

Fairfax CONNECTION

WELLBEING
PAGE 6

Performing "Santa Claus is Coming to Town" in Encore's upcoming holiday show are (from left) Maya Tischler, Faith Chun and Kendra Walsh.

'It Helps You Get into The Christmas Spirit'

HOLIDAY FUN, PAGE 7

'There's a Family whose Hearts Are Broken'

NEWS, PAGE 5

Holiday Fun

CALENDAR, PAGE 8

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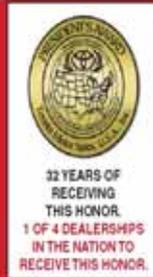
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'The Greatest Humanitarian Crisis in the World'

Kicking off Blanket & Coat Drive for Syrian Refugees 2019

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

"I am pleased that Fairfax County has once again hosted this important humanitarian effort by partnering with local organizations and jurisdictions to help provide winter coats and warm blankets to Syrian refugees abroad... The Syrian Blanket Drive is special to me," said Sharon Bulova, Chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, Nov. 21, at the Fairfax County Government Center, to announce the start of the Blanket & Coat Drive for Syrian Refugees 2019.

According to Mark Gibb, President and Executive Director of NOVA Relief Center, the drive originated seven years ago when he and a small delegation of local leaders from Northern Virginia, among them Chairman Bulova, traveled to Turkey in part to encourage friendship and understanding with local governments. The American Turkish Friendship Association headquartered in Fairfax, formed to address the social and cultural needs of Turkish and American people living in the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Area arranged the trip. "(It) forever altered the lives of all those who went there that day," said Gibb. NOVA Relief Center is coordinating the Blanket & Coat Drive. This year's donations will be distributed to three camps in Jordan: Mafraq, Jerash and Irbid. According to the organization's website, since 2011, Syrians have been trying to escape the civil war at home, with a reported 6 million people displaced within Syria and another 5 million seeking haven as refugees, especially in the neighboring countries of Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan.

"I am always impressed with how generous, caring and compassionate our community is. Since we began this drive, Northern Virginia has sent more than 300,000 blankets and coats to Syrian refugees overseas. It is a great example of what happens when people of all faiths and backgrounds come together," said Bulova.

The Northern Virginia delegation went to a city in the southern part of Turkey called Adana, Gibb said. As part of the tour, the mayor and governor of the region asked if they would like to visit a Syrian refugee camp. "I'm not sure if any of us knew exactly what we were being invited to see," said Gibb. "The war in Syria was not a large news item here in the United States, and Syrian refugees were barely a blip on our radar screen. ... We discovered a fenced, tent city of more than 50,000 people, the majority of which, 60 percent, were children under the age of 12. To say they had nothing would be an understatement. We dis-



Kicking off the Blanket & Coat Drive for Syrian Refugees 2019: Brody Buhler, Oakton Stake President, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Abdun Nafey Matin, Assistant Regional Coordinator, Mid-Atlantic Region, Helping Hand for Relief and Development; Nausheen Baig, All Dulles Area Muslim Society; Rabia Baig, All Dulles Area Muslim Society; Martin Nohe, member of the Prince William County Board of Supervisors and member of the NOVA Relief Center Board of Directors; Asif Khan, Director of Public Affairs, Helping Hand for Relief and Development; Jeff McKay, Chairman-elect of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and current Lee District Supervisor; Mark Gibb, President and Executive Director of the Northern Virginia Relief Center; Sharon Bulova, Chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and Mary Kathleen Paxton, Manager, Paxton Van Lines.

covered that these were normal, average, every day, people-police-men, firemen, teachers (who) through no fault of their own, had become refugees of this tragic war — no place to call home, no country to pay allegiance. They were all in need of the basic necessities - food, water, clothing. We were invited to go to one man's tent who had a family of four children. There was nothing in the tent except for some old ground covering rugs...As we talked to this man through a translator, we asked (him)... how we could help... He told us it was getting cold. Could we send him some blankets?" "That broke our hearts," said Bulova.

According to Gibb, given the gentleman's request, when the delegation returned home to the United States, they launched the first Northern Virginia Blanket Drive in coordination with other Northern Virginia jurisdictions, faith-based organizations and businesses. That first year they filled an entire 55-foot Paxton Companies moving van with blankets which they shipped overseas at no cost to the same refugee camp. "A few of us were fortunate enough to return to that camp and met the same man again who had requested the blankets. We told him we didn't bring just a few blankets we brought 50,000. This man wept, said we were from God as we delivered this precious cargo," said Gibb.

"So here we are today to continue our efforts to assist these somewhat forgotten people. It has been described as the great-



Mark Gibb, Executive Director of NOVA Relief Center, presents Mary Kathleen Paxton, Manager, Paxton Van Lines with a gift in recognition of the ongoing free shipping services the company provides to support the Blanket & Coat Drive for Syrian Refugees. Lee District Supervisor and Chairman-elect Jeff McKay and Sharon Bulova, Chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, look on.

est humanitarian crisis in the world. A few years ago, we added coats as well as blankets, and over the six-year period, we have collected enough blankets and coats to fill over 12 full moving vans. The numbers of coats and blankets are staggering, but the needs are still more than our collective efforts...We cannot do this alone. We partner with a worldwide nonprofit group by the name of the 'Helping Hand for Relief and Development.' Without their assistance, we could not accomplish this task."

Gibb said he learned another significant need is education. "The children are not receiving any education as they are not allowed to attend the local school system as

the number of children would completely overwhelm the schools... We are asking this year, in addition to our Coat and Blanket Drive, that a small monetary donation be made to help with teachers, building structures and school supplies for these refugee children. We have added a donation button on our website, www.novareliefcenr.org, for this purpose. All donations will be used to help educate these refugee children."

"In this country, the holiday season is a time for giving. And there is nothing more meaningful than helping our brothers and sisters around the world find warmth and comfort during difficult times," said Bulova. She thanked the many individuals and organizations that are making this year's drive possible: "Mark Gibb and the NOVA Relief Center for organizing this drive every year; the faith communities and organizations in the private and public sectors for helping children and families as they seek safety from violence; elected officials across Northern Virginia who are using their offices as donation sites and finally, a special thank you to Bill Paxton and Paxton Van Lines of Springfield, Virginia for donating their time, manpower and equipment."

LEE DISTRICT SUPERVISOR and Chairman-elect Jeff McKay said he was happy to support and participate in the effort. "I've always held the belief that we, as a community, must help those most vulnerable whenever we have an opportunity. We must not forget all of those who face hardship, especially those who flee from persecution in other countries. In this time of divisiveness, it's important that we remember our humanity and come together to help our fellow man. Through the NOVA Relief Center's Blanket and Coat Drive for Syrian refugees, we can ensure that Syrian refugee camps will have supplies to stay warm this winter. It's a small, but necessary and important role we can all play," said Supervisor McKay.

Bulova's office and other sites such as those of elected officials, including several members of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, serve as drop-off locations for gently used coats and blankets. Participants can stop by her office, Suite 530 of the Fairfax Government Center (5th floor), any time between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday with donations. "There is nothing more meaningful than helping our brothers and sisters around the world find warmth and comfort during difficult times," said Bulova.

The Blanket & Coat Drive for Syrian Refugees 2019 is currently underway and extended to Dec. 15, according to Mark Gibb. Visit, www.NOVAReliefCenter.org, for a complete list of drop-off locations and to donate to the education fund.

Getting Bills Ready for the 2020 State Legislature

BY SEN. SCOTT SUROVELL
(D-36)

The 2020 Virginia General Assembly will convene in about a month and legislators are now preparing bills to propose. Many constituents and advocacy groups are proposing legislation.

Two weeks ago, I reported on some of the bigger issues we are likely to tackle. In this column, I am covering a few of the bills that I will introduce. I will discuss more in future columns.

In the 2018 and 2019 sessions, we came very close to passing legislation prohibiting drivers from having a phone in their hand in a moving vehicle. In the last session, we approved legislation to prohibit this in construction zones, but the Speaker killed it by ruling Governor Ralph Northam's attempt to widen it to all highways not germane. It will pass this session.

I will propose several predatory lending reforms. Using Native American tribes as fronts, online lenders continue to make loans over the internet in Virginia at over 400 percent interest rates and requiring far off tribal arbitration for

disputes. Other states have enacted consumer protections, including steps to rein in interest rates, fees, collection practices and repeat loans.

I will introduce bills to curb firearm violence. The Unite the Right March in Charlottesville coupled with the four armed men who appeared at the Alexandria Farmer's Market in September underscore the need for local governments to have the ability to prohibit firearms at permitted public events. Second, suicide is the leading cause of firearm death in Virginia. One of my bills will allow people to place themselves on a "do-not-sell" list for firearms so they cannot be sold a gun if they have a moment of weakness. Third, Virginia's Department of Game and Inland Fisheries is still allowing permittees to license duck blinds in counties and areas where duck hunting is illegal under local ordinances. I will introduce legislation to fix this along with Del. Paul Krizek (D-44).

I will introduce a bill to create a new Public Defender's Office for Prince William County and the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park. Virginia currently has 25 public defender offices, but

Virginia's second-largest jurisdiction does not. A public defender's office will professionalize defense representation, improve justice outcomes and cost taxpayers little more than funding private court-appointed counsel.

In the late 1990s, Virginia required the use of alternative sentencing analyses to inform judges when convicted defendants should be considered for non-prison sentences. Over time, judges have ignored these recommendations more than followed them. I will carry legislation requiring the state to assemble data on judicial use of this data and require probation officers to provide findings about the costs of various sentencing alternatives to the courts before a judge renders a final sentence in a case. This would hopefully encourage more informed decision-making and better outcomes.

Virginia's civil justice system should also be modernized. Virginia and Mississippi are the only states in America that do not allow class action lawsuits. Virginia also still adheres to ancient doctrines that punish largely innocent collision victims, and we have not adjusted Virginia's auto insurance minimum policy limits since the

1970s when medical care cost a fraction of today's cost and the average car cost 25 percent of today's vehicles. This allows wrongdoers to escape responsibility and leaves innocent collision victims holding the bag for their own injuries.

Virginia's three boards governing mental health professionals issued regulations prohibiting therapies that attempt to change one's sexual orientation, known as "conversion therapy." We need to put that prohibition into law to ensure that it will not be reversed. I will introduce that bill.

For the last four sessions, I have introduced legislation to address the lack of available driving permits for many of my immigrant constituents.

Since 2014, Maryland and the District of Columbia have allowed driving permits to anyone who can show that they pay taxes, pass a driving test and pay fees. My bill has died in committee by one vote each year. I am hopeful the new majority will mean a better outcome.

Please email me at scott@scotturovell.org if you have any questions or feedback

Will Democrats Deliver Real Change?

BY JOHN LOVAAS
RESTON IMPACT PRODUCER/HOST

On Nov. 5, the Democrats captured majorities in both houses of Virginia's General Assembly after a long period of Republicans' having their way with public policy in the Commonwealth. Now, let's see what the Dems do. Because Gov. Ralph Northam is also a Democrat and because the composition of the Party now is very different—both more diverse and more progressive—from the Democrats of old it seems reasonable to expect a major shift in a more progressive direction. In fact, there is a lot of talk among the new legislators about many overdue actions including addressing gaping income inequality, gun violence, basic health care, expansion of pre-school education, gerrymandering and voting rights—in addition to actually ratifying the E.R.A!

Some specific measures are being discussed, but we are starting to hear voices of some long-time incumbents counselling us not to expect too much too soon. Be realistic! We might expect bills introduced to raise the hopelessly outdated \$7.25 minimum wage with gradual increases actually

passing. But, there have also been reports that repeal of Virginia's so-called "right to work" law is unlikely even to be submitted and certainly will not pass if it were to surface. Corporations and their chambers of commerce still hold sway with too many legislators including a junior local state senator and other longer serving members. Many of us believe that the "right to work" law which stifles creation of unions is a major factor in income inequality, severely tilting the playing field against working men and women. Sadly, it appears that the new majorities may lack the spine to remember who got them elected and to confront "right to work." hence unlikely to take a real bite out of income inequality in Virginia.

I am assured that ERA ratification is a real priority on the agenda. Also, there may be more willingness to address gun violence, which in Virginia is remarkable. For example, universal background checks and a ban on large capacity magazines and bump stocks are already being discussed and deemed likely to pass. In Vir-



INDEPENDENT PROGRESSIVE

ginia, this one falls under the category of I'll believe it when I see the Governor's signature on the actual pieces of legislation. Banning assault weapons much less buying back those already in circulation, while crucial to reducing the killings, are definitely a bridge too far for the new majority,

Increased funding for pre-school education and expanded health insurance coverage have strong backing and may make it through the legislative minefields as long as no noticeable increases in taxes are required to implement them! One prominent local legislator suggests tax increases are unlikely in the first General Assembly session. This would suggest that it may be feasible in the subsequent GA. Really?!? A tax increase in the second year of the delegates' term as they face election? No way! Will not happen. For me, the biggest shock, and a tie for biggest disappointment along with the bleak outlook for "right to work" repeal, is what I've seen in the Post and gotten talking to a state senator that the constitutional amendment reforming redistricting (a dagger

to the heart of gerrymandering) is in jeopardy. The amendment passed the outgoing legislature and was presumed a slam dunk in the 2020 session, thus meeting the Virginia requirement of a second passage to effect an amendment to the constitution, is in jeopardy. Sen. Dick Saslaw, long time Senate Minority Leader and now returned to his old Majority Leader status, is a big fan of gerrymandering and anxious to avenge what Republicans did to Democrats for many years. Saslaw, who unfortunately barely beat rising star Yasmine Taeb in a primary, and others may scuttle the excellent compromise amendment that would create a commission to draw maps consisting of 8 citizens and 8 legislators, evenly divided by party and requiring a supermajority of both sides to approve a new map. This requires a genuine consensus and is regarded as one of the strongest redistricting reforms undertaken to date in the U.S. If Saslaw and friends succeed in killing the amendment, maps reflecting the new 2020 census will be gerrymandered as before except that the Democrats, not Republicans, will dictate the outcomes. Reform would be delayed until at least the 2030 census.



'There's a Family whose Hearts Are Broken'

17 years in prison for 17-year-old's murder.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Before Fairfax City's Uriel Josaphat Espinosa Cruz was sentenced for killing Centreville High student Matthew Ortega, the victim's siblings told the judge how his death affected them.

"Matthew was my little brother," said Johnny Ortega. "There are no words to describe this immeasurable pain and incredible loss. Words can't replace a brother, a friend, a son."

Likewise, said Matthew's older sister, Margarita Ortega, "My world has been changed forever because he was so senselessly and cruelly taken from me. I'm overwhelmed with pain and grief, especially when my 6-year-old daughter and 4-year-old son ask where their uncle is."

And while the hole in their hearts will always remain, there is some justice in the world. On Friday, Nov. 15, in Fairfax County Circuit Court, Espinosa Cruz was sentenced to 17 years in prison.

THE TRAGEDY occurred Feb. 13, 2018, when Ortega was 17 and Espinosa Cruz, 18. And after two eyewitnesses told police what

happened that night – thereby obtaining immunity from prosecution for themselves – Espinosa Cruz pleaded guilty, Sept. 9, to second-degree murder.

Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Kathleen Bilton then explained the case against him. She said a paperboy called 911 after finding Ortega's body in the road, the next day, just after 5 a.m., in front of 13506 Jeb Stuart Square in Centreville.

"He was lying on his stomach with blood coming from his head," she said. But Ortega had no ID on him, so police didn't know who he was. "Det. Aaron Spooner got a list of absentee students and determined it was Matthew, and his mother confirmed it," said Bilton. "The medical examiner said cause of death was a single gunshot wound to the top of the head with a .40-caliber bullet."

She said nearby residents heard a scream, the night before, around 10:15 p.m., and detectives found a pill bottle containing just under 2 grams of marijuana in Ortega's pants pocket. Then, said Bilton, "A friend said he knew Matthew and that Uriel had confessed to killing him and said he'd bur-



Uriel Espinosa Cruz



The victim, Matthew Ortega

ied the gun somewhere far away."

Ortega was actually shot inside a car and his body dumped on the ground afterward. He was in the back seat, with Espinosa Cruz next to him and two other people – Enrique Rivera, 18, and a teen nicknamed Peanut – in the front. Rivera presented details of the crime during Espinosa Cruz's preliminary hearing.

Rivera said he was driving around in his mother's car that night, smoking marijuana with Espinosa Cruz and Peanut when "Uriel said he wanted to rob somebody who had weed; he said it would be easy." So they contacted Ortega, who told them where he

was in Centreville.

"There were people around, so I drove across the street because I knew Uriel was going to rob Matthew," said Rivera. He kept the motor running and, he said, less than a minute after Ortega got inside the car, he was dead.

"Uriel pulled out a gun from his waistband and pointed it near Matthew's chest," said Rivera. "I saw it in the rearview mirror. Matthew put up his hands, palms out in front of him, and said, 'Stop, chill, chill.' That's when Uriel shot Matthew in the head. I never expected Uriel to shoot him."

Afterward, continued Rivera, "Uriel said, 'He's bleeding, he's bleeding.'" So they pulled Ortega out of the car, placed him on the ground and drove to Safeway to buy cleaning supplies to erase the evidence of the crime inside the car. Said Rivera: "We all cleaned the blood off the back seat and the floor."

Espinosa Cruz later said he didn't mean to pull the trigger. But, said Bilton, both witnesses said he still wanted to take the marijuana from Ortega's pocket afterward, but they told him not to.

Prior to sentencing, Ortega's siblings read their victim-impact statements. Johnny Ortega was away at college at VCU when, he said, news of his brother's death "shat

SEE FAIRFAX MAN, PAGE 10

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WELLBEING

Maintaining Peace on Earth (and at Home)

Preserving your family's wellbeing during the holidays.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

For many, December will be filled with sugar-laden holiday parties, lengthy-shopping trips and long lines for a chance to sit on Santa's lap. For families that thrive on routine, holiday merriment can lead to schedule disruptions that throw a family's rhythm into disarray. Maintaining the wellbeing of both parents and children during the season takes a bit of advanced planning.

"Children, just like adults, need both energetic time and rest time embedded throughout the day," said psychologist Carolyn Lorente, Ph.D. of Northern Virginia Community College and Belle Point Wellness Center. "During the holidays, this natural rhythm can easily get disrupted."

Keep the holidays in the proper perspective and remember that the season is for a finite period of time and one's normal routine will be restored, says therapist Carol Barnaby, LCSW-C. "The biggest stress that people often have is feeling that they are being judged by others if their children are having a hard time. I tell my patients to focus on the things that they can control and remember, other people have once been in their shoes."

Providing opportunities for an emotional outlet can help with mood stabilization. "Make sure that [children] have enough outdoor play paired with quiet down time throughout their day," said Lorente. "Model for them how to find a quiet space to retreat to when things start to heat up."

When parents are able to exhibit a sense of tranquility during a period of chaos, children often mimic this emotional response. "Remain calm and stay patient," added Joanne Bagshaw, PhD Professor of Psychology Montgomery College. "Emotions are contagious, and your ability to remain calm under pressure is great role modeling for young children and can help prevent strong emotions from escalating."

When in new and unfamiliar social settings, some children need more time than others to adjust to the social demands, says Lorente. "Know your child," she said. "Some will make these transitions quite easily while many will find this challenging. Remember that our first job is to teach. And children learn best by watching how we handle the stressors of the season."

In fact, reflecting on a child's temperament can



PHOTO BY MARILYN CAMPBELL

The merriment of the holidays can disrupt a family's sense of wellbeing.

serve as a guide for parents as they navigate the impact of a disputed schedule. "This is a time to go with what you know about your child," said psychologist Stacie Isenberg Psy. D. "Some kids can push bedtime and sugar every so often, with little to no negative effects. If this describes your child, stay later than usual and enjoy the special occasion. If this is not your child, you and your child are likely to become miserable by pushing the limits that night and very likely the next day or maybe two."

Returning to normalcy as often as possible can preserve a family's wellbeing during the holiday season, suggests Jerome Short, Ph.D., professor of psychology at George Mason University. "Maintain household routines leading up to holiday events, such as regular meal, play, and bed times for children," he said. "Plenty of sleep, including naps, helps children with their attention spans, mood regulation, and self-control of their

behaviors,"

"Put limits around bedtime and sugar consumption that match your child's physiological and emotional abilities and you'll all have the best experience," added Isenberg.

Nutrition plays a role in mood and behavior especially during the holidays. "Keep some protein heavy snacks handy, like cheese sticks, or nuts if your child doesn't have allergies," said Bagshaw. "Snacks filled with protein can help stabilize blood sugar, and young children's moods."

Explaining to a child what they can expect at holiday event can mitigate meltdowns. "Make a plan with your partner and set realistic expectations on how long you will stay at events," said Barnaby. "This is often the best thing couples can do to manage stress and frustration that leads to conflict. Take turns in managing the children so that each of you can have some fun."

HOLIDAY FUN

'It Helps You Get into the Christmas Spirit'

Encore presents holiday musical, "Finding Santa."

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

The Christmas season is officially in full swing when Encore Theatrical Arts Project presents its annual, Broadway-style, holiday musical. This year's glittery production, "Finding Santa," will burst upon the stage 12 times between Dec. 13-22 at NOVA's Richard Ernst Theater, 8333 Little River Turnpike in Annandale.

Show times are Fridays at 7:30 p.m.; Saturdays, noon, 4 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.; Sundays, noon and 4 p.m. Tickets range from \$19-\$26 and may be purchased at www.Encore-tap.org. For group rates, call (703) 222-5511.

"It's Thanksgiving Day in New York City and, after the parade, Santa was scheduled to arrive at the Grand Hotel to meet his adoring fans, but he never arrives," explained Director and Choreographer Raynor van der Merwe. "So the search is on, and it's up to the hotel staff to find him. Meanwhile, they must also entertain a horde of kids who want to give their letters to Santa, telling him what they want for Christmas."

The scenes take place mainly in the hotel lobby and at the North Pole, and the cast of 24 girls and two boys – plus guest actors Jack Stine, Allen McRae and Matt Scarborough – has been rehearsing since August. And van der Merwe says things are really coming together nicely.

"There's a new playwright this year, Lorraine Magee, and seven new company members," said van der Merwe. "So we have a lot of young, new faces and talent, in addition to our seasoned veterans. They've all been working so hard and are wonderful singers and dancers."

THIS SHOW features a slew of new numbers and a couple perennial favorites, such as "Toy Soldiers." Van der Merwe's favorite is "Disappearing Santa," which is among the new ones. "We have 20 musical numbers total," she said. "I try to find different versions of the old favorites everyone enjoys, as well as new songs that'll further the storyline."

She said "Finding Santa" has "all the excitement and anticipation of Christmas that we all have, whether we're old or young. It'll transport people from their every-

day life and the stresses of the holiday season. And for two hours, they can live in this fantasy world. The show is upbeat and fun, and the audience will leave the theater singing a song."

Fairfax High sophomore Charley Herwood, 15, portrays Gladys, the hotel's head maid. "She's hardworking and dedicated to her job, but she's also tired and just wants to go home and see her child," said Herwood. "She's friendly and loves Christmastime at the hotel. I like playing her because we do a dance including the maids, so I get to both act and dance my role." An Encore dancer since age 5, she said, "I like expressing myself through dance. And we get to both sing and act at the same time."

Her favorite number is "Elf Jet," showing the elves readying to leave the North Pole for New York. "We're singing, dancing and talking about New York and the parade and how excited we are about it," said Herwood. "As for the show, the audience will like all the costumes and the idea of wanting to find and see Santa. And they'll love the toy soldiers, jack-in-the-box and dolls dances."

Playing a Broadway Rockette named Paige is Faith Chun, a sophomore at Trinity Christian School in Fairfax. "Paige is part of the team looking for Santa, and she and her fellow Rockettes come to the hotel to entertain the kids while Santa's missing," said Chun. "She brings a lot of positive energy and likes being in the spotlight."

She enjoys her role because "Paige is an exciting person who's fun to play." And she particularly likes the song, "Elf Lounge," showing the elves searching in the ho-

tel for Santa with flashlights. "I like the jazz style of the dance," she said. "The audience will also enjoy the Rockette dance and the story's happy ending."

Becca Perron, 16, plays Twinkle, one of the main elves trying to find Santa. "My favorite dance is our brand-new, Rockettes-style number, 'Swinging with Santa'" she said. "We wear sparkly, red-and-silver dresses with sequins. And because I'm 5-foot-4, I'm not tall enough to be a Rockette in real life, so this is my opportunity to be part of that world."

Perron said the audience will be surprised at "the level of professionalism coming from such young people, ages 11-18. Our show is original and has all the shine and showstopping numbers audiences have come to love."

Maya Tischler, 17, loves "the freedom to tell a story through movement and the way dancing makes me feel." She plays Sparkle, who's bubbly, outgoing, high-energy and excited by little things. "She's come from the North Pole to New York with Santa for the parade, but now she's helping look for him," said Tischler. "It's a fun role, and I'm outgoing, too, so I can relate to her,"

SHE ESPECIALLY LIKES the "Happy Holidays" number because "it shows our precision kicks and turns, plus stylistic elements, because we're portraying either maids or bellhops during that dance. It's an exciting show to watch, and we have more vocals this year, as well as strong dance numbers. The storyline is fun and, because we have lots of kids onstage, children in the audience will relate to them."

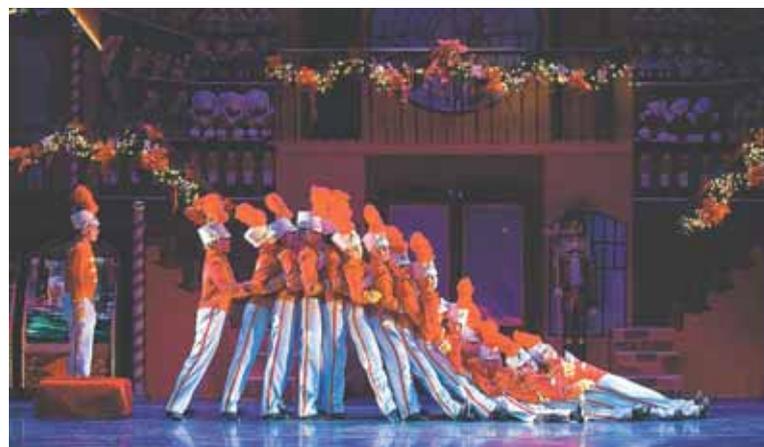


PHOTO COURTESY OF LINDA HELMS PHOTOGRAPHY

The toy soldiers dance number is one of the show's highlights.

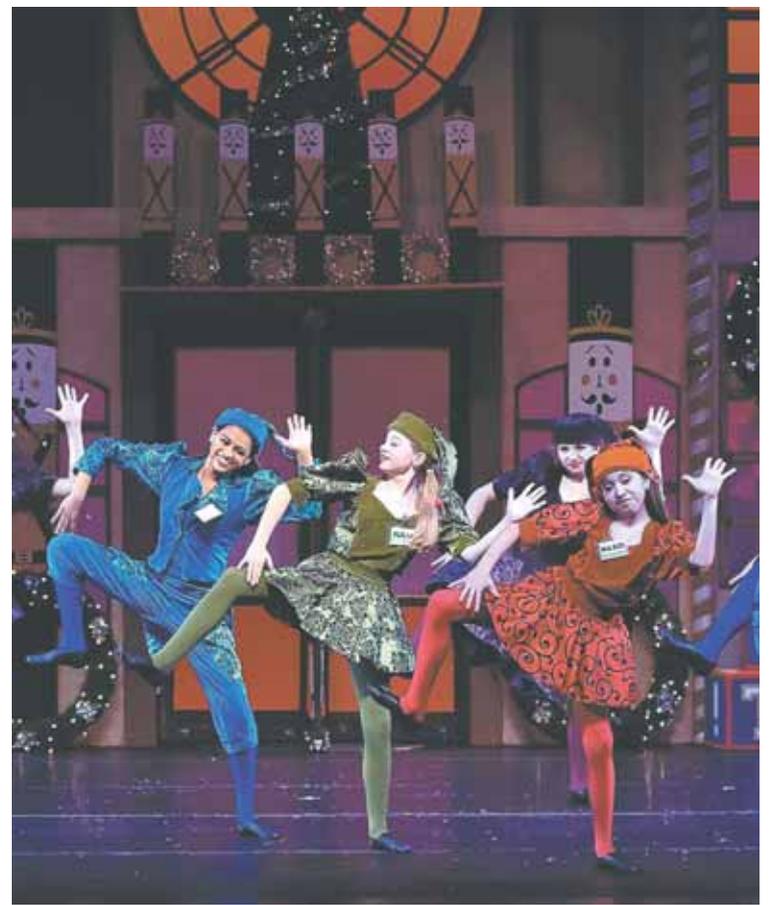


PHOTO COURTESY OF LINDA HELMS PHOTOGRAPHY

From left, Anjali Nair, Kelly Walsh, Ryleigh Hoag and Lola Farkas play elves in Encore's Christmas show.

Portraying Joe, a mall Santa full of Christmas spirit, is Vilas Iyer, 15. "He's called to the Grand Hotel to help out with the kids waiting for Santa," said Iyer. "He loves winter and Christmas, so he's bummed

out when Santa goes missing." Overall, he said, "The audience will enjoy everything about this show – "the sets, storyline, choreography, actors and songs. It helps you get into the Christmas spirit."

The Children's & Teens' 20 CONNECTION 19

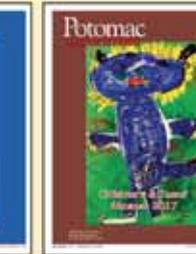
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HOLIDAY FUN

Submit entertainment announcements at www.connectionnewspapers.com/Calendar/. The deadline is noon on Friday. Photos/artwork encouraged.

ONGOING

Burke Farmers Market. Through Dec. 21, 8 a.m.-noon at the VRE parking lot, 5671 Roberts Parkway, Burke. Call 703-642-0128 or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/farmersmarkets/burke for more.

Give the Gift of Original Art. Now thru Jan. 5. At Torpedo Factory Artists at Mosaic, 2905 District Ave., #105, Fairfax. Open Wednesday thru Sunday 11 - 7 p.m. Reception celebrating small businesses, Nov. 30, 5 to 8 p.m. You can find extraordinary fine art that makes great gifts this holiday season — the work of highly-acclaimed Torpedo Factory Artists — at their satellite space in Merrifield. Beautiful paintings, fine-art photographs, one-of-a-kind jewelry, scarves, ceramics and much more

PJ Party + Santa's Arrival. At Springfield Town Center, Springfield. Welcome Santa with a Pajama Party. Get in the holiday spirit with caroling, hot coco and watch as Santa arrives in style with Fairfax police and fire. Santa's visiting hours will be as follows: Now through Dec. 13; Monday - Saturday: 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Sunday: 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.; Dec. 14 thru Dec. 23; Monday - Saturday: 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Sunday: 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.; and Christmas Eve: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

NOW THRU DEC. 20

Fairfax City Elf Hunt. 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. Takes place Fairfax City-wide, start point: Old Town Hall, 3999 University Drive, Fairfax. Locate 10 elves in Fairfax City businesses, get a stamp from each business confirming that you found the elf; share the Fairfax City Elf Hunt card with us at economicdevelopment@fairfaxva.gov. Once you have submitted your Fairfax City Elf Hunt card, you will receive a Fairfax City car magnet and have your name entered into a drawing for a \$250 cash prize. Completed cards must be



The Cathedral Brass Concert

The Cathedral Brass will put on a concert on Saturday, Dec. 7 at Living Savior Lutheran Church in Fairfax Station.

SATURDAY/DEC. 7

Cathedral Brass Concert. 6-7 p.m. At Living Savior Lutheran Church, 5500 Ox Road, Fairfax Station. Join in a family friendly, free Christmas concert featuring The Cathedral Brass. All are welcome. Visit the website: www.livingsaviorlutheran.org

received by Dec. 16 to be eligible. Free to participate; patrons are encouraged to purchase items when they visit businesses. Visit the website: <https://fairfaxcityconnected.com/2019/10/08/elfhunt/#prettyPhoto>

DEC. 6-7

Norwegian Christmas Festival. Friday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Saturday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. At Christ Lutheran Church, 3810 Meredith Drive, Fairfax. Free Admission. Live music, dancing, fjord horses on Saturday. Food and craft

demonstrations. Imported foods (nokkelost), fresh lefse and krumkake made onsite, Nordic Cafe, huge gift selection including books, linens, authentic Scandinavian sweaters. Free. Visit the website: www.norwaydc.org.

SATURDAY/DEC. 7

Christmastide at Gunston Hall. 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. At George Mason's Gunston Hall, 10709 Gunston Road, Lorton. Celebrate a holiday tradition at Gunston Hall! Daytime activities include children's crafts, a visit from Santa, games, and even an indoor snowball fight. The

evening hours provide a romantic holiday experience by candlelight as guests are invited to sample period food in the kitchen, explore the grounds, enjoy 18th century music, and chat with characters from the past. Cost: \$15 adults, \$10 children (ages 6 - 18), and members receive a 50% discount. gunstonhall.org/event/christmastide-at-gunston-hall/

Christmas Party. 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. At Twins Ace Hardware, 10310-B Main Street, Fairfax. Fun-filled activities include: Live grill demo from celebrity Ace grilling chef Jason K Morse of 5280 Culinary; BBQ Provisions & Team Traeger Grills; free goodie bags to the first 150 people at 11 a.m.; delicious apps and deserts; special appearance from children's author Lindsay Barry; photos with Santa; letters to Santa activity; decorating ideas; giveaways, demos and more. Visit the website: www.twinsacehardware.com.

DEC. 7-8

"The Nutcracker." 12 p.m. and 5 p.m. At Richard J. Ernst Community Cultural Center, 8333 Little River Turnpike, Annandale. Metropolitan School of the Arts' Nutcracker brings to life the gift of imagination with Clara and her Nutcracker in a magical journey from her Victorian home through the Land of Snow and into the Land of Sweets, with dazzling dancing, a larger-than-life Christmas tree, more than 100 dancers, and Tchaikovsky's glorious score. Tickets \$26 to \$28. www.metropolitanarts.org to purchase tickets.

Winter Wonderland. 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. At Burke Lake Park, 7315 Ox Road, Fairfax Station. At Winter Wonderland, you can hop a train ride on the Holiday Express, take unlimited spins on the Carolers Carousel, play Gingerbread Man Golf or cook s'mores by the fire. Visit with Santa and enjoy hot chocolate or cider and candy canes. Five-hour passes are \$15 in advance and \$20 on the event day. The park will also be accepting new toys or canned food items for donation. In the evenings, enjoy a magical train ride through a forest decorated with holiday-themed lights and scenes. Celebration Station runs the same weekends as Winter Wonderland, but will take place on Friday and Saturday evenings from 6 to 9 p.m. Celebration Station ticket are \$10 each; trains depart every 20 minutes. Visit the website: www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/burke-lake.

SEE CALENDAR, PAGE 10

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HOLIDAY FUN



PHOTOS COURTESY OF FAIRFAX BALLET COMPANY

Oakton High School's Nicole Shortle and GMU's Carlos Martinez dance "The Nutcracker."

Fairfax Ballet Company Presents 'The Nutcracker'

BY DENISE LEW
THE CONNECTION

Upcoming Performances

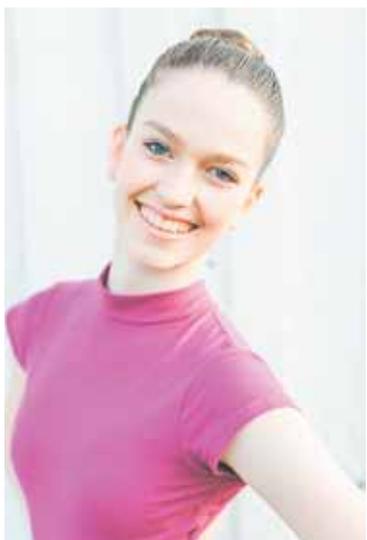
The Fairfax Ballet Company presented "The Nutcracker" on opening night, on Saturday, Nov. 30 at W.T. Woodson High School in Fairfax.

"The Nutcracker" was truly a spectacle for the community to see. It was accompanied with beautiful wintry sets, new colorful snow costumes and a multitude of dancers. The production took the audience through the experiences of Clara and her beloved Nutcracker — including a suspenseful battle with mice, magical wintry scenes, and exotic international dances.

Two main dancers from the local community are featured in the family holiday classic. Nicole Shortle, a sophomore at Oakton High School, danced as Clara, while George Mason University's Carlos Martinez, a sophomore in the dance program, performed as

the Nutcracker Prince. Professional guest artists included Richmond Ballet's Matt Szentes as Cavalier, Cody Beaton as the Sugar Plum Fairy, and Philip Smith-Cobbs as the Mouse King, Mechanical Doll, and Arabian Coffee.

Since 1991, the FBC has been performing this production for the surrounding community. "We are continually looking for opportunities to give back and remind the dancers that dance can have a larger impact... and we are always looking for special experiences for our dancers and community members to engage in together," said Andrea Cook, artistic director at FBC.



Nicole Shortle, a sophomore at Oakton High School.



Carlos Martinez, a sophomore at GMU.

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Announcements

CALENDAR

FROM PAGE 8

"The Nutcracker." Saturday at 8 p.m.; Sunday at 3 p.m. At Centreville High School, 6001 Union Mill Road, Clifton. Mia Saunders School of Ballet presents "The Nutcracker." The 2019 production of "The Nutcracker" marks the first for new MSB Artistic Director Hannah Woodruff, an alumna of MSB and 2017 graduate of University of Virginia. Tickets are \$12, (cash or checks payable to CVHS Drama Boosters only) and are available at the door. miasaundersballet.com/

SUNDAY/DEC. 8

"Little Drummer Dude." 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. At Jubilee Christian Center, 4650 Shirley Gate Road, Fairfax. A children's musical, "Little Drummer Dude" takes place during the time Jesus was born and we see the story through the eyes of the wise men, a traveling band and a little drummer dude. Free. Visit the website: jccag.org.

TUES-WEDNESDAY, DEC. 10-11

Moscow Ballet's "The Nutcracker." 7 p.m. At GMU's Concert Hall, 4373 Mason Pond Drive, Fairfax. The Moscow Ballet "Dance with Us" cast will perform



U.S. Army Chorus Concert

The U.S. Army Chorus puts on a concert on Saturday, Dec. 14 at Westwood Baptist Church in Springfield.

SATURDAY/DEC. 14

U.S. Army Chorus Concert. 3-5 p.m. At Westwood Baptist Church, 8200 Old Keene Mill Road, Springfield. The U.S. Army Chorus will perform a free community concert. Don't miss your chance to hear The U.S. Army Chorus when they return to Westwood Baptist Church for an afternoon of holiday nostalgia that is sure to enhance your patriotism and Advent preparations. Contact usarmyband.com or the church at 703-451-5120.

their ancillary roles as Party Children, Snowflakes, Mice, Snow Maidens and Variation Dancers. The aspiring ballerinas and danseurs, ages 7 to 17, perform in ancillary roles developed for their age and skill

level by dancer, choreographer, and Julliard graduate Mary Giannone Talmi, also co-producer of Moscow Ballet's North American tours. Tickets are \$34 to \$180.

Fairfax Man Sentenced for 2018 Murder

FROM PAGE 5

tered my family to pieces. Things were already difficult for my mom because we'd just lost my dad to cancer. I called her on Valentine's Day to tell her I loved her, and she said Matthew didn't come home and she couldn't reach him."

Then, said Johnny, "I saw a news article about a body found in Centreville, with a picture of a hoodie that looked just like his. The next day, my family said, 'Come home.' And when I did, the first thing I heard was my mother crying in agony. My little brother was dead, and his future had been snatched away from him."

"I lost laughter, birthdays, songs and the pleasure of everyday life because Matthew's life was cruelly and carelessly ripped away," he continued. "This was supposed to be a year of celebration for him – senior pictures, prom and graduation. Today – 630 days from his murder – this pain is still with me and will never leave."

Margarita Ortega said, "Whenever I see my mother cry because she misses Matthew, I tell her he's skateboarding in heaven, because that was his passion. He was on the A-B honor roll at Centreville High and wanted to become an attorney and help people. But he'll never get to accomplish his dreams, get married or have children."

Calling Matthew "the embodiment of what's right in this world," she said, "I always thought we'd die of old age together; I never thought he'd be taken so soon. When he was murdered, a piece of my heart was taken with him. Today and for the rest of my life, I'm mourning the loss of my baby brother. Nothing can bring him back – all we want is justice for him."

THE STATE SENTENCING GUIDELINES for Espinosa Cruz ranged from 13-21 years, with a midpoint of 17, and Bilton asked that he receive a "significant period of prison time. Matthew was a kind boy, humble, respectful, loyal – a good student with a bright future. But on Feb. 13, 2018, his light was extinguished by this defendant."

She noted that, in a document Espinosa Cruz wrote

about himself for the court, he described his "lack of respect" for others. "He pulled a toy gun on a child in elementary school as a prank; and when it didn't work, he ordered others to beat him up," said Bilton. "He later robbed people of money and weed; and at age 18, he committed murder. He may not have planned to shoot him, but he pulled out a gun and ended Matthew's life – a life full of promise, joy and hope."

Noting Espinosa Cruz's abusive childhood, defense attorney Mike Chick said it "doesn't excuse what he did," but if he grew up in a loving, supportive home, he might not have committed this "accidental homicide." He said Espinosa Cruz was born into a world so violent that his mother left him at age 6 to be raised by his "drunken, abusive father. He became addicted to marijuana as a child as the only way of escaping his reality."

Chick also said his client was diagnosed with complex PTSD, but never received treatment. And because of his conviction and lack of U.S. citizenship, he's now subject to deportation. Chick then asked for a 10-year sentence.

But Judge Thomas Mann had the last word. "This defendant doesn't value life, peace and dignity," he said. "If it wasn't Matthew Ortega, it would have been another person you killed. This defendant is a taker; he doesn't think of others, but only of his own needs."

"He took out a loaded gun, cocked it and pointed it at Matthew's head. I believe he didn't mean to pull the trigger – and yet, he still wanted to rob a dying person. This defendant said he had a gun since age 15 and was involved in a couple shootouts at age 14. So at 18, he was legally an adult, but immature, and basked in his reputation as a tough guy. Even in jail – knowing this day was coming – he got disciplinary charges."

Meanwhile, said Mann, "There's a family whose hearts are broken. The court hopes Matthew's family [eventually] finds some peace." He then sentenced Espinosa Cruz to 40 years in prison, suspending 23, leaving 17 years to serve. Mann also placed him on 20 years' active probation. Finally, he told Espinosa Cruz, "Today has been about your sentencing, but I want everybody to remember this name: Matthew Ortega."

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Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Meetings in 2019

12000 Government Center Parkway
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Dec. 10 Committee Meetings
9:30 a.m. - Health, Housing and Human Services Committee
11 a.m. - Development Process Committee
1:30 p.m. - Transportation Committee
3 p.m. - General Assembly Annual Reception and Work Session

THURSDAY/DEC. 5

Transportation Meeting. 7-9 p.m. At Garfield Elementary School, 7101 Old Keene Mill Road, Springfield. Fairfax County Department of Transportation (FCDOT) will hold a community input meeting to encourage public input on alternatives developed to provide enhanced Fairfax Connector bus service (Routes 310, 321, 322) in the Franconia and Springfield areas. The service alternatives were developed based on the first round of public input received through community engagement, stakeholder engagement and technical analysis. After this round of public engagement, FCDOT staff will develop a preferred service plan based on public input received and further technical analysis to provide better access to destinations, improved travel times, increased schedule reliability and more dependable service. The community will have an opportunity to review and comment on the preferred service plan in Spring 2020. Residents are encouraged to provide input on the service alternatives by filling out an online survey. (Visit <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/transportation/franconia-springfield-optimization>) The survey will be open from now thru Dec. 17, 2019. Mail comments to Fairfax County Department of Transportation, 4050 Legato Road, Suite 400, Fairfax, VA 22033.

SUNDAY/DEC. 8

Low Cost Rabies Vaccine Clinic. Noon-2 p.m. at West Springfield Governmental Center, 6140 Rolling Road, Springfield. Cost is \$15 per pet, cash and check only. Dogs, cats, and ferrets may be vaccinated at the clinic. Dogs must be on leashes; cats and ferrets must be in carriers. All pets will receive a 1-year rabies vaccination. To obtain a 3-year vaccine, bring pet's rabies certificate (not tag) showing the current rabies vaccination expiration date. 2019 county dog licenses will be sold for an additional \$10 per license. Visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/animalshelter/communityassistance/rabiesclinics for more.

SATURDAY/DEC. 14

Coffee with Del. Bulova. 9-11 a.m. At Main Street Bagel, 10268 Main Street, City of Fairfax. Del. David Bulova (D-Fairfax) will continue a tradition started in 2006 by holding informal office hours to take place from 9 to 11 a.m.. Constituents are invited to talk about issues of interest and to ask questions about legislation affecting our community. The format is casual and no appointment is needed. Bulova is also happy to arrange individual appointments on specific issues or concerns. He represents Virginia's 37th House District, which includes the City of Fairfax and portions of Fairfax County. Visit www.davidbulova.com.

PN Support Group. 2-4 p.m. At Mason District Government Center, 6507 Columbia Pike, Annandale. PN Support Group monthly meeting. Share information, experience, hope and news about Peripheral Neuropathy among fellow sufferers. Guest speaker and group discussions. Visit the website: www.dcpnsupport.org.

TUESDAY/DEC. 17

Lions Dinner Meeting. 6:30-8:30 p.m. at American Legion Post 177, 3939 Oak St., Fairfax. Lions Club meets the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of each month. Guests are welcome to learn about the mission of the Lions Clubs "We Serve," meet club members and learn to help serve the community. Free to visit time guests. Email fairfaxlions@cox.net or visit www.fairfaxlions.org for more.

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False Sense of Security



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

I never want to look a gift-oncologist in the mouth or take a "stable"-type CT scan with a grain of salt, however; self-preservation is a funny instinct. It can change from day to day (heck, even hour to hour) and dominate your pre-occupation or intrude your thinking not at all. You can rationalize away the good, bad or indifferent (results) or irrationalize away the less-than-expected or the more-than-anticipated. Results from lab work and/or diagnostic scans are the axis on which your entire life revolves. You either roll with the punches or you get knocked down by them. For a cancer patient, the punches often keep coming.

The punches thrown in my direction occur bi-weekly when I have my pre-immunotherapy lab work for my every-other Friday 30-minute opdivo infusion. (Although the actual lab work and even the infusion is more of a jab.) The left hook/right cross combination occurs quarterly. That's when I slide through the computerized tomography scan and wait for results (as I had been for most of the last week). Since I have generally been asymptomatic - other than for miscellaneous side effects from the various medicines with which I've been infused, the tale of the tape, to continue the boxing references, happens when my oncologist emails the radiologist's report to me with a brief sentence summary: "a little worse" (this time), "stable," or something less discouraging that needs to be discussed at our next face-to-face appointment which generally is scheduled a week or so after the previous week's scan.

Regardless of what these mostly cryptic emails have said, until I hear exactly what my oncologist says, I am neither too high or too low. Granted, hearing "stable" is extremely encouraging whereas "a little worse, not so much. Nevertheless, the fight goes on. Cancer treatment is a series of actions and reactions (punches and counter punches, you might even say) so depending on how one's body reacts, determines what action is recommended. I am living proof, literally. Over my nearly 11 years of treatment, I have been infused with upwards of a dozen different medicines. Once one treatment loses its luster, we change to another hoping it will be more effective, and so on. It's science, not arithmetic. As such, any guarantees left the building with Elvis.

Being a cancer patient is not for everybody. One has to make the most of the least. It's easy to let the hard facts make you soft. Unless you find a way to be up, the cancer will take you down. Somehow, even when it's doing the worst to you, you have to be at your best. Being positive generates positivity in return. When I look at people, I try to smile so that they'll smile back (I'm being selfish, really). Do you remember George Costanza describing the look of disappointment on his mother's face when he told her he wanted to play the accordion? Like that, only the complete opposite.

When I interact with people, I don't want them to feel "poor, poor, pitiful me" to quote Warren Zevon from his song first sung in 1976. And I don't want them to see cancer either. I want them to see everything about me. I may be diagnosed with a terminal form of cancer: stage IV, non-small cell lung cancer, but I don't want to be defined by it. Just because I'm living with cancer doesn't mean it's who I am. It's what I have, that's all.

And what reminds most me that I have cancer and what challenges my reactions to it more than anything, is when I have these quarterly CT scans (and the annual MRI, too). As much as I try to fend off the possible effect on my mortality (my true sense of insecurity), I'd be lying if I said I was always successful. In truth, I'm always worried about it. How could I not be? I guess I'm not quite ready to throw in the towel. I suppose that means, regardless of what my oncologist says at our next meeting, I'm still ready to live and fight another day.

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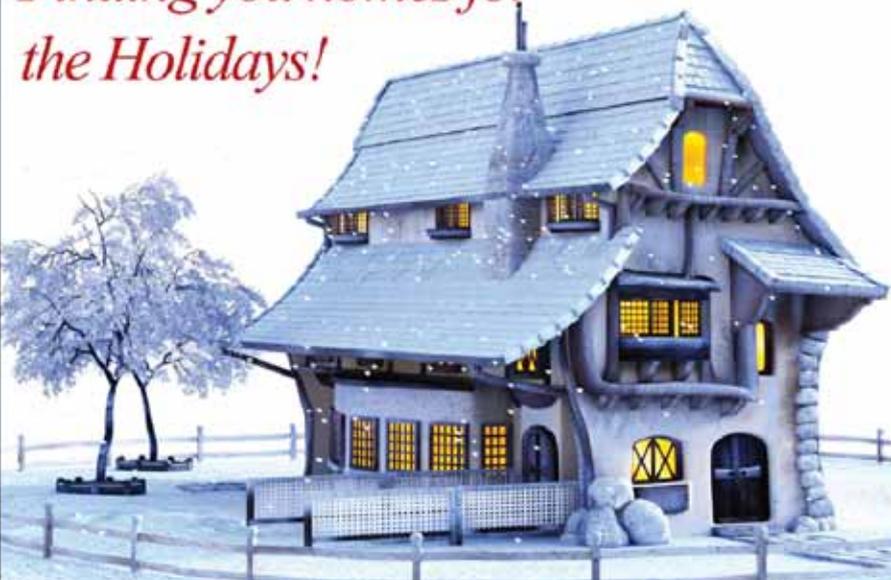


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