

Great Falls' 30th Annual Christmas Tree Lighting

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Santa and Mrs. Claus turn around to face their elves after lighting the tree at the 30th Annual Christmas Tree Lighting held this year on the Great Falls Village Centre Field on Sunday, Dec. 6.

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NEWS

Great Falls' 30th Annual Christmas Tree Lighting

Santa's visit sparks the spirit of the season.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

No way could Santa disappoint the children in Great Falls and miss the Annual Christmas Tree Lighting held this year on the Great Falls Village Centre Field on Sunday, Dec. 6. Surely Santa knew with Covid-19 and related public health issues, the children had already missed so many events in 2020. Santa said he always loved coming to Great Falls from the North Pole and anyway, "all nice the children are there. No naughty kids," he said.

Erin Lobato is Director of the Great Falls Citizens Foundation. The non-profit organization presented the Celebration of Lights and its annual tree lighting with a history that goes back to 1990. According to Lobato, Jackie Moore, who passed away in 1995, came up with the idea of erecting a tree on the Village Green. Holding tradition and the spirit of the season tucked close to their hearts, organizers at Celebrate Great Falls developed a plan to produce the event and keep everyone safe within the protocols for outdoor gatherings issued by Gov. Northam due to the State of Emergency.

Debbie Nagy, Vice President of the Great Falls Foundation said, "All of us are wearing masks. Volunteers are strategically placed along the planned drive-by route and no guests are allowed outside their vehicles." Organizers trimmed the scope of the event but not the joy of the holiday season.

With only a few minutes to spare as the clock ticked toward 5 p.m., Santa and Mrs. Claus hurried over to the 38-foot tall Norway spruce by SAB Lawn & Landscaping Inc., founded by owner Stephen A. Borcharding of McLean. The ceremonial countdown began. Ten, nine, eight, seven...until the magnificent tree, dressed in its 5000 lights and topped by a star, lit up against the backdrop of the dusk sky.

The children didn't seem to miss the additions from previous years. No pony rides; no petting zoo. They were at the Village Centre to see the man dressed in a red suit and talk with him. Santa took his time and answered the children's questions called out through car windows. "I like chocolate chip cookies," Santa said many times. Seated beside Mrs. Claus in the bed of a pickup truck, Santa posed perfectly for families to take photos of him and the Missus. Sight-lined directly behind them towered the majestic tree lit for the season. Masked elves accepted the children's hand-delivered letters, which Santa said he would read later.

After the drive-by, Sofia Georgopoulos, 5, of Great Falls, said, "Driving through was a little bit different...but I liked it... I wrote him a letter and it said... 'I love you, Santa. We will leave you cookies and carrots for your reindeer.'" Brother Ari, 2, said simply, "I like Santa." Mom, Rachael wished every-



The annual Great Falls Christmas tree lighting is a 30-year holiday tradition.



Santa and Mrs. Claus turn around to face their elves after lighting the tree.



A mother looks back to be sure her children are ready to talk a moment with Santa.



Cars line up for the drive-by Celebration of Lights featuring Santa and Mrs. Claus.

one a Merry Christmas. She added, "We are so thankful for all the volunteers who made this happen. It was so special."

"A part of my mom lives on in this annual tradition that was a dream come true. See-

ing the excitement in the children's faces and joy this celebration brings to the community is what it's all about," said Debbie Moore Chason, Jackie Moore's daughter.

Lobato thanked the many sponsors for

the event, including AOG Wealth Management, Costa Family & Cosmetic Dentistry, 1ROOF, and The Old Brogue. Visit www.celebrategreatfalls.org to see the full list of sponsors.

Redistricting Underway

BY KENNETH R. "KEN" PLUM
STATE DELEGATE (D-36)



The Constitution requires that after the federal census every ten years there is to be a reapportionment of legislative districts based on population growth and shifts reflecting "one-man, one-vote." Virginia voters made history this year by approving a constitutional amendment establishing a Redistricting Commission. With Virginia having elections in odd-numbered years including in 2021 elections for governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general and members of the House of Delegates, Virginia is on a fast track to get the Commission underway.

In the special session that ended in October, the General Assembly passed enabling legislation to establish the Commission by Nov. 15. Already the eight legislators who will be on the Commission have been named as well as the retired judges who will participate. In all instances of appointing members, consideration shall be given "to the racial, ethnic, geographic, and gender diversity of the Commonwealth." The

partisan leadership in the House and Senate who made the appointments were prohibited from appointing themselves.

Applications are being accepted through Dec. 28 from citizens who would like to serve on the Commission. Persons who have been involved in partisan political activity or who are relatives of members in office or those involved in partisan political activity are not eligible to serve on the Commission. For details on who is eligible for membership and details on applying, go to redistricting.dls.virginia.gov/.

The enabling language for the Commission includes extensive requirements for public participation in the redistricting process. "All meetings and hearings held by the Commission shall be adequately advertised and planned to ensure the public is able to attend and participate fully. Meetings and hearings shall be advertised in multiple languages as practicable and appropriate." At least three public hearings are to be held. The legislation also requires that "All data used by the Commission in the drawing of districts shall be available to the public on

its website. Such data, including census data, precinct maps, election results, and shapefiles, shall be posted within three days of receipt by the Commission."

The Commission is required to submit to the General Assembly plans for districts for the Senate and the House of Delegates of the General Assembly no later than 45 days following the receipt of census data and for Congressional Districts by 60 days. If the Commission is unable to agree on districts, the responsibility for drawing of district lines goes to the state Supreme Court. The law requires that the Court shall appoint two special masters to assist the Court in the establishment of districts. The two special masters shall work together to develop any plan to be submitted to the Court for its consideration. Special masters have been used by the courts to resolve district conflicts in the past including related to Virginia past redistricting.

The timing of the process is limited between the availability of census data and primary elections that could result in a delay in primary elections and reduced time before the general election. Virginia voters have spoken, and a complex process is underway to ensure that voters pick their representatives rather than legislators picking their voters.

495 NEXT Project: A 'Game Changer in the Region

To the Editor:

Having lived in McLean for more than 36 years and represented McLean and Great Falls in the House of Delegates, I have experienced our traffic congestion as it has grown worse each year. Travel along the northern section of I-495 near my neighborhood along the Georgetown Pike historic byway has become challenging. Once the covid health crisis is behind us, the prospect of more congestion will be ahead of us as normal commuting patterns resume.

The proposed 495 NEXT Project, which will extend the 495 Express Lanes north to the George Washington Memorial Parkway, can solve many of these the Dulles Toll Road and George Washington Memorial Parkway, this project will provide a reliable travel choice that

will reduce travel time significantly. Safety will be improved by reducing the number of accidents on I-495 and by reducing the cut through traffic on local roads – a very important factor for neighborhoods like mine. This project will allow transit and carpoolers to bypass congestion with a faster toll-free trip, a point I made consistently as a state legislator when the original HOT lanes were being constructed. That last point is even more compelling today. As Tysons - and the region – continue to grow, the Express Lanes will move more people in fewer vehicles.

Perhaps more importantly, the 495 NEXT Project will allow Virginia to be prepared for the Capital Beltway Accord Project that will include rebuilding the American Legion Bridge

and extending the 495 Express Lanes across the Potomac River into Maryland. This project will address one of the most congested corridors in the country and certainly will be a "game changer" for our region.

I encourage the Commonwealth to move this project forward as soon as possible. In addition to the benefits discussed above the 495 NEXT Project will create thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in economic activity at a time in which our region greatly needs this investment. As a former state legislator, a transportation policy activist, and a longtime resident of McLean, I strongly support this project.

Margaret G. Vanderhuy
McLean

What Does It Cost to Buy a Dog?

Virginia observes Puppy Mill Awareness Month.

BY SUSAN LAUME
THE CONNECTION

Second article in series.

With prices normally not displayed in puppy stores or on-line, it's often difficult for potential buyers to learn the purchase price of a dog and to compare prices across offerings before sale processing. Nor is cost information at breeder or dealer level transparent or readily shared by the pet trade industry.

Puppy stores charge what the market will

bear. You won't find prices on dog cages in the store or the store's web page because prices are quoted. Buyers should beware. There are often "specials" available — at a final price still well above what responsible small breeders are charging; even double the charge at a small breeder. Puppy stores include in their prices: factory farm wholesale price, "middle-man" charges for collecting and transporting the dog from out of state, attorney and lobbying fees, and store overhead. (Virginia's laws discourage commercial breeding operations, so all dogs are shipping in from out of state.) Without this overhead, small breeders are able to spend

more out-of-pocket on health testing and care.

No Higher Quality Behind Higher Puppy Store Pricing

If a pet store dog costs \$5,000 - 10,000, it must be a really good one, right? Wrong!

Quotes for trendy breeds, like French Bulldogs for example, can be as high as \$10,000 in the pet stores with their high mark-ups. The dog will be the same quality — even the same dog— when the French Bulldog

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The Buck Stops Here in Great Falls

Managed archery on private property for deer control.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Landowners with any parcel size in Great Falls have the option to use archery hunting for deer management on their private property, directly addressing the cause of deer damage—too many deer. Katherine Edwards, Ph.D., is a Certified Wildlife Biologist® Wildlife Management Specialist with Fairfax County Police Department. She said that the deer population within Fairfax County is still considered to be high and Fairfax County is identified as an area for deer herd reduction in the state-wide Deer Management Plan. “However, deer do not obey property lines and the majority of land within Fairfax County is private land. In order to more comprehensively address concerns related to deer and public safety, environmental damage, and residential property conflicts, a broader approach that includes deer population control and mitigation measures on both public and private lands is necessary. Generally speaking, archery hunting provides a safe, economical and effective method to reduce the local deer population in suburban areas and allows residents the ability to address conflicts associated with deer on their properties.”

According to the “Fairfax County 2019 Annual Report on the Environment,” “The population of deer that a healthy eastern forest ecosystem can support without damage to the native plant community and other animal species that these plants support is estimated to be between 10 and 25 deer per square mile... Deer density varies among parks with many sites in Fairfax County currently estimated at a minimum of 40 - 100 deer per square mile.”

ON NOV. 16, the Great Falls Citizens Association Environment and Parks Committee hosted “A Presentation on The Comprehensive, Long-term Management of Overabundant Deer in our Community” by Gerald (Jerry) Peters, Director of Green Fire. It is a 501(c) (3) non-profit corporation that among other things, offers landowners experienced and qualified archers to assist with managing deer on their private property. “Everyone understands that we are losing natural landscapes to development... We build a house in the woods with a drain field and a driveway, we essentially take a cookie cutter out of the woods. That creates an edge habitat, which is ok if you’re deer, not so good say if you’re a deep woods specialty, say a Wood Thrush.”

During his presentation, Peters discussed his non-profit organization’s mission to restore wildlife habitats. According to Peters, the second biggest threat to wildlife habi-



Gerald (Jerry) Peters, presenter at the Nov. 16 presentation to the Great Falls Citizens Association Environment and Parks Committee - deer management on private property by Green Fire, a non-profit organization.

tats was the overabundant deer population attributed to the loss of predators. “Every natural ecosystem needs predators,” he said. Peters said Green Fire harvests the deer on private land with the consent of the landowner.

Peters added, “In no case can the venison be sold - that is illegal by state law.” Hunting allows the resource (the venison), to be used for food by hunters and property owners or donated to Hunters for the Hungry “who distributes it to needy folks, in which case H4H pays for the processing.”

Environmental stewardship is key. Peters said, “Landowners have a responsibility for their land in a public welfare sense... The slogan of Green Fire is healthy forest, healthy wildlife and healthy people... Our vision is to have landowners educated and motivated to provide habitat stewardship on their own properties.” Peters’ view of stewardship compared comparably to that written in the “Annual Report on the Environment 2019 Fairfax County, Virginia Environmental Quality Advisory Council.” The stated Environmental Vision of the Board of Supervisors is: “An informed community works together with Fairfax County and its partners to care for and responsibly manage our treasured natural resources.”

Peters said there are things the homeowner can do now before Green Fire comes to help them with their deer population. “Surplus lawn, that is lawn that is not required for active use, kids playing soccer or football... (allow it) to secede to meadows or forests... That’s a natural process that can be accelerated... Second, point, don’t mow in the woods and don’t mulch under trees... And last, don’t feed wildlife.”

Of course, landowners could participate in deer population control themselves. Peters said some owners already hunt. Green Fire has a two-hour program for homeowners who want to learn how to do it themselves. According to data provided by the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, the total Fairfax County private land harvest was 1,408 deer for the 2019 season. This is the harvest from the “normal”

SEE DEER MANAGEMENT, PAGE 9

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Drawing the Line

By MICHAEL LEE POPE
THE CONNECTION

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)

Newly created redistricting commission zooms toward new maps.

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).

McLean Woman's Club: No Holiday Homes Tour This Year; Hopefully in 2021

For the first time in 53 years, the Woman's Club of McLean will be unable to plan and hold its annual Holiday Homes Tour this fall due to the coronavirus pandemic. The club has continued much of its charitable support, donating some of the proceeds of its 2019 Homes Tour, but has held back 50 percent so as to be able to donate them in 2021. The club hopes to mount a Homes Tour or other major fundraiser next year.

The charities supported by the club include the Falls Church—McLean Children's Center, Second Story, Friends

of Pleasant Grove, Share Inc., Vinson Hall Transitional Housing Project and the McLean Volunteer Fire Department.

During 2020, the club has continued to meet on a regular basis, either in available space or via Zoom technology. It will continue regular meetings in 2021.

Historic Home on McLean Ballantrae estate featured on the 2019 Holiday Homes Tour.

PHOTO BY LAURA SHERIDAN



Christmas Casual or Go All Out?

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

As with many traditions, the pandemic is altering celebrations. Whether extravagant and lavish, minimalist and understated or somewhere in between, inspiration for holiday décor abounds. A group of tastemakers are offering an array of design ideas to make any home merry and bright this season.

Ease and Simplicity

"You can go casual and let yourself off the hook this year," said Amy Rutherford, owner of Red Barn Mercantile in Old Town Alexandria. "Just iron your tablecloth and linen napkins, forage for greenery to put in a vase and call it a day."

Understated décor is one of the themes that Sustainable Designer, Zelda Elisco of Abigail-Elise Design Studio is encouraging this season. "Decorate your mantle with a garland of greenery and wooden beads for the perfect minimalist look," she said. "Arrange the perfect holly bouquet in a large glass vase."

"If there's one thing we've learned from the pandemic, it's to simplify," added Anne Walker of Anne Walker Design and Farm & Feast in Potomac, Maryland. "Focus on what's really important. This principle applies to design as much as it does to life."

A stunning tablescape doesn't have to mean lavish and fussy, says Walker whose designs often incorporate reindeer antler candle holders and laser-cut wood Christmas trees in soft shades of beige. "The lack of embellishment allows each element to have a huge impact. A beautiful dining table is so restful in its simplicity [and] invites you to linger in peaceful, elegant spaces she said.

Find inspiration in nature

While a daylong shopping spree in search of the most festive dining accessories might not be feasible this year, creating a tablescape with natural elements allows for simplicity while maintaining elegance.

"Grab a magnolia leaf and write a name on it for a place card and attach it to your napkins with twine. Simple twine is always a fun way to wrap napkins," said Rutherford. "When you get your Christmas tree they have extra branches lying around. Pick up some of those and line them down the table. Sprinkle in candles, and fresh fruit like pomegranates, apples or oranges with cloves, which smell nice and are really pretty."

"Evergreen is a beautiful smelling green and lasts a long time," added designer Tina Yaraghi of The Enchanted Home. "I love mixing it in with fresh cut boxwood and eucalyptus. Keep a spray bottle with tap water on hand to spray every few days."

Natural elements can also be used to add color. "Try adding a vase filled with cranberries or hurricane candle holders to a tablescape, suggests Yaraghi. "You can place it in the center of a festive wreath. I also add fresh greenery in a little mint julep next to each place setting, which is such a beautiful and elegant touch."

"Votive candles add understated elegance and are a must have for any holiday table," she continued. "There nothing like the glow of candlelight [mixed] with greenery is always a beautiful look and I will often add faux white berries for a little something extra."



PHOTO BY THE ENCHANTED HOME

Etched hurricanes mixed with greenery and pinecones create an elegant tablescape.



PHOTO BY COURTNEY THOMAS, THE PICKET FENCE

Tiny Christmas trees made from bottle brushes add a splash of color to holiday décor.

A Twist on Traditional Accessories

Dining tables aren't the only spots to add Christmas cheer. "Fill your mantle with different styles of bottle brush trees in varying heights and put a wreath above it" said Courtney Thomas of The Picket Fence in Burke, Virginia. "Bottle brush trees, which, as the name suggests, are made of the brushes that you use to clean bottles. They're popular this year. They were big in the 1950s, so they're kind of retro. You can also display them in groups of three or five and make a forest."

"Christmas villages have been really popular this year," continued Thomas. "Those are fun but for a side table, console or on a shelf."

There's Nothing Wrong with Extravagance

Even using decorations that you already own, simple doesn't mean lackluster. "Even if you normally go full tilt with glitter and glamour during the holidays, try something new this year," said Walker.

"For table settings, I say go big or go home," said Yaraghi. "I love bringing out all my silver, china, crystal. The more the merrier and if not for the holidays, then when?"

"Get a beautiful centerpiece and line the table with pretty candles," said Rutherford. "Embrace the moment, embrace it even though it might be your immediate family and not the 30 people you usually host. Go all out. Just because it's the four or six of you doesn't mean you can go all out."

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Great Falls Rotary Interact Club Gives Back to Community

In keeping with the Rotary Club motto "Service Above Self," more than a dozen teenage members of the Great Falls Rotary Interact Club spent two weekends hosting a food drive at area grocery stores to donate to Cornerstones' Annual Thanksgiving Food Drive. The teenagers, practicing Covid-19 safety guidelines, provided grocery shoppers a preferred list of food staples and collected items during the weekends of Nov. 7 and Nov. 14. Interact Club members then assembled and donated more than two dozen bags filled with staple food items and grocery gift cards.

Rotary Interact Co-Presidents Brooke Van Beuren and Cate Brownlee worked to coordinate the food drive with Cornerstones to help with the organization's goal to feed 1,000 families this holiday season. "The purpose of the Great Falls Rotary Interact Club is to give back to others. It seems like opportunities to help are limited this year, but it doesn't change people's situations," said Brooke Van Beuren. "We were happy to be a bit more creative and able to stand outside, socially distanced with masks, to collect food." The club members also said the Great Falls and McLean communities were in-



Interact Club members assembled and donated more than two dozen bags filled with staple food items and grocery gift cards.

credibly generous with their donations and support.

Cornerstones Director of Volunteer and Community Engagement, Susan Alger, said the club's contributions are greatly appreciated, "Right now, we have more people than ever using our services, many who have been greatly impacted by Covid-19. So, it's so wonderful

that these young people stepped up to help."

The Interact Club, which was not able to attend its summer service project with The Greater Lynchburg Habitat for Humanity, due to the pandemic, was still able to raise \$1,220 to send to the Habitat for Humanity organization this fall. These donations came from

Interact car washes and bake sales that the club held this past year and was matched by the Rotary Club of Great Falls.

For more information about the Rotary Interact Club follow them on Instagram: @GFInteract

For more information about Rotary Club of Great Falls: <http://rotarygreatfallsva.org/>

Student Publications, Journalists Win Peacemakers Awards

The National Scholastic Press Association (NSPA) has awarded Peacemaker Awards to two Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) publications.

Winners of the 2020 News-magazine Peacemaker are:

❖ tJTODAY, Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology; editors: Justin Chang, Irina Lee, and Grace Mak; adviser: Erinn Harris.

❖ The Highlander, McLean High School; editors: Nicholas Lohman, Dasha Makarishcheva, and Ava Rotondo; adviser: Lindsay Benedict.

Additionally, staff members from The Highlander were awarded several individual awards in a variety of contests:

Social Justice Reporting, second place, Coming Clean, Heran Essayas, Kyle Hawley, Nicholas Lohman, and Ava Rotondo.

Story of the Year: News Story, fourth place, Supporting Future Changemakers, Marina Qu.

Newsmagazine Cover, fifth place, Coronavirus edition, Dasha Makarishcheva.

Portfolio: Artist of the Year, fifth place, Darya Makarishcheva.

Local Climate Change Reporting, honorable mention, A Scorched Earth,

Ben Brooks, Dua Mobin, Marina Qu, and Rebeka Rafi.

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THE CONNECTION Alexandria Gazette Packet Mount Vernon Gazette Potomac ALMANAC

Looking Desperately for Holiday Santa Stars

Bob Nelson provides support to military families this COVID-19 holiday season.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

For over ten years, long-time Great Falls resident and businessman Bob Nelson hosted his Military Appreciation Monday dinners at the Old Brogue, raising funds to support various United States military organizations at the twice-monthly events. During the first or second week of December each year, Nelson could be found in the Irish pub's backroom thanking a hundred plus people for their generous assistance in providing holiday gifts to families of American fallen and injured service members.

Not this year, not 2020. The coronavirus halted all dinners, and Nelson asks if community members would step forward for the annual Christmas Gift Wish List, updated regularly by the Code of Support Foundation in Alexandria. He said, "It's my understanding that many of these families are in a tough position due to the pandemic."

According to Nelson, "The concept is that supporters choose the family of an injured or fallen service member and commit to spending a minimum of \$150 per child." He said, "Once you've done so, Santa will send you the contact information for the family. You then reach out and speak directly to your 'adopted' family. This personal interaction has meant so much to the veterans, their families, and those serving as Santa."

On Saturday, Dec. 5, Nelson received news from one of his newest santas. "Bob, After you and I spoke this morning...I called Veronica, one of our Military families, for



PHOTO COURTESY OF BOB NELSON

"Many of these families are in a tough position due to the pandemic," says Bob Nelson.

Christmas. She is a single mom with two children... After going over what the kids wanted for Christmas, I asked her what they were doing for their Christmas meal. Her family is close by, but they are elderly, and she said they would not be getting together as a family... I told her that we would be sending a Honey Baked Ham with all trimmings to her for Christmas Day...She immediately broke down in tears and was overwhelmed," she wrote (name withheld).

Nelson founded his Military Appreciation Monday dinners in the memory of Sgt. 1st Class Nathan R. Chapman, a Special Forces Communications Sergeant assigned to 3rd Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne). Chapman was killed in action during Operation Enduring Freedom on Jan. 4, 2002, near the town of Khost in Afghanistan, leaving behind his wife and two children, a daughter and son.

For more information on the project, email Santa@bobnelsonsteam.com.

Deer Management Discussed in Great Falls

FROM PAGE 5
season. There were an additional 137 deer harvested in the late season in Fairfax."

PETERS said that the main way people can help Green Fire is to grant access to them to hunt on their property. "Or at least to track and retrieve if we're hunting nearby. The deer don't just drop in their tracks when we are using archery." In addition, people can monitor deer activity by running trail cameras for Green Fire. "They tell us where they see the deer...That's intelligence that our archers and I want to hear," Peters said.

In 2015, when the Great Falls Citizens Association first invited Peters to speak, member Bill Canis said, "What is not acceptable is to do nothing...In 20 to 25 years, the understory will be gone. That is not the legacy we want to leave behind." After the 2020 presentation Canis said, "Because of the work of Green Fire with the local residents to remove some deer each year, the understory is probably being helped. This is part of the Great Falls Citizens Association's priorities to educate residents on deer related issues."

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Highlights of Questions and Answers

Q - What is the reasonable goal for the deer population? Is it to get it to zero or to reduce it to a certain level? (Sanford Friedenthal of Great Falls)

A - There's no way to get it to zero... (Peters)

Q - When I go walking, I see herds of deer (that run along the gas pipeline). I wonder if Green Fire is doing archery on those pipelines?... And a follow-up question, have you had success speaking to an HOA and getting the whole HOA to agree to let Green Fire in? (Anna Freska of Great Falls)

A - The easements for the gas pipelines, they are not easements for archers. (Second question) "The answer is a big fat no."

Peters recommended that private property owners who are interested in safety and liability concerns should see VA DGIF's publication "Hunting on Private Property". Also see "A Landowner's Guide To Working With Sportsmen In Virginia" by Peter T. Bromley, Extension Specialist, Wildlife, Dept. of Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences, Virginia Tech.

Here's What's Happening at MCC!

The Old Firehouse

Light Up McLean Holiday Decorating Contest Competition is limited to the first 15 registered households

Sponsored by The Alden



The Unruly Theatre Project's Virtual Improv Show
Wednesday, Dec. 9, 7 p.m.
Free; registration is required.

A Live, Virtual Event!



McLean Uncorked Part 2
Sunday, Dec. 13, 5 p.m.
Free admission; registration is required.

Sponsored by The Alden



The Unruly Theatre Project's Virtual Improv Show
Wednesday, Dec. 16, 7 p.m.
Free; registration is required.

The Old Firehouse



Virtual Family Fun Trivia Night
Friday, Dec. 18, 7-9 p.m.
\$5 per family
Registration is required.

Sponsored by The Alden



Family Holiday Movie
Saturday, Dec. 19, at 2 p.m.
Free admission
Registration is required.

Closing Notice

Christmas Eve (half-day) and Christmas Day
Thursday, Dec. 24 - Friday, Dec. 25



The McLean Community Center
www.mcleancenter.org

Home of The Alden Theatre
www.aldentheatre.org

1234 Ingleside Ave. McLean, VA 22101

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

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-Werner Heisenberg

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

SUBMIT YOUR LETTER TO THE EDITOR HERE

www.ConnectionNewspapers.com/contact/letter

SATURDAY/DEC. 12
'Shop & Stroll' Campaign. The Town of Vienna announced the launch of a new campaign to encourage visitors to explore the town's diverse shopping centers. The initiative titled Vienna Shop & Stroll will take place on Saturday, Dec. 12 from 12-4 p.m. at Glyndon Plaza. Visit ViennaVA.gov/shopandstroll.

NOW THRU DEC. 12
Toys for Tots Collection. The McLean Community Center is now accepting new, unwrapped toys for Toys for Tots. Toys for Tots is a program run by the United States Marine Corps Reserve that distributes toys to children whose parents cannot afford to buy them gifts for Christmas. A donation box is now located in MCC lobby to collect the items. You may drop off toys during our regular business operating hours. This effort will continue through Saturday, Dec. 12, at noon, when a member of the U.S. Marine Corps will come to collect all the donated items at our Santa Claus is Coming to Town event.

DEC. 5-19
XP League Tryouts. 2-4 p.m. At Code Ninjas Falls Church, 479 South Maple Avenue, Suite E, Falls Church. In collaboration with R Controlled E-Sports, Code Ninjas Falls Church will be holding tryouts for its new XP League esports team and invite elementary and middle-school students to participate in try-outs at the Falls Church Code Ninjas with league play starting in early January. Visit the website: <https://www.codeninjas.com/va-falls-church>

DEC. 14 AND 28
Grief Support Group. 6:45 p.m. Virtual Zoom Event. Support group for adults for losses relating to COVID-19 as a result of death, decline or illness, financial impact or spiritual suffering. Support Group takes place 2nd and 4th Mondays monthly through December. Register for the group on the website: <https://www.capitalcaring.org/grief-support-groups-registration/>

TUESDAY/DEC. 15
Caregivers Support Group. 10-11:30 a.m. Virtual via Zoom. Shepherd's Center serving Oakton-Vienna-Reston-Herndon (SC)
SC hosts a support group for caregivers of adult family members with dementia the first and third Tuesdays of each month. Their virtual, facilitated meetings are from 10 to 11:30 a.m. Contact facilitator, Jack Tarr, at jtarr5@verizon.net for details on joining the meeting via zoom or see the SC web site: <https://www.scov.org/announcements>.

VIENNA'S TREASURE ORNAMENT
The Vienna Volunteer Fire Department is offering Vienna's treasure, the 1946 Maxim Fire Engine that will be featured on a beautifully crafted ornament. Limited quantity available, delivery expected early December. Don't miss out, order yours now for \$20 at <http://vvfd.org/store.html>.

CALENDAR

TYSONS CORNER CENTER HOLIDAY PLANS

Santa Is Back (Now through Dec. 24). Careful consideration has been given to the Santa set to ensure that they are both healthy and magical to meet the moment. Santa will be seated a distance from his guests to maintain a healthful distance, with a physical barrier to prevent young guests from trying to sit on Santa's lap. Santa and his young visitors will wear masks and maintain a healthful distance, in a contactless visit and photo experience fully re-designed to meet the moment.

Grinch's Grotto (Now thru Dec. 31). Located on Level 2 next to A Christmas to Remember. Guests will meet The Grinch and interact with him right in his cave, as well as pose for a photo. Admission includes a free 6x8" printed photo with a playful Grinch catchphrase. With over 20 sayings to choose from, guests can customize their own Grinch holiday memory. Admission also gets you a collectible Grinch ornament. Each ticket allows admission for up to 5 guests to meet the Grinch as a group. This ticket secures your individual time to meet the Grinch and experience his cave. Social distancing and mask usage will be in accordance with local and mall regulations.

Saturday/Dec. 12 -- Virtual Holiday Performance at Tysons Corner Center. 10 a.m. Those Funny Little People is a one-of-a-kind entertainment company with life-sized puppets who dance, sing, and make people laugh. Making their television debut in 2011, Those Funny Little People appeared on the TV show America's Got Talent as four elves, an agent, and a showgirl. The group resonated with audiences everywhere and placed within the top 36 acts. Enjoy their holiday entertainment from the comfort of your home.

NOW THRU THE HOLIDAYS

Santa at Springfield Town Center. Santa and his reindeer have arrived at Springfield Town Center to kick-off the holiday season. In an effort to create touchless experiences and accommodate varying levels of visitor comfort, Santa will be available at Springfield Town Center via numerous experiences and offerings: Picture with Santa; Virtual Experience; Family Pet Photos on Mondays; Family Photos and Visits with Santa. Reservations are required for all Santa and photo offerings.

NOW THRU DEC. 15

BUMC Holiday Marketplace. Burke United Methodist Church is hosting an online Holiday Marketplace. Proceeds will benefit our Cambodia ministry and the preschool. Includes links to many local crafters. Visit www.burkeumc.org

MONDAYS BEGINNING DEC. 7

Junior Lakeside Explorers. 10:30 a.m. At Burke Lake Park, 7315 Ox Road, Fairfax Station. Don't miss the chance for your child to join the Park Authority's newest nature club. Join "Junior Lakeside Explorers" at Burke Lake Park. This new nature club is designed for children age 5 to 7. Kids will learn about the wildlife that call the region's lakefront parks home, and the nature topics will be geared to meet some homeschool science requirements. The program meets on Mondays, beginning

Dec. 7, 2020. Sessions run from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. for four weeks. The cost is \$32 per child. Call 703-323-6600.

WEDNESDAY/DEC. 9

Movie in Community Hall. 7 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Sponsored by The Alden. Attendees must wear masks and adhere to social-distancing requirements while in the facility. Seating is limited and preregistration is mandatory. Subscribe to The Alden's monthly newsletter (<https://bit.ly/2HSTLhs>) to get the full movie lineup and movie titles. Visit www.mcleancenter.org

WEDNESDAY/DEC. 9

The Unruly Theatre Project's Virtual Improv Show. 7 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Join in (the) Unruly Theatre Project's virtual fall improv shows from the comfort of your couch! Register online and a Zoom link and password for the show will be emailed to you. Participants must register two hours in advance of showtime. Visit www.mcleancenter.org

FRIDAY/DEC. 11

Centrestage Spotlight. 6-8 p.m. Virtual Event. Centrestage Spotlight is a virtual show that will feature songs, monologues and scenes performed by Theatre Centreville students. Audience members will receive a link so the show can be enjoyed virtually. The first show can be viewed between Dec 4th and Dec 7th. The second show can be enjoyed Dec 11th through Dec 14th. To purchase tickets, go to <https://www.theatrecentreville.com/wpa/>

DEC. 11-13

Herndon WinterMarkt WinterPlatz. 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. In Historic Downtown Herndon. WinterPlatz is a community celebration in the heart of Herndon. Participating businesses will join in the festive spirit, decorating and offering WinterPlatz specials. Visit the website: www.herndonwintermarkt.com

SATURDAY/DEC. 12

Winterfest Holiday Market. Noon to 6 p.m. At Workhouse Arts Center, Lorton. This year's event will feature a holiday art market, local vendors, a snowflake decorating content, festive lights, and a special visit from Santa. They are also offering a 20% discount on ALL artwork campus-wide! This is an excellent opportunity to get the perfect gift for the art lover in your life. Visit our website for tickets and information: <https://www.workhousearts.org/event/winterfest-community-market/>

SUNDAY/DEC. 13

Winter Wreath Workshop. 1 p.m. At Colvin Run Mill, 10017 Colvin Run Road, Great Falls. With help from staff at Green Spring Gardens, the "Winter Wreath Workshop" will teach you some dazzling possibilities with greens, ribbons and pinecones. This workshop is designed for participants age 16 to adult. The cost is \$39 per person, plus a \$25 supply fee. Please register for both the program and supply fee. Call 703-759-2771.

Laume

FROM PAGE 4

is found in a rescue or shelter for \$125-\$500 after the original owner surrenders the dog, for any number of reasons.

Typical cost of dogs by source:

public shelters \$125 - \$175

rescues \$300 - \$500

small hobby breeders \$800 - \$1,500 (depending on breed)

pet stores. \$2,500 - \$7,000; even \$10,000 for more popular breeds

To keep your purchase price reasonable and avoid adopting from a puppy

mill: avoid pet stores, newspaper ads, and online "deals." Responsible breeders won't use these sales outlets.

Visit the breeder, ask to see the entire facility where the dogs are kept and bred, ask questions about the dog's genetics and parent health testing. Doing so will help to ensure you receive a healthy puppy whose cost will not be increased by expensive veterinary bills.

Read more information on *Puppy Mill Awareness Month in Connection* during December.

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"Medican't" Take It Anymore



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

The non-stop - or so it seems, television advertising letting all of us viewers know that the 2020 Medicare Open Enrollment window is about to slam shut is nearly over. For those of us age 65 or older, this is not an opportunity to ignore. And given the frequency and repetition (the commercials are repeated, rarely ever different), at least on the channels that I watch (maybe that's the problem?), I feel like Bill Murray reliving his previous 24 hours endlessly in the movie, "Groundhog Day." However, unlike the movie, I can't do anything to undo what is constantly bombarding me on television. Switching channels during the commercials wouldn't really help because usually I'm watching a specific program - in between the commercials, and switching back and forth seems like too much effort. Besides, I might lose the continuity of the program I'm watching if I were to mis-time my switch. I suppose I could mute the commercial but I've heard Joe Namath - and others talk about the "give back benefit," the "zero dollar premiums in your area," and the possible additional benefits: "vision including contacts, hearing aids and batteries, home-delivered meals, dental and rides to your doctor's appointment" so often that even if I couldn't hear Joe actually promoting, I would still hear what he's saying in my head since I've probably heard it already a hundred times since the enrollment period began.

As I sit and write this on Tuesday, Dec. 1, the end is near however: Dec. 7, 2020. On that day the senior-centric advertising party (solicitation) will be over. Then the commercials will cease and desist - for now, only to return next year in November when the 2021 Open Enrollment period begins anew. Perhaps I'll be more inclined to act then. After all, I am their target audience. However, my being a senior with a pre-existing condition: cancer, limits and complicates my options. In addition, changing plans means changing doctors and though change can often be a good thing, for me, considering my life occasionally hangs in the balance, change might not be a good thing. In fact, it could be a downright bad thing. I mean, my oncologist has kept me alive for almost 12 years since my Feb. 27, 2009 non small cell lung cancer stage IV diagnosis. Granted, there may have been a slight revision of my diagnosis since three surgical biopsies performed earlier this year confirmed that what I actually have is papillary thyroid cancer. Nevertheless, changing now seems counterproductive, sort of. The damage is already done. I'm not sure there's much to gain now that a second opinion has similarly confirmed my updated diagnosis and has agreed with my current oncologist's treatment plan: Lenvima for me. But I do feel there's much to lose: nearly 12 years of treatment/experience with my present provider. And even though I understand that medical records can get transferred, I still feel I'd be putting myself at risk by forfeiting the knowledge that has been accumulated by the doctors who have been treating me/managing my care.

I imagine it's typical that a patient's survival depends in part on their emotional and psychological make-up. And of course on the doctors and staff that have been responsible for their care. And though I am not unaware of the possible mistake/blip on my medical radar with respect to my actual diagnosis, I still feel that I should stay on the horse on which I rode in on, if you know what I mean? Switching plans would mean switching doctors, staffs, procedures, et cetera. And I'm just not sure if I'm emotionally (there's that word again) equipped to deal with such upheaval in my life/care.

All of this being said - and sort of anticipated, listening to all those Medicare Open Enrollment commercials has made Kenny a very dull boy, and an aggravated one at that. I'm not sure I can take much more of it. Thankfully, mercifully, the commercials will stop after Monday, Dec. 7. Although I think Joe did an excellent job promoting his cause, I'm afraid it's fallen on deaf ears. Now that I mention that, I wonder if my current provider offers hearing benefits.

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



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