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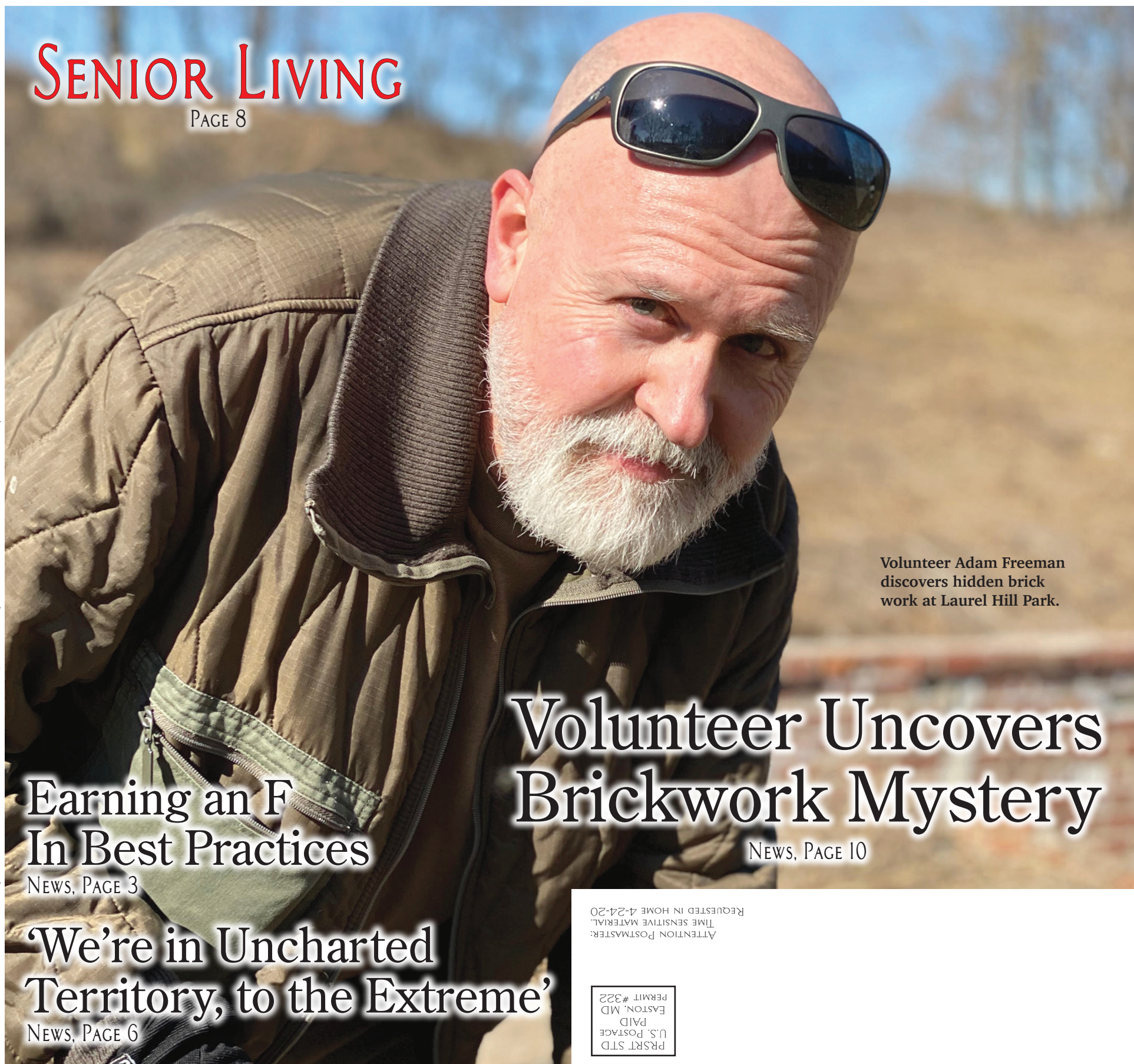
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CONNECTION

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SENIOR LIVING

PAGE 8



Volunteer Adam Freeman discovers hidden brick work at Laurel Hill Park.

Volunteer Uncovers Brickwork Mystery

NEWS, PAGE 10

Earning an F In Best Practices

NEWS, PAGE 3

'We're in Uncharted Territory, to the Extreme'

NEWS, PAGE 6

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PHOTO BY SUSAN LAUME/ THE CONNECTION OPINION, PAGE 4 ♦ CLASSIFIEDS, PAGE 11



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AREA ROUNDUPS

Unattended Cooking Cause Of West Springfield House Fire

On Monday, April 20 at 7:43 p.m., units were dispatched for a reported house fire in the 6200 block of Lavell Court in the West Springfield area of Fairfax County. Units arrived on the scene of a two-story, single-family home with smoke showing from the roof. Crews quickly located a fire in the second-floor kitchen with extension into the attic. The fire was rapidly extinguished. There were no firefighter or civilian injuries reported.

Two occupants were home at the time of the fire. One occupant noted smoke coming from the kitchen and discovered a fire. She retrieved her child and safely evacuated. She then called 9-1-1.

Fire Investigators determined the fire was accidental in nature and started on stove. The cause of the fire was unattended cooking materials.

Two occupants were displaced because of the fire. Red Cross assistance was offered but declined. Damages as a result of the fire were approximately \$93,750.

Fairfax County Fire and Rescue would also like to remind all residents about cooking safely. Please remember to "Watch What You Heat!"

Donate PPEs to Fairfax City Workers

Fairfax City is accepting donations of PPEs – masks, gowns, gloves – for use by essential City employees. Place these items in the container in the City Hall Atrium lobby vestibule, east side (facing George Mason Boulevard). Donations are accepted weekdays, from 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. To coordinate large donations, or for more information, call 703-385-7800.

BULLETIN BOARD

SALVATION ARMY FOOD DISTRIBUTION

The Salvation Army remains open as the Coronavirus crisis continues into a second month. Officers are on the frontlines serving the needs of families and individuals across the DMV. This week, thanks to a generous donation from major food distributor Sysco Baltimore, The Salvation Army Fairfax Corps is distributing grocery bags to families in need of help. Sysco sent three tractor-trailers filled with fresh and nonperishable food to

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NEWS

Who Earned the F in Best Practices?

Distance Learning goes awry for FCPS.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Maintenance releases, patch management and software updates keep users' experience optimal. Staying ahead of security threats is vital. So what caused and who is responsible for events leading up to the reflex action by the superintendent of Fairfax County Public Schools, the 10th largest school division in the nation located in one of the United States' wealthiest counties, to end the launch of the division's Distance Learning Plan two days into the project because of load capacity and security issues?

That's what the twelve elected members serving on the Fairfax County Public Schools Board turned their attention toward Thursday, April 16, during their virtual Board Meeting. The first item on the Agenda read: "Distance Learning Update: Blackboard."

The night before, Superintendent Scott Brabrand canceled teacher-led instruction through Blackboard scheduled for that day and Friday, April 17, due to continued login and security issues with Blackboard Learn FCPS 24-7 and Blackboard Collaborate Ultra.

"Our teachers are ready and willing to do



FCPS Superintendent Scott Brabrand



Marty Smith, Chief Operating Officer



COURTESY OF FCPS

Marty Smith,
Chief Operating Officer

whatever is necessary to provide a robust learning experience for our students. ... We have identified our problems, and today we are proposing solutions," said Brabrand.

Later, during the School Board meeting, Marty Smith, Chief Operating Officer, said, "We were able to identify [disruptive] students by IP address, and then work with those principals to then refer those students for any additional discipline as necessary."

FCPS twelve School Board members, Brabrand and his Leadership Team composed of Frances Ivey, Deputy Superintendent; Marty Smith, Chief Operating Officer; Maribeth Luftglass, Assistant Superintendent, Department of Information Technology and Sloan Presidio, Assistant Superintendent and Instructional Services Department and Tim Tomlinson, Chief Product Officer for Blackboard, Inc., attended the meeting virtually.

As the 3-hour portion of the School Board

Meeting wore on, individuals provided different levels of insight.

Whereas Tim Tomlinson of Blackboard initially commented with a prepared statement saying: "I'm here this morning on behalf of our (Blackboard's) leadership team to apologize for the challenges experienced this week in moving Fairfax County students to fully remote instruction," later he added: "We had no indication, based on our years of experience running the software for thousands of customers that we would have this issue at the levels of load that was expected this week."

One hour into the meeting, Sloan Presidio said, "As a Leadership Team, we failed to properly train the staff. We failed to properly communicate the expectations, and we failed to properly monitor the implementation." Presidio referenced security concerns and misbehaviors exhibited by then anon-

ymous individuals who logged into virtual live class sessions via Guest Log-In, not through the preferred, guide-lined and more secure pre-populated email address access.

Nearly two hours into the meeting, School Board member Megan McLaughlin (Brad-dock) said, "I remain shocked that the 10th largest school system in the country did not know, working with its vendor, to do a load testing. There is no getting around it. ... I want to say that the IT failures, the lack of flow testing, the software updates that didn't occur, the fact that we're doing information to our schools to prepare for this as guidance, versus direct as mandates, do speak to a larger problem we have in the system."

A letter on the FCPS official twitter account to FCPS families dated April 17, read: "Distance learning will resume Monday

SEE PLAN B, PAGE 9

Second Rollout for Distance Learning Fails

Technology Council and attorneys called in by FCPS.

Fairfax County Superintendent of Schools Scott Brabrand announced at 10 p.m. Monday, April 20, that the school division was going to "move away from Blackboard Learn 24-7 as a tool for face to face instruction." Earlier that day, FCPS's second attempt at teacher-led virtual education failed. Families, students and staff continued to experience difficulties with the online resource.

According to Lucy Caldwell, Director of News & Information Fairfax County Public Schools, the updates made by Blackboard over the weekend did not correct the system delays experienced the previous week. She said while roughly 40,000 students successfully participated in synchronous or simultaneous learning with their teachers and classmates on Monday, FCPS received reports that there were challenges at about that point. "It appeared that the system slowed down, and it started to take several attempts for users to log

on," Caldwell said. There are reported 189,000 students in schools and centers.

BRABRAND said they recognized that students and teachers needed a reliable system for virtual learning. He described two actions he had taken. Brabrand said he was creating "the Superintendent's Technology Advisory Council with three co-chairs: Bobbie Kilberg, President and CEO of the Northern Virginia Technology Council; Andrew Ko, Managing Director of Global Education at Amazon Web Services; and Amy Gilliland, President of General Dynamics IT." The initial purpose of the council would be to resolve current distance learning challenges and provide ongoing support to enhance distance learning in a K-12 environment.

Also, Brabrand said he was initiating a comprehensive, outside review of the distance learning rollout. "We have retained Hunton Andrews Kurth LLP, a law firm with expertise in information technology and cybersecurity. We anticipate a report from them in the next few weeks," he said.

For now, the schools would continue to use Blackboard Learn 24-7 to access instructional resources and supports and prepare to provide virtual instruction through a secure Blackboard Collaborate Ultra link or other alternative means. "Teachers will contact students over the next several days about virtual learning opportunities and the platform that will be used," Brabrand said.

Dr. Melaney Mackin Principal of Silverbrook Elementary School messaged parents. "We wanted to ensure that Silverbrook students would not lose another day of learning. Please look for an email from your child's teacher tomorrow morning... Our teachers are the best and are committed to teaching one way or another," she said.

REACTION from parents posting to FCPS official Facebook page was swift.

Char Wright: I'm so tired of trying to fit all the pieces together for distance learning. The constant buffering and non-working websites while also trying to keep my own

job and work remotely is honestly just too much...

Courtney Sarah Draper: After multiple failed attempts and weeks of confusing communication, you continue to fall short, and what's more concerning is that you have now lost the trust of this community.

Chrissy Hammaker: This is completely unacceptable! You've had 5 weeks. Fairfax County is the third wealthiest county in the United States, yet you guys can't figure it out! This is infuriating! And now you are going to waste our tax dollars to hire a law firm and a panel of IT experts.... completely absurd!!

Monica Cooper Sloan: I am a teacher, and I have not received any instructions from my principal. I honestly do not know if I am supposed to host my classes in Collaborate Ultra as scheduled tomorrow or not. Does anyone know how to access Collaborate Ultra without going through Blackboard 24/7?

Julie McGregor Jordan: Let's just call it a day and end the school year. Take this circus and stress off parents, kids, and teachers

Back to the Capitol

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



COMMENTARY

As you are reading this column on Wednesday morning, I will have left home in Reston and be heading south on Interstate 95 for a noon meeting of the General Assembly for its reconvened session, commonly referred to as the "veto session." A reconvened session can be deemed essential during this stay-at-home period because Article IV, Section 6 and Article V, Section 6 of the Constitution of Virginia and House Joint Resolution No. 99 (procedural resolution) require that the 2020 Reconvened Session convene on Wednesday, April 22, 2020, at noon, to act upon the Governor's recommendations and vetoes to legislation passed during the 2020 Regular Session. The constitutional requirement for a reconvened session came about after Virginians started electing a Republican governor ever so often who would have the audacity to veto bills that had been passed by the Democrat-dominated General Assembly. The constitutional amendment establishing the reconvened session gives legislators the last word

as to what bills can become law without the Governor's signature if a two-thirds vote can be gotten in both houses. Also, the reconvened session provides an opportunity to correct technical glitches or provide clarifying language through amendments suggested by the Governor from the bills that are passed in the fast-paced legislative sessions.

Social distancing will be strictly adhered to for the session which will be a challenge for legislators who are accustomed to a lot of handshaking and hugging. The House of Delegates will convene under a temporary tent covering on capitol grounds that will provide the space for the 100 members to be at least six feet apart. The Senate of Virginia will meet in a large space at the Science Museum of Virginia that will accommodate social distancing for its 40 members. The usual strict requirement that men wear neckties has been relaxed for apparently ties sweep up too many germs. The Governor and his staff are not wearing ties these days. Face masks will be required,

and plenty of hand sanitizer will be available. It is suggested that members bring their own lunches.

The Constitution limits the business of the General Assembly at Reconvened Session to consideration of the Governor's amendments and objections. Of the 1,291 bills presented to the Governor, he signed 1,188 (92.02 percent), recommended amendments to 102 bills and vetoed 1 bill. An official summary of the bills passed during the 2020 General Assembly session is available at <http://dls.virginia.gov/pubs/summary/2020/summary2020.pdf>.

The effort that legislators have to make to finish our work for the session pales in comparison to the challenges that people worldwide face every day during the pandemic. I continue to be impressed with the ways that social distancing has brought us together. Every day on social media and other outlets I learn of people who are sewing masks, running food pantries, contributing to charities, and doing good deeds for others. Our medical personnel put their lives on the line every day and cannot be thanked enough. On my website, kenplum.com there is updated information on the pandemic and ways you can help. Stay safe. I will be heading back home immediately upon the conclusion of the one-day session.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Finding SafeSpot in COVID-19 Time

To the Editor:

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month. Child abuse occurs in every demographic of the population, and it has many forms.

Every day in America, children as a group endure physical and sexual abuse, they are exploited by pornographers and sex traffickers, they become collateral victims of drug abuse, and they are witnesses to violent crimes. Fortunately, SafeSpot Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) of Fairfax County provides critical recovery services to these young victims while safeguarding their rights, and SafeSpot's presence is especially vital during this COVID-19 pandemic.

Protecting children is the heart of every CAC, and the mission of SafeSpot, a nationally recognized CAC, is to coordinate the investigation, prosecution, and treatment of child abuse. SafeSpot relies on multidisciplinary teams of professionals from the child-protective and victim-advocacy services, the law enforcement and prosecution agencies, and the medical and mental health providers in Fairfax County to shorten the timeline be-

tween victims' trauma and Recovery.

Prior to SafeSpot's inception, social-service and criminal-justice systems in Fairfax County often failed to coordinate their responses to child maltreatment cases, which deprived victims of basic services and prolonged their stress and emotional pain through a series of redundant interactions with system officials. After enduring the trauma of abuse, children were forced to recount their experiences in multiple, separate interviews with investigators and social-service professionals.

SafeSpot's unification of Fairfax County resources has made the response to child trauma powerful and efficient. However, these days SafeSpot is facing a new challenge: balancing two public health issues. While continuing to respond to reports of child abuse, which is a persistent public health concern, SafeSpot is also successfully reacting to the shifting landscape of child trauma during the COVID-19 pandemic.

SafeSpot is providing strategic in-person services at this point, conducting forensic interviews in situations where children are currently experiencing abuse. However, SafeSpot has dramatically increased its use of technology, with many multidisciplinary teams

conducting their meetings via secure Zoom teleconferences and aggressively implementing tele-mental health services for children and families. SafeSpot has a family resource page for COVID-19 at www.safespotfairfax.org.

Trauma impacts both children and their families, and SafeSpot believes that resilience is the path to healing. Collaboration with investigators, evidence-based therapy and forensic interviews, and a dedicated team in Fairfax County ensure that children and families have a chance to heal. Children in Fairfax County are getting the care, treatment, and justice that they deserve.

Michele Thames
Fairfax

Selflessness and Compassion

To the Editor:

Right now the world is being brought to its knees by this "novel" Coronavirus. I was completing my surgery rotation in Brooklyn, the current epicenter of this virus, when I was sent home. I saw, first hand, the impact that this monster had on the community. Trust me, coming back to my quiet home in northern Virginia and being stuck

indoors for 14 days drove me crazy too. But not because I wanted to hang out with my friends or go out to eat, but because I had seen how the world was suffering and would continue to suffer and there was nothing I could do about it. This virus was about to show the world how being ignorant may not be as bliss as we all thought. It doesn't discriminate between races, age, gender or wealth. To be honest, this was the most equity I had seen in the 27 years of my existence.

Being an Ahamdi Muslim, I was listening to a sermon by the head of our community on Friday and he stressed the importance of abiding by the rules placed by one's country. Honestly, as a doctor-to-be, it saddens me how ignorant we as a nation are. Wake up America. You won't die if you don't play basketball for a couple of weeks or get your nails done for a month. But you will put many others around you at risk. And if that risk is greater than your love for one another, then what a shame.

I hope that this virus teaches us the importance of selflessness and compassion and I hope that once this pandemic ceases to exist, that we as humans don't forget these important lessons.

Aneela Wadan
Fairfax





PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION

Honoring Frontline Responders

Craft sewer Janet Vincent, of Springfield, delivers personal protection masks to oncology nurse Elizabeth Earle, of Alexandria, as a donation to patients who may need them



Burke Postal workers receive "sign" of appreciation.

Four members of Anna Maria Fitzhugh Chapter, NSDAR, in Springfield, and a member of Nelly Custis Chapter in Mount Vernon, have made more than one hundred masks for the Warrior Transition Battalion and the Fisher House at Ft. Belvoir. At Fisher House, the masks made of "fun" fabrics have been especially popular. Nationwide, DAR chapters have made and donated more than 100,000 masks during the pandemic.



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‘We’re in Uncharted Territory, to the Extreme’

Fairfax City Manager recommends FY 21 budget cuts.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Like jurisdictions across the nation, Fairfax City is having to revise and drastically slash its proposed FY 21 budget because of COVID-19 and its devastating effect on the economy. During the City Council’s April 7 work session, City Manager Rob Stalzer shared the bleak details, but also a possible blueprint to guide the City through the weeds.

“According to Old Dominion University’s Vulnerability index, of 36 Virginia cities, Fairfax is ranked number 8, due to the percent of its total revenues that are vulnerable in an economic downturn,” he said. “These are revenues based on discretionary spending.”

To illustrate, Stalzer showed a list of estimated FY 20 revenue decreases by category, including those based on consumers’ discretionary spending, such as meals tax, vehicle-rental tax and local sales tax. Meals tax, alone, was projected as a 60-percent loss.

“We’ll have to get used to some serious ambiguity and make the best decisions we can at the time,”

— Mayor David Meyer

“Our meals-tax revenue is approximately \$6 million/year, and a 60-percent decrease is a significant hit,” he said. “And for every three months into FY 21 that the downturn continues, we can expect an additional 5 percent per quarter decrease for each of these categories.”

STALZER said the estimates are based on a worst-case scenario of a 12-month decline, followed by a rebound in FY 22. So, for example, without a recovery in FY 21, he predicted the meals-tax loss would go from 60 to 80 percent by the end of FY 21 – June 30, 2021.

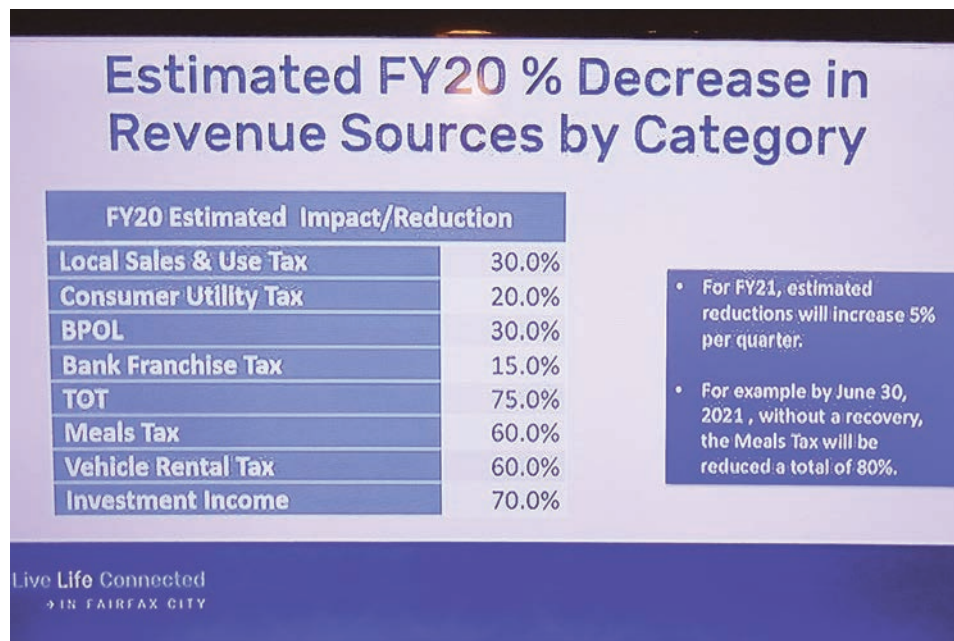
“Essentially, for FY 20, these revenue shortfalls translate into a 3-1/2-month decline of about \$2.3 million in business revenue,” he said. “And for City operations – primarily Parks and Rec and other fee-based operations – we’re anticipating a \$1.3 million revenue reduction.”

However, because of decreases in operating expenses and capital-improvement spending, Stalzer said the City will have the revenue it needs to maintain its 12-percent fund balance of \$2.2 million. FY 21, though, will be much tougher, so he’s recommending keeping the real-estate tax rate at \$1.075, not increasing the stormwater tax rate, and setting the Old Town Service District tax rate at 0 cents.



BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

The Council members, mayor and city manager meet digitally to discuss the budget.



Some estimated revenue decreases anticipated for the rest of this fiscal year.

Still, it would result in an estimated overall shortfall of \$17.8 million. So he proposed \$6 million in budget cuts – but held in reserve so that, “If revenues begin to turn around, some of these cuts could go back into the budget.” They included \$2.3 million from FY 21 initiatives/increases, \$1 million from operations and \$2.1 million from personnel actions – including 3.5-percent merit raises, plus hiring an assistant fire marshal and adding 1-1/2 positions for Economic Development. And, said Stalzer, “I think those 2-1/2 positions are integral, in terms of what we’re going to need to do to weather the storm and come out the back end.”

He also noted Fairfax isn’t seeing a slowdown in development. “I’m happy about that,” he said. “We’re fully staffed and are doing plan reviews and inspections, getting projects either underway or through to completion.”

Stalzer also wants to continue with the City’s two Small Area Plans “to make the statement that we’re still open for business and moving forward. And all these scenarios are premised on the assumption that I’m going to come back next year with a 3-cent real-estate tax-rate increase.”

Meanwhile, for FY 20-FY 21, he recommends a hiring freeze, eliminating temporary employees (except public safety) and freezing overtime (except public safety). For FY 21, he suggests considering furloughs/layoffs and having employees use their annual leave for holidays such as Presidents Day or Labor Day.

MAYOR David Meyer said the Council needs to look at the variables of the tax rate, spending reductions and “the function of time” all together. “We’ll have to get used to some serious ambiguity and make the best decisions we can at the time,” he said.

Councilman Sang Yi confirmed that none of Stalzer’s proposals incorporated any state or federal assistance. “That’s a complete unknown and won’t even come close to fixing our problems,” replied Stalzer. “If something happens, we’ll adjust accordingly.”

“This is a work in progress,” added Commissioner of the Revenue Page Johnson. “We’re in uncharted territory, to the extreme.”

Local Men Charged with Soliciting Minors

Fairfax County police have charged five local men in connection with an online sting that sought to identify and apprehend predators who use the internet to exploit children. On Tuesday April 21, police said the arrests took place earlier this month.

Charged with solicitation of a minor and attempted indecent liberties were Pedro Gonzalez, 50; Jose Mejia Carabantes, 36; Nelson Sosa Grande, 38; Japher Flores Arriaza, 20; and Tod Rehm, 74, all of Fairfax.

Detectives from the Major Crimes and Organized Crime and Intelligence Bureaus arrested 30 men total during “Operation COVID Crackdown.” In each case, the alleged offenders used online platforms to initiate explicit conversations and solicit sex from police officers posing as children.

Then, when each of the suspects arrived at agreed-upon locations to meet these “children” in person, detectives took them into custody. The men, ranging in age from 20-74, were charged with a combined 68 felonies.

“Our detectives have remained vigilant, and they recognized the increased threat posed by online predators in recent weeks,” said Major Ed O’Carroll, Bureau Commander, Major Crimes. “I commend their ability to adapt during this unprecedented, public-health pandemic and to do so in the interest of protecting our children and bringing justice to those who commit these repugnant crimes.”

— BONNIE HOBBS

This Week in Coronavirus in Fairfax County

BY KEN MOORE
THE CONNECTION

Tuesday, April 21

Fairfax County Cases: 2,077
Virginia Cases: 9,630

Looking for a New Pet? Adopt Virtually

For those looking to add a new friend to the family, the county Animal Shelter has made the adoption process nearly contact free. New pets available for adoption will be added to the shelter's available pet page daily between 10-10:30 a.m. each day. Those interested will then fill out a survey and wait for staff to contact them via phone or email to talk through the adoption process. Once finalized, the shelter schedules a contactless pick up of your newest family addition. Details on virtual adoptions are available <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/animalshelter/adopt/steps>

See Something New Without Leaving the House

The Park Authority has created a new Virtual Exploration Center with resources to help residents stay healthy, connected and engaged while parks are closed. With links to on-demand fitness classes, a virtual history tool and nature bingo, the site provides a plethora of options to suit the needs of any family looking for ways to stay active and involved. The page will be updated regularly with new highlights. <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/virtual>

Parenting Support by Phone or Watch a Video

The Department of Family Services (DFS) has a variety of free supports available for families including parenting videos, articles and online classes. <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/familyservices/children-youth/assistance-from-a-distance> There is also a new Parent Support call line that has been established to help parents and caregivers of children with parenting advice, support and tips (703-324-7720, TTY 711, or email buildingstrongerfamilies@fairfaxcounty.gov). Learn more about Parenting Assistance from a Distance from DFS.

Stay Informed

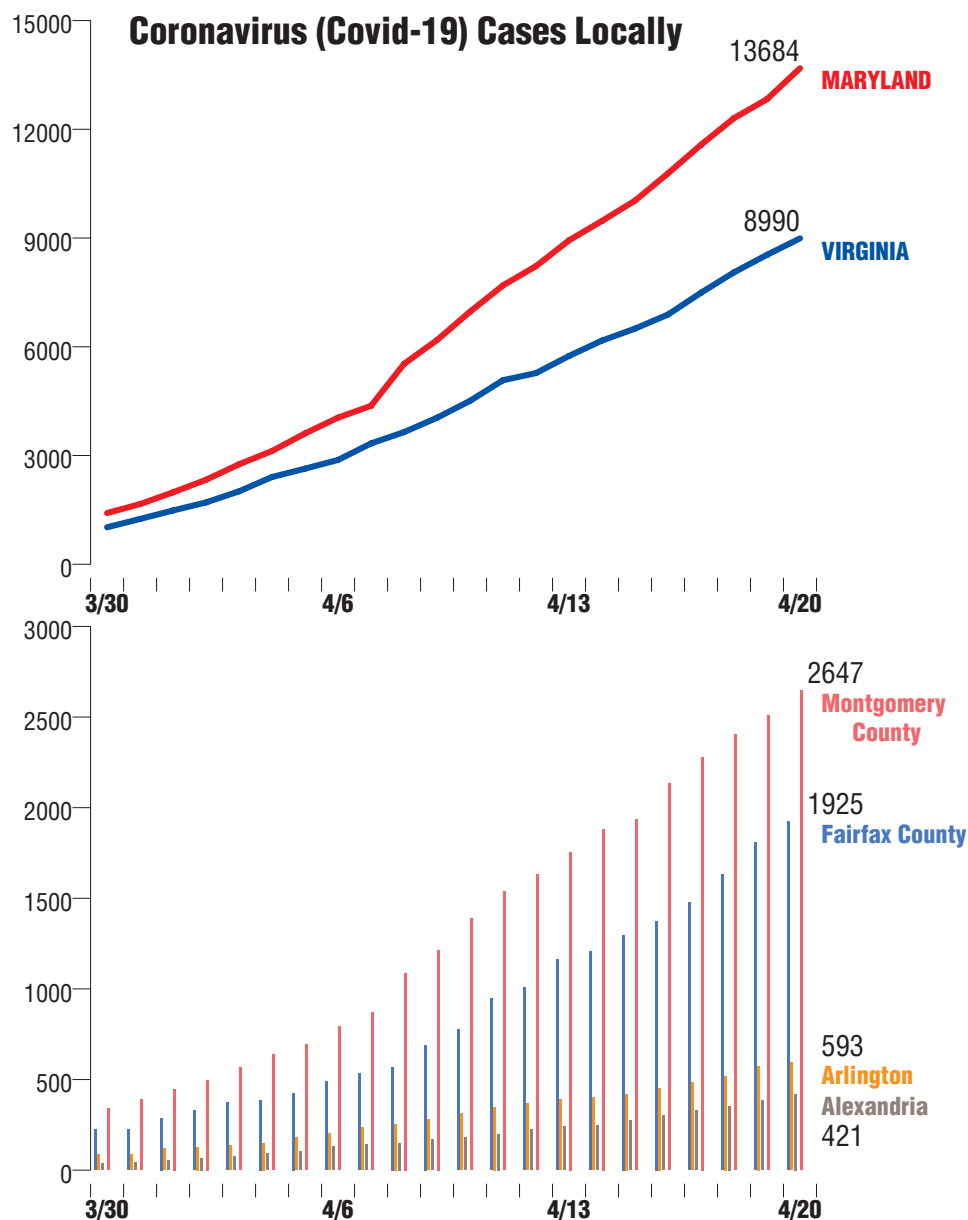
- ❖ Health Department Call Center at 703-267-3511 with Coronavirus questions; open 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. weekdays and 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekends.
- ❖ Text FFXCOVID to 888777 to receive updates from Fairfax County about COVID-19.
- ❖ Email questions or concerns to ffx-covid@fairfaxcounty.gov. This email account will be staffed Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. through 6 p.m.

Monday, April 20

Fairfax County Cases: 1,925
Virginia Cases: 8,990

Sunday, April 19

Fairfax County Cases: 1,809
Virginia Cases: 8,537



SOURCES:

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH [HTTP://WWW.VDH.VIRGINIA.GOV/CORONAVIRUS/](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/)
MARYLAND: MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH [HTTPS://CORONAVIRUS.MARYLAND.GOV/](https://coronavirus.maryland.gov/)
ALEXANDRIA SOURCE: CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

Ten Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department personnel have tested positive for COVID-19; eight are currently positive, two have fully recovered and one is currently in quarantine. All personnel are closely monitored by a nurse at Fairfax County's Occupational Health Center. Fairfax County Fire and Rescue will notify the public if there is any concern of exposure.

Saturday, April 18

Fairfax County Cases: 1,633
Virginia Cases: 8,053

WHERE ARE THE TESTS? Sens. Mark Warner and Tim Kaine joined 44 other Senators in calling on the Coronavirus Task Force and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to conduct a national inventory of the coronavirus (COVID-19) diagnostic testing supply, publicly release data on testing results, and provide a detailed plan and timeline for addressing future shortages and gaps in the testing supply chain.

EQUITABLE DATA: Following reports across the United States of stark racial disparities in COVID-19 cases and fatalities, Sens. Warner and Kaine joined Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) to introduce the Equitable Data Collection and Disclosure on COVID-19 Act. The bill would require the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to collect and report racial and other demographic data on COVID-19 testing, treatment, and fatality rates, and provide a summary of the final statistics and a report to Congress within 60 days after the end of the public health emergency.

While Virginia has received \$3.3 billion to support its COVID-19 response, Sens. Warner and Kaine are pushing for the next emergency coronavirus relief package to provide assurances that funding can be used to prevent potentially devastating budget cuts and that localities of all sizes will receive dedicated funding.

Friday, April 17

Fairfax County Cases: 1,476
Virginia Cases: 7,491

Numerous shopping scams, mortgage relief scams and personal loan scams have targeted seniors and others needing assistance during the coronavirus crisis. If you believe you have been the victim of a scam, call the Fairfax County Police Non-Emergency Line at 703-691-2131, TTY 711. Also contact the AARP Fraud Watch Network at 1-877-908-3360 or www.aarp.org/scams.

U.S. Sen. Mark R. Warner (D-VA) and 37 of his Senate colleagues urged Senate and House leaders to ensure that those who have lost their employer-based benefits – and those who are uninsured or underinsured – have access to health insurance.

More than 20 million Americans have lost their jobs in recent weeks. With approximately half of all of Americans receiving their health care coverage from an employer, the COVID-19 crisis threatens to leave a vast number of people without health insurance during the largest public health crisis in a century, adding to the estimated 27 million people in the U.S. who already did not have health care.

The Senators urged Congress to strengthen Medicaid, re-open the Affordable Care Act so uninsured individuals can immediately enroll, and provide premium reimbursement to newly unemployed Americans in accordance with the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA).

Gov. Ralph Northam's Executive Order Fifty-Seven increases the use of nurse practitioners, out-of-state doctors, medical students and telehealth in the state's COVID-19 response. Up to 30,000 additional workers could be needed in Virginia hospitals, long-term care facilities, and public health departments, should a surge occur.

"While we are seeing promising signs in our ongoing fight against COVID-19, we must continue to prepare for all scenarios, and that includes making sure we have the necessary staff to confront a potential medical surge," said Northam.

U.S. Sen. Mark R. Warner (D-Va) was appointed to a White House task force focused on eventual efforts to reopen the economy in the aftermath of the coronavirus outbreak. Warner was one of 13 Senate Democrats invited to participate, along with all Republican Senators except for Sen. Mitt Romney (R-UT).

"My highest priority on this task force will be to ensure the federal government's efforts to reopen our economy are bipartisan, data-driven, and based on the expertise of public health professionals," Warner said.

Northam reported that Virginia's collaborative efforts to release low-level offenders from local and regional jails in response to the COVID-19 pandemic are working to safely reduce the number of incarcerated people.

SENIOR LIVING



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Virtual classes and gatherings are keeping seniors engaged during this period of social isolation.

Staying Active in Social Isolation

A variety of local offerings allows for days filled with activity.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

Cora Foley, an active 68-year-old of Burke, Virginia, has been able to maintain her social life while coronavirus stay-at-home orders are in effect. She's using her predilection for innovation to help other seniors do the same. Foley co-founded the Senior Center Without Walls of Burke, West Springfield and Great Falls, which offers social programming to seniors in those communities. She created a corresponding website to include online social offerings.

"When the coronavirus 'stay home' lockdowns were imposed, "I expanded the website to include other classes that are usually offered on-site, like line dancing and Zumba," said Foley. "From April 1st through the 17th, the website has recorded 451 visitors and 1,789 views, so it has been a daily help to many residents, particularly seniors."

The new normal of not leaving home except for emergencies can leave many, including seniors and others who are most susceptible to contracting coronavirus, with a social void in their lives. Seniors can join classes and activities ranging from yoga and fitness classes to concerts and lunch with friends.

"Isolation and loneliness has been one of our ongoing concerns for older adults prior to coronavirus and we remain committed to help older adults establish and maintain meaningful social connections during this time and beyond," said Rachel Coates, Director of the Agency on Aging Arlington Aging and Disability Services Division.

Arlington County is also working collaboratively to keep the social lives of area senior intact, says Coates. "In partnership with Arlington Adult Day Program, Developmental Disability Services and other County programs [including] Parks 55+ programs and libraries, we are making phone calls, mailing activity kits... and hosting music and socialization skills classes virtually," she said.

Such initiatives offer options and an outlet from consuming the often-conflicting news of coronavirus

happenings in solitude.

"Every one-in-7 individuals living in Fairfax County right now is 65 and over," said Evan Braff of the Department of Neighborhood and Community Services in Fairfax County co-founded the Senior Center Without Walls of Burke, West Springfield and Great Falls. "We recognize that this is a scary time for all of us especially for older adults. "Since we've been in this situation, we've gotten creative and innovative."

Part of that innovation is creating virtual versions of the activities that seniors enjoyed in brick-and-mortar settings. "It is truly a collaborative effort to develop the virtual senior center," said Amanda Rogers of the Fairfax County Neighborhood & Community Services. "Everything is being developed in coordination with other county agencies as well, such as Family Services, Libraries, Housing, and the Health Department."

In addition to routine services such as delivering meals and providing transportation to medical appointments, local seniors have options for virtual opportunities for social and recreational activities.

For example, the Caregiver Program in Montgomery County now has two online sources of information for seniors. "Rather than disconnect at home during the COVID-19 uncertainty, it is important that we...develop new social connections...and nurture personal health and wellness," said Lylie Fisher, Caregiver Support Program, Area Agency on Aging, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services.

That effort, says Fisher, includes the County's Engage@HOME, YouTube channel as well as an e-newsletter and blog where seniors can find services including community support groups, telephone and online activities as well Covid-19 updates.

For seniors who need technical assistance, Fairfax County has technicians who are only a phone call away to assist with needs ranging from downloading a video conferencing app to understanding the basics of the Internet. "Technology can be scary for older adults, but we've actually been teaching older adults how to use Skype and Zoom for a while" said Braff.

Those lessons have led to success stories that have given seniors the skills necessary to weather the current storm of uncertainty. "What's really exciting to see was a 98 year old woman posting on Twitter," said Braff. "It's great that you have someone who's 98 and who's able to post on Twitter."

Those lessons have led to success stories that have given seniors the skills necessary to weather the current storm of uncertainty. "What's really exciting to see was a 98 year old woman posting on Twitter," said Braff. "It's great that you have someone who's 98 and who's able to post on Twitter."



PHOTO COURTESY OF TARA RUSZKOWSKI

Fairfax City Mayor David Meyer speaks to the City Jobs crew at Stafford Park.

'A Bit of Normalcy in a Tumultuous Time'

City Jobs program keeps restrooms open in Stafford Park.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, people have been constantly reminded to stay home and wash their hands. But that's tough to do for people without homes or access to clean water. And locked restrooms, due to closures of libraries and other public places, only make matters worse.

But thanks to a partnership between Fairfax City and The Lamb Center – a daytime, drop-in shelter serving the homeless – this problem has been solved locally. And it was easy to do, since the connections were already in place.

Under the already-existing City Jobs program, some 20 homeless men and women from The Lamb Center are paid to do a variety of tasks for Fairfax City's Parks and Recreation Department. Via this innovative initiative, these workers clean and beautify City parks and other outdoor spaces for the public's enjoyment.

So – recognizing the increased vulnerability of its homeless citizens during the COVID-19 crisis – Fairfax City looked to City Jobs and The Lamb Center for a solution. As a result, the City made a spe-

cial agreement to reopen its Stafford Park restrooms, weekdays, from 8 a.m.-8 p.m., and weekends, 10 a.m.-8 p.m. In exchange, a City Jobs employee cleans and maintains these restrooms at no charge to the City.

Calling them a "very welcome refuge," Lamb Center Board Chairman Tara Ruszkowski said, "The Stafford restrooms provide homeless residents sleeping in tents around the area a much-needed place to wash up, charge a phone and start the day on a good note."

Fairfax Mayor David Meyer is also pleased. "The City Jobs program has proven immensely successful for our community," he said. "We have the opportunity to keep our parks in excellent condition because of the fine work of the Lamb Center crews. This is so important now. With so many citizens trying to be safe but needing to go outside, many more residents are visiting our parks – and we're able to keep them clean and well-maintained."

So, added Ruszkowski, "It's not only homeless residents who benefit. Delivery drivers, police and families visiting the park know there are clean public facilities – a bit of normalcy in a tumultuous time."

PEOPLE

A Former Lake Braddock Bruin Now on Hollywood's Red Carpets

Emily Peachey, class of 2009, is making movies and a name as an actress.

BY MIKE SALMON
THE CONNECTION

When she's on the Hollywood set, and there comes a shot that requires a glimpse into life as a teenager, Emily Peachey digs down into her past life at Lake Braddock Secondary School, and finds a past experience she can recall to pull it off. Now that she's hit the big time as a movie star, it was her experience at Lake Braddock that started it all.

"I had a great high school experience, that's where it all started for me," Peachey said. Now she's rubbing elbows with Laura Dern, Holly Hunter, Dakota Fanning and Josh Hartnett, who she had a teen crush on in her previous life. "I've gotten to work with a lot of my idols," she said with a giggle. The 29-year-old has accomplished what some just dream of, and she's not turning back.

Peachey was born in Arlington and graduated from Lake Braddock in 2009. She was happy to be a regular high school teenager going to the prom, the homecoming football game and being part of the rowing team at Lake Braddock. She was in drama too through her school years, and credited her middle school teacher for planting the drama seed.

After graduation, and beach week, it was on to Duquesne University in Pittsburgh where she earned a Bachelor's Degree in Marketing and Communications, and did television news as an on-air reporter with local station WPXI in Pittsburgh. In school, she wanted to study law, so her classes took off in that direction. The acting bug was still there though, so she set out to Hollywood, a move that seemed crazy at the time to her parents, but she followed her dream. "Definitely on a whim, the best decision I ever



PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED

Emily Peachey remembers the proms, football games and boyfriends at Lake Braddock.

made," she said.

HER FIRST ROLE in a teen drama "The Fault in Our Stars," would lead to parts in HBO's Emmy Award winning series "Veep," and MTV's "Awkward," as well as the films "American Pastoral," starring Ewan McGregor and Dakota Fanning, "Strange Weather," where she plays opposite Academy Award winner Holly Hunter, and cult, indie film "Gearheads."

In her most recent move she is taking on the role of Liza Sampson in the southern gothic drama, "Paradise Lost", releasing this



There are some aspects of the Hollywood glamour and glitz that raise her eyebrows, but she's making it work from her apartment on Sunset Boulevard.

spring on the Paramount Network. "Set in the South, the series is a contemporary southern family saga that follows a prodigal son (Josh Hartnett), as he returns to his hometown and struggles to choose between his past and his future," the network description read. She stars as a teen, and this is where she has to dig back into her experiences at Lake Braddock. "Brings up all these old memories," she said, noting that she's in her twenties now but she plays the role of a teenager. "Portraying Liza Sampson, Peachey showed her ability to channel the lightheartedness of youth while maintaining the seriousness of the dark role

amid the drama," her agent Barbara Parks said, in a release.

Next up, she was getting ready to star in "Tar," with Timothy Bottoms and Graham Greene, but with the coronavirus impacting everything in the country, that movie is put on hold for now. "It's been a little bit crazy, we're on hold indefinitely," she said. But the movie is a horror film and she likes that genre, so it will be worth the wait.

Sunset Boulevard

Being in Hollywood is an experience in itself. Everybody is into acting, and Peachey is living in an apartment right on Sunset Boulevard in the heart of all the drama. Parts of her life are reminiscent of the movie "Swingers," where would-be actors work behind the counter at Starbucks before their big break. She's familiar with the movie. "The bar where that was filmed is within walking distance to my apartment," she said, "everything is pretty much within walking distance." And in Hollywood, that's important because the traffic out there is not good.

All the other stars she's worked with have been really nice, she said, even though she described it as a "cutthroat world." With the quarantine in place, many aren't working. When the red carpet was out, she was there on several occasions, watching the paparazzi at work with some of the other big names, but she hasn't been their target yet. "I've seen them targeting other people, photographers lining the red carpet," she said, "very aggressive."

There was another Lake Braddock alumni that starred on Desperate Housewives, and Peachey saw her name on an acting list. "I thought that was so cool," she said. "Paradise Lost" will be available soon on streaming services.

Looking for 'Plan B' for Distance Learning

FROM PAGE 3

morning. Blackboard continues to make the necessary upgrades to the FCPS 24-7 system to bring students back to a safer, more stable online environment." FCPS signed the letter.

Q&A: What Went Wrong and Why?

Q-School Board member Karl Frisch (Providence): Was any request made to Blackboard to do testing to make sure, beyond simply telling them what our load would be?

A- Luftglass: No, we did not. We relied on our vendor to do that testing.

According to Tomlinson and confirmed by Luftglass, until recently, FCPS generally updated its software once a year, taking a one-week downtime after the academic school year ended and before summer school started.

Q- School Board member Sizemore Heizer (Member-at-Large): Why (wasn't) the software update... just done automatically?

A- Tomlinson: The Fairfax County Team makes decisions about when and how the software is updated... This system actually hasn't been updated in two years. We recommend that all of our clients stay on the most current versions of our software. The

version of the software that Fairfax County is running is three years old. Fairfax County has made the choice not to update that software."

Q- School Board member & Vice Chair Tamara Derenak Kaufax (Lee): What are your best practices in place to make certain that your clients are getting the most up-to-date product from you?

A- Tomlinson: We release major updates twice a year. We release patch updates as frequently as needed. The system that's currently running (FCPS') was released three years ago. It's had two levels of patch updates applied to it... There have been seven updates made publicly available to the software that have not been applied.

Every time Blackboard releases an update, it's communicated directly to the client by email and its availability published on the company's Support Portal. Today...over one hundred of our clients are actually now running on a stats version of our product that's hosted by Amazon Web Services in the cloud... That's the most modern version of our software that we've been recommending to all of our clients for a couple of years. (It) is updated automatically every month; no action required by the client... That's the best practice we deliver for software. It's a change that Fairfax County has not chosen to take advantage of over time.

Legals

PUBLIC NOTICE

AT&T proposes to replace an existing 41.9' wood utility pole with a new 51' wood utility pole and install a top-mounted antenna at 54.4' at 8858 Lee Hwy, Fairfax, VA (20200384). Interested parties may contact Scott Horn (856-809-1202) (1012 Industrial Dr., West Berlin, NJ 08091) with comments regarding potential effects on historic properties.

Legals

ABC LICENSE

Welcome California Market, Inc. trading as 99 Ranch Market 622, 10780 Fairfax Blvd. Fairfax, VA 22030-4323. The above establishment is applying to the VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE CONTROL (ABC) for a Wine and Beer Off Premises license to sell or manufacture alcoholic beverages. Alice Chen/CFO. NOTE: Objections to the issuance of this license must be submitted to ABC no later than 30 days from the publishing date of the first of two required newspaper legal notices. Objections should be registered at www.abc.virginia.gov or 800-552-3200.

Legals

ABC LICENSE

Burke Centre Texaco INC trading as Burke Centre Texaco, 6054 Burke Commons Rd, Burke, VA 22015. The above establishment is applying to the VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE CONTROL (ABC) for a Wine And Beer Off Premises license to sell or manufacture alcoholic beverages. Robin M Haar, President authorizing advertisement. NOTE: Objections to the issuance of this license must be submitted to ABC no later than 30 days from the publishing date of the first of two required newspaper legal notices. Objections should be registered at www.abc.virginia.gov or 800-552-3200

Legals

Notice of Initiation of the Section 106 Process: Public Participation

Sprint proposes the construction of a rooftop telecommunications facility at 6120 Franconia Rd, Alexandria, Fairfax County, VA. Members of the public interested in submitting comments on the possible effects on historic properties included in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places may send their comments to Andrew Smith, RESCOM Environmental Corp., PO Box 361 Petoskey, MI 49770 or call 260-385-6999.

Legals

Legals

Public Hearing for the Town of Clifton, Virginia Proposed FY2021 Town Budget May 6, 2020

Notice is hereby given that the Town Council of the Town of Clifton, Virginia will conduct an electronic Public Hearing on Wednesday, May 6, 2020 at 7:30 p.m. using Zoom teleconferencing audio and video service to consider the proposed FYE2106 Town Budget. The Public Hearing will be conducted in accordance with the Town of Clifton's Emergency Uncodified Ordinance to Establish Methods to Assure Continuity in the Town of Clifton Government and Conduct of Town Council Members Meetings during the Novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Emergency under Virginia Code § 15.2-1413.

The FY2021 proposed Town Budget will be posted on the Town's website cliftonva.gov and a hardcopy will be posted at the Clifton Post Office, 12644 Chapel Road, Clifton, VA 20124. All interested parties are encouraged to contact the Town Clerk to receive instructions on how to access the electronic forum in order to express their views with respect to the proposed FY2021 Town Budget. Written comments on the proposed Budget can also be submitted via email to the Town Clerk and via regular U.S. mail by sending them to P.O. Box 309, Clifton, VA, 20124.

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An expert is someone who knows some of the worst mistakes that can be made in his subject and how to avoid them.
-Werner Heisenberg

NEWS

Volunteer Uncovers Brickwork Mystery

Extensive brickwork pathways, lined culverts, and walls found at Laurel Hill Park.

PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME/ THE CONNECTION

BY SUSAN LAUME
THE CONNECTION



Volunteer Adam Freeman discovers hidden brick work at Laurel Hill Park.



Brickwork pathways and walls suggest a one-time garden.

A mystery was waiting to be rediscovered among invasive vines in a section of Laurel Hill Park in Lorton. This past January, a volunteer, working in a section heavily infested with dead kudzu vines, noticed a portion of brick wall poking through the debris. The volunteer, Adam Freeman, of Alexandria, wanted to see more of what was hidden by the vines.

Further delving beneath the overgrowth revealed extensive brickwork pathways, lined culverts, and walls. Freeman described the features as an "extremely well-designed, carefully laid structure." The layout suggested a formal, terraced garden. However, without a nearby structure its historical use was not immediately clear. An inquiry to the County suggested the area might have been a garden area, part of animal processing, or even animal troughs.

THE SECTION is targeted for reforestation; possibly a controlled burn for final eradication of the kudzu, removal of invasive plants, and planting native trees in the Fall 2020. County Park Authority managers reviewed the site with volunteer team members in early March after the brick work discovery to determine if changes to the reforestation plan were necessary. Their initial assessment suggested that reforestation plans could likely proceed with care around the bricked portion of the area. The county also might reserve a portion of the site to serve as an open air archaeology class room. No final determination had been made by the county when contacted for this story.

Those who know the history of Lorton will remember that the Lorton Workhouse was built in 1910 and encompassed over 500 acres. It began as a prison farm for non-violent offenders, established for the District of Columbia justice system. About 20 years later, the Lorton Reformatory construction began and continued from 1931 to 1938 as a walled prison, constructed by the inmates with heightened security features. The complex expanded to 3,500 acres at its peak and was in service for 92 years, until it closed in late 1990. The area was sold to Fairfax County in July 2002 for \$4.2 million with a requirement that the county plan use for maximum open space, parkland, or recreation. Recently construction began on pathways and picnic

pavilions expected to open in Fall 2020.

Bricks used in the classically inspired symmetrical prison dormitory complexes and walls were made on site by inmates. Brick material was clay dredged from the nearby Occoquan River. The prison maintained its own internal railroad line, the Lorton & Occoquan from 1911 to 1977, and was used to transport raw and finished brick materials. Inmate brick work is common throughout the park area.

From 1940 to 1960, the prison farm operation included cows, chickens, and turkeys. For a time, there was a hog ranch located on the present grounds of Occoquan Regional Park. The hog ranch was hit by an outbreak of hog cholera in the early 1950s and approximately 3,000 pigs had to be destroyed. The hog ranch was never able to recover from the epidemic. The dairy and poultry operations continued to provide food for prison and DC school consumption.

FREEMAN, a local school teacher and amateur naturalist, who lives in Alexandria, often stops by to enjoy Laurel Hill during his work commute. He is part of a team of park volunteers who share their love for the natural resources found there. The park volunteer team (PVT) sanctioned by the Fairfax County Park Authority, normally holds monthly events to remove trash or invasive vines. The PVT was recognized for their work with an Ellie Doyle Service Award in November 2019. Official information about the Laurel Hill PVT can be found at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/laurel-hill-volunteer-team>; informal information is on their Facebook page: Laurel Hill Park Ents.

— The author serves as Laurel Hill Park PVT Leader



Fairfax County Park Authority managers, John Burke, Dr. Elizabeth Crowell, and Aimee Wells meet with Adam Freeman.

BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 5

the center located at 4915 Ox Road, Fairfax. The Salvation Army is practicing no-touch, safe distancing to ensure the safety of families and staff. Interested families must call at 703-385-8700, Ext. 10, to arrange a pick-up.

FAIRFAX COUNTY PARKWAY TO BE WIDENED

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors unanimously endorsed the design plans for widening the Fairfax County Parkway between Routes 29 and 123 and constructing an interchange at Popes Head Road. These designs are based on extensive community engagement and feedback. This project will: Construct the interchange at Popes Head Road and the Fairfax County Parkway and allow for the future construction of the long-planned extension of Shirley Gate Road from Braddock Road to the Parkway. Widen the Parkway to three lanes in each direction from Route 29 to Route 123. Make improvements at the Burke Centre Parkway/Fairfax County Parkway intersection as well as the 123 interchange. Provide a continuous shared-use path along the Parkway by building the missing piece of trail between 123 and Burke Centre Parkway.

GOVERNOR EXTENDS BUSINESS RESTRICTIONS

Gov. Ralph Northam has announced the extension of Executive Order 53, which bans crowds of more than 10 people; closes recreation, entertainment and personal care businesses; and limits restaurants to offering takeout and delivery services only, until May 8. The order was extended to allow physical distancing, and other measures shown to be slowing the spread of COVID-19, to continue. Extending the order also allows state officials to evaluate the situation and plan for how to ease restrictions so businesses may eventually operate without endangering public health. Executive Order 55 (requiring Virginians to stay at home unless they must leave for essential services) remains in effect until June 10.

MONDAY/APRIL 27

Community Conversations: Transportation. 7:30-9 p.m. The General Assembly passed momentous legislation for transportation and transit in 2020. Mark your calendars for this webinar that discusses the impact of the legislation and opportunities to move clean transportation forward in northern Virginia. Webinar address: bit.ly/NOVA-Transportation.

MARRIAGE LICENSES GO VIRTUAL

Beginning April 15, a new "Virtual Marriage License" appointment program will be the exclusive way to get a marriage license from the Fairfax Circuit Court Clerk's Office during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using the Clerk of Circuit Court's existing "preApp" technology, a couple can prepare their marriage license application in their home and schedule a time to appear by Webex to take their oath before a deputy clerk of court. An e-signature tool has been added. Applicants must have a computer, smartphone or tablet with a microphone and camera, along with internet access. Plus they need an email address/account for both the preApp and the Webex appointment. Contact Gerarda Culipher, Chief Deputy Clerk, at 703-246-4111.

VIRGINIA TO DECREASE JAIL POPULATION

Gov. Ralph Northam announced that Virginia's collaborative efforts to release low-level offenders from local and regional jails in response to the COVID-19 pandemic are working, and the administration's guidelines have been effective in decreasing the jail population. On March 19, Northam issued guidance to local criminal justice officials, calling for them to consider proactive measures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 while ensuring public safety. The Northam administration issued a joint statement with local public safety agencies, including the Virginia Sheriffs Association (VSA), the Virginia Association of Commonwealth's Attorneys (VACA), the Virginia Indigent Defense Commission (IDC), and the Virginia Association of Regional Jails (VARJ).

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Wholesale Change



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Since I'm not doing the food and pharmacy out-of-the-house shopping anymore, as I have for the last 40 years (as I may have mentioned in last week's column: "Money For What") I am no longer in control of what we buy and how much we spend. The pandemic and my upcoming thyroid cancer treatment have combined to empower my wife, Dina, to set fairly strict guidelines. Primarily that I am to stay put in the house ALL THE TIME and that during my isolation, she will fill the purchasing vacuum. The effect being that all my years of experience reducing our grocery expenses has led to this: we're paying re, re, retail for nearly all of our purchases. Not impoverished because of it but not very happy about it either.

I derived a certain pleasure in wandering around the stores, advertising circular and coupon book in hand, looking for sale items, checking the 50% off/discontinued merchandise rack, occasionally looking at the day-old bakery cabinet, using miscellaneous paper and digital coupons, buying in bulk/quantity, getting rain checks when products were sold out, as well as being open to any other in-store incentives I might find. The process, as tedious as it may sound, was not nearly so for me, especially considering that over the course of a year, according to the stores' own online tally, I saved the Lourie family business upwards of \$1,000. Now it seems as if we're paying it all back since product availability — due to pandemic pressures, has often laid waste to the stores' shelves. And also laid waste to stores' interest in offering products on sale. And why should they? Consumers are buying anything they can get their hands on, price be damned.

Moreover, the stores themselves, at least the ones where I have been a regular buyer, are providing fewer digital coupons on their sites than ever before and the advertising circulars, typically 10 to 14 pages, have now been reduced by one half or so. In addition, there are also fewer coupon inserts in the Sunday newspaper editions. The net effect of this is that the supermarket/pharmacy budget has been blown to smithereens. And the outlook for the future (immediate future anyway) is more of the same, or rather less, if you catch my drift.

Now further combine the fact that yours truly, a strategic shopper of some repute is not doing the in-store shopping anymore, and perhaps you can do the metaphorical math. Can you say through the roof? Let me be clear; this situation has nothing to do with control. It has to do with cash flow. I feel as if we're being taken advantage of, like we're sitting ducks almost, and there's not a thing I can do about any of it other than to take solace in the fact that our stimulus checks will most definitely have somewhere to go, even if I don't.

Still, I realize there are many others who are not complaining about what they're paying for groceries because they're too busy trying to make withdrawals from their local food bank. I would imagine their challenge is identical to mine, only much worse: hoping to find necessary items in limited supply without the proper money and means to do so. Means, unfortunately which are not leading to satisfactory ends. Ends which will either bust their budgets, overwhelm public-type assistance or swell credit card balances; thereby increasing future minimum payments and exacerbating pressures to even make monthly payments. A vicious circle and cycle if there ever was one, or two.

But I don't have one or two so I am very lucky. Now I do have two types of cancer but that wasn't the point of this column. The point was more narrow than that. It was simply to make a little fun at a predicament not of my own choosing but one that is impacting my life and totally out of my control. I wouldn't say that it's food for thought but it is something to chew on.

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

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