

# The Arlington Connection

## SENIOR LIVING

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## Be Counted!

CENSUS PAGE 4

John Garver with his '71 Chevy Nova that he has owned for five years before the Nauck Antique and Classic Car Parade on Sept. 12. The event was part of Census Palooza.

## Voting on the Very First Day

NEWS, PAGE 3

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PHOTO BY JOAN BRADY/JOAN BRADY PHOTOGRAPHY

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# ARPEETS: MEET JACKFRUIT, THE RAT

BY JOAN BRADY  
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

Joan is an award-winning Connection Newspapers columnist and local photographer specializing in pets, children and families and contemporary business portraits.

Rats apparently make great pets. Truly. This isn't just another crazy 2020 thing. Or actually, maybe it is.

It turns out rats are not the icky, dirty little creatures I always thought they were. Now the truth is, the rats I'm talking about are the domesticated -- or fancy -- rat variety, not the big honkers seen scurrying around the streets at night.

Wild rats have a different lifestyle which doesn't necessarily allow for good grooming and close, warm relationships. But looking back, it was still probably very hurtful to the little guy I saw on the street last week, when the sight of his whiskers popping out from under a bush startled me into a small scream.

Like cats, pet rats are constantly grooming themselves to be sure to stay looking sharp. They are also very smart and can be taught all kinds of tricks. And they are loyal as, well, dogs. I know, I know. I was incredulous too. But I googled



While rats eyes can come in different colors. Albino rats, like Jackfruit, have red eyes.

around and it's all true.

Little Jackfruit, the hero of this week's column, was surrendered to a shelter along with his two sibs when it became clear that his owner had too many rats to take care of safely. Rats actually have empathy, so young Jackfruit likely understood how hard things were for his previous owner.

But his behavior would suggest that he prefers the quiet, uncluttered environment of his foster home. His empathy, by the way, is not limited to his previous owner.



Jackfruit startled when caught grabbing an afternoon snack.

Consistent with the breed, he apparently recognizes emotion in his siblings and foster mom and responds accordingly.

Jackfruit got a new name with his new life and he is still learning it. But, I kid you not, once he learns his name, he will totally

come when called. In addition, he can be taught all kinds of things including how to shoot hoops with a rat-sized basketball hoop. Now I'm a dog person through and through, but my beagle, fab as he is, cannot shoot hoops.

While he doesn't know any tricks

yet, Jackfruit does enjoy spending time with this foster mom, riding on her shoulder as she moves about her home.

He has been waiting since the beginning of August for his forever home.

In his perfect world, he will be adopted with one or both of his brothers into a home where people spend lots of time with him cuddling and playing.

You can check out Jackfruit on the Animal Welfare League of Arlington website ([awla.org](http://awla.org)). And you can schedule a virtual date to meet him by emailing: [awla.foster.lorena@gmail.com](mailto:awla.foster.lorena@gmail.com). If Jackfruit and his brothers are not a good fit for your household, please share and help these guys find their forever home.

And if you do choose to adopt Jackfruit and especially if you teach him to shoot baskets, please, please send me pictures.

*ArPets is a weekly feature for highlighting the well-loved pets of Arlington as well as animals who are available for adoption.*

*If you or your dog, cat, iguana, bunny, rat or any other pet, has an interesting pet story to tell, email me at [joan@joanbradyphotography.com](mailto:joan@joanbradyphotography.com).*

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED BY AW/LA

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## Voters Taking No Chances in Arlington

Voting is underway for the November Presidential election.



Absentee ballots begin to arrive in the mail on Sept. 18.

BY SHIRLEY RUHE  
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

**O**n Sept. 18 the official countdown begins in Arlington for the Nov. 3 Presidential election. Voting choices include voting in-person either the day of the election at your regular polling site or in-person before the Election at one of five sites located around Arlington or voting by absentee ballot through the mail or by depositing the ballot in a drop box. But many voters didn't want to wait.

Voters line up in unexpected numbers on the first day of early voting at Courthouse Plaza. Ed McDermott is in line at 7:50 a.m. to vote when the polls open on Sept. 18 for the first day of

early voting in Arlington. He says even with the line trailing down Clarendon Boulevard, it only took 15 minutes to complete the process including COVID precautions and pen sanitizing.

"I voted early for two reasons," McDermott said. "I wanted to make sure my ballot was counted and I didn't trust the shenanigans at the Post Office. Second reason is that I fear there is going to be a COVID spike very soon, and people that haven't planned ahead and

who may be sick on Nov. 3 may feel compelled to vote in person and expose others to their sickness."

Hand sanitizer is available at the check in station manned by a masked poll worker. The voter receives a sanitized pen and advances to a well-spaced desk to fill out the ballot.

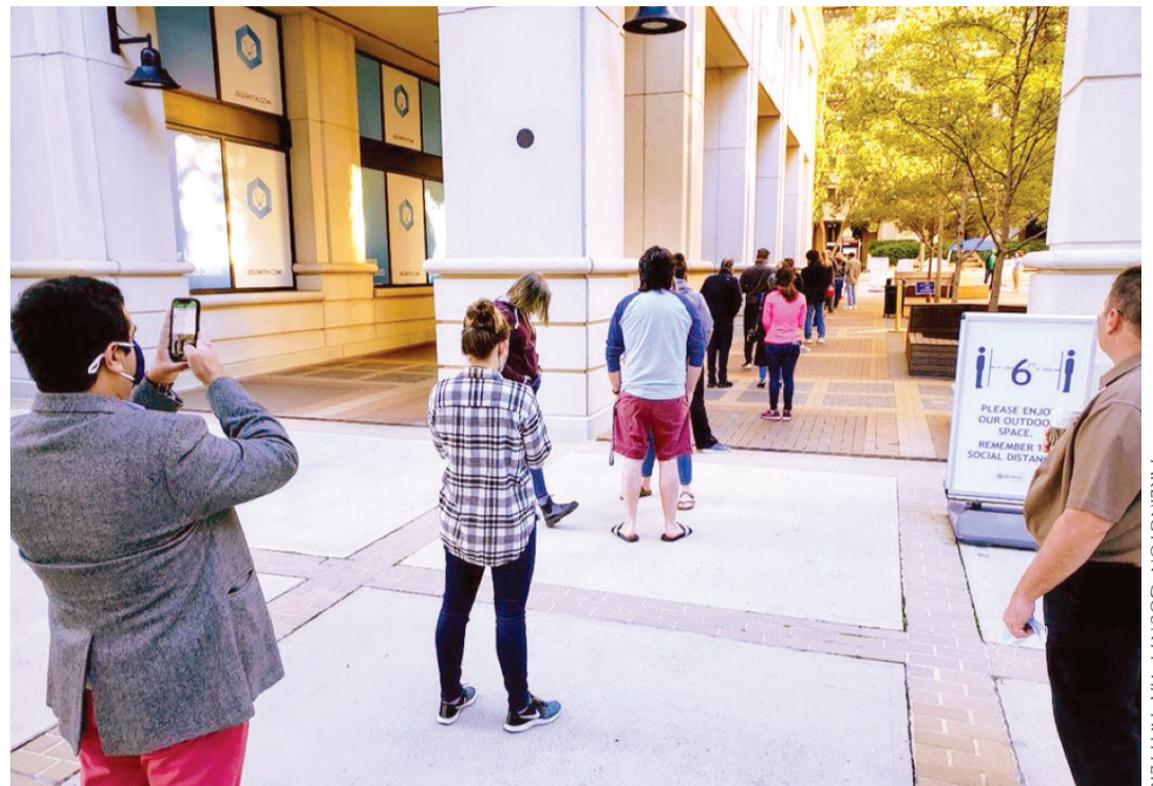
Meanwhile on Sept. 18 voters who signed up for absentee ballots began to find their green and white Official Mail Ballot envelope in their mailboxes. Inside is a Mail Ballot Return Envelope with a wide yellow stripe addressed

**"I wanted to make sure my ballot was counted and I didn't trust the shenanigans at the Post Office."**

— Ed McDermott, voting on the first day possible

to the Arlington County Board of Elections and including postage. A sealed envelope including a ballot with a warning not to open it until you have read the instructions accompanies it.

The instructions state that you mark your ballot with a blue or black pen, place marked ballot in Envelope B, complete the statement on the envelope, seal the envelope and sign it. The envelope has a line for a witness signature but this is no longer required. En-



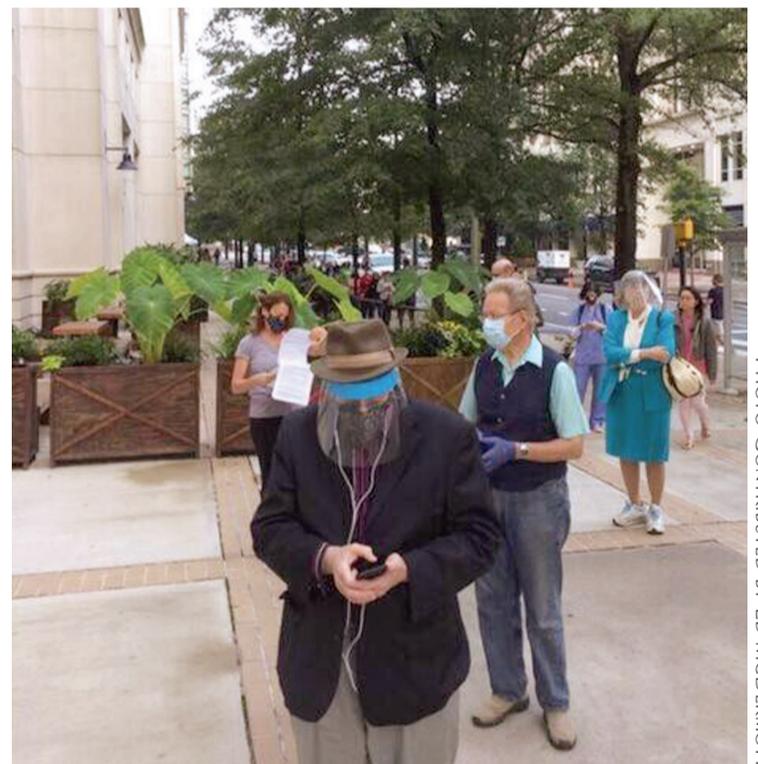
In-person advanced voting has resumed at the Courthouse polling site. Mail-in absentee ballots have begun arriving in mailboxes and can be dropped off completed at supervised locations now or at your polling site on Nov. 3. [vote.arlingtonva.us](http://vote.arlingtonva.us)

velope B is then placed in the Mail Ballot Return Envelope.

You may mail your absentee ballot through USPS or a commercial delivery service or deliver to a drop box location. Mail ballots must be postmarked on or before Election Day and received by noon on the Friday after Election Day to be counted.

In addition to in-person voting at the Courthouse Plaza beginning Sept. 18, early in-person voting is also available beginning Oct. 17 at four additional sites including Aurora Hills Community Center, Langston-Brown Community Center, Madison Community Center and Walter Reed Community Center. These same locations also serve as official supervised drop sites for depositing your absentee ballot.

For more information: [vote.arlingtonva.us](http://vote.arlingtonva.us) or call 703-228-3456.



Voters line Clarendon Blvd. outside Courthouse Plaza for early voting Sept. 18.

### BULLETIN BOARD

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

#### THURSDAY/SEPT. 24.

Community Kick-Off: Pentagon City Planning Study. 7 p.m. Virtual. Join in a virtual community kick-off for the Pentagon City Planning Study. Arlington Coun-

ty is leading this strategic community planning process for Pentagon City to reevaluate long-term goals for this important area with an emphasis on its transportation network. The Planning Study will be

informed by the community's recent work on livability and include broad participation from residents, businesses, community groups and stakeholders. Visit [www.building.arlingtonva.us/contact](http://www.building.arlingtonva.us/contact).

#### FRIDAY/SEPT. 25

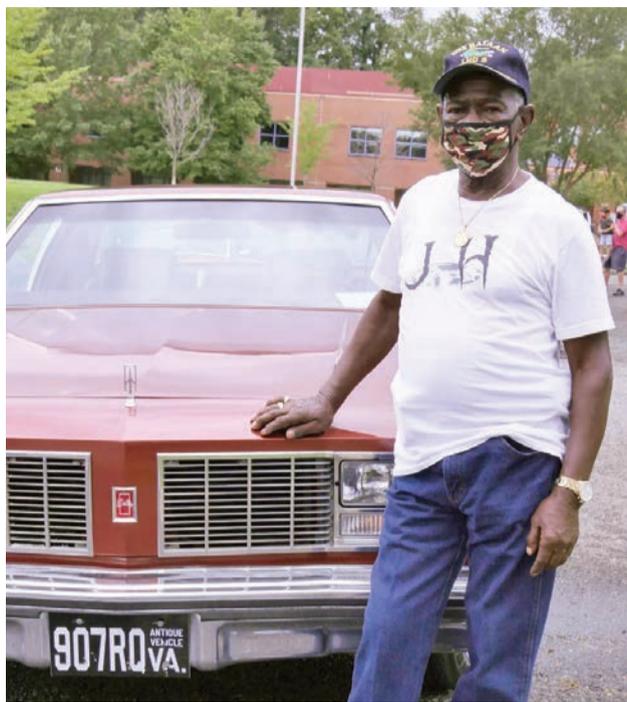
Native Ground Covers for Sun and Shade. 10 – 11:30 a.m. Online. A variety of native plant species, including perennials, ferns, grasses, and even some woody plants, can

function as ground covers in multiple landscape situations. Learn which native species may serve as excellent replacements for overused and invasive tra-

SEE BULLETIN, PAGE 5



Joann Griffin and Ahmed Scego man a census information table at the Arlington Census Palooza event held at Charles Drew Community Center on Saturday, Sept. 12.



Joe Honesty is only the second owner of his '79 Delta Oldsmobile that he has owned for three years, and drove it in the Nauck Antique and Classic Car Parade on Saturday morning,



Romina Andrades offers a basket and cleaning supplies for families who have completed the 2020 Census.

PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUHE/ARLINGTON CONNECTION

# Stand Up and Be Counted

## Fill it out the Census before Sept. 30!

BY SHIRLEY RUHE  
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

In mid-August an estimated 24,400 Arlington households still remained to be counted by the US Census. The push is on to get them counted by Sept. 30.

Arlington's Census Palooza II had tables at Barcroft Apartments, Buckingham Gates of Ballston Community Center and Green Valley Charles Drew Community Center on Saturday, Sept. 12.

Volunteers wearing bright purple "Arlington Counts" T-shirts stood on the median of Glebe Road waving passersby to the Census Palooza sites.

Joann Griffin manned a table at Charles Drew Community Center filled with flyers, background information, and questions and answers about the 2020 Census.

Just down the way Romina Andrades manned a table lined with neat rows of green bottles of Palmolive, sponges, large plastic jugs of bleach and Ajax. People who filled out the Census were invited to take a basket and a few cleaning supplies. "I think Arlington has 76 percent of people who have filled out the Census but we're going after the hard to reach 24 percent," she said.

Kelvin Maurs, Executive Director of Arm & Arm, a peer counseling group for formerly incarcerated prisoners, is there to encourage community members to sign up for the Census. "I grab someone who can speak Spanish and go out in the neighborhood. I've been walking around over there and connecting at the barber shop."

He says language can be a barrier. "You have to get trust and convince people why this is important. People can be suspicious. I was just talking to two guys and one was on board but the other one gave me the eye. So I gave the first one my phone number so I could get him to come."

The Constitution requires the U.S. to conduct a Census which counts every person living in the United State once a decade. This information is used as a basis for allocating the number of seats in Congress as well as for allocation of state, federal and local funds for such things as schools, hospitals and public utilities.

Filling out the Census takes only a few minutes. However, there can be a number of obstacles including the challenges posed by the pandemic, lack of information, suspicion about government intrusion and violation of privacy, and language barriers. In addition,

a newly imposed September deadline has shortened the time allowed for completion of the Census.

If you have not taken the Census there are several options for completion.

Online: Go to [my2020census.gov](http://my2020census.gov) where you can complete in English or select a different option at the bottom of the page.

Phone: call 844-330-2020 for English, 844-468-2020 for Spanish. Phone numbers are also available in 13 languages including Russian, Japanese, Vietnamese and Arabic.

Mail: If you received a paper copy by mail, just fill it out and mail it back in the envelope provided.

In person: A census person might knock at your door.

In addition there are Mobile Questionnaire Assistance stations such as the pop-up locations around Arlington weekly through September.

## First You Say You Do, Then You Say You Don't

### Arlington reverses social distancing ordinance.

BY SHIRLEY RUHE  
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

The repeal of the Arlington County Emergency Sidewalk Distancing Ordinance at the Sept. 15 Arlington County Board Meeting sits right in the middle of the widespread controversy. For some, it pits individual freedom against the appropriate role of the government in regulating personal conduct in order to control the spread of COVID.

Thrown in the mix are the Arlington restaurants who are struggling to stay in business and the efforts of Arlington County Police Department (ACPD) officers to enforce the ordinance that have been met with defiance, hostility and confrontation.

On July 31 the Arlington County Board passed an emergency ordinance that targeted groups of four or more people that weren't adhering to 6-foot socially distancing requirements in public spaces where signs had been posted. It allowed

imposition of fines of not more than \$100 for violations of the ordinance. The ordinance stated it would expire after 60 days unless the County Board advertises and holds a public hearing on its permanency.

This ordinance was targeted at areas where patrons wait for long periods of time for admission to restaurants that currently have limited indoor space for customers. The ordinance was passed in response to the uptick in COVID infections after the Phase III reopen-

ing announced by the Governor on July 1.

The Virginia State Department of Health statistics record 3,819 cases of coronavirus with 491 hospitalized and 196 deaths in Arlington as of Sept. 18. An Arlington health official indicated that the statistics in the younger age groups 18-29 years and 30-39 years had gone upward in the state and the region after the Phase III reopening.

On Sept. 15 the County Board voted to allow the Emergency Sidewalk Distancing Ordinance to

lapse on Sept. 29. Arguments to the Board ranged from accusations of hasty construction of the ordinance without appropriate engagement and public input to fear that it allowed the opportunity for selective enforcement against people of color to poor targeting for public health problems to inability of police officers to enforce the ordinance.

The police have not issued a single citation, instead encour-

SEE FIRST YOU . PAGE 7

# FLOURISHING AFTER 55

Arlington's five 55+ centers are closed, however, virtual programs and outdoor programs are available free of charge this month and are open to all residents 55 years of age and older. Residents must pre-register to receive a link to the virtual programs and the outdoor programs. Register at [registration.arlingtonva.us](http://registration.arlingtonva.us) or by calling 703-228-4747, option 3.

## Virtual and In the Park Programs

### SEPT. 23-OCT. 2, 2020

Ways to prevent falls, virtual discussion with Kate Chutaupé, Virginia Hospital Center, Wednesday, Sept. 23, 11 a.m. – noon. Registration # 911502-01.

Virtual Paint 'n Sip demonstration, Thursday, Sept. 24, 10-11:30 a.m. No experience necessary. Register to receive supply list and picture to paint. Registration # 911301-03.

Overview of ways to cut cable, phone and internet bills using today's technology. Virtual program led by Tech Guru Nick Englund, Thursday, Sept. 24, 11 a.m. – noon. Registration # 911403-01.

Fast paced walking group, Fast Forwards, Friday, Sept. 25, 9-10:30 a.m. Meet at Fairlington Community Center, 3308 S. Stafford St., for a two to three mile loop in the vicinity. Registration # 911109-03.

Guided hike, one to two miles along trails from Gulf Branch Nature Center and Park, 3608 N. Military Rd., Tuesday, Sept. 29, 9-11 a.m. Registration # 911009-01.

Arlington's Poet Laureate and professor of literature and languages at Marymount University, Dr. Holly Karapetkava, to present a virtual program extolling the virtues of poetry, Wednesday, Sept. 30, 11 a.m.

– noon. Registration # 911300-01. Smart home technology using automation devices, virtual program presented by Tech Guru Nick Englund, Wednesday, Sept. 30, 3 – 4 p.m. Registration # 911403-15.

Italian game of bocce, Friday, Oct. 2, 9-10 a.m., Walter Reed 55+ Center, 2909 S. 16th Street. Register after Sept. 23. Registration # 911700-07.

Basic drawing class, two parts, begins Friday, Oct. 2, 1-2:30 p.m. Virtual program with community arts programmer, Jennifer Droblyen. Supply list and other details supplied at registration. Register after Sept. 23. Registration # 911301-05.

Strategies for speaking to people with dementia, virtual program, Friday, Oct. 2, 1:30-2:30 p.m., presented by Dan Cronin, program manager, local chapter, Alzheimer's Association.

Register after Sept. 23. Registration # 911500-04.

The Arlington County Commission on Aging advises the County Board and Agency on Aging on a variety of aging issues. For information on how to get involved, go to [www.arlingtonva.us](http://www.arlingtonva.us) and search Commission on Aging.

Check out the new amenities at Lubber Run Park, 300 N. Park Dr., beyond the new center. New playground, lighted courts for pickleball and volleyball and a new boardwalk to access the rest of the park. For more information, <https://parks.arlingtonva.us>.

The non-profit Alliance for Arlington Senior Programs (AASP) has announced they have been recognized by Amazon as being eligible to receive donations from AmazonSmile. When placing an order, go to [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) and designate the Alliance. Amazon will donate 0.5% of the purchase price to AASP. An easy way to support AASP for free.

## BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 3

ditional ground covers such as English ivy, liriopé, periwinkle, and creeping euonymus, while providing much-needed food and habitat for our local pollinators and birds. Extension Master Gardener Elaine Mills, a creative force behind the resource Tried and True Native Plant Selections for the Mid-Atlantic, will share her experience growing most of these plants in her own garden and at the Glencarlyn Library Community Garden, a Virginia Cooperative Extension Demonstration Garden in Arlington, Virginia, where she serves as a co-coordinator. Free. RSVP at <https://mgnv.org/events/> to receive link to participate.

### SATURDAY/SEPT. 26

Scholarship Workshop. Do you know students and/or parents of students who are wondering about paying for college? If so, you and/or they can learn the strategies of Marianne Ragins, \$400,000 scholarship winner and author of Winning Scholarships for College and College Survival & Success Skills 101, by attending a virtual presenta-

tion of The Scholarship Workshop on Saturday, Sept. 26, 2020 with Mount Zion Baptist Church. See [www.scholarship-workshop.com/mzbc](http://www.scholarship-workshop.com/mzbc) for more information and to register.

### SATURDAY/SEPT. 26

Native Seed Collection. 1-3 p.m. At Lubber Run Park, 200 N. Columbus Street, Arlington. Join EcoAction Arlington in collecting acorns and other tree seeds in coordination with the Potomac Conservancy's Growing Native Program. Collected seeds are sent to the Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) nurseries to be grown into tree seedlings which are then used in native forest restoration projects.

### SATURDAY/SEPT. 26

International Coastal Cleanup. 9-1:30 p.m. At Barcroft Park, 4200 S. Four Mile Run Drive, Arlington. They will identify trees and their seeds as they collect, bag, and label them for transport to the VDOF. Good for families and anyone interested in trees and replenishing our forests. Email [volunteer@ecoactionarlington.org](mailto:volunteer@ecoactionarlington.org)



The Alzheimer's Association Walk to End Alzheimer's® is happening on every sidewalk, track, and trail across this country. All of us are raising funds for one goal: A world without Alzheimer's and all other dementia. Because this disease isn't waiting, and neither are you.



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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**

**SENIOR LIVING**

**Getting in Shape at 60, 70 and 80**

Starting where you are and staying consistent among suggestions from healthy and fit seniors.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL  
 THE CONNECTION

**W**hether starting a fitness program after the age of 70 or restarting one after raising children and midlife career building, local seniors share inspiring stories of how achieving and maintaining fitness, health and wellness allows them to lead fulfilling, happy and active lives.

After retiring at age 70 from a career in investment, Jim Owen said his life became sedentary. Aching knees and excruciating back pain determined his daily schedule and he tipped the scale at 205 pounds. His life, as he describes it, was on a steady decline.

"I was a certified couch potato and my back pain was robbing me of my energy," said Owen, now 79, who lived in Alexandria before retiring to San Diego. "I said, 'I have to do something or I'll go down hill.'"

After seeking help from a doctor who specialized in sports medicine, Owen began physical therapy, his pain subsided and he was able to begin an exercise program. "I wasn't trying to be Mr. America," said Owen, who turns 80 next month. "My goal was to get rid of my aches and pains."

Though he found it daunting, but also necessary, he began making his way to the gym. Now his workouts include lunges and squats, push-ups, core work and cardio.

"When I started out at age 70, I couldn't do one push up, now I can do 50," said Owen. "The key is to start from where you are and with what you got. So much of it is mental and getting yourself to just try it."

Now he's committed to inspiring other seniors to achieve physical fitness, and he's written a book called "Just Move! A New Approach to Fitness after 50." He also produced a documentary called, "The Art of Aging Well," which he'll release to public television stations next month.

"I want to devote the rest of my life, whether it's five or ten years, to inspiring people to take care of themselves when they're older," he said. "There are some people who say 'My best days are behind me.' I think my best days are still ahead of me."

As a physician, 64-year-old Bob Posner, M.D., has always prioritized his health, but life events including an internal medicine residency program, service in the United States Army, and raising a family often took precedence over fitness.

"Exercise was limited, meals were often fast food ... and I realized that weight started to pack on," he said. "I exited the Navy in 1988 weighing over 190 pounds."

When Posner, of Fairfax, returned to life as a civilian and began his medical practice, his mindset began to change. "I vowed that I would try to set an example for my patients," he said. "How much credibility can an overweight or obese physician have in telling patients to lose weight to become healthier?"

Posner founded Potomac Internal Medicine Associates and uses a program called SeroFit to help patients who want to get in shape. "It is never too late to embark on efforts to get into a more healthy shape," said Posner. "Looking younger, having more energy, lessening risks of severe medical diseases, alleviating pain and fitting into your beautiful clothes are the benefits of being in shape."

Working out with his wife, who is also dedicated to fitness, makes exercising more pleasurable, says Posner, and being fit has helped him maintain fulfilling



PHOTO COURTESY OF JIM OWEN

Jim Owen started working out for the first time at age 70. Now at 79 he says he's in the best shape of this life.

**"When I started out at age 70, I couldn't do one push up, now I can do 50."**

— Jim Owen, 79



PHOTO COURTESY OF BOB POSNER

Bob Posner, MD is motivated to keep in shape so that he can hike and play tennis with his children. Posner, 63, lives in Fairfax and has offices in Burke.

relationships with his children.

"My son is a tennis player, my daughter is a hiking person and sharing time with them is best when I am doing activities with them that they enjoy," he said. "If I was sedentary and expected them to hang out with me I would probably see less of them than if I am able to keep up with them in their activities."

78 year-old Bonnie Frankel is driven by her goal of maintaining her physical, mental and emotional fitness for as long as possible. "My lifestyle is built around exercise and my sport, which is running," she said. "I cross-train with water workouts, monkey bars, yoga and other ground stretches."

The impact that exercise has on her life is her constant motivator. "Exercise helps me to eat healthier and drink better and more fluids," said Frankel. "It changes my mood from blue to sunny, as those wonderful endorphins start to kick in. I want to be able to live an independent long healthy life."

# First You Say You Do, Then You Say You Don't

FROM PAGE 4

aging voluntary compliance.

Nick Freshman representing Arlington restaurants and a long-time Arlington businessman and active community member, pointed out that restaurants are "tired, worried and stressed" and can't afford to lose any more business. Freshman said he is invested in safety and has hired more workers to help monitor the long lines, but this ordinance isn't working.

Another restaurant owner suggested closing off the streets to allow more space for customers to spread out. Another observed a group of unhappy patrons are holding the businesses accountable for the ordinance, and it's affecting revenues.

The Arlington Chamber of Commerce raised concerns in a letter to the Board. "Arlington County could have been proactively constructive in developing this ordinance but it was not. It is still unclear how and where Arlington County plans to enforce the ordinance. As such we cannot assess the ordinance's likely impact on businesses."

Residents raised the concern that the language was vague and could unintentionally target a mother with her three children waiting at a bus stop.

The targeted areas were in Clarendon where an influx of patrons has been seen between 10 p.m.-2 a.m. It is unclear whether this is due to the diversion of customers to Arlington from Maryland and D.C. where bars close at Midnight or 10 p.m. respectively or whether more people now feel comfortable going out at night, or both. Other areas mentioned in the Board meeting were the 23rd Street restaurant corridor, Columbia Pike and Shirlington.

Acting Arlington County Police Chief Charles "Andy" Penn indicated the data from the last weekend in August showed that the size of the lines outside the establishments found 550 potential violations, and 480 people were warned. On Saturday the line got as long as 90 people at a time which makes it physically impossible with the space constraints to enforce physical distancing.

Almost universal opposition to the ordinance came with support for actions to con-

front the pandemic. But that concern was often overshadowed by their more immediate need to protect a struggling business, to feel safe walking around in their neighborhood or to avoid police confrontation.

Arlington County Board Chair Libby Garvey reminded the Board about the importance of wearing facemasks. An Arlington public health officer indicated that the most important things to prevent the spread of COVID is to stay at home or maintain 6 feet of social distancing.

Penn described some of the challenges the ACPD faces with enforcement in today's political climate that adds layers of complexity around routine police actions. He said he had seen different struggles when police encountered customers who indicated that in their opinion enforcing a health ordinance wasn't really a police matter. And he added with the challenges in law enforcement in the United States, this adds additional anxiety. Penn said frankly officers were not engaging. The goal of the original ordinance in July was to educate people and gain voluntary compliance with citations as a backup. As a result implementation was delayed while County Public Health officials, the ACPD and the fire Marshall provided information to the public.

Penn indicated in response to a question from Board Member Katie Cristol that it was difficult to know whether the ordinance had promoted a partnership between the police and restaurants since they already had a successful working relationship in place through the Arlington Restaurant Initiative. County Manager Mark Schwartz said Arlington's first priority continues to be education and voluntary compliance with emphasis on indoor compliance in restaurants. But Penn acknowledged there are still some problems.

Garvey, the one dissenting vote on reversing the ordinance, asked the question of whether the ordinance was working. "My sense is people are paying more attention but I'm worried if we step back that people will say O.K.; now we don't have to worry. We're doing an experiment. I hope if this problem continues, my colleagues will reconsider."

## BUSINESS DIRECTORY

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## "Canceritis"



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

There are two generic types of cancer: the cancer that you have, and the cancer that has you. And the yin and yang is what defines 'canceritis.' The internal struggle between being defined by your disease verses living a life in spite of your disease. The former is easy; you're a victim of an insidious, in some cases, incurable disease that causes myriad problems, shall we say; physically, emotionally and psychologically. The latter is hard. Sometimes, overcoming the former in order to live the latter is much easier said than done. The reason being, primarily, that cancer isn't a killer because symptoms, treatment and side effects are always manageable and overall mental/emotional demands are easily compartmentalized. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the truth is that if the disease, treatment and side effects and/or anxiety/stress about your diagnosis doesn't get you, the total disruption of your life and/or routine will.

Not that you lose free will, but you do lose a fair amount of control. While cancer is in the house, cancer rules the roost. Somehow, even though the disease and all is all about you, you must find a way (navigate) a path forward that enables you to set aside the physical and emotional demands of a terminator-type disease. With many patients, the cancer won't stop until it kills. And for the hundreds of thousands of cancer patients who die every year, wishing, hoping, praying and being compliant to their doctor's instructions, the outcome though hardly guaranteed is not particularly encouraging either. The disease takes its toll and despite all the efforts of the king's men to put Humpty back together again, the ravages of cancer often prevent the patient from ever being whole again.

Sometimes, the damage is already done as it usually is for non-small lung cancer patients who often are asymptomatic until they're not (as I found out, first hand). Then you're told you have a "terminal" form of stage IV lung cancer which is described as incurable which meant for me, being told I had 13 months to two years to live. The question I asked myself back in Feb., 2009: What the hell happened to stages I, II and III? This is what cancer can do: travel at warp speed and not leave too many clues. Finding some kind of work-around/plan "B" to deal with the loss of control and helplessness might keep the patient from descending into an emotional rabbit hole from which there's a scant chance of recovery. At this juncture, the cancer is in charge.

This is the challenge: overcoming a disease which in many instances, is beyond your doctor's/modern medicine's ability to control. Just imagine living with the knowledge that every day you wake up, is a day borrowed against future days when you might not wake up or if you do, might feel so poorly that the point of trying to feel better becomes more of a fool's errand than it does a practical alternative. Cancer is not literally a four-letter word but it's most definitely in its own category: a six-letter word which makes all four-letter words meek by comparison.

Somehow, you must restructure your understanding of your cancerous condition and philosophize: everyday you wake up and feel something isn't a day that's lost. It's a day that's found. Making the most of these emotional crumbs is not a guarantee of anything. Rather, it's an attempt to prevent things from getting worse. And as any cancer patient will tell you: it can always be worse. And until it's the worst, try to embrace whatever remains as the best.

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

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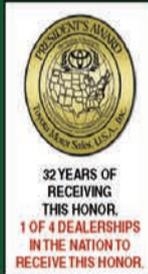
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