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Springfield Teens March Against Racism

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Sara Salih, Burke, left, remembering how long people of color have sought equality; with Marie Brangan, Alexandria, and Mohammad Ali Salin, Springfield, participating in a well attended Springfield protest in support of Black Lives Matter.

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PHOTO BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION



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NEWS

COVID-19: Not a Fair Fight

Regional perspective: pandemic exposes health inequality leading up to discrepancies in life expectancy.

BY KEN MOORE
THE CONNECTION

The population of Fairfax County is 16.8 percent Hispanic but Latinx individuals account for 65.3 percent of positive COVID-19 cases in Fairfax County.

By Sunday, June 14, months into the pandemic, African Americans accounted for 1,154 deaths, more than 41 percent of the total, in Maryland even though they account for 30.9 percent of the overall population.

Arlington's Latinx community makes up 15.8 percent of the county's population, but accounts for 55.5 percent of the positive COVID cases. And Arlington's black population which makes up about 1 in 10 people (9.6 percent) in the county accounts for almost 1 in 4 deaths (24.1 percent).

In Alexandria, Latinx population, which comprises 16.8 percent of the City, has had 55.5 percent of Alexandria's positive cases.

Montgomery County's black population had the highest rate per 100,000 individuals (79). And the African-American population in Montgomery County was the only demographic that had a greater percentage of deaths than its demographic predicts.

THE NORTHERN VIRGINIA Regional Commission concluded that Latinos accounted for a disproportionate number of coronavirus cases in this area.

"The Hispanic or Latino share of cases in Northern Virginia is three-and-a-half times their overall share. All health districts in NOVA have significantly higher shares [for the Latino population]. This indicates significant ethnic disparities in COVID 19 cases."

Coronavirus cases by zip code in Northern Virginia also revealed disparities by race, ethnicity and economic status. In the City of Alexandria, zip code 22305 stood out for 579 cases.

"Although viruses do not discriminate, the COVID-19 virus disproportionately impacts vulnerable populations just as other diseases and health conditions do," according to the Alexandria City Government, explaining some disparities.

The zip codes with higher concentrations of poverty, lower education levels, and crowded housing conditions tend to have the highest rates of COVID. These people are more likely to work in jobs where they are underpaid, don't get paid sick leave, depend on public transit and don't have telework opportunities, bringing more risk of exposure to coronavirus.

"Inequitable conditions have created disproportionate rates of chronic health issues resulting in large differences in life expectancy across Alexandria. Now, these chronic health issues also make people more sus-

ceptible to severe disease from COVID-19 infection," the city report said.

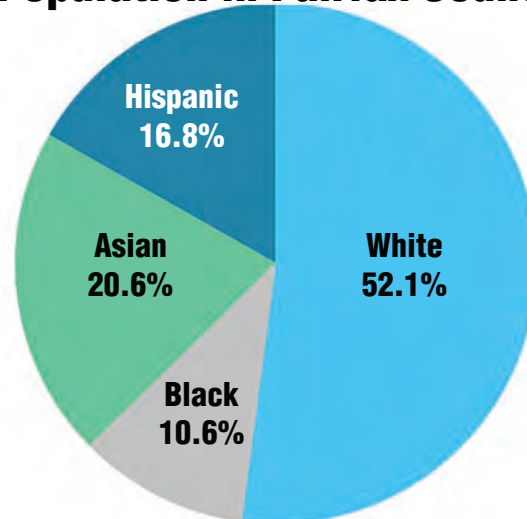
"**AFFLUENCE** in Northern Virginia masks gaps in health and economic opportunity that have been exacerbated even further by the current coronavirus pandemic," according to the Northern Virginia Health Foundation.

"Although everyone is potentially susceptible to the virus, research shows that people of color and low-income families are especially vulnerable and have higher death rates from COVID-19," said Steven H. Woolf, of Virginia Commonwealth University and the Northern Virginia Health Foundation. "They have greater exposure to the virus, are more susceptible to complications, have greater barriers to health care, are more vulnerable economically, and suffer from deteriorating health caused by deepening economic adversity."

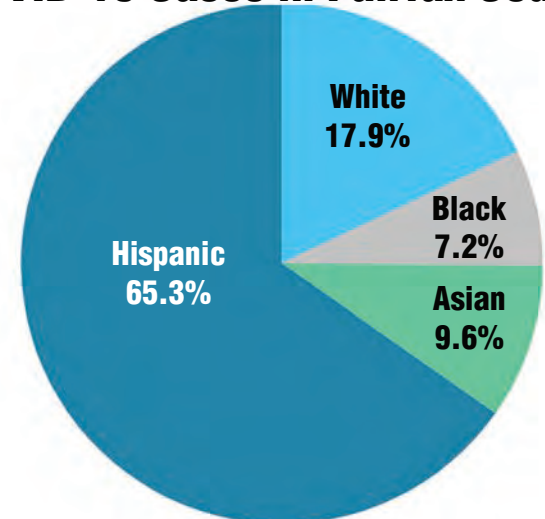
Northern Virginia is a "seemingly affluent area" with good health statistics in general, but life expectancy varies by 17 years within the region, he said. "Economically marginalized communities will face devastating wage losses, unemployment and food scarcity. Low income families will undoubtedly struggle the most to rebound."

THE PANDEMIC has magnified discrepancies that health offi-

Population in Fairfax County



COVID-19 Cases in Fairfax County



SOURCE: FAIRFAX COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT



Neighborhood Health, a local non-profit community health center serving primarily low-income and uninsured people in Fairfax County, Arlington and Alexandria held a COVID-19 testing day in the Arlandria neighborhood of Alexandria, where 236 residents received free COVID-19 tests on Saturday, May 16.

cials already knew were there.

According to the Arlington County Government, "Arlington rightfully celebrates being highly ranked in many areas, like employment, education and health. However, looking beyond aggregate data and drilling into results in different geographic, ethnic, racial and other often-marginalized groups reveals that health disparities exist among Arlingtonians in these groups. Not everyone is thriving."

According to the Fairfax County health department, "The data does underscore some of the existing disparities in Fairfax which make certain populations more susceptible to exposure and to greater risks from COVID-19 infection, just as they are for other diseases and health conditions."

"Simultaneously, COVID-19 continues to showcase and exacerbate the disparities that exist in our most vulnerable communities," said Fairfax County Chairman Jeff McKay.

"Now more than ever, we know it is the role of our local government to achieve true structural change in our communities. We in Fairfax County must honestly ask ourselves, 'What actions are we taking?; What voices are we lifting up?;' and for me as your Chairman, 'Are our policies affecting systemic change in our community?'"

Nadia Ruffner (far left), Delina Phicadu (far right) and family.

PHOTOS BY JESS KIRBY/
THE CONNECTION



Springfield Teens March Against Racism

Hundreds join Black Lives Matter movement.

BY JESS KIRBY
THE CONNECTION

At 4:30 p.m. on June 10, hundreds of Springfield locals gathered to protest systemic racism and emphasize that Black lives matter. The protesters, starting at the intersection of Old Keene Mill and Rolling Roads, almost reached Washington Irving Middle School and West Springfield High School (WSHS).

The protest was organized largely by young adults. One of the organizers, Rachel Fleming, estimated that more than 500 people gathered that day, despite the 90-degree weather.

Silence was rare; almost every moment was filled with chanting and passing cars beeping in support. Hundreds of drivers and passengers decorated their cars, held signs up to the windows, and lifted their fists in solidarity as they drove by.

Many protesters shared their stories and the reason they came to protest.

“Even when I was on active duty I was discriminated against. It was subtle, but it was there. I have gone into stores when I was on active duty and people assumed that I couldn’t buy what I wanted to buy and refused to wait on me. I’m in uniform, military uniform, and somebody thinks I’m an elevator operator. Over time that stuff builds up,” said Roxana Baylor. “I think we—my generation—need to be handing off to [younger] generations a better place to live. It’s a shame that Black boys and men are constantly looked upon as subhuman. They should not have to fear for their lives when they have no weapons and they’re in a non-violent situation.”

“We have a serious issue in this country when it comes to racism and systematic oppression of our Black and Brown brothers and sisters. It’s been too long, and it’s 2020 and we shouldn’t have to be out



Springfield residents Nami Solomon, third from left, Haymanot Solomon, middle, Makida Solomon, third from right, and family.



From left -- Daniel Smith and Cory McDonald of Springfield.

here now. We need to have changes in our government all the way to the top,” said Nadia Ruffner.

“Black people in America really have to deal with this every single day. Everybody else... can go home at night and take off that sign, but I can’t take off my skin color. I decided because... I still have the privilege of being alive, and not to be one of these cases, that I have to just show it,” said Cory McDonald of Springfield.

“We’re out here to just support the Black Lives Matter movement and make sure that everybody knows what’s going on in the world,” said Makida Solomon of Springfield. “Police need to be held accountable for their actions.”

Around 6:10 p.m., protesters began to march through the streets from Old Keene Mill to Rolling and down to WSHS.

The march ended at the West Springfield Governmental Center, where protesters laid on the ground in memory of George Floyd, who was killed on the ground in police custody. Springfield resident Jackson Morrow thanked the protesters and led a prayer.

“We live in West Springfield, it’s a diverse community and it’s just nice to see all these people out here supporting us. This is just one step in our city; we’re doing what we can to make a change,” Morrow said in an interview.

“We’re more than friends now, it’s a family,” said Zion Pearson of Springfield. “Black lives matter.”



PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION

Rebecca Geigen, David Giorgis, Jackson Morrow among the group of teenage friends planning the demonstration in support of Black Lives Matter.

West Springfield Teens Protest in Pictures

With no formal group sponsorship, and using only social media, a group of friends connected through West Springfield HS, organized a well attended Springfield protest in support of Black Lives Matter for several hours on June 10. The event at the intersection of Old Keene Mill and Rolling Roads drew a diverse crowd of all ages for the peaceful protest.



Signs spoke of a movement with staying power.



Wendi Dorey (right) was there with Abigail Dorey and Ella McCandless “because blacks have suffered for centuries..”



Protestors included small children with big messages.

Discussing Racial Injustice with Children

Books and visual art can help begin difficult conversations.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

As horrific scenes of police brutality and images of passionate protesters fighting for racial justice are ubiquitous in a smartphone and social media obsessed society, parental control over information that children receive can be limited. Framing and discussing such issues can be equally as challenging.

Children pick up on racial injustice earlier than parents might think, so toddlers can begin to learn about injustice early in very basic terms, says Glenda Hernández Tittle, Ph.D. Montgomery College, School of Education. “I think it’s really important to start talking to children about racism and biases early and why it’s wrong that people are mistreated,” she said. “Ask how they would feel if they were treated that way themselves. Research shows that as early as two to three years old, children are quite aware of biases.”

Parents can create a safe environment in which children and young adults can express their thoughts. “Conversations about racial injustice can be difficult, but they are necessary,” said Karen Bentall, a librarian at Oakridge Elementary School in Arlington. “Books can help, [but] I must stress the importance of reading a wide variety of books where children can see themselves and others.”

Reading can give children an appreciation of the experiences of those whose lives are different from their own. “Books can be windows into the lives of others, mirrors to reflect our own experience, and sliding glass doors that allow us to step into other worlds,” said Bentall. “They help develop empathy.”

Literary classics such as Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* can offer a springboard for lively discussions on race, suggests Bentall. “Many parents feel a sense of nostalgia toward their childhood books, but looking at them through a social-justice lens can spark conversations about the insidious bias that has crept into our language, thoughts, and patterns,” she said.

Movies can also give children an opportunity to understand the lives of others. “You can ask questions about characters and why they did what they did,” said Tittle. “You can also ask children about their own peers and who sits with whom at school and how they feel about that.”

The types of characters that children see in books, movies, television and other types of media can have an impact on their cultural and racial understanding. “It’s important for children to see diverse characters in positions of leadership and power,” said Tittle. “Be cautious in selecting. Some classics often perpetuate biases and racists attitudes.”

Visual art is another medium by which children can see and absorb beliefs about the characteristics



PHOTO BY MARILYN CAMPBELL

The types of characters that children see in books, movies, television and other types of media can have an impact on their cultural and racial understanding.

“Conversations about racial injustice can be difficult, but they are necessary.”

— Karen Bentall,
Oakridge Elementary School

of others. “Looking at art can also be a powerful part of raising awareness of racism and calling for needed change,” said Kathryn Horn Coneway.

One example, says Coneway, is the Four Freedoms Project co-founded by Hank Willis Thomas. “[It] includes multiple versions of images that focus on freedom from fear, freedom from want, freedom of worship, freedom of speech,” she said. “Families can view the original images created by [artist] Norman Rockwell 70 years ago and reflect on how the recreated versions made by the Four Freedoms Project both signify and call for change.”

Parents can encourage their children to be agents of change, suggests Tittle. “Such as, ‘What do you think we should do if we see something like that?’ These prompts go beyond what we’ve typically done and help to develop a culture beyond awareness but also of advocacy and activism,” she said.

Conversations around race should be ongoing, advises Tittle. “Parents will have different comfort levels about talking to kids about these topics and that’s okay, she said.”

An examination of the past can inform current conversations on racial justice. “Though parts of American history can be difficult and even heart wrenching, remain honest about our history, and that while we are proud of some of our history, there are things we didn’t do right and that we need to work to change,” said Tittle. “These conversations should be ongoing.”

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NEWS

'One Step in the Long Road to Recovery'

Fairfax City creates grant program for its businesses.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Fairfax City received some \$2.1 million of Virginia's CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security) Act funds. And last Tuesday, June 9, City Council approved using \$1,150,000 of this money for a business-support grant program, Fairfax City ReConnected Grant, to help small City businesses impacted by COVID-19.

Proposed by the City's Economic Development Office, \$1 million will fund the grant program, \$50,000 is for a program manager and \$100,000 is for related support activities. The other \$945,000 will be held in reserve.

"We'd like to award the grants in late June," said Economic Development Director Chris Bruno. "The program manager will design and implement the grants program, [which is] just one step in the long road to recovery."

He said the money will go to businesses and industries needing it the most. "It'll include considerable outreach to the [potential recipients], and this program will be on a reimbursement basis. Grants will be between \$5,000 and \$10,000. And in December or January, we can report to Council who received the grants and how successful they were."

BEFORE GREENLIGHTING

the program, Council members and other City officials discussed it during their June 2 work session. "I support this effort wholeheartedly," said Commissioner of the Revenue Page Johnson. "The focus will be on businesses most at risk, but we're also able to support our overall, business goals."

And fortuitously, he and Chief Financial Officer Dave Hodgkins already identified the City's strategic business segments. So, for example, said Hodgkins,

"We can take sales-tax information and compare April 2019 and April 2020 numbers to see which business segments have been hit hardest by COVID-19 and by how much. Then we can create a program based on actual dollars."

Regarding the \$945,000, he said they'd bring a plan for it to Council soon, with spending priorities, such as additional investments in teleworking and keeping \$200,000 in reserve for unanticipated expenses. It'll also include reimbursing the City for its pandemic response-related costs.

"We had to spend out-of-pocket money on materials, supplies and personnel – such as PPE for our public-safety personnel – and these expenditures weren't in our FY 20 budget," explained Hodgkins. "We also had to change the way and how often we clean and sanitize things in our offices and buildings."



Dave Hodgkins

IN DETERMINING the grant distribution, Johnson said, "We're going to balance

a business's need vs. how much that business contributes to the City's success. That sounds harsh, but these are public funds. For example, a small business may have a greater need than a restaurant because these small businesses have been closed three months, while restaurants have been able to have some business. We'll try to sincerely and genuinely address those issues."

Councilmember Sang Yi wanted women- or minority-owned businesses to receive special consideration for the grants. And Bruno said they'd look into it and, hopefully, should be able to do so.

"This is a huge task, and I

appreciate everyone's hard work," said Councilmember Jennifer Passey. "This is new, so I ask businesses to work with us and have patience so we can make this a great grant program."

Mayor David Meyer then told City staff, "We're in uncharted waters, and you brought something to us that we hope will be the most effective and helpful to our businesses." And at the Council's June 9 meeting, the members voted unanimously in favor of it.

"We can take sales-tax information and compare April 2019 and April 2020 numbers to see which business segments have been hit hardest by COVID-19 and by how much. Then we can create a program based on actual dollars."

— Chief Financial Officer Dave Hodgkins

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NEWS



PHOTO BY FCPS

Karen Keys-Gamarra, School Board Member-at-Large, Fairfax County Public Schools



PHOTO BY FCPS

Tamara Derenak Kaufax, Lee District School Board Representative Fairfax County Public Schools.



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Confederacy is Part of History, Not the Future

School board continues renaming process for County high school.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

“School names will reflect an inclusive and respectful learning environment as outlined in our One Fairfax policy,” said Lee District School Board Representative Tamara Derenak Kaufax, Fairfax County Public Schools.

Elected representatives on the Fairfax County Public School (FCPS) Board resumed the process of considering to rename Robert E. Lee High School in Springfield. Built in 1958 as Lee High School, the name officially changed in 1964 to Robert E. Lee High School, after an American and Confederate soldier, best known as a commander of the Confederate States Army. The current multistep renaming process was interrupted when, on March 23, Governor Northam directed all schools in the Commonwealth closed, effective 11:59 p.m., March 24 through the end of the academic school year, to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

As the County reopened under Phase Two of the Governor’s Forward Virginia Plan, the FCPS Board rescheduled public comments on the renaming of Lee High School. A virtual Public Hearing is scheduled for June 22, 4 p.m. Members of the public are welcome to attend at <https://www.fcps.edu/tv/ch99>. Community members who wish to speak at the public hearing can sign up to speak (<https://www.fcps.edu/school-board/citizen-participation>). Community members can also share their comments via email to Region3admin@fcps.edu.

According to FCPS BoardDocs, eighty-six names representing individuals and those speaking on behalf of groups or organizations such as the Secretary of Student Government and President NAACP Club, Class of 2022 President, SURJ Northern Virginia, Fairfax County Democratic Committee and others are listed.

“We are in a particular moment in time where we cannot ignore the weight of racism and the disparities it produces... Confederate symbols, names and practices that uphold systemic racism must be removed...One Fairfax requires us to remove these names and dig deeper to address disparities within our system. We can, and we must,” said School Board Member-at-Large Karen Keys-Gamarra.

ON TUESDAY, June 23, during the School Board’s regular business meeting, the Board is scheduled to take action on whether or not to change the name of Robert E. Lee High School. According to FCPS, “If the Board votes to proceed, Superintendent Scott S. Brabrand will bring a recommendation to the Board on a new name for the school as a new business item at the June 23 meeting. If the Board does not vote to proceed, the process will end.”

The Fairfax County School Board may rename a school if it determines it is appropriate to do so. Action is initiated through a Board forum topic by at least one magisterial School Board member representing students attending that facility and one at-large School Board member. The re-

SEE VOTE, PAGE 8

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Donors Laing Hinton and Bill Lynch transfer Fairfax County land stewardship to NOVA Parks.



Symbolic ribbon cutting takes place where existing park joins new acquisition to honor donation to NOVA Parks. From left: Laing Hinson; Bill Lynch; Michael Nardolilli, Park Board Chair; Jeff McKay, Chair, BOS; Dan Storck, Mount Vernon District Supervisor.

Ribbon Cutting Marks Conservation Stewardship

NOVA Parks acknowledges donors.

BY SUSAN LAUME
THE CONNECTION

NOVA Parks and Fairfax County officials and staff celebrated, honoring the gift of an additional 32 acres to the Pohick Regional Park with a ribbon cutting ceremony at the Lorton park on June 11. The land donation by Lorton based Colchester Land Company significantly extends the park's more than 400 acres, adding wetlands, woods, and a half mile of Occoquan river shoreline to the Park's holdings, primarily for conservation.

Local business partners Laing Hinson and Bill Lynch were on-hand to cut the ribbon with Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Chairman Jeff McKay, and Mount Vernon District Supervisor, Dan Storck, in a small ceremony, sized in consideration of the Covid-19 limits on public gatherings. As noted by Michael Nardolilli, Chairman, NOVA Parks Board, celebrating park space in time of trouble has historic precedent. Congress passed the act that established the Grand Canyon National Park in February 1919 in the midst of the Spanish Flu epidemic that lasted from Spring 1918 to Summer 1919; a flu likened to Covid-19 for its impact and deadliness. Praising the importance of the donation,



Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Chairman, Jeff McKay, notes value of parks as "great equalizer."

Chairman McKay observed that in troubled times such as these, "parks are a great equal-izer... [All being able to] come out to parks that are free, kids and adults alike, at a time when our mental health is being challenged every minute of every day, has been so valuable. People are looking at parks as an absolute necessity to our quality of life in Fairfax County. ...They are looking at environmental stewardship in a whole different way."

Nardolilli further praised the donation as "remarkable" for its value as a riparian vegetative buffer; positively impacting water quality along the Occoquan River. Scientists

consider a 35 foot buffer minimal for promoting healthy water, and 150 feet as optimal; this donation provides a superior 175 foot vegetative buffer.

Lauding Hinson and Lynch's "foresight and willingness" to donate to the community, Supervisor Storck expressed the hope that there will be many more like them who will add to this community. He said, "We are part of a long line of people who will inhabit this planet. We've preserved another piece for future generations."

Hinson, speaking in acknowledgment of the County's thanks, shared that the donated property had been in Lynch's family since the Great Depression, about 1944, and was considered "family land."

IN 1995 Hinson became a partner in the development undertaking. Notably he hit the last ball, a promiscuous one which shattered an earthmover's windshield, as the driving range previously located there was ripped up to make way for industrial development. From that year to now, leaning more toward 'con'-struction, Hinson described Colchester's successful economic stewardship of the land which provided over one million square feet of office space, employment in southeastern Fairfax County, and support of the Department of Defense and law enforcement agencies. Directing attention to the land immediately behind the podium,

he said:

"This land is something else. We can't be that kind of [land] stewards, so we are grateful to the NOVA Park Authority for being willing to take over and become the stewards that Bill and I couldn't be. In doing that you are doing a great thing for our families, for the community. Now the Hinson family, the Lynch family can look and say our neighbors, our friends, the community can use the property in a way that benefits everyone."

Hinson is on the Board of Burke & Herbert Bank; Lynch and his family have a significant history of community volunteering and philanthropy. Lynch's parents, Edwin and Helen, donated land on Belmont Bay on Mason Neck to establish "Point of View," an international conference and retreat center under the auspices of George Mason University, dedicated to the study and practice of conflict resolution.

Connection asked Lynch what his father, a recognized long-time peace activist who died in 2004, might make of today's realities. While we chuckled at the ironies of our times, perhaps Edwin Lynch gave his answer and advice years ago, which still resonates today: "We must seek to develop and use our minds, not to conquer one another, but to peacefully and constructively solve the conflicts that cause so much of the world's grief." (Edwin Lynch, 1995)

Vote on Renaming Lee High Set for June 23

FROM PAGE 7

naming process began when Lee District School Board Member Tamara Derenak Kaufax and School Board Member-at-Large Karen Keys-Gamarra requested the Board considers to begin the renaming process. In their Forum Topic Request, submitted Feb. 5, they wrote: "In accordance with our updated School Naming Policy 8170.6...School Names will reflect

an inclusive, respectful learning environment as outlined in our adopted One Fairfax Policy--as such we believe it is now time to rename Robert E. Lee High School. We are asking the Board to consider to begin the renaming process as outlined in our Regulation 8170."

THE SCHOOL BOARD indicated support for moving forward at its Feb. 20 Meeting.

"Our School Board is committed to fos-

tering a caring and inclusive culture. We cannot live up to that standard if we force students to attend schools named in honor of the racist vestiges of our past — especially as we seek to combat racism in our present," said Karl Frisch, the Providence District Representative on the Fairfax County School Board.

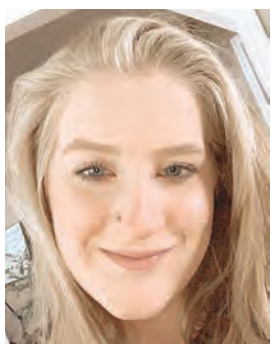
On March 11, before Covid-19 shut down the region, the School Board held a Community Meeting to gather feedback on the

proposal to rename the school. It invited community members to submit their suggestions online and via email. Feedback has been posted online (<https://www.fcps.edu/node/41209>).

"Critics will say this is an attempt to erase history, but this is not the case at all. We understand this was a part of our history, but it is not a part of our future. Confederate values do not align with our community," said Kaufax.



Taiyler Russell, South County High School graduate, Lorton



Maggie Corbin, Lake Braddock Secondary School graduate, Burke



Marcus Cyr, West Springfield High School graduate, Springfield



Ian Krein, West Springfield High School graduate, Springfield

Partying While Social Distancing

Area high school graduates reflect on drive-through diplomas, basement prom parties.

BY JESS KIRBY
THE CONNECTION

As seniors everywhere are adjusting to the loss of their final year in high school, many have had to get creative to celebrate their long-awaited accomplishments.

While complying with social distancing protocols, some schools have designed drive through diploma pickups and online ceremonies to celebrate their students.

“[Lake Braddock] had a drive through drop off for books and laptops and a little station where they handed us a bag with our cap, gown, diploma, and some other little stuff. And we have an online ceremony coming up,” said Maggie Corbin of Burke, a Lake Braddock Secondary School graduate. “It was definitely a bit anticlimactic for me, but I know that they’re doing everything they can right now. I went alone to pick up my stuff but we have a photo-op next week at school which my family will come for.”

“They had photographers stationed taking pictures and a lot of the teachers and staff congratulating passing seniors as they left,” said West Springfield High School graduate Marcus Cyr, a Springfield resident. “Even though we couldn’t have a proper graduation ceremony, it was a nice gesture by the school.”

Many of the families are doing what they can to celebrate their graduates while staying safe.

“My parents will be making a special dinner, but other than that there isn’t much I can do. I’ve been trapped inside for three months,” said Cyr.

“I’m having my family and friends come to just take pictures... kind of like a grad party but with a limited amount of guests,” said South County High School graduate and Lorton resident Taiyler Russell.

“For graduation my family decorated the house and car the night before and surprised me the next day with fatheads of me in the yard. My family made such a big deal out of it once I had my expectations so low (as our graduation was a drive through),” said West Springfield graduate Riley Tufts of Springfield. “It was really fun and memorable despite the lack of ceremony.”

Tufts’ family even threw her a private prom in their basement.



Riley and Hannah Tufts pose with their prom-positional sign.

“Once we knew the rest of senior year was cancelled, my sister came up with the idea and later rang our doorbell to prom-pose to me. She decorated our basement and made a playlist for the day we were supposed to have prom, so my mom, sister and I all got dressed up for pictures and then dancing! She even created a photo booth and station to vote for prom queen! I won of course. It surpassed my expectations and I can guarantee I had a better time in my own basement than I would have if we had gone to actual prom,” she said.

Some graduates are trying to celebrate with their friends while practicing social distancing.

“We are doing a makeshift prom at my friend’s (mostly just pictures),” said Russell. “We decided not to buy expensive dresses, just simple, cheaper ones. There are about six or seven of us and we are going to take pictures and probably have a nice dinner at my friend’s house.”

“I’m making gifts for some of my other friends that are graduating,” said Cyr.

“My friends and I are hoping to be able to have a little group party social distancing later in the summer,” said Corbin.

Others are prioritizing staying safe over celebrating.

“I’ve been staying home as much as I can,” said West Springfield graduate Ian Krein of Springfield. “People are dying—I have to do my part. It makes me angry when people say they want to have graduation later. The money is so much better used in other places like testing next year at the schools or supplies for low-income kids.”

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED



Paul VI High seniors Ava Burkat and Colby Davoren pose before their graduation parade.

BONNIE HOBBS/
THE CONNECTION

‘This Was Something I Could Count On’

Paul VI seniors honored in neighborhood’s graduation parade.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Thanks to COVID-19, this year’s high-school seniors didn’t get to have their achievements and graduation recognized in a public way. So moms Liz MacDonald and Amy McConaghie of Centreville’s Gate Post Estates community organized a parade in their honor.

Thirteen grads – 11 from Westfield High and two from Paul VI High – live in that neighborhood. And on Friday evening, May 29, they donned their caps and gowns, got into decorated vehicles and were driven by their parents through the community while the residents cheered.

“Their senior year ended abruptly, and they missed out on so much – senior prom, sports and student-government banquets, barbecues and awards ceremonies,” explained MacDonald. “We’re just trying to make lemonade out of the lemons being thrown at them.”

“While FCPS will eventually hold a virtual graduation, that’s not the real deal,” she continued. “And talk of a possible, full graduation ceremony in the fall is a moot point, as these kids are slated to be off to college. So we took matters into our own hands. We’ve never had a parade in our neighborhood, so we put flyers on everybody’s mailboxes

to let them know about it.”

Signs with each student’s photo were posted along the parade route, which the vehicles traveled three times. Also participating were a fire engine and a police cruiser.

When school suddenly came to a close, PVI senior Colby Davoren was saddest about missing senior prom. “It was going to be on my birthday, May 1, so it was a double whammy,” he said. Following in his dad’s footsteps, he’s now heading to South Carolina’s Clemson University to major in computer science and eventually become a master programmer. Davoren was happy about the parade because, he said, “We get a second chance to have a real graduation, as opposed to virtual.”

Classmate Ava Burkat also felt bad about missing out on prom and “not being able to see everybody all together for the last time.” This was Paul VI’s final year in Fairfax before moving to Loudoun County in the fall, so Burkat regrets “not spending those last few months at the old building.”

She’ll be attending The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., to pursue a degree in early childhood education, in hopes of becoming a teacher. Regarding the parade, she said, “It’s great; it feels special. Even though the last few months were kind of unpredictable, this was something I could count on.”

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AREA ROUNDUPS

Workhouse Community Market Opens June 27

The Workhouse Arts Center has announced a new Community Market initiative in partnership with the South Fairfax Chamber of Commerce every Saturday beginning June 27 from 9 a.m. – 1 p.m.

The Community Market is designed to help businesses rebuild during Virginia's Phase II reopening in a unique setting all while keeping local arts alive.

Surrounded by historic buildings, the Workhouse offers a unique venue for Fairfax and Prince William businesses and organizations to market and sell goods and services. The outdoor environment provides greater exposure to traditional brick and mortar businesses as well as a way for the community to shop in a safer way during Phase I and Phase II of re-opening the local economy. Spaces and tents will adhere to social distancing guidelines and the Workhouse will monitor traffic and cleaning guidelines for optimal safety.

Interested vendors should contact Elena Romanova at elenaromanova@workhousearts.org for more information.

Residents Can Help from the Heart

Fairfax County's Communities of Trust is holding an ongoing, Help from the Heart community drive, collecting items for local food pantries to distribute to people in need. Only new items are accepted; put them into plastic grocery bags and drop them off, 24/7, into collection bins at all Fairfax County police stations.

Needed are: Toothpaste, toothbrushes, deodorant, lotions, diapers, baby wipes, soap, shampoo, conditioner, feminine hygiene products, adult incontinence underwear, laundry and dish detergent, household cleaners, paper towels and toilet paper.

Donate PPEs to 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

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

SUNDAY/JUNE 21

Virtual Museum Tour. 1 p.m. Virtual tours at Fairfax Station Railroad Museum. Museum volunteer and former museum Vice President Michael Chinworth will host Railroad Tools Explained. Visit www.Facebook.com/FFXSRR to participate.

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Taking the Results in Stride



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Apparently, I'm back in the lung cancer business. According to the video visit I had June 8 with my endocrinologist, my thyroid cancer has not moved into my lungs where my oncologist thought it might have - given the results of a previous biopsy and some surprising tumor inactivity in my lungs. The 'surprising inactivity': the tumors didn't kill me. Living, as they say is the best reward. And it sure beats the alternative.

Nevertheless, I can't say I'm thrilled with the outcome. All the tumors in my lungs still being non small cell lung cancer squashes my dream that those tumors were curable papillary thyroid cancer (as it had been suggested by my oncologist in a previous phone call) that had moved rather than the originally diagnosed incurable lung cancer which itself had metastasized. In fact, papillary thyroid cancer is called "the friendly cancer," according to one of my oncology nurses at the infusion center. There's nothing friendly about non small cell lung cancer, stage IV.

I was hoping that the diagnosis of thyroid cancer was going to change my life from being cancer-centric to being thyroid-cancer-are-you-kidding? You mean to tell me, after 11 years and four months living as, and being treated for, lung cancer, the actual diagnosis is thyroid cancer? But alas, poor Yorick, 'twas not to be. If what I've been told recently is the absolute-without-a-doubt truth/accurate diagnosis, than I am back on the emotional precipice waiting for the other shoe to drop or at the very least, have one of my socks fall down around my ankles and get all balled up in my sneakers. (Which I hate by the way; when socks get all rearranged like that. I like the heel of the sock to be lined up properly with my heel and the toe of my sock not twisted away from the toes and so forth.)

Once again, I suppose I'll have to pull myself up by my own boot straps, which I don't even own, and step lively, putting one foot ahead of the other and trying not to back up one step for every two I take. I've progressed too far for too long to backslide now. And even though my working thyroid-cancer-instead-of-lung-cancer narrative is now a thing of my medical past, it was sort of fun and uplifting - while it lasted. Now, I have to reconnect with my previous lung cancer reality and try to find some new approaches to living with a "terminal" disease.

It reminds me of what Cpl. Klinger (Jamie Farr) the cross-dresser from the television series M*A*S*H once did when he returned to camp after assisting the doctors off-site at an aid station. He was all business away from the 4077th, but upon his return, a few hundred yards outside "the upholstered toilet seat" as Trapper John (Wayne McIntyre) once called it, Klinger put his female nurses cap back on and reverted to his previous form as a skirt-wearing Section 8 wannabe, and life for him and all the other M*A*S*H personnel returned to their abnormal.

So too must I return to mine: as a stage IV, non small cell lung cancer patient who hasn't died and somehow has managed to keep under the reaper's radar. I mean, how else does one live so far beyond one's original "13 month to two year" prognosis? Granted, I have a good attitude and have made some changes to my diet and lifestyle, but hardly would I characterize my behavior as any kind of poster-boy status. Sure, I've tried to make light of an extraordinarily heavy burden and made lots of jokes in the face of what I was led to believe was certain premature death (what death isn't premature?), but that's more about personality than procedure. I was up for the challenge is all. Not everybody is. As Kenny Beatrice, a long time sports-talk-show host in the Washington DC area used to say: "You can't teach height." Lucky for me, as my late father often said, I was "born with broad shoulders."

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

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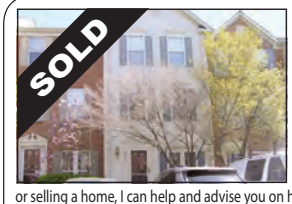


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