

Springfield CONNECTION

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PET CONNECTION

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Supervisor Pat Herrity addresses the crowd at his Springfield District Town Hall Meeting on Feb. 19, 2020. He discussed his thoughts and concerns about the County's proposals.

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PHOTO BY CALEB LESTER/THE CONNECTION

FEBRUARY 27-MARCH 4, 2020

ONLINE AT WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

BULLETIN BOARD

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

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.

SUNDAY/MAY 17

Psychic Fair. 9-5 p.m. At Arlington-Fairfax Elks Lodge, 8421 Arlington Boulevard, Fairfax. Psychic Fair for both those who are serious and for those who are just curious. Event can be a life-changing experience or just a fun time. Many of the best psychics, mediums, healers, and readers of all types, along with related arts and crafts vendors from Virginia and the surrounding areas. Note: 75% of tables offer some type of readings, 25% of tables offer related arts, crafts, books, oils, crystals, sage, herbs, information, jewelry, etc. There will be 44 vendors, All under one roof, all in one room, indoor event, free parking. Cost: \$5 in advance \$10 at the door. Visit the website: <https://va-psychic-fair-2020.eventbrite.com>

SUPPORT GROUPS

Parent Support Partners, a service of the Healthy Minds Fairfax initiative, are all parents who have received training and are qualified 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

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.

Docents Needed. Sundays 1-4 p.m. at the Fairfax Station Railroad Museum, 11200 Fairfax Station Road in Fairfax Station. Greet museum visitors and tell them about the exhibits, the museum and the its railroad and Civil War history. Ideal for those interested in railroads, the Civil War and Northern Virginia history. Training and orientation provided. Other volunteer opportunities are gardening, publicity and exhibit planning. Call 703-945-7483.

Haven of Northern Virginia is committed to offering, support, compassion, information and resources to the bereaved and seriously ill. Volunteers provide individual and group support to those suffering from a loss. Volunteers must participate in a 30 hour training. Training will be offered in October 2018. To volunteer, call Haven at 703-941-7000.

Assistance League of Northern Virginia is an all-volunteer nonprofit organization that feeds, clothes and educates children in need.

Assistance League's philanthropic programs touch the lives of thousands of children, including those at 11 Title 1 elementary schools in Fairfax and Prince William counties and the City of Alexandria. There are many volunteer opportunities for community members to contribute to helping those in need through Weekend Food for Kids, tutoring programs and providing new clothing and layettes. To learn more, email: info@alnv.org, or visit www.alnv.org



2020 Fairfax County Teen Job Fairs and Career Building Workshops

Woodson High School Saturday, March 7th 10 am to 12 pm	Mount Vernon High School Saturday, March 21st 10 am to 12 pm
South County High School Saturday, March 7th 2 pm to 4 pm	West Springfield High School Saturday, March 28th 10 am to 12 pm
Chantilly High School Saturday, March 14th 2 pm to 4 pm	Full-time employment Part-time employment Seasonal positions Internships Volunteer Positions and More

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A full house as community members attend Supervisor Pat Herry's Springfield District Town Hall Meeting on Feb. 19, 2020.



PHOTOS BY CALEB LESTER/THE CONNECTION

Supervisor Pat Herry addresses the crowd at his Springfield District Town Hall Meeting on Feb. 19, 2020. He discussed his thoughts and concerns about the County's proposals.

Neighbors Question 'Country Inn,' Agritourism Proposals

Residential preservation and urbanization standoff in the latest Springfield District Town Hall Meeting.

BY CALEB LESTER
THE CONNECTION

On Feb. 19, Supervisor Pat Herry (R-Springfield) and Fairfax County Staff held a community meeting regarding the County's proposed Agritourism Zoning Ordinance Amendment, changes to the requirements for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) and the addition of a "Rural Resort" use, now named "Country Inn."

The County's current proposal on a Country Inn use is described as a special exception use in certain zoning districts on 20 acres or more throughout the County. This proposal would allow rural property owners to use their land as venues for weddings, breweries, or fair and festival grounds.

THE MEETING was held at the Clifton Town Hall, and saw a packed house of concerned community members and residents seeking to learn more about the County proposals and to provide their feedback.

County staff provided a brief presentation and used most of their time taking questions and feedback from attendees. Most everyone's attention was focused on Agritourism and "Country Inns," with many voicing their opposition.

Residents discussed several significant areas of concern. Many feared the proposed amendment, and Country Inns, would lead to an increase in development in their neighborhoods. They also voiced concerns about a possible influx of people, traffic, safety, noise, and the potential negative impacts on the environment, particularly



Supervisor Pat Herry stays after the meeting to further discuss Agritourism and the ADU proposals with concerned constituents.

the Occoquan Watershed (R-C).

Supervisor Herry also addressed his concerns over the need for more details and questioned the proposed acreage requirements for Country Inns and the use of these potential properties. He also echoed the environmental worries that residents discussed.

Currently, the Code of Virginia permits agritourism by-right when associated with an agricultural operation. Localities may regulate agritourism activities when there is a significant impact on the health, safety, or general welfare of the public. County

staff has proposed definitions for agritourism and use limitations to provide thresholds for a predictable and consistent path for future agritourism activities.

Throughout the discussion, County staff cited both Loudoun and Prince William County, along with a similar proposal and venture in the Sully District. These references sparked some attendees to inquire about more urbanized areas in the region, like Arlington County and Alexandria City. According to County staff, those jurisdictions are not exploring any similar proposals.

County staff also proposed revisions to ADU standards during their presentation. Currently, all ADUs require a special permit review by the Board of Zoning Appeals. Staff is offering a more streamlined process that would allow administrative approval of an ADU when located within the principal dwelling. Staff is also proposing to limit the size to 1200 square feet. Currently, an ADU is only allowed if someone on the property meets certain age or disability restrictions. However, the Board and staff are looking to eliminate those constraints as well.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS voiced concerns over increased density in their neighborhoods, and the lack of enforcement in a complaint-based system. At the same time, Supervisor Herry expressed his support of easing the requirements for ADUs with the current age and disability restrictions while still opposing eliminating these restrictions in their entirety. Wednesday night's meeting shed light on the rapidly changing landscape of Fairfax County. Over the years, the County has presented itself as a hub for new businesses and new development. It is now situated as an ever-urbanizing powerhouse, inviting everyone from all over the world to live, work, and raise a family. At a time when rural preservation and urbanization collide, residential communities and the protection of their neighborhoods are taking center-stage.

Animal Bill Town Hall to Be Held in Springfield

Virginia state elected officials want to make life better for dogs and cats. Several bills were introduced in the General Assembly this session to benefit pets and the humans that care for them.

Select legislators will speak about companion animal bills in a post-session recap. On hand to discuss bills that passed

or failed will be co-chair's of the General Assembly animal caucus, Senator Dave Marsden, Del. Kaye Kory and Del. Kathy Tran, Chairman of the House Natural Resources subcommittee. Senator Marsden also chairs the senate's Companion Animal subcommittee.

Manassas Animal Control Officer Marc Daigle will recount the successful cruelty

investigation which led to closing a local puppy store.

The event, hosted by the VA Dog Army, an animal advocacy group working for law enforcement and legislation, is free and open to the public. West Springfield Government Center, 6140 Rolling Road, Springfield, March 28, 2-4 p.m.

—SUSAN LAUME

Budgeting the State's Resources

BY KENNETH R. "KEN" PLUM
STATE DELEGATE (D-36)



COMMENTARY

In contrast to the federal government's method of budgeting, the budget for the Commonwealth of Virginia is more than balanced. The state Constitution prohibits the borrowing of money for operations, and it requires a "rainy day fund" of reserve monies that can be drawn upon in an economic downturn. That is in part why the state has a perfect AAA bond rating giving it the best terms when monies are borrowed for capital projects.

Both the House and the Senate have completed work on their versions of the budget that was proposed by Governor Ralph Northam earlier this year. The two budgets will be reconciled in a conference committee that will resolve differences between the two. Total spending for the biennium will be about \$48 billion in general funds raised through taxes. Individual and corporate income taxes provide three quarters of the revenue with sales tax providing about seventeen percent and additional smaller taxes making up the rest. General funds coming from taxes make up about

36 percent of total revenue. Non-general funds that consist of fees such as motor vehicle and gas taxes, college tuition, federal grants and other fees make up 64 percent of the budget.

Noteworthy features of the House and Senate budgets that are being reconciled and are subject to change before a final budget is adopted include a much needed increase in rates for personal care providers in Medicaid programs, an increase in developmental waiver disability slots by 1,135 in the Governor's budget to 1,635 in the Senate version of the budget. While the increase will help, the number of persons on the waiting list still number in the thousands. The Governor and the House budgeted for 630 supportive housing slots for persons with serious mental illness while the Senate provided 1,630. Budget language provides for the establishment of a state-based exchange for health insurance.

The budgets of both houses provided for teacher raises as did the Governor's budget.

The amount differs in each with an expected three to four percent over the biennium. The ratio of counselors to students in the public schools will be improved. The Governor proposed a ratio of one counselor per 250 students. The House ratio is 325 and the Senate's is 300. Likewise, the ratio of teachers for English learners will be improved. A major point of contention among the Governor's and the House and Senate budgets is that only the House has proposed to restore the cost to compete funding for Northern Virginia schools because of the high cost of living in the region. The average per pupil direct aid for public school students range from \$6,206 in the Governor's budget \$6,297 in the House budget.

A major emphasis in the budget is an increased investment in preschool education that was championed by the First Lady. The Governor's "Get skilled, Get a job, Give back" (G3) funding to provide tuition assistance to low- to moderate-income students who meet certain criteria is receiving significant funding. The Housing Trust Fund will receive a much-needed infusion of cash proposed in all the budgets.

For information comparing the three budgets, go to www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org.

We Both Deserve \$15. Why Don't Our Senators Think So?

BY NICK RIVIERE AND
TONY HEDGEPEATH



Riviere



Hedgepeth

Like millions of Virginians, we work hard. As home care providers, we work every day to help older adults and people with disabilities live independently at home and in the community. By keeping people out of costly nursing homes and institutions, we save taxpayers money and deliver quality care.

We do the same work but in different parts of Virginia – Fairfax County and City of Richmond – and have different backgrounds. One of us is a 21-year-old assisting young adults with developmental disabilities and one of us is a 61-year-old Army veteran helping his fellow vets who suffer from PTSD.

However, we both love what we do. It's a blessing to be able to help others live with dignity.

We both deserve to make at least \$15 per hour and live with dignity ourselves.

Unfortunately, our Virginia state Senators seem to disagree.

Earlier this month, the Virginia House of Delegates passed a bill to raise the minimum wage to \$15 for all workers by 2025. They recognized that working families are falling behind no matter how hard we work, and that we need to build an economy that works for everyone.

The Senate, however, passed a bill which would create different minimum wages in different regions, even for workers who do the exact same jobs like us.

Their bill also forces workers to wait even longer to get a raise.

If the Senate bill becomes law, people working in Fairfax won't make \$15 until 2027, while those in Richmond won't make \$15 until 2032. Our fellow homecare providers and others working in Hampton Roads won't make \$15 until 2034.

Delaying the minimum wage increase for 14 years, and paying different wages for the same work, is not only unfair; it's unacceptable.

Every person who works hard and plays by the rules in Virginia deserves equal respect. We deserve living wages, paid sick days, affordable health care, a secure retirement, and the right to join together in a union.

While the cost of living varies in different parts of Virginia, we all feel the same pain when we struggle to pay rent, buy groceries and pay utilities. Housing costs are skyrocketing in both Richmond and Northern Virginia. Health care costs, food costs and transportation costs are all increasing. We need a state-wide \$15 minimum wage to ensure that no one gets left behind.

To our Senators, we ask: why should a home care worker in Richmond or Roanoke make less than a home care worker in Fairfax when we make the same contribution to Virginia's families?

We elected Democratic majorities to the House and Senate because they promised to deliver a brighter future for working Virginians. It's time that our Senators delivered on that promise.

LETTERS

Targeted by Scammers

To the Editor:

Recently, I was stuck at home and unable to go to work for a few weeks due to health reasons. While to some people that may seem like a welcome respite from the drudgery of commuting to a 9 to 5 job, let me tell you it was not.

While Week 1 wasn't too bad, one can only watch so many episodes of Law and Order: Special Victim's Unit! What I would like to share with everyone is just how many calls we all get on our house landlines each day. When we're at work and don't answer, most callers don't leave messages so we have no idea of the volume of these calls each day.

I can honestly say that 99 percent of these calls are cold calling sales people or scammers! Yes, there is the occasional call from Giant Food that "a prescription is due for pickup," but for the most part they are from strangers trying to separate you from your hard-earned cash.

Social Security scams, lower credit card interest rates, police benevolent association donations, hail damage inspection teams that

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PET CONNECTION



Christmas Guests

Ron Edwards of Springfield writes: "Gunner (left) and Ammo, our Swedish Vallhund grandpups, visited us in their Christmas PJs. Posed under the tree before opening their presents."

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PET CONNECTION

Vizsla 'Love' Letters

They were, literally, all about "LOVE"

when "Vizsla Go" (VGO) members met to celebrate the Feb. 14 holiday. The new permanent home of the "LOVE" sign at the Workhouse Arts Center in Lorton provided a perfect backdrop for heart-themed pictures.

Valentine's Day or Vizslantine's Day, as it's referred to in the group, is a natural time to celebrate this affectionate, beautiful, and energetic red dog.

A pointing breed, originating in Hungary, the Vizsla has risen in popularity in the United States to 42nd in the national registry. Known for its versatility in dog sports, and its increasing use in bomb and drug detection, the dogs also are happy to be family dogs, as long as significant daily exercise is provided.

VGO is a small group of active Vizsla enthusiasts who meet regularly to exercise, socialize, and train their beloved animals. Several VGO members serve the community as therapy dog teams and can be found at the library reading with children, at the airport, schools, colleges, and retirement communities.... after a long run.

—SUSAN LAUME

A Perfect Friend

County Board of Supervisors Chairman Jeff McKay: "I have an adopted retired racing Greyhound named Pascal. Despite their reputation as fast dogs that can run 45 mph, they also live up to their nickname as the '40 mph couch potato.' Greyhounds are loving, calm, and relaxed; a perfect friend for me and my kids Aidan and Leann. Adopting older pets from places like the Fairfax County Animal Shelter is great too."



Pascal with Leann.



Pascal with Aidan.



PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME

Vizsla Go members Tia, Haley, Stella, Ryker, Lucy, and Skye make some "Love" letters.



Vizsla Go members Evelyn Novins, Michael Crossin, Barbara Autry, Alina Madalina, Ron Green, and Cynthia Fox pose with "Love"



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Allison Waldron: We have become the Irish Rover Family with all our furry friends.

Reflections of the Irish Rover Dog Walker

A crisp morning, blue skies, playful paws, an empty breakfast bowl, a leash ready by the door, and wagging tails can only mean one thing: Time to go for a dog walk. Seven years later, I am still dog walking and enjoying my career switch even more with every passing day. Supported by a passionate team, who are client focused, who enjoy pets, who appreciate the outdoors, we have become the Irish Rover Family with all our furry friends. We are not just walking for the sake of walking. Instead, your pet is taking in the wonders of their natural environment. Your pet feels at home with us.

Last year, Irish Rover Dog Walkers and Pet Sitters continued to flourish and expand our team. Our approach has always been client and pet focused. Our philosophy is to understand the fundamental needs of the pet owners first before we even get to know their pet. This allows us to meet the expectation of the owner and to provide service tailored to their dog. We also have the expertise to care for other pets including cats, rabbits, guinea pigs, birds, fish, and bearded dragons.

One might ask, how difficult can it be to walk a dog? A dog walk is not just a dog walk. The walk should be pleasurable and stimulate the dog. When a dog is out in the great outdoors, they are using all of their senses

to explore their environment. Our goal is to make this experience as fun and exciting as possible. Irish Rover prides itself with great walks as we have a variety of trails to choose from. Not only are we walking dogs, but we are admiring nature all around us. Whether it's an early morning walk, we are listening to a chorus of birds, or if it is a late night, we might be enjoying the sounds of the frogs or the bugs. The pets always perk up when they see a heron wading in the pond, or a family of deer grazing, or a sly fox rambling around. Last year, we had the good fortune of seeing a brown owl who was secretly trying to disguise himself as a fallen log. That is the beauty of a walk, there is always something new to see that stimulates your pet's interest. The dogs also get to interact with their friendly neighborhood furry friends along the way.

Last year, the feeling of that extended family really came into play when we had our first human client pass away. For the first time in Irish Rover history, I came to inherit a dog. This was truly an honor that someone would think so highly of my pet care that they would leave me their dog..

— ALLISON WALDRON
The writer is the owner of Irish Rover Dog Walkers and Pet Sitters LLC in Fairfax Station.

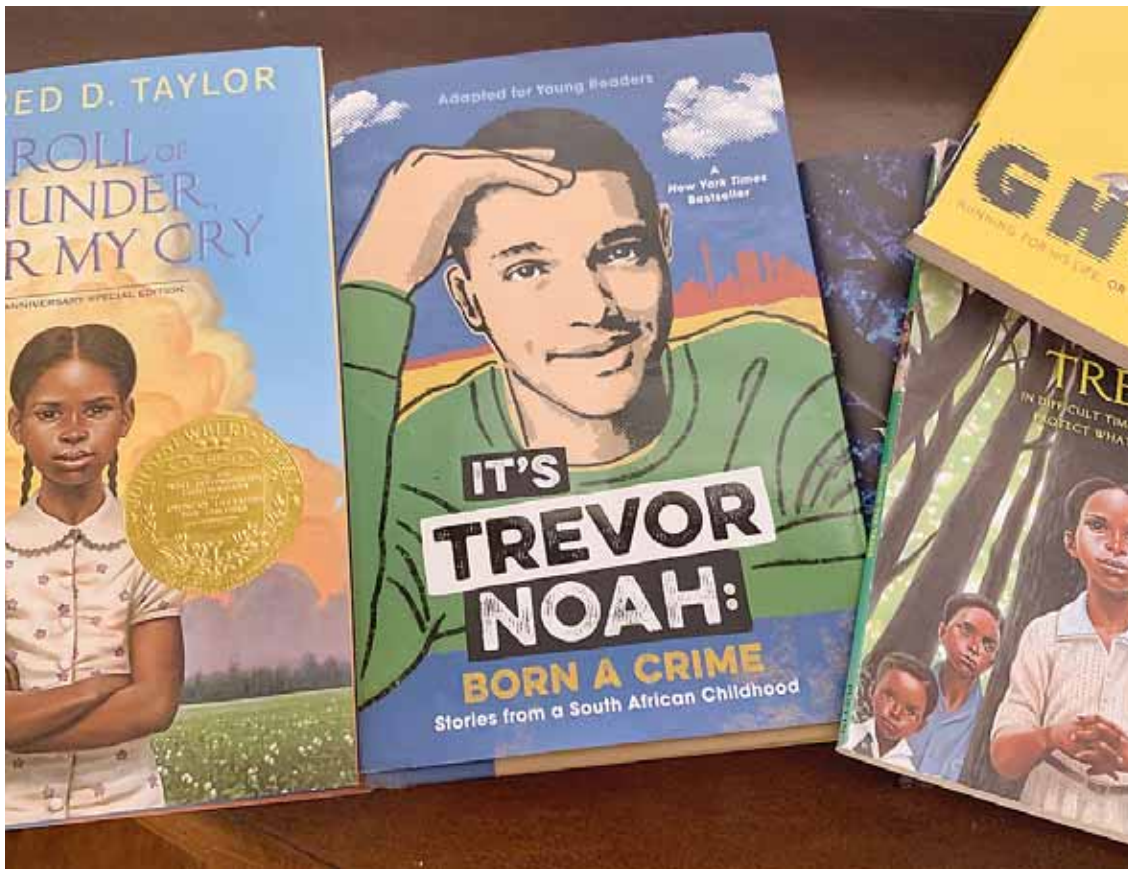


PHOTO BY MARILYN CAMPBELL

While February is designed to raise awareness of the societal contributions of African Americans, in some schools, it's taught all year long.

Black History for a New Generation

Lessons on the contributions of African Americans not limited to February.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

Black History Month was created to devote one period during the year to highlight the contributions of African Americans. It represents an opportunity for all, not just African Americans to learn about and appreciate the numerous contributions of Black Americans. That conversation, however, is changing at some local schools.

"It's part of Madeira's curriculum ... not specifically for Black History Month," said Karen Joostema, Director of Communications at Madeira. "[Students] taking Modernism will be researching a Harlem Renaissance poet of their choice, analyzing their lives and work. Juniors have also read Frederick Douglass' Narrative and Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon to interrogate the promise, failures, and continuing work in the U.S. on race and civil rights."

The school's curriculum, says Joostema incorporates studies of the contributions of all cultures including those of African Americans, seamlessly throughout the year. "AP (Advanced Placement) seniors will be finishing up Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man, working to understand how Ellison viewed the struggles of race and class in the middle of the twentieth century and how he viewed himself as part of

the American literary tradition, as voiced in his response to Irving Howe, "The World and the Jug," she said. "Sophomores have just finished reading a short story from the Kenyan writer Ngig) wa Thiong'o along with a play from the white South African playwright Athol Fugard.

Ninth graders read Maya Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings to explore how identity, one's sense of self, are shaped by race, class, gender, and geography.

At The Heights School, African American history is part of year round study, said Linda F. Maher. "We study seminal figures in American History, many of whom are African American, so it's just a given that it's just a part of studying history throughout the year," she said. "Studying the Civil Rights movement, for example, is integral to our study of Civics.

Still, February offers an opportunity to focus on African Americans history outside of tragic events. KiKi Davis, Director of Institutional Equity and Diversity at St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School, says that African Americans have contributed to every aspect of American culture, her school's celebrations include recognition for those influences. "[We're] celebrating the contributions of African Americans to the arts literature, music, theater," she said. "Students will learn about the contributions and the effects of Americans of African descent in other segments of society including, academia, medicine and science."

"There will be several lunch forums held for our students to discuss issues directly relating to the African American experience," said Davis. "Many teachers will incorporate historical facts and references in their curriculum."

"We study seminal figures in American History, many of whom are African American, so it's just a given that we're studying it throughout the year."

—Linda F. Maher, The Heights School



PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED

#15 Vanessa Gardiner: As of February, Lee HS Lady Lancers, have a 12-10 winning record.

Lady Lancers Earn Respect, Enjoy Winning Season

Coach Leia (Le) Towe, MBA came to Lee High School in 2017, with the goal to try to change the mindset and environment of its athletic basketball team. She wanted to not only instill belief in the athletes, but to also create a stronger community around the school, to support these students on and off the court.

Her first two seasons were trying-as basketball was not first nature for many of the players. She spent more time building confidence and connection, than skills and competition. Needless to say in two seasons the team only won 4 games out of 36.

This year has been a huge turn around. All the players have bought into the process and grown. Almost immediately after having her baby in October of 2019, Coach Le came into her third season on

fire. The girls had spent a lot of time, since late August conditioning and preparing for the basketball days to come. First game, Lee HS Varsity girl took off with a victory—but then the following two weeks, spiraled back to old ways. Through hard work, discipline, and focus; they were able to regroup and create a winning record.

As of February, Lee HS Lady Lancers, have a 12-10 winning record.

Their record hasn't been this good at the the school, since 2008. Coach Le, her staff, and the Lady Lancers are working hard to make history for the school. The season isn't done yet— but no matter what happens from this point on - they have done an excellent job in changing the culture and gaining the respect from other schools in the area all while maintaining high grade point averages.



Through hard work, discipline, and focus Lee High girls basketball team was able to regroup and create a winning record.

CALENDAR

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

ONGOING

St. James Intramural High School Basketball League. Now thru March 10. 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), Now thru 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.

Monday Exercise Classes. Now thru March 30. 9:30-10:30 a.m. At Lord of Life Lutheran Church, 5114 Twinbrook Road, Fairfax. Shepherd's Center of Fairfax-Burke offers exercise classes for older adults designed to build strength and improve balance and flexibility. All levels of ability are welcome. Call the SCFB office, 703-426-2824, for class information.

Wednesday Exercise Classes. Now thru May 27. 9-10 a.m. At The Lutheran Church of the Abiding Presence, 6304 Lee Chapel Road, Burke. Shepherd's Center of Fairfax-Burke offers exercise classes for older adults designed to build strength and improve balance and flexibility. All levels of ability are welcome. Call the SCFB office, 703-426-2824, for class information. (20 weeks @\$2.50/class = \$50)

Friday Exercise Classes. Now thru April 3. 9:30-10:30 a.m. At Lord of Life Lutheran Church, 5114 Twinbrook Road, Fairfax. Shepherd's Center of Fairfax-Burke offers exercise classes for older adults designed to build strength and improve balance and flexibility. All levels of ability are welcome. Call the SCFB office, 703-426-2824, for class information. (8 weeks, \$20).

The Color Green. Now thru March 29. At Torpedo Factory Artists at Mosaic, 105 District Ave., Fairfax. In celebration of an early spring and St. Patrick's Day, Torpedo Factory artists are tackling one of nature's most ubiquitous colors, green. In its newest exhibit simply titled, Green, the gallery is presenting a selection of original paintings, photographs, jewelry, scarves, ceramics and more, that reflect its various artists' interpretations of the color. Torpedo Factory artists are chosen through a rigorous jurying process and enjoy a high degree of acclaim, both locally and nationally. Savvy shoppers know Torpedo Factory Artists @ Mosaic as a place not only to enjoy fine art but also as a great place to purchase art at affordable prices.

SATURDAY/FEB. 29

Mason Jazz Festival. Begins 10 a.m. At Harris Theatre, GMU, 4471 Aquia Creek Lane, Fairfax. The Mason Jazz Festival is an invitational event open to middle school, high school, collegiate and community Jazz ensembles. Sponsored by Mason Jazz Studies, National Jazz Workshop and the Jazz Education Network, participating groups will perform a 20-30 minute set, followed by a clinic by Mason Jazz faculty and special guests. The participation fee is \$200 per ensemble and spots are limited. Closing festival performance will be the United States Air Force, Airmen of Note at 7 p.m. All performances are free and open to the public – no tickets or registration required. This festival will include three "Outstanding Soloist" (cash prizes) and four "Best Section" awards as well as scholarships to the National Jazz Workshop summer camp at Mason.

NPR's From the Top. 8 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, 4373 Mason Pond Dr, Fairfax. Attend a live recording of this popular NPR radio show, featuring the acclaimed piano duo Anderson and Roe as guest hosts. From the Top celebrates the stories, talents, and character of America's best pre-collegiate classically-trained musicians. It began as an experiment in 2000 and quickly grew to become the most popular weekly one-hour classical music program on public radio. It



Lesson Zero

Lesson Zero will appear at Fat Tuesdays in Fairfax on Friday, Feb. 28.

FRIDAY/FEB. 28

Lesson Zero. 9 p.m. At Fat Tuesdays, 10673 Braddock Rd., Fairfax. Cover is \$5, plenty of parking, good food, good drinks, nice folks, and way cool music from Oasis recording artist LESSON ZERO. For more information see: www.youtube.com/lessonzero and www.reverbnation.com/lessonzero

delights both seasoned classical listeners and new classical music fans alike. With a mission to empower young musicians and inspire music lovers, From the Top showcases the extraordinary gifts and stories of the young musicians. Guest hosts Greg Anderson (a From the Top alum himself) and Elizabeth Joy Roe will emcee the program and perform alongside the young artists. Following the performances, the featured young artists discuss balancing their musical passions and dedication to their craft around school, hobbies and full family schedules. Visit the website: <https://cfa.gmu.edu/>

FEB. 29 AND MARCH 1

Monty's Trains Special LEGO Model Train Show. 12-4 p.m. At Fairfax Station Railroad Museum, 11200 Fairfax Station Road, Fairfax Station. Local modeling enthusiast, Monty Smith, will share his LEGO (R) model train layouts in a special two day event. Admission: Museum members and ages 4 and under, free; ages 5-12, \$3; ages 13 and older, \$5; seniors 65 and older and military, both retired and active, \$4. Visit the website www.fairfax-station.org, or call 703-425-9225.

SUNDAY/MARCH 1

Hot Peas 'n Butter. 1 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, 4373 Mason Pond Drive, Fairfax. Praised by the Los Angeles Times for their "hot and mellow multicultural groove," Hot Peas 'n Butter will have you and your whole family on their feet dancing with their infectiously fun global music celebration. This Parent Choice Award-winning, family music ensemble blends together traditional Latin music, Afro-Caribbean rhythms, jazz, bluegrass, country, and rock to create a "rainbow of color and sound." (NY 1 TV). Singing in English, Spanish, French, Korean and Hebrew, Hot Peas 'n Butter aims to show multi-cultural interconnectedness. Their repertoire of songs like "Number 1" and their signature Latin beat tracks "Somos Familia," "Amistad," "Que Lluvia," and "Round the World" enjoy radio play nationwide. Cost is \$15 for adults; \$10 for children. Visit the website: www.cfa.gmu.edu

MARCH 4 TO APRIL 5

Lines and Pauses. At Arches Gallery, Workhouse Arts Center, Lorton. "Lines and Pauses" is the culmination of the works of Marc Pachon captured over the last years with local and international dancers and models, tied together with a common thread of fabric moving from one shot to the next, interspersed with his freeze-frame captures of moments in time that disappeared as soon as the photograph was taken. Free. Visit the website: www.beyondhelp.com

SATURDAY/MARCH 7

Monopoly Tournament. 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. At Moose Lodge Family Center in Lorton. Nearly 100 players, cheered on by family, friends, and volunteers will play three timed rounds of Monopoly and compete for cash and prizes - all to raise money for the Lorton Community Action Center (LCAC). Sponsorship Levels: Round 1 - \$300 per table; Round 2 - \$600 per table (incl. 2 free tickets to the event); Round 3 - \$1,000 (incl. 4 free tickets to the event). To register / sponsor / pay / participate or play, go to: <https://lortonaction.org/monopoly-tournament/>

Catholic Schools Job Fair. 9-11 a.m. At Paul VI High School, 10675 Fairfax Blvd., Fairfax. The Catholic Diocese of Arlington's Office of Catholic Schools will hold a job fair seeking to fill up to 150 teaching positions. Positions are open in preschools, elementary, middle and high schools. The Diocese has 37 parish (K-8) schools, four diocesan high schools, four independent Catholic schools and five free-standing (not connected with a parish school) pre-schools, serving more than 17,000 students. For more information, contact Mallory Sigmon at 703-841-2519 or visit <https://www.arlingtondiocese.org/catholic-schools/careers/>.

Teen Job Fair. 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. At Woodson High School 9525 Main Street, Fairfax. Focused on students and younger job seekers looking for a variety of employment opportunities; full time, after-school, seasonal positions, internship opportunities, and volunteer positions. Sponsored by Supervisor Pat Herry, Supervisor Dalia Palchik, Supervisor James Walkinshaw, Woodson High School, Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce.

Wilderness Walk. 1-3 p.m. At Burke Lake Park, 7315 Ox Road, Fairfax Station. Take a walk on the wild side with the "Burke Lake Wilderness Walk" for participants age 12 to adult. Explore the wilderness area of the park as you visit two old home sites and two vernal pools with a naturalist. Learn about the park's natural and cultural history. Moderate walking is required. The cost is \$15 per person. Call 703-323-6600.

Teen Job Fair. 2 to 4 p.m. At South County High School, 8501 Silverbrook Road, Lorton. These events focused on students and younger job seekers looking for a variety of employment opportunities; full time, after-school, seasonal positions, internship opportunities, and volunteer positions. Sponsored by Supervisor Pat Herry, Supervisor Dan Storck, South Fairfax Chamber of Commerce, South County Federation, and South County High School.

Geocaching Workshop 2 to 4 p.m. At Burke Lake Park, 7315 Ox Road, Fairfax Station. For ages 8 to adult. Learn how to use hand-held Global Positioning System (GPS) units to locate hidden caches within Burke Lake Park. Follow latitude and longitude coordinates to find a hidden object, container or unique geological feature. Bring your own GPS; a limited number

are available to borrow from the instructor at class. The program cost is \$22 per person. Call 703-323-6600.

Russian National Ballet: "Romeo & Juliet" / "Carmen." 8 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, 4373 Mason Pond Drive, Fairfax. With lush music and exquisite grace, the Russian National Ballet returns to the Center to perform two of the world's greatest ballets: Romeo and Juliet together with Carmen. Both ballets express the torments of love. Young love, bursting with exhilarating passion, is at the heart of Romeo and Juliet, with the perilous fate for the star-crossed lovers. While with Carmen, it is unrequited love, burning with obsession that is at the center of this beautifully tragic ballet. Under the direction of the legendary Bolshoi principal dancer Elena Radchenko, the company brings both timeless classics to life, articulating the nuances of love through expressive dance, elegant costumes, and lavish sets. Cost is \$56, \$48, \$34. Visit the website: www.cfa.gmu.edu

Stargazing and S'Mores. 8:30-10 p.m. At Burke Lake Park, 7315 Ox Road, Fairfax Station, Burke. Set your sights on the stars and warm up inside and out with s'mores by a roaring campfire at Burke Lake Park. Participants age 3 to adult can take a stroll along the lakeshore while learning about the constellations, their stories and other night-sky features. An astronomical naturalist will identify stars for you and have some telescopes available for you to use. Then, put the finishing touches on your evening out with a campfire and s'mores. S'mores ingredients will be provided; hot dogs are welcome. Cost is \$12 per person. Children must be accompanied by a registered adult. Call 703-323-6600 or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/burke-lake.

SUNDAY/MARCH 8

A Day at Fairfax Station Railroad Museum. 1-4 p.m. At Fairfax Station Railroad Museum, 11200 Fairfax Station Road, Fairfax Station. Take the History Challenge or enjoy self-guided tours with our Uniguide Audio Tour. Volunteers will conduct 60-minute walking tours of the museum and museum neighborhood to give visitors an idea of what life was like in a small railroad community. Tours begin at 1:15 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. No reservations needed. Museum members and ages 4 and under, free; ages 5-12, \$3; ages 13 and older, \$5; seniors 65 and older and active and retired military, \$4. Visit the website: www.fairfax-station.org.

SATURDAY/MARCH 14

Beethoven at 250 "Soulmates." 8 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, Concert Hall, 4373 Mason Pond Dr, Fairfax. Featuring the Fairfax Symphony Orchestra with Christopher Zimmerman, conductor, and Philippe Bianconi of France on piano. The program features Brahms: Piano Concerto No. 2 and Beethoven "Symphony of Symphonies." Hear the stories behind the music with music director Christopher Zimmerman and special guests before the concert at 7 p.m. Visit the website: <http://cfa.calendar.gmu.edu/fairfax-symphony-orchestra-beethoven-at-250-soulmates>

SATURDAY/APRIL 18

Model Classic 2020. 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. At Fairfax High School, 3501 Rebel Run, Fairfax. The Northern Virginia Modelers Chapter, International Plastic Modelers Society presents an educational and fun event for the entire family. Cost is \$8/adults; \$10/contestant \$10/family; free under 18. Visit the web site: www.novaiipms.org

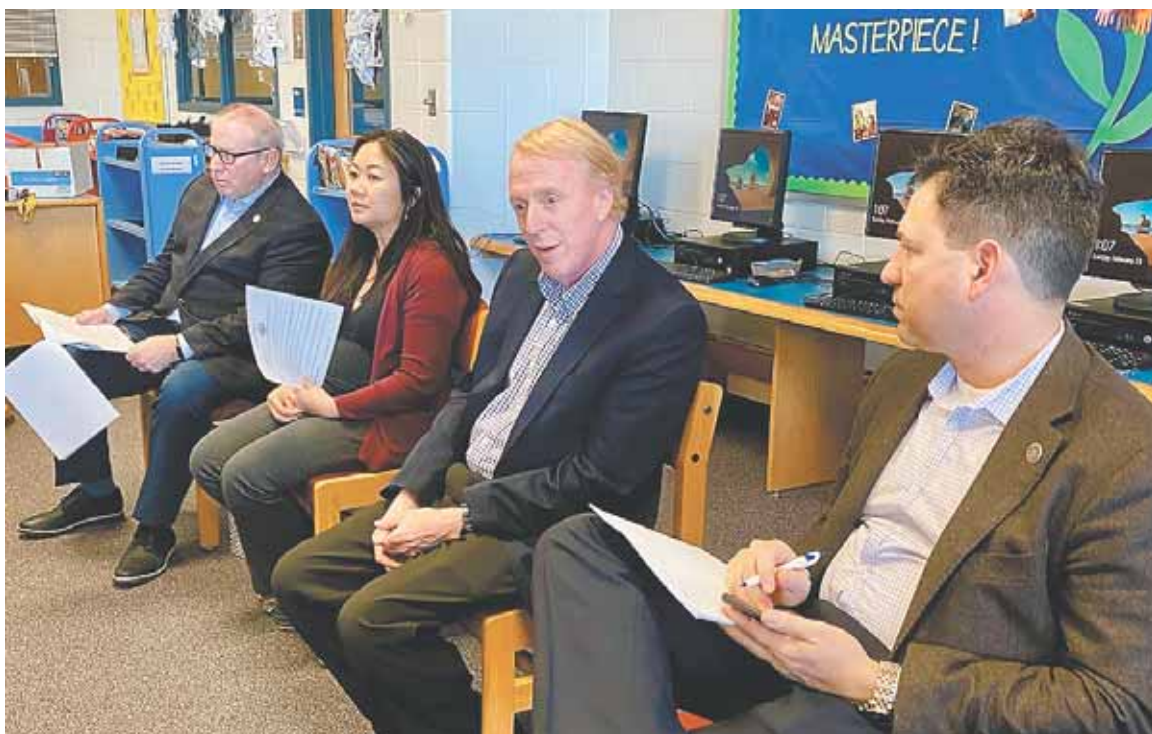
SATURDAY/MARCH 21

Fantasy and Fun. 1 p.m. At Annandale United Methodist Church, 6935 Columbia Pike, Annandale. Featuring The Great Zucchini and the Da Capo and Lyric Youth Chorus of the Fairfax Choral Society. Tickets are \$15/adults; \$5/students; children 13 and under free.

SUNDAY/MARCH 22

Back to the Beatles and Beyond. 4 p.m. At W.T. Woodson High School, 9525 Main Street, Fairfax. Featuring the Vocal Arts Ensemble of the Fairfax Choral Society with Michael Ehrlich, Director. Tickets are \$25/adults; \$10/students. Kids 13 and under free.

SEE CALENDAR, PAGE 11



PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION

State Senator Scott Surovell at Town Hall in Lorton.

Surovell Defends Vote Against Assault Weapon Ban

BY SUSAN LAUME
THE CONNECTION

Those following Virginia's gun violence prevention measures were surprised when Senator Scott Surovell (D-36th) joined three other Democrats - Senators Petersen (D-34), Edwards (D-21) and Deeds (D-25) - in a committee vote against advancing an assault weapons ban on Feb. 17. Gun control and gun advocates were among those in the audience to ask about gun measures and other issues at a joint Feb. 23 town hall meeting with Senator George Barker (D-39), Del. Kathy Tran (D-42) and Del. Mark Sickles (D-43) in Lorton Laurel Crest Elementary School.

When asked about his vote, Surovell said he "does not personally support the ownership of weapons of war not needed for hunting or self-protection." However, he felt Senate members were not prepared to vote for the ban. In fact, there was no "companion bill" in the Senate. He said, "From my perspective, we had a bill that wasn't going to pass. I had some questions about the bill. It needed some work but . . . even if it had got . . . on the floor it would have died there and would have continued a discussion going nowhere and wasted a lot of time." Surovell explained he felt the time was better spent on the 20 to 25 other big policy issues which remain to be discussed in the two weeks remaining in the session. He referred those attending to his blog and to articles that will appear in the "Washington Post", "Connection" and other local newspapers this week for further explanation. Senator Petersen has also defended his vote in Fox News media.

THE FULL VIRGINIA HOUSE passed an assault weapon bill on Feb. 11, by a narrow margin, 51 - 48, along party lines. That action moved the bill, spon-



Delegates Sickles and Tran, Senators Barker and Surovell conduct town hall meeting in Lorton.

sored by Del. Mark Levine (D-45) to "cross over" to the Senate, where it was assigned to the Judiciary Committee. The Committee voted to carry over the bill, HB961, until the 2021 session, by a vote of 10-5. Those committee members voting in support of the bill were Senators Saslaw, Lucas, McClellan, Boysko, and Morrissey.

Surovell reminded constituents in his blog that much progress was made in gun control during the 2020 session. "We have made significant progress on firearm violence prevention. We have passed (1) universal background checks, (2) reinstating Virginia's "one-gun-a-month" purchase limit, (3) emergency risk protection or "red flag" orders, (4) authorizing local governments to regulate guns in public buildings, parks and events, (5) allowing firearm forfeiture during protective order proceedings, (6) banned bump stocks, and (7) increased penalties for child access. Legislation to broaden the crimes that surrender firearms rights to misdemeanor stalking and sexual battery is pending along with my voluntary Do Not Sell List legislation. Passage of these bills is unprecedented and historic."

ASSAULT STYLE WEAPONS gained infamy as the weapon of choice in several mass shooting episodes, spurring gun control activists to seek bans or other limits on their sale and use. Levine's assault weapon ban was included in the package of bills planned for introduction in Governor Northam's special general assembly session on gun control in July 2019 following the mass shooting in Virginia Beach. The Special Session was quickly shut down by the GOP controlled legislature less than two hours after it convened, hearing no gun bills. With the change in party control this session, gun measures are among several issues that have found better reception from lawmakers.



PHOTOS FROM DOORBELL CAMERA

The doorbell camera picture shows the suspect taking a picture through the door transom window.

South County Stalker Caught on Doorbell Camera

Technology around the Newington neighborhood is valuable in this case.

BY MIKE SALMON
THE CONNECTION

Stalking and taking unauthorized photos at a house in Newington Forest started as an acquaintance at the workplace, and thanks to the technology of the doorbell cameras, the man who continued stalking several locations around Newington Forest was arrested. The suspect, Christopher Kiernan Murphy, was arrested in Arlington and charged with three charges of peeping and one charge of stalking. He was booked and released on his own cognizance. The arrest came in Arlington because that was where Murphy worked.

Natalie Fleming, the Newington resident who was the victim in this case, had a feeling something was going on and decided to check her doorbell camera. After seeing the footage of the suspect getting out of his car, approaching the door, and taking pictures through the transom windows, she warned her neighbors, and a few neighbors reported seeing him. She's still looking for help from the surrounding community. "I want people to look at their ring footage and see if they see him," said Fleming.

The Newington Forest homeowners association had

gotten calls about the individual, "but they never called police nor warned residents," said Fleming on the Nextdoor Neighbor chat site. This incident has "jeopardized my feeling of safety and security in my own home," she said.

The doorbell cameras are quickly becoming a tool for law enforcement. "Any type of video footage can be useful evidence," said Lt. Erica Webb of the Fairfax County Police Department. Webb would not comment on Fleming's case because it is still under investigation, and will go before a judge on April 1.

Another Set of Eyes

A "Ring," doorbell camera is about \$100 and can be found in hardware stores and online. It was invented by Jamie Siminoff, it said on the Ring website, and he started tinkering around when he came up with the idea and shared it with his wife. "If not for my wife, the Ring™ Video Doorbell would not exist," he said on their website. "One night I shared my idea for reinventing the doorbell. She loved it! Not just for the obvious convenience but for the security of now being able to safely answer the door from anywhere." It was compared to caller ID for the front door. "Our Mission: To Reduce Crime in Neighborhoods," Ring claims.

"Ring" is not the only brand out there. Other brands include Vivent, ADT, Amcrest, and Remo who also make doorbell cameras. There is an app for camera-doorbell so it's possible for property owners to know who is knocking at their door even when they are away.

He's approaching the door with the camera in hand.



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OPINION

Climate Change at Our Doorstep

How Virginia is taking the high road.

BY ROHAN MANI

Crowing up in a world in which scientists predict we only have 12 years to limit climate change catastrophe is understandably unnerving for an 18-year old. And the most worrisome concern is that we are doing almost nothing about what is looming over the horizon.

For decades, our planet has experienced consistent increases in temperature, changing rainfall patterns, increasing frequency of floods, droughts, melting of glaciers and more. While cutting back greenhouse gas emissions responsible for global warming is the only way forward, limited progress has been made on this front. Coal and oil continue to dominate as major energy sources despite the availability of relatively cheap and abundant solar and wind energy. What then are realistic and sustainable solutions that we should pursue in order to leave a thriving planet for our children and grandchildren?

According to the Fourth National Assessment Report, the impacts of global climate change are already being felt in the United States and are projected to intensify in the future. But the severity of future impacts will depend largely on actions taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to adapt to the changes that will occur. This report draws a direct connection between the warming atmosphere and the resulting changes that affect Americans' lives, communities, and livelihoods, now and in the future. Multiple studies have now projected that the climate of our region will turn more southern over

the coming decades. The unusually warm winter of this year may not be an exception but a norm for coming years. That means, less need for jackets, gloves, hats, scarves etc.

Many communities are attempting to answer this question in different ways. And it's been fascinating to see how some are gearing up to cope with immediate problems through advocacy and the support of local governments. It's obvious that communities need to adapt to a changing climate irrespective of what happens globally to reduce greenhouse gases.

There is, however, a ray of hope. The Virginia lawmakers passed an unprecedented climate legislation last week that will significantly alter use of clean energy in our power generation. The measure, called the Clean Economy Act, lays out a plan to get Virginia to 100 percent renewable generation by 2050. The legislation will significantly alter our generation energy capacity with solar and offshore wind taking the lead. That will not only reduce our dependence on fossil fuel-based energy generation but will put Virginia among the top US states in terms of dealing with climate change.

Climate change has the potential to significantly transform every aspect of our lives, ranging from where we live to what we eat and the stories we tell. It is an existential crisis for our generation and generations to come. I believe this is the time to act now to save the planet and it begins at our doorstep. We can do our own bit by driving less, switching to cleaner energy sources, using energy efficient appliances and reducing usage of water. As activist Greta Thunberg put it aptly, "the climate crisis has already been solved. We already have the facts and solutions. All we have to do is to wake up and change."

Rohan Mani is a Senior and a student journalist at McLean Highlander.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FROM PAGE 4

are in my neighborhood and countless free vacations I've won where I only have to sit through a short two hour presentation, are just some of the calls I get every day!

Boredom forced me to pick up the phone and actually speak with these people. Civic duty caused me to engage in as long a conversation as I could so they would have less time to rip off my neighbors. They target the young and the old. Their metrics must show they succeed enough to make it profitable. And our number is registered with the "Do Not Call" list! Something must be done.

Bill Byrne
Oak Hill

Making Virginia a Climate Leader

To the Editor:

We don't have time to waste in the face of the climate crisis. A recent climate report from the Na-

tional Audubon Society revealed that two-thirds of North American bird species are vulnerable to extinction from climate change, including nearly 70 species found in Virginia.

From the coasts of the Chesapeake Bay to the forests of the Blue Ridge Mountains, birds like the Field Sparrow and Cerulean Warbler may lose nearly all of their seasonal habitat range. We need practical, ambitious climate solutions to protect our state's birds.

The Virginia Clean Economy Act (HB 1526 / SB 851) can help by leading our state on a path to

achieve a 100 percent carbon-free economy that will help our birds, our environment, and our communities thrive.

This bill is not the only step Virginia should take to address climate change—but it's a great first step. I urge Senator Barker and the General Assembly to make cutting carbon emissions a top priority. We must act now to make Virginia a climate leader and prevent another year of inaction.

Nikka De Mesa
National Audubon Society
Springfield

Write

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

Letters to the Editor
The Connection
1606 King St.
Alexandria VA 22314
Call: 703-917-6444.

By e-mail: editors@connectionnewspapers.com

CALENDAR

FROM PAGE 8

TUESDAY/MARCH 24

Poetry of Music: It Takes a Whole Village. 7 p.m. At Annandale United Methodist Church, 6935 Columbia Pike, Annandale. Featuring the Master Singers, Concert Choir and Treble Choruses of the Fairfax Choral Society. With Patrick Vaughn, Director, Youth Choruses of the Fairfax Choral Society. Tickets are \$15/adults; \$5/students; Kids 13 and under free.

SATURDAY/MAY 2

Healthy Strides 5K/10K. 7:30 a.m. At Burke Lake Park, 7315 Ox Road, Fairfax Station. Registration is underway for the ninth annual Healthy Strides 5K/10K on Saturday, May 2. The 10K runs along a wooded path and takes participants around Burke Lake. The 5K follows a tree-lined road through the park and is wheelchair accessible. Race walkers and strollers are welcome on the 5K route. Both courses are USATF certified. The run begins at 7:30 a.m., and all levels are welcome. Space is limited to the first 500 runners and walkers, so register early. The early bird fee is \$30 through Friday, January 31, 2020. The price goes up to \$35 through Tuesday, March 31 and will then rise to \$40, if there are still open spots. Team registration is also available. Children age two to six can register for the Lil' Striders Tot Dash for \$10. Packets will be available for pick-up on Friday, May 1 at the Burke Lake Park Ice Cream Parlor from 2 to 7 p.m. and on race day at Shelter A from 6 to 7 a.m. Visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/healthy-strides.

SATURDAY/AUG. 1

Unprofane Riders 2nd Annual Car Show. 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. At American Legion Post 176, 6520 Amherst Ave., Springfield. Cars, trucks, SUVs, and bikes welcome. All makes and models. Registration: 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. There will be trophies, door prizes, and raffle prizes. Food and drink. Kid-friendly event. Proceeds will be going to Shelter House, Inc., a non-profit organization that helps victims of domestic abuse. Sponsored by Safford of Springfield. Cost: \$20 Entry Fee for Cars, Trucks and SUVs, \$15 Entry Fee for Bikes, Spectators Free. Visit the website: <https://www.facebook.com/events/2434610970197659/>

ONGOING

Second Saturdays. 6-9 p.m. at the Workhouse Arts Center, 9518 Workhouse Road, Lorton. The Second Saturday Art Walk is the perfect time to meet nearly 85 Resident and Associate Artists, creating art in the studios or exhibiting in our galleries. Experience performances of dance, cabaret, comedy, big band, jazz, and theater. Indulge in classes in the art of mixology or cuisines from around the globe. Enjoy art exhibitions in nine galleries of the region's finest sculpture, painting, glass, ceramics, and fiber art works. Visit www.workhousearts.org/.

Senior Line Dancing. Mondays, 1 p.m.; Fridays, 10-11:30 a.m. at Little River Glen Senior Center, 4001 Barker Court, Fairfax. Line Dancing is a gentle, social form of aerobic activity. Studies have shown it aids in warding off Alzheimer's disease. No previous experience needed. Cost: \$5 per 8-week session. Email barbriba@hotmail.com or call 703-524-3739.

Fairfax Pets on Wheels New Volunteer Orientation. An orientation for new volunteers interested in visiting residents of nursing homes and assisted living facilities with their approved pets through the Fairfax Pets On Wheels program is held the first Wednesday of every month starting at 7:30 p.m. Visit www.fpow.org for each month's location. Prior to attending, please complete the online application found at www.fpow.org/volunteer. www.fpow.org, 703-324-5424 or dfspetsonwheels@fairfaxcounty.gov.

Carolina Shag. Wednesdays, 6:30-10 p.m. at Arlington/Fairfax Elks Lodge, 8421 Arlington Blvd., Fairfax. Free lessons at 7:30 p.m. No partners needed. Dinner menu. \$8. Under 21 free. nvshag.org.

FUN-Exercise Thursdays, noon-12:50 p.m. at Grace Presbyterian Church Family Room, 7434 Bath St., Springfield. Inova certified exercise instructor leads a moderate level exercise class with music and current events conversation. Muscle, Balance, Strength Training using stretch bands and weights both standing and seated exercises. Instructor donation is \$5. moorefitt@yahoo.com or 703-499-6133.

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Useless Is As Useless Doesn't Have To Do



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

It began years ago when technology enabled many public bathrooms to change to hands-free. Other than the obvious hands-on responsibilities, many of the other elements no longer required any touching. Be it the paper-towel dispenser, the hand dryer, the hot and cold/on and off functions in the sinks, and of course, the urinal and toilet flushing functions. All providing a convenience never before possible. Other than an automatic entry/exit function for the bathroom door, and one as well on the inside for the stalls themselves, using many public bathrooms has become much less involved, shall we say, than ever before. And it has not stopped there. It has gone public in a very big way.

Driving, specifically through tolls, that is. Thanks to EZ-Pass, tolls or rather interacting with them by having to hand money over to a "toll collector," (or even to stop and toss money into a basket) has nearly been eliminated. Due to a device (transponder) attached to my licence plate, as me and my car approach the toll booth, I simply go about my normal driving business with nary a worry in the world. I steer into the dedicated EZ-Pass lane at a bit less than the posted speed, and ding!, as I drive through the toll booth, the toll is paid. No fuss, no muss, no window roll-down and no scrambling for change or digging for dollars. What's done is done so long as the yellow light illuminates and "paid" appears. (Although if what's done isn't done, you'll soon receive a paper bill in the mail at the address on file.)

Metro, our local public conveyer, also provides a hands-free or very nearly hands-free experience. If you have a plastic "Metro card" linked into their system, all you need do as you enter the turnstile is tap your card and go. No more standing in line at the "Fare"/"Add Fare" kiosks to load your card with money to start or end your journey. As with your EZ-Pass, once you sign up and link your Metro card to a credit/debit card, you are "In Like Flint," as some of us from a certain generation might say. Henceforth, your card is automatically updated to always provide sufficient dollars for this trip and any subsequent trips to make sense.

Now imagine if I had a "smart phone." How many more functions/people-free interactions might I enjoy with a tap, a scan or a wave? Unfortunately, I have what my wife, Dina calls a "stupid phone." That's a flip phone with no internet access. As such, I am cut off from an evolving world. A world in which I'll likely not have to interact with anybody or reach into my pocket for anything resembling money. All I'll have to reach for is my "smart phone." I've seen its functionality at the airport in lieu of a paper ticket, on Amtrak, at concert venues and of course sports venues. It seems to help speed up the entry process.

I don't really don't want to be the last flip-phone-holding man standing. But neither do I want to get into a life-accident while negotiating the learning curve. At the moment, the road ahead seems full of twists and turns with more curves than I can possibly imagine. How do I negotiate something I can't see? Moreover, how do I negotiate the road less traveled, by me? Where will I draw the experience necessary to acclimate to these ever-changing signposts? I mean, the words may be familiar, but some of the context may be off putting and counterintuitive, to me.

I'm not a complete Bozo. I have partially integrated into this new world. I have had insurance and car payments automatically debited from my bank account for years. I have some over-the-counter medicines, supplements and a variety of cat-related care and feeding products automatically delivered to my home. However, sometimes I feel like a pinball (and I'm no wizard) without the bells and whistles banging around trying to stay on top of what product is debit/paid and when. Now that's a service I could use: an automated weekly reminder of what's happening when. And the beauty of it, I wouldn't need any new devices. I use what I always use: my home computer. Turn it on, click the email, open, read and then close. Even Bozo the clown could do that.

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

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