

Students and Parents Navigate Virtual Learning FCPS Virtual and In-Person Learning During COVID 2020.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
GAZETTE PACKET

Dec. 1 marked the day that Fairfax County Public Schools students in Group 5, those in Early Head Start, PreK, Kindergarten, and some who receive special education services were to at last transition out of distance learning and walk through school doors to receive two days a week of in-person learning.

But the spike in COVID-19 cases meant Virginia Department of Health data did not support the return to in-person learning. On Nov. 24, FCPS Superintendent Scott Brabrand said in his Thanksgiving Message to families, "As we see COVID-19 infection rates continue to rise in our community, we must continue to pause in-person return for students in Group 5 ... Health conditions do not support bringing Group 5 students back to school in person on Dec. 1 as we had hoped."

Dec. 1 is 264 days since the release of Brabrand's March 12 Coronavirus Update Message that closed all FCPS schools on Friday, March 13, the last day many students attended in-person. It was then that Brabrand wrote, "This remains a very fast-moving narrative." Those words proved to be one constant in the yet to be fulfilled FCPS Return to School plan.

As FCPS began the last month of 2020, with majority of students learning virtually, analyses of the First Quarter grades showed increased number of Ds and Fs for Students with Disabilities and English learner students.

Key Ups and Downs from March 13- Dec. 1, 2020

The beginning of distance learning did not go smoothly.

When FCPS closed on March 13, it was the tenth-largest school division in the country with a diverse prekindergarten-through-12 student population of 188,000 — 29 percent economically disadvantaged, 14.7 percent with disabilities, and 27 percent English learners.

Technical issues with Blackboard the first week of distance learning beginning April 14 prompted Brabrand to cancel online learning for the rest of the week.

A second issue surfaced, failures to implement and monitor security protocol by FCPS. Sloan Presidio, the school system's assistant superintendent for instructional services, described it as a leadership failure. "We failed to properly train the staff," Presidio said.

School year 2019-2020 ended with no fourth-quarter grades assigned to elementary students to help compensate for equity issues of access to technology. Secondary students received a "no mark" for



Caitlyn Berman, 5, on her first day of distance kindergarten at Mosby Woods Elementary, Fairfax. No ride on the school bus and no in-person FCPS teacher. All learning remains virtual as of Dec. 1.

the fourth quarter, with submitted assignments allowed to influence the overall final year grade positively.

School Board chair Karen Corbett Sanders said, "This Board is committed to working with the Superintendent, staff members, and our families to get through this period."

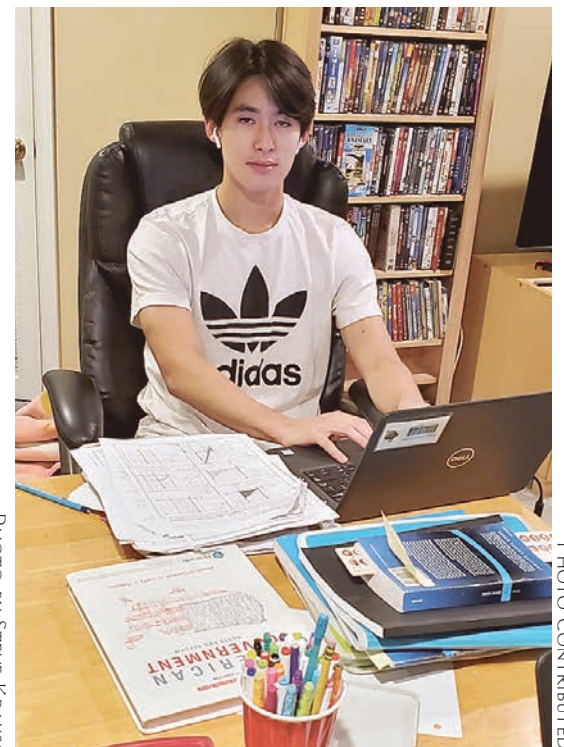
In the summer, FCPS reshaped distance learning with Schoology, a management system to start fall 2020 as a pilot at 17 schools.

SCHOOL YEAR 2020-2021 began with virtual learning for everyone. The fall student population declined by 8,859 students, with the total dipping to 180,151 compared

to data recorded the year before at the same time, according to Assistant Superintendent of Facilities and Transportation Services Jeff Platenberg.

Oct. 5, 19, and 26 saw FCPS begin its Return to School in-person instruction for some small groups of students whose families opted

SEE SCHOOL YEAR, PAGE 4



Sebastian Krauss, 17, a senior at Westfield High School in Chantilly, shares a makeshift basement classroom in the family home with his twin sister, Jordan.

'Fairfax Peak' Indoor Ski Slope Jumps Another Mogul Public comments show mixed opinions for the slope planned at Lorton Landfill.

MIKE SALMON
GAZETTE PACKET

On one side, local skiers look at the possibility of the "Fairfax Peak," indoor ski slope in Lorton, as an opportunity. Fairfax County resident Aidan Lewie thinks the indoor slope could be a healthy escape from the evils of drugs and alcohol that sometimes impact teenagers. "Snowboarding is my passion and all the struggles of life are suddenly lifted when I'm on snow," he wrote.

Resident Anthony Haynes was supportive of this initiative

as well, citing energy, enthusiasm, and employment that it could bring to the area. "As a very active snowboarder and long time employee in Lorton, I'm very excited about the possibility of having an indoor ski resort in Fairfax County. Lorton is already an outdoor recreation destination. Fairfax Peak would act as an anchor facility to help improve ski and snowboard skills," he wrote.

"This would be a great addition to the Laurel Hill subdivision," said Robert Arnakis. "I believe it would be a terrific opportunity for exercise and fits well within the adaptive reuse of the greater Lorton

Penitentiary area," Arnakis added.

"Very supportive of this initiative. Will bring energy, enthusiasm, and employment. Hope this proceeds quickly," wrote Salim K Saifee.

Not all the comments were supportive.

THE OTHER SIDE cited environmental issues, transportation and racial inequalities that the Fairfax Peak could generate.

"My comments focus mainly on the potential loss of a large area of outdoor green space, particularly natural grassland habitat

SEE 'FAIRFAX PEAK', PAGE 3



Another artist rendering of "Fairfax Peak."

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Artifacts Tell the Nation's Story at the New Army Museum

Museum showcases display cases, first hand accounts, newsreel footage and more.

BY MIKE SALMON
GAZETTE PACKET

In 1861, when the Civil War was just starting, Capt. Josiah Sawell was attacked by a pro-secession mob while passing through Baltimore with the 6th Massachusetts Volunteer infantry.

Pro-secession mobs in the northern city of Baltimore? It's just one of the historical nuggets to uncover in a tour of the new National Museum of the United States Army, which opened on Veterans Day.

The pistol Sawell used to fight off the mob is on display along with other guns, tanks, uniforms and recorded first-hand accounts of fighting in the many wars that this country fought since being formed nearly 250 years ago.

The U.S. Army started as a militia, fighting the British for independence and continuing to defend the nation.

This museum is on Fort Belvoir land off the Fairfax County Parkway, right across from the Davidson Airfield.

Once inside the front doors, visitors find themselves in a chronological corridor, with the Revolutionary War off to the left, the Civil War, World War I and II, and Korea and Vietnam in the cold war area. Then there is a section called the "changing world," off to

the right.

That's where Andy Sampson and his brother Lucas Ilaug were looking at the current uniforms and materials.

Ilaug was a medic in the First Armored Division at Fort Bliss, Texas. "What they're showing here is pretty accurate," he said, pointing to a medic kit behind glass in the Iraq War area.

In each exhibit there are guns, ammunition, bombs, cannons, mortars and vehicles pertaining to the time. There are dioramas as well, such as the intricately painted soldiers in the snow dragging captured British cannons across the Hudson River.

Fast forward 175 years, and authentically outfitted soldiers are climbing over the side of transport ships in Normandy. Audio tells the story.

In Vietnam, for example, Mary Powers describes a harrowing story of flying into a combat zone at night to pick up wounded soldiers from a jungle landing zone. "I could see tracer rounds from the firefight around me," she said.

In another glass case were the striped pajamas that Staff Sgt. Jon R. Cavaiani wore as a prisoner of war in Vietnam, 1971-1973.

One thing you won't see at the museum is the 1960s anti-war movement that was associated with the Vietnam War.



PHOTO BY MIKE SALMON/THE CONNECTION

Andy Sampson and his brother Lucas Ilaug look on at the Desert Storm exhibit. There is a Taliban motorcycle in this exhibit.

In the Iraq War section, the newsreel of the twin towers of the World Trade Center collapsing on Sept. 11, 2001 in New York City provides the backdrop to a Desert Storm diorama.

On the second floor, there's an exhibit called the "Art of Soldering," full of art produced on the front lines.

On the third floor is the Medal of Honor garden and experience. In July 1862, the

Medal of Honor was created by Congress for soldiers that "distinguished themselves by gallantry in action," reads the description.

Outside in the lobby, there's a gift shop full of Army sweatshirts, coffee cups and more.

The security at the front door is similar to the airport security. Attendees must have reservations through the website. See <https://www.thenmusa.org/> for free timed tickets and more information.

'Fairfax Peak' Indoor Ski Slope Jumps Another Mogul

FROM PAGE 1

that shelters declining species of birds and pollinators," wrote George C. Ledec, Ph.D., a local biodiversity conservation specialist who called it "economically risky as well as environmentally problematic."

The Fairfax County chapter of Citizens' Climate Lobby looked at the Community-wide Energy and Climate Action Plan (CECAP) already in place. "We believe a public-private partnership of this scale must not conflict with the ambitious goals being set forth in the CECAP process," wrote Jim Gearing of New Alexandria. This large indoor facility would need to be cooled to the point of allowing snow to be generated. This would take a lot of cooling and energy. "It completely disregards living in the environment we have and it sends a completely wrong message about global warming," he wrote, noting that the expense of skiing adds into the equation. "Fairfax County already has enough social equity issues without creating a facility that half or more of the county residents would not be able to afford," Gearing said.

Mary Paden, Chair of the South County Task Force, brought up some questions she felt were not answered: Are there economic benefits to low income families from this? What about the increased jobs for people who rely on public transportation?

"We hope you can provide answers to some of these concerns—especially those regarding energy use, environment, equity, and costs to the county—before the proj-



This is one plan for the facility.

ect advances much further. It is crucial that community members be able to understand and discuss this information," Paden wrote.

The Audubon Society of Northern Virginia was against the project as well, citing the county's environmental statements in the past. "ASNV recommends that the Board of Supervisors reject the proposed interim agreement with Alpine X LLC for the Fairfax Peak ski resort complex," they wrote.

Catherine Ledec cited the racial inequalities for park land, and affiliated her comment with an NPR radio show from Aug 5 called "Parks in Nonwhite Areas are Half

Estimated Expenses

Skiing or snowboarding is not a cheap sport. Here's a look at what a skier pays on average for a day on the slopes - these prices may be what a Fairfax Peak skier may have to come up with*:

Skis: \$179.99 new or rental \$53/per day
Snowboard: \$197.95 new or rental \$53/per day

Helmet rental: \$42.95 new or \$14/per day
Lessons: \$139/two-hour lesson
Lift Ticket: \$91/per day
Lodging: \$130 a night, per person

Total ski trip: \$427 for a day on the slopes
* Based on rates at Seven Springs Ski Resort in Pennsylvania

the Size of Ones in Majority-White Areas, Study Says." Weighing all the comments, the Board of Supervisors entered into an "interim agreement" on Nov. 18 with Alpine-X and the project is moving forward.

Supervisor Dan Storck (D-Mount Vernon) is strongly supportive of moving forward with the process to determine if this location is viable for an indoor ski facility and the additional amenities proposed by Alpine-X. "Once due diligence is complete and County staff and Alpine-X come to a mutual understanding to build on the site, I look forward to working with the community through a series of public engagements on the proposed development. I understand its potential environment, recreation, transportation and community impacts. I also look forward to continuing to realize the vision and transformation of Lorton, consistent with our

on-going visioning and planning efforts," Storck said.

Ski Local

The whole thing is being planned to be built on the mountain of trash at the Lorton Landfill, right off I-95 in the southern part of Fairfax County. The ski facility plans may include multiple slopes for skiing and snowboarding with a variety of ramps, jumps, rails, boxes and other features, capable for use in national snowboarding and freestyle skiing competitions.

At the top of the 20-degree slope there are plans for restaurants, a ski shop and sky bar. A 100-plus room luxury hotel is planned at the base of the indoor snow facility.

It could be connected to Occoquan Regional Park by a gravity-powered, mountain coaster that would slide from the summit to the park. A gondola could ferry riders from Occoquan Regional Park and the facility's base to the summit where Fairfax Peak sky terrace could be built, one plan states.

Fairfax Peak would be built as a public-private partnership, so the county would lease its land to Alpine-X, and the company would build, own and operate its facility. Details of the agreement are pending.

The project is moving forward but there are no concrete dates on the county website under the heading "2021 and Beyond," so it is not clear when the first mogul might be jumped at Fairfax Peak. The immediate future includes more public meetings, traffic analysis, application review and studies.

School Year Like No Other

FROM PAGE 1

in and facing the greatest challenges with distance learning — high school career prep, preschool autism, early childhood, English learner newcomers, special needs and adapted curriculum.

The school division passed the first quarter (Q1) milestone only to receive the 2020 FCPS Study of Teaching and Learning During the Covid 19 Pandemic, Analyses of Q1 Secondary Marks by the Office of Research and Strategic Improvement.

Learning-disabled students and English-as-a-second-language students fell significantly behind according to the new study, with the trend “especially concerning.”

According to the study, “Students who performed well previously primarily performed slightly better than expected during Q1 of this year. In contrast, students who were previously not performing well-performed considerably less well. A greater proportion of low-performing students received failing grades during Q1 than would have been expected based on patterns of marks in prior years...The amount of increase among racial/ethnic, gender, and other student groups was highest among Students with Disabilities (111 percent increase), and English learner (106 percent increase) students and lowest among Black (63 percent increase) and White students (67 percent increase). Nonetheless, all groups showed increases in the percentage of F marks received during Q1 of the current year compared to the prior year, indicating that more students were failing courses during the (primarily) virtual instruction period than had occurred when the instruction was delivered in-person.”

Moving toward Thanksgiving week, COVID-19 cases per 100,000 population in the community trended consistently upwards. On Sunday, Nov. 22, FCPS notified parents of students in Group 4 that their children would return to all virtual instruction because health metrics reached a threshold based on guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). “The number of cases per 100,000 must be equal to or less than 200 and the positivity rate must remain at, or equal to, 10 percent. When either one of these metrics exceeds the threshold for seven consecutive days, students will temporarily return to all virtual instruction.”

COVID-19 Pandemic Metrics for Core Indicators, Fairfax on Nov. 16, 2020 showed total cases per 100,000 first recorded greater

than 200 at 211.2. The indicator remained greater than 200 for seven consecutive days, to Nov. 22, with cases recorded at 264.3.

On Nov. 24, in his thanksgiving message, Brabrand said, “As we see COVID-19 infection rates continue to rise in our community, we must continue to pause in-person return for students in Group 5 (Early Head Start, PreK and Kindergarten). Health conditions do not support bringing Group 5 students back to school in person on Dec. 1 as we had hoped.”

Parent and Student Comments

Dave Krauss, parent of twins at Westfield High School:

“We went through the fourth quarter of last year, Sebastian’s and Jordan’s junior year, like everyone else, online. I think both of them were somewhat of the opinion that it was a bit of a waste... We all felt that Fairfax County was so unprepared to move to that model. (However) they were focused on their AP exams ... For those classes specifically, they were on the ball. They were studying with each other. That was one of the benefits of having twins... They both did very well on their AP tests ... Heading into the summer, we were asked in a survey by Fairfax County whether we wanted them to be in school or at home remotely. Now, both my wife and I did not feel that it was particularly dangerous to send them into school ... After the fourth quarter experience, we felt that a hybrid learning situation where they go into school would probably be for the best. Fairfax County obviously decided to go fully virtual, regardless of everyone else’s choice ... They (Sebastian and Jordan) had us a little worried. But I think the combination of them focusing on their AP classes for their AP exams, plus, the whole college thing that we’re now still in the middle of, they both really understood they needed to focus.

“In the basement, we set up a table. On each side of it, they have both their FCPS laptop and personal laptop, in case the FCPS one has issues, which has happened. Within a week, they were starting to complain to us that their backs were hurting. I suddenly realized; how could I not have realized they needed comfortable chairs. So, we went out to Office Depot, a little bit late, and luckily, we’re able to find a couple of decent chairs. Instead of spending money on school supplies this year, I wound up spending money on office chairs.

“[As for metrics used by FCPS to determine when to phase in



Ritisha Sen helps her sister, Riyana as they continue their education virtually in the FCPS system. They arrived in the United States from Singapore summer of 2020.

high school classes] my first reaction would be I agree with Fairfax County using those indicators. On the other hand, I kind of don’t care. And the reason why I say I don’t care is that we pretty much already made up our minds that they were not going to go back into school ... That decision had very little to do with our safety concerns but had everything to do with how we felt they were successful in this online environment. We didn’t want to disrupt that now...It turns out they’re able to do just fine online.”

Jordan Krauss, 17, senior at Westfield HS:

“One positive thing about the FCPS learning and teaching model that came from distance learning, is better organization. Teachers are more inclined to post all of the class work and homework assignments on Schoology because there are no paper copies. Being able to access the material we are taught online is really helpful for me to truly learn the material.”

Sebastian Krauss, 17, senior at Westfield HS:

“Because FCPS had outdated and hard to use technology, the 4th quarter of last year was a complete mess.

“The switch to virtual learning has forced FCPS to overhaul their online classroom through applications like Schoology and Blackboard Collaborate. In the past, online resources were confusing, and there were too many places to find your assignments - (Black-

board Learn, Google Classroom, AP Classroom).”

Shaurav Sen of Vienna: Daughter Riyana is in seventh grade at Thoreau Middle School in Vienna and Ritisha is in ninth grade at Oakton High School, both learning virtually. “The last we heard was Jan. 26, that they were looking at going back to a hybrid model ... But now, with the cases rising, I think even that is up in the air. Fairfax County is relooking at their plan, so we don’t know honestly ... “I’ve been setting my children’s expectations... Jan. 26 looks highly unlikely ... I doubt very much they will go back this year based on the news and information around us. But, you know, I’m keeping my fingers crossed that I’m wrong. I think I would send them back ... For me, more than anything else, it’s the social connections.

“We moved from Singapore and landed here on June 29. At that time, the expectation was that they would ... start school in late August as was originally planned ... My wife and I had originally opted for the hybrid as soon as it started, just because I wanted them to interact socially. I don’t know what damage this is doing long-term from a social standpoint ... It’s more important that they go to school, make one or two friends with whom they can at least connect, even if it’s through the phone or socially distant over the weekends. That’s something that’s been missing, and that’s what worries me the most frankly ... They are not

enjoying school as much as they used to. In Singapore, they would love to go to school. Not only because it gave them an opportunity to interact with the teachers and really enjoy the learning, but also their friends were there. Here, what is happening is they don’t have friends. ...

“The girls always say: ‘Wish our teachers would create more opportunities for us to connect with our classmates so we get to know each other better — learning is a lot more fun when we can do it sometimes together with our classmates and friends.’”

Amy Berman of Vienna, parent of Caitlyn, 5:

“We ended up making a choice in July for Caitlyn to be hybrid because we felt this was her first real school experience ... I had some nights that it was difficult falling asleep or staying asleep thinking about it. We made the choice feeling that Fairfax County was taking the right measures to provide a safe environment. We felt that at her age, especially as a single child, it was important that even with masks and all that, she be around other kids.

“Like everything else this year, you make a decision, and then... We were given an option ... If we wanted to come to the parking lot, we could meet the teacher in-person with masks and social distance. We did that. I went to ask the teacher another question, and the teacher looked at her phone and basically said, ‘Oh no. The decision is reversed.’

“I don’t know if it was more upsetting for me, the parent, or my daughter. I think it was just frustrating, and I understand the metrics ... I reminded Caitlyn of what we’ve just been saying since all this happened. We’re flexible. We’re flexible ... Things keep changing, and we must remain flexible.”

Caitlyn Berman, 5, of Vienna:

“My teacher has dark brown hair. She read my favorite book, Bubble Gum Brain...and gave us asynchronous work. There’s one that has two apps, one for one day and one for the other...I love Monster Math Squad.”

Joshua Dantine, 18, Chantilly High School:

Q - How was your first week back at school?

A - It was ok. Not what I was expecting, but I liked getting out of the house. Q - What were you expecting?

A - Chaos, honestly, but they had it together.

PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

BULLETIN BOARD

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

NOW THRU DEC. 15

Annual Membership Drive. The Port City Chapter of the National Charity League (NCL), a premier mother-daughter volunteer organization, invites women with daughters currently in 7th-12th grade, to join its chapter of 200-plus active mothers and daughters who reside in or attend school in Arlington, Alexandria, Springfield, Crystal City, or Washington, D.C. Visit the website: www.nationalcharityleague.org/chapter/portcity/

TUESDAY/DEC. 8

The Chamber ALX's 2020 State of Business: Annual Meeting, presented by Truist will be held Tuesday, December 8, from 9 - 10:30 a.m. via Zoom. Chamber Chairman, Dave Millard, will provide an end-of-year recap, which will highlight Chamber happenings over the past 12 months. In addition, they will feature a presentation on the state of the economy from Jeannette Chapman, Director of the Stephen S. Fuller Institute in the Schar School of Public Policy and Government at George Mason University. Register here: <https://alexandriavacoc.wiinc33.com/events/The-Chamber-ALXs-2020-State-of-Business-Annual-Meeting-presented-by-Truist-2730/register>

DRIVERS NEEDED

TO HELP SENIORS

Mount Vernon At Home is a nonprofit organization serving senior citizens in the Mount Vernon and Alexandria areas of Fairfax County. They are in critical need for volunteers to assist members with driving to medical appointments and grocery shopping. Mount Vernon At Home will supply you with necessary personal protective equipment (PPE), and can provide a donation receipt for your mileage. Volunteers can sign up for driving assignments through the online system which makes it easy to see and accept assignments. Give what time you can, there is no minimum or maximum number of hours. If you have some time to give to the community and can spare several hours a month, visit info@mountvernonathome.org, or call 703-303-4060.

WORKHOUSE ARTS CENTER AFTER-SCHOOL CAMPS

After-school visual arts camps at Workhouse Arts Center have begun. After-school camps are offered from 4:30-6:30 p.m. every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday in two week sessions. Camps are for students Grades 1-3 and 4-6, with a limit of 9 students per session. Session E - December 7 to December 18. Email JoshStout@workhousearts.org or call 703-584-2934.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

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 lynnieb517@verizon.net.

United Community (formerly UCM), 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, 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.

RSVP, a volunteer network for seniors seeking service opportunities in and around Fairfax County, Arlington County and the City of Alexandria, offers a wide array of opportunities for volunteers 55 and older. RSVP volunteers enjoy flexible schedules, free accident and liability insurance while serving, optional mileage and meal reimbursement and are invited to volunteer group projects and social gatherings. To sign up for an upcoming orientation, email Carly SEE BULLETIN, PAGE G



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Alex/Hybla Valley Farm \$619,900
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Are you tired of stairs and longing for 1 level living? A beautiful partially covered front porch that you can sit out & wave to your neighbors as they walk by? How about entertaining on a large deck that overlooks a large, fenced bkyd & watching your children/grandchildren congregate & play? We have that... plus 4BRs, 2BAs, beautiful refinished hwd floors & freshly painted interior. Throw in replacement double pane windows, 6 panel interior doors, a beautifully updated kitchen w/granite counters, SS appliances, that is open to the living & dining areas. Finally, an oversized 1 car garage w/a 12'x10' storage/workshop area on the end, & extensive parking available on a large driveway. Ideal location, less than 1 mile to Mt. Vernon Hospital & Sherwood Hall Library, 10 mins to Ft. Belvoir (S) & Old Town (N), 20 mins to Ntl Airport & 30 mins to D.C. & the Pentagon (N). Come take a look you won't be sorry.



Alex/Riverside Estates \$587,500
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Alex/Riverside Estates \$724,900
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Riverside Estates' largest split foyer model (Concord) w/2 car garage & lots of updates, i.e., roof 2001, HVAC 2012, baths 2010, furnace 2001, updated double pane windows 2019. Kitchen was opened to the dining & living rooms & is absolutely stunning: granite & quartz counters, large island w/seating capacity & beautiful hwd floors. Oversized MBR & MBA share a lovely gas FPL to add charm to the master suite. A large lower level offers a family rm which also has a gas FPL, a 4th BR & 3rd full bath. Plenty of storage behind the 2-car garage. Large lovely fenced bkyd, perfect for entertaining. 5-minute drive to Ft. Belvoir (S), 15 minutes to Alexandria, (N), 25 mins to National Airport (N) and 33 mins to the Pentagon (N).



For more information: www.RexReiley.com

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Proposed Cuts to WMATA Would Be Devastating

Leaders must step up.

BY STEWART SCHWARTZ
COALITION FOR SMARTER GROWTH

The reality of proposed cuts to our Metrorail and Metrobus service in the absence of a rescue package is now clear. It would be simply devastating – to our work-

ers, our economy, our transportation network.

Congress needs to step up and this includes every Republican. We are one nation, one economy, with a huge share of our economy dependent on our cities and metropolitan regions.

If the cuts were to take place they would gut a system the DC region built over four decades and upon which our essential workers and economy depend. It would

undermine decades of real estate investment, prompt flight of our next generation workforce, and have a disproportionate impact on the essential workers upon whom our food and health and services systems depend.

We shouldn't let our two Governors and local elected officials off the hook either. We cannot afford to continue wasteful road expansion and sprawl, massive toll roads that benefit few, and boondoggles

like the Maglev when we can't afford to maintain and operate what we've already built.

We must be shifting funding from road expansion to save the transit system that is the backbone of our region's economy.

Fix-it-first: maintain, rehabilitate, and operate our existing infrastructure first. Locate new development in walkable communities with both jobs and frequent transit.

The New Redistricting Process Begins

BY DELEGATE PAUL KRIZEK

With the approval of Amendment #1 by 66% of Virginia voters at the ballot box last month, the new redistricting process is now underway and the map-drawing is shifted to a 16-member bipartisan commission. While I did not support the passage of Amendment #1 due to concerns regarding partisanship and weak language regarding racial gerrymandering, among other reasons, I am hopeful that with strong leadership, this commission will help produce fairer electoral maps that will reduce gerrymandering and provide equal representation for all Virginians.

Last week, the five retired Circuit Court judges appointed to the commission met for their inaugural meeting to determine how they will go about accepting applications from citizen members to join the commission. The process to appoint these five judges was that one judge each was selected by the House Democratic leadership, House Republican leadership, Senate Democratic leadership, and Republican leadership, and then one chairman was chosen to serve by those four appointees. This week, Speaker Eileen Filler-Corn announced her appointment of Dele-

gate Delores McQuinn and Delegate Marcus Simon to serve on the commission as her two appointees. I have every confidence that they will serve with distinction, fairly, and honestly as new legislative boundaries are drawn. Eight total General Assembly legislators will serve on the commission. The other appointments must be made by Dec. 1, and at the time I write this column, six nominees from Republican House leadership and the Senate are still forthcoming.

The other half of the new Redistricting Commission will have eight citizen members. The appointments must reflect "the racial, ethnic, geographic, and gender diversity of the Commonwealth," according to the constitutional amendment we just passed. The application to join the commission is now live. If you are interested in applying to work on the commission as a citizen member, I have outlined below the requirements that must be met and the on-line application link. Citizen members are required to be Virginia residents for the past three years and must have voted in at least two of



the last three general elections. Applicants CANNOT be considered if:

They currently hold, have held, or have sought partisan elected office or political party position

Employed or has been employed by the General Assembly or

Congress

Employed or has been employed by any campaign for local, state, or federal office

Employed or has been employed by any political party or a member of state party central committee

Has been lobbyist or lobbyist principal in the last five years

In addition, the prohibition extends to a parent, spouse, child, sibling, or in-law of anyone who would be disqualified for the five reasons stated above

To learn more and apply as a citizen member, you can visit <https://redistricting.dls.virginia.gov/RedApplicationDownload.aspx>. The deadline to submit an application is Dec. 28, 2020.

Jan. 1 is the deadline for legislators to submit names to the judicial panel from the applications collected to consider as the citizen nominees. Each of the four delega-

tions — House Democrats, House Republicans, Senate Democrats, Senate Republicans — can nominate up to 16 nominees. By Jan. 15, the judicial panel must select their eight final citizen members.

Then, on Feb. 1, the newly-formed commission will hold its first full meeting where they select a chairman from among the citizen members. The 2020 Census data is expected to be provided to Virginia by April 1, 2021. Receiving this Census data on time will be crucial to using these new district boundary maps for the Aug. 24 primary and November 2021 general elections. The Department of Elections requires 99 days between the approval of maps and the start of early voting for a primary election to give localities an opportunity to reassign voters to their new voting districts, as well as to allow candidates time to qualify to run for election. So, next year, we will not have the normal June primary elections. Instead, when I run for reelection as Delegate of the newly drawn 44th district, it will be an August primary, followed by the November general election. The 45-day early voting period for the primary would begin on July 9th. All of this is of course contingent upon the Census data arriving in time.

BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 5

Hubicki at chubicki@volunteerfairfax.org or call RSVP at 703-403-5360. To learn more about RSVP, visit www.rsvpnova.org.

Line Dance Instructor needed for the Gum Springs Senior Program once a week on either Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. Volunteer Solutions, call 703-324-5406, TTY 711.

Volunteer Fairfax makes it easy for individuals and families, youth and seniors, corporate groups and civic clubs to volunteer. Fulfill hours, give back, or pay it forward through a variety service options. Visit www.volunteerfairfax.org or

call 703-246-3460.

STEM VOLUNTEERS. The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) needs scientists, engineers, mathematicians, and physicians to assist K-12 STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) teachers in the Northern Virginia Area, during the 2016-17 school year. In the 2015-16 school year, the numbers of STEM volunteers in Northern Virginia were: Fairfax County - 40, Arlington - 20, and Alexandria - one. Details of the collaboration are worked out between the

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PHOTO BY MARK MOGLE

There will be no Scottish Christmas Walk this year, 2020. But the Campagna Center needs your support more than ever. www.campagnacenter.org/get-involved.

True Impact of Alexandria's Scottish Christmas Walk Weekend

BY TAMMY L. MANN, PHD
PRESIDENT & CEO, THE CAMPAGNA CENTER

This year will mark the first time in 50 years that the sound of bagpipes won't be heard in the heart of old town Alexandria on the first Saturday in December. For the last 50 years, the Junior Friends of The Campagna Center have undertaken the awesome task of organizing and bringing forward a beloved community tradition – Scottish Christmas Walk Weekend (SCWW).

Established to help invigorate business activity in the city while also raising funds to support the programs of The Campagna Center, the parade and the events surrounding it generate more than \$250,000 in vital revenue to support Campagna Center programs like Building Better Futures, New Neighbors, and the Early Learning Center at St. James.

In August, The Campagna Center decided that all events tied to the weekend would be cancelled due to the public health risks brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. While the streets will be quiet, the staff at The Campagna Center will be busy doing what we have done for 75 years – serving the community.

For months now, The Campagna Center has been actively working to provide in person and virtual services to our families. These activities were incorporated into existing programs that focus heavily on pre-school education, access to child care for the school-age children of working parents, tutoring and mentoring for students across the education continuum, and English language classes for immigrants and refugees in our community.

For many Campagna families these services are essential. To qualify for free early care and education programs families generally fall within 100 to 200 percent of the Federal poverty level, which today is considered \$26,200 to \$54,200 for a family of four. We serve children in our Cam-

pagna Kids program on a sliding fee basis to help ensure the program is accessible to all families. Tutoring and mentoring services through Wright to Read and Building Better Futures target significant populations of children who qualify for free and reduced priced lunch. Many of the adults served in our New Neighbors programs are unemployed or underemployed. It has been vital for us to remain open and active during this unprecedented time of stress, anxiety, and worry for our families.

The Campagna Center has also expanded our network of services in 2020 to meet the needs of our community. In April, Campagna launched an emergency diaper bank that has so far received 3,583 applications from parents in need. In July, The Campagna Center was selected as one of seven non-profit organizations to participate in the ALX Grocery Gift Card program, allowing us to provide monthly gift cards to families who have lost income due to the pandemic and need support. We were also able to open in person learning opportunities at our Early Learning Center as well as at two Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) to provide relief for parents who needed to leave home for work and wanted access to our Campagna Kids programs. Our strong partnership with ACPS has been vital to our ability to meet needs in this area.

In September, we increased the number of children we are serving in person to 135 while continuing to serve an additional 523 through virtual learning experiences. We have found ways to provide the technology and internet services to our families with children under five and those we are tutoring in our Wright to Read program. Thanks to a partnership with Goodwin House, Inc., we were able to introduce COVID testing on a monthly basis for all staff working in person with children.

On December 5, what would have been the peak of Scottish Walk Weekend, Campagna Center staff will hold a drive-through

SEE TRUE IMPACT, PAGE 9



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- OPRAH MAGAZINE, 2020

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WELLBEING

Have Yourself a Sober Little Christmas

Batting addictions during the holidays.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
GAZETTE PACKET

With the holidays come an increase in imbibing. For battling addiction, the ubiquity of temptations can make attending social events, even those that are virtual or small in-person outdoor gatherings can be difficult, but not impossible, say local mental health practitioners.

“Staying sober is a daily, sometimes even hourly, choice,” said Carolyn Lorente, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Northern Virginia Community College and a private practitioner in Maryland. “During a pandemic, this may be especially difficult because of loneliness and social isolation. In order to protect ourselves from spreading the virus, so many people are experiencing being lonely, which is hard at any time, but especially during the holidays.”

Advanced planning when anticipating times when there might be triggers or temptations to drink is important.

“Build in activities, set up alternative things that are pleasurable,” said Linda McKenna Gulyen, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology, Marymount University. “Keep yourself busy with tasks or appointments to greet or meet people virtually, by phone or go out on a brisk walk. And tell a trusted loved one that you are planning, too.”

Have plans in place to help with those urges, says Lorente. “I also encourage my clients to make a list of tools that they will use to counteract the urges that I call choosing health and happiness, such as going for a 15 minute walk,” she said.

Give forethought to situations that might lead to temptation. “It is important to have a plan and work your plan,” said Lorente.

Even if conducted virtually, make sure to participate in regular meetings, advises Lorente. “Stay in touch with your recovery support person, whether it is a sober friend or a dedicated sponsor,” she said. “And to counteract the isolation that many of us are feeling, reach out to help another person,”

There are a variety of options for those looking for support. “For instance, call someone you know is alone,” said Lorente. “Meet up for a socially distanced coffee with a neighbor or friend where you each bring your own thermos and blanket.”



PHOTO BY MARILYN CAMPBELL

Alcohol can flow freely during the holidays. Develop a plan to maintain sobriety.

“Make a list on your phone of why ... you want to maintain your sobriety and check it whenever you start to get the urge.”

— Carolyn Lorente, Ph.D.

Practice benevolence, suggests Lorente. “Volunteer to help provide food to those that need it,” she said. “When we help others, we help ourselves.”

It is important to acknowledge and understand the reasons why sobriety might be challenging during this time of year, advises Jerome Short, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology at George Mason University. “It may be difficult for people to

stay sober during a pandemic holiday because many of us are experiencing anxiety, depression, or loneliness and want to feel better,” he said. “We also have expectations that we should enjoy the holidays and do fun social activities. Alcohol and other substances may help us feel better briefly and stop thinking about problems.”

When spending time with difficult family, or navigating gift giving and money shortages, alcohol or other substances might appear to provide temporary stress relief. “Those feelings are fleeting so engaging in or developing hobbies can help fill the void normally satisfied by substances,” said Short.

Maintain one’s physical health, continued Short. “Get adequate sleep, exercise, and nutrition to reduce urges to use substances.”

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NEWS

True Impact of Alexandria's Scottish Christmas Walk Weekend

FROM PAGE 7

gift pickup for our Campagna families offering them a small token of holiday cheer in the form of grocery gift cards, pajamas, books, a toy, and stocking stuffers. The students in our Wright to Read program will have access to similar supports through a distribution we are organizing for December 12.

While I can't think of a better way to celebrate the spirit of Campagna's mission, the revenues lost by canceling the SCWW festivities weigh heavily on my mind. This year has not been easy.

The cost of keeping children and staff safe is significant. In a year that has come with added and unexpected costs, Campagna will

need the support of our community – visit www.campagnacenter.org/get-involved to learn about the ways you can support our work.

Tammy L. Mann, PhD, is the President and CEO of The Campagna Center, not-for-profit organization in Alexandria, equipping children and families with a comprehensive set of tools they need to thrive and succeed. Since 1945, The Campagna Center has served the community by offering a range of programs that foster a dedication to learning among children, youth, and adults. More than 2,000 children and families take advantage of their services on a daily basis.

BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 6

teacher and the volunteer, and may involve giving demonstrations, assisting in lab experiments, lecturing on special topics, assisting with homework, etc. The hours are flexible, and volunteers attend a one-day training in September before being assigned to schools. To see how volunteers are assisting their teachers, view the video clips at www.seniorscientist.org. To volunteer, contact donaldrea@aol.com.

Fairfax County's Community Services Board is seeking volunteer office assistants. Volunteers are needed to assist CSB staff with greeting guests, making reminder phone calls, data entry, filing, shredding, stocking shelves, and other duties as needed. Hours are flexible, but would be during normal business hours. Visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/csb/viva/volunteers.htm for more.

Yoga Teachers are needed. Help improve a person's well-being by teaching yoga classes to adults who are staying in a residential facility. The day/time is flexible, but would be during the week. Prior yoga instruction is required. Visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/csb/viva/volunteers.htm for more.

The Northern Virginia Long Term Care Ombudsman Program needs volunteer advocates for residents in nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Contact Lisa Callahan at 703-324-5861, TTY 711 or email Lisa.Callahan@fairfaxcounty.gov.

Respite Care volunteers give family caregivers of a frail older adult a break so they can go shopping, attend a doctor's appointment or just have coffee with a friend. Volunteers visit and oversee the safety of the older adult for a few hours each month. Support and training are provided. Contact Kristin Martin at 703-324-7577, TTY 711, or Kristin.Martin@fairfaxcounty.gov.

Fairfax County needs volunteers to drive older adults to medical appointments and wellness programs. For these and other volunteer

opportunities, call 703-324-5406, TTY 711 or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/olderadults and click on Volunteer Solutions.

The Gum Springs Senior Program in Alexandria is looking for a Line Dance Instructor. For these and other volunteer opportunities, call 703-324-5406, TTY 711 or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/olderadults and click on Volunteer Solutions.

The Kingstowne Center for Active Adults in Alexandria needs Instructors for the following classes: Country-Western Line Dance, Hula Hoop and African Style Dance. For these and other volunteer opportunities, call 703-324-5406, TTY 711 or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/olderadults and click on Volunteer Solutions.

The Hollin Hall Senior Center in Alexandria needs instructors for the following classes: Basic Woodworking, Italian and Ballroom Dance. For these and other volunteer opportunities, call 703-324-5406, TTY 711 or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/olderadults and click on Volunteer Solutions.

The Mount Vernon Adult Day Health Care Center in Alexandria needs front desk volunteers and patient Card Players. For these and other volunteer opportunities, call 703-324-5406, TTY 711 or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/olderadults and click on Volunteer Solutions.

The Advisory Board of the Joe and Fredona Gartlan Center for mental health is looking for volunteers. The board meets the second Tuesday of the month from 9-11 a.m. at Gartlan Center 8119 Holland Road.

Mount Vernon At Home is a community Village, providing support, services, and community to seniors in the area. Volunteers are needed for a variety of services, with transportation to medical appointments are greatest need.

They can also use help with in-home handyman work and handling IT problems. If you are interested in volunteering, contact us at info@mountvernonathome.org or call 703-303-4060.

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ENTERTAINMENT

LTA Presents 'A Christmas Carol'

During Covid-19, the show will be seen through live acting, animation, and virtual reality.

BY STEVE HIBBARD
THE GAZETTE

Continuing with its holiday tradition (with Covid-19 restrictions), the Little Theatre of Alexandria (LTA) is presenting Charles Dickens' classic, "A Christmas Carol," from Dec. 4-19, 2020 through live acting, animation, and virtual reality.

According to co-producer Ira Forstater: "I was eager to contribute to LTA's goal of continuing live theatre during this challenging time in a way that ensures the health and safety of our patrons, actors, production crew, staff, and volunteers. The technical challenge we faced was how to bring this timeless play, an annual LTA tradition, to the stage within the restrictions required in response to the Covid-19 pandemic."

Charlotte Corneliusen is the other producer.

Mike Baker Jr., ACC stage and film sequence director (as well as the Scrooge character), said he was able to get some talented actors to participate virtually who had concerns about Covid-19 and a few who were willing to do the 12 live performances. "Since this had never been done before on a live stage it was a brain teaser. I took it a step at a time — a month of Zoom rehearsals and one in-person rehearsal and we were off and running," he said.

He said a huge green screen was brought in on Nov. 14 along with some lighting folks from "House of Cards" and "The Walking Dead."

"Eight hours later Dickens' characters came to life, including some who have never been seen before — Ali Baba, Robinson Crusoe, Tiny Tim in the church, the Minister in the Graveyard and so on," he said.

Peter Fannon, who plays the roles of Charles Dickens and The Gentleman, added: "It's a real Christmas treat to be cast as Charles Dickens, who is also the narrator of this telling of his enduring story. Dickens was, from a very early age, a strong social reformer, and used his immensely popular novels, short-stories and newspaper articles to illuminate the political and social changes he felt needed to stop Britain from 'failing.' He uses his story's characters — including my other role as The Gentleman seeking alms — to humanize these needs. So, we're trying to portray Dickens, the unmatched observer of human nature, as the passionate reformer, too."

Dayna Wade, who plays the



Peter Fannon plays the role of Charles Dickens.



Mike Davis plays the role of Scrooge and is the Director.



Sidney Davis plays the role of Jacob Marley.

Ghost of Christmas Present, Caroline, and the waif, added: "Christmas Present has come to Scrooge as a teacher of sorts. She is his second spirit visitor and is a true representation of the holiday spirit and all it has to offer. Her presence allows Scrooge an opportunity to see what his actions have manifested for the people around him, and she is warning him. My director called her the jolly prosecutor — I love that! I also think about her as a very bold Mother Earth. She is intentional about her teachings and is confident in who she is and all that she represents."

Sidney Davis, who plays the role of Jacob Marley, added: "One of the main challenges was rehearsing in our new format on Zoom. As a former dancer and pretty physical actor, I found it extremely difficult when reading the scenes with the company, not to get on my feet and really 'feel' the character in my bones. I imagine once I get into the rehearsal room or onstage it will be a shock to my body (especially since Marley has to carry heavy iron chains onstage). But, realizing that this might be the future of theater, and the way that most if not all companies will be rehearsing, it felt good to just be doing theater again."

Larry Grey, who plays the role of Fezziwig, added: "Bringing this character to life has always been fun and somewhat challenging. He is loud, colorful, over the top. I am grateful to the costumers and makeup crew who help in that respect. He dresses flamboyantly and fun. It adds to his jovial character."

He added: "Charles Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol' is the story of the redemption of the human soul When it was first published it sold so fast and became so popular the stores could not keep it on the shelves. It was credited for re-inventing and reviving Old Christmas traditions in England, which



Anna Maria Shockey plays the role of the spirit of Christmas Past.



Dayna Wade plays the role of the spirit of Christmas Present.

had become dark and oppressive in the extremely harsh poverty of the industrial age."

Patrick Mahoney, who plays the roles of Fred Scrooge, Ghost of Christmas Future, and Robinson Crusoe, added: "This hybrid stage-film technique is a new and exciting medium, and one that offers the new generation of actors a unique challenge. When no one is

giving you your cue lines, you are your own supporting actor. This can be a blessing or a curse. But as an up-and-coming actor, I revel in any opportunity for a challenge. Overcoming these roadblocks is how we grow as performers."

Tickets to "A Christmas Carol" are \$20 per person. There will be 12 performances of this play, and audiences will be limited to

a maximum of 46 people. Seating will be arranged in sets of 2 or 3 seats, with the ticket price based on the number of patrons (1, 2 or 3) attending. Only members of the same household may sit together in adjoining seats. The theatre plans to stream it for those who can't come see it in person. For details, visit www.thelittletheatre.com.

CALENDAR

NOW THRU JAN. 3

Ice & Lights: The Winter Village at Cameron Run. At Cameron Run Regional Park, 4001 Eisenhower Ave., Alexandria. Opens nightly 5 to 10 p.m. Ice and Lights: The Winter Village at Cameron Run will return this year, featuring an ice rink, more than a dozen holiday light displays perfect for Instagramming,

retail area, food, music and more. The Ice and Lights Village is a short drive from Old Town. Masks are required in all areas of Ice & Lights except when eating or drinking in the concession areas. Admission: \$8.16 for general admission to Village; \$20.68 for admission with skating; starting January 9, 2021, \$12.19 for skating. Visit novaparks.com/events/ice-lights

NOW THRU DEC. 6

Alexandria's Holiday Market at Carlyle. Virtual now thru December 4, 2020; in-person December 5-6, 2020, from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. At John Carlyle Square Park, 300 John Carlyle St., Alexandria. Alexandria's Holiday Market is an annual signature event that trans-

SEE CALENDAR, PAGE 11

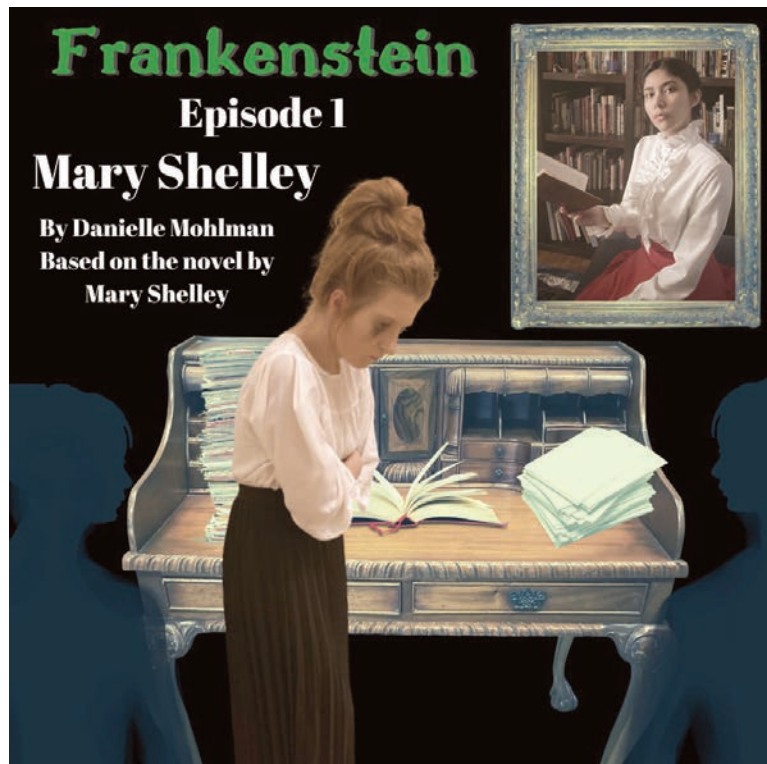
Mount Vernon High Brings Frankenstein to Audio Theater

BY CAROLINE JAREB
CENTREVILLE HIGH SCHOOL, THE CAPPIES

Wind blew and whistled over a soft piano until cracks of thunder and a baby's cries punctured the surroundings. The audience felt as though they were surrounded by the walls of an old, dark mansion in a different time, but they opened their eyes and saw their modern home and laptop. Mount Vernon High School presented Danielle Mohlman's "Frankenstein, Episode 1," a radio play adaptation of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. They not only retold the classic tale of Victor Frankenstein and his creature but drew parallels with Mary Shelley's tragic life.

Mount Vernon faced the challenge of an online performance and overcame it by making the strong choice of using audio only. The actors and techs had the audience feeling like they were following the characters as they ran from one place to the next and created emotion and depth without the physicality that can feel necessary to put on a performance.

Bridget Snyder's emotional vocal delivery brought Mary Shelley's pain from her infant daughter's death to life and put an image in the audience's mind of her hunched over, paralyzed from her despair. Snyder conveyed a character different than herself and showed the audience Shelley's back-



Mount Vernon High School has produced Frankenstein as a series of audio recordings. More information can be found at: <https://www.mvhstheatrearts.com/frankenstein>.

story through only her emotion, along with Katia Ramirez as Mary Wollstonecraft. The audience could tell they were mother and daughter from the chemistry and blend of their voices and could sense the passion for feminism and strength in Ramirez's words. Snyder was also able to change her voice to

create a completely different character as The Creature, along with Quinn Montgomery who played both Percy Shelley and Victor Frankenstein. The characters were clear and easy to differentiate, which allowed the audience to see how Percy, as the man, created the public's perception of Mary just as

Victor created The Creature.

The environment was most clearly shown through the outstanding soundscape created by Sebastian Fisher, Caden Mulvey and Katia Ramirez. At the beginning of the production, a minute and a half of only sound effects was crafted to place the audience into the world of Mary Shelley and Frankenstein. A chilling lullaby produced a creepy tone while background, forgotten sounds like footsteps and the clinks of a glass jar allowed the imagination to form a clear scene. Even the blending of voices and inclusion of breathing heightened the emotion and made the audience feel as though they were sitting with the characters. The beautifully themed and cohesive posters that included actors in perfect period clothes and tragic makeup prepared audience members for the environment they would be placed in and gave them a visual to facilitate their imaginations.

Theatre is currently limited by COVID-19, but Mount Vernon was able to exceed the expectations of the audience by creating such a strong environment with every single aspect of the show. And there is more than just "Frankenstein, Episode 1." They left the story on a cliffhanger and will keep audiences entertained for a total of 7 episodes. Instead of bingeing a TV show or podcast, allow Mount Vernon to bring you back to the theatre and immerse you in the world of Mary Shelley with just a computer and a pair of headphones.

CALENDAR

FROM PAGE 10

forms John Carlyle Square into a lively open-air festival, perfect for children young and old. This year, shop online and preorder the perfect present prior to the in-person market, which will feature physically distant vendors and musical entertainment including Gretchen and the Sidecar Six. The holiday market and festivities are sponsored by The Carlyle Vitality Initiative. Visit thecarlylecommunity.com

NOW THRU DEC. 31

Christmas at Mount Vernon. From 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. At George Washington's Mount Vernon, 3200 Mount Vernon Memorial Hwy., Mount Vernon. Visit Mount Vernon this winter to participate in holiday activities and meet special guest Aladdin the camel. Learn about camels and George Washington's interest in exotic animals during Camel Talks, offered Friday through Sunday beginning on November 27. Specialty tours give guests a deeper look into the holidays at Mount Vernon. During the tour "Mrs. Washington's Mount Vernon," hear Martha Washington discuss the day-to-day planning needed for a busy holiday season. The "Holiday Dinner for the Washingtons" tour shares how food was grown, preserved and served during the holidays. Mount Vernon is open 365 days a year, including on Christmas Day. Admission: \$23 for adults; \$12 for youth (ages 6-11); free for children age 5 and below; extra cost for some activities. Visit mountvernon.org/christmas

NOW THRU DEC. 6

Alexandria Shop Small Week. Experience Alexandria's biggest shopping week of the year, the first-ever Alexandria Shop Small Week, Now thru December 6, 2020. Alexandria Shop Small Week is an opportunity to show your support for the D.C. region's largest destination for independent boutiques with 10 days and two weekends of deals, promotions and Instagram giveaways. Visit alexandriava.com/Holidays/Shop-Small-Week

NOW THRU THE HOLIDAYS

Art on the Avenue. The 25th Annual Art on the Avenue festival will move to a virtual format for 2020, running through the holidays. Over 150 artists will be featured, offering handmade items in a wide range of mediums, including wheel-thrown vases and bowls, tiles, sculpture, tote bags and purses, drawings and pastels, knitted and crocheted hats and gloves, woven scarves and shawls, gourmet food, fused and blown glass, jewelry, paintings, photography, and much more. Traditionally held each fall on Mount Vernon Avenue, Art on the Avenue is a multicultural arts festival that strives to reflect the vibrant mix of the Del Ray community through the artists and their work, and draws an estimated 75,000 visitors each year. Visit www.artontheavenue.org.

NOW THRU DEC. 9

Forty+ Project II. 3-4 p.m. Via Zoom. Forty+ celebrates the collective creativity of people past the age of 40. Fall Project 2 is directed by choreographer Kelsey Rohr through

weekly sessions on Zoom (with outdoor or in-person meetings as conditions allow). The project is open to people of all physical abilities. Cost is \$100. Visit the website: <https://www.janefranklin.com/adult-dance/forty-plus>

DEC. 1-31

Small Works Show. 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. At Gallery Underground, 2100 Crystal Drive, Arlington. "Small Works, Great Joy!" an all-member, all-media show of compelling small-scale works by our artists, priced affordably for holiday shopping. Visit the website: <https://galleryunderground.org/>

STARTING DEC. 1

ArtWalk. At various locations along King Street (Union to Diagonal), and select side streets, Alexandria. Old Town Business Association is partnering with The Art League of Alexandria to offer a holiday themed ArtWalk in Old Town along King Street (Union to Diagonal) and select side streets. Each block will feature a work of art adorning a lamppost.

Maps may be found at oldtownbusiness.org beginning December 1, 2020. Keep an eye out for holiday trees located on both upper and lower King Streets. Visit oldtownbusiness.org

WEDNESDAY/DEC. 2

Chopin Concert. 6:40 p.m. At George Washington's Mount Vernon. A unique concert combining space technologies with the timeless beauty of Frédéric Chopin's music. Free online broadcast of the concert at <http://www.chopin.space/>

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Drawing the Line

Newly created redistricting commission zooms toward new maps.

BY MICHAEL LEE POPE
GAZETTE PACKET

The history of partisan gerrymandering in Virginia dates back to the 1780s, when Gov. Patrick Henry tried to draw the congressional districts in a way specifically designed to deny his archenemy James Madison a seat in the House of Representatives. The plan failed, and Madison was elected anyway. Ever since then, the history of partisan gerrymandering has been a story of elected officials lusting after power for themselves and seeking revenge on others. The last redistricting in 2011 was so bad that courts threw out two of the three maps.

"There's a House district in the Richmond area that became known as the toilet bowl district because of the way it's strung around, and there's a congressional district that goes from North Carolina to Loudoun County," said Sen. George Barker (D-39), who led redistricting effort for Senate Democrats in 2011. "I think with the new map, you'll be able to see that the districts are better and more compact."

Now that voters have approved a constitutional amendment creating a new redistricting commission, the pieces have already started falling into place for how the commission will work and who will serve on it. Leaders in the General Assembly have already named the judges for the selection committee that will name the citizen members, including retired Arlington Circuit Court Judge Joanne Alper. And party leaders in the General Assembly have selected the "Super Eight" lawmakers who will serve on the panel. All that's left now is for members of the general public to submit their application to the Virginia Division of Legislative Services. "The more people that apply, the more diverse set of people we'll have to consider," said Barker, who is one of the eight lawmakers who will serve on the commission. "You don't have anything to lose by applying. Please apply if you're at all interested."

TO BE SELECTED, citizen applicants must

first grab the attention of one of the four party leaders in the General Assembly. That could mean a letter of recommendation from an elected official who is close to the Speaker of the House. Or it could mean a call to the Senate Republican Leader. But that's only the first part of the process. The 64 resumes that are selected by the party leaders in the General Assembly will go to a five-judge panel, who will get to make the final selection of the eight citizen members.

"They're basically seating a jury," said Brian Cannon, executive director of Fair Maps VA. "The judges are probably looking for people who are going to make really good commissioners because the partisan sorting has already happened at the first phase."

Applicants don't need to be demographers or lawyers to become part of the commission, although that wouldn't hurt. Elected officials or anyone who has ever tried to be an elected official in a partisan election will be excluded from being a citizen member now that lawmakers have approved implementing legislation.

The deadline for applications is Dec. 28, and the commission will start meeting in February to prepare for the Census data to be available in April.

"If you are a former School Board member or a former city administrator, you're more likely to receive a favorable look from the judges," said Cannon. "You don't have to be an expert to be on the commission, but if you have some sort of expertise like you're a demographer or a mathematician you're likely to receive a favorable look from the judges."

THE EFFORT TO DITCH the old way of redistricting was decades in the making, stretching back to the civil rights movement. Back in 1965, a federal court ruled that Virginia's congressional districts were unconsti-



Sen. George Barker (D-39)

Five-Judge Panel

- ❖ Retired Petersburg Circuit Court Judge Pamela Baskervill, chairwoman
- ❖ Retired Arlington Circuit Court Judge Joanne Alper, chosen by House Democrats
- ❖ Retired Bristol Circuit Court Judge Larry Kirksey, chosen by House Republicans
- ❖ Retired Newport News Judge David Pugh, chosen by Senate Democrats
- ❖ Retired Hampton Circuit Court Judge Williams Andrews, chosen by Senate Republicans

Super Eight Lawmakers

- ❖ Sen. George Barker (D-39)
- ❖ Sen. Mamie Locke (D-2)
- ❖ Sen. Steve Newman (R-23)
- ❖ Sen. Ryan McDougale (R-4)
- ❖ Del. Marcus Simon (D-53)
- ❖ Del. Delores McQuinn (D-70)
- ❖ Del. Margaret Ransone (R-99)
- ❖ Del. Les Adams (R-16)

tutional because they violated the principle of "one man, one vote." The map for the House of Delegates districts in the election of 1981 was so bad a judge ordered a new election in 1982, promptly followed by yet another election in 1983. One of the more notorious examples of partisan gerrymandering in Virginia happened after the 2010 Census, when Republicans drew maps that a federal court later determined packed Black voters into a handful of districts to dilute their influence throughout the state.

"Be careful in how you describe what you're seeking," wrote former Alexandria Republican Chairman Chis Marston in a 2010 email that later became evidence in a United States Supreme Court case. "We need to keep out any hint of unfairness (except the fundamental unfairness of the Voting Rights Act) or partisanship." As the 2020 Census approached last year, lawmakers saw a rare opportunity for compromise. Republicans were justifiably worried they were about to lose control, and they were willing to set up a process to take some of the partisanship out of the process. Democrats were eager to finally score some kind of reform

of a process they had long criticized while they were out of power. When the two sides became deadlocked, the process moved to a closed-door conference committee of three senators and four House members.

"At the time, it seemed like the best opportunity we had at getting rid of gerrymandering," said Del. Paul Krizek (D-44), who was a member of the conference committee.

THE COMMISSION that voters approved last month was nobody's ideal model for what a redistricting commission should look like. Instead of an independent commission of retired judges, the panel is instead a bipartisan commission of elected officials and citizen members who have been selected by elected officials and retired judges. Supporters say the two-step process of having party leaders identify a pool of potential candidates that are then selected by retired judges offers a series of checks and balances that will work out in the end.

"Having the judges and going through the process will put a certain degree of separation," said David Ramadan, a former Republican member of the House of Delegates who now at the Schar School of Policy and Government at George Mason University. "It's less likely to have influence on them by individuals or by certain citizen groups that may want to push for one side or another."

The deadline for the five-judge panel to select citizen members is Jan. 15. The commission is expected to start meeting and select a chairman sometime in February. If all goes well, the Census data will be available in March or April. But because of delays caused by the pandemic, the Census numbers might not be available in time to accommodate an August primary for the House of Delegates. That could mean a series of elections in the future that will keep political consultants fully employed for years to come.

"There's some speculation that the current House members may run in their current districts in 2021 and then have to run in the new redistricted districts in 2022," said Del. Mark Cole (R-88).

Lyles-Crouch Student Andras Is Out of This World

For all those who hold a fascination with outer space, the chance to ask a question to an astronaut on the International Space Station is beyond their wildest dreams.

Not for Lyles-Crouch Traditional Academy second grader Andras Jacobson, who is one of just a handful of children from across the United States about to get the chance to quiz their heroes.

On Dec. 3, during a NASA live streaming event, a question he submitted as part of a nationwide competition is expected to be answered by astronaut Victor Glover broadcasting from the International Space Station, 240 miles above earth.

According to his mother, Judit Csonka, her son's question relates to the muscular

system in space. Last week, the astronauts were conducting a human research study observing their muscular system in space.

Andras said he is thinking about becoming an astronaut but "is not sure yet."

"I am very interested in space and specifically if there is life anywhere else in space."

When he got the news his question had been selected he said he felt, "excited and very happy. I could not believe that I was chosen from thousands of people."

"Here on Earth I know how our muscles act, but in space it may act differently. I am also interested in the human body."

You can tune in to NASA's programming at 12:30 p.m. beginning with a pre-show so students can learn more about Glover and his collaboration with the Smithsonian before the livestream from space.

The entire show will be broadcast on the STEM in 30 and Air and Space Facebook page and the livestream from space can also be viewed on the NASA website.

Proud Lyles-Crouch Principal Dr. Patricia Zissios said, "As educators, we use platitudes with children to 'reach for the stars' and 'the sky's the limit,' never knowing what impact those phrases may actually have on our students. Well, at Lyles-Crouch Traditional Academy, second grader, Andras, took his natural inquisitiveness about the impact of weightlessness on the muscle strength of a human body to the real experts: NASA astronauts in space."

"Andras exemplifies critical thinking and scientific inquiry through the use of primary sources at it's best. I am so proud of our own LCTA Lion."



Andras Jacobson

Time to Send Art for Children's Gazette

Like everything else, the Children's Gazette will be different in 2020. With many schools virtual or with limited in-person classes, we know submissions will be different this year.

On our end, we will be unable to print every piece of art from classes this year, but we don't want to miss this beloved edition entirely.

During the last weeks of each year, this newspaper devotes its pages to the creativity of local students and children. The results are always remarkable. It is a keepsake edition for many families. Even readers without children of that age spend time admiring and chuckling over the issue. The annual Children's Connection (including Children's Gazette, Children's Almanac and Children's Centre View) is a long-time tradition.

We welcome contributions from public and private schools, art classes, individuals and homeschoolers. We publish artwork, poetry, essays, creative writing, opinion pieces, short stories, photography, photos of sculpture or gardens or other creative efforts.

For classes in 2020, please send a curated collection of no more than 5-10 pieces of art. Please realize that we will not be able to print every item submitted.

We ask that all submissions be digital so they can be sent through email or delivered on flash drive. Writing should be submitted in text format. Artwork should be photographed or scanned and provided in jpeg format.

Some suggestions, but different ideas are welcome: Drawings or paintings or photographs of your fami-

ly, friends, pets or some favorite activity. These should be photographed or scanned and submitted in jpeg format. Photos of sculpture or larger art projects are also welcome.

Short answers to some of the following questions: If you could give your parents, family or friends any gift that didn't cost money what would that gift be? What are you most looking forward to in the upcoming year? What makes a good friend? What is the best gift you've ever given? Ever received?

What are your thoughts on the pandemic and how it affected you and your family and friends?

Were you involved in November's elections? What did you think?

To be published, we must have the full first and last name of the student artist/writer.

Identify each piece of writing or art, including the student's full name, age, grade and town of residence, plus the name of the school, name of teacher and town of school location. Home schoolers' contributions are welcomed.

Please send all submissions by Friday, Dec. 11, 2020.

You can see last year's editions by visiting www.connectionnewspapers.com/PDFs/ and scroll down to Children's Edition.

Email submissions for the Children's Gazette to with-Childrens-Gazette@connectionnewspapers.com

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A Bone To Pick

By KENNETH B. LOURIE



Not that I'm the most-stressed about it, but I am at least stressed about a bone scan I'm having this week. The reason being that thyroid cancer that's metastasized - which mine has, sometimes moves to the bones. And since I have some knee-hip discomfort, particularly when I get up from a seated position, my oncologist ordered this two-step diagnostic process: an injection of something followed a few hours later by the actual scan to assess the damage. Not that I want to look for trouble (since it has already found me) but it's important - though scary, to tell your oncologist about any new symptoms, especially, if this new symptom has persisted for more than a few weeks. Rather than be an idiot and not mention the problem, I mentioned it during our last phone call on Thursday the week before Thanksgiving and tomorrow, Monday, 10 days after the new fact, the bone scan will occur. I imagine I'll receive the results by the end of the week. Waiting for results all the time is another negative aspect of this disease. Very little happens while you wait, if you know what I mean?

I wouldn't say exactly that common sense has prevailed here. It really doesn't take a genius to call a doctor when you're experiencing some new and unusual pain. In fact, the first lesson of oncology 101 is to contact your oncologist if any new symptom presents. It might actually be serious. Moreover, you're never to presume anything. You are to let the doctor know and let him be the judge. Keep the self-diagnosing and self-medicating to a minimum, if at all. You don't know best. In fact, you hardly know at all.

Part of the occasional apprehension I've had in not sharing any new symptoms with my oncologist is fear. If I tell him about a new symptom, it might actually indicate a problem/complication with my disease/treatment. The illogic is: if I don't tell him, my overall medical situation can't get worse - which is obviously stupid, and not true. But since I'll never receive medical confirmation that my health situation has taken a turn, I can continue to delude myself. But my thought process - as a previously diagnosed "terminal" non small cell lung cancer patient stage IV, was just that. What I don't tell him won't hurt me. 'Hurt me' meaning leading to a premature death (I know, any death is premature). I realize even before writing this that it doesn't make any sense. As I have said on many occasions, I'll blame the cancer.

And why I'll blame the cancer is because more than the damage it does to your body, it is the damage (effect really) it has on your brain. In a subconscious kind of way, your brain is totally rewired. After receiving such a life-changing/potentially life-ending diagnosis, you begin to think differently about life. Your obligations change. Your priorities change. Your responsibilities change. Your perspective changes. As such, your answers to questions and preferences no longer seem to be coming from the same place as they were before your diagnosis. It's not so much physically as much as it is emotionally, psychologically, spiritually. You're almost an entirely new person. At a minimum, you definitely become a variation of the previous you. You might look the same, but you don't exactly act - or sound the same.

All your decisions become controlled by your disease, not literally, but made through the prism of your being a cancer patient. It's not that, if you're lucky, you need someone to prepare your meals/assist with your activities of daily living, but you do lose yourself in the disease with all the appointments, scans and treatments. And the worst part of it, none of it guarantees anything other than more appointments, scans and treatment. The bone scan I'm having is a perfect example. And unless I embrace the process, the stress and anxiety is likely to do as much damage as the cancer. Fortunately, I'm up to the challenge. Nevertheless, it's worrisome.

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

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News



PHOTO COURTESY OF FCPD

If an officer is on a bicycle, it makes it easier to approach some of the residents, particularly children.

Police Patrol on Bikes To Enhance Community Relations Fairfax County has the Neighborhood Patrol Units in every district.

By MIKE SALMON
GAZETTE PACKET

The boots on the ground for the Fairfax County Police Department include the numerous bicycle squads cruising throughout the county, keeping communities safe while interacting with the public on a daily basis. These bicycle squads, called Neighborhood Patrol Units "remove the barrier between the officers and the public," said Sgt. Scott Shafer, a police spokesperson who started his career as part of the bike team based out of the Franconia District Station. "They enjoy that outreach," he said of the bike officers.

There are about 60-70 bicycle officers in the various districts around the county, divided into units of up to eight riders and one captain. It would seem the weather would have some impact, but it's a year-round duty that most of the first-year officers participate in while they climb the ladder through the ranks.

"They certainly are equipped to be out in all weather," Shafer said.

There are certain events throughout the year that the neighborhood patrol units usually work, such as local parades or the National Night Out in the late summer. Those opportunities were limited this year due to the pandemic. The bike patrol teams often receive special assignments when concerns are raised by community members or at the direction of the commanders at each district station. For example, the Neighborhood Patrol Units were part of the arrest at Springfield Town Center in January 2019 when a suspect was videoing in the dressing room. A NPU was involved in another arrest when a fugitive escaped at Mount Vernon Hospital last winter, and they were involved in another residential burglary in 2018. Due to the nature of this type of patrol, they were

able to be present in a neighborhood where robberies were reported, and didn't attract as much attention as a squad car may have.

Reston has a large number of bike paths going through the community and this provides an ideal NPU environment, so the Reston bike squad puts in a lot of miles, while other districts are a little less rideable. Mount Vernon, for instance: the NPU riders do occasionally go on the Mount Vernon bike trail, but that is predominantly patrolled by the National Park Service.

"All the bike patrols across the county are pretty active," said Shafer.

There are some rules for the bike officers to follow, both qualifying to be a rider and rules of the road, laid out in Fairfax County Police Department general order #530.4, dated July 1, 2012. "It shall be the policy of the Fairfax County Police Department to implement the use of bicycles by officers whenever such methods will result in an improved level of service to the community," the order states. Bicycle officers must go through a training course and complete a "ride-along," with another officer before official duty starts. At least two bike officers must work together on a patrol, and they need to wear a helmet and ballistic vest.

The bicycles they use are mountain bikes made by Trek, Cannondale and Volcanic.

At Volcanic, "police mountain bike" is one of their special models.

In 2005, a police officer in Seattle complained that the patrol bike was breaking down, and that's how Volcanic started creating a rugged bike that many police departments across the country use, including Fairfax County.

"Volcanic APB (Approach Patrol Bicycles) are designed and manufactured specifically for the bicycle patrol industry to the standards required to withstand the rigors of daily patrol," their website states.

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