 percent of the county's overall revenue. But Dale said the schools are facing a projected shortfall of $166 million in the 2010-2011 school year, in part due to rising costs that are out of the system's control.

The additional money equates to an increase of three-cents per $100 of assessed land value in the Fairfax County real estate property tax rate. Fairfax schools draw approximately 75 percent of their funding from the local county government which, in turn, almost exclusively relies on real estate taxes for revenue.

In addition to requesting more money from the county, Dale has suggested $108.2 million in spending cuts to assist in closing the schools system's projected funding gap for next year.

The superintendent added that the quality of Fairfax County public education system will suffer as a result of the cuts.

"We spend the same amount of money on schools as Montgomery County, Md. but we have 30,000 more students than they do," said Dale, referencing Fairfax's largest public education rival in the region.

Dale does not ultimately make the decision about the Fairfax schools' budget. The school board — largely relying on the superintendent's budget proposal as a template — will make its formal request for funding from the Fairfax County Board of Super

See Budget Cuts, Page 7

Carjacking Reported in Hybla Valley Area

On Sunday, Jan 10, around 1:50 a.m., a couple became suspicious that a black Nissan Altima was following them on Buckman Road. They called police as the Altima pulled in front of them and three men exited with baseball bats. The 31-year-old driver was able to drive around the Altima and escape the suspects.

At Needles Place the Altima pulled in front of the victim's car once again. The three suspects exited their vehicle, threatened the driver with baseball bats and demanded he exit his car. As the victim and his

25-year-old wife exited the car, a 36-year-old family member came to assist them. Two of the suspects then threatened the 36-year-old man and demanded his wallet. As the second victim was being robbed, the third suspect took off in the first victim's car but crashed into a parked car. The first two suspects returned to the Altima and drove off as the third suspect fled on foot.

None of the victims were injured.

A citizen was able to provide police with a description of the suspect vehicle and a patrol officer stopped the Altima a short distance away on Buckman Road. A 19-year-old man from Alexandria and a 15-year-old Alexandria-area male were both arrested for carjacking and robbery.

The third suspect remains at large.

Anyone with information is asked to contact Crime Solvers by phone at 1-866-411-TIPS/8477, e-mail at www.fairfaxcrimesolvers.org or text

"TIP187" plus a message to CRIMES/274637 or call Fairfax County Police at 703-691-2131.

What Residents Want

In their own words, locals speak out at General Assembly hearing.

By Julia O'Donoghue
The Gazette

About 60 people showed up to testify before the Fairfax County delegation to the Virginia General Assembly at a Jan. 9 hearing The representatives, including state senators and delegates, headed to Richmond for the start of the legislative session on Jan. 13.

Virginia's budget is one of the top priorities, if not the top, for most state legislators in 2010. The General Assembly passes a new budget once every two years and the current spending plan has a $4 billion shortfall.

Former Gov. Tim Kaine (D) proposed closing Virginia's budget gap through a mix of tax increases and cuts in services before leaving office this month. Among other things, Kaine's plan included a $60 million reduction in Fairfax County Public Schools' state funding.

Unlike his predecessor, newly sworn-in Gov. Robert McDonnell (R) has said he will not raise taxes to balance the budget, which could mean deeper cuts to services than the ones proposed by Kaine.

About one-third of the people who took their Saturday morning off to speak to Fairfax County's senators and delegates had serious concerns about how Virginia's budget would impact residents with disabilities who receive or are waiting to receive assistance from the commonwealth.

Other speakers addressed a range of topics including taxes, the local court system and state funding for Fairfax schools.

Here are excerpts of what people said to Fairfax County's senators and delegates:

JAMES RENWICK MANSHIP, like founding father Thomas Jefferson, is a fan of juries. So to prove his point, Manship dressed up like Jefferson to speak before the Fairfax delegation to the Virginia General Assembly.

James Renwick Manship, Mount Vernon resident

Over the past decade, Manship said there has been a steep decline in the number of jury trials in Virginia, as much as 70 percent according to official state figures. He said judges would prefer to make judicial decisions themselves and lawyers loathe jury trials because they are often more work.

But without juries, judges are granted too much power and become tyrants, said Manship.

"Juries provide judicial accountability," he said.

WHEN TERESA CHAMPION'S son, now 16, was first diagnosed with autism, the family had to pay out of their own pockets for any additional therapy he needed. At first, Champion had tried sending a bill to their insurance company for her son's sessions, but the family's claims were denied. Still, Champion said the therapy, though expensive, was worth it. When first diagnosed, her son was labeled as being moderate-to-severe on the autism spectrum. Now, he is considered moderate-to-high-functioning.

Teresa Champion, Springfield resident

Champion thinks all children with autism, including those who can't cover expensive therapy themselves, should have access to the extra services that helped her child.

She is pushing for the Virginia General Assembly to pass a bill the would require insurance companies in Virginia to cover the cost of therapy associated with autism until a child is about 9.

"Studies show that intensive early intervention helps the most," said Champion.

LIZ BRADSHER (Springfield), Fairfax County School Board member, was most concerned with state funding cuts to the local school system but she also

Elizabeth Bradsher, Fairfax County School Board member

See Pleas to State, Page 4

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News

Pleas to State

From Page 3

had harsh words for one of Bob McDonnell's campaign promises about education funding. McDonnell proposes requiring school districts to spend a greater percentage of whatever state they receive funding "in the classroom."

According to Bradsher, Kaine's proposed budget sets state funding for Fairfax schools at $20 million below the amount Virginia gave Fairfax in 2007, even though the local school population has grown by approximately 10,000 students since then.

Fairfax County Public Schools was also scheduled to receive an additional $61 million from the commonwealth this year, the result of a recalculation of the commonwealth's funding formula for primary and secondary education.

But as a cost-saving measure, Kaine proposed "freezing" Virginia's education funding formula so that school districts would receive the same amount of money from the commonwealth that they did last year. If implemented, this measure would cost Fairfax the $61 million it was scheduled to get, on top of the $20 million in other state funding cuts it will sustain, said Bradsher.

In light of current cuts in state financial assistance, Bradsher criticized McDonnell's proposal to require local school systems to spend 60 percent or more of their state funding on "classroom instruction."

"To rely on a one-size-fits-all gimmick to 'protect the classroom' is exactly the wrong approach and will do absolutely nothing to address the budget crisis all school divisions face. We hope you will reject calls to direct arbitrarily set percentages of funding 'to the classroom,'" said Bradsher.

Variety of Topics At Kiwanis Meeting

Carolyn Richar, president of the Fairfax Kiwanis Club and an official of Capital Hospice Center addressed the Mount Vernon Kiwanis Club last week.

The Mount Vernon Kiwanis Club hosted two speakers at its dinner meeting at the Mount Vernon Country Club on Wednesday, Jan. 6. Starting off was Ian Warren, an Eagle Scout candidate from Fort Washington, Md. As a final part of his extensive requirements to reach the level of Eagle Scout, Ian was invited to do his public speaking effort to the MVKC. In his presentation on "Preventing Crime in the Community," he gave specific recommendations to safeguard residents from home burglaries, car theft, and identity theft.

The other guest speaker that night was Carolyn Richar, president of the Fairfax Kiwanis Club and an official of Capital Hospice Center. She outlined the need for and the ability of the Kiwanis International organization to resolve some of the issues of child and maternity care in developing countries. She asked for support to expand the concept of free rural health clinics.

live learn lead

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Can Taxpayers Spare a Dime?

From Page 1

ing out to PTA groups throughout the county with a petition outlining the plan. He says he's already received hundreds of e-mails in support of the idea, and he's currently engaged in collecting signatures for his petition drive. According to his calculations, the effort would raise about $180 million — the approximate amount of the current shortfall projected by the school system.

"Having worked as a lobbyist, I know that you can't just complain," said Fitzsimmons. "You have to present a solution."

MEANWHILE, COUNTY officials are preparing for a cutthroat budget season. Mount Vernon Supervisor Gerry Hyland says that he would be opposed to any budget proposal that does not raise the appropriation beyond last year's funding level. With recent additions to the county's enrollment, he says it would be unconscionable to appropriate the same level of funding as last year. Yet although Hyland acknowledged the need to finding additional revenue, he said it would be premature for him to sign onto any specific effort such as the one proposed by Fitzsimmons.

"We can't say that any tax rate is going to magically cover the shortfall," said Hyland. "At this point, we need to see what the county manager is going to propose."

Competition for resources is certain to be fierce, with dwindling revenues creating shortfalls across the county government. And the idea of earmarking a certain portion of the tax rate for a specific kind of expenditure is certain to face opposition with the Board of Supervisors. Lee District Supervisor Jeff McKay says he would be willing to raise the tax rate, although he would oppose any effort to earmark the increase toward any specific line item.

"That would really tie our hands in a way that I could never support," said McKay. "We've got to meet all the needs of the county, and while that includes education it also includes public safety and human services and library services."

> "This is a nightmare scenario."
>
> — Ron Fitzsimmons, president, Academic Booster Club at Mount Vernon High School

Bulletin Board

THURSDAY/JAN. 14

The Case of the Promiscuous Quillwort. 7:30 p.m. Join Carl Taylor, program manager at the National Science Foundation, for his presentation on Quillworts (Isoëtes). At Green Spring Gardens, 4603 Green Spring Road, Alexandria. Call 703-642-5173.

MONDAY/JAN. 18

Family Day of Service. 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. In honor of Martin Luther King Jr. This Family Day of Service will offer projects geared specifically for families with children aged 4 to 14 who attend Burgundy Farm Country Day School, George Washington Middle School, and Jefferson Houston Elementary School. At Burgundy Farm Country Day School. Contact Liliana López at 703-842-0469 or lilianal@burgundyfarm.org.

TUESDAY/JAN. 19

Mt. Vernon Evening Lions. 7 p.m. Monthly meeting and dinner. At Pema's Restaurant on Route 1. Interested persons are welcome. Contact Andrea at 703-960-4973.

Youth Survey. 7 p.m. Washington Mill Elementary School Gymnasium — 2008 Fairfax County Youth Survey will be presented by a county expert. Alcohol, drug and sexual activity among Mt. Vernon Pyramid youth will be addressed. To RSVP, email wmespta1@gmail.com.

Mount Vernon Genealogical Society Meets. 1 p.m. The meeting will feature a presentation entitled "Navigating the National Archives: Understanding and Using NARA Finding Aids." At Hollin Hall Senior Center, Room 112, Alexandria. Call

See Bulletin, Page 7

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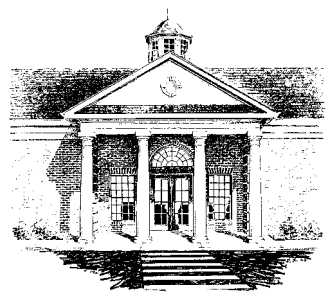

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Moran Close To Securing Money To Widen Route 1

From Page 1

organization, the Department of Defense is also doubling the size of the Mount Vernon Community Hospital on the Fort Belvoir Army Base, partly in response to the closing of Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington D.C.

Local elected officials expect the change — which is supposed to be complete by 2011 — to wreak havoc on traffic in the southeastern part of Fairfax County and Alexandria, particularly along Richmond Highway and in the Interstate 95/395 corridor.

Though all 19,100 workers are technically assigned to Fort Belvoir, approximately 8,500 of them will be moving to the former Engineering Proving Ground in Springfield and 6,400 will be transferred to a new facility at the intersection of Seminary Road and Interstate 395 in the City of Alexandria.

"We are inheriting an insolvable mess," said Moran.

Photo by Julia O'Donoghue/The Gazette

U.S. Rep. Jim Moran (D-8) secured federal dollars to help widen a section of Richmond Highway close to Fort Belvoir Army Base.

THE FEDERAL MONEY, approximately $300 million overall, is supposed to ensure good access to the new hospital facility at Fort Belvoir and must be shared with the Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., where the bulk of Walter Reed's personnel and departments will move.

The simplest way to justify the money was to put it in for the military medical facilities," said Moran.

The congressman, who sits on the House of Representatives committee that oversees the military spending put the request in for the funding himself, expects Virginia and Maryland will split the money equally, receiving $150 million each.

Moran's top priority for Virginia's share of the funding is the expansion of Richmond Highway near Ft. Belvoir.

Last fall, Gov. Tim Kaine (D) wrote Moran asking for money to widen Richmond Highway from Telegraph Road to the Woodlawn Plantation, which the Virginia Department of Transportation estimated would cost approximately $75 million. In December, Fairfax County chairman Sharon Bulova (D), Supervisor Jeff McKay (D-Lee) and Supervisor Gerry Hyland (D-Mount Vernon) urged Moran to ask for enough money to widen a longer stretch of the corridor, from Fairfax County Parkway to Mount Vernon Memorial Highway.

"There are going to be thousands of people coming to that hospital. This [funding] is a very important piece in terms of addressing the present bottleneck," said Hyland.

Richmond Highway, which shrinks down to four lanes near the base, already backs up in several areas during traffic rush hours, including near the Belvoir gates.

"A lot of people are really worried about what is going to happen to traffic around the base because of that hospital," said Del. Scott Surovell (D-44), whose district includes Richmond Highway to the north of Belvoir.

In addition to the hospital and defense department workers being relocated to Belvoir, Hyland and Surovell said a new Army museum, which is likely to open in the next few years, will also aggravate the traffic situation.

They said this latest batch of federal funding is crucial start but not nearly enough to address the long-neglected problems of the Richmond Highway corridor.

"This is a step in the right direction but it is not going to solve the problem," said Surovell.

If Moran is able to get all the money he asked for, Fairfax County has requested approximately $5 million of it for a feasibility study of resurrecting an "old" Fort Belvoir rail spur that could run from the Franconia-Springfield Metro station to the base, according to a letter written by Bulova.

BUT NEXT to Richmond Highway's expansion, the top priority for the new funding is to address traffic backup that could occur along Interstate 95 as a result of moving thousands of workers onto the Engineer Proving Ground site in Springfield.

Kaine and Fairfax County has asked Moran to find $15 to $40 million to construct a new HOV "flyover" exit at Newington Road that would provide direct access for employees going to the new Springfield facility.

Originally, the congressman had also intended to ask for $60 million to construct another direct access ramp for HOV and general traffic lanes from Interstate 395 to the new military facility off Seminary Road. But some members of the Alexandria City Council and the public objected to the project because of its effect on a nature preserve in the area.

Moran was unclear as to what infrastructure improvements that city council was interested in seeing at the Seminary Road location and so he decided to devote his efforts —— and the additional federal funding — to Fairfax County's requests instead.

"I am very fond of the city council and the mayor but they did not put in a request for a plan to be funded. I worked with Gerry Hyland, Jeff McKay and Sharon Bulova on a proposal," said Moran.

Nevertheless, a lack of transportation infrastructure at Seminary Road is likely to impact Fairfax County residents who travel interstates 95 and 395 during the morning and evening rush hours, said several elected officials.

"I am going to do my very best to avoid that area in the morning and evening because it is going to chaos. I would advise other people to do the same," said Moran.

Icy Recreation

Some neighborhood children from the Fort Hunt area decided to grab their hockey skates, sticks, and goals and play their own version of The Winter Classic last weekend, Jan. 9-10. The pictures were taken at the Belle Haven Marina Park (Dyke Marsh of off George Washington Parkway). Frozen melted snow made a few frozen ice patches on the lawn of the Belle Haven Marina Park.

News

Budget Cuts To Affect Students

From Page 3

visors next month.

In late April, the supervisors will pass an annual countywide budget and announce how much they intend to allocate to Fairfax schools overall next year.

Some school board members have already indicated that they would like to ask the county for funding above and beyond what Dale has suggested.

"Let's just say $57.8 million is not my favorite number," said School Board member Brad Center (Lee).

New Fees For Families

To make up for the budget shortfall, Dale is proposing $3.4 million in new fees for families and students, such as:

❖ a $75 charge for any Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate exam a student takes

❖ a $100 student fee for participating on a sports team

Proposed programs for elimination

Dale has proposed the elimination of the following services:

❖ "behind the wheel" drivers education. Fairfax students would now have to depend on the private sector for such training.

❖ bus service to "gifted and talented" centers if a base school has "gifted and talented" equivalent classes available.

❖ bus service to academy programs if there are fewer than five students enrolled in the program from a high school.

❖ freshman athletics, indoor track and winter cheerleading

❖ foreign language in the elementary schools (not including immersion programs)

❖ elementary "focus" programs (currently present at Riverside, Fort Hunt, Hollin Meadows, Woodley Hills elementary schools in Mount Vernon; Lake Anne and Forest Edge elementary schools in Reston; Kent Gardens Elementary School in McLean; Daniels Run Elementary School in Fairfax)

❖ Pimmit Hills Alternative High School in Falls Church

❖ Modified School Calendar (currently present at Dogwood Elementary School in Reston, Franconia Elementary School in the Springfield area, and Timber Lane Elementary School in the McLean area)

❖ Project Excel (currently present at Bucknell, Hollin Meadows, Hybla Valley, Mount Vernon Woods, Riverside, Woodlawn, Woodley Hills and Fort Belvoir elementary schools in the Mount Vernon area; Dogwood Elementary School in Reston; Hutchinson Elementary School in Herndon; Halley Elementary School in Fairfax Station; and London Towne Elementary School in Centreville)

❖ Most traditional summer school programs

Other Budget Actions

Dale has also proposed the following:

❖ To increase class size by one student per teacher for all classes except special education.

❖ To freeze employees salaries and not give school system staff a "cost of living" increase in the next year.

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Bulletin Board

From Page 5

Harold McClendon at 703-360-0920 or haroldm@erols.com.

WEDNESDAY/JAN. 20

Open House. 10 a.m. At Plymouth Haven Christian Preschool. The school offers a learning environment that encourages individual growth through early childhood education while sharing Christian values. At 8600 Plymouth Road, off of Fort Hunt Road, Alexandria. Call 703-779-2217.

SATURDAY/JAN. 23

Wellness/Get Organized Day. 10:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Learning organizing tips at the Habitat ReStore of Northern Virginia. At the Habitat for Humanity ReStore, 7770 Richmond Highway, Alexandria.

Spaghetti Dinner and Silent Auction. 5-8 p.m. For Mount Vernon High School Girls Basketball. 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.

Effective Prayer for the Economy. 3-4:30 p.m. With speaker Sarah Hyatt, CSB. A free lecture/workshop with childcare provided. At the First Church of Christ Scientist Mount Vernon, 1509 Collingswood Road, Alexandria. Call 703-768-2494.

Food History Symposium. 9 a.m. to 4:15 p.m. Fee: $50. "Food for Thought: A Food History Symposium." The series of lectures will examine public markets, pottery vessels, bakeries, chocolate, and African-American foodways, with an emphasis on Alexandria and the Chesapeake region. At The Lyceum, Alexandria's History Museum, 201 South Washington Street, Alexandria. Register at www.alexandriahistory.org or by calling 703-838-4994.

WEDNESDAY/JAN. 27

New Metropolis Lecture Series. 7 p.m. Melissa Keeley, assistant professor, Geography and Public Policy and Public Administration, George Washington University, will present Developing Urban Green Infrastructure Policy: A D.C. Case Study. At the Virginia Tech Alexandria Center, 1021 Prince Street, 3rd floor conference room. Contact Kris Wernstedt, 703-706-8132 or krisw@vt.edu.

SATURDAY/JAN. 30

Java Jolt Archaeology Event. 10 a.m. Jack Hranicky, former chair of the Alexandria Archaeological Commission, will present "The Sandy Hill Adena Cache of Dorchester County, Md.," an illustrated lecture exploring a significant artifact collection. At the Alexandria Archaeology Museum, 105 North Union Street, #327, in Old Town, Alexandria. Call 703-838-4399 or e-mail ruth.reeder@alexandriava.gov.

SUNDAY/JAN. 31

Book Talk. 2-4 p.m. The topic is "Searching." Two authors, Nicole Burton and Solveig Eggerz, will discuss how the theme of searching is depicted in their books. Nicole is the author of the adoption memoir, Swimming Up the Sun. Solveig is the author of the novel, Seal Woman. At St. Elmo's Coffee Pub Inc., 2300 Mt. Vernon Ave., Alexandria. Call 703-739-9268.

Commonwealth Academy Open House. 1-4 p.m. Learn about its award winning college-prep program for students with learning differences and AD/HD. Grades 4-12. Meet with faculty and staff and tour the school. At the Commonwealth Academy, 1321 Leslie Avenue, Alexandria. Call 703-548-6912 or go to www.CommonwealthAcademy.com

THURSDAY/FEB. 4

Statewide Application Assistance Workshop. 10 a.m. to noon. Free. Presented by the Virginia Commission for the Arts. Program Coordinator Cathy Welborn and Arts-in-Education Coordinator Elizabeth Cantile will provide an overview of grant programs, updates to the Guidelines for Funding, application and review procedures, as well as general tips on preparing competitive proposals in preparation for the March 1, 2010, and April 1, 2010, application deadlines. At The Athenaeum, 201 Prince Street, Alexandria. Call 703-548-0035 or 804-225-3132 or visit www.arts.virginia.gov.

SATURDAY/FEB. 6

Grow Underwater Grasses. 10:30 a.m. to noon. Learn to grow underwater bay grasses at home for later planting in the Potomac River. At the Buddie Ford Nature Center, 5750 Sanger Ave., Alexandria. Register at www.cbf.org/grasses.

SATURDAY/FEB. 13

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

Grow Underwater Grasses. 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Learn to grow underwater bay grasses at home for later planting in the Potomac River. At the Sherwood Regional Library, 2501 Sherwood Hall Lane, Alexandria. Register at www.cbf.org/grasses.

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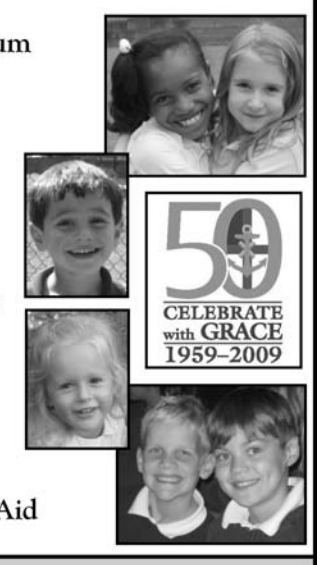

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Opinion

Large Classes, Tough Choices

Opening the doors for more charter schools in Virginia.

Editorial

One reason for growth in the student population in public school systems in the area right now is the effect of the recession on family budgets. With more than 70,000 unemployed people in Northern Virginia, and thousands more underemployed, some families who did have children in private schools have switched to public school. Given the stellar reputations of the schools in question, it's a rational financial move.

But now growing enrollment and costs combined with stagnant budgets are forcing some local public school systems to rework their budget calculations as well, resulting in more than 30 students in many classes, more than 40 students in some classes.

This will no doubt send some parents back to the family budget drawing board, seeking a way to afford private school and smaller class sizes for their children.

Most parents don't care very much about the size of the average class, only the sizes of the classes in which their children are trying to learn.

Very large classes, especially classes with 30 or more students in them, are a detriment to learning. Students with any sort of challenges are particularly poorly served by large classes. Very large classes also make the task of maintaining a civil school environment much more difficult.

Schools would do well to focus first on limiting very large classes, worrying a bit less about average class size.

It's also an excellent time to begin paving the way for charter schools in Virginia. What, in the middle of a financial crunch? If we start now to develop more encouraging guidelines for charter schools in the region, by the time the first schools are open, the economic climate will be vastly different.

Public schools cannot meet all the needs of all the students that come through the doors. Families deserve some well-constructed alternatives. Governor-elect Bob McDonnell, along with President Obama, is right to push to open the doors for more charter schools in Virginia.

Letters to the Editor

Why Not Bottle Deposit Program?

To the Editor:

The following open letter is addressed to the representatives of the Mount Vernon District.

Virginia needs a beverage container deposit law in order to reduce litter waste, especially in Virginia streams and rivers and the Chesapeake Bay. Such a law also would conserve energy and natural resources (such as aluminum), and could provide revenue for the Commonwealth.

My neighbors and I observe and remove an enormous amount of trash from our local creek. Under the auspices of the Alice Ferguson Foundation's Potomac-wide cleanup, the Friends of Little Hunting Creek have picked up bottles and trash from the creek and shoreline every spring since 2001. Last year, for example, 82 volunteers working at 8 sites along our creek picked up 119 bags of trash and recyclables (along with 10 tires and other items).

Cleanups of the sort we conduct are at the heart of Virginia's litter reduction program. Establishments (such as our local 7-11) pay a litter tax of $25 a year which goes in part to sponsor and fund voluntary citizen cleanups. Curbside recycling programs also prevent recyclable material from being tossed out as litter. However, Virginia's solid waste recycling rate (reported by the Department of Environmental Quality) appears to have plateaued at less than 39 percent for the past decade.

Current programs are clearly inadequate, because the amount of trash is unending and overwhelming. The Friends of Little Hunting Creek could have gone out a few days later and picked up just as much trash as we picked up during our cleanup. Much of it, by the way, is from our local 7-11 (we can identify some trash by label). The $25 litter tax that 7-11 pays per year would cover the equivalent of about an hour and a half of a volunteer's time, a gross understatement of the amount of labor that would actually be needed to pick up the litter generated by one convenience store over the course of a year.

Letter-writer Elizabeth Martin's evidence of Virginia's failed litter reduction efforts.

Picking up other people's litter and trash is dirty, dangerous, disgusting, and a waste of my and other volunteers' time. I personally am sick and tired of it. It makes me angry that a recent brochure produced by industry ("Virginia Business: Putting Its Money Where Its Mouth Is to Support a Cleaner Virginia") brags about the 395,627 hours of volunteer labor that have been dedicated to citizen cleanups of bottle litter, as if that represents an industry accomplishment rather than a disgrace. The answer, it seems to me, is to stop relying on the labor of people who don't litter and offer incentives to stop the littering by people who do.

Perhaps three quarters by volume of what we collect is beverage containers — water bottles, soda bottles and cans, beer cans — all of which are potentially recyclable. (Unfortunately, most of what we retrieve from the creek cannot be recycled because it's full of mud or broken or disintegrated.)

Nationally, only 48 per cent of aluminum beer and soft drink cans, 28 per cent of glass containers, and 27 per cent of PET bottles and jars were recycled in 2008, according to data assembled by the Container Recycling Institute.

A deposit on all plastic, metal, and glass beverage containers creates an incentive for people to return them to redeem the deposit, rather than toss them by the roadside, in a park, etc. In the 11 states with beverage container deposit laws, recycling rates are much higher than in states that do not have them, according to statistics provided by the Beverage Container Institute. The 11 U.S. states

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Mount Vernon Gazette

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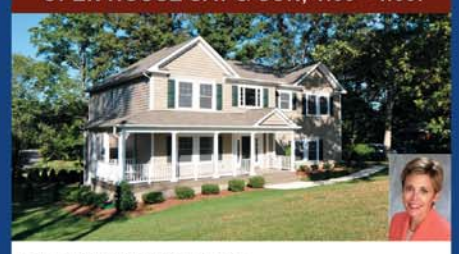

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Opinion

State Budget Crisis Hits Home

By Scott A. Surovell
Delegate-Elect

This session marks the worst state budget since the Great Depression. Gov. Kaine leaves office as the first governor in a long time to have a smaller budget than when he entered four years earlier.

When I started college in 1989, I remember Virginia going through a bad recession and the pain that it caused at my college, James Madison University. Programs and construction was cancelled and my parents received bills for tuition surcharges in the middle of the year. The General Assembly sessions became so contentious that people in the same party did not speak to each other for years after it was over because of the cuts that occurred. That crisis was part of what motivated me to closely follow state politics my entire life.

At the Fairfax County public hearing last week, we heard from over 70 people and dozens of groups that were staring changed lives in the face due to what is coming. We heard from the physically and mentally disabled who depend on Medicaid for home care, advocates for the homeless, domestic violence prevention programs that work, and from advocates for education. I have also met with at least six Mount Vernon PTAs regarding the proposed changes to our school system. These changes are not acceptable to me. And of course none of this even begins to address our crisis in transportation.

I do not believe that Gov. Kaine's proposed budget fairly allocates the burdens of this budget upon Virginians either by region or by need. Going forward, we need to ensure that we do not punish our most vulnerable or place the budget of budget cuts on those with the least ability to pay.

I am also deeply concerned that the state will try to balance this budget by disproportionately using money from Northern Virginia. We cannot continue to be the piggy bank for the entire Commonwealth of Virginia. In times of crisis, everyone needs to get in the boat and pull on the oars.

I have created a blog called The Dixie Pig to communicate my views on issues of interest to the district. It is currently located at scottsurovell.blogspot.com. I have requested 26 pieces of legislation for drafting. I expect to introduce 15-to-20 bills. You can find more information regarding my agenda there or on my Web site at www.scottsurovell.org. Please contact my office via telephone or email if you have any questions during the session.

It is an honor to represent this community in Richmond. I look forward to fighting for you as this session unfolds.

Letters

From Page 8

with container deposit laws consistently recycle containers that are covered under their laws at rates between 66 – 96 per cent. The 39 states without deposit programs average 35 per cent recycling rates for aluminum cans, 14 per cent for PET plastic, and 12 per cent for glass bottles.

As a consequence, litter is drastically reduced in states that adopt beverage container deposits. Beverage container litter is reduced between 70 and 84 percent, and total litter is reduced between 34 and 47 percent, when bottle deposit laws are adopted (Bottle Bill Resource Guide).

States with bottle deposit laws realize net economic benefits from sale of beverage containers to recycling markets, reduced litter and waste management costs, and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. Thus, bottle deposits could potentially generate significant net revenue for the Commonwealth of Virginia. For example, a 2005 study prepared for the City of Tacoma, Washington projected that the State of Washington would reap $32 million in net benefits from a beverage container deposit system operated through redemption centers. A well-designed bottle deposit program similarly could create jobs and provide revenues to the Commonwealth at a time when they are sorely needed. Some portion of revenues (e.g., from unclaimed deposits) might also be retained by industry to help cover operational costs.

Elizabeth Martin
Alexandria

Public Shame Needed

To the Editor:

In your Jan. 7 story about the hunters cited for illegal duck hunting in Dyke Marsh you failed to identify the alleged culprits. The individuals were cited so you should have had access to their names. Had this been a street crime or drunk driver on Route 1, I'll bet you'd have identified any perpetrators who were caught. Is there a double standard here? Sometimes the best punishment and future deterrent is a little public shame.

Jim Cooper
Mount Vernon

Police Warn Shovelers to Increase Awareness

Police are investigating at least two burglary cases in the Belle Haven area in which thieves appear to be targeting homes where residents are outside doing yard work.

Most recently, a 56-year-old woman's home was burglarized on Monday, Dec. 21 while she was outside shoveling snow, following the region's record snowfall. A thief shoved open a side door in the 6000 block of Woodmont Road around noon, trekked through multiple rooms, and stole credit cards from the victim's purse. The thief subsequently used the cards extensively in Potomac Yards retail center.

In an incident on Nov. 18, a thief entered a home in the 6000 block of Edgewood Terrace and stole credit cards from a 64-year-old woman's purse. The victim had been outside working in her yard all afternoon, and had not locked her doors. The thief, in that case too, went to numerous retail stores and used the victim's credit cards.

In both cases, the suspect is described as a male, black, and in his late 20s. He is approximately 6 feet 1 inch tall, and weighs around 200 pounds.

Police remind residents to secure their doors when they are not present in their home; even if they are in their own yards or visiting nearby neighbors.

Anyone with information is asked to contact Crime Solvers by phone at 1-866-411-TIPS/8477.

Opinion

Mount Vernon seniors (55 and over) account for approximately 12 per cent of the total Mt. Vernon Magisterial District population. According to the new Mount Vernon At Home (MVAH) senior community service organization, there are 9,000 seniors over 65 years of age living in Mt. Vernon District.

Legislative Wish List for 2010

By Gerald A. Fill
The Gazette

The holiday season is behind us and most of us are now turning to the new year and establishing personal and family priorities. In Richmond, the Virginia General Assembly and its newly elected House of Delegates, begins work with the new Governor Robert McDonnell.

A myriad of serious problems face the Legislature and Governor. First and foremost are very difficult decisions about the Fiscal Year 2011 budget. Here in Fairfax County, transportation, social services, education, and other priorities face a beleaguered county government that is strapped for money. Mt. Vernon Supervisor Gerald Hyland stated at a recent local public forum in December that "the Board of Supervisors is looking for ways to close a projected $400 million revenue gap for the 2011 fiscal year."

The New Middle Age

The short-term focus of the county will be to decide on ways to increase real estate taxes. Why? Because the county lacks the authority on its own to levy taxes and fees in other areas without the express approval of the General Assembly. The lack of flexibility in deciding on how to raise sufficient revenue has been and will continue to be a burden on all property owners. However, it is particularly onerous for retirees and others on fixed incomes who have already greatly tightened their belts as they struggle to make their dollars stretch as far as possible during these tough economic times.

Money is always the issue when government decides a particular program needs to be funded. Unfortunately whether to raise property taxes and by how much is a short-term albeit serious issue for Fairfax County government. Over the long term if we are to enjoy any relief from property taxes, there are serious roadblocks that have to be overcome in order for Fairfax county to manage its affairs more efficiently and effectively, and put an end to the over-reliance on property taxes as a primary source of revenue. This is not a new problem but, because of the poor economy and the political and policy implications of the revenue shortfall, the time may be propitious for our political leaders to finally make something happen in Richmond that will help all of us over the long run. Here are some suggestions.

REVISE THE STATE'S current Local Composite Index (LCI) formula to increase Fairfax County's share of state revenue for public education programs.

Currently this formula punishes Fairfax county residents for having higher property values, and higher per capita incomes than those who live elsewhere and contribute less to the state's coffers. The present formula rewards lower income governmental jurisdictions with lower average state income tax receipts by rewarding them with a higher share of the state's tax receipts. The genesis of the LCI is a state Supreme Court ruling which established that all students, regardless of ability to pay, should receive an equivalent basic education. Presently, for every $100 Fairfax County contributes to the state's public education costs we receive only $23 back. The fundamentals of the LCI formula (that calculates real property values; gross income; sales tax receipts) should be amended to return a higher proportion of state income tax dollars to Fairfax County. Public education is the largest single program in the Fairfax county budget; relief in this area will reduce pressure to raise real estate taxes which disproportionately impacts our seniors.

AMEND THE "DILLON RULE" to enable Fairfax County to restructure its taxing authorities so that it will not have to rely solely on higher real estate taxes to raise revenue.

The Dillon Rule is a law that places the power of the state ahead of Fairfax County. The law requires the county to seek state legislative approval on any matter, such as taxing authority, not expressly previously approved by the state. It is an anachronistic law adopted many years ago when most of the state was a rural agrarian society and the state legislature probably viewed itself as more enlightened and objective about matters of local government. They may still think this is true, and continue to enjoy the power over local government which this law gives them. It also serves as a means for special interests to circumvent Fairfax County. But times have long since changed. For one, Fairfax County is the largest single county in the Commonwealth in terms of population and contribution to the state's income. Amending or repealing the Dillon Rule would give Fairfax county Home Rule status and enable the county government to, for example, revise its tax structure to establish different rates for property taxes for residential and commercial properties, and grant a Homestead exemption to longstanding seniors who do not qualify for current exemptions.

SUPPORT THE CREATION of a Charter Review Commission to formally study and debate changing Fairfax County's governing authorities and operating structure.

Fundamental reform of Fairfax County governments' operating authorities is long overdue and needed. Over the past 30 years this issue has repeatedly come up only to be rejected by state or local government representatives. The above mentioned suggestions are examples of the current paternalistic aspect of local vs state government affairs. No Home Rule for a million people and a county government responsible for managing a billion dollar budget. In 1993 former Gov. Linwood Holton chaired a committee to look at changing the county's form of government among other issues. Approximately 30 years ago the Mount Vernon Council of Citizen's Associations formed a study group called a "Citizens Assembly" (chaired by Phil Chabot, a Mt Vernon citizen). The members who participated in this group were drawn county-wide from the Federation of Citizens Associations. The Citizens Assembly report recommended to the Board of Supervisors the creation of a Charter Review Commission. The purpose of the commission would be to review the county's charter and recommend changes in the form of government (from the present unicameral weak mayor system vis a vis bicameral government and an elected county executive) and its governing authorities. Creation of a Charter Commission would require support by the board and approval of the General Assembly. Maximum participation by citizens would ensure democratic self-determination principles would be honored. The Board of Supervisors rejected the citizens Assembly proposal pointing to the Triple A Bond Rating as evidence that the county government managed its affairs efficiently and didn't need a charter review. The board missed the point of the citizens report and recommendations. Now, many years later, the board continues to be constrained by the Dillon Rule, the punishing Local Composite Index, and is unable to initiate managerially and politically appro

See Wish List, Page 21

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ALEXANDRIA/OLD TOWN HISTORIC

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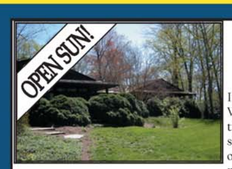
Managing Brokers
Anne Rector & Bill Jourdan

1208 Tatum Drive
$850,000
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. **Open Sun 1-4pm.** S GW Pkwy, R **Tulane,** L **Park Terr,** R **Tatum.**



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.) **Open Sun 1-4pm.** S GW Pkwy, R **Morningside Ln,** R **Park Terr Dr.**

8311 Mount Vernon Hwy
$779,000
Brand New Home!
Stunning opportunity! Leading builder's model home has been loaded with options and was planned to sell for over $1,000,000! Fabulous special features include: bright and open floor plan, high ceilings, four levels, upgraded kitchen and baths, hardwood floors, custom trim detail, spacious screened porch and two car garage. Prime location convenient to everything!

9316 Allwood Drive
$540,000
Stunning!
Home features bright, open floor plan with soaring cathedral ceilings in the main living area. This fabulous property has been substantially updated and is in absolutely impeccable condition. Gleaming hardwood floors, track lighting, finished lower level, garage and much more. Gorgeous setting on half acre tract fronting a quiet street in the heart of Mount Vernon.

3906 Rive Drive
$998,500
Stunning Property!
The most spectacular property you will ever find has been completely updated with breathtaking results! Bright & open floor plan, 3 fin lvls including full w/o LL, 4/5BR, 3.5BA, updated gourmet kitchen, stunning MBR suite and custom river view screened porch house with deck. Expansive glass window walls capture river views and natural beauty of almost full acre site.

4401 Jackson Place
$475,000
Special Value!
Spacious brick home on gorgeous half acre lot with open floor plan, hardwood floors, family room with fireplace, covered parking and extra driveway space. Fabulous custom deck overlooks magnificent level grounds. Rare opportunity to find a well maintained Mount Vernon home for under $500,000!

4413 Ferry Landing Road
$559,900
Yacht Haven!
Recently installed top quality gourmet kitchen with custom cabinets & granite counters, hardwood floors, large deck & covered parking. Bright, open floor plan overlooks gorgeous half acre grounds in one of the area's leading waterfront communities! Less than 5 mins from Ft Belvoir, GW Pkwy, Mt Vernon Yacht Club & Mansion House Club. Home warranty!

4816 Stillwell Avenue
$525,000
Renovated!
Unique opportunity! Exceptionally large 5/6 BR home is located in a gorgeous setting on a ½ 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!

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.

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!

3102 Waterside Lane
$798,500
Waterfront Value!
Updated and expanded home on gorgeous elevated grounds overlooks Little Hunting Creek! Private dock, custom glass walled family room, updated kitchen with granite, stainless & custom cabinets, hardwood floors, two car garage and much more! Unique opportunity - do not miss out!

3706 Riverwood Ct

4821 Stillwell Ave

1810 Hollindale Dr

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CHRIS WHITE 703.283.9028
www.chrisandpeggywhite.com
chris.white@longandfoster.com

2805 CAMERON MILLS ROAD
$619,000
Solidly built 4BR/2BA brick colonial in sought after Braddock Heights. This home has been well maintained and is ready for a new owner. Good size level lot offers expansion possibilities. Large first level Master BR could also be great room.

Dayna Blumel / Kerry Adams
703.597.2252

4862 EISENHOWER AVE, #368
Alexandria
$330,000
REGULAR SALE! Largest unit in this pet friendly community w/2 Master BRs, den. Upgraded kit w/ granite, black appliances, ceramic tile, cherry cabinets. Full size W/D, soaking tub. Community amenities inc METRO shuttle, gar., pool, sport ct, & 24 hr fitness + more.

www.susanmovesyou.com
Susan Haughton 703.470.4545

5902 MOUNT EAGLE DR #1418
Alexandria - $319,000
GREAT VIEWS! Totally remodeled 3BR, 2BA J model. New kit w/SSA, 2 drawer dishwasher, Advantium microwave, tile backsplash, granite counters & custom cabs. Hwds in foyer, LR/DR. Berber carpet in the BRs. Lovely paint colors throuout. Newer baths. New windows! And all the conveniences Montebello has to offer.

Brenda Jourdan 703.472.0406

199 RACEY LANE
Strasburg, VA -
$365,000
RETIREMENT OASIS! Breathtaking views from front & back of scenic mountains. Situated on 3+acres - 3BR, 2.5BA over 2,800sqft - 2 car garage - craft/hobby room - office - upstairs open family room w/skylights - 1st flr MBR suite w/ sep shower, garden tub & enormous walk-in closets - close to Strasburg. *Call for private showing…*

Louise Devers 703.795.9944

6129 REDWOOD LA
Alexandria -
$649,000
Classic colonial sited on a quiet cul-de-sac has perfect floor plan for entertaining incl. an updated kit, adjacent FamRm opening to a 4 season sunroom. Foyer leads to the LR & formal DR. Chef's will love granite, SSA, & a brkfst area. MasterBr w/updated BA.

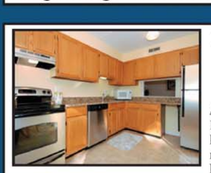
Catherine Foltz 703.626.6914
Margaret Keagle 703.518.8726

710 S UNION ST
Alexandria -
$1,499,000
VICTORIAN BEAUTY. Located in the SE quadrant, this sunny, all brick end townhome boasts Classic dentil moldings, art niches, tray ceilings and a granite/marble entry. 3BR, library, study, formal living room, dining room, & garage parking. Walk to river, fine shops & dining! *Call to see…*

Pat Tierney 703.850.5630

828 SLATERS LA
#104 Alexandria
$699,000
MAJOR PRICE REDUCTION! Spectacular Condo! 1,890sqft!! 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



116 ROBERTS LANE
#301
Alexandria
$330,000
ALEXANDRIA'S BEST KEPT SECRET! The location and space you need, the updated kitchen you want. 2 bedrooms, 2 full baths, granite counter-tops, stainless steel appliances. Come check out this move-in ready unit.

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4105 FAITH COURT
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$799,000
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Michael Manuel
703.615.6317

Unit 101: 3,812 sq ft; 3BR, 2.5BA; $1,775,000
Unit 102: 4,123 sq ft; 3BR, 3.5BA; $1,975,000

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2497 FREETOWN DR
Reston - $574,900
GREAT OPPORTUNITY to own in lovely neighborhood close to parks/greenspace. Wonderful floor plan w/ generous room sizes & excellent flow is perfect for entertaining. HW on main level, new berber in rec room. Kit w/ breakfast area opens to deck & large peaceful treed lot. Master suite offers lg WIC, tile & dual sinks.

Laura Biederman 202.309.1350

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E

Arts ❖ Entertainment ❖ Leisure

SATURDAY/FEB. 13

Birthnight Banquet and Ball. 5:30 p.m. to 11 p.m. (Ball starts at 9 p.m.) Celebrate George Washington's Birthday with a banquet and ball. The evening includes a four-course 18th-century banquet by Gadsby's Tavern Restaurant, English country dancing, toasts, a special 18th-century style dessert collation, and character re-enactors — including General and Mrs. Washington. Tickets are $100 to $200 per person, or $50 for the ball only. At Gadsby's Tavern Museum. Call 703-838-4242. At 134 North Royal Street in Old Town Alexandria.

SUNDAY, FEB. 14

Burlesque-a-Pades. 7:30 p.m. Tickets: $29.50. A Valentine's variety show with burlesque, comedy, acrobatics, singers and swinging live music! Starring Angie Pontani, Corn No, the Pontani Sisters, Little Brooklyn, Albert Cadabra, Helen Pontani, Lefty Lucy and Peekaboo Pointe with live music from the Breadbasket and the Chili Boys Orchestra. At the Birchmere, 3701 Mt. Vernon Ave., Alexandria. For tickets, go to www.ticketmaster.com or call 202-397-SEAT.

Lasso Your Partner . . .

It's time for the Wild Wild West End. Register for the Alexandria Chamber 2010 Gala.

By Gale Curcio
For the Gazette

If it's January, it must be time for the Alexandria Chamber Gala. If it's time for the Gala, then it's time to be at the Hilton Alexandria Mark Center. And if it's time to be at the Hilton, then it's surely time for Vice-Mayor Kerry Donley to wield his auctioneer gavel.

The Live Auction will not disappoint. Once again, Charlie Banta, general manager of the Hilton Alexandria Mark Center, has donated a Dinner for 12 with wine pairings at Finn & Porter. The Curcios won this same package a couple of years ago and was well worth it.

Not to be outdone, Charlotte Hall has donated a night on the Potomac Riverboat. This is paired with catering by Mango Mike's so it is sure to be a popular item.

There will be other live auction items, and of course many great items for the silent auction. So far, 'Charlie's Favorite Table' includes golf lessons from Belle Haven Country Club; an autographed item from the Washington Capitals; and cigars.

There will also be an opportunity to win a three- to four-night vacation package in Cancun, courtesy of MacNair Travel; a $500 gift certificate from King's Jewelry; and a three-night stay at the Pointe Hilton Squaw Peak Phoenix Resort.

Photo by Gale Curcio

A group enjoys dinner at the Finn & Porter Dinner purchased by Tom Curcio during the 2008 Gala.

This is not your mother's gala. Every year, the Alexandria Chamber does something new and exciting. This year's rodeo theme promises that at least a few of the more daring members will come attired with cowboy hats and spurs — maybe a lariat or two.

Anybody who is anybody in Alexandria will be there and Kaleidoscope will perform for your dancing pleasure. For those guests wishing to continue the party after the gala is over, the Hilton is offering a special room rate of $79.

Gala will be held on Saturday, Jan. 30 from 6 p.m. to midnight at the Hilton Alexandria Mark Center, 5000 Seminary Road, Alexandria. Tickets for the gala are $125 – or you can buy a table of 10 for $1,000. To register, visit https://alexchamber.bluekeyinc.com/view_events.php or call 703-549-1000.

Guests wishing to stay overnight can book a room for $79 by calling 703-845-1010.

Fine Arts

THURSDAY/JAN. 14

Second Thursday Art Night: Snowy Winter Nights. 6-9 p.m. Free. Walk through an artistic wonderland of open studios and artist-made snowflakes at this free event. Enjoy fun activities for the whole family with opening receptions in Target Gallery and The Art League Gallery and a kids' scavenger hunt. At the Torpedo Factory Art Center, 105 N. Union St., Alexandria. Go to www.torpedofactory.org; or call 703-838-4565.

NOW THROUGH JAN. 31

Art Show and Reception. Reception is Jan. 10 from 2-4 p.m. At St. Elmo's Coffee Pub in Del Ray. For Studio In-Sight, which is based in Bethesda and serves artists with severe chronic disabilities. Call 301-493-4200 ext. 160.

NOW THROUGH JAN. 31

Ceramic Artistry. With clay artists from Washington's Ceramic Guild showing their wares. At Scope Gallery, Studio 19, 101 North Union Street, Alexandria. Hours are Monday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., with Thursdays open until 9 p.m. Call 703-548-6288 or visit www.torpedofactory.org/galleries/scope.

NOW THROUGH FEB. 20

"White Ice." At the Potomac Fiber Arts Gallery. Artists interpret in fiber the cool, clear, sparkly, sheer, and smooth nature of Ice. Jewelry, sculpture, clothing, and wall pieces are some of the items that will be exhibited. Located in Studio 18 of the Torpedo Factory Art Center at 105 North Union Street in Old Town Alexandria. Open daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., except on Thursdays when it is open from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m. Free admission.

NOW THROUGH FEB. 1

"Timbuktu." Kathleen Stafford's Solo Artist Exhibit at The Art League Gallery. Stafford spent 18 years immersed in African culture. "Timbuktu," her solo artist exhibit at The Art League Gallery, celebrates the compelling people she met and the brilliant textures and colors of West Africa through her unique artistic process. Opening Reception on Thursday, Jan. 14, 6:30 – 8 p.m.; Printmaking demo on Saturday, Jan. 23, 1 – 3 p.m. The Art League Gallery, 105 North Union Street, Alexandria. Call 703-683-1780, www.theartleague.org.

NOW THROUGH JAN. 24

New Work for a New Year. The Del Ray Artisans' (DRA) January show for 2010. This exhibit provides local artists a platform to show recent work that has not been previously exhibited. The show will open on with a reception on Friday, Jan. 8 from 7 – 9:30 p.m., and close Sunday, Jan. 24 at 6 p.m. Admission is free. At the Del Ray Artisans gallery at the Nicholas A. Colasanto Center, 2704 Mt. Vernon Avenue, Alexandria. Call 703-838-4827 or www.thedelrayartisans.org.

NOW THROUGH FEB. 28

Kazaan Viveiros at The Anthenaum. Kazaan Viveiros crafts large, richly complex paintings that evoke collage. Opening reception is Sunday, Jan. 17 from 4-6 p.m.

NOW THROUGH FEB. 5

East to West Landscapes. Works by Mary Anne Warner in the Tyler Gallery, Northern Virginia Community College, Alexandria Campus. Opening Reception is Thursday, Jan. 21 from 7 to 9 p.m. Tyler Gallery is located at 3001 North Beauregard Street, Alexandria. Call 703-845-6239.

FEB. 1-28

Budding Zen. Handmade Homes for Far East Florals: Ikebana. At the Torpedo Factory Art Center. The gallery is located at 101 North Union Street, ground floor Studio 19, Alexandria. Call the Scope Gallery at 703-548-6288 or visit www.torpedofactory.org/galleries/scope.htm.

Theatre

NOW THROUGH JAN. 24

"Nuts" by Tom Topor. Fri. and Sat. at 8 p.m. Jan. 8-9, Jan. 15-16, Jan. 22-23; Tue. at 8 p.m. Jan. 19; plus Sun. matinee at 2 p.m. Jan. 24. At Lee Center for the Performing Arts, 1108 Jefferson Street in Old Town, Alexandria. Tickets are $16/general; $14/seniors and 18 and under; $12/groups of 10 or more. Call 703-838-2880 or visit www.portcityplayhouse.com.

JAN. 15-FEB. 6

"Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?" 8 p.m. nightly; Saturday/Sunday matinees 2:30 p.m. (No matinee Jan. 16). Sponsored by the American Century Theater. At the Theater Two, Gunston Arts Center, 2700 S. Lang St., Arlington. Tickets are $26-$32. Go to www.americancentury.org or call 703-998-4555.

JAN. 12-MARCH 7

"I am My Own Wife." Andrew Long plays all 33 characters, from Charlotte, her aunt and her father, SS commanders and Stasi officials, to international reporters and the playwright himself. Showtimes are Tuesdays and Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m.; Thursdays and Fridays at 8 p.m.; Saturdays at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m.; Sundays at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. Presented by Signature Theater in the ARK Theater. Tickets are $47-$71, and are available by calling Ticketmaster at 703-573-SEAT or visiting www.signature-theatre.org.

JAN. 15-30

"Reefer Madness." 8 p.m. Sunday matinee at 2 p.m.. Cost is $15. Hosted by Dominion Stage. At Gunston Arts Center, Theatre One, 2700 S. Lang St., Arlington. Go to www.dominionstage.org. Reservations can be made online or by calling 703-683-0502.

A Sanity Hearing On Stage

By Brad Hathaway
The Gazette

How do you prove you aren't "nuts" when the charge is paranoia? If you claim your accusers are "out to get you" aren't you just confirming their allegation?

That is the quandary facing the heroine of the 1979 play "Nuts," which Port City Playhouse is staging with Karen Jadlos Shotts as the accused paranoid and a superbly smooth Jeff Murray as her cannily easygoing lawyer.

The play, which was made into a movie in 1987 starring Barbra Streisand and Richard Dreyfuss in the roles now played by Shotts and Murray, is a courtroom drama that plays out in what director Donald Neal refers to as "real time" with few cuts in the action. The two hours of the play are basically equal to the two hours of the sanity hearing with a 15-minute intermission when the judge rather artificially announces a 15-minute recess.

While it is a full-out legal battle, it is not a full-out legal trial. Shott's character is a prostitute who has been indicted for manslaughter for the killing of a customer but she's been shunted off to New York's Bellevue Hospital where the powers that be have determined she should not stand trial due to her paranoia. Instead, she should remain confined in the institution while they treat her. That confinement could well continue for as much as 17 years.

SHE PREFERS to have her day in court, taking her chances on the possibility of conviction (which might only get her six year's in jail as opposed to 17 years in the hospital — and they say she's the crazy one?). First, however, she needs to have the court reject the diagnosis of incapacitating paranoia and permit her to stand trial.

Her attorney proceeds to dismantle the arguments of the witnesses called by the state: her parents who testify to her childhood, and the hospital's psychiatrist, played by Mario D. Font, in a marvelously meticulous performance.

The laying out of the case with the mechanical questioning by the state's attorney, (Donnell Boykin who can't do very much with such a blandly written role) and the amiable but devastating cross examination of Murray as her attorney, takes up the bulk of the first act with the findings of the psychiatrist effectively challenged and some sordid revelations from her childhood forced from her step-father (David James in a well modulated progression from self assurance to quivering hulk).

Director Neal has staged the action on a fairly predictable courtroom layout with tables for the prosecution and defense, a platform for the judge and the witness stand, chairs and a few flags.

Neal deserves kudos that everyone on stage who doesn't have a line seems to be listening and reacting to the testimony that is being given.

Where and When:

The Port City Playhouse production of "Nuts" plays through Jan. 24 at the Lee Center for the Performing Arts, 1108 Jefferson Street, Old Town Alexandria. Performances are Friday - Saturday and Tuesday, Jan. 19 at 8 p.m., and Sunday Jan. 24 at 2 p.m.

fso

Join Us for an Evening of Romance and Passion

The Fairfax Symphony Orchestra

invites you to attend the

2010 Valentine Pops Gala and Silent Auction

Amore!

Friday, February 5, 2010

Hilton McLean Tysons Corner

6:30 pm – Silent Auction and Cocktail Reception

8:00 pm – Dinner

9:30 pm – Fairfax Symphony Orchestra in concert, featuring Robert Petillo, tenor, and Jeanine Thames, soprano

Tables of 10 available for $3,000, $5,000 and $7,500.
Individual tickets available for $300 each.

R.S.V.P. by January 22, 2010 • Black Tie Optional

info@fairfaxsymphony.org

The Fairfax Symphony Orchestra Board of Directors
and the 2010 Valentine Pops Gala Committee

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Thank you!

First Night Alexandria relies on the generosity of area businesses and individuals. The sale of admission badges covers less than one-half of the annual cost to produce the event. In addition to the many goods and services provided pro bono or far below retail, $200,00 is needed to cover the expense of First Night Alexandria. These businesses and individuals make it all possible. We are grateful for their generosity and hope you will thank them too when you do business.

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Burger Night (Kids eat 1/2 price) Each child must be accompanied by adult having entree.
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Wednesday - All American Night
Meatloaf, Chicken Fried Chicken. Va. Ham
Thursday - Italian Night
Lasagna, Chicken Alfredo, Calamari
Friday - Fish Night
Crab Cakes, Shrimp & Scallops over penne pasta with white sauce
Saturday -Steak and Chop Night
Prime Rib, Lamb, Surf and Turf, Pork Chops, and Moussaka
Sunday
Brunch served 7am - 2pm
Dine in or call ahead and your dinner will be ready for pick up.
Dinner hours 2:30-9:30pm
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Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 548-1616
Ample Free Parking

Calendar

E-mail announcements to the Gazette, gazette@connectionnewspapers.com. Photos and artwork are encouraged. Deadline is Thursday at noon for the following week's paper. Call Steve Hibbard at 703-778-9412 with questions.

WEDNESDAY/JAN. 13

Ladies Luncheon. 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Cost is $17. Sponsored by the Springfield/Alexandria Women's Connection. At the Springfield Golf & Country Club, 8301 Old Keene Mill Road, Springfield. For reservations, call 703-569-4670 or 703-590-6562.

All About Dogs. 7:30 p.m. Friends of Duncan Library are hosting Robin Bennett, author of All About Dog Daycare: A Blueprint for Success and Off-Leash Dog Play. At Duncan Library, 2501 Commonwealth Ave., Alexandria. Call 703-838-4566 or visit www.alexandria.lib.va.us.

THURSDAY/JAN. 14

Second Thursday Art Night: Snowy Winter Nights. 6-9 p.m. Free. Walk through an artistic wonderland of open studios and artist-made snowflakes at this free event. Enjoy fun activities for the whole family with opening receptions in Target Gallery and The Art League Gallery and a kids' scavenger hunt. At the Torpedo Factory Art Center, 105 N. Union St., Alexandria. Go to www.torpedofactory.org; or call 703-838-4565.

Civil War Dance Class. 7:30-9:30 p.m. Learn the waltz, polka, Virginia Reel and more. At the Gadsby's Tavern Museum, 134 N. Royal Street, Alexandria. Cost is $12. visit www.gadsbystavern.org or call 703-838-4242.

JAN. 14, 15, 16

Used Book Sale. At the Alexandria Library, Barrett Branch. Hours are Thursday, 4-9 p.m.; Friday 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Saturday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. At 717 Queen Street, Alexandria. Call 703-838-4555.

JAN. 15-24

"Disney's Mulan Jr." Performances at 3 p.m. on Jan. 17, 18, 23, 24, and at 7:30 p.m. on Jan. 15, 16, 22 and 23. Travel back to the legendary, story-telling days of ancient China with this action-packed stage adaptation of Disney's Mulan. A youth production presented by Aldersgate Church Community Theater, 1301 Collingwood Road, Alexandria. Tickets can be purchased at www.acctonline.org. Seats are $9/online and $10/door.

JAN. 15-24

Alexandria Restaurant Week. More than 40 dining establishments participating in this second-annual event. Offering $35 pre-fixe three-course dinner or $35 dinner for two, or $3.50 sweet treats. Throughout the City of Alexandria. Menus, event details, and online reservations at: www.VisitAlexandriaVA.com. Call 703-746-3301

SATURDAY/JAN. 16

Evening of Brass Classics and Jazz. 7:30 p.m. Featuring Ottone Ensemble. Tickets: Adults $20, Seniors $15, Students $10, Children under 13: $5. At St. Luke's Church, 8009 Fort Hunt Road, Alexandria. Email tpyoder@yahoo.com or 703-765-4342.

Breakfast Reach Out Meeting. 9:15 a.m. $3.25 donation. Sponsored by Arlington Aglow. Speaker Mike Bickle, founder of the International House of Prayer, via DVD. At St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 3439 Payne street, Baileys Crossroads. For reservations, call Betty Rose Forsell at 703-671-9264.

Gyrotonic Exercise. Open house. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Offers massage, yoga, acupuncture, chiropractic care, Rolfing, Naturopathic medicine, biofeedback/psychology and meditation. Open house price for one hour private session is $30. Call for appointment or come by to watch. At the Body in Balance Center, 1423 Powhatan St., Unit 7, Alexandria.

SOUPer Saturday. 9 a.m. to noon. Potters from the Torpedo Factory have donated handmade bowls, and Chart House Restaurant will serve homemade soup for $15. Proceeds go to United Community Ministries (UCM) in Alexandria. Contact Christine Fiske at 703-768-7106, x 328.

Behind the Counter Tours. 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. Explore the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum, 105-107 S. Fairfax Street, Alexandria. Cost is $25, which includes a light breakfast. Call 703-838-4242.

SUNDAY/JAN. 17

Robert E. Lee Birthday Open House. Noon to 3 p.m. Celebrate the 203rd birthday of Robert E. Lee at the R.E. Lee Camp Hall. Admission is free; donations are appreciated. Call 703-519-2123. At R.E. Lee Camp Hall Museum, 806 Prince Street, Alexandria.

Martin Luther King Choir Fest. 7 p.m. A musical celebration in honor and memory of Martin Luther King. At Bethlehem Baptist Church of Alexandria, 7836 Fordson Road, Alexandria. Call 703-360-4170.

Messing Around with Creativity Workshop. 1-3 p.m. Fee: $10/$12. Explore how the creative process works so that you can apply it to traditional artistic pursuits and life in general. At the DRA Gallery, 2704 Mount Vernon Ave., Alexandria. Details, fees and pre-registration at www.thedelrayartisans.org. Contact Lynn Wyvill at 703-299-0848 or lwyvill@comcast.net.

JAN. 17-18

Used Book Sale. 9 a.m. CDs and records as well. At Beth El Hebrew Congregation, 3830 Seminary Road, Alexandria.

JAN. 14-17

Nancy Reinke Memorial Exhibition. Free. Reception on Jan. 14 from 6-9 p.m. Founding member Nancy McDonald Reinke died on Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2009, after a battle against cancer with her beloved husband Roger and her children by her side. At the Torpedo Factory Art Center's Target Gallery, 105 N. Union St., Alexandria.

MONDAY/JAN. 18

Lee Birthday Celebration. 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. In honor of the birthdays of General Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee and his son, General Robert E. Lee, the Lee-Fendall House Museum and Garden will be offering free tours.

TUESDAY/JAN. 19

National Chamber Players. 6:30 p.m. reception, 7:30 p.m. concert. National Symphony Orchestra concertmaster Nurit Bar-Josef joins National Chamber Players artistic director James Lee and other members of the NSO in a performance of Philip Glass Quartet No. 2 and Arnold Schönberg's "Verklärte Nacht." At Pendleton Hall, Episcopal High School, 3900 N. Quaker Lane, Alexandria.

WEDNESDAY/JAN. 20

Square Dance Lessons. 7:30-9:30 p.m. With the Boomerangs Square Dance Teaching Council. At Lincolnia Center, 4710 North Chambliss St., Alexandria. Contact Nancy at 703-573-8378.

SATURDAY/JAN. 23

Civil War Ball. 8-11 p.m. In Gadsby's Tavern ballroom. $45/advance; $50/door. Period attire, either civilian or military, is encouraged. In preparation for the Ball, dance classes will be offered at Gadsby's Tavern Museum from 7:30-9:30 p.m. on Thursdays, Jan. 14, 21. Learn the waltz, polka, Virginia Reel and more. Cost is $12/each of $30 for the series. Call 703-838-4242. Visit www.gadsbystavern.org.

Free Yoga Class. 9:30 a.m. to 11 a.m. In celebration of National Yoga Day USA. Guests are encouraged to donate to Soles4Souls, the international shoe charity. At Gadsby's Tavern Museum in Alexandria. Visit www.soles4soulsfundraising.org/abellayoga.

JAN. 23-24

"Mint Condition." Jan. 23 at 8 p.m.; Jan. 24 at 2 p.m. Jane Franklin Dance and Washington Saxophone Quartet perform in a shared evening. At The Athenaeum, 201 Prince Street, Alexandria. Tickets are $28 - $16 can be purchased by phone 703-933-1111 or at www.janefranklin.com

SUNDAY/JAN. 24

Classical Pianist Sara Leila Sherman. 4 p.m. Free. The recital will feature solo piano works from German, French and American composers. The program includes Ludwig van Beethoven's Piano Sonata in A-flat Major Op. 110, Gabriel Fauré's Nocturne for Piano No. 6 in-D flat major Op. 63, and Samuel Barber's Sonata for Piano Op. 26. At The Lyceum, 201 South Washington Street, Old Town Alexandria.

JAN. 28, FEB. 4 AND 11

18th Century Dance Classes. 7:30-9:30 p.m. Learn the dances of Jane Austen, George Washington, and Abigail Adams in Gadsby's Tavern Museum's historic ballroom. At Gadsby's Tavern Museum, 134 North Royal Street. Cost is $30/series or $12/class. Call 703-838-4242.

FRIDAY/JAN. 29

Balalaika Quartet Nalimov. 7:30 p.m. Tickets are $20/advance, $25/door. At the Lyceum. Go to www.balalaika.org or call 703-549-0760.

Student Writings

The following poems and story, written by members of the Creative Writing Club at Walt Whitman Middle School, were submitted by writing teacher Beverly Wong.

A Purr-fect Christmas

By Whitney Brown
Walt Whitman Middle School

A small black cat shifted its weight on its haunches, its ears angled forwards. He was staring ahead intently on the small body of a rodent. It was scrambling among the roots of a holly bush, searching and collecting food for the upcoming Snow Fall. Fritz stretched out his forepaw eagerly, managing his urge to pounce on the ignorant creature. A small clicking sound escaped his parted jaws when the mouse darted nearer. His tail flicked back and forth anxiously, throwing up a few withering, crispy leaves. Suddenly, the brown, furry animal jerked its head up, its small, beady eyes wide then sprinted away on all fours. With a small mew, Fritz darted after it, his claws trapping the creature instantly.

"Gotcha!" Fritz purred triumphantly. Then he jumped at the sound of a slamming door from his twoleg nest. The mouse escaped his clutches and vanished into the undergrowth, beyond the fence. The small black cat hissed in frustration before he straightened up, hearing a twoleg kit call him.

"Fritz! Come here, boy," his sister's human pet yowled. Quickly, Fritz pranced over to the ugly, no-furred she-pet, Sophie, and rubbed against her long legs, purring. His mom, Jinx, and his sister, Twist, greeted him inside.

"Trying to hunt, I see," Twist giggled innocently. Fritz merely stuck his little, pink tongue out at her.

"Shh, darlings," their mother chided. By the tone in her voice, Fritz guessed she wanted them to take a nap. The dark she-cat padded over to a small nest, that the Nofur tom had brought home for them, and laid down on her side, waiting expectantly for her mischievous kittens. Fritz and Twist trotted over obediently and curled up by Jinx. Fritz loved the warmth of being huddled together with his family, not to mention his mom's warm milk-scent. The faint sunlight dappled against their fur as they soon drifted into a deep sleep, the soft, even breathing of each other comforting each of them.

"Fritz, wake up!" A small paw prodded the wiry tom's side.

"What?" he mumbled, stretching from a long night's sleep. He rolled onto his belly then crouched low, parting his jaws in a wide, luxurious yawn.

"Look, there are small, white leaves falling outside," Twist squealed in delight, gesturing towards the flap on the door that led outside. They both scrambled out of bed and to the door. Now wide awake, Fritz stood on his hind legs and pawed excitedly at the flap, stretching to full height. But it didn't budge. Twist glanced around and mewled pitifully, trying to get the Nofurs awake to let them out.

"Come on." Fritz darted away then around the corner of the room to the staircase. The grown Nofurs hibernated most of the time up there in a secluded room. Rising on his hind legs, Fritz gripped the next rung with his unsheathed forepaws. He heaved himself up, scrabbling desperately with his hind paws until he fell forwards onto the step and bumped his nose against the third stair.

"Hurry up, darn fur ball!" Twist squeaked, nudging him roughly from below.

"I am," Fritz grumbled. It took a while for them until, finally, they reached the last step. The two kits raced each other until they reached a huge, flat tree. "Great …" Twist reached up, unsheathed her tiny claws, and scraped furiously at the door.

"Let us in! Let us in!" She mewed continuously and Fritz joined, clawing loudly until they heard movement from the other side. Both instantly dropped into a sitting position when the door groaned open. The Nofur tom towered over them, his eyes squinting down at them.

"It's only five o'clock," he moaned hoarsely. "Do you really need to go out so early?" Since neither of the kittens understood what the massive beast was meowing, they led him back down the stairs. Twist stumbled a few times and flew down the flight of steps head over heels before balancing uneasily at the bottom.

"Chris?" The Nofur tom's mate was by his side as he reached out to let them outside. "It's snowing, I don't think we should –"

"Nonsense, sweetheart," he purred back, grooming her blonde fur back over her ears with his paw. "It isn't too bad . Besides, it'll be a good experience for them." Finally, the two twolegs agreed and yanked the door open to let the anxious kittens out. Both leapt out excitedly.

An icy wind blasted into Fritz's face, his fur bristled against it in

SEE STUDENTS, PAGE 18

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Student Writings

From Page 17

surprise. "Twist?" he mewed, shivering. Twist was crouching beside him, her eyes wide while her small, seemingly frail body trembled intensely.

"Wh-what?" She retorted angrily. Fritz scanned the frozen garden, seeking for a place to hide from the stinging breeze. He spotted the holly bush where he had spent his Burning Sky afternoons lousing and nudged his sister in the direction. They squeezed in, ignoring the thorns that snagged at their fur and huddled together to keep warm. "That was a mean trick," Twist grumbled, her eyes narrowing angrily. They clustered together until what seemed to take a century when they heard the familiar creak as the front door to their twoleg nest opened.

They both rushed across the cold, whitened ground and darted inside. "Fritz! Twist!" one of the Nofur's kits yowled. The scrawny, tall kit scooped Fritz up and cradled him. That was Jacob, Fritz's human pet. The second was Twist's she-kit.

"Aw, you poor little things," she whimpered, cuddling Twist. Then they carried Fritz and Twist to the living room. In the fireplace, flames licked at the red stone walls, casting gentle, warm shadows across the small room. The grown Nofur tom, Chris, and the grown she-Nofur, Samantha waited for them.

What is this? Fritz thought miserably. Now they're going to roast us after we froze our tails off? Jacob sat down by the fire, still clutching Fritz tightly and leaned against his mom's chest. Suddenly as Sophie collapsed and stroked Twist affectionately, Jacob snatched a bright-colored box from underneath the Sweet-Smelling Tree. He handed it over to Sophie and she gave him a puzzled look however, her eyes glimmered with a thrill. Instantly, she set Twist aside and started shredding the skin off the box, leaving a plain, brown box and tore it apart quickly.

Fritz jumped away from Jacob in surprise and fright, the fur along his back rising. Jacob pointed his huge paw at Fritz and burst out with loud, happy howls. This is their way of laughing or having fun apparently. Strangely enough, the twolegs began trading boxes, smiling at each other happily, then shredding these presents as they call them. Twist learned that after the skin was torn away, it was fun to claw and play with. Fritz enjoyed scoring the coat of the presents with his claws and batting them around after chasing them excitedly.

Both their mother, Jinx, and their dad, Dash, enjoyed watching their kits play wildly with the human's leftovers. "Happy Christmas," Jinx purred to her mate, pressing against him.

"And Happy New Year," Dash meowed, his voice deep and full of delight.

Notes for Story

Fritz – Black tom kit with bronze eyes
Twist – White she-kit with bronze eyes
Jinx – Black she-cat with bronze eyes
Dash – Dark gray tom with pale yellow eyes and a white dash on his chest
Chris – Grown Nofur tom
Samantha – Grown she-Nofur
Jacob – Nofur tom kit
Sophie – Nofur she-kit
Twoleg, Nofur, Human Pet – Human
Twoleg Nest – House
Snow Fall – Winter
Burning Sky – Summer
Sweet-Smelling Tree – (Pine) Christmas tree

Winter's Night

The silence of the night,
So quiet, so light,
To hear nothing,
Except the wind
Whisking in and out of sight.

The snow is shimmering,
Just like a crystal.
My favorite wind chime is singing
A beautiful melody
While the snowflakes are glistening.

I see in the distance,
Past my ice-coated pond,
Mt. Fuji covered in snow.
And even far beyond,
The sea is in balance.

In my yard
Is a winter wonderland.
Bamboo and flower arrangements
Are sheeted with a blanket of ice,
Which looks like small flakes of white sand.

The silence of the night,
So quiet, so light,
To hear nothing,
Except the wind
Whisking in and out of sight.

Hearing such silence
is just too quiet.
Alone on the patio
I look to the sky.
The sky filled with stars.

The cold is surrounding my body.
The snow is so soft
And tastes like water,
Freezing cold water,
From the icy north pole.

Winter's snow is like
The snowflakes that will carry
My thoughts and feelings
Into the ground to become
A part of the soon-coming spring flowers.

Till then they will hibernate in the soil,
My heart's treasured feelings.

By Laosha Quaites
Walt Whitman Middle School

On a Wintery Day

On a crispy, cold day
I sat by the Chesapeake Bay.
I felt a breeze carrying immense snow,
It gave me a persistent blow.
I glimpsed a great light,
And it gave me a little fright,
For across the Chesapeake Bay,
Was a beam of moonlight's ray,
On the Chesapeake Bay,
Where I decided to stay.

By Maaz Kashif
Walt Whitman Middle School

Empty Wonderland

Colored lights
Wrapped loosely around
The surrounding trees
Shimmering against
The thickly frozen
Pond
Piles of crisp
Frosty snow
Clutter the dry
Ground
The remaining leaves
Of the dying trees
Flutter down to
The pale white
Earth below
Words
Are nothing
But muffled sounds
In this
Silent and dying
Wonderland
Where
Snowflakes
In the air and
On the ground
Are visible

By Tory Wallington
Walt Whitman Middle School

What Everyone Loves About Christmas

Around this certain time of year,
People try to spread good cheer.

Hanging up holly, putting up the tree,
Home at Christmas is where I want to be.

There's mistletoe and lots fun,
Playing in snow under the sun.

Singing carols everywhere,
Good memories are what we share.

Laying out cookies, going to sleep,
Thinking 'bout presents, not making a peep.

With presents a plenty on Christmas morn,
Before parents wake all wrappers are torn.

What is it about Christmas everyone loves?
It's a lot of reasons, too much to think of.

By Aurora Bonnette
Walt Whitman Middle School

Winter Wonderland Poem

Yeahhhhh!
Eggnog in my cup
Lying by the open fire
With my family going "gulp"
Mother reads the traditional story
While Dad puts up the Christmas tree
The TV is on talking about Christmas glory
The big time is here and everyone's going berserk
My sister's making her list while I look at the cold snow
I think of all the fun I'll have this Christmas season
But I beg
And beg
For Santa
To get me
The new
R/C copter
In stores NOW!

By Alhassan Kamara
Walt Whitman Middle School

Should It Snow

Seeing the flakes fall like frozen feathers,
Covering the ground like a cloud traveling to rest on the pavement,
Why do you complain about nature's gift?
It only melts because it dislikes its surface.
Or is it us who cause it to leave?
Do we deserve to be blessed with this covering of assurance?
It comes as we go into the holiday season,
Giving gifts and spending money,
Not stopping to see the cloud's present to us.
"Let it Snow," they say;
You tune to the weather channel to avoid what you ask for,
Tis' the season to be not just jolly,
But appreciative, also.
Snow will fall for many years to come;
Other things won't be here forever.
While you sip from cups filled with egg nog
Listening to music, enjoying things you can buy,
The snow falls, not knowing the inhabitants of the world it is falling into.
It wants to melt before it has a chance to rest.
You smile; you see the snow on the ground,
You see no school or a white Christmas.
The snow has no choice where it lands or goes;
Do you think about the feelings of the flakes as it snows?

By Charles Evans
Walt Whitman Middle School

School Notes

Send announcements to the Mount Vernon Gazette, by e-mail to gazette@connectionnewspapers.com. Deadline is Thursday at noon for the following week's paper. Photos are encouraged. Call Steve Hibbard at 703-778-9412 with questions.

Hollin Meadows Elementary School will be holding its Multicultural Fair on Saturday, Jan. 23 from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. The afternoon will include food, children's crafts, stories and performances by our students.

Kelly Jemison, a 2007 graduate of West Potomac, has been named the 2009-2010 winner of the Sara C. Yacovac Memorial Scholarship in Economics at James Madison University, Harrisonburg.

Jemison, a double-major in International Economics and International Affairs, was selected for not only meeting high academic standards as an honors student in the College of Business but also for her community and collegiate activities. Jemison is president and co-founder of Madison Liberty, a student libertarian organization, and Student Athlete Advisory Council representative for the Cross Country team. She is also president of Bring Your Own Spirituality and a member of the National Society of Collegiate Scholars.

Jemison, an NCAA scholarship athlete, runs Division 1 cross-country, indoor track and outdoor track for JMU.

George Forrest Allen, a graduate of West Potomac High School, has enrolled at Hampden-Sydney College with the Class of 2013 as a Venable Scholar. Forrest is the son of George and Susan Allen of Alexandria.

West Potomac High School Symphonic Winds of Alexandria has accepted an invitation to perform at the prestigious Music for All National Festival, presented by Yamaha, in Indianapolis in March 2010. High school and middle school instrumental ensembles around the country audition for the festival via a taped audition sent to Music for All, one of the nation's largest and most influential organizations in support of active music making. The West Potomac High School Symphonic Winds is under the direction of Mr. Stephen Rice.

Only 16 high school concert bands were accepted into the 2010 festival, to be held March 4-6, 2010. The Festival is comprised of the Bands of America National Concert Band Festival, Sandy Feldstein National Percussion Festival, Orchestra America National Festival and the Middle School National Music Festival. Bands of America and Orchestra America are programs of Music for All. The Music for All National Festival has taken place annually since 1992.

Fort Hunt High School, Alexandria, class of 1980 announces its 30th reunion. Plans are under way for a fun-filled weekend in July 2010. Visit the web site to register and stay connected on all of the happenings. Go to fhhs80.com or email: fhhsclassof80@yahoo.com.

Carmen Alston, who graduated from St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School, Alexandria, received a $1,000 scholarship from the Department of the Interior's Blacks-in-Government (BIG) chapter. She will study international business at the University of Maryland.

Mount Vernon Gazette Sports Editor Jon Roetman
703-224-3015 or jroetman@connectionnewspapers.com

Local PGA Professional Helps Disabled Veterans

California native Ramon Padilla plays golf despite losing his left hand to a grenade explosion in Afghanistan.

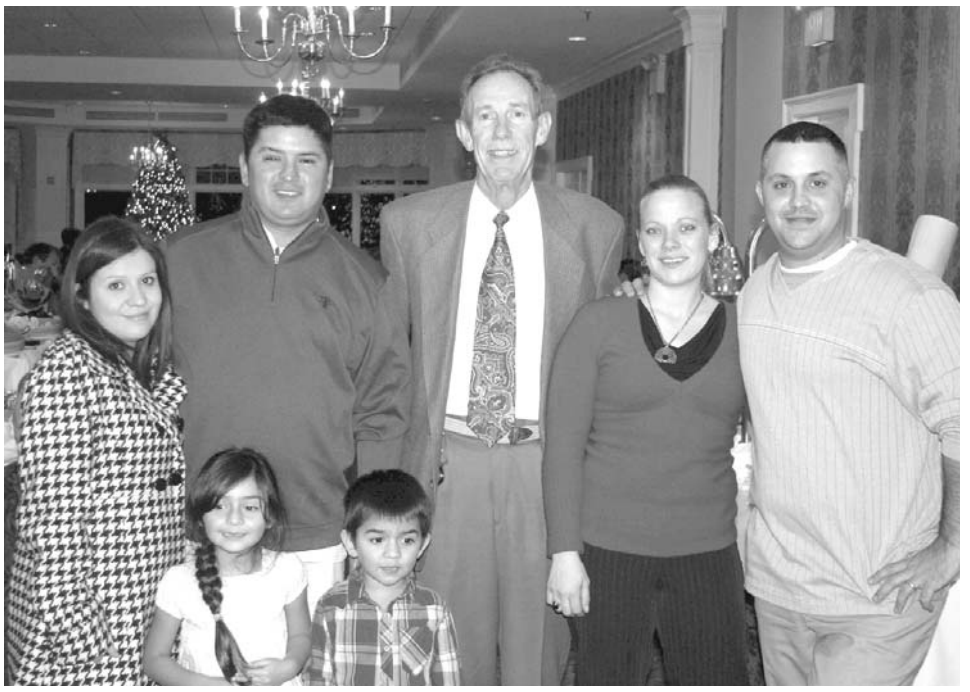
By Michael K. Bohn
The Gazette

On a chilly late fall day at Mount Vernon Country Club, PGA golf professional Al Fenstomocher studied his student's golf swing for a few minutes. Posture and balance looked good, so did the take away, downswing, and follow-through. Fenstomocher was concerned about the grip, though. But considering the player had lost his left hand to a rocket-propelled grenade in Afghanistan, Fenstomocher decided that the grip was actually pretty darn good.

Ramon Padilla and two other wounded warriors worked on their game at Mount Vernon's practice range while Fenstomocher rotated between them. The PGA of America arranges for Fenstomocher and other area pros to give free golf lessons to veterans with disabilities.

As Padilla addressed the ball, he slipped the grip of a 7-iron into a special device at the end of the prosthesis on his left forearm. He then placed his right hand on the club with about the same overlapping grip that most golfers use.

Fenstomocher explained that Padilla and every golfer should rotate his hands through the impact point, thus "releasing" them from the cocked position at the top of the backswing. It is remarkable that Padilla is accomplishing this part of the golf swing with a mechanical device instead of his left hand. It's not surprising to Padilla, however, because the former soldier helped design the prosthetic.



Courtesy Photo

Mount Vernon Country Club pro Al Fenstomocher, center, welcomes wounded veterans to a holiday dinner at the club. Also pictured: Ramon Padilla, his wife Judith and children Emily and Ramon are on the left, and Joshua Ferguson and wife Danielle.

Padilla, 34, is a California native who recently retired from the Army with 100 percent disability. His multiple wounds in July 2007 sent him to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. for extended rehabilitation. His wife and their four children joined him for his two-year recovery, and they bought a home in Waldorf in November.

A good high school athlete, Padilla had not played golf until he joined other disabled veterans at Walter Reed in exploring the game. They have met a warm welcome, as it seems the entire Washington area golf establishment has reached out to help the wounded warriors. Mount Vernon is no exception, and club president Bob O'Toole welcomes the chance to help.

"We're honored to have them as our guests," he said.

Photo by Michael K. Bohn

Wounded veteran Ramon Padilla helped devise the prosthetic he uses to play golf.

"I really love the game," Padilla said during lunch in Mount Vernon's grill. "It's great to get outside on the golf course and forget about the grind. I feel a sense of peace while playing, even after a bad shot."

Padilla found golf through the Salute Military Golf Association, a Washington-based nonprofit organization. SMGA works to introduce combat-wounded veterans to the mental and physical benefits of golf. In concert with area PGA professionals and golf equipment manufacturers, the association helps fit players with clubs, arranges for free lessons, and recruits area golf clubs to donate tee times.

At the 2009 AT&T National golf tournament, Padilla joined host Tiger Woods to hit the ceremonial first ball of the event's Pro-Am on July 1 at Congressional Country Club. Photographers captured his smooth swing, quite an improvement in one short year.

The prosthesis technicians at Walter Reed fitted Padilla with a rudimentary device when he first started playing golf.

"I didn't like it," he recalled, "and it was too loose. They gave me another, but it would break easily."

Padilla began working with occupational therapist Josef Butkus to improve the prosthesis. When Padilla complained that it didn't rotate well enough, Butkus attached the gripping device to a "robo wrist," a ball and socket system that rotates 30 degrees in all directions. After five or six versions, Padilla had a comfortable and practical prosthesis

Al Fenstomocher, a veteran professional on the staff at Mount Vernon, matches Padilla's passion for golf. Honored on two occasions by the PGA for his contributions for growing the game, Fenstomocher is a great ambassador for golf.

"I'm so proud to be able to help these fine young men," he said. "And so is everyone else, because everywhere I go, club members invite these guys to join their group or ask to buy them lunch."

Padilla is currently looking for a job, and when asked about long-term goals, he confided, "I want to be a PGA pro."

Sports Briefs

No Jones, No Problem for Mount Vernon

The Mount Vernon boys basketball team defeated Stuart 47-41 at home on Tuesday despite being without the services of leading scorer and rebounder Skylar Jones, who suffered an ankle injury the previous game against Chantilly. Jones suffered a "mild sprain," head coach Alfonso Smith said.

Robert Smith led the way in Jones' absence, finishing with a team-high 17 points. De'quan Doyle scored 13 points for the Majors and Jesse Konadu added 11.

Mount Vernon also beat Chantilly 55-52 Saturday. Jones scored a team-high 22 points and Konadu finished with 19. Smith said post players Doyle and Dylan Bischoff did a good job defending 7-foot Chantilly post John Manning, helping limit the junior to six points.

The Majors defeated Yorktown 64-51 on Friday. All but three Majors scored during the game, led by Konadu's 14 points. Jones and Smith each finished with 12.

Doyle scored nine points, seven of which came in the first quarter.

"He really set the tone for us inside," Smith said of Doyle, "[he] opened up some things for us throughout the game from what he did in the first quarter."

Jones is averaging 20.4 points and 7 rebounds per contest. Konadu is averaging 16 points per game and Smith is adding 12.9 points per contest.

Mount Vernon (9-2 overall, 4-0 National District) travels to face Hayfield at 7:45 p.m. Friday.

West Potomac Boys Now 3-1 in District

Three players reached double figures in scoring for the West Potomac boys basketball team during a 64-46 victory over Patriot District opponent West Springfield on Monday.

The win improved the Wolverines to 7-4, 3-1 in district. West Potomac has won three straight and four of its last five.

Martez Redfearn scored 19 points, grabbed 11 rebounds, dished out four assists and recorded four steals for West Potomac. Daryl Copeland finished with 17 points, five assists and four steals and Keevyn Hankins added 11points, nine rebounds and two blocks.

The Wolverines beat Annandale 75-56 on Friday. West Potomac travels to face Woodson at 7:30 p.m. today.

Mount Vernon Girls Cruise

The Mount Vernon girls basketball team defeated Stuart 72-37 on Tuesday. The Majors beat Yorktown 63-44 on Friday.

Mount Vernon faced Edison on Wednesday. Results were not available before the Gazette's deadline. The Majors host Hayfield at 7:45 p.m. Friday.

Majors Bond During Holiday Trip to California

Mount Vernon Girls finish 2-2 and have fun away from basketball.

By Jon Roetman
The Gazette

Talent and hard work put the Mount Vernon girls basketball team in a position to repeat as National District champions. Dancing and hanging out in Southern California might be what pushes the Majors to the top.

While many in the Washington D.C. metro area battled cold weather during the holidays, the Majors flew west to sunny Southern California for a tournament at Oaks Christian School in Westlake Village. The team departed on Virgin America from Dulles Airport on Dec. 25 and returned from LAX Dec. 31. Mount Vernon played four games and finished 2-2 against what head coach Terry Henderson said was quality competition. The Majors beat Taft (Woodland Hills) and Westlake before losing to Oaks Christian and dropping a rematch with Taft.

But while time on the court should help the Majors down the road, it was the experiences away from basketball which appears to have improved the chemistry on a team composed primarily of decorated seniors and talented newcomers.

The fun started on the plane, which was equipped with wireless Internet and satellite TV. Players looked at Facebook on their laptops while coaches watched basketball games. They were able send text messages to each other through screens installed in the back of each seat.

"It was fun. It gave the girls a chance to bond," Henderson said. "Meeting up at the airport, it kind of felt like a professional atmosphere to the girls. Everyone had their jackets on. It was real exciting to have girls who were flying for the first time, girls that hadn't flown since they were kids. … The whole atmosphere was nice."

Courtesy photo

The Mount Vernon girls basketball team is seen at its hotel in Westlake Village Calif. The Majors participated in a holiday tournament at Oaks Christian School.

Sophomore forward TiTi Gray was one of the first-time flyers.

"I was scared," she said. "The stories I heard — the takeoff was horrible, it's real bumpy — [were bad]. But when I actually got to the plane, I wasn't that scared. I got into the air and I was fine. When we were about to land I got kind of scared because I heard it was shaky, too, but then we landed and it wasn't that bad."

Henderson said the team came up with the idea for the trip during the summer. Each player had to pay for her own plane ticket and part of the hotel costs. The rest was covered through fund raising, Henderson said, including concession stand sales and a homecoming dance for parents. The team is also hosting a spaghetti dinner on Jan. 23.

Between games the team would eat meals together and check out some of the area's attractions. The Majors went to Six Flags Magic Mountain, Staples Center and the Hollywood Walk of Fame, among other places. The Majors also went shopping.

There were many amusing moments, but one evening stood out to Tracy King. The players gathered and hung out in a room shared by King, Gray, Jasmine McDonald and Taylor Dunham. It was there, King said, where the team did much of its bonding.

"We have a lot of new players on the team and then we have a lot of people that played with each other before," said King, speaking to the gap in age and experience. "It definitely brought the team closer because we weren't as close as we are now. We danced in there, we talked, we ate, we had fun."

ALONG WITH having fun, the team benefited from the return of two of its star players. King while in California played for the first time since tearing an ACL in last season's regional tournament. Senior point guard Jalinda Venable, a first-team all-district selection last season, returned to play for the first time this season.

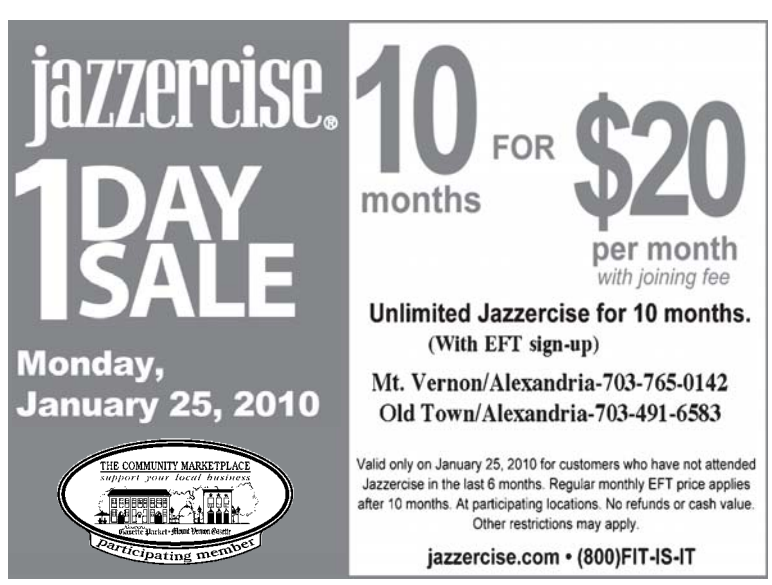
"I thought we did good because it was the first time I played again and we had Jalinda back, so it was kind of like everybody was getting used to each other," King said. "From that point of view, I think we did good. I just think that the last two games we didn't play to our full potential, which is why we lost. It was that the teams were better than us."

McDonald, one of the team's top defensive players, expressed her joy over King's return.

"Personally," she said, "I'm glad that she's back because I miss playing with her."

Mount Vernon started the season 4-0 in district. If the team's chemistry is strong, the Majors have the talent necessary to repeat as champions.

"It was something new for me since I've never really traveled," Gray said. "I've never really been outside of Virginia and Maryland so … it was a cool experience."



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Opinion

Wish List

From Page 11

priate and supportable actions to finance transportation and other needs. Our political leaders in Richmond have been unable to secure favorable funding for transportation or education. Despite the supposed clout our northern Virginia delegation enjoys in Richmond the governing authorities issues discussed here have escaped resolution.

IN RESPONSE to the mountain of road projects awaiting funding with virtually no state money promised, the current revenue shortfall, and frustrating governance constraints, last fall the board directed the county executive to review the efficacy and feasibility of revising it's governing structure to a "City" status from its present status as a county to gain leverage to obtain additional revenue. No one will argue the need for the county to broaden its revenue enhancing leverage; but to do so by changing the county to a city? Independent city status would narrow, not broaden much needed regional approaches to transportation. In the unlikely event that the legislature approved such a change to city status the county would become by far the largest city in the state and likely result in punitive action by the Richmond pols who would be loathe to grant independence to Fairfax County at the expense of much smaller cities elsewhere in the state. As the 10th largest county in the U.S. and the only unicameral body of its size in the U.S., the current revenue shortfall and the lack of alternatives to manage its affairs begs for a Charter Review Commission. Although you will hear arguments to the contrary, no single elected official is responsible for a county-wide view except for the at-large chairperson who nevertheless casts one vote among many on the board. Accountability and responsibility is diffused to all board members equally. If we changed our county government's structure would it make a difference in gaining political advantage with the General Assembly or the governor? Only time and our political leadership will prove if this is "marginal improvement," as one politician was recently quoted as saying, or a welcome departure from business as usual, i.e., relentlessly going to the property tax "well" to the detriment of everyone, particularly seniors and others living on fixed or declining incomes. At the very least an elected county executive would have the visibility, clout in Richmond, and the accountability and responsibility county-wide to potentially make a difference.

It is in the hands of our local and state political leadership to promote a long-term view of the need to change Fairfax County's governing authorities to enable Fairfax county to meet its obligations. Thirty years ago the Mt. Vernon-led Citizens Assembly thought so when it recommended a Charter Review Commission. Not much has changed since then except the problems are much bigger and the county population is much larger.

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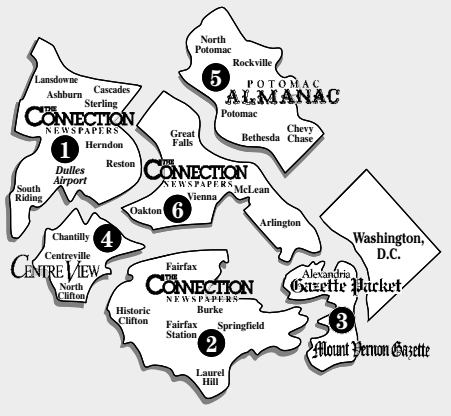

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ALEXANDRIA — **$599,999**

Elegance Meets Location

This lovely four-level Nethergate townhome has all you could want-a gourmet kitchen, hardwood floors, spacious master suite with luxe bath, ample closets and best of all- fantastic location. One light to DC, close to Metro and all of Old Town's charm!

Sue Goodhart
703.263.8321 www.suegoodhart.com
MLS ID# FX7210821

ALEXANDRIA/DEL RAY — **$469,900**

Del Ray Townhome

This Del Ray townhome has been lovingly maintained. Features include a large, fenced corner lot, updated kitchen, two bedrooms and one and a half baths. Walk to Braddock Metro, just steps from "The Avenue" and all of the wonderful restaurants and shops of Del Ray!

Jennifer Walker
703.675.1566 www.jenwalker.com
MLS ID# AX7232525

ANNANDALE — **$559,900**

Exciting and Spacious

Four-bedroom, three-bath home on half acre lot. Beautifully updated throughout with hardwood floors, a gourmet eat-in kitchen, a private dining room addition, remodeled bathrooms with new tiles and fixtures, a massive lower level rec room with a brick hearth fireplace. Easy on the commuter. Park your car in the garage. Enjoy the new deck and hot tub.

Jessica Richardson
703.864.3438 www.jessicarichardson.com
MLS ID# FX7134734

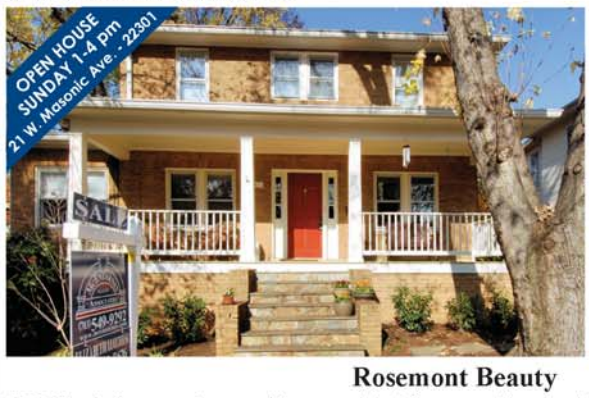
ALEXANDRIA — **$1,335,000**

Classic Elegance and Comfort

This striking home features a bright and airy floorplan that effortlessly accomodates grand entertaining or comfortable living. Fantastic central Alexandria location with six-bedrooms, four-and-a-half baths, and sophisticated yet welcoming living space.

Janet Price
703.960.5858 www.janetpricehomes.com
MLS ID# AX7178011

ALEXANDRIA/ROSEMONT — **$879,000**



Rosemont Beauty

1930 Classic Rosemont beauty with many original features and just the right amount of modern touches. Includes off-street parking for two, phenomenal landscaping with perennial choices and hardscaped patio, fully finished basement with decadent bath, recessed lighting, stunningly appointed kitchen, sun room, and a wide porch.

Elizabeth Lucchesi
703.868.5676 www.lizluke.com
MLS ID# AX7204217

ALEXANDRIA — **$1,195,000**

Renovated to Perfection

A commanding foyer welcomes you into this special Seminary Ridge property with a completely renovated center-island kitchen, gorgeous formal living and dining rooms and spacious family room overlooking the backyard and pool. Four-bedrooms upstairs and a beautifully finished basement with rec room, office, bath and storage space.

Sue Goodhart
703.263.8321 www.suegoodhart.com
MLS ID# AX7168152

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