Vienna’s Church Street At Its Christmas Best

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Scouts Evict Invaders in Oakton

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Santa waved to the crowd as he rode in on a 1940s VVFD firetruck during the Vienna’s annual Church Street Stroll Monday evening, Dec. 2, 2019.
Scouts Evict Invaders in Oakton

Every Saturday and Sunday in October, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, college students, and neighborhood homeowners pulled invasive plants, primarily pachysandra, from a section of the Gerry Connolly Cross County Trail off Miller Heights Road in Oakton. I am a Scout in BSA Troop 987 and led the project with support from Hornaday advisor Sara Holtz and sponsor Fairfax County Park Authority’s Invasive Management Area (IMA) program. Invasive plants are non-native, aggressive plants that cause ecological or economic harm and degrade our natural ecosystem.

Ninety-nine volunteers worked 210 hours to remove 85 bags of invasive plants from the park land. The goal was to replace the pachysandra with native plants and trees. Volunteers planted white wood aster, hairy bush clover, American alumroot, trailing bush clover, dwarf cinquefoil, pussytoes, arrowleaf violet, common wood rush, Pennsylvania sedge, bluestem, goldenrod, arrowwood viburnum, witch hazel, hazelnut trees, ironwood trees, and redbud trees. I created this plan for this project in order to earn the BSA Hornaday Badge. This award was created by Dr. William T. Hornaday who was a conservationist and is a prestigious award that requires a Scout to lead a conservation project, complete several merit badges, and meet rank requirements. By successfully completing this project I am one step closer to earning the Boy Scout Hornaday Badge.

Homeowners, I encourage you to remove any invasive plants in your yard and replace with native plants (see list above).

—Eli Edwards

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Vienna’s Church Street at Its Christmas Best

Holiday Stroll celebrates community spirit.

By Lisa Fay
The Connection

Vienna’s Church Street Holiday Stroll is so full of charm, it is an event that would make any Christmas Hallmark movie jealous. The on and off cold drizzle did not keep residents from enjoying the 23rd annual holiday event.

Church Street merchants put on their Christmas best as Mayor Laurie DiRocco started the Stroll by giving out the awards for best decorated storefront. This year’s theme was “Home for the Holidays.” Merle Norman Cosmetic Studio took home the gold, Vienna Rexall Drug Center and JV Tile Ltd. both came in second, and Social Burger came in third.

Afterwards, a loud siren came streaming down Church Street as Santa rode in on the Vienna Volunteer Fire Department’s 1940s restored fire engine. Screams of “Santa!” filled the air as kids cheered when Santa took his place on the front porch of the Free-man Store and Museum after lighting the holiday tree with the Mayor.

The Old Chapel of Vienna Presbyterian Church was filled with classic Christmas tunes as residents were allowed to ring the church bells, providing the town with a “Silver Bells” vibe. Children happily roasted marshmallows on the open fire pits lining Church Street and Caffe Amouri cups were aplenty.

A petting zoo, sponsored by My Gym Vienna!, outside of the Caboose entertained people as they walked by to check out historic structures such as the Little Library, Caboose, and Train Station that were decorated and open to visitors.

The Church Street Holiday Stroll would not be possible without the Town of Vienna team, Historic Vienna Inc, and the entirety of Church Street and its merchants coming together to celebrate this traditional event and one another. Another successful Vienna event is marked in the books as the year comes to a close and a new decade is on the horizon. Here’s to 2020, Vienna!

—More photos from HOLIDAY STROLL, Page 9
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 have written to me with four-legged groups 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 a bill that would have allowed 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 firearms on a “do not sell” list for firearms so they cannot be sold if a gun they have a moment of weakness. Third, Virginia’s Department of Inland Fisheries is still allowing permissive license to 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 Kruize (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, track 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 public defenders to 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 constituent communities. 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@scottwurovell.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. I will give you a minute of talk among the new legislators about many overdue actions including addressing gaping income inequality, expanding health care, expansion of pre-school education, gerrymandering and voting rights—in addition to actually ratifying the ERA! Some specific measures are being discussed, but we are starting to hear voices of some long-time constituents 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. Cooperations and their chambers of commerce still hold sway with too many legislators including a junior local state senator and other long 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 remove this anachronism. I will try, however, 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 Virginia, 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 buy-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 tax increases that are required to implement them! One prominent local legislator suggests tax increases are unlikely to pass 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 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 avert 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.
People

Medal of Merit for Life-saving Action

Calvin Mihalak, a member of Scouts BSA Troop 1983 at Vale United Methodist Church in Oakton, was awarded the Medal of Merit by the Boy Scouts of America for extraordinary skill in saving the life of a drowning individual on Aug. 8, 2019. When Calvin saw his father remove an unresponsive young boy from the pool, he quickly jumped to action. Using skills that he had recently learned as part of the Lifesaving merit badge at summer camp, Calvin began administering CPR, and after a number of CPR cycles, the young boy began taking limited breaths. When the ambulance arrived, the EMTs took over, and by the time the young boy was in the ambulance for transport to the hospital he was breathing regularly. As a result of Calvin’s quick action, extraordinary skill, and calm demeanor he saved the life of an individual who has since fully recovered.

Photo contributed by Calvin Mihalak

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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 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 bedtime 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.”
Local businesses are getting a boost this holiday shopping season with the introduction of Natalie Monkou, the new economic development manager who is kicking off the season with a listening tour. Meeting up face to face will give her a glimpse of what’s out there for Vienna businesses. “I plan to get feedback from as many community stakeholder groups as possible,” she said.

She knows there is change occurring in and around Vienna, and economically, the introduction of Amazon to Arlington, the downfall of the brick and mortar stores nationwide, and the huge widening project on I-66 impact the commercial scene in Vienna in one way or another. Monkou has experience working in Arlington when March of Dimes and Nestle arrived to boost that economic picture, and before that, she was in Prince George’s County as the special assistant to the deputy chief of economic development.

Shopping on the internet has impacted the local retail establishments around Fairfax County, but shopping in Vienna on Church Street and Main Street has a colorful side that the web shopping lacks. “A lot of people are looking for experiences when they shop,” she said. “It’s one of the things I’m going to talk about,” on the listening tour, she said.

Having a supporter of the town’s strategic plan will help, said Town Manager Mercury Payton, who noted the impact of strong local businesses and a vibrant downtown area. “Having an economic development manager who is focused on supporting existing businesses and partnering with potential businesses will result in a healthier, even more vibrant Vienna,” he said. He also sees Monkou’s role as a relationship-builder, helping to connect property owners with perspective businesses and business managers with assistive resources as well as collaborating with Fairfax County’s Economic Development Authority.

Monkou has an undergraduate degree in English and a master’s degree in public administration, both from the University of Maryland. She’s a resident of Annandale, and enjoys traveling, spicy foods, and brunch.

When the position search was launched by the town, Monkou stood out amongst a very competitive pool, says Payton. He wanted a candidate who would not be intimidated by the pressures of the Northern Virginia region and who could be effective almost immediately. He was impressed by Monkou’s economic development experience in Prince George’s County and Arlington, where she was part of a team that, he says, had “headline-grabbing economic development wins.”

Although the situations may have been a little different in Arlington and Prince George’s County, the skills she used elsewhere “can be applied here,” as well, she said.
ON GOING
White House Ornaments. The 2019 White House Ornaments are available from the Assistance League of Northern Virginia. White House Ornaments are wonderful for gift giving. This year’s White House Ornament is a “whimsybird” honoring Dwight D. Eisenhower, 34th president of the United States. To purchase, contact Cindy Burgess at Burgessg4@verizon.net. Cost per ornament is $22. Proceeds support ALNV’s local children’s programs. Visit the website: www.alnv.org.
Great Falls Farmers Market. Year-round, Saturdays, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. at Unity of Fairfax Church, 2854 Hunter Mill Road, Oakton. Year-round weekly farmers market in Oakton. Local produce, meats, eggs, dairy, baked goods, and more. Admission is free. Visit community-foodworks.org.

CHRISTMAS AND HOLIDAYS
Now thru Dec. 24
Holiday Art Market, Noon to 6 p.m. At 101 Church Street, NW, Vienna. The Vienna Arts Society presents hundreds of original artworks as well as hand-crafted gift items; to include jewelry, silk scarves, pottery, fused glass and more. Free. Market hours are Thursdays and Sundays from noon to 6 p.m. In addition, doors will be open during the annual Vienna Christmas Street Stroll, 5-9 p.m., Monday, Dec. 2, when the street fills with hundreds celebrating Santa’s arrival in town. Visit the website: www.ViennaArtsSociety.org.

Now thru Dec. 24
ACS Gift Wrapping, 11 a.m.-8 p.m. At Tyson Corners Center, 1061 Chain Bridge Road, McLean. Kids can explore the wonder of Santa in the digital age. This holiday, check out the interactive Elf Explore the wonder of Santa in the digital age. This holiday, check out the interactive Elf

Now thru Dec. 24
HGTV’s Santa HQ. At Tyson Corner Center, 1941 Chain Bridge Road, McLean. Visit the website: www.ViennaArtsSociety.org.

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Dec. 5 and 6
Tiny Tots Concerts. Dec. 5 at 10 a.m. and 7 p.m. (“Sunny Friendly?”) and Dec. 6 at 10 a.m. At James Madison High School, 2500 James Madison Drive, Vienna. The James Madison High School Band Program presents an exciting concert featuring a wide spectrum of seasonal music. Costumed performers include old friends and some very special surprise guests. Sing, clap and dance along with the band as you are introduced to the wonderful world of music and symphonic instruments. Advance purchase is recommended to ensure admission. Tickets are $9 per person and may be purchased online at https://www.jmhsband.org. Admission is free for babies in arms (under age 1). Walk-in tickets may be purchased in the lobby by check, cash or credit card 30 minutes prior to the show for $10 per person if the concert has not sold out. Visit the website: www.jmhsband.org.

Dec. 7
Breakfast with Santa. 8-11 a.m. At Tyson Corner Center, Food Court on 3, McLean. Take part in holiday festivities provided by Tyson Corner Center, entertainment by Those Funny Little People (featured on America’s Got Talent), a balloon artist, holiday crafts, and a visit by Santa. Breakfast includes breakfast buffet, juice, and coffee. No reservations required. Visit the website: www.ViennaArtsSociety.org.

Dec. 7
Night in Bethlehem. 5-7 p.m. At Andrew Chapel United Methodist Church, 1310 Trap Road, Vienna. Wonders of Advent and Christmastime favorites. Also the Christmas Section of Handel’s Messiah with the Vienna Master Chorale. Also features Artists: Lewisville’s vocal and bell choirs, featuring orchestra. Visit: www.lewiscville.org/concerts/ or call the church office during business hours 703-536-7777.

Dec. 7
Sensory Santa. 8-10 a.m. At Tyson Corner Center, Level 1, Fashion Court, McLean. Tyson Corner Center is pleased to partner with Cherry Hill photography and Autism Speaks to welcome children with special needs for a low impact, time with Santa. The mall will open its doors early, exclusively for families and give them private time with the Big Man in Red.

Dec. 7
Santa Visits. 12-2 p.m. At Freeman Store and Museum, 101 Leesburg Pike, Vienna. Presented by the Historic Vienna, Inc., The jolly ol’ elf will listen to children’s wishes in the decorated parlor next to the Christmas tree. Free admission; no reservations necessary. Questions? Call 703-938-5187, email historicviennainc@gmail.com, or visit historicviennainc.org.

Christmas Concert. 6 p.m. At Lewisville Presbyterian Church, 1724 Chain Bridge Road, McLean. “Waiting for the Messiah” - a blend of the Christmas Section of Handel’s Messiah with Advent and Christmas time favorites. Also features Artists: Lewisville’s vocal and bell choirs, featuring orchestra. Visit: https://www.lewiscville.org/concerts/ or call the church office during business hours 703-536-7777.

Thursday/Dec. 12
Boat Parade of Lights. Parade begins at 5:30 p.m.; Deckside festivities 2 to 8 p.m. At Waterfront Park, 1 King Street, Alexandria. Parade viewing areas: Founders Park (351 N. Union St.), Alexandria City Marina (2 Cameron St.), Waterfront Park (1 King St. and 1A Prince Street), Point Lumley Park (1 Duke St.), Shipyard/ Hardwarke Park (1 Wilkes St.), Windmill Hill Park (501 S. Union St.) and Ford’s Landing Park (930 Alfred St.). Free: 5 for food/drink and some activities. Visit: AlexandriaVA.com/bouparade Schedule in Old Town (2 to 8 p.m.)

Friday/Dec. 6-7
The Scottish Christmas Walk Weekend. At various Old Town Alexandria locations. The Carnegie Center presents the 49th Annual Scottish Christmas Walk and Parade. The parade is Dec. 7 at 11 a.m. and begins at St. Asaph and Wolfe Streets and concludes at Market Square with a masked band concert. Admission: Free for parade and Festival and Greens Sales; $180-$290 for Taste of Scotland; $40 for Holiday Home Tours. In 1749, the City of Alexandria was officially established by three Scottish merchants and named after its original founder, John Alexander, also of Scottish descent. Through your support of the events of The Scottish Christmas Walk Weekend, you provide vital support to Campagna Center programs that serve more than 2,000 children, teens, and adults throughout the year. Visit the website: https://www.campagnacenters.com/

Thursday/Dec. 12
Calendar

Friday/Dec. 6-7
Kings, Shepherds, and a camel join the nativity scene at Andrew Chapel United Methodist Church’s annual Christmas event, “A Night in Bethlehem.”

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Holiday Stroll on Church Street

Santa waved to the crowd as he rode in on a 1940s VVFD firetruck.

Lollipop the sheep was wearing a festive headband.

Santa welcomed all ages on the front porch of the Freeman Store and Museum.

Families made funny faces to get their children's attention as they sat on Santa's lap.

Photos by Lisa Fay/ The Connection

Here’s What’s Happening at MCC!

It’s Back & Better Than Ever!

- The McLean Holiday Crafts Show
  - Friday, Dec. 6, 11 a.m.-7 p.m.
  - Saturday, Dec. 7, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.
  - Sunday, Dec. 8, 11 a.m.-4 p.m.
  - Admission: $7; good for all three days of the show

MCC Governing Board

- MCC Governing Board Meeting
  - Wednesday, Dec. 11, 7:30 p.m.
  - Open to the public

McLean Traveler

- Holiday House Tour, Richmond, Va.
  - Thursday, Dec. 12
  - 7:30 a.m.-7 p.m.
  - $148/$145 MCC district residents

Holiday Family Fun

- Holiday Gingerbread Workshop
  - Thursday, Dec. 12, 6:30-8 p.m.
  - $45/$35 MCC district residents
  - Fee includes payment for one house

The Barter Players Encore Company

- "Frosty"
  - Saturday, Dec. 14
  - 1 p.m. and 4 p.m.
  - $15/$10 MCC district residents

The McLean Community Center

- www.mcleancenter.org
- Home of the Alden Theatre
- www.aldentheatre.org
- 703-790-0123, TTY: 711
- 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean, VA 22101

Photos by Lisa Fay/ The Connection
Local Book Launch for One of the World’s Best Selling Authors

New thriller hits Herndon first at Herndon Middle School.

By Mercia Hobson
The Connection

Fans of one of the world’s best-selling fiction-writers and storytellers, David Baldacci, attended the book launch for the second novel in his Atlee Pine Thriller, “A Minute to Midnight” by Grand Central Publishing. Held at Herndon Middle School on Nov. 19, an estimated crowd of 200 book enthusiasts from across the region and as far as Woodstock, Va. poured into the auditorium. Baldacci hoped to be one of the lucky winners in the giveaway of 100 free signed copies of the new thriller and to hear Baldacci speak. Bards Alley in Vienna, an Indie bookstore owned by Jen Morrow, partnered with Reston Regional Library to produce the book launch. The Friends of the Reston Regional Library supported the event.

Igor Birman of Herndon sat in the auditorium’s tiered theatre seats and waited for the author talk and signing to begin. “I like Baldacci’s books,” he said. “They are always entertaining. The last one, ‘Long Road to Mercy’ (Atlee Pine #1), was set in the Grand Canyon, and now I would like to visit there again.”

For Deb Tangren of Woodstock, Va., Baldacci’s ability to develop his characters drew her to his novels. “You feel like you know them,” she said. It was the opportunity, though, for the author to sign the 21 books she brought to the event that drew Tangren to make the 90-minute drive to Herndon.

Evelyn Valdez of Alexandria also attended the book launch. She described herself as “one of David Baldacci’s biggest fans,” something she said she shared with her 90-year-old grandfather. “He is only Spanish-speaking, so we have to wait a year for the book to be translated for him,” she said.

According to Tracey Key of Reston, she found Baldacci “uniquely relevant in his ability to connect and communicate not only through his books but in personal storytelling during his book signings and interviews,” she said.

Jen Morrow, the owner of Bards Alley, introduced Baldacci. “On the book birthday of ‘A Minute to Midnight,’ you really don’t need a long introduction. A lifelong Virginian... (David) practiced law in Washington, D.C., but he was always a lifelong writer. He published his first novel, ‘Absolute Power,’ in 1996. A featured film adaptation followed with Clint Eastwood as its director and star. In total, David has published 40 novels. Is it 41 now... all national and international bestsellers and several have been adapted for film and television. His novels are published in over 45 languages and in more than 80 countries, with over $130 million worldwide sales. David has also published seven novels for younger readers. Now, in addition to being a prolific writer, David is a devoted philanthropist, and his greatest efforts are dedicated to his family’s Wish You Well Foundation... fostering literacy and educational programs.”

Baldacci provided the audience with a snapshot of the first two chapters of “A Minute to Midnight.” Baldacci said he brought back the main character, FBI Agent Atlee Pine. According to Baldacci, Pine finds herself interviewing a serial killer she thinks might have abducted her twin sister, Mercy, thirty years ago. While driving home following the interview, Pine receives an Amber Alert on her phone, sees the suspect and gives chase. “They have a confrontation, and he comes out on the worse end of it... She saw thirty years of frustration and anger building of not knowing what happened to her sister, and she almost beats this guy to death. And that’s really bad for an FBI agent. They frown on stuff like that. So she’s given an ultimatum. Get your head straight, figure this out. Find out what happened, and if you don’t do that, you have no more future at the Federal Bureau of Investigation,” he said.

Transitioning to a different topic during his remarks, Baldacci said he grew up in segregated Richmond, Va., as a self-described library rat. “I don’t think I’d be a writer today except for the fact I was a huge reader as a kid. I know what libraries meant to me... I was able to see the world through books. I read about people who didn’t look like me, talk like me... dress like me, pray like me. But we all had one common factor among us all, and that was our humanity. That’s what I got out of books growing up as a kid in a world that maybe wasn’t as fair-minded or equal as it should have been...Libraries can change you completely,” he said.

“I find readers to be more open, more tolerant, curious about life and talkative. They want to know things, and they can change their minds. They don’t mind having spirited debates with people because they understand the power of knowledge and information. And I’ve always felt if every community, every street had a library packed with books, and people went there every day and read books, we’d have a far better world than the one I see today,” said Baldacci.
The playground at Tysons Pimmit Park will be PLAYGROUND CLOSING TEMPORARILY.

Students and Volunteers Wanted.

JAN. 7 AND 9

Road to Richmond Legislative Brunch.

FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY BOARD

WEDNESDAY/DEC. 11

Potluck Holiday Party. 12 noon. At Vienna Community Center, 120 Cherry Street, SE, Vienna. Presented by NARFE (National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association) Chapter 116. Includes an installation of officers by Dr. Constance Bails, President, Virginia Federation of NARFE (VFN) – Members and guests welcome. RSVP to 703-281-5123.

WEDNESDAY/DEC. 11

Fairfax County Park Authority Board Meeting. 7:30 p.m. in the Henry Building, 12055 Government Center Parkway, Suite 941, Fairfax. The Park Authority Board’s 12 appointed members establish strategic policy and direction for the Park Authority. Open to the public. For agenda and more information visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/boardagenda.htm or call 703-324-8662.

SUNDAY/JAN. 5

Road to Richmond Legislative Brunch. 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. At Westwood Country Club, 800 Maple Ave., East, Vienna. You’re invited to join the annual Road to Richmond Legislative Brunch where the General Assembly leadership will discuss the upcoming legislative session. This time will be especially significant because Democrats will be in the majority.

JAN. 7 AND 9

Students and Volunteers Wanted. 7 to 8:30 p.m. At St. Mark’s Catholic Church, 9972 Vale Road, Vienna. Students and volunteers are needed for the St. Mark’s Catholic Church English as a Second Language (ESL) Ministry. Seeking Students and Volunteers to participate in the upcoming Winter 2020 Term, Jan. 14- Mar. 12. The goal is to “Welcome Everyone” and provide a program where adults from all ethnic and religious backgrounds can learn English and acclimate better to life in the U.S. No experience is necessary to Volunteer. All classes take place on Tuesday and Thursday evenings at St. Mark Christian Formation Center. Call Monica at 703-980-9380, Bob at 703-242-7449, email stmkaesel@gmail.com, or see the Web site at www.stmarkesl.org.

PLAYGROUND CLOSING TEMPORARILY

The playground at Tysons Pimmit Park will be closing temporarily to allow for the replacement of the existing picnic shelter at the park. Work on the installation of a picnic shelter with new metal roof is scheduled now through Feb. 28, 2020. The $120,000 project is being funded by the 2016 Park Bond. The address is 7758 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church. For details, call 703-234-8862 or at parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov.

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-preservasion is a funny idea. It can change from day to day (or not, even hour to hour) and dominate your pre-occupation or intrude your thinking not at all. You can rationalize away the good news, bad news (results) or irrationalize away the less-than-ex- pected or the more-than-anticipated. Results from one test/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 punch often keeps 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 opillo infusion. (Although the actual lab work and even the infusion is more of a job.) The left hook/right cross combination occurs quarterly. That’s when I have my quarterly CT scan. The radiologist reviews my scan and wait for results (as I had been for most of the last week). Since I have generally been asymptomatic, other than for occasional side effects from the various medicines with which I’ve been infused, the tale of the tape, to continue the boxing references, what we see when my oncologist emails the radiologist’s report to me with a brief sentence summary: “a little worse” (this time, “stable” and less discouraging) needing 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, and 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” this time, “stable” and less discouraging 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.

And what reminds most me that I have cancer is the report or the CT scan. 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-preservasion is a funny idea. It can change from day to day (or not, even hour to hour) and dominate your pre-occupation or intrude your thinking not at all. You can rationalize away the good news, bad news (results) or irrationalize away the less-than-ex- pected or the more-than-anticipated. Results from one test/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 punch often keeps coming.

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NEWS

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, Chair-
man of the Fairfax County Board of Super-
visors, Nov. 21, at the Fairfax County Gov-
ernment Center, to announce the start of the Blanket & Coat Drive for Syrian Refu-
gees 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 Chair-
man Bulova, traveled to Turkey in part to encourage friendship and understanding with local governments. The American Turk-
ish Friendship Association headquartered in Fairfax, formed to address the social and cultural needs of Turkish and American people living in the Washington, D.C. Met-
ropolitan Area arranged the trip. “(It) for-
ever altered the lives of all those who went there that day,” said Gibb. NOVA Relief Cen-
ter 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 try-
ing 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 Jor-
dan.

“I am always impressed with how gener-
ous, caring and compassionate our commu-
nity is. Since we began this drive, Northern Virginia has sent more than 300,000 blank-
ets 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 ex-
actly 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 ma-
jority of which, 60 percent, were children under the age of 12. To say they had noth-
ing would be an understatement. We dis-
covered that these were normal, average,
every day, people-policemen, fire-
men, 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 ex-
cept for some old ground cover-
ing 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 Com-
panies moving van with blankets which they shipped overseas at no cost to the same refu-
gee 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 deliv-
ered 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-
est humanitarian crisis in the world. A few years ago, we added coats as well as blan-
kets, 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 part-
ner 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 re-
cieving any education as they are not al-
lowed 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 struc-
tures and school supplies for these refugee children. We have added a donation but-
ton on our website, www.novareliefcenter.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 or-
ganizations 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 North-
ernia 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 Chair-
man-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 opportu-
nity. We must not forget all of those who face hardship, espe-
cially those who flee from perse-
cution in other countries. In this time of divisiveness, it’s impor-
tant that we remember our hu-
manity and come together to help as few can. Through the NOVA Relief Center’s Blanket and Coat Drive for Syrian refu-
gees, we can ensure that Syrian refugee camps will have supplies to stay warm this winter. It’s a small, but necessary and impor-
tant role we can all play,” said Su-
pervisor McKay.

Bulova’s office and other sites such as those of elected officials, including several members of the Fairfax County Board of Supervi-
sors, 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 Refu-
gees 2019 is currently underway and ex-
tended 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.

Kicking off the Blanket & Coat Drive for Syrian Refugees 2019: Brody Buehler, 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.

Photos by Mercia Hobson/The Connection