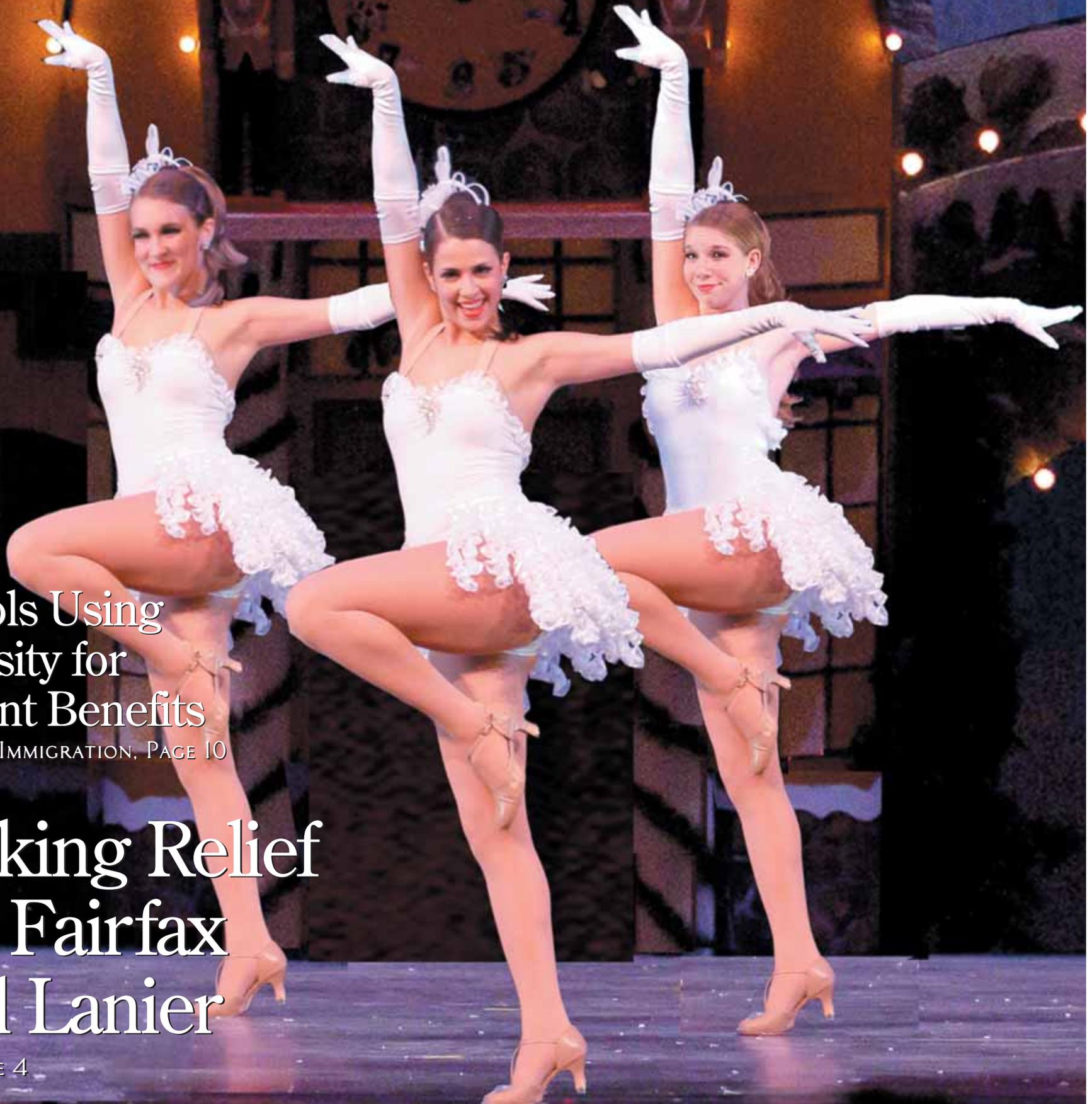


'All I Want for Christmas'

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Schools Using
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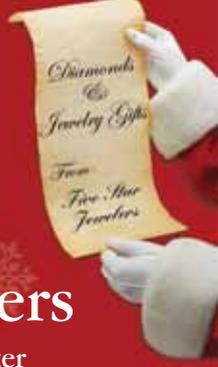
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WEEK IN FAIRFAX

Police Collect Toys for Ill Children

For the 26th year in a row, the Fairfax County Police Department motorcycle squad is working collaboratively with the Fairfax County Sheriff's Office, Virginia State Police, Fairfax City Police, Falls Church Sheriff's Office, and the Town of Vienna Police to collect and distribute toys for sick children, as well as local charities such as the Ronald McDonald House.

Please consider donating a new, unwrapped toy, game or book at any Fairfax County Police station before Monday, Dec. 10. Donations are also being accepted at the Fairfax County Police Headquarters at 4100 Chain Bridge Road, Fairfax.

The motorcycle officers' "Santa's Ride" collection will take place on Dec. 11; distribution of gifts will take place at Inova Fairfax Hospital on Dec. 12 and Georgetown Hospital on Dec. 13.

For more information, contact the Public Information Office, 703-246-2253.

Adopt a Shelter Animal

The Fairfax County Animal Shelter is offering a free spay or neuter for the first 100 cats, kittens, dogs or puppies adopted from the shelter through Dec. 31.



Dai Dai the cat needs a good home.

The special offer is part of the shelter's annual Home for the Holidays adoption celebration to help homeless animals leave the shelter for stable, new homes in time for the holidays.

The shelter has cats and dogs available for adoption, in addition to rabbits, small mammals, reptiles and birds. To view animals available for adoption, visit <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/police/animalservices/> and click on adoption. The shelter is at 4500 West Ox Road in Fairfax. Regular adoption hours are Tuesday-Friday, noon-6:30 p.m.; and Saturday, 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m. For more information, call 703-830-1100.

SEE WEEK, PAGE 5

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PHOTOS BY VICTORIA ROSS/THE CONNECTION

Supervisor Jeff McKay (D-Lee), who has been instrumental in pushing the Springfield Mall project forward, looks back at the demolished exterior of the mall. Vornado kicked off exterior demolition of the mall on Monday, Nov. 26.



VORNADO REALTY TRUST

An architectural drawing of the grand entry plaza near the Loisdale Road entrance.

RIP Springfield Mall

Demolition signals transformation of Springfield Mall into \$200 million town center.

BY VICTORIA ROSS
THE CONNECTION

Fairfax County Supervisor Jeff McKay (D-Lee) could not have been happier as chunks of steel and concrete began falling off Springfield Mall Monday morning, Nov. 26.

“This is the biggest thing to happen in Springfield since the Mixing Bowl,” McKay said, watching as the CAT excavator began demolishing what was once Garfinckel’s department store.

McKay, who has been instrumental in pushing the Springfield Mall project forward for several years, joined Vornado/Charles E. Smith President Mitchell Shear and other civic leaders to kick off the exterior demolition of the mall, a visible sign that the 1970s-era “fortress” mall will be transformed into Springfield Town Center in 2014.

Holding a rock-sized piece of Garfinckel’s in his hand, McKay said it will be a relief to be able to tell constituents that the project, which the board of supervisors approved three years ago, is finally underway.

“It’s the first question everyone always asks me. Not why, but when,” McKay said.

“People have doubted this project,” said Nancy-jo Manney, executive director, Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce. “We are all excited to see the new re-done project.”

In July, mega-developer Vornado shuttered all of the interior stores

as the first phase of the \$200 million renovation began. But the project had lurched forward in fits and starts for so many years that many in the local business community were skeptical they would ever see a new mall.

Faiqa Bahtti, who works in sales at the Hilton across from the mall, walked over to the construction site on Monday morning to take photos of the demolition. “It’s exciting to finally see it happen. People wondered if this day would come,” she said.

In 2006, Vornado Realty purchased the mall for \$171.5 million. In 2009, the board of supervisors approved rezoning of the property to permit Vornado’s development plans. Soon after, any sign of redevelopment came to a halt. No construction equipment materialized, and shoppers saw the mall continue its slow decline.

In 2010, Vornado defaulted on its mortgage of \$171.5 million, and then refinanced the mall for \$115 million, a strategic way to alleviate debt.

“People have been disappointed in the past,” McKay said, “but when everything is complete, the final product will knock your socks off.”

THE NEWLY-RENOVATED MALL, which Shear said would open in the fall of 2014, will include an addition of roughly 700,000 square feet of retail, restaurants, a food court and a state-of-the-art movie theater. The 20-foot-tall brown numbers that indicated the mall’s six main entrances—a hallmark of the 1970s-

era mall—will be replaced with one central grand entranceway.

Though Shear said it was too early to disclose potential new tenants, he said the new center will have a more “upscale” tenant mix and the three anchor stores—Macy’s, Target and JCP—will remain open during construction.

“There will be much more in terms of variety of shops,” said Vornado’s project manager, Bob Byrne, adding that the mall will be turned “inside-out,” with outward facing storefronts in keeping with the town center look of the mall.

Later phases of the renovation—expected to take about 10 to 15 years—will complete the town center look, with a mix of upscale retail and commercial development, a 225-room hotel, pedestrian plazas, recreational facilities, 2,000 residential units and transportation improvements.

McKay and other county leaders have called the mall’s renovation “the most important redevelopment project in Springfield.”

Jerry Gordon, executive director of the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority, agrees.

He said Springfield has all the right pieces in place to experience a “rebirth” and create a vibrant new identity, despite its ubiquitous name.

“Every state has a Springfield, and Springfield, Virginia, has always been a bedroom community. Now it’s changing, and that’s exciting,” Gordon said. “I think Jeff McKay has shown a great deal of leadership on this.”

“The final product will knock your socks off.”

—Supervisor Jeff McKay



“People have doubted this project,” said Nancy-jo Manney, executive director of the Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce, standing next to Supervisor Jeff McKay (D-Lee) and Vornado/Charles E. Smith President Mitchell Shear during the exterior demolition of the mall on Monday, Nov. 26.

Gordon said the time is right for the community’s transformation.

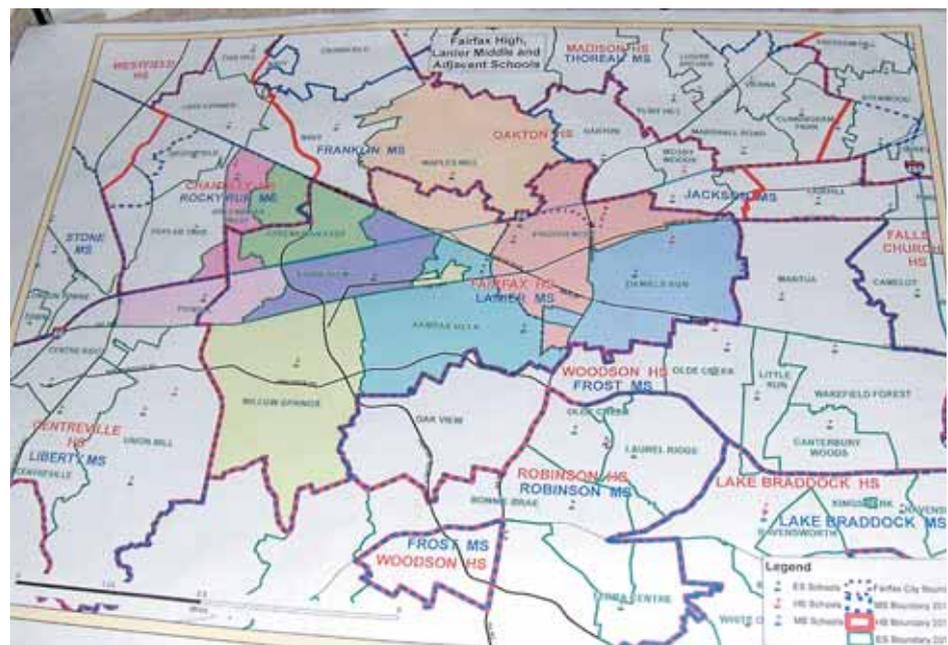
“You have transportation in place with the Mixing Bowl and a Metro station, and the jobs coming—an estimated 16,000 new jobs and \$8-10 million in construction as a result of Ft. Belvoir’s Base Realignment and Closures (BRAC)—and the next thing are the amenities, such as the new Springfield Town Center... This all contributes to a higher quality of life.”

MCKAY SAID he was looking forward to new shops that cater to children, since he has two young children, “and good restaurants that my wife and I can enjoy.”

He said the chunk of Garfinckel’s—a place he remembers shopping with his mother, and being “bored to tears”—will take its place on a shelf in his office with other pieces of Springfield’s past, such as Chi-Chi’s Mexican restaurant and Circuit City.



Fair Oaks resident Teresa Cleveland (in foreground) and other parents hear details of the boundary study.



A map of the school boundary study area under consideration.

PHOTOS BY BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

Seeking Relief for Fairfax and Lanier

Parents discuss school boundary changes.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

School boundary changes are never easy and, no matter how they end up, somebody's always unhappy. But when schools are projected to be at 125 percent and 109 percent of their building capacities in just a few more years, something has to be done in advance to prevent it.

As a result, nearly 300 people filled Fairfax High's cafeteria Monday night, Nov. 26, to hear what's being considered and to voice their concerns and opinions. And whatever ultimately happens will affect students not only in Fairfax, but in Centreville and Chantilly, as well.

"Fairfax High School and Lanier Middle School are overcrowded," said FCPS spokeswoman Barbara Burke. "They're owned and operated by the City of Fairfax. But 65 percent of the students who attend Fairfax are county residents, so we're looking to do something that's workable for everybody."

Meeting attendees also included Denise James, FCPS director of Facilities Planning Services; Dean Tistadt, FCPS chief operating officer; some FCPS and City of Fairfax school board members; City of Fairfax council members and Cluster VII Superintendent Linda Burke.

Parents received maps showing the schools with attendance areas contiguous to Fairfax High and Lanier. They also received charts listing the high schools and middle schools currently in the boundary study, plus information about their building capacities, current enrollments and 2017-18 projections.

THIS STUDY will impact only middle and high school students who live in Fairfax County. No elementary school boundary changes are involved. But middle and high school feeder schools may change for county students.

Currently, high schools in the boundary study are Centreville, Chantilly, Fairfax, Falls Church, Oakton, Woodson and Robinson Secondary. Middle schools in the mix are Franklin, Frost, Jackson, Lanier, Liberty, Robinson and Rocky Run. But Barbara Burke said Madison, Lake Braddock and South County

might also be added in, and parents were asked to tell which schools they thought should be included in the study.

"The decision on the boundaries will be made in May to prepare for the next school year," she said. And in response to a parent's question, James said school officials initially want to alleviate the overcrowding by moving about 300 students currently attending Fairfax High to other schools.

But it's not as simple as that because, at the same time, FCPS is holding community meetings to gather public input about the timing of expanding advanced academic services to all pyramids within the school system. The goal is to ensure that all students have access to advanced academic programs (AAP).

Ajay Rawat, FCPS coordinator of Facilities Planning Services, told parents that, "If the AAP changes are improved, they'll be included in the boundary study – including Robinson, which has the IB [international baccalaureate] program."

Typically, he said, when the changes are implemented, rising eighth-graders and rising seniors affected by them would be grandfathered and could attend their current schools, instead of having to move.

"No students who currently reside in the City of Fairfax will be impacted by the study," said Rawat. "We'll look at all the schools with contiguous boundaries, but we're not limited to them, if other schools have the capacity to offer relief."

According to the data presented, Fairfax High has a building capacity of 2,412 students and a current enrollment of 2,659—meaning a 110-percent building utilization. But if nothing changes, it's projected to have 3,011 students by the 2017-18 school year and a 125-percent building utilization.

Lanier's capacity is 1,307 students, and it presently has a 1,239 student population using 95 percent of its building. But if left as is, it's projected to have an enrollment of 1,421 by 2017-18 for a 109-percent building utilization.

But things are crowded at Centreville and Chantilly high schools, too. So when a parent asked, "How come some Greenbriar East and Greenbriar West elementary students don't go to Rocky Run, the middle school closest to them, rather than to Lanier?" Rawat had an answer ready. "Rocky Run has the capacity to accommodate them," he said. "But Chantilly doesn't."

SEE SCHOOL BOUNDARIES. PAGE 6



(From left) Parents Tina Steblein and Reem Akkad talk about potential effects of the boundary changes.

BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

Parent Perspective On Boundary Changes

After Monday's boundary-change meeting, some parents discussed their own concerns with the potential changes.

"I don't want to see a change," said Tina Steblein, who lives near Willow Springs Elementary. "There's not enough flexibility in the other high schools. I have two children who are now a freshman and a sophomore at Fairfax High."

"I'm concerned about the change in the curriculum from Fairfax to Robinson Secondary—which is closer, but has IB instead of AP classes, plus different programs," she said. "My daughter is in the AVID program, a college-prep program which just isn't offered at Robinson."

Steblein also wants to know what school officials did to explore other options, such as trailers and modular units, to

alleviate overcrowding at Lanier Middle School and Fairfax High.

"There's a lot of pavement out here [at Fairfax]," she said. "The meeting tonight didn't provide enough background information about why this is needed."

Mom Reem Akkad lives in Fair Lakes; her son graduated from Fairfax and her daughter goes to Lanier. "Fairfax is a good school; I like the curriculum and the atmosphere, but I'm concerned that my daughter could get moved elsewhere," she said.

"I used to live in Fairfax City and moved five years ago," she continued. "I looked at the school boundaries and chose my home so my son and daughter would both go to Fairfax High. I looked for a house for a year because of that—and now, they're going to ruin it."

— BONNIE HOBBS

WEEK IN FAIRFAX

FROM PAGE 2

Remembering Leslie Prokop

Members of the board of directors and staff of the Main Street Child Development Center, a non-profit early learning center located in the City of Fairfax near George Mason University, gathered this week with friends and family of long-time volunteer Leslie Prokop to dedicate the Main Street children's library in her memory. Ms. Prokop was a volunteer and advocate for Main Street, including serving as the school's ESL teacher, from 2005 until her death in September 2012.

"Leslie Prokop was extremely devoted to Main Street and our students," said Main Street board member Elizabeth Egan. "For years, she dedicated her time, attention and considerable talents to teaching ESL at Main Street and the impact she had on our students and their families cannot be overstated."

Woodson Drama Night Out

Woodson High's Drama Department is holding a Drama Night Out for children in grades one through eight. It's set for Saturday, Dec. 8, from 2-8 p.m. Children will have fun on and off stage with other children their age while learning acting, improvisation and musical theater. Woodson theater students lead theatre games and teach techniques. For more information and to register, go to www.wtdrama.org. E-mail questions to deniseatsea@aol.com.

First Bike Sharing System Implemented at George Mason

GMU recently implemented a bike sharing system at four "stations" around campus. Patriot Bikeshare uses bikes from viaCycle. The bikes are parked at designated bike racks using an at-

tached cable locking system. To use the system, people may either pay a one-time \$3 fee to check out a bike for 12 hours or a subscription fee of \$6/month available to GMU students, faculty or staff. Guests may also use the system. The first two hours of use are free.

Christmas Tree Fire Safety

Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department crews distributed Christmas tree safety tags to holiday tree lot vendors during the week before Thanksgiving. These tags provide valuable, fire-safety tips for residents when purchasing a tree.

Residents should keep the tree base immersed in water; not allow smoking near the tree; use only lights approved by Underwriters Laboratories (U.L.); use flame-retardant decorations and paper; inspect lights for frayed or cracked wiring, broken plugs and defective sockets; unplug lights at night and when leaving the home; and remove the tree soon after the holidays, before the needles dry out.

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School Boundaries Discussed

FROM PAGE 4

Besides receiving all the students from the four City of Fairfax elementary schools—Daniels Run, Eagle View, Fairfax Villa and Providence—Lanier Middle and Fairfax High also receive all of Willow Springs Elementary's students. That translates into 157 students currently at Lanier and 364 students at Fairfax just from Willow Springs.

But that's not all, because some of Greenbriar East, Greenbriar West, Colin Powell and Waples Mill elementary-school graduates also feed into Lanier and Fairfax. Consequently, the total number of these Fairfax County students currently attending Lanier and Fairfax High—just from these four schools alone—is 250 at Lanier and 512 at Fairfax.

So it's no wonder then, that to ease overcrowding in City of Fairfax schools, the focus is on eliminating many of the students now coming there from the county.

However, many already-worried parents became outraged when Rawat told them that whatever boundary changes are made won't necessarily be permanent. Trying to reassure them, he said, "If students are switched [to other schools] now, they won't be moved again for three years."

But Fair Oaks resident Teresa Cleveland wasn't buying it. "My son was already moved from Eagle View to Willow Springs," she said. "Now he could get moved again; and then in three years, he could again get switched to another school. They should be thinking of the effect of all these changes on the kids."

Rawat said future relief could come someday in the form of a new high school, but it was too far in the distance to provide solace to the parents at Monday's meeting. "We've identified a need for a west county high school, and it'll



Denise James, FCPS director of Facilities Planning Services, discusses the boundary-change timetable.

be presented to the School Board on Dec. 20," he said. "It would eventually relieve South Lakes, Chantilly and Centreville, which are also projected for overcrowding in 2017-18."

But when a mom asked how soon that new high school could materialize, Rawat replied, "It could take seven to 10 years. We don't even have a site for it now."

Meanwhile, many parents told him that if students are shifted from Fairfax High to Robinson in 2013-14, it could pose huge problems for them academically. "Fairfax offers 38 AP classes; Robinson has seven," said a mom. "So if they're switched to Robinson, you need to make a change to the curriculum—or not move the students."

ALSO WORRIED about her middle-school child being sent to the large Robinson campus, instead of to Lanier as she'd ex-

pected, was a mom named Wendy, whose comments were followed by loud applause.

"The middle-school experience is different than the secondary-school experience, and I'm concerned about sending my student to a humongous school," she told Rawat. "And you say this is a temporary patch that could last three years. But then I'd have three children in three different schools. You need to look at the big picture and do something long-range."

"You need to look at the five-mile radius around the schools," added another parent. "That's how you'll solve this."

James said the official boundary implementation would be in 2014 and that the school system is "monitoring the AP-student situation." But another mom asked what the hurry was. "Why rush it?" she asked. "Why not take the next six months to decide?"

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NEWS



PHOTO BY CHIP CERTZOG

Hazel Thurston as Beth Bradley in the Providence Players of Fairfax production of "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever."

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Buoyant Holiday Fare

Providence Players present "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever."

BY DAVID SIEGEL
THE CONNECTION

When and Where

A delightfully boisterous, but controlled chaos lit up a recent rehearsal of the Providence Players' next production, the family-friendly holiday treat "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever." Over a dozen joyously energetic middle school and high school students were rehearsing their roles under the watchful eye of Director Beth Whitehead (Mantua).

Written by Barbara Robinson, "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever" has been a magazine article, a book and a play. It is a comic, heartwarming tale focused on children considered some of the most incorrigible in town. Then they are cast in the local church's annual Christmas pageant.

Fully expecting the worse, the entire town shows-up, just waiting to see an expected car-crash. Will the Christmas pageant be ruined? Or will some kinder, gentler virtues somehow surface?

Whitehead noted that there was an open call to cast the 30-actor production. It includes about 20 children; over 50 children auditioned for the roles.

Providence Players of Fairfax perform "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever" at the James Lee Community Center Theater, 2855 Annandale Road, Falls Church. Performances are on Dec. 7-16, 2012, Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings at 8 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday matinees at 2 p.m. Tickets: \$15-\$18. Call 703-425-6782 or visit www.providenceplayers.org.

Blake Phillips, a freshman at Woodson High School greatly likes the theater. "I can express myself in a theater production. I get to show feelings and emotions as an actor." He wanted to be in "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever" since "it is a unique show, family-centered, kids-centered show. It can teach good lessons. And the audience can watch children transform as they hear the Christmas Story for the first time. They truly begin to change before the audience's eyes."

Hazel Thurston has a very key role, she narrates the evening's entertainment.

She is from Kenmore Middle School in nearby Arlington. Thurston loves theater and being in this production. "There are lots

SEE CHRISTMAS, PAGE 13

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OPINION

Learning in a Global Community

Students in Fairfax County speak 160 languages.

This week our ongoing series about immigration in Fairfax County takes a look at county schools, and some of the joys and challenges of having a diverse student body that speaks as many as 160 different languages at home.

Find the series compiled online at <http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/news/Immigration/>.

For the director of language acquisition in Fairfax County Public Schools, the 44 percent of students who speak a foreign language at home present an opportunity to create language immersion classes where half a kindergarten is learning Spanish or Korean while the other half is learning English.

For principals of some elementary schools where more than half of their students are not proficient in English, the need to have students meet benchmarks in a variety of subjects is a relentless process. In addition to limited English, immigrant students come from varied backgrounds, some with good basics in their

own languages and some with limited previous education in any language. The parents of these students are similarly varied.

Meanwhile, representation of Latino and African American students in Fairfax County's top instructional centers for gifted students lags dramatically.

EDITORIAL

FCPS is conducting two critical sets of public meetings this week and next. The call for public input is not specifically about growing diversity in the schools, but related challenges make both the possible expansion of centers for the county's most talented students and the selection of a new superintendent of schools that much more important.

A fast moving proposal to expand the number of centers to provide "advanced academic" services is the topic of meetings this week. The meetings will run from 7 to 9 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 27, in the Westfield High School cafeteria; Wednesday, Nov. 28, in the Lee High School cafeteria; and Thursday, Nov. 29, in the Kilmer

Middle School cafeteria.

Fairfax County Public Schools Superintendent Jack Dale will be retiring in June of 2013. The School Board has hired a search firm, Hazard, Young, Attea and Associates, which will be gathering community input. Many of the challenges facing the new superintendent will revolve around growing diversity, and a track record of open communication and achievement in this will be key to success.

SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH COMMUNITY MEETINGS

- ❖ Dec. 3 - 7 p.m., cafeteria, South County HS, 8501 Silverbrook Road, Lorton, VA 22079.
- ❖ Dec. 4 - 7 p.m., cafeteria, Langley HS, 6520 Georgetown Pike, McLean, VA 22101.
- ❖ Dec. 5 - 7 p.m., cafeteria, Robinson SS, 5035 Sideburn Road, Fairfax, VA 22032.
- ❖ Dec. 6 - 10 a.m. Gatehouse Administration Center, 8115 Gatehouse Road, Falls Church, VA 22042 Room 1600.
- ❖ Dec. 6 - 7 p.m., cafeteria, Annandale HS, 4700 Medford Drive, Annandale, VA 22003.
- ❖ Dec. 6 - 7 p.m., cafeteria, Groveton Elementary School, 6900 Harrison Lane, Alexandria, VA 22306.
- ❖ Dec. 7 - 1 p.m., Gatehouse Administration Center, 8115 Gatehouse Road, Falls Church, VA 22042 Room 1600.

FOCUS ON IMMIGRATION

Immigrants and Today's Faith Response

By JOHN HOREJSI, COORDINATOR
SOCIAL ACTION LINKING TOGETHER (SALT)

The presence of increasing numbers of immigrants is a challenge to the Fairfax County faith community commitments. The challenge is to be a faith community with open arms.

Historically the churches in the United States have been immigrant churches. Who among us cannot trace one's ancestors back to a country outside the U.S.? The church's care and concern for countless European immigrants is well known. Today, we the faith community are called to welcome immigrants with similar hospitality.

The situation of immigrants is often desperate. Entering a culturally strange and different land, and struggling financially is as scary today as it ever was in the past. Perhaps it is even more so because of the quickened pace of American life.

Those who are fortunate to connect with helpers are settled within a few years. Others remain in transition the rest of their lives as families struggle with complex adjustments. All face major problems in housing, employment, health care, legal assistance, and a difficult new language.

Immigrants frequently face the additional obstacle of cruel prejudice and racism. Non-immigrants often want to exclude them from the benefits of a free country, yet are eager to use cheap and reliable labor of immigrants.

The immigrants and other refugees keep coming, not necessarily because they want to,



but as one, fleeing from war and persecution, put it, because of "the persistent advantage of life over death."

Presently, many Hispanics from Central America are located in Northern Virginia. About 65 percent are Salvadoran, 15 percent Honduran, and 10 percent each are Guatemalan and Nicaraguan. The faith community in Northern Virginia has not been unaware of the presence and plight of these immigrant refugees.

Nationally, for more than 65 years, Catholic Charities agencies have responded to the needs of people who come to this country in search of a better life. Thousands of refugees have

been settled. Over 90 percent of Catholic resettlement services are provided through Catholic Charities, which is one of the keys to the future of migration ministry in the U.S.

In Northern Virginia, one of the responses of the faith community has been through Hogar Immigrant Services, a program of Catholic Charities. Hogar assists immigrants in participating more fully in their everyday lives. Information referrals, legal information services, and educational opportunities are just some of the aids. The aim is to help the Northern Virginia immigrant population become knowledgeable, participating individuals in society.

Yet much remains to be done, especially in and by the faith community. What are the elements of this challenge?

- ❖ Recognizing the contributions of the immigrants to the community;
- ❖ Providing a greater voice to the immigrant community in decision-making within the community;
- ❖ Supporting programs designed to improve the quality of life for newcomers;
- ❖ Serving as advocates to create a favorable public opinion out of which good things can happen; and
- ❖ Seeking to raise consciousness for solidarity with the poor and the stranger.

Our response must be to acknowledge by word and action that the spirituality of the faith community and the spirituality of the immigrant communities are interdependent. Through love, kindness, service and advocacy for each other both stand to gain.

Write Us

The Connection welcomes views on any public issue. The deadline for all material is noon Friday. Letters must be signed. Include home address and home and business numbers. Letters are routinely edited for libel, grammar, good taste and factual errors. Send to:

Letters to the Editor, The Connection
1606 King St., Alexandria VA 22314
Call: 703-917-6444. ❖ south@connectionnewspapers.com

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OPINION

The Secret Beauty of Holiday Assistance

BY LISA WHETZEL

Every year I grapple with the appropriateness of Our Daily Bread's very popular Holiday Assistance Program. I'm conflicted. Is it really doing anyone any good providing a local child a Pillow Pet or toy fire-truck this holiday? What the children of our clients really need is quality day care/preschool, consistently nutritious food, and decent paying jobs for their parents, among other things.

Should I care that the Holiday Program perpetuates consumerism? Six years ago we launched our Financial Literacy Program which today teaches over 500 people a year how to budget their limited incomes and to withstand the bombardment of advertising and unabashed consumerism. They are barely making ends meet and here we are sending them a contradictory message that "stuff" is needed during the holidays.

So how do I reconcile this conflict?

First, learning a lesson from our Financial Literacy classes, we encourage our donors to stay within a modest donation budget, tempering their well-meaning holiday excessiveness. Second, we encourage donors to spend more on food than on gifts. Food provides nutrition, obviously, but a meal also brings people together. Bringing loved ones together to experience a holiday meal strengthens their bond. Feeling this bond causes a ripple effect which plays out in their everyday lives. Kids who feel connected do better in school. Parents who feel connected to their community persevere to stay on course. Our communities thrive when we all feel connected.

Third, and most importantly, the secret beauty of the Holiday Assistance Program is the transformation

of the giver. Our hope is that when donors "sponsor a family" for the holidays, they serendipitously see what a family in need looks like. If ODB facilitates a human connection that then motivates people to give back year round, then the Holiday Program promises exponential generosity and a stronger community. Better yet, when persons of influence are sensitized perhaps they will make a connection that raising the cost of their business products by pennies is worth it to provide adequate wages and benefits to their employees. Perhaps when they see the innocence in the eyes of the child clutching the Pillow Pet and who deserves the same care as their own kids they will make the connection that subsidizing quality day care or head start programs should be a priority. Perhaps investing in affordable housing is a good idea too.

The beauty of the holiday assistance program is that it reminds us that we are more alike than different and that we need to live according to our values year round. People are more important than stuff or our maintaining maximum profits.

What's more beautiful is that when a struggling parent receives their prepared meal or food gift card, it gives them hope. It gives them hope that they are not alone in their struggles, and we, their community, care about their plight.

So, Our Daily Bread will continue to match neighbors with neighbors for the Holiday Program. It is our mission to empower the community to support our neighbors in need. Our hope is that the act of giving during the holidays transforms us all, prompting us to live out our generosity every day.

Lisa Whetzel is the executive director of Our Daily Bread, Inc. in Fairfax. www.ODBFairfax.org

Be a Part of CHILDREN'S (& TEENS') CONNECTION



Every year between Christmas and New Year's, The Fairfax Connection turns its pages over to the contributions of local students. We are seeking artwork, photography, poetry, opinions, short stories and reflections. We welcome contributions from public schools, private schools and students who are home schooled.

E-mail to: ChildrensSouth@connectionnewspapers.com, or mail (.jpg and text files on disc only) by Dec. 5, to 1606 King St., Alexandria, VA 22314. Please be sure to include the student's name, age, grade, school and town of residence along with each submission. For information, call 703-778-9410.

THE CONNECTION
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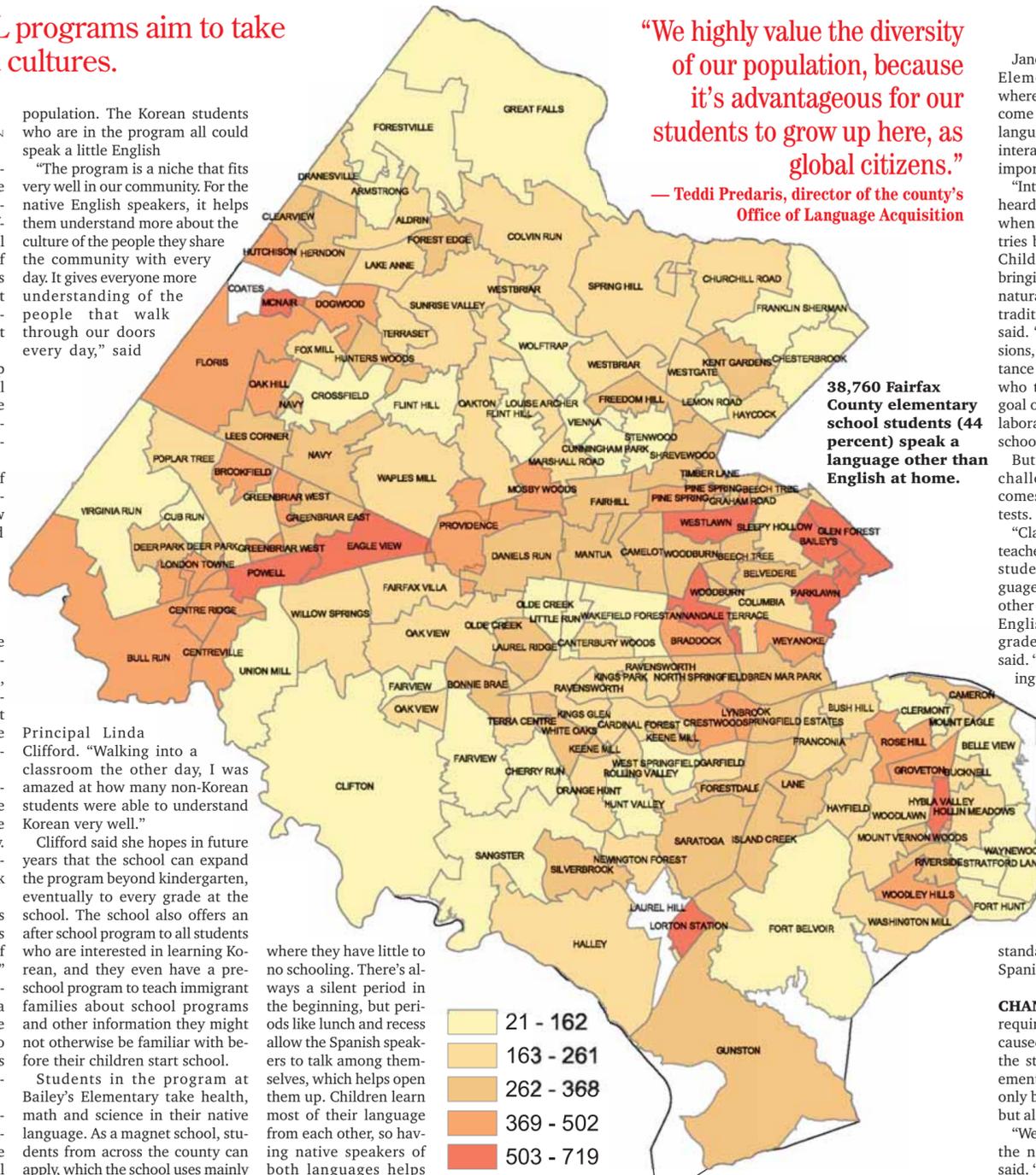
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All listings due by Tuesday at 3 P.M.

FOCUS ON IMMIGRATION

Schools Using Diversity for Student Benefits

Immersion, ESOL programs aim to take advantage of area cultures.

“We highly value the diversity of our population, because it’s advantageous for our students to grow up here, as global citizens.”
— Teddi Predaris, director of the county’s Office of Language Acquisition



Janet Funk, principal of Gunston Elementary School in Lorton, where approximately 300 students come from a home where another language is spoken, says everyday interaction with new cultures is an important part of early education. “Interesting conversations can be heard in the lunchroom, especially when students from other countries bring their food from home. Children are very interested in bringing their favorite foods, which naturally flows to a discussion of traditions and celebrations,” she said. “With these informal discussions, the students learn the importance of accepting classmates for who they are. This supports our goal of cultural acceptance and collaborative interaction among our school community.”

But with such diversity comes challenges, especially when it comes to Standards of Learning tests.

“Classroom teachers and ESOL teachers work diligently to help the students learn the English language. Many of our students from other countries are still learning English and are reading below grade level expectations,” Funk said. “These students receive reading instruction in the classroom setting and the ESOL classroom. They are receiving a ‘double’ dose of reading on a regularly scheduled basis. However, when it comes time to take the SOL tests, they are required to take the test on grade level in a language in which they are not proficient.”

In Virginia, SOL tests must be taken in English, but in Texas, for example, standardized tests can be taken in Spanish.

CHANGES to the state’s licensure requirements this year have also caused some difficulties. This year, the state required teachers in elementary school programs to not only be licensed in their language, but also for elementary education. “We’ve struggled this year due to the new requirement,” Charlton said. “We’ve had to use some long-term subs until as recently as two or three weeks ago before we had enough full time teachers that met qualifications. Now I think the universities are aware of the change, so it might be better in future years, but it can definitely make it difficult to find people.”

population. The Korean students who are in the program all could speak a little English. “The program is a niche that fits very well in our community. For the native English speakers, it helps them understand more about the culture of the people they share the community with every day. It gives everyone more understanding of the people that walk through our doors every day,” said

As Fairfax County has experienced massive growth in its international population, its effects have spread to its educational institutions. Forty-four percent of the Fairfax County Public Schools students come from homes that speak a language other than English, which includes 160 different languages. In 2006, the county came up with the goal to eventually have all graduates be able to communicate in two languages. The county currently offers 11 different languages.

“We highly value the diversity of our population, because it’s advantageous for our students to grow up here, as global citizens,” said Teddi Predaris, director of the county’s Office of Language Acquisition. “We believe it’s a huge asset for our students in their future endeavors.”

Approximately 28 percent of the county’s current population are foreign born, with Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese, Arabic, Urdu and Chinese/Mandarin being the most common languages spoken in the homes of elementary school students.

The county’s kindergarten two-way immersion program is one method used by schools to take advantage of increasing diversity. The program consists of half English speakers and half who speak the immersion language.

“In this program, the teachers and students are language models for each other, and they spend half the day working at each language,” Predaris said. “Our criteria for adding these programs is having a large enough population of the non-English speaking group to make a 50-50 mix possible. This is one of the models we hope to expand in coming years.”

The county has five Spanish kindergarten two-way immersion programs, at Bailey’s, Braddock, Lake Anne, London Towne and Rose Hill Elementary Schools. New this year is a Korean two-way immersion school at Colin Powell Elementary School in Centreville.

THE PROGRAM AT COLIN POWELL was designed to take advantage of the area’s large Korean

Principal Linda Clifford. “Walking into a classroom the other day, I was amazed at how many non-Korean students were able to understand Korean very well.”

Clifford said she hopes in future years that the school can expand the program beyond kindergarten, eventually to every grade at the school. The school also offers an after school program to all students who are interested in learning Korean, and they even have a pre-school program to teach immigrant families about school programs and other information they might not otherwise be familiar with before their children start school.

Students in the program at Bailey’s Elementary take health, math and science in their native language. As a magnet school, students from across the county can apply, which the school uses mainly to fill its English-speaking requirement.

“The native Spanish speakers come to Bailey’s with a wide range of English skills, depending on where they come from,” said Assistant Principal Rachel Charlton. “Some come from very rural areas

where they have little to no schooling. There’s always a silent period in the beginning, but periods like lunch and recess allow the Spanish speakers to talk among themselves, which helps open them up. Children learn most of their language from each other, so having native speakers of both languages helps both groups immensely. Each group of native speakers gets to be the language role model for half a day, with the other students learning from them. It really boosts their confidence.”

COUNTY SCHOOLS also feature

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AREAS
Students who speak a language other than English at home

immersion programs in Japanese, German and French at elementary and middle schools.

“Marshall has an international student body from all walks of life, from the four corners of the world . . . We are the face of what Fairfax County is in 2012.”

— George C. Marshall High School Principal Jay Pearson



George C. Marshall High School has a student population representing more than 90 nations.

PHOTO BY DONNA MANZ / THE CONNECTION

Marshall High Is the Face of Fairfax County

Over 90 countries represented by student population.

VIEWPOINTS

What was your biggest concern or fear when moving to U.S. schools?

—DONNA MANZ

Kasthury Paramiswaran, senior, Malaysia

“I had a close group of friends there and I didn’t know anybody here,” on leaving Malaysia when she had made friends in her native high school. “I still work very hard in my [I.B.] classes.”



Jia Loh, senior, Malaysia

“My biggest fear was finding friends. Still find it hard



Dalila Ferrara, junior, Italy

“Actually, I was really happy to move here. My only fear was that I wouldn’t be accepted. That didn’t happen. My biggest dream is to get an MBA from Harvard.”



Millan Mbise, senior, Tanzania

“The cultural aspect. For example, in Tanzania there is little interaction with teachers. The teachers are strict, classes are very intense. It’s not like that here. I played varsity soccer last year and that helped me a lot with the transition to Marshall.



Amber Holder, senior, Panama

“My biggest fear was that I wouldn’t have the same friends throughout my academic career. My dream is to establish a music education system that would produce more diverse, well-rounded musicians, not just musicians who are skilled in just one instrument.”



academics-only that define your future, a selected group of students said in the recent discussion with Pearson and an interviewer. In the U.S., the students said, you have extracurricular programs that enhance the total person. What the U.S. does not have, however, that international schools stress, is an emphasis on foreign language fluency.

English is a compulsory curriculum in many school systems the world over. Some students, such as Kasthury Paramiswaran, a Marshall senior from Malaysia, speak multiple languages, fluent in each. Kasthury’s family moved around the world as part of her father’s job, and Kasthury mastered four languages in her journeys. She said she still works very hard in her I.B. subjects, getting “A’s in every one of her classes. She is applying to colleges in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.

Jia Loh, a Malaysian native who has been in the U.S. for two years, said the transition to schools here was “hard,” even though the academic environment is less intense than in Malaysia.

“I had to adjust to different cultures, so, there aren’t ‘cliques.’ “We are the face of what Fairfax County is in 2012.”

FIVE INVITED STUDENTS gathered in a roundtable discussion at Marshall recently. What they agreed on is that American schools are less-intense academically, less-academically pressuring than schools outside the U.S. In other countries, it is

SEE CURRICULUM, PAGE 12

We Are the World, at Garfield

Teachers discuss challenges of teaching English as a Second Language.

BY MICHELLE KAIN
THE CONNECTION

Garfield Elementary School in Springfield, like all of Fairfax County, has a population that reflects a wide range of backgrounds. With 33 languages spoken, the school's ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) program has had to expand. The school has a first grade class of 60 students, 58 of whom are ESOL students ranging from levels one through four.

Jane Cofie-Raczko, who has been a teacher for the past 13 years, teaches one of three first grade classes in which all 20 of the students have English as a second language.

The majority of these students are from Hispanic or Middle Eastern backgrounds and common languages include Spanish, Arabic, Urdu, Farsi, Korean, Chinese and Vietnamese. The challenges involved with teaching these students depend on their proficiency with the English language.

"For students who speak almost no English, it can be difficult to communicate to the students that you want them to succeed and that you are there to help them. It can also be difficult to get the students to ask for help, mostly due to their lack of confidence in their speaking ability. For students with a better knowledge of the social language, it can be tough to give them a similarly strong academic language. Add the already difficult material to learning English for the first time and it can be very challenging," said Cofie-Raczko.

"The success of the students with the curriculum and their preparedness for middle and high school depends on the schooling they received in their home country as well as when they enrolled



Jane Cofie-Raczko gives her first grade class the details regarding their upcoming test.

at Garfield," said Rozi Khakpour, an ESOL teacher at Garfield Elementary.

Students who have attended Garfield from the start get the opportunity to develop oral language at an early age through programs such as Lunch and Bunch in which kindergartners with English as a second language meet twice a week to have lunch and practice this important skill.

The program, along with others, have proven to be successful as "students who have been at Garfield since kindergarten often exceed in high school and earn positions on the honor roll," Khakpour said.

"Another thing that has proven to be helpful," said Kirsten Howard, another first grade teacher, "is Garfield's social curriculum." This social curriculum, which concentrates on teaching students cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control, has given students a greater awareness outside themselves and has helped them in middle in high school as demonstrated by their willingness to take on leadership positions.



Mariana Del Cid-Quintanilla, Spanish, parents from El Salvador



Anmul Jan, Pashtu, born in Pakistan



Michael Opuni, Akah, parents from Ghana (Michael born in US)



Yusuf Ouanina, Arabic, Morocco



Tracy Huynh, Vietnamese, Vietnam



Mohammed (Jafar) Abdulridna, Arabic, Iraq

PHOTOS BY MICHELLE KAIN/THE CONNECTION

FOCUS ON IMMIGRATION

'Hidden Curriculum'

FROM PAGE 10

of being Italian." Dalila carried that warning with her when she entered Marshall. The dire warning turned out to have no basis at her new school. "When I tell people here I'm Italian, they say, 'oh, I love Italy' and then, I'm so relieved. Yes, I am proud to say I'm Italian here."

In Italy, it was always school and studying through late evening, Dalila said. She had no social life there.

"When I came here, it was such a relief," she said. "I was so happy I finally had time for myself."

Millan Mbise, from Tanzania, was pleasantly surprised by the degree of interaction between students and teachers. Teachers are less approachable than in the U.S. Millan, whose native language is Swahili, grew up speaking English,

up their native language.

"Studies show that bilingual students do better academically."

Bloom said the school helps newly-immigrated students to transition by embracing the families as they enter the school. Relationship-building is how he refers to the partnership. "When you establish that relationship with new families from other countries, you get rid of a lot of hurdles. When you do that, the families feel valued and a part of the Freedom Hill family. We have students learning from one another simply from their exposure to each other."

The children of Freedom Hill Elementary School are so accustomed to establishing relationships within the classroom, they don't recognize barriers, Bloom said. "It's a representation of the world."

Bloom refers to the school's di-

"There's so much value in having a school where children from all over the world can come together."

— Scott Bloom, Freedom Hill principal

as well. English is compulsory in the schools, and, Millan calls it the "unofficial" language of Tanzania.

Millan is bused from Marshall daily to Falls Church High School for a class in "pharmacy technology." He learned what he wanted to do with his life while living here and attending an American school. He wants to be a pharmacist some day.

FREEDOM HILL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL feeds into the Marshall pyramid. Like Marshall, Freedom Hill is the world in microcosm. There are more than 42 languages spoken in the students' homes and the children of Freedom Hill represent more than 53 countries. Some Freedom Hill students are from diplomatic families, already bilingual or multilingual with English exposure. Others are new to English. The school, through its many ESOL levels, works with these students to help them adapt to English.

"Within the realm of school, the kids are held accountable to communicate in the English language," said first-year Freedom Hill principal Scott Bloom. As the kids interact with their peers, they pick up English.

"I like to think we also recognize the importance of kids having that dual-language skill," Bloom said. "We want them to learn English, but, we don't want them to give

versity as a "hidden curriculum."

"There's so much value in having a school where children from all over the world can come together," Bloom said. "You set the stage for the children to share their history, backgrounds, culture, and experiences. "There's so much power in bringing all these different cultures together that I think it's justified to call it a hidden curriculum."

"The kids don't even know they're learning from this diversity."

Marshall's roundtable students eager to discuss their new lives all said that school life is more pressured in their native countries with little opportunities within the school system to learn nonacademic things. Schools do not promote extracurricular activities as they do here.

"Students are pushed by their parents to excel academically in Malaysia," Kasthury said. "Many of these kids commit suicide. They're told, 'if you're not the best, you'll never succeed.'"

Amber Holder has found a multitude of extracurricular activities to engage in. In Panama, there was only a single option. Here, she said, she's involved with the marching band, the literary magazine and other programs. "In Panama, you have to find one place to fit in. But, here, you can fit in in many places."

CALENDAR

To have community events listed, send to south@connectionnewspapers.com or call 703-778-9416 with questions. Deadline for calendar listings is two weeks prior to event.

SATURDAY/DEC. 1

Volunteer 5K and Fun Run. 9 a.m., at Fairfax Corner Shopping Center, 4100 Monument Drive, Fairfax. Run or walk to benefit Volunteer Fairfax's efforts to connect the skills and interests of volunteers and donors with local nonprofit needs; long sleeve t-shirt included. \$35; \$15 for youth 15-and-under; \$15 for 1K Fun Run (adults must be accompanying a child). www.volunteerfairfax.org.

Shop the Shepherd Christmas Showcase. 10 a.m.-3 p.m., at the Church of the Good Shepherd, 9350 Braddock Road, Burke. Enjoy holiday shopping in a festive market filled with crafts and gifts; jewelry, toys, handbags, home decor, kitchenware, skin care, decorations, a bakeshop and raffle are among the day's offerings. 703-323-5400 or jhwilcox@aol.com.

Holiday Used Book Sale. 10 a.m.-5 p.m., at Burke Centre Library, 5935 Freds Oak Road, Burke. Find holiday-themed books and gifts for everyone on your list. 703-249-1520.

Strolling Santa. 1-3 p.m., at Fair City Mall, 9560 Virginia 236, Fairfax. Santa strolls the mall with a candy cane treat for each child. www.faircitymall.com.

2012 Festival of Lights and Carols. 11 a.m.-7 p.m., 3999 University Drive, Fairfax. From lunch with Santa at Old Town Hall to holiday music, hot cider, s'mores, the Pender United Methodist Church Bell Ringers, caroling and bell ringing with the Jubil-Aires at Kitty Pozer Garden to the lighting of the Christmas tree, choral and band performances, and candlelit tours of Ratcliffe-Allison House at 7 p.m., the day is full of cheer. www.fairfaxva.gov.

Christmas in Ireland: An Nollaig in Éirinn. 8 p.m., at George Mason University's Center for the Arts, 4400 University Drive, Fairfax. A family friendly performance focusing on the Irish Christmas tradition of music and song with Celtic instruments from the internationally celebrated band often broadcast on NPR, BBC and the like. \$23-46. 888-945-2468 or cfa.gmu.edu.

SUNDAY/DEC. 2

Sacred Carol Sing. 7-8 p.m., at Historic Chapel of Truro Anglican Church, 10520 Main Street, Fairfax. Jazz singer Juanita Williams and saxophonist Matt Rogers will provide special music, with reception to follow. 703-273-1300 or www.truroanglican.com.

Chancel Choir Concert. 7:30 p.m., at the Fairfax United Methodist Church, 10300 Stratford Ave., Fairfax. The Christmas-themed portion of Handel's Messiah with a professional orchestra and singers; traditional carols follow the Hallelujah Chorus, with the audience invited to sing-along. 703-591-3120.

MONDAY/DEC. 3

Children's Music Performance Series. 10:30 a.m. Old Town Hall, 3999 University Drive, Fairfax. First and third Mondays of each month. Free admission. 703-352-2787 or www.fairfaxarts.org.

SATURDAY/DEC. 8

Breakfast With Santa. 8:30 a.m.-10:30 p.m., at Old Country Buffet, 9560 Main Street, Suite 10, Fairfax. Enjoy a magic show from The Great Kosmo, listen to music from the Potomac River Brass Quintet, take a



The Bein Hashmashot choir.

Bein Hashmashot

On the first day of Chanukah, the Israeli youth choir whose name means "between the suns" and who function as a melting pot of the Beit Shemesh society, add a little more light to the Festival of Lights with their high quality musical performance led by professional music directors; arts, crafts and food precede the 4 p.m. concert on Sunday, Dec. 9 at 3 p.m., at the JCCNV, 8900 Little River Turnpike, Fairfax. Latkes and sufganiyot donuts are included. Reservations. \$3 for JCCNV members; \$5. 703-537-3000 or www.jccnv.org.

professional photo with St. Nick after breakfast and take home a decorated card frame to benefit Our Daily Bread. \$5, photos; see menu for breakfast prices. www.oldcountrybuffet.com.

Second Saturday. 9 a.m., at Marriot Courtyard, 11220 Lee-Jackson Highway, Fairfax. Speakers will speak about educating spouses about separation and divorce process in order to encourage them to be civil and reasonable for their pocketbooks, emotional health and children. RSVP to claphambeakinney.com.

A Holiday Toy Train Show. 9 a.m.-3 p.m., at Shriner's Kena Temple, 9001 Arlington Boulevard, Fairfax. The show will include working layouts of model trains of all types and gauges. Model trains, track and components will also be available for sale. \$5; otherwise free for children under 12, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts in uniform (when accompanied by an adult, active members of the military, National Guard, Coast Guard and reserves, and members of the WB&A. www.wbchaptertca.org.

Strolling Santa. 1-3 p.m., at Fair City Mall, 9560 Virginia 236, Fairfax. Santa strolls the mall with a candy cane treat for each child. www.faircitymall.com.

Advent Lessons and Carols. 5 p.m., at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, 6509 Sydenstricker Road, Burke. Choral anthems and congregational hymns will be sung in response to readings of prophecies of the coming messiah. 703-455-250 or www.standrews.net.

Fairfax Symphony Orchestra: Masterworks III. 8 p.m. George Mason University Center for the Arts, 4400 University Drive, Fairfax. Conductor Christopher Zimmerman and pianist James Dick perform Rossini's Overture to La Gazza Ladra plus Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 and Symphony No. 6, "Pathétique." \$25-\$55. 703-563-1990 or www.fairfaxsymphony.org.

SUNDAY/DEC. 9

The Japanese Americans' Care Fund Arts and Crafts Fair. 10 a.m.-3 p.m., at the annex building of Kena Shriners, 9001 Arlington Blvd., Fairfax. The Japanese Americans' Care Fund, a nonprofit, brings together artists with Japanese heritage from the Washington D.C. Metro area to share their wares. \$2; children under 12, free. 703-573-4202, www.jacarefund.org or carefund@jacarefund.org.

Journey to Bethlehem. 1-3 p.m., Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, 8304 Old Keene Mill Road, Springfield. "Register for the census," visit the busy Bethlehem town with crafts and family activities, meet the

members of the live nativity and the stable animals and be a part of the Christmas story. www.poplc.org.

Bein Hashmashot. 3 p.m., at the JCCNV, 8900 Little River Turnpike, Fairfax. On the first day of Chanukah, the Israeli youth choir whose name means "between the suns" and who function as a melting pot of the Beit Shemesh society, add a little more light to the Festival of Lights with their high quality musical performance led by professional music directors; arts, crafts and food precede the 4 p.m. concert (latkes and sufganiyot donuts included). Reservations. \$3 for JCCNV members; \$5. 703-537-3000 or www.jccnv.org.

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WEDNESDAY/DEC. 12

Finishing the Hat: A Tribute to Stephen Sondheim. 8 p.m., at the JCCNV, 8900 Little River Turnpike, Fairfax. In honor of the man some say to be the greatest composer/lyricist of the American musical—whose works include West Side Story, Sweeney Todd and many more—Mason Cabaret plays a concert; the proceeds support students pursuing certificates in musical theater as part of their theater degree at GMU. \$20. www.brownpapertickets.com or www.jccnv.org.

FRIDAY/DEC. 14

GMU Senior Exhibition. 6-9 p.m., in the Art and Design Building at George Mason University, 4400 University Drive, Fairfax. The closing reception of the exhibit of student work encompassing many different artistic disciplines—painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, printmaking, installation and new media and handbound books written and designed by graphic design students; art is on display Dec. 10-14. www.masonseniorshow.com/fall2012.

SATURDAY/DEC. 15

Christmas Gift Distribution Day. 7 a.m., at St. Stephen's United Methodist Church, 9203 Braddock Road, Burke. A praise service followed by breakfast and distribution of food and clothing to guests who could use some holiday help. www.ststephensfairfax.org or www.graceministriesumc.org.



PHOTO BY CHIP CERTZOG

From left, Blake Phillips as Ralph Herdman, Ryan Clark as Leroy Herdman, Brendan Dure as Charlie Bradley, and Jody Parker as Imogene Herdman in rehearsal for the Providence Players of Fairfax production of "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever."

Christmas Pageant

FROM PAGE 7

of funny lines. . . . And there are good lessons to be learned. Don't judge people by what you first see on their outside; there may be great kindness and niceness hidden away longing to get out."

One of the early members of the Providence Players, now celebrating its fifteenth year, is Dave Schwartz performing as a reverend lending a hand to help the children understand the Christmas

Story. "It is a fun show with so much energy. Really, the whole family will enjoy it."

This holiday family fare production of the Providence Players will benefit the generous, charitable work of the Young Hearts, a group of Fairfax County teens who raise funds to battle blood cancers and other diseases. As a co-production of the Young Hearts, Prince McLaughlin is taking on the responsibilities of production co-producer.

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ENTERTAINMENT

'All I Want for Christmas'

Encore dancers present annual holiday show.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
 THE CONNECTION

A great way to kick off the holiday season is by seeing Encore Theatrical Arts Project's new show, "All I Want for Christmas." This song-and-dance extravaganza aims to delight audiences of all ages.

Show times are Dec. 8 and 15 at 1, 4 and 8 p.m.; Dec. 9 and 16 at 1 and 4 p.m.; and Dec. 14 at 8 p.m. at NOVA's Annandale campus at 8333 Little River Turnpike. Tickets range from \$17-\$30 at www.encore-tap.org/ or call 703-222-5511.

"The sets are huge and glorious, the costumes are colorful and there's a lot of acting, plus both old and new songs," said the director and choreographer, Raynor van der Merwe. "We have everything from dancing reindeers and elves to sophisticated Rockette-style numbers—one done with lighted wreaths."

The 31 dancers have been training and rehearsing 18 hours a week in preparation, and van der Merwe says they're "enthusiastic, talented and giving performers." Rounding out the cast are acting veterans Tina and Dan Delafield who portray the head elves, Margaret and Marv.

"The girls have worked incredibly hard and have been a joy to work with," said van der Merwe. "And the upbeat numbers will have the audience dancing in their seats."

THE SETS WILL SHOW New York's Rockefeller Center and the North Pole. Designed and painted by Tabitha Dees, they're 50 feet wide and 20 feet high and she put in 18-hour days for six weeks to complete them. But she says the long hours and hard work are all worthwhile.

"They have lights, real working windows and doors, and there's even snow," said Dees. "One of my favorite parts is when the curtain goes up and the audience gives a collective gasp. For a moment, they're transported to another place."

"That's part of the magic of theater," added van der Merwe. "For a little while, you're all on the same journey together."

Centreville's Logan Floyd plays Mistletoe the elf. "She starts off as a good elf, but makes the mistake of opening a letter meant for Santa—which she's not supposed to do," explained Floyd. "Because of it, she's infected with the Gimme-Gimme Flu and becomes selfish." She then passes it on to the other elves and they have to find an antidote.

As Mistletoe, Floyd likes transforming from a good to a bad elf. "Everyone else is such a good character, so it's fun getting to explore a different type of character," she said.

With Encore since age 2 is Fairfax's Grace Cryblskey, a sixth-grader at Oak View Elementary. In the show, she acts and dances in six numbers. "I play a little girl talking with her friends about Santa," she said. "She thinks Christmas is only about getting presents. I also play an elf named Jinxie. At first, she's a regular elf and then she turns evil, and it's fun playing both characters."

Cryblskey's favorite number is "Winter Wonder-



Dolls and a train are at the North Pole in Encore's annual holiday show. PHOTO COURTESY OF LINDA HELMS

land" because "it's about how Christmas is a winter wonderland and it'll snow while we're dancing." She said the audience will enjoy the whole show because "the script is well-written, very funny and entertaining." She loves dancing because "it's a way to express myself and you get to be onstage, share your talents with others and make them happy."

FAIRFAX RESIDENT Christina Mastracchio, 14, is a 10-year member of Encore. "When I'm onstage, it's the most amazing feeling," she said. "I love performing and seeing people's reactions when I do something cool."

She especially likes the song, "Dolly," because "we get on a train and the sound effects are really good, and the tap dancing is very crisp." Overall, she said, "The audience will like the show because the dancing is professional, the singing is amazing and so is the acting—and everything just comes together."

Teen Audra Avery, who's homeschooled, joined Encore at age 6. She said van der Merwe taught her "how to show the audience with your expression how much you love to dance—which I do." Playing an elf named Twinkle, when the story starts, she's in charge of getting things ready for Christmas. But she's eventually infected with the flu, as well, which makes her want to keep all the presents for herself.

"I usually play the nice elf," she said. "But Twinkle's character changes, so it's like playing two parts. And I love the costume—it's a short blue, pixie-type dress; all the costumes in this show are really amazing. My favorite number is 'Reindeer,' we wear brown and have antlers, and the song has a lot of leaps and is really high-energy. I think the audience will also like our new, winter set for the North Pole and the storyline."

Alia Artieda of Centreville loves dancing because, she explains, "I can express myself about everything." She also likes the "Cool Yule" number because it's done with a smaller group and "it's bluesy, which is more my style."

Chantilly High sophomore Renee Griesse says it's "an amazing feeling being up on stage and having people clap afterward. It gives you a really good sense of accomplishment." Calling the show "kid-friendly," she said, "When the curtain goes up and you hear all the little kids, they think everything they see onstage is real and are totally entertained by it."

"All the girls in this production want it to be great as much as I do," added van der Merwe. "It's a full cast focused on a common goal, and that's what makes it special."

FAITH

Send notes to the Connection at south@connectionnewspapers.com or call 703-778-9416. Deadline is Friday. Dated announcements should be submitted at least two weeks prior to the event.

Advent Holy Communion worship service, 7:30 p.m. on Wednesdays Dec. 5, 12 and 19 at LivingSavior Lutheran Church, 5500 Ox Road, Fairfax Station. All are welcome—join to celebrate the season. 703-352-1421. <http://www.livingsaviorlutheran.org>.

On Tuesday, Dec. 25, a Christmas Eve Candlelight Holy Communion Service takes place at 6:30 (family) and 8:30. All are welcome—come to celebrate the season. 703-352-1421. <http://www.livingsaviorlutheran.org>.

Fairfax Baptist Temple, at the corner of Fairfax County Parkway and Burke Lake Roads, holds a Bible Study Fellowship at 9 a.m. Sundays followed by a 10 a.m. worship service. Nursery care and Children's Church also provided. 6401 Missionary Lane, Fairfax Station, 703-323-8100, www.fbtministries.org

A Walk through Ancient Bethlehem, Dec. 8-9, 2012. Walk through a replica of ancient Bethlehem during the time of Jesus Christ' birth. On Dec. 8 and 9, Parkwood Baptist Church of Annandale will present its 12th annual re-creation of Bethlehem. Tours conducted from 4 to 8 p.m. will feature costumed re-enactors including Roman soldiers and tax collectors, musical performances, and a nativity scene with live performers and animals. Activities and crafts for children and refreshments for all. No admission charge. 8726 Braddock

Road, Annandale. Details available at www.bwalk.org or 703-978-8160.

Lord of Life Lutheran offers services at two locations, in Fairfax at 5114 Twinbrook Road and in Clifton at 13421 Twin Lakes Drive. Services in Fairfax are held on Saturdays at 5:30 p.m. and Sundays at 8:15, 9:45 and 11:15 a.m. Services in Clifton are held on Sundays at 8:15 and 10:30 a.m. 703-323-9500 or www.Lordoflifeva.org.

First Baptist Church of Springfield offers Sunday school at 9:15 a.m., followed by a 10:30 a.m. worship service. 7300 Gary Street, Springfield. 703-451-1500 www.fbcspringfield.org.

Clifton Presbyterian Church, 12748 Richards Lane, Clifton, offers Sunday worship services at 8:30 a.m. and 11 a.m. Nursery care is provided. Christian education for all ages is at 9:45 a.m. 703-830-3175.

St. Andrew the Apostle Catholic Church, 6720 Union Mill Road, Clifton, conducts Sunday masses at 7:30 a.m., 8:45 a.m., 10:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. It also offers a Saturday vigil at 5:30 p.m. and a Thursday Latin mass at 7 p.m. 703-817-1770 or www.st-andrew.org.

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, 8304 Old Keene Mill Road, Springfield, offers casual worship services on Saturday evenings at 5:30 p.m. featuring contemporary music. More traditional services take place on Sunday mornings at 8:15 and 11 a.m. Sunday School is at 9:45-10:45 a.m. for children and adults. The church also offers discussion groups for adults. 703-451-5855 or www.popl.org.

BULLETIN BOARD

Send notes to the Connection at south@connectionnewspapers.com or call 703-778-9416. Deadline is Friday. Dated announcements should be submitted at least two weeks prior to the event.

THURSDAY/NOV. 29

Facing Life's Losses. 7-9 p.m., at the City of Fairfax Regional Library, Room A, 10360 North St., Fairfax. A class offered through COAA's Healing Center on how to deal with the many faces of loss—whether of a home, job, friendship, marriage or loved one; the class is designed from a Christian perspective but is open to people of all faiths. 703-966-5606 or healingcenterinternational.sharepoint.com.

SATURDAY/DEC. 1

Compass Homeschool Classes Registration. Registration for third quarter classes starting Jan. 9 for homeschoolers in grades 1-8 in music, voice, drama, art, civics, anthropology, history, trigonometry, chess, Spanish, literature, photography, sciences and many more. Classes are held on Wednesdays in Oakton, but all Fairfax County students welcome. www.compassclasses.com. 703-544-5332 or admin@compassclasses.com.

THURSDAY/DEC. 6

Facing Life's Losses. 7-9 p.m., at the City of Fairfax Regional Library, Room A, 10360 North St., Fairfax. A class offered through COAA's Healing Center on how to deal with the many faces of loss—whether of a home, job, friendship, marriage or loved one; the class is designed from a Christian perspective but is open to people of all faiths. 703-966-5606 or healingcenterinternational.sharepoint.com.

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SPORTS



PHOTOS BY CRAIG STERBUTZEL/THE CONNECTION



West Springfield junior Caroline Alcorta, seen at states on Nov. 10, advanced to nationals by placing ninth at the Foot Locker Cross Country Championships South Regional on Nov. 24 in Charlotte, N.C.

Robinson junior Macey Schweikert, seen at states on Nov. 10, finished 21st at the Foot Locker Cross Country Championships South Regional on Nov. 24 in Charlotte, N.C.

Four Northern Virginia Harriers Heading to Nationals

Lake Braddock's Chase, West Springfield's Alcorta earn trip to San Diego.

BY JON ROETMAN
THE CONNECTION

Chantilly senior Sean McGorty and Lake Braddock senior Sophie Chase were the best in the state of Virginia this year, each winning a VHSL AAA cross country championship on Nov. 10.

Two weeks after capturing state titles at Great Meadow, McGorty and Chase took their running show on the road to compete at the Foot Locker Cross Country Championships South Regional on Nov. 24 in Charlotte, N.C. They experienced familiar results.

McGorty won the seeded boys' race with a course-record time and Chase won the seeded girls' race, earning each a spot at nationals on Dec. 8 in San Diego. McGorty, who is committed to Stanford University, finished with a personal-best time of 14:28, and Chase recorded a time of 17:05 at McAlpine Greenway Park. McGorty's effort broke the record of 14:32, set in 2004 by Andrew Bumbalough of Brentwood, Tenn.

"My performance was all I could have hoped for," McGorty wrote in an email. "To run that fast on the course was amazing and I couldn't be happier with my performance. . . . My time was a course record and this means so much to me. The course has such history and to hold the record there is truly an awesome feeling. I went out pretty hard so I knew that I had a chance at the record, but I really thought I had it in the last 200 meters."

This was McGorty's fourth year competing at the Foot Locker regional meet and his third year running in the seeded boys' race. As a sophomore in 2010, he finished 35th. McGorty placed sixth as a junior last season, earning him a trip to nationals. The top 10 finishers advance to the national championship meet. McGorty went on to place 10th at nationals in 2011.

CHASE COMPETED in the girls' seeded race at Foot

Locker regionals each of her four years of high school. She placed 41st as a freshman, eighth as a sophomore and second as a junior. At nationals, Chase finished 38th as a sophomore and 11th as a junior.

Chase wasn't the only girls' harrier from Northern Virginia to advance to nationals. West Springfield junior Caroline Alcorta placed eighth (17:19) and Oakton sophomore Allie Klimkiewicz finished ninth (17:29), securing their places in San Diego.

Alcorta's time was a personal best. "It's unbelievably exciting and nerve-wracking all at once," Alcorta wrote in an email. "Making it to Foot Locker Finals has been one of my goals ever since the beginning of the season and I can't believe it's actually happening! It's like a dream come true!"

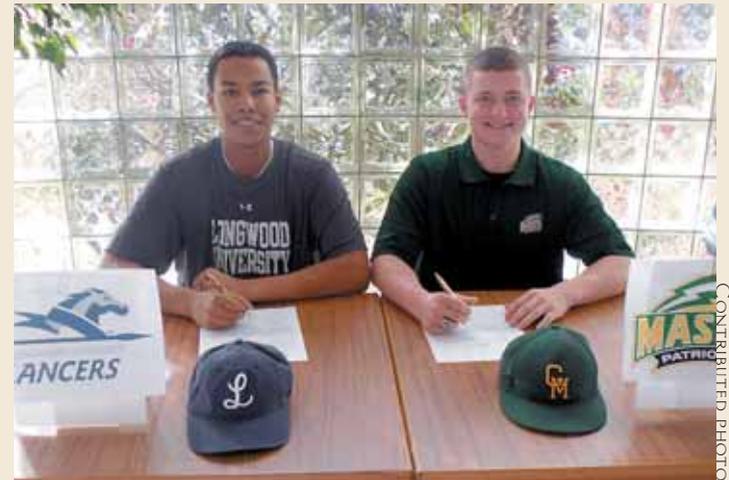
Alcorta knew about two-thirds of the way through she had a chance to crack the top 10.

"Somewhere around the two-mile mark, I realized that there was only seven of us in the pack," she wrote. "I was shocked there was only seven (later I was caught by another girl), but I came to the realization that we were all going to make it. We had all worked and pushed ourselves so hard that we were able [to] pull away from the rest of the field, and after that I decided I was not going to let this opportunity just slip by, I had come too far to lose it."

Alcorta placed 23rd at last year's Foot Locker South meet with a time of 17:52. She remembers the experience.

"Last year, I didn't really have any goals in mind except to try and finish top 30 (top 30 is considered to be 'All South'), and felt like I was running just to run and maybe even PR," she wrote. "I remember during the race the top 10 girls just flying away from me and thinking, 'Off they go!' After that, I knew I'd have to stick to that group the next and upcoming year if I had ever wanted a chance to try and qualify for the Finals. This year, I feel like I knew what to expect and knew what I needed to do in order to have a shot at making top 10."

LAKE BRADDOCK senior Nick Tuck finished 14th in the Foot Locker South seeded boys' race with a time of 15:15. In the girls' race, Robinson junior Macey Schweikert finished 21st with a time of 18:00. West Springfield senior Maddie Wittich was 22nd with a time of 18:01.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Lake Braddock baseball players Alex Lewis, left, and Garrett Driscoll signed letters of intent to play in college.

Committed to Play

Two Bruins baseball players college-bound.

Alex Lewis and Garrett Driscoll, two members of the 2012 Virginia state champion Lake Braddock Bruins, saw their hard work pay off as they signed their NCAA National Letters of Intent to play Division I baseball. Lewis will be heading to the Big South (Farmville) as part of the Longwood Lancers, while Driscoll will be staying close to home and playing for the George Mason Patriots. Not only have they been teammates in high school, but over the years, they have played travel baseball

together. They were both an integral part of the Bruins success this past season, winning the first state championship for Lake Braddock Bruins baseball. This is a culmination of years of hard work by both boys.

Lewis played third base for the Bruins and is likely to have an opportunity to start as a freshman and make an immediate impact. He was 2012 first team All-Patriot District and LBSS 2012 Defensive MVP. In addition, Lewis was a member of Championship 2012 VA Commonwealth North Team.

"There were other schools who had interest but in the end I chose Longwood because it was a good fit for me," Lewis said. "It is a rapidly growing baseball program and I have a good chance to start as a freshman. I like the coaching staff and how they approach the game and I really liked the field and campus."

Garrett Driscoll is the catcher for the Bruins. He was second team all-Patriot District and received the 2012 Mike Muresco Award for Commitment from LBSS. Earlier this month, Driscoll completed his

travel season with an invite to the MLB sponsored "South Atlantic Border Battle" in Burlington, N.C. where he played for the Virginia team coached by the MLB Braves.

"It has been my goal to play college baseball since I played Little League," Driscoll said. "I have been fortunate to get to know Coach Brown and the rest of the coaching staff over the years. I can't think of a better baseball program to play for. I have had a chance to spend some time on campus because my sister, Mckena, is there too. It will be great to spend my first two years there with her. George Mason is an outstanding school and I look forward to getting an excellent education as well as contributing to the Patriots on the field."

"It has been my goal to play college baseball since I played Little League."

— Garrett Driscoll

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OBITUARY



Mike Wilder of Centreville, Virginia passed away on November 12, 2012 on his 48th birthday. Mike was born in Knoxville, TN. He grew up in Lake Ridge, VA and graduated from Woodbridge Senior HS in 1982.

Mike attended George Mason University and later Marymount University where he received his Bachelor's degree in Communications while working at AT&T part-time. Through a program offered by AT&T, Mike got his Master's degree in Human Resource Development from American University. Mike met his wife Sonja at AT&T in 1988. They were married in 1992. They have two daughters, Rachel and Erica.

Mike continued to work at AT&T until he transferred to Concert. He later joined Nextel Communications and was working as a Senior Manager when his illness occurred.

Mike was diagnosed with a brain tumor in August 2002. He had surgery to remove the tumor on August 15, 2002. Through the years, he never fully recovered from the initial surgery and as a result of his injuries never worked again. He had several recurrences of the brain tumor. In June 2012, the tumor returned and was nearly as large as the initial tumor. The doctors determined that the only treatments they could offer this time were palliative.

Mike's mom passed away in 2001. His dad passed away in 2008. His brother, Dave, lives in Lake Ridge, VA with his wife, Jane, and daughter Kristi.

Mike touched many people's lives before and after his illness. He was adored by friends, co-workers, and caregivers. He had a quick wit and made funny comments right up until his last day.

A funeral Mass will be held at St. Timothy Catholic Church, 13807 Poplar Road, Chantilly, Virginia 20151 on Friday, November 30, 2012 at 2 p.m.

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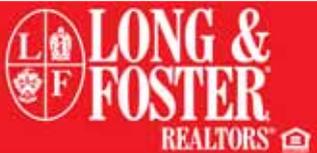


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