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‘Because My Skin Is Black, Is My Life Worth Less?’

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With signs and facemasks, this group prepares to march from Mount Calvary Baptist Church to Fairfax City Hall. Some 200 people gathered Sunday afternoon, June 28, in Veterans Amphitheater outside Fairfax City Hall to emphasize that the time for action is now.

BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION
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NEWS



With signs and facemasks, this group prepares to march from Mount Calvary Baptist Church to Fairfax City Hall.

PHOTOS BY BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION



Some of the event's attendees during a prayer.

'Because My Skin Is Black, Is My Life Worth Less?'

Black Lives Matter protest in Fairfax City.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Their voices were strong, and their message was clear: Black Lives Matter. And some 200 people gathered Sunday afternoon, June 28, in Veterans Amphitheater outside Fairfax City Hall to emphasize that the time for action is now.

"Painting 'Black Lives Matter' on streets and taking down statues only takes the bandage off the wound – it doesn't make it go away," said Fairfax High and GMU grad Dori Prescott. "The standard of Black lives has to be more than just 'matter.' Challenge the white supremacy you were taught. Unlearn this systemic racism and oppression of Blacks."

"We're in the midst of a Civil Rights movement; and until the wound heals, and after, it will continue," she said. "It deserves space in everyone's lives. What will your grandchildren say about you? Use your time, gifts and money and catalyze healing."

Putting on the March and Rally for Peace, Justice and Prayer was the City's Mount Calvary Baptist Church and the nonprofit House of Wood Neighborhood Outreach run by church member Vicki Wood. Participants gathered at the church and – carrying signs and chanting, "No Justice, No Peace" and "Black Lives Matter" – they marched to City Hall.

Church member Katie Richardson was there "trying to do my part. My extended family really don't get it, and I just feel I can do more." For member Sharon Miller, it was personal.

"I have Black family members, and their lives matter, and I want to make a difference," said Miller. "We need to communicate



The Rev. Jeffery Johnson



Fairfax High grad Dori Prescott



Police Capt. Ronnie Lewis



Ready to march are (from left) Vernon and Sharon Miller, and Denise Snowden, with Miller siblings Jayceon, 7, and Jayanna, 3.

and work with the community for the common good. No lives should be lost if we put humanity first."

Bishop Paul Taylor, of Living Water Worship Center Church, called this moment the continuation of the Rev. Martin Luther King

Jr.'s dream and "the march for justice and equality for all. As a father of four, Black males, this is my contribution for all Black men of vision and purpose."

CITY RESIDENT Brij Singh explained, "It's a reasonable thing to ask for – for people to be fair to each other. On the Supreme Court building are etched the words, 'Justice for all,' but we're not following that."

Taylor's brother, Booker Taylor Jr., said Mount Calvary is his family's church. "Black folks have been treated badly throughout the years," he said. "Hopefully, this [movement] will raise awareness of what they've been through, but no one's really believed until now that there are videotapes."

Emcee Denise Taylor told the crowd, "Prayer changes things, and we're here today to present our request to God with prayer. We're all human beings, and children imitate what they see. So we've got to hold each other accountable for what we're not doing." Then Bishop Taylor prayed that this movement "will protect all of different cultures and backgrounds."

"I call upon you to break barriers and not Blacks," added Deacon Michael Crabbe of Howard Ministry Church. "Why does power still seem to rest with a knee upon our necks? To admit that God made us equal is to dismantle America's history of separate but equal. You can be separate or equal, but not both."

"Can I be Black and still your brother?" he asked. "Let there be no more basis for baseless attacks. Slavery hasn't ended but evolved, and there can be no solution until love is involved."

Then Mount Calvary's pastor, the Rev. Jeffery Johnson, electrified the crowd by reenacting from memory King's historic, 1963, "I Have a Dream" speech – which, said Johnson, "should be irrelevant by now."

Public Demands Changes, Not Studies and Delays

Virginia Senate Democratic Caucus Police Reform and Criminal Justice Equity Plan.

The deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor has awoken Americans and Virginians to long standing problems in policing in America. After people are arrested additional damage is done by a criminal justice system that has been streamlined to produce convictions and punishment instead of rehabilitation and justice. The Senate Democratic Caucus has led and is continuing to conduct a series of community conversations to discuss these issues and we have heard from the public that now is not the time for studies or delay and that changes must be made during our Special Session. Many states have already enacted comprehensive policing reform measures in the wake of these events. Others already have measures in place. Many Virginia localities already have these measures in place as well, and some of this legislation has been considered in prior sessions.

The list below represents a series of distinct policy proposals that the Senate Democratic Caucus believes can be taken up, considered and passed during the special session in August. We will continue to take public input and work with stakeholders, the House of Delegates, state agencies, and Governor Northam to refine these measures over the next 60 days.

We cannot achieve true equity unless we address the entire Criminal Justice System and not solely policing. Further, we note that this is a problem that permeates beyond the criminal justice system and will require legislative action beyond this scope. In the absence of universal pre-K, quality schools, a path to economic equity, affordable healthcare, affordable and quality housing, and food access, we will not be able to close the many paths that lead to the criminal system pipeline.

1. Bringing Equity to Virginia Policing
 - ❖ Prohibit No Knock Warrants (Breonna Taylor)
 - ❖ Ban Sex With Individuals Arrested by Law Enforcement*
 - ❖ Prohibit Hiring of Officers Fired or Resigned During Use of Force Investigations
 - ❖ Create a Decertification Procedure for Law Enforcement Officers*
 - ❖ Ban chokeholds and strangleholds (George Floyd)
 - ❖ Require Attempts at De-escalation Prior to Use of Force
 - ❖ Require Warnings Before Shots Fired
 - ❖ Require Law Enforcement to Exhaust All Other Means Prior to Shooting
 - ❖ Create Duty to Intervene by Fellow Law Enforcement Officers
 - ❖ Prohibit Shooting at Moving Motor Vehicles
 - ❖ Require Departments to Create a Use of Force Continuum
 - ❖ Require Comprehensive Reporting by All

Law Enforcement Agencies Including Use of Force Data

- ❖ Defelonize Assault on Law Enforcement Officer (Return to Misdemeanor Offense)
- ❖ Cancel HB599 Funding (Virginia supplemental funding for local police departments) After Local Police Have Disproportionate Use of Force Incidents In their Jurisdiction

2. Expand Local Authority to Respond to Mental Health and Regulate Law Enforcement

- ❖ Create Local Authority for a Marcus Alert System - System to Report Acute Mental Health Crises
- ❖ Create Local Option for Citizen Review Board Empowered to Investigate, Fire and/or Discipline Officers

3. Restore Courts' and Prosecutors' Flexibility to Effect Mercy

- ❖ Confirm Prosecutors' Authority to Drop Charges*
- ❖ Enhance Courts' Ability to Expunge Charges for Dismissed Charges, Substance Convictions and Pardoned Offenses*

4. Reduce Racial Profiling Opportunities for Law Enforcement

- ❖ Prohibit Searches of Person or Vehicle Based on Odor of Marijuana Without Probable Cause for Other Offenses*
- ❖ Prohibit Stops for Equipment Violations Not Covered by State Vehicle Inspection
- ❖ Secondary Offense For Dangling Objects, Extinguished Tag Light, Tinted Windows or Loud Exhaust

5. Restore Equity to the Sentencing Process

- ❖ Jury Sentencing Only at Option of the Accused*
- ❖ Eliminate Commonwealth's Right to Demand Jury Trial When Jury Trials Suspended for State of Emergency*
- ❖ Require Agencies to Determine Cost Savings for Introduced Criminal Justice Legislation

6. Restore Equity to the Virginia Prison System

- ❖ Allow Earned Sentence Credit for Good Behavior During Prison*
- ❖ Create Discretion for Compassionate Release for Terminally Ill or Permanently Disabled Prisoners*

7. COVID Relief

- ❖ Virginia Rental Assistance Fund for Families Economically Impacted by COVID
 - ❖ Require & Reimburse Localities for Postage Prepaid Envelopes for Absentee Voting*
- * Represents Legislation Introduced in Prior Sessions

Reform Is Also a Long Term Process

There are other measures that are being studied and considered for the 2021 General Session that were introduced, are under study, and were too complex for the shortened special session including:

- ❖ Restoration of Parole
- ❖ Decoupling Charging and Conviction Decisions from Commonwealth Attorney Funding
- ❖ Public Defender Pay Equity
- ❖ Expanding Public Defender Offices to Additional Jurisdictions
- ❖ Elimination of Mandatory Minimum Sentences

The Senate Democratic Caucus has led in the area of Criminal Justice Reform for years and we look forward to working with the Governor and the House of Delegates to collaboratively enact these policies. Last year, many Senate criminal justice reform bills passed the Senate last year but were not presented to the Governor including:

- ❖ Elimination of jury sentencing [Morrissey, SB 811],
- ❖ Prohibiting imposition of death penalty to person with severe mental illness [Favola, SB 116],
- ❖ Defelonizing third offense petit larceny [Morrissey, SB 807],
- ❖ Allow jury to recommend leniency [Deeds, SB 326],
- ❖ Ban sexual relations between officers and arrested persons [Marsden, SB 242],
- ❖ Require judges to explain failure to use of recommended evidence-based non-incarceration sentencing alternatives [Surovell, SB 438],
- ❖ Reinstate prosecutors and judges' authority to reduce/drop charges upon terms and conditions [Surovell, SB 489],
- ❖ Allowing court appointed defendants to seek expert witness assistance on an ex parte basis without involvement of prosecutors [Morrissey, SB 806]
- ❖ Compassionate release of permanently disabled prisoners [Bell, SB 493],
- ❖ Compassionate release of terminally ill prisoners [Bell, SB 493],
- ❖ Expunge marijuana/alcohol/tobacco charges dismissed per successful rehabilitation program completion [McDougle, SB 517],
- ❖ Require Virginia Sentencing Commission recommendations to be published to juries before sentencing [Morrissey, SB 810],
- ❖ Reduce maximum sentence for robberies without physical injuries from life to terms of years, [Morrissey, SB 805],
- ❖ Expunge marijuana/tobacco/alcohol/fake ID convictions occurring before age 21 [McDougle, SB 517],
- ❖ Expunge convictions pardoned by Governor [Norment, SB 608],
- ❖ Defelonize consensual sexting between minors [Surovell, SB 440].



WELLBEING

Yoga and Meditation

How self-care and mindfulness help ease anxiety over racial injustice.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

Before the coronavirus pandemic and the subsequent stay-at-home orders, Kesha Davis's weekday evening routine included picking up her fifteen-year-old son at a bus stop in Old Town Alexandria. He used public transportation to make the trek from his school in Potomac. Davis timed her arrival around his bus schedule so that he wasn't left waiting for her on the sidewalk.

"Since Ahmaud Arbery was killed in Georgia while he was jogging, just because he was Black, I've felt like I need to be even more careful about how other people will perceive my son," said Davis, who is African American. "He plays sports and wears athletic clothes home from school. He's also five-ten (5'10") and could be mistaken for a man."

As reports of protests and police killings across the country seem ubiquitous, the toll of racial injustice leaves many in the African American community feeling vulnerable and anxious. According to the Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, African Americans are 10 times more likely to experience psychological distress than whites.

Even without a personal connection to those who have been victims of racist acts of violence, images of such events can lead to heightened feelings of stress particularly for African American women, says therapist, Deborah Jackson, LPC. "We are often caretakers and expected to be strong all the time," she said. "Even if we don't know anyone involved the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and so many others, as African Americans we know that it could have been us or someone we know."

The constant presence of such images can lead to feelings of defenselessness, advises Jackson. "When we feel unsafe or vulnerable, we feel the effects spiritually and emotionally," she said. "These feelings can happen gradually and we might not even be aware of them, but this is the time to practice self-care. For many African American women, practicing self-care often takes a backseat to taking care of others. In order to stay strong we have to take care of our own well-being."

Practices such as yoga and meditation bring about an awareness of one's feelings or emotions, says meditation and yoga instructor Sydnea Lewis. "They quiet your mind so that you're aware of what's going on in your body."

The current racial climate is concerning and stressful, particularly for African American women, says Lewis. "Anxiety is worrying about the future," she said. "Yoga forces you to be present during an asana



PHOTO COURTESY OF SYDNEA LEWIS

Yoga teacher Sydnea Lewis believes that yoga and meditation can soothe the stress that some African American women might feel during this challenging time of race relations.

practice or meditation. Yoga and meditation teach you how to quiet the mind. The more you do it the more you can take it off the mat and meditation cushion and into your everyday life."

"I am fearful for my sons as they walk through the world," said Jackie Lee, an African American mother of three. "One is a man and one is still a boy but, depending on the situation they could both be seen as a menace at worst or a nuisance at least. In either case, they could find themselves on the wrong side of the law for no other reason than that they are Black. It is infuriating."

It takes a consistent practice of yoga and meditation to gain the mental relaxation that can soothe the strong emotions that injustices induce, says Lewis. "For example, if I think about one of my friends or someone I love being hurt or killed by the police, it serves me no good."

Worrying about something that has not happened is destructive and unnecessary, advises Lewis. "Yes, it's a possibility, but it's good to remind yourself of the positive," she said. "Try to reach for the silver lining in any

and everything."

Such a forward-looking mentality can be difficult to cultivate. "I have had frank conversations with [my sons] through the years, but in the wake of George Floyd's murder have had to do a deep dive into the realities of racism, white privilege, perceptions, and the protocol for interacting with the police," said Lee. "I hate having these difficult conversations but I have to set aside my discomfort to increase their awareness and improve the chances of their survival."

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Use of Force Rises in 2019

Disproportionate treatment of African Americans recorded in every police district in the county.

BY KEN MOORE
THE CONNECTION

While Black people are less than 10 percent of the Fairfax County population (9.7 percent), they are the targets for use of force by police 46.53 percent of the time. Incidents of police use of force rose from 510 incidents in 2018 to 594 in 2019. Fairfax County Police released its published data on Monday, June 22.

This year, police published use of force data in each police district for the first time. Every police district reported disproportionate use of force against Black community members.

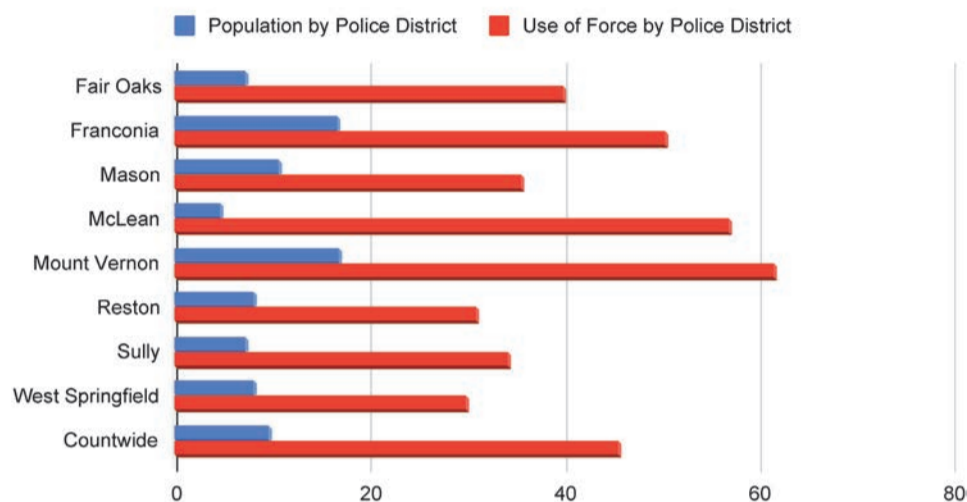
Mount Vernon, McLean and Franconia police districts had the most disproportionate statistics.

In the Mount Vernon District, police used force against Black people 61.72 percent of the time; the population of the Mount Vernon District is 16.94 Black. The Mount Vernon District is where Officer Tyler Timberlake used his taser multiple times on a Black man who did not appear to be a threat on June 5 in Gum Springs. Timberlake has been charged with three counts of assault.

In the McLean district, where African American community members account for fewer than one in 20 (4.69 percent), they were the subject of police force 57.02 percent of the time.

In the Franconia police district, force was

Black People as a Percentage of...



used against Black people more than half the time, 50.66 percent, even though Black people account for only 16.76 percent of the area population.

ALL POLICE DISTRICTS, alphabetically:

Fair Oaks, 40 percent use of force against Black people, who are 7.22 percent of the population;

Franconia, 50.55 percent use of force against Black people, who are 16.76 percent of the population;

Mason, 35.64 percent use of force against Black people, who are 10.80 percent of the population;

McLean, 57.02 percent use of force against Black people, who are 4.69 percent of the population;

Mount Vernon, 61.72 percent use of force against Black people, who are 16.94 percent of the population;

Reston, 31.03 percent use of force against Black people, who are 8.24 percent of the population;

Sully, 34.25 percent use of force against Black people, who are 7.3 percent of the population;

West Springfield, 30 percent use of force against Black people, who are 8.1 percent of the population.

THE MOST INCIDENTS of use of force, 87, were in each of the McLean and Mason police districts; police resorted to use of force in the Mount Vernon police district 86 times.

In the entire county, a pointed firearm accounted for 396 of the 1,632 times use of force was used (multiple kinds of force were used in the 594 cases), force to hold in 255 incidents, take down 229 times, and force to cuff 206 times. Use of force includes use of weapons, use of pepper spray, strikes with hands or feet, taser weapons, canine, and more.

In 2018, African American community members were targets of police force 48.6 percent of the time.

The implemented recommendations of the Ad Hoc Police Practices Review Commission, to which FCPD leadership agreed, call for collection and release of more detailed data than has been made available: "Collect data, and publish an annual statistical report, covering all stops, frisks, citations, arrests, and use-of force by district station and magisterial district - include the race, gender, and ethnicity of the individual involved and note whether the suspect is homeless and/or if a mental health crisis is a factor. Document the outcome of each incident and regularly report the collected data to the BOS and the public and post the data online."

"This data is troubling, and we certainly have work to do," said Chairman Jeff McKay. "I also asked the Police Chief to provide a timeline to the Board for the release and publication of all FCPD police stops (to include traffic citations, traffic stops, and arrests). ... Our goal must be increased transparency moving forward."

Remote or In-School Learning

County families should respond by July 10.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

School reopens for Fairfax County Public Schools students in eight weeks. That means, families in the 10th largest school division in the United States, have until Friday, July 10, to respond with their enrollment choice for the entire 2020-21 school year. Their options are four-day remote learning or two-day socially distanced in-school learning. The deadline allows the County time to plan for the virtual and in-person class schedules. County teachers will also be surveyed for their return-to-school preferences.

At the June 23 Fairfax County School Board, Work Session, Superintendent Scott S. Brabrand said, "We have heard you. You have asked for additional flexibility for students and families, and we are providing that today. You asked for additional flexibility for our teachers, and we are providing that today... We hope again to better accommodate our families



Fairfax County Schools Superintendent Scott S. Brabrand.

because of this flexibility... The increased flexibility will allow more students online... Hopefully, as we get more kids to do virtual, we will be able to increase the number of days for face-for face interactions."

According to Fairfax County Public Schools, in Choice One, students participate in full-time remote learning for the academic year, regardless of any changes to the

schools' operational status.

THE COUNTY would provide virtual interactive instruction four days per week and asynchronous education one day per week. To the extent possible, elementary and middle school students would be served by dedicated online Fairfax County School teachers in a cohort model with other students from their school, region, or the division. High school students would be served through Online Campus courses, Virtual Virginia courses and specialized course instruction from dedicated online Fairfax County School staff. However, families must understand the need to support their child's active participation in all online learning activities on the established schedule. According to the Fairfax County Public Schools website, parents would need to work with the division to arrange for their students to participate in state assessments and other mandated educational activities.

Choice Two is at least two full days of in-school learning weekly with students engaged in independent study and work on the

days they are not in the school building. This option aligns with the predominant model for instructional delivery under Phase 3 of state guidance. It allows for health and social distancing protocols to protect students and staff per current CDC and VDH guidance.

According to the Fairfax County School Board website: "When in the building, six-foot separation is maintained whenever possible, to apply to both staff and students, and efforts are in place to limit mixing groups of students. Buses will enact new capacity limits and seating guidelines, per health and safety expectations."

"I'm trying to think of how we can manage some of the expectations and wanting to protect us from impossible asks... Time is what I'm more concerned about," said Fairfax County School Board Member At-Large Abrar Omeish during the June 23 work session.

SEE BACK TO SCHOOL, PAGE 11

Protest in Fairfax City

FROM PAGE 3

King said the Constitution and Declaration of Independence promised all men the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness – but America defaulted on that promise to people of color.

“Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood,” said King, “Now is the time to make justice a reality for all God’s children.” He warned that Black discontent wouldn’t pass until there was freedom and equality for all and that there’d be a “rude

awakening” if the nation returns to business as usual.

“The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges. I have a dream that my four, little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.”

Next, Fairfax High senior Kate Coffin decried the way “White people don’t recognize their privilege.” She also presented a long list of many famous inventions created by Blacks but taken credit for by Whites.


“None of you are guaranteed your next birthday, especially if your skin is Black,” said Fairfax City’s Penny Tangamu. “Breonna Taylor was killed in her bed – shot eight times while asleep. June 5 would have been her birthday, and her killers have still not been charged. Because my skin is Black, is my life worth less? This fight is about letting us live.”

FAIRFAX CITY Police Maj. Daniel Grimm, who’s White, said his department is committed to this movement. “When I look out here, I see diversity,” he said. “We need to love and support each other more, learn about and invest in one another. The Police

Department is trying to improve, every day. I told my children that what they saw happen [to George Floyd] shouldn’t have – it was a police officer abusing his power.”

City Police Capt. Ronnie Lewis, who’s Black, said he was raised in Southern Virginia “where people called you names – and it made my dad feel less than a man. I joined public safety, over 25 years ago, to try to make a difference. The best way to change something is to transform it from the inside. I was the first Black supervisor in Fairfax City, but we need more people of color to participate.”

SEE PROTEST, PAGE 11



PUBLIC NOTICE

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Pursuant to Section 6009 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) and 23 CFR 774.5, notice is hereby given that the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) is accepting written comments regarding the Fairfax County Park Authority’s preliminary concurrence with the Federal Highway Administration’s Section 4(f) applicability criteria for *de minimis* impact for a 0.01-acre permanent utility easement on Random Hills Park for the captioned project.

Review the Section 4(f) *de minimis* documentation on the project website (www.outside.transform66.org/route50) or by appointment only during business hours at VDOT’s Northern Virginia District Office, 4975 Alliance Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030. Please call 703-259-1215 or TTY/TDD 711 to make an appointment with appropriate personnel.


Submit your written comments to Mr. John Muse at the above address by July 20, 2020. You may also email Transform66@VDOT.virginia.gov. Please reference “Random Hills Park” in the subject line.

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The Workhouse Arts Center hosted the first of its weekly Community Markets on June 27.

PHOTOS BY
JESS KIRBY/
THE CONNECTION



Community Market Opens in Lorton

Lorton Workhouse Arts Center hosted the first of its weekly Community Markets.

BY JESS KIRBY
THE CONNECTION

On the warm Saturday morning of June 27, the Lorton Workhouse Arts Center hosted the first of its weekly Community Markets. Music played as small businesses set up tents and sold products from food to jewelry.

“We knew we had a space that is truly unique. We thought why don’t we get our local community back here and do something like a farmer’s market but with a twist? Where we would invite various businesses to participate to let people know that they’re back in business, to give them the opportunity to do so safely and also surrounded by beautiful, historical structures of the Workhouse,” said Elena Romanova, the Chief Development Officer of the Workhouse Arts Center.

Many of the businesses that attended were negatively affected by COVID-19.

“I had to cancel probably up to 40 events between March and the end of June because of COVID,” said Carla Mangone, an owner of Pet Wants Chantilly.

But one business actually saw positive effects from the pandemic.

“I do home parties, virtual parties these days actually, which is great because that means I give away free sparkle to people. It’s great because we now do parties without borders. I can do parties with anyone across the country versus just locally from going into their homes,” said La-Chundra Lindsey of Touchstone Crystal by Swarovski.

The event provided a venue for local businesses to reconnect with customers.

“We don’t have a storefront so... a lot of our business comes through events like festivals and markets,” said Natasha Ettienne-Johnson, an owner of HoneyCakes Desserts in Lorton. “I think this platform is good for people in the community who don’t know so much about our product and give them the opportunity to try something different.”

One business even came from Pennsylvania.

“A lot of our marketing is done at events similar to this where we’re actually talking to people and interacting with them face-to-face. Since we’re not able to do this ... we haven’t really gotten to interact and



Pam Eisenmann, artist, Workhouse Arts Center, Lorton



Natasha Ettienne-Johnson and Terrell Johnson, HoneyCakes Desserts, Lorton



Nicole Powell, Passanante’s Home Food Services, Bristol, Pa.

explain and kind of let people know about our services,” said Nicole Powell of Passanante’s Home Food Services in Bristol, Pa. “We have people who definitely were in dire need of our services. I’m just trying to bring awareness to our company and our products and let people know that they have other options other than going to the grocery store.”

Representatives from the Workhouse also had tables set up to announce their summer camps.

Some customers shared the reasons they came to the event.

“I came out to support the small businesses that are local to this area,” said Sarah Mazzello of Springfield.

“The Workhouse Arts Center is one of my favorite places, I love coming here on a pretty regular basis,” said Jess Morris of Alexandria. “We haven’t gotten out much recently so we heard about this and went to come check it out.”



PHOTOS BY MIKE SALMON/THE CONNECTION

The Fairfax County Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) was on hand to help with the food distribution.

USDA Coronavirus Program Feeds Many in Springfield

Supervisor Rodney Lusk and Journey Church make it happen.

BY MIKE SALMON
THE CONNECTION

The Journey Church in eastern Springfield was the site of Supervisor Rodney Lusk’s (D-Lee) “Drive Thru Food Distribution,” on Thursday, June 25, and one look at the traffic backed up on Franconia Road was a sign that residents in this part of Fairfax County were feeling the strain of the coronavirus pandemic.

“We’re serving food to at least 1200 families a week,” Lusk said, noting that the church was a good setting for this event. “They’ve been a great partner,” Lusk added.

Normally in the summer, the church embarks on a meals program called the “Summer Lunch Bunch,” but with the quarantines, job losses and income sources disappearing, the effort took on a new push.

“I would say the virus is a big part of it, jobs and all,” said Chad Simpkins, a pastor at Journey Church.

The word about the food distribution event was pushed out to central Springfield in the 22150 zip code, which Lusk said was the hardest hit in Fairfax County, par-

ticularly the Hispanic and minority populations in that part of the county. This was the sixth food distribution event his office has taken part in. Three were in the South County area, and they’ve served 7,500 families.

The event was made possible by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Coronavirus Farm Assistance Program to reduce food insecurity during COVID-19. Locally, USDA worked with DeLune Corporation to make the effort possible. De Lune is an agricultural shipping company located in Springfield.

The day of the event started out with a special session in the morning aimed at stocking up the area’s non-profits, and about one-third of the food was given to various local organizations. “Their resources were also stretched tight,” said Kathleen Ambroso who was there with the church. “So many people are out of work,” she added. Local area food pantries continue to face up to an 800 percent increase in demand for food, Lusk’s office reported. Ambroso did say that another event was possible sometime later in the summer, but they need to work with USDA to make it happen.



Masks were a must.

Paul Gilbert and Brad Jackson outside Pohick Bay Park "Rustic" cabin.



PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME/
THE CONNECTION

Local Parks Lure Vacation Campers

Low risk campgrounds open.

BY SUSAN LAUME
THE CONNECTION

Saturday, June 20, marked the official start of summer and traditionally, with the end school, the start of vacation season for many area residents. Though making safe vacation choices during the Covid-19 pandemic is challenging, area parks are ready to welcome vacationers with fresh air and de-stressing camping opportunities.

Three parks in the regional park authority system, Algonkian in Sterling/Potomac Falls, Bull Run in western Fairfax County, and Pohick Bay on the Mason Neck peninsula, have multiple levels of camping experiences available. Whether you are a true pioneer-style rustic, ready for a back to nature adventure in a tent; want to bring your own recreational vehicle (RV); a camper for whom "rustic" means a cabin without running water; or are looking for a bit of luxury away from home in the woods; area parks have a campsite to tempt you. Cabins available with ADA compliance. (*Algonkian has 12 secluded, multi-bedroom cottages; no tent/RV campsites.)

CHOOSING A CAMPING outing at a park puts several outdoor activities just outside your door, or tent flap. At Pohick Bay, campers and other park users have access to fishing; hiking, equestrian, and biking trails; miniature and disc golf; and rental options at the on-grounds marina for kayaking, paddle boarding, and paddle boating; or power boating on the bay. Greg Susanke, of Fairfax, who likes to combine camping with kayaking or birding, camped there recently. "The campgrounds are great with all accommodations, clean, and kept up. I liked that they were concerned with the virus and set up..." said Susanke. (Note, the nearby water park will remain closed this season and swimming is not permitted for the park's shoreline. Dogs are permitted in the park, but not in cabins.)

Unique to Pohick Bay Regional Park's camping options are two "deluxe" cabins; upgrades from its ten "rustic" cabins. A deluxe cabin provides a completely equipped kitchen, and a spacious, full indoor, private bathroom, as well as air conditioning or heating. All "campers" need to bring to a deluxe cabin is food and linens. Outdoor grilling, fire ring, and picnic table are included, along with back porch seating. "Rustic" cabins have electricity for heat/air conditioning, but are without indoor cooking or plumbing; a comfort station within walking distance provides indoor showers, restrooms, and laundry facilities.



Deluxe cabins snuggled into woods at Pohick Bay Regional Park provide "get away from hustle and bustle."

Brad Jackson, Assistant Manager, leads a small staff whose goal is to "cultivate a GREAT customer experience." Jackson recognizes that, "people want to be out but in a controlled environment and week days are a great time to come now. There are more people on weekends but comfortable distancing." Paul Gilbert, NOVA Parks Executive Director, points to polls indicating only 13-15 percent of people are comfortable with planes and hotels due to Covid-19 concerns. "People want a summer break and this is a great way for a stay-cation."

HEALTH EXPERTS agree that camping is among the safest vacation activities. It's outdoors and campers are more likely to stay with their own family or social group, with less exposure to others. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) notes the importance of staying active as a means to keep physically and mentally healthy. "In many areas people can visit parks, trails, and open spaces as a way to relieve stress, get some fresh air and stay active." CDC further recommends "visiting parks close to home since traveling distances may require you to stop along the way or be in close contact with others."

Area outdoor enthusiasts seem to agree. Pohick Bay Regional Park, with 143 campsites, saw a significant increase in occupancy, jumping to 41 percent compared to 16 percent for a comparable two week period in early June 2019. Susanke sees camping as "getting away from the hustle and bustle." Gilbert observed, "With so many other vacation options closed to people ... we are seeing many people rediscover camping this summer."

Check availability or make reservations on-line at www.novaparks.com.

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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

Hiking, Running, Walking

What are the young people doing in pandemic time?

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED

BY JESS KIRBY
THE CONNECTION

During the months of isolation, many young adults have altered their lifestyles and picked up new hobbies.

"I've been following many TikTok recipes like blueberry ice cream, peanut butter cookies and others. They've all turned out to be now family favorites!" said Springfield resident Alejandra Caballero, a freshman at Virginia Tech.

"I am playing a lot of video games, trying to eat healthier and consume less since I'm barely working out, and I'm taking the 'COVID-19 in Context' course offered by UMW. It's actually pretty interesting and super easy too," said Springfield resident Peter Lermo, a freshman at the University of Mary Washington.

Many young adults have been spending their time in nature.

"My girlfriend and I hang out every now and then and we go do some outdoor stuff; we like hiking. There's a nice 20 ft. ledge we jump off of at the Occoquan River. We did the billy goat trail by Great Falls and swam there," said Lermo.

"During quarantine I've been doing a lot of hiking, some sewing and reading. I guess you could say a new hobby I picked up has been running. I've been trying to start running consistently to maybe do some races in the future," said Carolyn Willmore, a Burke resident and sophomore at the University of Mary Washington.

Some have also been spending more time with their family.

"For hiking I've mainly been with my family and we've all been quarantined together," said Willmore. "Whenever we pass other hikers we make sure to get at least six feet off the trail and let them pass before we get back on. For running I've been doing that myself around my neighborhood where I don't come across anyone."

"My family and I have also made it a habit to be more active and take daily family walks," said Caballero.

"I've started to go on more runs and walks with my family. My sister and I started to go paint more to keep us busy and to go grocery shopping for our parents since they work from home and we have nothing to do," said Burke resident Delaney Hagerty, an incoming freshman at James Madison University.

As Northern Virginia approaches phase three of its reopening, many people are starting to venture out in public again.

"I've started going on more hikes and I learned how to ride a skateboard. It's been more outdoors but I've gone to the mall and beach too," said West Springfield High School junior Jasmine Yasser from Springfield.

"I went on a trip to South Carolina for beach week June 13-20 with a group of eight people," said Hagerty.

But even as businesses reopen, many are still taking precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

"I wear a mask when I'm indoors and social dis-



Alejandra Caballero, freshman, Virginia Tech, Springfield



Carolyn Willmore, sophomore, University of Mary Washington, Burke



Delaney Hagerty, freshman, James Madison University, Burke



Peter Lermo, freshman, University of Mary Washington, Springfield



Jasmine Yasser, junior, West Springfield High School, Springfield

tance from everyone that I didn't arrive with," said Yasser. "I am worried about COVID-19, but I can only do so much to protect myself. I try not to stress about what I can't control."

"I've been wearing my mask when I leave my house but I did get tested yesterday after coming into contact with a person who later tested positive," said Hagerty.

"I'm wearing my mask and only going hiking, not going to restaurants or anywhere where we wouldn't be able to social distance," said Lermo.

"My immediate family has really had minimal contact with outside people. We get all our groceries delivered and then wipe them down with Clorox wipes, and both my parents work from home so we've been very isolated," said Willmore.

Overall, many are eager for life to return to normal. "The boredom has reached a whole new meaning," said Caballero.

AREA ROUNDUPS

Infant Dies After Being Left Unattended in SUV

Detectives are investigating after an 11-month-old girl died after being left unattended in an SUV for an extended period of time Friday afternoon, June 26. Officers responded with the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department shortly before 5 p.m. to the 6400 block of Meriwether Lane in Springfield for a report of an unresponsive child who was left in a vehicle. She was taken to a hospital where she later died.

A preliminary investigation revealed the child's father placed the 11-month-old in the rear seat of the SUV at his Springfield home and inadvertently left the child while he used another vehicle to run errands. After returning home, he then drove the SUV to an in-home daycare to pick up another child when he realized the 11-month-old was still in the back seat.

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner will determine the exact cause and manner of death.

Detectives have consulted with the Fairfax County Office of the Commonwealth's Attorney and no charges are expected to be placed in this case.

— FCPD MEDIA RELATIONS BUREAU

Protest

FROM PAGE 7

"We're angry, hurt and terrified [in] a system that doesn't value Black lives," said Adele McClure, executive director of the Virginia Legislative Black Caucus. "Racism permeates our whole society – in the justice system, health care, housing policies, education, loans and jobs." Encouraging Blacks to vote and run for office, she said systemic disparity must be reversed.

"Take action to change the system," said McClure. "We need to continue raising our voices, making sure we're heard and standing strong, for as long as it takes. When these laws of oppression come down, only then will we truly be free."

The Rev. Rob Cheeks, of Shiloh Baptist Church, said there's a problem when privileges aren't used to help the underprivileged. "We can't breathe because of public policies precluding our possibilities. Our skin color has been criminalized. Make some waves until there's fairness and an end to racism – and justice rolls down like water. Although it may seem like a season of despair, never give up."

Back to School

FROM PAGE 6

IN BOTH CHOICES, one day would be set aside for teacher planning and intervention support for some students. Special Education students and English Language Learners would receive more in-person or synchronous instruction. "I think it's important to keep in mind our students with disabilities are served in very different settings across the district...There isn't going to be a one size fits all," said Teresa Johnson, Assistant Superintendent, Department of Special Services. Additional details about Reopening of School plans are available online.

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Mourning, Afternoon and Evening



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

We had to euthanize Biscuit, our oldest cat on Saturday, June 20th. He would have been 14 on September 20th. Biscuit is survived by his half-brother, Andrew and his two half sisters, Sloane and Twinkle. Biscuit's litter mate and brother, "Chino" preceded him in death in November, 2019, after succumbing to diabetes. Biscuit had likewise been diagnosed with diabetes around the same time as "Chino." However, as occasionally happens, according to Biscuit's veterinarian, some cats "spontaneously" overcome the disease, as Biscuit miraculously did, and go on to live relatively normal lives. Biscuit lived approximately one year after his diabetes went into remission, which ended up being about seven months longer than "Chino." Not exactly 'relatively normal'; nonetheless, we were grateful for the extra seven months.

Biscuit was "the senior man," as we called him and we typically left him in charge of the other four cats when both Dina and I would be away from home. Of all five cats, Biscuit was the most present in our lives. He was also the most social, the most fearless and the most affable/tolerant of all our cats. An indoor cat like our entire herd, Biscuit was most likely to be around and to socialize. He would greet visitors within a few minutes of their arrival and invariably introduce himself by jumping up on the coffee table in front of the couch and staring at the newcomer. He was also the first in line for breakfast and dinner, first in line for treats, and whenever my wife, Dina, made a tuna fish sandwich for lunch, Biscuit was, you guessed it, first in line. Topping out at 15 pounds, somehow he managed to keep his weight down. He was a sweet, adoring and talkative cat and we loved him, and of course, we miss him terribly, especially Dina.

Over the last few years, particularly, Dina and Biscuit had formed a bond. He was her cat, just as "Chino" had been mine. Not that Biscuit ignored me, hardly. But when he made his requests, verbal or otherwise, Dina was almost always the intended requestee. Moreover, as Dina's schedule changed, she became Biscuit's primary caregiver, feeder, litter-box scooper and groomer and more interesting for Biscuit, became the one to let him outside to take in the sights, sounds and smells which enthrall cats. She was, on these special occasions, daily of late, his constant companion, which is how they spent his last Saturday morning, together, outside.

What has made Biscuit's passing so difficult is how quickly he declined, always a bad sign, our veterinarian said. Biscuit stopped eating on Friday after barely nibbling on Thursday. He even turned away from treats that I offered him and tuna fish that Dina placed in his bowl. Though still engaged with us, we could see his haunches, and feel his boney spine. He had lost two and half pounds in the last three months. That Friday night, Biscuit had trouble settling down and whimpered off and on through the night. I called the veterinarian first thing Saturday morning and we were fortunate to secure an appointment at 10 am that very morning. Biscuit was clearly struggling and probably even suffering as his zero interest in breakfast confirmed and his sounds not of silence continued.

We didn't want to be selfish this time as we had been with "Chino." We kept him at home far too long before taking him to the veterinarian and have regretted it ever since. We just couldn't let go. We weren't going to make the same mistake with Biscuit. That Saturday, we drove to the animal hospital and dropped Biscuit off to be examined while we waited in the car (per phase 2 rules). Ten minutes or so later, the veterinarian called with her grim assessment: Biscuit was failing and was not going to recover. Through our tears, we then made the decision to end Biscuit's suffering. We took his body home that day and buried him on Monday next to his brother "Chino."

It was a private service attended only by family members.

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



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