

Mount Vernon Gazette

MOUNT VERNON'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER • A CONNECTION NEWSPAPER

JULY 30, 2020

Progressive Prosecutors Lobby for Justice

Commonwealth's Attorneys from Alexandria, Arlington and Fairfax join forces to press for reform.

BY MICHAEL LEE POPE
GAZETTE

Democrats ended the General Assembly session earlier this year having failed to achieve their campaign promises on criminal justice reform. Aside from decriminalizing marijuana, the rest of the agenda was a bust. Mandatory minimum sentences remain on the books. People convicted of marijuana possession are still unable to expunge their records. Commonwealth's attorney's still can't set aside prosecutions for defendants who deserve a second chance.

When the General Assembly session ended in March, advocates were disappointed and Democrats were pointing fingers. Senate Democrats blamed House Democrats for dragging their feet. Progressive lawmakers blamed conservative prosecutors for using their association to block reform.

"We found ourselves at loggerheads with the Virginia Association of Commonwealth's Attorneys," said state Sen. Scott Surovell (D-36). "As we proposed some of these new ideas we found some support from some new people who were elected."

Enter the Progressive Prosecutors for Justice, the newly created group that includes Commonwealth's Attorneys from Alexandria, Arlington and Fairfax as well as eight other jurisdictions. As lawmakers prepare to return to Richmond for a special session on criminal justice reform, this group of like-minded prosecutors will be pushing for a package of bills that does not have the backing of the Virginia Association of Commonwealth's Attorneys.

"I think they realized that 11 likeminded people can come to a decision a lot quicker and more in line with their thinking than 120 individual elected people," said Fluvanna Commonwealth's Attorney Jeff Haislip, president of the Virginia Association of Commonwealth's Attorneys. "I don't think it's a sleight at VACA. I think they have a like mind on these issues, and they want to make sure they're heard."

CLEARING THE RECORD of old criminal charges was one of the issues that caused friction between Senate Democrats and House Democrats. Some of the cases were easy, like expunging the record of misdemeanor drug convictions. Others proved more challenging, like proving that someone was a victim of sex trafficking in an effort to expunge the record. Ultimately, lawmakers decided to study the issue more and left town without taking action. Now it's at the top of the agenda for the Progressive Prosecutors for Justice.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL LEE POPE/GAZETTE

The Alexandria courthouse in Old Town Alexandria.



Steve Descano



Parisa Dehghani-Tafti



Bryan Porter

"You could still have a situation in which there is still some record maintained somewhere by the courts," said Alexandria Commonwealth's Attorney Bryan Porter. "But their public criminal record would be expunged or sealed so they don't have barriers to education, barriers to employment or barriers to housing."

House and Senate Democrats remain divided on how to approach the issue. House Democrats are focused on a system of automatic expungements for certain crimes, preventing defendants from jumping through a series of hoops to clear their record after five years. Senate Democrats want to make sure judges are able to exercise discretion, potentially preventing sex offenders from having their records unnecessarily cleared. With the special session only a few weeks away, Democrats remained divided on the best solution.

"I wouldn't want the perfect solution to be the enemy of the good," said Porter. "If we can find a way to allow people who have faithfully discharged whatever sentence

they have received for an offense and have become contributing members of society, it seems to me there ought be a way for them to have their records officially cleared."

DEFERRED DISPOSITION might sound like a wonky reform effort, but it's probably one of the most simple and easily understood proposals on the legislative agenda for the progressive prosecutors. Essentially, the idea is that courts are able to set aside convictions for defendants who deserve a second chance. In a technical sense, the disposition of the cases is deferred until the defendant is able to successfully complete a probationary period. In a practical sense, it's a way for people who have made stupid mistakes to get back on track.

"That proposal is a clear message to judges that they have the authority to delay imposing a conviction in order to give a person a chance to mitigate the harm that they've done," said Arlington Commonwealth's Attorney Parisa Dehghani-Tafti. "It's a way for

us to push pause and offer real opportunities for rehabilitation and fairness."

Currently, judges are able to defer disposition in cases involving possession of drugs or trespass. Earlier this year, a bill by Del. Mike Mullin (D-93) and Sen. Creigh Deeds (D-25) added shoplifting to that list. Senate Democrats are pressing for a change to the law that would do away with the limited number of crimes where defendants could get deferred distortion. If the proposal makes it out of the special session, defendants could work with judges to set aside charges for crimes like reckless driving, assault and drunk driving.

"Not every social ill should be a crime," said Dehghani-Tafti. "Not every crime should result in punishment that involves incarceration, and not every punishment should be so long and so onerous that it leaves no room for rehabilitation."

SOMETIMES JUDGES push back against prosecutors who want to dismiss charges. In the last year, that's happened in courtrooms in Arlington and Norfolk, where judges rejected efforts by prosecutors to set aside misdemeanor drug charges. That's led to some frustration among Commonwealth's Attorneys, who are elected by voters rather than appointed to their position like judges. One of the items on the legislative agenda for the Progressive Prosecutors for Justice is for the General Assembly to clarify what kind of discretion they can exercise in the courtroom.

"The only actor in the criminal justice system that is directly accountable to the people, the Commonwealth's Attorney, had the duty to bring the values of the community into the courthouse," said Fairfax County Commonwealth's Attorney Steve Descano, who also clashed with judges after his election last year. "The way that we do that is through our prosecutorial discretion in terms of how we deal with cases that come across our desks."

Sometimes tension between prosecutors and judges happen when Commonwealth's Attorneys change their approach. That's what happened in Norfolk, where Commonwealth's Attorney Greg Underwood decided to stop prosecuting misdemeanor marijuana possession charges and the circuit court bench announced they wouldn't be going along with the program. Tensions have also been high in Arlington, where judges demanded written explanations for each individual charge Dehghani-Tafti wanted to set aside. Descano says that kind of behavior undermines a bedrock principle of justice.

"Over the last few years, as more and more communities have elected reform-minded prosecutors, we're seeing more and more judges around the state ignore that and look for loopholes in the law to try to thwart their Commonwealth's Attorneys and therefore thwart the will of the people," said Descano.

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EDUCATION

Senior Year Unlike Any Other

Recent high school grads, Class of 2021 face college uncertainty amid pandemic.

BY BRIDGETTE ADU-WADIER
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

Senior year, 2020 T.C. Williams graduate Mikaela Pozo applied to 17 colleges. Despite the copious essays and application fees, she needed to cast a wide net. An immigrant and first-generation college student, Pozo depended on scholarships to realize her college dreams. So she applied to pricier private universities that could give her more grants as an international student.

But as college decisions came, Pozo had few options. Her top choice rejected her. Most of the colleges that accepted her such as George Washington University and the University of Richmond gave her no financial aid.

She did receive a full-ride to George Mason University, which she will be attending in the fall.

"It's definitely not the school I thought I would be attending," said Pozo. "It was not a part of the plan. The reason why I chose George Mason was because it was the most financially feasible option."

She's just one student whose college plans differed from initial expectations. Several other recent high school grads are re-evaluating college options amid the pandemic and financial crisis. The students behind them, the Class of 2021, are navigating a new college admissions landscape.

"Because of COVID-19, I had to think about what was the best option financially," said Pozo. "Hypothetically, if I did take out a loan and go to the University of Richmond while we have COVID-19 happening, my mom loses her job and can't help me pay for school. Would there be any opportunities for me to pay off the loan? I would be taking a risk."

Reopening plans for colleges don't make the decision making any easier. George Mason University plans to start its fall semester on schedule with a hybrid plan including both online and in-person classes, but final decisions have yet to be made. Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) will continue most of its classes online.

For some students, the first year of college done remotely is anything but ideal.

María Areyán, a 2019 T.C. Williams graduate who took a gap year, is excited to start her first year of college at NOVA. However, she's not happy about the Zoom lectures.

"I'm not very good at online learning, which is something that I'm scared about," said Areyán. "I'm more functional in a classroom than I am in my room."

College plans aren't the only thing that's changed. Commonly regarded as a rite of passage, the traditional senior year experience is now anything but. The Class of 2020



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Kennetra Smith, rising senior at Thomas Edison High School and first-generation Ghanaian-American, has high hopes and expectations for her college admissions process. But she worries that her circumstances and the pandemic might inhibit her from achieving her dreams of attending a top college.

"I think '21 thought we were safe, that maybe we'd miss some schoolwork. But prom is non-negotiable. As we are going into the year, I'm starting to realize that maybe we won't have prom. ... It is what it is."

**— Kennetra Smith,
Thomas Edison High School Class of 2021**

had their senior year upended with a virtual graduation ceremony, no prom, and a pandemic crashing it all.

"There was so much going on in the world, it was difficult to think about college when there were so many other things I had to think about and process," said Pozo.

The Class of 2021 will have to deal with the same thing, all on top of college applications, possible first days of school over Zoom and rising uncertainty as the pandemic continues.

"We know how hard it is, doing college apps, doing schoolwork and balancing everything," said Areyán. "But I think it's going to be harder now with the pandemic."

Fairfax and Loudoun counties have an-



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Yulisa Morales, 2020 T.C. Williams graduate and SFA Scholarship Recipient. She's heading to Virginia State University in the fall to pursue social work.

"Our senior year is going to be really different; I don't think it's going to be normal. I don't think anything's going to be normal."

— Fina Osei-Owusu, T.C. Williams Class of 2021

nounced a complete virtual fall reopening for its public school students. Alexandria is still deliberating, hosting public hearings to develop a plan that will be publicized by mid-August.

Kennetra Smith, a rising senior at Thomas Edison High School, feels uncertain about a new online school year. As a low-income student living in a small apartment with five other people, she struggled to balance family responsibilities on top of schoolwork and scholarship applications.

"It's going to be really hard to make those connections with my new teachers this year," said Smith. "How do I put myself out there for my teachers and how do I engage?"

Fairfax had a rocky start to online learning earlier in the spring. A security breach and technical issues with the distance learning platform Blackboard led to the district pressing pause on online learning for several days. Despite the issues being fixed, students

will start a new school year with continuing struggles with online learning.

"NOT EVERYONE has the same learning environment," said Smith. "Not everyone has a place where they can be respected. Not everyone has a specific space for this stuff. ... We all know virtual learning isn't working. If anything, we're taking a step backwards."

The pandemic is also causing a shakeup in college admissions. Several Northern Virginia schools have adopted pass/fail grading and taking college admissions tests like the SAT and ACT have become nearly impossible. In response, many Virginia universities such as University of Virginia and Virginia Tech have made test scores optional for admission.

Smith is anxious to get standardized testing over with. She registered to take the SAT in August but her testing location in D.C. canceled. She's now scheduled to take the

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MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE ♦ JULY 30 - AUGUST 5, 2020 ♦ 3

Plans Under Microscope for Belle View Shopping Center

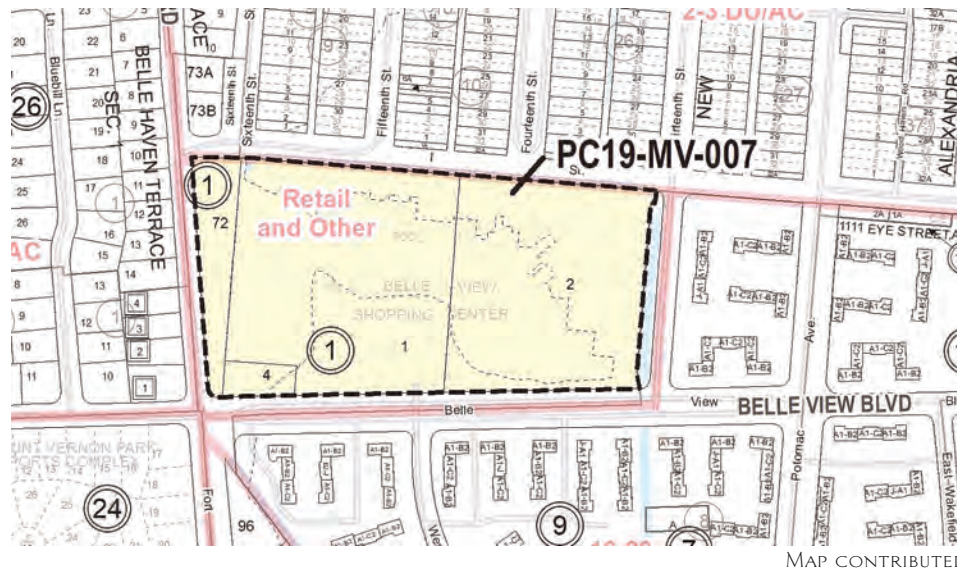
Mount Vernon Task Force delays decision on recommendation.

BY MIKE SALMON
THE GAZETTE

The plans to redevelop the Belle View Shopping Center at Fort Hunt Road and Belle View Boulevard are under closer examination now that officials deem the mixed-use plan that was submitted is more suitable for a commercial area along Richmond Highway.

On the Site Specific Amendment Process paper, the reason for the change was cited as the following: “The proposed intensity would be appropriate in development centers, such as the Richmond Highway Corridor Area, that are planned for more intense development and provide high frequency transit service that enable residents to rely less upon single occupancy vehicle travel,” it stated. With its proximity to the Potomac River, there are flooding concerns, and the proposed mixed use development is not consistent with the surrounding single family homes in that area. “The subject area is surrounded by single-family detached homes to the west and north, low-rise multifamily uses to the east, and commercial and multifamily residential uses to the south,” the report stated.

The shopping center is located within the



MAP CONTRIBUTED

The map shows the residential streets surrounding the center.

MV4-Wellington Community Planning Sector, which is designated on the Concept for Future Development as a Suburban Neighborhood. Suburban Neighborhoods contain a broad mix of residential densities, are planned for little to no change in land use, and recommend that infill development be of compatible use, type, and intensity with

the surrounding areas, the staff report stated. Wire Gill LLP proposed to build a mixed-use facility on the 16-acre parcel consisting of retail, office, and midrise multifamily residential uses with a maximum building height of 5 stories, it said in the report. This type of development seems to be inline with the Embark Richmond Highway plan that

is being developed by county planners over the last few years.

On Tuesday, July 28, the Mount Vernon Task Force remotely met via phone and video chat, to discuss the matter with the property owner Wire Gill LLP and Supervisor Dan Storck, although Storck was delayed at the Board of Supervisors meeting and was not actually on the call. Graham Owen from Fairfax County ran the meeting.

The Belle View Shopping Center was brought up early on in the call and was discussed for some time, before David Gill from Wire Gill LLP spoke, saying the face of retail was changing, including the equation of retail vs. residential mix.

Gill requested that the decision on Belle View be delayed until Sept. 15, which is the next planning meeting. Gill cited recent events at the center from the fire months ago, and the pandemic which has impacted the businesses and surrounding residents. Under this delay on a decision, Wire Gill LLP will have to put up their new plan on the website by Aug. 14 so everyone can see it before the new decision is made in mid-September.

“Retail is changing considerably,” Gill said, “this shopping center will face a challenge in the next 20 years,” he said.

When the task force brought up the con-

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PHOTOS BY MIKE SALMON/THE CONNECTION

It's a dated look but it seems to work for the surrounding community.

Redevelopment Plans

FROM PAGE 5

cerns of traffic, floods, building heights and density with the new project, Gill acknowledged it. "They are valid concerns," he said.

"This does not fit in with a suburban neighborhood at all," added one task force member.

The task force put the new date up for a vote and it was decided, nine yea's and four nea's that the Belle View decision will be moved to Sept. 15.

Although the Mount Vernon Gazette requested the names, Storck's office declined to provide names of those on the task force.

Mount Vernon District Task Force

The Mount Vernon District Task Force "membership, including appointment of the co-chairs, is established by the Mount Vernon District Supervisor. During the Planning Commission Screening, the task force is responsible for reviewing the Mount Vernon District Site-Specific Plan Amendment nominations and making recommendations to the Planning Commission about including the nominations as submitted or modified on the Comprehensive Plan Amendment Work Program," according to county documents.

"Task force members also may act as a liaison to their representative organizations or communities — relaying information, soliciting feedback, and advocating on behalf of interested community members and key stakeholders, prior to the final vote of the task force."

The task force is considered a public body under the Virginia Freedom of Information Act.

Voices From the Neighborhood

Nearby residents shopping at the center were mixed on the initial proposal which came out last winter. Bud Wright was shopping at the center with his wife Kate



A grocery store and post office are the biggest entities at the center.

who said "we're here all the time." Both had heard of the proposals, and Bud Wright thought the stores were a little dated. "I hope they still do something to refurbish the stores," he said.

On the other hand, Edward Altemos was looking at the transportation problems that might come with a new center. He was glad to hear they were taking another look. "I didn't want to see it built, the infrastructure couldn't support it," he said.

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OPINION

Creating More Equitable Admissions Policies for Magnet Schools

BY SEN. SCOTT SUROVELL

We need more equitable admissions practices in what are called “Governor’s Schools.” Earlier this month, Gov. Ralph Northam appointed me to a task force with about 20 other individuals including Secretary of Education Atif Qarni to examine equity within our Governor’s Schools System. Governor’s Schools were created in 1973 to provide an intense, summer academic experience to high-achieving students and were later expanded to full-year programs, including Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology (TJHSST) in Fairfax County which also also serves Prince William and Arlington Counties.

I have often expressed concerns about TJHSST’s admissions practices. Very few children from eastern Fairfax or Prince William Counties are admitted. When I reviewed data a few years ago, fewer than five children had been admitted out of 125 applicants from Walt Whitman Intermediate School. In the most recent freshman class, there were none or there were so few African American students admitted that Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) was prohibited from releasing the actual number.

This history means that the student population in these schools is very unrepresentative of Northern Virginia, a region with a very diverse population. TJHSST’s current student population has less than 2% “economically disadvantaged” students as measured by students that



receive free and reduced lunches. The feeder, non-Fairfax County jurisdictions all are 27.3% economically disadvantaged. TJHSST’s current student population is now 70% Asian, 25% White and less than 2% Black and Hispanic, while its feeder jurisdictions are 18% Asian, 39% White, 11% Black, and 27% Hispanic.

Over 25% of each class’s admissions come from two middle schools – Rachel Carson in McLean and Longfellow in Falls Church. Most of the middle schools that are in eastern Fairfax and Prince William counties have fewer than five students – often zero – admitted students.

The problems leading to these results start in elementary school. There is well-documented research indicating that minority children are often not identified or encouraged to participate in elementary gifted and talented programs. There is also a strong correlation between recommendations and the race of the teacher. In other words, low numbers or the absence of minority teachers is associated with fewer minority children recommended for gifted programs. Economically disadvantaged families are not aware of such programs and do not advocate for their children to enroll in them. Schools with large economically disadvantaged student populations have fewer gifted programs.

We also heard some surprising testimony. First, gifted and talented programs arose during the 1960s in response to school desegregation efforts, and also have their roots in eugenics research. Admissions to gifted programs are also keyed solely to intelligence testing instead of other variables such as creativity, problem-solving

ability or other talents.

TJHSST’s principal pointed out that TJHSST’s success – measured by standardized test performance -- has brought international acclaim which has encouraged “Thomas” branded prep elementary schools to arise in foreign countries that feed students into specific Fairfax County middle schools for admissions after families obtain visas. She said that private test preparation programs pay students to remember certain questions and report them back so they can prepare students in \$14,000/year TJHSST preparation programs that meet regularly with their own homework and curriculum.

Many have been aware of these facts for over a decade and little action has been taken, which is why the General Assembly needs to act.

There are multiple admissions approaches that could be used. TJHSST currently uses an admissions test and an essay. According to the research, this type of admissions program is the most likely of any to favor family wealth over any other admissions factor, like a child’s ability.

Let me be clear: We are not considering a racial quota system. That is unconstitutional.

We will consider recommending alternate admissions processes that cannot be gamed by wealthy or advantaged families such as a lottery system with equitable scoring systems, middle school admissions minimums or caps, offering admission to top students of each middle school and allowing competition for remaining spots or other processes. We will also consider eliminating Governor’s Schools if they are unable to adopt more equitable admissions policies.

I hope you will share your views with me. Please send me an email at scott@scottsurvell.org. It is an honor to serve as your State Senator.

Voting During a Pandemic

BY DELEGATE PAUL KRIZEK

Over the last several weeks I have been getting many questions from constituents about the upcoming Nov. 3 election and the rules and options for voting during this pandemic. Given the realities of this year, it’s never too early to begin thinking about your plan to vote — whether that involves requesting a mail-in absentee ballot, voting in-person absentee (early), or voting in-person on Election Day, November 3rd.

This is the Presidential election, in case you need reminding! Also, on the ballot will be the U.S. Senate seat and all House of Representatives races.

First, you should make sure that your voter registration is up to date before the voter registration deadline on Oct. 13, 22 days prior to the November General Election. You can go to



<https://www.elections.virginia.gov/registration/> online to do this. Should you choose to vote absentee, you will need to apply for an absentee ballot. These will begin to be sent out to voters who apply for them 45 days before Election Day. The final deadline to request an absentee ballot to be mailed to you is Friday, Oct. 23 at 5 p.m.

With the potential delays we are concerned about regarding the United States Postal Service, due to Congressional funding issues and the increase in demand due to the pandemic, there is much anxiety surrounding ensuring that ballots are received in a timely manner and that votes are counted.

So, what can you do to ensure that your ballot will be safely returned on time and counted? I will tell you.

Virginia has done a lot of work this year to

make sure that voters can have confidence that their votes will be secure and counted. When you apply for an absentee ballot online, there are several ways that you can return the completed ballot. You can always hand-deliver your completed ballot to the local registrar’s office. Or, you can place a stamp on the return envelope and mail it back right away. For additional assurance, during this year’s session, we passed a new law introduced by Delegate Sickles that gives a 3-day extension for accepting ballots that are postmarked by Election Day. Before the passage of this law, ballots received after polls closed on Election Day, even those postmarked by Election Day, were not counted. This grace period will ensure that more votes are counted even with a postal delivery delay.

Lastly, you can surrender your ballot at the polling place on Election Day or one of the early voting days and vote in-person. If you misplace your ballot or do not receive it in time and still

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Mount Vernon Gazette

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Published by
Local Media Connection LLC

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Alexandria, Virginia 22314

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A Connection Newspaper



Voting During a Pandemic

FROM PAGE 6

wish to vote in-person, you can visit your polling place and vote provisionally. Once it is confirmed that you did not also submit your absentee ballot, your provisional ballot is counted. There is no way to vote twice!

Another option, if you would feel more comfortable voting in person, is taking advantage of the newly expanded absentee in-person voting. In-person absentee voting will begin on Sept. 19. My wife and I plan to vote early at the Mount Vernon Government Center on Parkers Lane. You can easily practice social distancing by staying 6 feet apart from other voters and staff while masked when voting early. This is a good option to avoid crowds and lines that would be likely on Election Day.

Thanks to laws passed during the General Assembly this year, voters no longer need to have an excuse to vote by absentee ballot, whether by mail or in person.

I am returning to Richmond for a Special General Assembly Session on Aug. 18. With a surge in absentee ballot requests expected, Virginia will need to be proactive to ensure that ballots can be returned in a timely manner. Therefore, we will try to pass a law that authorizes localities to install absentee ballot drop boxes to avoid using the USPS due to the possibility of delays. As a member of the Privileges and Elections Committee and the Appropriations Committee, I am going to push to find funding for this measure. As I have stated before, Virginians should not be forced to choose between exercising their right to vote and the health and safety of themselves and their loved ones. Giving Virginians a plethora of options to exercise their civic duty to be able to safely cast their votes, while being confident that each option means that their vote will be counted, remains a top priority of mine. Don't forget to vote!

14 Satellite Absentee Voting Locations

In anticipation of a high voter turnout, Fairfax County will offer 14 satellite locations for in-person absentee voting for the

Nov. 3, general election. The Board of Supervisors established these locations during their July 14, meeting. For the 2020 presidential election, the county is increasing its absentee voting locations compared to the nine that were available in 2016. Election officials called for added locations because they are anticipating a high turnout — especially with the new state law that allows “no-excuse” absentee voting. Until now, voters were required to have a reason to vote absentee.

These 14 satellite locations will be open for in-person absentee voting starting on Oct. 14:

Centreville Regional Library, 14200 Saint Germain Drive, Centreville
 Franconia Governmental Center 6121 Franconia Road, Alexandria
 Great Falls Library 9830 Georgetown Pike, Great Falls
 Herndon Fortnightly Library 768 Center Street, Herndon
 Laurel Hill Golf Club 8701 Laurel Crest Drive, Lorton
 Mason Governmental Center 6507 Columbia Pike, Annandale
 McLean Governmental Center 1437 Balls Hill Road, McLean
 Mount Vernon Governmental Center 2511 Parkers Lane, Alexandria
 North County Governmental Center 1801 Cameron Glen Drive, Reston
 Providence Community Center 3001 Vaden Drive, Fairfax
 Sully Governmental Center 4900 Stonecroft Boulevard, Chantilly
 Thomas Jefferson Library 7415 Arlington Boulevard, Falls Church
 Tysons-Pimmit Regional Library 7584 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church
 West Springfield Governmental Center 6140 Rolling Road, Springfield

These locations are currently proposed to be open weekdays from 1 to 7 p.m., and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. However, the Fairfax County Electoral Board may decide to adjust these hours later this summer based on the interest in absentee voting by mail.

Senior Year Unlike Any Other

FROM PAGE 3

exam in October at a school in Maryland, an hour and a half away from home.

Even with recent policy changes, a good test score can still bring scholarships and college affordability.

“Schools say they’re ‘test-optional,’ but to what extent are they actually test-optional?” said Smith.

She’s not the only one who might have to apply to college without test scores. T.C. Williams rising senior Fina Osei-Owusu is banking on taking her SAT in August after having her first one canceled in April. But like many things, there’s no guarantee that it will happen.

“Everybody is in the same boat,” said Beth Lovain of the Scholarship Fund of Alexandria. “Whatever challenges that they have, every student has.”

DESPITE THE PANDEMIC, Pozo argues the barriers many disadvantaged students face when applying to college will persist.

“A lot of low-income people and undocumented people experience the college process a little bit differently,” said Pozo. “The college process itself shows how inaccessible college education is.”

“We’re very worried about the students,” said Lovain. “But at some point, it all will go back to normal.”

But Smith is starting to accept that her senior year probably won’t go as anticipated.

“I think ‘21 thought we were safe, that maybe we’d miss some schoolwork,” said Smith. “But prom is non-negotiable. As we are going into the year, I’m starting to realize that maybe we won’t have prom....It is what it is.”

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PET GAZETTE



Pliny the Elder relaxes in his comfy Toasty Cat bed. This 5-year-old feline lives with Hope Nelson and Michael Pope



Let me introduce you to Scooby, our adorable Yorkie. We are celebrating his 12th birthday July 22. He loves riding in the car, chasing sand crabs on the beach and just being outside with us. He joined our family when my sons Alex and Chris were 15 and 11, respectively, and loves playing with them. In this photo, he was visiting Alex in DC and out for a hike in the park. We take him everywhere and he has stolen our hearts. Happy birthday, Scooby!

LYNN CHENG, ALEXANDRIA



Featured is Tilly, a retired Guiding Eyes for the Blind dog who “worked” for 6 years as a therapy dog (after retiring from Guide work) at a local special needs school, APTS.

She often got visits and walks and time with the students, but she was definitely surprised by this student dressed up as a dog. But, she agreed to humor the unusual visitor! as she always did. She was owned and loved by the Vernon family.

She often appeared in church with us, and was recognized on Veteran’s day for her Service work! She was a great dog and lived until May of this year, to the age of 14.

ANN AND JERRY VERNON



Rose, the black cat, and Cumin, belong to Gazette editor Mary Kimm. They are 8 years old. Rose was adopted from Lost Dog and Cat Rescue, and Cumin was adopted from PetConnect rescue.



Jeremiah, a neighbor cat from a few houses away, is frequently at our front door in the morning looking for our cat Cannoli



Our cat Cannoli sitting “guard” on a rock in front of our home in Alexandria.



This is Jeremiah, a neighbor cat from a few houses away, who enjoys hanging out in our yard



Cannoli, left and neighbor Jeremiah, are cat friends, greeting each other in the morning

Here are a few photos of my cat as well as a neighbor’s cat that has almost become our cat. And I include a few photos of a wild fox. While certainly not ours or anyone else’s pet, in the late spring, this fox and another young one, started frequently showing up in our yard, which is not far from Holmes Run Park. He would wander around the yard, play, sleep sometimes, they just sort of adopted our yard for a while. And they didn’t seem to mind that people were there as we would frequently just sit and watch them.

PHOTOS BY BRIAN MARQUIS



The fox did not seemed to be bothered by us and would walk around our yard while we were just sitting right there watching.



While technically not our pet, this fox from the Holmes Run Park, would frequently come into our yard to roam around, rest, he seemed quite comfortable around us, we named it Kit.



Reporter Mike Salmon and

Reporter Mike Salmon and his dog have spent a lot of time since the advent of Coronavirus in his home office hanging out together. “Around the Salmon house, The Cokester is the boss. The Cokester is a Maltipoo and he’s very smart. He barks when he wants a treat, and thinks he deserves one when he eats his bowl of food. His job is to tend to Mary Jane whose mobility is limited and she uses a walker to get around. And at 9 pm sharp, The Cokester knows it’s bedtime, and works on getting everybody upstairs. Being on the floor, he can’t see everything, so he likes it when I carry him around so he can see what’s going on.”



From Neal Denton: This is our 14yr old German Shorthaired Pointer, Dexter. We took a short visit to OBX and Dex loves an early morning sunrise.

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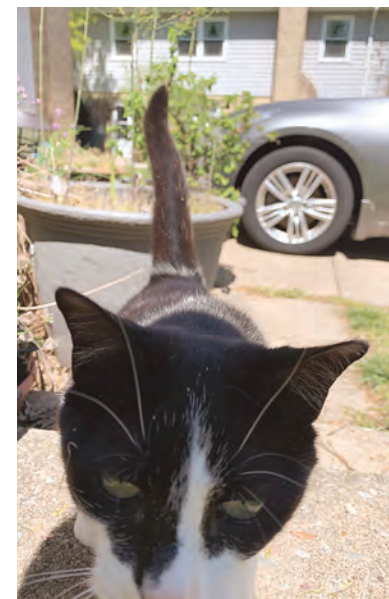


This is Dexter (the cat) and Kiki from Alexandria VA. Dexter was a foster cat in Richmond Va. Previously lived in a garage, without much social interaction. He is very talkative, so many folks didn’t quite want to live with him. However, Kiki fostered him in college and he won her heart, she adopted him. Oddly enough, he still talks, but not as much.



This is Lillie Knapp! She lives in Hollin Hall Village. Lillie was adopted from the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria 15 years ago with her sister Raven, who has since crossed over the Rainbow Bridge. She loves to cuddle in bed with her mom, lay on the back patio in the sunshine and eat “Greenies” treats every chance she gets! We love our Lillie.

JENNIFER KNAPP:



Here is a picture of my three papillons: Bucky (foreground), Dora (left), and Morgan (background). We make the trip to the Old Town Market every Saturday morning to buy fresh fruits and vegetables and visit with our doggie friends. The last stop is the dog park at Ford’s Landing for some rest and relaxation. Bucky is one year older than his sister, Dora. Morgan is the oldest and captain of the crew. We have a cat named Luna, 3 years old, keeping with the black and white theme.

DILLON AND SUSAN BOYER
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BULLETIN

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COUNTY OFFERS 14 SATELLITE ABSENTEE VOTING

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Mason Governmental Center 6507 Columbia Pike, Annandale
McLean Governmental Center 1437 Balls Hill Road, McLean
Mount Vernon Governmental Center

2511 Parkers Lane, Alexandria
North County Governmental Center
1801 Cameron Glen Drive, Reston
Providence Community Center 3001 Vaden Drive, Fairfax
Sully Governmental Center 4900 Stonecroft Boulevard, Chantilly
Thomas Jefferson Library 7415 Arlington Boulevard, Falls Church
Tysons-Pimmit Regional Library 7584 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church
West Springfield Governmental Center 6140 Rolling Road, Springfield
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NEEDLEWORK SHOW AT WOODLAWN

The 57th Annual Needlework Show at Woodlawn & Pope-Leighey House re-opens to the public on July 15- August 2, 2020. The Show structure will be modified: Entry is by timed ticket, in smaller groups each half-hour, purchased online only. Woodlawn & Pope-Leighey House is at 9000 Richmond Highway, Alexandria, VA 22309.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Help the Alexandria Domestic Violence Program (DVP) and Sexual Assault Center (SAC) make a positive impact for those in need and increase awareness of domestic

SEE BULLETIN, PAGE 13

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VIRGINIA INFORMATION: www.virginia.gov/coronavirus-updates/

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BACKYARD HABITAT

Ponds are Popular in Backyards Around the Area

Sometimes a water garden provides the natural setting for fish, frogs, butterflies and birds.

BY MIKE SALMON
THE CONNECTION

To Vineeta Anand, all the creatures that flock to her backyard pond are so familiar they're like pets to her, with the pond being the common bond. It's the center of the ecosystem she's created in her Alexandria backyard and a feature that's becoming more common in the area as the definition of a pet is getting as diverse as the population.

"The hummingbirds and Monarch butterflies have brought me so much comfort, I just go out and sit there and watch them," Anand said. "The foxes come for a visit, birds come down and drink from the pond," she said.

Inside her pond, there is a school of fish, frogs that aren't afraid to let out bellows right in front of her, and plants of all sorts that provide shade and oxygen for the water. "The plants are food for the fish," so she doesn't add any food, and this keeps the school wild, she said.

Although there's a big natural role for this feature in the yard, the pond does need a certain level of maintenance to keep everything in balance. There's a filtration pump and aerator, and a fountain that keeps the water oxygenated, and occasionally everything needs cleaning, including the lily pads. The duckweed that invades from time to time has to be removed, otherwise it will overgrow and fill the pond with plants. "It's a lot of work," she said, but with the pandemic outside her yard, the pond and all the creatures that live there are her escape. "I like to think of this as my slice of heaven," she said.

Lilypons Water Gardens, is a local company that specializes in these ponds, that they describe as a place to nourish the soul. They sell everything from a starter kit to plants, fish, snails, tub liners, waterfalls and filters, with prices that vary depending on the size of the pond and accessories.



PHOTOS BY MIKE SALMON/THE CONNECTION
Vineeta Anand enjoys the animals around her pond, and thinks of them as her pets.



In Springfield, this front yard pond was made entirely by the homeowner.

Putting in the Pond

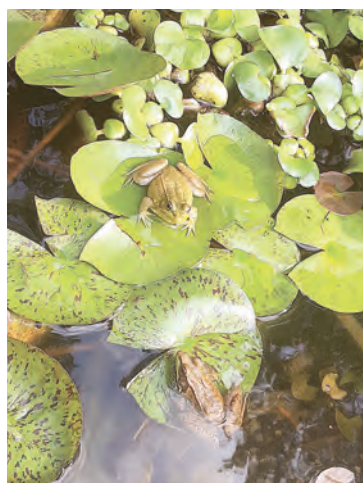
As with any home project, an expert can be hired to do it all and the homeowner only needs to write the check, but backyard ponds, there are a batch of do-it-yourself models too. Most consist of a plastic shell to hold the water, or digging a hole and then lining it with plastic to hold the water, and then putting rocks around it to hold the plastic. After that, the sky's the limit to the designs.

HomeBNC, a home beautification and creative organization, even has one that is built around an old truck tire, they call the Recycled Tractor Tire Pond, and it is basically a shallow hole for the tire, then cut the top of the tire off, fill in the middle, line with plastic, and fill with water.

Kirsten Conrad is a Agriculture Natural Resource Extension Agent for the Virginia Cooperative Extension in Arlington that works with the Master Gardeners, and she finds many gardeners incorporate a pond too. "It's a popular thing to do," she said. Conrad has worked with Anand to keep her backyard habitat a spot for wildlife in busy Alexandria, and likes the pond as well. Although it is a water structure, Conrad finds the mosquitoes don't seem to be a problem, that's when natural species take care of the situation. The fish and birds eat the larvae. "Natural organisms take control," she said, and Anand has the same feeling for nature around her yard.



This pond in a Hayfield backyard has an owl lurking that eats some of the wildlife.



These two frogs in Anand's pond are the perfect pets and even provide a sound track with their croaking.



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GAZETTE FILE PHOTOS BY JANET BARNETT

An eviction protest in Alexandria earlier in July.



Gap Between Relief Funds, Eviction Moratorium Could Cause Mass Evictions

Slow: 12,000 eviction cases in courts statewide while only 300 tenant households had received federal funds.

BY MARY PADEN
GAZETTE

The expiration of the state eviction moratorium and the refusal of the Fairfax District Court to extend it locally past July 10 has sent Fairfax County legal aid attorneys and Health and Human Services Department staff into a flurry of action to try to get federal assistance to the 500 tenants currently on the docket for eviction proceedings. Less than a quarter of households seeking rent assistance from the county have gotten it so far, with most still in processing.

The situation is worse throughout the state. At a press conference July 17, VOICE, a faith-based community action group, said there were 12,000 eviction cases in courts statewide while only 300 tenant households had received federal funds.

Ironically, low-income tenants — those most affected by the pandemic and shutdown — may face eviction while federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds sit in the bank.

The Fairfax NAACP and the South County Task Force called on Gov. Ralph Northam today to extend the moratorium until CARES rent relief funds can be distributed to tenants. VOICE called for a moratorium through Aug. 31. Other statewide groups have also recommended a new moratorium.

Meanwhile, last week the federal eviction moratorium for landlords with federally backed loans expired (on July 25), as did the extension on unemployment insurance. The federal forbearance program applied to

only 30-40 percent of rental properties, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition. Many housing groups are calling on Congress to provide more rent relief and housing funding as part of the HEROES Act which is before the Senate, because the pandemic and economic slowdown are dragging out much longer than anticipated in the original CARES Act. Virginia Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine have co-sponsored some of the housing bills.

Eviction Tsunami Predicted Since April

A summer eviction tsunami was predicted last April by national housing think tanks and advocates such as the Urban Institute and Enterprise, and the Urban League. The \$2 trillion federal CARES Act signed March 27, plus various state eviction moratoria, were designed to shore up out-of-work low and moderate income renters. But funds were slow to get out and eviction moratoria are expiring nationwide before the payments can be distributed.

Fairfax County received CARES funds in early May and designated \$20 million for housing stability, utilities, and food support in mid-May. Gov. Northam announced a \$50 million CARES rent relief fund on June 25 and asked Circuit Courts to extend eviction moratoria so the state could get the funds out. The state Supreme Court moratorium ended June 28 and circuit courts did not renew it.

Some Tenants Self-evict to Keep Record Clean

The state moratorium did not prevent

landlords from sending threatening letters to tenants in the meantime. About 50 percent of renters “self-evict” after receiving such letters from landlords, according to VOICE, because an eviction on their record can prevent them from being able to rent another apartment. Most tenants in eviction court have no legal representation and those without it face nearly 100 percent chance of eviction, whereas those with an attorney face about a 50 percent chance of eviction, according to Northern Virginia legal aid attorneys.

Legislation passed at the 2020 session allows a 60-day postponement of an eviction if the tenant can show proof of being laid off because of the pandemic. But most tenants don’t know about this and don’t have an attorney to tell them. Many very-low-income tenants worked jobs that did not provide documentation of a Covid layoff.

Scrambling to Help in Fairfax District Court

In Fairfax County, Northern Virginia Legal Aid attorney Dipti Pidikiti-Smith and others are going all out to identify clients and connect them with rent relief assistance at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Dean Klein, former head of the Office to Prevent and End Homelessness, heads a task force that includes members from legal aid, HHS, the Department of Housing, and the Sheriff’s office to alert tenants and landlords to the possibility of paying rent with CARES funds.

To get CARES funds out quickly, the county gave grants to various nonprofits throughout the county with which it has relationships. It designed a system whereby people in need must call the county’s emergency hotline for an intake process after which they are directed to a nonprofit in their area that cuts a check to their landlords or utilities.

However, the hotline was overwhelmed with calls, especially after the number was advertised widely, and callers faced a long wait — over an hour in some cases. As of the end of June, the hotline had received 4,885 calls requesting rent relief alone, up about 300 percent over the previous year, and with over 3,000 first-time callers. Calls spiked the week of July 15, with 5,654 calls (up 600 percent) after the number appeared in the media. But so far, just over 1,000 tenants have received CARES rent relief (of up to 4 months’ rent) according to county staff. It is not clear what is causing the bottleneck, but HHS is bringing in additional intake operators and has promised to give the Board of Supervisors a plan to streamline the hotline system.

Meanwhile, Klein’s task force is trying to help tenants on the brink of eviction. Legal aid is trying to get in touch with landlords to let them know rent relief funds are available through the county and giving them guidance on how to get mortgage forbearance. Earlier the county had sent letters to landlords with information about the moratorium and forthcoming CARES funds, but the follow up was unclear.

“We have a huge battle ahead of us with the moratorium ending,” Klein said. Some people have not been able to pay rent for three to four months and they usually struggle to pay one month’s rent.”

AT THE END OF MAY, the South County Task Force and 37 other organizations in Northern Virginia — including the Fairfax NAACP, the Equity Agenda Coalition, SIEU, and two teachers unions — plus 14 Fairfax County legislators, sent a letter to Northam asking for an extension of the moratorium through Aug. 31. The Southern Poverty Law

SEE EVICTION, PAGE 13

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BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 13

violence and sexual assault in our community by becoming a volunteer. Volunteers benefit from the unique experience of interacting personally with victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. There are opportunities in DVP for special events volunteers, court advocates and shelter supervisors. Call 703-746-4911 or visit alexandriava.gov/DomesticViolence. To become a SAC volunteer, which includes opportunities for Volunteer Hotline Advocates, call Lydia at 703-746-3127 or visit alexandriava.gov/SexualViolence.

Assistance League of Northern Virginia, a volunteer nonprofit, invites community members to join the organization to participate in its Reading Express program. Volunteers provide one-on-one tutoring to first grade students during the school year. To learn more contact VP Membership Mary Gronlund at gronbiz@aol.com or Program Coordinator Lynn Barron at lynnlieb517@verizon.net.

United Community (formerly UCM), with main office located at 7511 Fordson Road, Alexandria, seeks volunteers for Food Pantry assistance, Early Learning Center teacher aides, basic needs counselors, youth tutors and mentors, office administration/data entry,

SEE BULLETIN, PAGE 14

Evictions

FROM PAGE 12

Center in Richmond asked for the same.

The South County Task Force letter noted that "In an analysis of eviction moratoria in 50 states, Princeton's Eviction Lab's interactive Policy Scorecard rated Virginia's Supreme Court ordered moratorium only a half-star out of five stars, because it lacked most of the provisions that would alleviate a rent crisis when the moratorium lifts" and that "Governors in 30 states have issued executive orders to halt evictions."

Northam has insisted that he doesn't have the authority to order an eviction moratorium, but a July 15 letter from Attorney General Mark Herring in response to a query from several legislators says, "The Governor has both the executive and statutory authority to issue emergency orders.... Whether any particular executive order is an appropriate exercise of emergency power depends on the scope of the executive order and the facts and circumstances."

Herring also said the "General Assembly can pass legislation placing limitations on evictions" as well as "pass legislation allowing localities to place limitations on evictions."

The General Assembly starts a special session Aug. 18 that is restricted to dealing with the budget and police reform, but an eviction moratorium might be appropriate if the Governor does not act by then.

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Legals

Legals

NOTICE OF AVAILABILITY

DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT AND DRAFT FINDING OF NO PRACTICABLE ALTERNATIVE FOR THE DAVISON ARMY AIRFIELD AREA DEVELOPMENT PLAN

U.S. Army Garrison Fort Belvoir, Fairfax County, Virginia

Description. Interested parties are hereby notified that the Department of Army (Army) has prepared a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) regarding the proposed action described below. Notice is also made for a Draft Finding of No Practical Alternative (FONPA), prepared by the Army to comply with Executive Order (EO) 11988, Floodplain Management and EO 11990, Protection of Wetlands.

Statutory Authority. This notice is being issued to all interested parties in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Council on Environmental Quality NEPA implementing regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] Parts 1500-1508), and Army NEPA regulations (32 CFR Part 651).

Proposed Action. The Army proposes to implement an Area Development Plan (ADP) for Davison Army Airfield (DAAF) on Fort Belvoir in Fairfax County, Virginia. The proposed ADP would provide DAAF and its tenant organizations with the required facilities and infrastructure to fully support their ongoing missions. Implementing the ADP for DAAF would also address multiple operational safety concerns along the runway and improve the functional layout of the airfield as a whole. Projects in the proposed ADP would be implemented over the next 30 years.

Public Review. The Draft EIS and Draft FONPA are available for view or download online or by request, as follows:

Online <https://home.army.mil/belvoir/index.php/about/Garrison/directorate-public-works/environmental-division>

Compact Disc Request by email to: FortBelvoirNOI@usace.army.mil

Request by mail to:
US Army Fort Belvoir Directorate of Public Works
Attn.: DAAF Draft EIS
Environmental Division, Chief
9430 Jackson Loop, Building 1442, Rm #230
Fort Belvoir, Virginia 22060-5116

Printed copies of the Draft EIS and Draft FONPA typically provided to local libraries will not be available due to COVID-19 restrictions. All materials will be provided online. If you cannot access the Draft EIS materials online, please send a request for information to the above address.

Comments. The Army welcomes your participation in its decision-making process and solicits your feedback on the proposed action. In accordance with 32 CFR Part 651.14, the Draft EIS will be available for a 45-day public review period starting 24 July 2020. During this period, the public may submit comments on the Draft EIS and Draft FONPA. Written comments or requests for additional information about the proposed action and environmental review can be made via email or postal mail, as noted above. The 45-day public review and comment period for the Draft EIS and Draft FONPA will conclude on 8 September 2020.

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Wait. What?



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

"Thyroid cancer." Again? I thought the point of last week's surgical biopsy was to genetically-sequence a lung cancer tumor. Now you tell me the radiologist/pathologist found more thyroid cancer. As it already has happened, my oncologist - in coordination with my endocrinologist, said that my most recent CT scan showed "excellent results" (from my previous thyroid cancer treatment - which ended with radioiodine therapy), and furthermore noted that the thyroid cancer was confined to my neck. Yet a few weeks later, the thyroid cancer is back in my lungs. What happened? Or more importantly perhaps, what didn't happen?

Well, if I understand what my oncologist said to us over the phone on Wednesday, disappointing as it initially sounded, it might not be at all bad. Apparently, the dose of radioiodine (nuclear medicine) I received had been modified (reduced) due to my pre-existing kidney function issue. Since this modification was not a "normal" dose, it didn't locate all the thyroid cancer tumors; the smaller ones, that is, so the presumption was that all the thyroid cancer had been found, identified and eliminated. Until last week's biopsy found otherwise. What does it all mean? I'll try to explain, although I'm sure I'll get lost in the science somewhere.

I still have two types of cancer: non small cell lung cancer and papillary thyroid cancer. However, I may have thyroid cancer in the lungs which actually may be better than having lung cancer in the lungs. The reason being: papillary thyroid cancer is curable whereas non small cell lung cancer is not (it is treatable though). Moreover, thyroid cancer is slow-growing and at present, so small that there may not be any treatment to follow. To learn more definitively what is happening in my body, I'm scheduled for a PET scan this week and then another surgical biopsy the following week. This time the biopsy will be a lung biopsy. This will get tissue from within the lung (a bit of a lung-collapsing risk), not from the periphery (the lymph nodes). Presumably, this biopsy will provide some clarity.

According to my oncologist, I have a dozen or so tumors in my lungs, some of which may be thyroid cancer. Unfortunately, it's not practical or prudent to biopsy all of them so a complete assessment will not be possible. Therefore, an educated guess will have to be made: continue to treat the lung cancer with immunotherapy or not, and/or only treat the thyroid cancer which given its small size and slow-growing nature wouldn't require any treatment - for now. And might not for years.

But if there are more tumors that are lung cancer - which the doctors can't confirm, and I'm not receiving any treatment for them (because of the thyroid cancer diagnosis), won't my lung cancer tumors grow? And since one medicine doesn't work against two types of cancer, I may not be receiving treatment for the cancer that's really active and receiving treatment for the cancer that is not active. And the only way to find out what types of cancer exist is to biopsy each and every tumor - which is not going to happen. As my oncologist said in response to our characterization of this damned if I don't and damned if I do scenario as being very complicated: "Mr. Lourie has always been a complicated patient."

As I review this column and reconsider what my oncologist has advised going forward, it's not only complicated, it's confusing and a bit disorienting. What exactly do I have and what are the risks, and more importantly: what is my life expectancy? Nevertheless, as my oncologist said: "I'm glad we did this biopsy." Me, too.

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

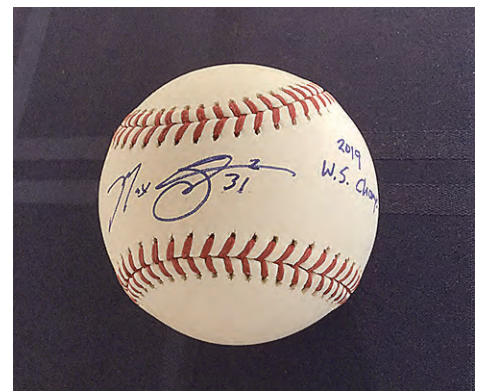
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News



Max Scherzer Signs Baseball for Women's Education Fundraiser

There is an opportunity to own a baseball signed by Nationals pitcher Max Scherzer with "2019 World Series Champs!" and at the same time support women's and girl's education. With the cancellation of McLean Branch AAUW's Used Book Sale, its annual charitable fundraiser, a substitute fundraiser will feature the Scherzer baseball opportunity along with a request for contributions to support education and local scholarships for women. In 2019 the proceeds of the book sale enabled the branch to fund scholarships for a woman returning to college at George Mason, Marymount, and Trinity universities and also support women's education through AAUW Funds, a 501(c)(3) entity.

Donors will get on base with a contribution of \$20 or more and also have the opportunity to hit a home run and own the baseball signed by Max Scherzer. In fact, three donors will have the opportunity because Max graciously gave the branch three signed balls.

For each \$20 contribution, the person's name will be listed. Multiples of \$20 will enhance the opportunity, and the owners will be selected randomly.

Contributions can be made until Aug. 31 through GoFundMe at <https://charity.gofundme.com/o/en/campaign/aauw-mc-lean-areas-home-run-fundraiser-for-women-and-education>.

Donations may also be sent with full name, address, and phone number to McLean Branch AAUW (American Association of University Women) at P.O. Box 1002, McLean, VA 22101. A receipt will be sent for each contribution. The \$40,000 goal will enable the branch to fund the scholarships and AAUW fellowships and grants as in the past. Last year's book sale netted \$47,000.

BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE I3

and community outreach. Flexible hours and schedules. Opportunities for all ages to serve, including community service hours. More info at ucmagency.org/volunteer-opportunities or email volunteer@ucmagency.org.

Operation Paws for Homes, a Virginia based 501(c)(3) organization seeks volunteers, especially to foster dogs. See www.ophrescue.org for information and all volunteer opportunities.

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Over the past 3 months, four clients of ours switched agents and trusted us through the buying and selling process. During these unique times, the agent you choose matters more than ever. Here are two examples of their experiences!

★★★★★ Highly likely to recommend

The White Family Group is THE DREAM TEAM! They know the Alexandria area better than anyone, and switching realtors to them was the best decision I made in my buying process. They found me an off-market home in Mt. Vernon that checked all my boxes, and more, for a fantastic price. I was a nervous first time home buyer, but they made the entire process painless! They always made themselves available to me and stopped at nothing to find me a home. I will be using them again in the future and would recommend them to anyone who is looking to find their dream home in the Alexandria area!!

★★★★★ Highly likely to recommend

While I had seen Chris White's name and his listings in our neighborhood for years as well as his number of successful sales, I initially chose another agent to list my house. So we listed our house and I then found a wonderful house. Ironically, Chris was the listing agent for the house we wanted to buy. He was wonderful to work with on that end and even guided my buying agent through the hoops so as to complete the sale. While we're happily the owners of a new home, my old house had not sold even though it had been on the market for 3 months. I wondered why he kept selling houses and my house was just sitting on the market, fairly priced... My husband and I called Chris and his team and immediately hired them. Within 8 days we had a ratified contract! Chris is simply the best there is in real estate. His contacts and wonderful relationships with other realtors, contractors, and the community make him stand out. His knowledge of the area, his marketing, his plan to sell your house or to help you buy a house will not fail. He will make a what could be a stressful situation seem effortless. He will handle all the details; you will feel cared for and reassured that he and his team will make the buying or selling of your home a success story. There is a reason he is a top realtor in the country. I would never recommend any one else when it comes to real estate!

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