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The Government Center auditorium was packed with well-wishers as Fairfax County's Board of Supervisors, Constitutional Officers, and Soil and Water Conservation District Directors took their oaths of office on Dec. 16.

Photo by Susan Laume

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Opening the Floodgates

Northern Virginia Democrats wrestle with power now that they have it.

By Michael Lee Pope
The Connection

When they were in the minor-ity, Democrats were mostly united in their views about everything from gun control and reproductive rights to the Equal Rights Amendment. Now that they've seized power, though, members of the newly minted majority are hearing from opposite sides on everything from gerrymandering and labor rights. That push and pull was evident during a legislative hearing of the Fairfax delegation, the largest in Virginia and home of the new speaker of the House and the Senate majority leader. The hearing was dominated by dozens of firearms enthusiasts sporting orange "guns save lives" stickers from the Virginia Citizens Defense League.

"It's important that our board be given the authority to keep guns out of our rec centers and government centers," said Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Chairman Jeff McKay, the first to testify, drawing jeers from the heavily armed crowd.

McKay went through a number of gun control measures Democrats campaigned on last year: universal background checks and limitation on how many firearms an individual can purchase a month as well as a ban on assault weapons to include suppressors, bump stocks and high-capacity magazines. That prompted loud and extensive heckling from the crowd, who responded by yelling loudly that he was a "traitor" and a "communist." Later in the hearing, when gun advocates took the microphone, they warned of "a civil war" if Virginia took action to limit what they view as their Second Amendment rights.

"It's a lot like looking at modern art," said Vincent Dory, who described himself as a rank-and-file member of the Virginia Citizens Defense League. "Modern art and gun control are both extremely confusing to look at, extremely pretentious and extremely ridiculous."

Photo by Michael Lee Pope/The Connection

Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Chairman Jeff McKay is heckled by heavily-armed firearms enthusiasts as he calls for the General Assembly to give local governments the ability to ban guns at government centers.

Photo by Michael Lee Pope/The Connection

SEIU Virginia 512 president David Broder asks lawmakers to raise the minimum wage, allowing collective bargaining for public employees and pass a homecare workers bill of rights.

THE DEBATE OVER GERRYMANDERING is one of the thorniest questions before lawmakers, an issue that divides Democrats as they prepare to take control for the first time in a generation. On one side of the debate is supporters of a group called Virginia 2021, which struck a compromise last year between Democrats and Republicans to craft a constitutional amendment that would take the power to draw legislative districts out of the hands of lawmakers and give it to a bipartisan commission. One volunteer with Virginia 2021 even broke into song, crooning to the tune of "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen."

"All rest ye merry gentle folk, let nothing you dismay. Remember gerrymandering will let us get our way," sang Michael Martin. "And save us from all others hopes. They do not have a say. Oh, tidings of corruption and joy."

The proposed amendment passed last year, and because of the amendment process in Virginia it has to pass again this year and then go to voters. But now that Democrats have control of the General Assembly, they would be the ones drawing the maps. Many Democrats say they would be squandering their newfound power by yielding that power to a commission, especially because the maps would likely end up before the Republican-dominated Supreme Court of Virginia. Advocates of the amendment say that can be fixed by enabling legislation that would require a special master draw the districts. But many people associated with Indivisible groups in Northern Virginia are urging lawmakers to vote no on the amendment.

"If I could rid myself of the concerns that I have with respect to that amendment and some of the backdoor was this could work against Democrats, in particular, I would support it," said Luke Levasseur of McLean. "I cannot support it, and I believe that the amendment that we have is not a step forward. It's a step in the wrong direction, sideways, potentially off a cliff."

LABOR ISSUES have long been a sticking point in Richmond, where the Republican majority and their allies in the business world have resisted the agenda of labor leaders. Now things have changed, and labor unions across Virginia are pressing lawmakers on a lengthy list of agenda items. SEIU Virginia 512 president David Broder asked members of the Fairfax delegation to raise the minimum wage, allowing collective bargaining for public employees and pass a homecare workers bill of rights — slate of bills to make sure homecare workers under the state's Medicaid program get a living wage, benefits and health care.

> "Many of us are working longer hours for less pay with fewer benefits than ever before with virtually no rights on the job."
>
> **— David Broder, president of SEIU Virginia 512**

"Many of us are working longer hours for less pay with fewer benefits than ever before with virtually no rights on the job," said Broder. "Many of us have two or three jobs just to put together the income that one job used to provide, and so it's no surprise that under the previous Republican majorities OXFAM America ranked Virginia as the worst state for working people two years in a row."

Notably absent from the SEIU's list of priorities was repealing Virginia's infamous right-to-work law, a 1940s era restriction on employers from compelling employees to pay union dues. Broder says his organization has always been in favor of repealing the law, which he says hurts working families. But, he adds, it's not a priority because it wouldn't help as many people as raising the minimum wage or allowing collective bargaining for public employees. Representatives of the American Federation of Teachers and the Fairfax Education Association, however, both outlined repealing the right-to-work law as a top priority.

"They would be more appropriately named right-to fire-laws or right-to-work for less laws," said David Walrod of the Fairfax County Federation of Teachers. "By stripping employees of the right to collectively organize and have a collective voice, the power is returned to CEOs rather than employees."

Opinion

Promises Kept

By U.S. Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)

None of us came to Congress to impeach a president, but each of us took an oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.

In 2018, Democrats reclaimed our majority in the House of Representatives with a promise to deliver on bold, progressive solutions to the most pressing issues we face as a nation. Now, one year into the 116th Congress, that promise has been kept.

The House approved more than 400 pieces of legislation last year alone, more than 275 of which are bipartisan. Each of these bills is important and many are even life-changing, but there are several that are particularly worth highlighting.º

I cannot go anywhere in our community without hearing how access to healthcare is affecting people's lives. While the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid expansion have increased access, Virginians are still struggling with skyrocketing prescription drug prices. That is why I am so proud the House passed the Elijah E. Cummings Lower Drug Costs Now Act, legislation that will lower prescription drug costs by increasing competition and would allow Medicare to renegotiate lower prices for more than 250 prescription drugs.

Conversations about our gun violence crisis are equally unavoidable. Like far too many communities across America, Northern Virginia is no stranger to the pain and loss wrought by mass shootings. I was Chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors during the Virginia Tech massacre. I, like so many of our neighbors, will never forget the six young people we buried in the wake of that horrific day.

We need to pass gun control that makes our communities safer. That is why I was so proud the House passed the Bipartisan Background Checks Act and the Enhanced Background Checks Act. These long overdue bills would close dangerous loopholes and ensure that no American can purchase a gun without first clearing a federal background check. We are in the middle of a national crisis, and this legislation is the least we can do to address it.

We have also had important successes for our region — particularly for federal employees. Thanks to Democratic efforts, we finally secured 12 weeks of paid parental leave and a 3.1 percent pay raise for federal employees. As Chairman of the Subcommittee on Government Operations, I successfully led the fight to stop the Trump administration's disastrous proposal to abolish the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). We secured back pay for federal employees following the President's damaging 35-day shutdown, and I held a hearing on the need to provide equal protections for federal contract workers.

Of course, despite our achievements, the last several months of 2019 were not easy for the Congress or the country. None of us came to Congress to impeach a president, but each of us took an oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States. That oath demanded we take action in the face of unprecedented wrongdoing by an out-of-control executive. To extort a foreign country to investigate your political opponent is an unconstitutional abuse of power. To solicit foreign interference in an American election is an unconstitutional abuse of power. And the delicate balance of power that underpins our democracy is threatened when a President disregards the Constitution by obstructing Congress to cover up these unconstitutional abuses of power.º

Impeachment is a uniquely serious issue, but it isn't the only issue. Through even the most difficult moments, our legislative work never stopped. Last month, the House voted on a bipartisan basis to replace NAFTA with the United States - Mexico - Canada Agreement (USMCA). After months of tough negotiating, Democrats secured a deal that includes the strongest enforcement mechanisms of any U.S. trade agreement, as well as critical victories for workers, lower prescription drug costs, and much-needed environmental protections. We also adopted a bipartisan appropriations agreement to fully fund the government for fiscal year 2020.

These successes are a reminder of the incredible progress our country can make. But they also bring into focus the stark reality that the House of Representatives cannot make laws on its own. Leader McConnell has unilaterally blocked the Senate from debating and voting on 80 percent of the bills that we in the House have sent to his desk — most of them bipartisan, and all of them worthy of consideration. His failure of leadership, however, will not deter us from doing the business of the American people.ºº

As we say goodbye to 2019, you can rest assured that we will build upon the progress we've made and continue to hold the Trump administration accountable in the New Year.

2019 By the Numbers

By Pat Herrity
Springfield District Supervisor

The past year was a great year here, and as a numbers guy, here are a few of the many highlights I would like to share with you:

❖ In 2019, Fairfax County recycled over 3 million pounds of clean glass with the new Purple Bin Program with plans in place to start true glass to glass recycling in 2020.

❖ We started a pilot program with two nonprofit partners modeled after the "There's a Better Way" program to provide the dignity of work for people who are unemployed and between housing to clean up our streams.

❖ Our police department collected over 4,694 pounds of unused prescription drugs in the fight to prevent and end opioid addiction, with many police stations participating in two Drug Take Back Days.

❖ We had over 1,500 students engage with over 100 businesses to find their first job at our annual Fairfax County Teen Job and Opportunity Fairs.

❖ In the summer, over 2,500 people enjoyed the Free Concert in the Park Series at one of the state's premiere parks, Burke Lake Park, with shows by local artists and opening acts by local high school students.

❖ Members of the West Springfield community celebrated the completed renovation of West Springfield High School with over 2,000 students benefiting from better lighting, improved science classrooms, learning labs, and better gymnasium space.

❖ The Board adopted the plan for the SHAPE the Future of Aging plan which will update the award winning 50+ Community Action Plan to address the challenges of growing older adult population that now makes up over 25% of the County including initiatives to address isolation, dementia and mobility.

❖ We are moving forward on over $460M worth of transportation improvement projects in Springfield District, including:

❖ Fairfax County Parkway Widening Project including a grade separated interchange at the Popes Head intersection,

❖ Widening Route 29 between Union Mill Road & Buckleys Gate

❖ Widening Route 28 between Prince William County & Lee Highway

❖ Widening Rolling Road between Old Keene Mill Road & Hunter Village Dr.

❖ Eliminating the dangerous curve on Burke Road

❖ Numerous bicycle and pedestrian projects

❖ I was honored to be reelected as Springfield District Supervisor and to be named Sun Gazette's Best Public Servant in Fairfax County for the third year in a row.

As we welcome in 2020, we have a lot to be proud of, a lot of challenges to address and a lot of work to be done to make Fairfax County a better place for all our residents. I look forward to working with you in the new year. Please don't hesitate to contact my office at 703-451-8873 or Springfield@fairfaxcounty.gov if I can be of service to you.

Write The Connection welcomes views on any public issue. The deadline for all material is noon Friday. Send to:

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By email: editors@connectionnewspapers.com

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2018 Virginia Press Association
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Letter

Making Our Voices Heard

To the Editor:

With the New Year, Virginia kicks off its whirlwind legislative session, beginning on Jan. 8 and concluding on March 7. In this short time, legislators consider hundreds of bills on issues that affect our daily lives in ways great and small. Issues that are particularly important to me, as a pet and nature lover, include animal welfare issues.

This year will see numerous bills on animal welfare introduced, debated, and perhaps enacted into law, including bills that affect puppy mills.

Readers may remember two stories about two different pet stores in northern Virginia this year, one in Fairfax City and one in Manassas City, being investigated for and charged with multiple counts of animal cruelty. Since then, Fairfax City has passed an ordinance requiring that pet stores be licensed and inspected to ensure that they are in compliance with laws in Virginia requiring humane treatment of animals.

The Commonwealth will have an opportunity to address this issue in counties and cities across Virginia through legislation being introduced at the state level.

Other bills under consideration address tethering of dogs in extreme weather, penalties for cruelty that results in serious bodily injury or death of an animal, protections for Virginia consumers that purchase pets from sellers that have misrepresented the animal's health or background, and testing of cosmetics on animals.

I and many of my fellow Virginians that care about animal welfare will be heading to

Richmond on Jan. 23, Humane Lobby Day, to ask our representatives to vote in support of or opposition to these and other bills.

Whatever our issues may be, we are very fortunate to have this chance to make our voices heard and to exercise our rights in a democratic society to influence how we are governed. It is an exhilarating experience and I encourage all to consider a visit to the state capitol or writing or calling our representatives. They do care and truly appreciate hearing from constituents.

Eileen Hanrahan
Lorton

Fairfax County Inaugurates Leadership

The Government Center audito-rium was packed with well-wishers as Fairfax County's Board of Supervisors, Constitutional Officers, and Soil and Water Conservation District Directors took their oaths of office on Dec. 16.

Speaking to those gathered, new Board Chairman, Jeffrey C. McKay, touted Fairfax County's top ranking in most statistical categories. He said those positions were "rooted in two fundamental beliefs that have made us successful: one, being a welcoming and accepting community that accepts everyone regardless of their backgrounds; and two, investing in people, by providing first rate services including outstanding public schools, parks, libraries, safe communities, and sophisticated wrap around services for all of our residents."

The Board consists of nine supervisory districts and the Chair at-large position. Judge Penney S. Azcarate, Fairfax Circuit Court, administered the oath to:

❖ Supervisors: Walter L. Acorn, Hunter Mill; John W. Foust, Dranesville; Penelope A. Gross, Mason: Pat Herrity, Springfield; Rodney Lusk, Lee; Dalia A, Palchik, Providence; Kathy L. Smith, Sully: Daniel G. Storck, Mount Vernon; and James R. Walkinshaw, Braddock;

❖ Commonwealth's Attorney, Steve T. Descano

❖ Sheriff, Stacey A. Kincaid

❖ Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Directors, Monica A. Billger, Chris E. Koerner, and Gerald Peters Jr.

Photo by Susan Laume

Newly elected County leadership prepares to swear their oaths.

McKay reflected he still embraces the motto sown on his high school shirt, "Advance always." He pledges that "we'll do just that. … view every decision …..through an equity lens. Every community member in every corner of this County deserves an equal opportunity to succeed." He highlighted the areas of priority for the Board: affordable housing, combating climate change, transportation, public schools, and responsible budgeting. "Education has always been, and will always be our Board's number one priority."

McKay acknowledged the mentorship and leadership of outgoing Chairman Sharon Bulova; who he described as his public service role model and close friend. And also the role model provided by his high school government teacher present in the audience.

Opening the event, U.S. Rep. Gerry Connolly, former Fairfax County Board Chairman, reminded the board members-elect, "Having the title is one thing, earning it is another. Successful local government is learning to satisfy the annoyed, without annoying the satisfied."

The elected officials took office on Jan. 1, 2020.

— Susan Laume

> "Having the title is one thing, earning it is another. Successful local government is learning to satisfy the annoyed, without annoying the satisfied."
>
> **— U.S. Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-10)**

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Giving up alcohol during "Dry January" can have positive health benefits.

Photo by Marilyn Campbell

Dry January?

The benefits of and strategies for taking a month-long booze break.

By Marilyn Campbell
The Connection

After a season filled with Champagne, Whiskey Sours, Gingerbread Martinis and other libations, some might need a break from booze. Dry January, a public health campaign that encourages giving up alcohol until the first of February – can help with that effort. The health benefits of staying dry for a month range from thinner thighs to a fatter wallet.

"It's very common for people to come home after a stressful day and unwind with a glass of wine or two," said Alexandria-based substance abuse counselor Sarah Brewer, Ph.D. "But the reality is that while alcohol does seem to make you more relaxed at first, it can lead to anxiety or a depressed mood."

Weight loss can be a pleasant side effect of abstaining from an evening pour, says nutritionist Kathryn Armstrong, who sites a report by the National Institutes of Health that showed a strong link between weight gain and alcohol. "Basically, the cocktail or wine that you're drinking has empty calories," she said. "Also, many people tend to eat, especially junk food when they drink."

"Another benefit of being alcohol-free for a month is that people often find that they don't need that glass of wine to relax and unwind from a stressful day," added Brewer. "Giving up alcohol for a month might give you an opportunity to find explore other relaxation methods like meditation or going for a walk or some other type of exercise."

For those who regularly attend happy hours with friends or have a glass of wine to relax, abstaining during one of the longest months of the year might seem unpleasant or unappealing, says Bethesda-based therapist Carol Barnaby, LCSW. "You might to find things to distract you," she said. "If you're used to having a drink or going to a happy hour at the same time every day, you can schedule something else during that time so you're mind isn't on alcohol. People who enjoy the taste of alcohol might try eating fruit or drinking a fruit flavored sparkling water."

> "If you're used to having a drink or going to a happy hour at the same time every day, you can schedule something else during that time so you're mind isn't on alcohol."
>
> — Carol Barnaby, LCSW

> "By not drinking you might find that you've been using alcohol to help deal with other issues like depression, PTSD or anxiety. In those cases you should get help from a medical or mental health professional."
>
> — Sarah Brewer, Ph.D.

Attempting to take a break from alcohol might unmask deeper issues, suggests Brewer.

"If you find that you can't stop drinking, it could mean that you have a problem with alcohol consumption," she said. "By not drinking you might find that you've been using alcohol to help deal with other issues like depression, PTSD or anxiety. In those cases you should get help from a medical or mental health professional."

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Entertainment

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ONGOING

Oculus: A Place of Unseen. Now thru Feb. 2. At The Workhouse Arts Center, 9518 Workhouse Road, Lorton. The Workhouse Arts Center presents the interactive exhibit Oculus: Of A Place Unseen featuring works of artists Elaine Buss, Edgar Endress, Michelle Repiso and Steve Wanna. The use of the word 'oculus,' most known as an eye-like form in architecture, gestures towards the enlightening narratives discovered throughout the show. Each referencing feelings of solitude and contemplation, the storylines range from institutional boundaries to societal oversights and mantra meditations. Some works are as light as silk, some as heavy as stone, but the overall space is quiet — both literally and figuratively.

JAN. 10 TO MARCH 10

St. James Intramural High School Basketball League. At the St. James Sports, Wellness and Entertainment Complex, 6805 Industrial Road, Springfield. The St. James invites you to participate in its Middle School Basketball League for Boys & Girls (8th to 12th grade), Jan. 10- March 10, in the new 33,000 square foot Basketball Courthouse on four high school regulation sized courts. The TSJ Intramural High School Basketball League registration fee is $250 per player and $600 per team. All games are officiated and statistics provided. The TSJ Intramural High School Basketball league also includes a Playoff round where top teams in the league will meet. Visit https://www.thestjames.com/sports/basketball/sessions/8/courses/tsj-basketball-winter-team or contact Alpha or Pele with any questions at 703-239-6841.

SATURDAY/JAN. 11

Jewish Music Portraits. 7:30 p.m. At Pozez JCC, 8900 Little River Turnpike, Fairfax. Commemorating five years since the "Je Suis Juif" movement in France, Les Chansons Juives, Portraits of Jewish Music in France celebrates the enduring connections between French and Jewish musical traditions in Europe and North Africa. In addition to music by Jonas and Attia, this concert highlights compositions from different French and Jewish liturgical traditions. Some of the music originates in
Bordeaux, Provence, Carpentras, and Bayonne, as well as the unforgettable Paris. A number of the compositions were selected and orchestrated by Hazzan Dr. Tasat from Solomon Foy. Concert followed by Q&A. Tickets: $25. For tickets, visit https://chansons.bpt.me

SATURDAY, JAN. 11 AND TUESDAY JAN. 14

Winter Art Lessons for Youth Classes (8 yrs & up). Saturday 9:30-10:30 a.m.; Tuesday 5:15-6:15 p.m. at Woods Community Centre, 10100 Wards Grove Circle, Burke. Instructor Carol Zeitlin drawing and watercolor. Visit www.czartlessons.com for more. Call 703-250-6930.

SATURDAY, JAN. 11 AND TUESDAY, JAN. 14

Winter Art Workshop for Teens/Adults. Saturday 10:30-12:30 p.m.; Tuesday 1:30-3:30 p.m. at Woods Community Centre, 10100 Wards Grove Circle, Burke. Instructor Carol Zeitlin, drawing, watercolor, Chinese Brush & portfolio development.
Visit www.czartlessons.com for more. Call 703-250-6930.

SUNDAY/JAN. 12

Clown Class. 12-1:30 p.m. At Workhouse Arts Center, Building W-4, Room 409, Lorton. Five weeks. Exploring clown traditions from all over the world; from Japanese masked theatre to tricksters in the American Southwest to cartoons and silent cinema, students will work through improvisational exercises that focus on the connection with the audience as well as deep emotional connectivity by performing exercises and games that are constructed to build skills and techniques that are applicable to many differing performance venues and disciplines. Tuition is $130. Visit the website: https://reservations.workhousearts.org/Info.aspx?EventID=50

Jewish Music Portraits will be held Saturday, Jan. 11 at Pozez JCC in Fairfax.

Jewish Music Portraits Concert

Saturday/Jan. 11, 7:30 p.m. At Pozez JCC, 8900 Little River Turnpike, Fairfax. Commemorating five years since the "Je Suis Juif" movement in France, Les Chansons Juives, Portraits of Jewish Music in France celebrates the enduring connections between French and Jewish musical traditions in Europe and North Africa. In addition to music by Jonas and Attia, this concert highlights compositions from different French and Jewish liturgical traditions. Some of the music originates in

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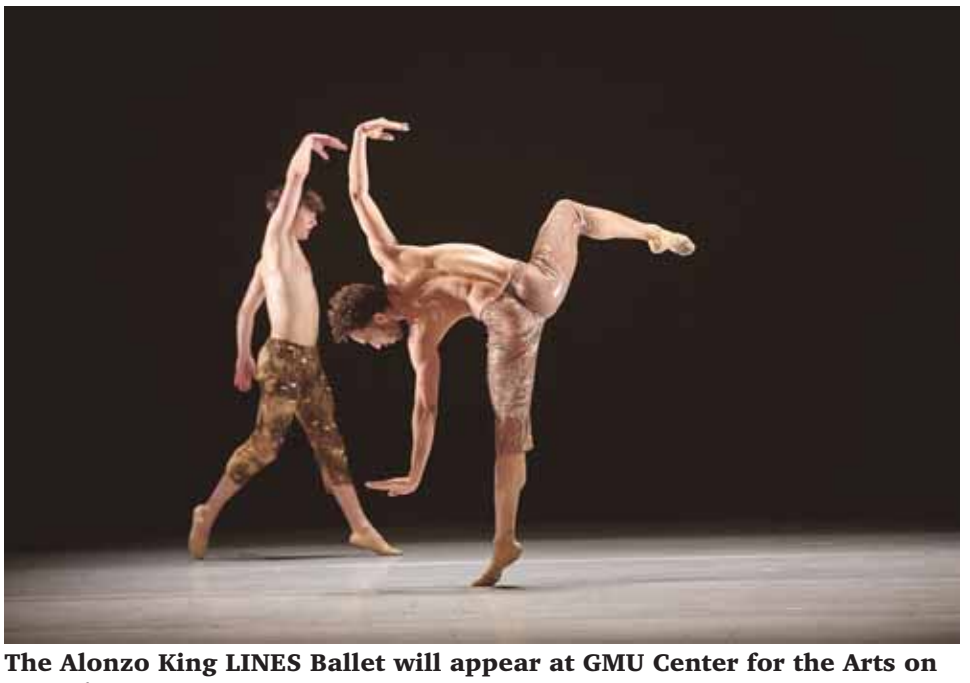

The Alonzo King LINES Ballet will appear at GMU Center for the Arts on Saturday, Jan. 25.

Alonzo King LINES Ballet

Saturday/Jan. 25, 8 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, 4373 Mason Pond Drive, Fairfax. Since 1982, visionary choreographer Alonzo King has been redefining contemporary ballet by creating daring new works that marry the science of artistic movement with the beauty of other art forms. In his latest collaboration, Figures of Speech, King addresses the fact that languages of the world are vanishing at an alarming rate, and draws on the research of poet and activist Bob Holman, pioneer in the slam poetry movement and co-founder of the Endangered Language Alliance. His expressive choreography takes inspiration from a soundtrack of poetry recited by native speakers of languages nearing extinction and music played on traditional instruments. Cost is $48, $41, $29. Visit the website: https://cfa.gmu.edu/

Personal Tour Day. 1-4 p.m. At Fairfax Station Railroad Museum, 11200 Fairfax Station Road, Fairfax Station. Come have a day at the Fairfax Station Railroad Museum. Let the knowledgeable docents provide personal tours or download the Uniguide Audio Tour and explore the rich local history of the Fairfax Station. Tours of the Museum will be held every 30 minutes. Admission: Museum members and ages 4 and under, free; ages 5-12, $3; ages 13 and older $5; Seniors 65 and older and active or retired Military, $4. www.fairfax-station.org, www.facebook.com/FFXSRR, 703-425-9225.

Sousa Season Opener. 2 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, Concert Hall, 4373 Mason Pond Dr, Fairfax. Presenting "The American Offenbach: Sousa and the Operetta" by The President's Own Marine Band. Concerts are free, no tickets required unless otherwise noted. Visit www.marineband.marines.mil.

TUESDAY, JAN. 14

Art at Lake Accotink. 10 a.m. to noon. At Lake Accotink Park, 7500 Accotink Park Road, Springfield. With a focus on drawing, participants will gain fundamental skills with different artistic mediums and take home a nature-themed project at the end of each class. These classes are designed for children age 7 to 12. The cost is $24 per person, plus a supply fee of $2 payable to the instructor at class. Call 703-569-3464 or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/lake-accotink.

Winter Drawing Plus Color Class (5-8 yrs.). 6:15 p.m.- 7:00 p.m. at Woods Community Centre, 10100 Wards Grove Circle, Burke. Instructor Carol Zeitlin, drawing and watercolor. Visit www.czartlessons.com for more.

JAN. 16-19

Shen Yun. At GMU Center for the Arts, 4373 Mason Pond Drive, Fairfax. Show times are Thursday, Jan. 16 at 2 p.m.; Friday, Jan. 17 at 7:30 p.m.; Saturday, Jan. 18 at 2 p.m.; Saturday, Jan. 18 at 7:30 p.m.; and Sunday, Jan. 19 at 2 p.m. Prices starting at $80. Shen Yun's artistic vision expands theatrical experience into a multi-dimensional, inspiring journey through one of humanity's greatest treasures—the five millennia of traditional Chinese culture. This epic production immerses you in stories reaching back to the most distant past. You'll explore realms even beyond our visible world. Featuring one of the world's oldest art forms— classical Chinese dance—along with patented scenographic effects and all-original orchestral works, Shen Yun opens a portal to a civilization of enchanting beauty and enlightening wisdom.

SUNDAY/JAN. 19

G-Scale Model Train Show. 1-4 p.m. At Fairfax Station Railroad Museum, 11200 Fairfax Station Road, Fairfax. The Washington, Virginia & Maryland Garden Railway Society "WVMGRS" members will have a display running at the Fairfax Station Railroad Museum. Museum members, free; adults 13 and over, $5; children 5-12, $3; under 4, free. Seniors (65+ and military (active & retired), $4. Information on the museum and shows is at www.fairfax-station.org or call 703-425-9225.

MONDAY/JAN. 20

Give Together. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. At Pozez Jewish Community Center of Northern Virginia, 8900 Little River Turnpike, Fairfax.Give Together, a signature program of Volunteer Fairfax, helps to foster a legacy of volunteerism in the generations to come. The program recognizes MLK Day as a day of service bringing families together to work on projects that benefit the community. The event is free and encourages families of elementary school-age children to participate. Volunteer with your children to work on service projects benefitting the community. Together, you'll create Valentine's cards for youth in foster care, prepare cat adoption kits, assemble snack packs for food insecure children, create fleece lap blankets for veterans and more. Registration is required. Visit www.volunteerfairfax.org, click events, then click Give Together.

THURSDAY/JAN. 23

ESL Registration. 7-8 p.m. At Lord of Life Lutheran Church's two locations: 5114 Twinbrook Rd, Fairfax, and 13421 Twinlakes Dr., Clifton. Register for ESL classes in Fairfax or Clifton/Centreville on Jan. 23. Classes meet Tuesdays and Thursdays, 7-9 p.m.,January 28-April 2. Cost is $40 for student text book. Visit the website: www.lordoflifeva.org

SATURDAY/JAN. 25

Alonzo King LINES Ballet. 8 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, 4373 Mason Pond Drive, Fairfax. Since 1982, visionary choreographer Alonzo King has been redefining contemporary ballet by creating daring new works that marry the science of artistic movement with the beauty of other art forms. In his latest collaboration, Figures of Speech, King addresses the fact that languages of the world are vanishing at an alarming rate, and draws on the research of poet and activist Bob Holman, pioneer in the slam poetry movement and co-founder of the Endangered Language Alliance. His expressive choreography takes inspiration from a soundtrack of poetry recited by native speakers of languages nearing extinction and music played on traditional instruments. Cost is $48, $41, $29. Visit the website: https://cfa.gmu.edu/

SUNDAY/JAN. 26

Game Day Activities. 1-4 p.m. At Fairfax Station Railroad Museum, 11200 Fairfax Station Road, Fairfax Station. There will be train-related games for all ages and you can win a prize if you play. Admission: Museum members and ages 4 and under, free; ages 5-12, $3; ages 13 and older, $5; seniors 65 and older and active or retired Military, $4. Visit the website:

See Calendar, Page 10

School Time Allotted for Civic Engagement

School Board allows excused absence for activism.

By Mike Salmon
The Connection

During the school year in 2018, there was a planned walkout to protest gun violence after the shooting in Parkland, Florida, and students from several schools in the Fairfax County Public Schools took part, although this was not part of the county curriculum. Starting Tuesday, Jan. 21, activities like this will be part of the curriculum, now that the school system recently enacted a "Student Civic Engagement Activity," option for students.

Lee High School sophomore Oranus Yaqubi did participate in the anti-gun rally when she was a middle school student at Key Middle School and gained some real-life experience from the event. "I like making a stand for what I believe in," she said.

Noshin Hassan is a 2018 alum from Lake Braddock that took part in the same walkout, and looked at it as "a great opportunity for us to voice our opinion," she said.

Lee junior Leah Kareem likes the new policy the school system adopted, and if it was part of the curriculum a few years ago, "I would have gone to the women's march," she said.

Photo by Sumaiya Haque/The Connection

The civic engagement could include tree planting, like these students at Lee High School are performing.

It's these kind of activities the school system is open to, feeling that it has a place in education. "Civic engagement is something that is emphasized in our government classes and the new regulation recognizes that our students are offered multiple opportunities to participate because of our location," said FCPS School Board Chair Karen Corbett Sanders.

This may seem like a day off with an excuse but in the wording, it's only a partial absence, and the student is expected to attend school for some portion of the day. But according to school spokesperson Lucy Caldwell, "there has not been a specific number of hours assigned to the term," she said. The school system has built in a parental approval angle. According to Caldwell, "students will have addressed ideas with their parent(s) and parents/guardians will have approved and signed off on prearranged absence forms in advance of the request," she said. "These conversations provide another opportunity for families to discuss issues that are of importance to them and the education of their children."

This will only stop some of the abuse, said West Springfield alumni Alex Cronin. "There's a lot of people that are interested in politics so they would use it, but there's others who would just use it as an excuse to get the day off," he said. Cronin did participate in some of the recent event discussions in class, but he noticed the teachers tried to stay clear of siding with one party or the other.

Whether it's a school shooting activity like Parkland, and an uproar against guns, or a pro-National Rifle Association rally, the reason for the absence has to be approved by the parents so this takes the judgment out of school hands.

"As there is a pre-arranged absence form that parents must submit, school administration will not apply a personal lens to the activity," Caldwell added.

This civic engagement policy was the result of a School Board initiative, largely driven by a rise in student involvement following incidents around the nation that impacted students and their communities, such as the shooting in Parkland, Caldwell said.

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Calendar

From Page 8

www.fairfax-station.org, www.facebook.com/FFXSRR, or call 703-425-9225.

Steam Day. 3-5 p.m. At Gesher Jewish Day School, 4800 Mattie Moore Court, Fairfax. Tinker, experiment, create, and explore with Gesher JDS and PJ Library. Join in a free afternoon of around-the-world family fun. Your child's curiosity will take them to new and far-away places when they experience science, technology, engineering, art, math with hands-on projects for kids aged 3-8 and their parents. Free. RSVP at: https://www.gesher-jds.org/steam-day/

BHS General Meeting. 3:30-5 p.m. At Pohick Regional Library, 6450 Sydenstricker Road, Burke. View a film on the history of Burke's Lee Chapel, with some accompanying remarks by Rev. Katie Carson Phillips and Burke Historical Society President Jon Vrana. Free. Visit the website: www.burkehistoricalsociety.org.

Keyboard Conversations with Jeffrey Siegel. 7 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, 4373 Mason Pond Drive, Fairfax. Virtuoso pianist and storyteller extraordinaire Jeffrey Siegel is popular with classical music lovers and newcomers alike with his unique "concerts with commentary" format. Hear some of the most famous works by these two popular composers who have recently had anniversary celebrations in the musical world: the 100th anniversary of the death of Debussy and the 75th of Rachmaninoff. In this program, Siegel plays Debussy's Clair de Lune and Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C-sharp minor as well as colorful Preludes by both composers. Cost is $44, $37, $26. Family Friendly. Visit the website: https://cfa.gmu.edu/

WEDNESDAY/JAN. 29

Troop Open House. 7-8:30 p.m. At Wood Community Center, 10100 Wards Grove Circle, Burke. Scouts BSA Troop 1345G will host an Open House for young women (ages 11-17) interested in learning more about Scouting and its focus on outdoor adventure, leadership development, and citizenship skills. Free. Visit the website: http://www.troop1345.org

Beau Soir Ensemble Performs. 7 p.m. At Fairfax City Regional Library, 10360 North Street, Fairfax. The Beau Soir Ensemble is a flute, viola, and harp trio dedicated to the performance of standard and contemporary repertoire spanning a variety of genres. Free. Call 703-293-6227.

JAN. 31-FEB. 1

The Mason Cabaret in Concert. Friday at 8 p.m.; Saturday at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, 4373 Mason Pond Drive, Fairfax. A perennial favorite, the Musical Theater ambassadors, the Mason Cabaret, return with a fresh line-up of stellar vocalists offering showstoppers, ballads and duets, delving into the music of George Gershwin, Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, Duke Ellington, Harold Arlen, and many more. This "Fun-raiser" supports the Musical Theater program at Mason and will have you dancing in your seats and humming all the way home. Tickets are $30 General Public; $15 students, staff, seniors and groups. Visit the website: https://cfa.gmu.edu/

SATURDAY/FEB. 1

Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company. 8 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, 4373 Mason Pond Drive, Fairfax. In this world premiere, Mason Artist-in-Residence Bill T. Jones examines group identity and its relationship to aloneness set to spoken word and live music. What Problem? includes three thought-provoking sections: Jones in solo performance; Jones alongside members of the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company; and, in conclusion, Jones and the company onstage with participants from the greater Northern Virginia community. For more than 35 years, the landmark Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company has revolutionized modern dance while exploring issues of identity through social commentary. Tickets are $48, $41, and $29. Visit the website: https://cfa.gmu.edu/

Keyboard Conversations with Jeffrey Siegel will be presented Jan. 26 at GMU Center for the Arts.

Keyboard Conversations with Jeffrey Siegel

Sunday/Jan. 26, 7 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, 4373 Mason Pond Drive, Fairfax. Virtuoso pianist and storyteller extraordinaire Jeffrey Siegel is popular with classical music lovers and newcomers alike with his unique "concerts with commentary" format. Hear some of the most famous works by these two popular composers who have recently had anniversary celebrations in the musical world: the 100th anniversary of the death of Debussy and the 75th of Rachmaninoff. In this program, Siegel plays Debussy's Clair de Lune and Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C-sharp minor as well as colorful Preludes by both composers. Cost is $44, $37, $26. Family Friendly. Visit the website: https://cfa.gmu.edu/

SATURDAY/FEB. 8

Fairfax Symphony Orchestra. 8 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, 4373 Mason Pond Dr, Fairfax.Violinist Simone Porter is the virtuoso soloist in Vivaldi's dazzlingly imaginative evocation of the sights, sounds and sensations of the Italian seasons. The Four Seasons violin concertos are so richly detailed you can feel the sirocco of summer, hear the dancing villagers of Autumn and slip on the ice of a Venetian winter. The master of the New Tango, Ástor Piazzolla, brought the wild dance of Buenos Aires into the concert hall. There's an apt nod to Vivaldi in Leonid Desyatnikov's sensational string arrangements of the Estaciones Porteñas, but they have an atmosphere that's unique to Buenos Aires – fiercely sensual in summer, hazy and melancholic in winter, all moving to the heartbeat of the tango. Vivaldi's seasons enfold Piazzolla's in this dance around the year. Prices begin at $25; $15 for students. Visit the website: https://cfa.gmu.edu/

SATURDAY/FEB. 15

Country-Western Dance. 7-9:30 p.m. at AUUC, Accotink Unitarian Universalist Church, 10125 Lakehaven Court, Burke. The Northern Virginia Country-Western Dance Association will hold a dance with lessons, 6-7 p.m. and open dancing, 7-9:30 p.m. A DJ provides music. Couples and singles of all ages welcome. Admission for members $10; non-members $12; children under 18 accompanied by a paying adult $5. Smoke-free, alcohol-free. BYO refreshments. Visit www.nvcwda.org for more.

SATURDAY-SUNDAY/FEB. 15-16

Virginia Opera's "Cinderella." 8 p.m. Saturday; 2 p.m. Sunday. At GMU Center for the Arts, 4373 Mason Pond Drive, Fairfax. Gioachino Rossini's Cinderella (La Cenerentola) is one of his funniest and best-known comic operas. Following on his success of The Barber of Seville, Rossini and librettist Jacopo Ferretti worked day and night to create this opera in just three weeks. The story differs somewhat from the classic fairytale: there is no fairy godmother, magic pumpkin, or even a glass slipper! Even so, this enchanting tale delivers with all of the glimmering splendor, the comic characters, and the happy ending, of course. Best of all, it includes Rossini's effervescent score with the epic orchestral storm before the Prince finally finds Cenerentola, and the arias "Miei rampolli femminini," and "Nacqui all' affanno...Non piu mesta." Directed by Kyle Lang. Sung in Italian with English supertitles. Tickets are $45-$115. Visit the website: www.cfa.gmu.edu.

SATURDAY/FEB. 22

Off the Wall. 2-5 p.m. At the Art and Design Building, GMU Fairfax Campus, Fairfax. Every year GMU opens its Art and Design Building to alumni, parents, prospective students, and the public for a showcase of the visual arts at Mason. Tour 15 open studios and hands-on exhibits with student and faculty artists, enjoy the music, plus create your own works of art - it's a great party. Cost is $30/regular; $20/Mason alumni, faculty and staff; $10/ages 14-18. Ticket and sponsorship proceeds support arts scholarships and guest artist residencies. Sponsorship opportunities begin at $500. Contact Emily Rusch at 703-993-3872 or erusch2@gmu.edu. Visit the website: offthewall.gmu.edu.

National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine. 8 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, 4373 Mason Pond Drive, Fairfax. Celebrating their Jubilee 100th concert season, the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine (NSOU) presents a concert of Eastern European delights, including a showpiece for cello by Tchaikovsky, Sibelius' first symphony which displays his unique Nordic style as well as his admiration for Tchaikovsky, and Ukrainian composer Borys Lyatoshynsky's symphonic ballade composed as a tribute to the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz on the centenary of his death. Considered one of the finest symphony orchestras in Eastern Europe, NSOU has achieved international recognition with its extensive touring schedule and more than 100 acclaimed recordings, including Lyatoshynsky's Symphonies No. 2 and No. 3 named The Best Recording of the Year by the Australian Broadcasting Company. Under the direction of Volodymyr Sirenko, the orchestra is joined by world-renowned cellist Natalia Khoma as the featured soloist. Tickets are $60, $51, $36. Visit the website: https://cfa.gmu.edu/

Bulletin

Submit civic/community announcements at ConnectionNewspapers.com/Calendar. Photos and artwork welcome. Deadline is Thursday at noon, at least two weeks before event.

MONDAY/JAN. 13

Effective Strategies for Dementia Caregivers. 7-8:30 p.m. At Kings Park Library, 9000 Burke Lake Road, Burke. Explore how communication changes when someone is living with Alzheimer's, and identify strategies to help you communicate at each stage of the disease. Presented by the Alzheimer's Association. Light refreshments provided. Free. Visit the website: www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library

GROW AND PLANT UNDERWATER GRASSES

Volunteers are needed across Virginia to restore native underwater grasses by growing them at home, school, or work through the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's Grasses for the Masses program. These wild celery grasses grow underwater in Virginia's tidal rivers and offer many benefits for both wildlife and clean water. While submerged grasses in Virginia have been seriously depleted by pollution, they are beginning to make a comeback. To participate, volunteers must attend one of several upcoming workshops in the area. Volunteers then grow grasses from seed in trays submerged in the provided tubs. They nurture these grass sprouts until late spring, when they will transplant their grasses to restoration sites in the James, Rappahannock, Chickahominy, and Potomac rivers. Advance registration is required. Participants will receive a self-contained indoor growing kit, seeds, and instructions at any of the following workshops:

❖ In Northern Virginia, on Jan. 22 at Daniels Run Elementary School in Fairfax and on Feb. 2 and Feb. 8 at Alexandria ReNew Enterprises; there is a $40 fee per grass growing kit. Visit www.cbf.org/grassesworkshops.

BRITEPATHS SEEKING VOLUNTEERS

Fairfax-based nonprofit Britepaths is seeking volunteers to sponsor families in need who live throughout the Fairfax County area. Sponsors are matched with families who have demonstrated need, and may opt to provide a December holiday meal and/or gifts for children under 18. Britepaths also has a great need for cash donations and gift cards to grocery stores or Target/Walmart to assist those who are not sponsored. A wonderful family, company or group holiday service project. Register and learn more at: britepaths.org. Contact 703-273-8829 or sryan@britepaths.org.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Parent Support Partners, a service of the Healthy Minds Fairfax initiative, are all parents who have received training and are qualitied to offer education, support and assistance at no cost to families or caregivers. They provide reliable information that families can use in decision-making and are familiar with services and resources that can help families in distress. Visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/healthymindsfairfax or www.nami-northernvirginia.org/parent-peer-support.html.

Shepherd's Center of Fairfax-Burke sponsors a monthly meeting on the 2nd Tuesday of each month, noon-1:30 p.m., for caregivers to learn and to share with others experiencing similar challenges. Before attending, contact the facilitator, Eileen Thompson at 703-451-8626 or eileen.thompson1@gmail.com.

Haven of Northern Virginia provides support, compassion, information and resources to the bereaved and seriously ill. To become a Haven volunteer, please call 703-941-7000 to request an orientation. Volunteers must complete a 30-hour training and commit to one year of service answering Haven phones (2.5 hours weekly). Next training is scheduled for fall 2017.

ONGOING

STEM Professionals Needed. Volunteers are needed to assist K-12 STEM teachers in northern Virginia as part of the American Association for the Advancement of Science's STEM Volunteer Program, stemvolunteers.org, during the 2019-20 school year, beginning in September. Please contact Don Rea at 571-551-2488 or donaldrea@aol.com.

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OMG

By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Are you sitting down? I wasn't when I got the call from my oncologist after hours this past Thursday. He was calling me with the results from the previous week's biopsy. He said he had "exciting news." He said the biopsy was not only "typed" (genetic mutation/biomarker) but, as he continued to bury the lead using medical jargon about the slide and stain, finally got around to it: I may not have (or have had, still to be discussed/possibly determined) non-small cell lung cancer, stage IV. Instead, I may have (always had) thyroid cancer, specifically, papillary thyroid cancer, referred to as "the friendly cancer," by my oncology nurse the following infusion when I shared with her these preliminary findings. 'Friendly' referring to one's survival/life expectancy after diagnosis.

Moving forward to begin/confirm this new working diagnosis, I had an ultrasound of my thyroid the next day and Friday the following week, Team Lourie will be meeting with an endocrinologist. She (I saw her picture on the wall outside her office) presumably will have had a discussion, or at the very least, received an email/referral from my oncologist citing chapter and a few verses about who I am, how I've been treated, what scan/results I've had and of course, the news of this most recent biopsy, explaining why he reached out. I really don't expect, given my oncologist's excitement, and the fact that he called me (only the second time in nearly 11 years) that the endocrinologist will be likewise informed and possibly even excited to share a similar diagnosis with a previously-characterized as "terminal" patient who (yours truly) might not be "terminal" after all. 'Might not' being the operative phrase I'm still having difficulty grasping.

Somehow, I have to slow my roll and pull back on the reins. We're still early days here. Right now, I don't know anything definitive, so I'm not quite ready to call this a "Festivus miracle." Though at present it all sounds fairly promising, it's not exactly cast in stone. and neither has a revised Thyroid-cancer-treatment plan been put in place. I'm still a lung cancer "diagnossee" and one still waiting for the other shoe to drop. Therefore, until I'm told otherwise, as of now, I'm scheduled for my bi-weekly opdivo immunotherapy infusion on Jan. 3, 2020.

Now, why all of this is worth writing about, prematurely as it is, is that oncologists, almost by definition, are typically not the bearer of "exciting news." Generally speaking, they are giving bad news and saying it very directly at that. As was said to me in late February 2009: "Why not take that vacation you've always dreamed of while you're still feeling good?" The implication being quite clear that it's likely to get worse from here. To receive a call like I did Thursday from my oncologist now implying that it might get better from here is completely out of the ordinary. Moreover, if he initiated such a communication, I should probably take him at his words and take him very seriously.

Right now, I am possibly elated to be over the moon. However, it's not as if I've been given a clean bill of health. Cleaner, yes, but one still with a significant balance. And until I look the endocrinologist in her stethoscope and hear some magic words, I am keeping my powder dry and not shouting off my mouth - too much.

Cancer is a funny business. There are twists and turns and unexpected results, much of it not controlled by the doctors. And though I may be on the precipice of being blessed with some amazing, life-altering news, this time for the unbelievably good, I am still a week, maybe even weeks away from knowing with any certainty. In the interim, however, I am certain of one thing. If this change in my status does occur and I'm given back my life expectancy, somehow, I will try and return the favor.

Kenny Lourie is an Advertising Representative for The Potomac Almanac & The Connection Newspapers.

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