

CONNECTION

Burke ♦ Fairfax ♦ Springfield ♦ Fairfax Station

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Mackenzie Alexander, 6, waves to Santa in Old Town Fairfax.

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PHOTO BY BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

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NEWS

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 McDougle (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).

Electrical Event Cause of Fairfax Station House Fire

On Saturday, Dec. 5, at 8:28 p.m., units from Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department and the City of Fairfax Fire Department were dispatched for a reported house fire in the 5400 block of Dranes Tavern Drive in the Fairfax Station area of Fairfax County.

Units arrived on the scene of a two-story, single-family home to find an attached garage fully involved in fire. Crews rapidly initiated an exterior attack which suppressed the bulk of the fire. There were no civilian or firefighter injuries reported.

Two occupants were home at the time of the fire. One occupant heard a loud boom. While investigating the noise, she

discovered a fire in the garage. She attempted to extinguish the fire before calling 9-1-1. Both occupants self-evacuated prior to fire department arrival. Working smoke alarms were present in the home. The alarms did not activate because of the location of the fire.

Fire Investigators determined that the fire was accidental in nature and started in the attached, two car garage. The fire was caused by an electrical event within the household wiring for an outlet located in the garage.

Three occupants were displaced because of the fire. Red Cross assistance was offered and declined. Damages as a result of the fire were approximately \$187,500. Note the content damage total reflects two vehicles destroyed in this fire.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Damages as a result of the fire were approximately \$187,500.

Shop Local and Support Our Neighbors!

BY DAN STORCK
MOUNT VERNON SUPERVISOR



Just like every year, COVID-19 or not, the season of thanksgiving is followed by the season of giving. While there will be an even greater tendency to order holiday gifts on-line, it is especially important this year that we support our local and small businesses.

Harder hit than most may be the businesses located at the Belle View Shopping Center. Truly small, local owned businesses, these owners survived rebuilding from the 2019 fire and continue to persevere through decreased foot traffic due to the pandemic. Whether you are up for a stroll through the shops or ordering a gift card from one of the restaurants, this holiday your purchas-

es will truly help our neighborhood businesses to keep the heart of our community beating.

Of course, there are also many other local and small businesses struggling in our community, from the Workhouse Arts Center and Gunston Hall, to the Shoppes at Lorton Valley, Saratoga Plaza, Sacramento, Woodlawn and Hollin Hall Shopping Centers, to name a few. I hope you will use

your holiday purchases to assist our neighbors and buy more locally.

There are several organizations in our neighborhoods looking for contributions to help those in need. The Mount Vernon Fire Station (as well as all other stations) is collecting new, unwrapped toys, books and games for Toys for Tots until Dec. 13. Community organizations such as United Communities (unitedcommuni-

ty.org) and the Lorton Community Action Center (LCAC) (lortonaction.org) are collecting for a variety of needs for their clients.

In addition, in lieu of the TEAM MVD annual food drive, it has been brought to our attention that there is a need for diapers of all sizes for babies and young children in our area. Please help us help them by dropping off diapers at our Mount Vernon Government Center office between now and Jan. 5! Any and all sizes welcome.

Looking for a special and unique gift this holiday? Consider making a donation to Save River Farm (saveriverfarm.com)! Regular donations to the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust (NVCT) River Farm Fund are fully tax-deductible. 80% of the funds will go to land acquisition, 10% for advocacy related to River Farm, and 10% for administration of the campaign.

However you choose to give, I wish you a bright, peaceful and merry holiday season!

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.



Puppies with health issues and puppy mill origins seized from a Manassas puppy store in 2019 preceding forced closure of the store by Manassas Animal Control Police.

PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

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 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 (de-

pending 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.

BULLETIN BOARD

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

SATURDAY/DEC. 12

Fight Wisteria Vines. 1-4 p.m. At Accotink Gorge, Meet at Costco Parking Lot, 7373 Boston Blvd., Springfield. Join in cutting tree-killing wisteria vines in Accotink Gorge. Rugged terrain. Wear masks, gloves, long pants, sturdy shoes.

Tools provided. Social distance picnic. Friends of Accotink Creek

ARTS PROGRAMMING DELAYED

The Center for the Arts in Fairfax and the Hylton Performing Arts Center in Manassas will delay the start of indoor, in-person performances un-

til March 2021, at the earliest. The two performing arts venues, which are operated by George Mason University's College of Visual and Performing Arts (CVPA), will continue to present digital performances and events through Mason Arts at Home and Hylton at Home, featur-

ing a diverse lineup of renowned professional artists, community arts partners, and students and faculty of CVPA. The venues will gradually phase in a small number of in-person, indoor performances when it is

SEE BULLETIN, PAGE 5



BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 4

considered safe to do so, in coordination with state and George Mason University officials. Visit: Center for the Arts: <https://cfa.gmu.edu/plan-your-visit/covid-19-updates> or Hylton Performing Arts Center: <https://hyltoncenter.org/plan-your-visit/covid-19-updates>

VIRGINIA OPERA CANCELS 2020-2021 SEASON

Virginia Opera, The Official Opera Company of the Commonwealth of Virginia, announces cancellation of all scheduled 2020-2021 Season productions due to the public safety concerns caused by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The determination follows a complete VO staff and Board review affecting statewide presentations in the Hampton Roads, Central Virginia, and Northern Virginia markets scheduled to begin February 2021. Visit the website – vaopera.org.

NOW THRU DEC. 13

Holiday Greenery for Delivery. 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Thru Assistance League of Northern Virginia, P.O. Box 209, Herndon. The holidays are just around the corner and Assistance League of Northern Virginia has teamed up with Lynch Creek Farm to offer holiday décor. Purchase wreaths, garlands, and centerpieces for your home or as gifts for family and friends. Your orders will be sent directly to the recipients. Shipments to Northern Virginia should take about 5 business days. Assistance League will receive 15% of the cost of every purchase and 100% of any donations. Those funds will help the charity provide food, new clothing and books to many needy children in our community. Here's the link to

shopping: <https://www.lynchcreek-fundraising.com/teams/250781>. Shipping is free. Contact info@alnv.org. Visit www.alnv.org.

STARTING JAN. 26, 2021

On-Line ESL Classes. 7-9 p.m. Free on-line ESL classes will be offered Tuesdays and Thursdays, 7-9 PM, from January 26 to April 1, 2021. Must register online December 10, 2020 at www.lordoflifeva.org Class size limited. Free.

DEC. 1 TO JAN. 21

Citizenship Test Preparation. 7-8:30 p.m. Free On-Line Citizenship Test Preparation classes. Register at www.lordoflifeva.org. We will use ZOOM software. For permanent residents who are eligible for citizenship. Sponsored by Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Fairfax and Centreville.

WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA

Northern Virginia Veterans Association is partnering with Wreaths Across America to support your local Quantico National Cemetery and needs your support. To lay wreaths, those interested can join up individually or in groups (employee/family/church/civic). Select the day and time frame over a four-day time period from Dec. 16-19 via the Eventbrite registration. Laying wreaths is a memorable way to honor our fallen service men and women during a time that many of us have had little opportunity to get out and give back. Visit <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/125175867389> For more information feel free to email info@novavets.org or if you'd like to volunteer with our NOVA Veteran's Team to support this event, email our Volunteer Coordinator at Fred@novavets.org.



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Artist's rendition of the American Legion post in front (white exterior) and the affordable apartments above.



Artist's rendition of the two-over-two, stacked townhouses.

'Supporting American Legion, Youth and the Community'

Fairfax's Post 177 plans renovation, homes and new Chilcott Field.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

For decades, American Legion Post 177 has been an asset to the City of Fairfax. But now, in order to continue all it does for the local residents, it needs to make some major changes to its facility at 3939 Oak St.

Toward that end, it plans a significant redevelopment that'll help everyone it serves – and then some. And last Thursday, Dec. 3, it hosted an online presentation to explain its vision for the not-too-distant future.

"We've been in the City for 75 years, and we have about 1,000 members involved in our community," said the post's Hank Waters. "We've also been involved with [adjacent] Chilcott Field, the Fairfax Little League and Challenger Baseball for 60 years."

But, he added, "Our building is really old and no longer supports our mission well. And there's no handicap access between the floors, which makes it difficult for disabled veterans."

So the plan for a complete redevelopment will renovate and enlarge the existing, 12,000-square-foot building to 17,523 square feet and add three floors of brick-exterior, affordable housing above and to the back of the current structure.

THE PROPOSAL also includes market-rate, two-over-two townhouses, a park, 34.5 percent open space and a \$1 million overhaul and modernization of Chilcott Field.

The project is a collaboration between the American Legion, Toll Brothers and Post 177 Apartments LLC (Good Works) – which will develop the affordable/workforce housing. "We're leasing this property from the post," explained Kim Hart of Good Works. "And after 30 years, ownership will revert back to the post for income."

Noah Hale, director of TM Associates, which manages and develops affordable

housing, assured meeting attendees that the multifamily apartments won't be "subsidized or cheap" housing. The 76 units are mainly geared for working people, with 25 percent set aside for veterans. Nine will be fully handicap-accessible, and the building, itself, will feature elevators and underground parking.

"A two-bedroom unit will rent for about \$1,200 and will be at 60 percent AMI [area median income]," he said. "And all the apartments will be the same quality as the market-rate homes. There'll also be fitness centers, computer labs and other, onsite amenities, including a tot lot." Of the approximately 111 underground parking spaces, 76 will be for the residents and the rest for the post.

As for the 66 stacked townhouses, Scott Tressler with Toll Brothers said they'll all be three-bedroom, 2-1/2 baths, with parking for one car in the garage and one car on the driveway. The lower units will be 1,125 square feet, and the upper units will be 2,456 square feet.

"We expect them to sell from the high \$500,000s to the mid \$600,000s," he said. "We consider them luxury affordable homes for young professionals and move-down empty-nesters."

Two Oak Street entrances are planned – one for the American Legion and one for the residents. Post 177 will still have the same amount of parking it does currently – 139 spaces, and Chilcott Field will retain its 40-90 spaces.

Ken Wire, a zoning attorney and member of the American Legion, spoke on behalf of all the applicants. "Everything is within walking distance to bus stops and stores, and we'll connect the sidewalks on both sides of our project," he said. "We've had a tree survey done and will keep as many of those overhead trees as we can. We think only three or four will have to be removed because they're unhealthy and unsafe."

REGARDING CHILCOTT FIELD – which currently has no amenities – its new stadium will have bleachers with an elevator, conces-

sion stands, restrooms and a press box. Wire said the stormwater management there will also be improved. He noted, as well, that the nearby, multi-use project being built on the former Paul VI High School site will also contain 60 spaces for the ballfield to use.

Hart said one parking space per affordable-housing unit is sufficient because "Most renters will either be single people or a mom and a couple children." The apartments will be a mix of studio, one, two and three bedrooms.

The project hasn't been approved, yet. It will still undergo further scrutiny and review by Fairfax City staff, Board of Architectural Review, Planning Commission and City Council. Then would come the permit process, site inspections and construction.

Therefore, said Wire, "It probably won't be completed until three years from now. We still have a lot of work to do with staff, but we wanted to give you an update."

"This is about supporting the American Legion's mission, our youth and the community," added Waters. "And we hope you'll see that this is a true value to the City."



Site plan of the entire project, including the ballfield.



Drawing of what Chilcott Field's new bleachers with concession stands, restrooms and elevator (at far right).

NEWS

Passing of Honored Park Volunteer Noted

BY SUSAN LAUME
THE CONNECTION

Commander Richard E. Sargent USN (Retired), formerly of Springfield, died in hospice care in Madison Wisconsin on Nov. 28, 2020. During his years in Springfield's Ravensworth community, Sargent, and his wife Martha, were active community members, with a particular interest in Lake Accotink Park. Sargent also served on the Park Authority Advisory Council. He and his neighbor, Chet McLaren, were honored for their volunteerism in 1999 with dedication of the McLaren-Sargent Pavillion. The Sargents were further honored by the Board of Supervisors on May 26, 2006, with the proclamation of Dick and Martha Sargent day.

Former Board of Supervisors Chairman, Sharon Bulova, who knew Sargent during her tenure as Supervisor of Braddock District, called him a "lion in the community" and "pioneer of community associations in Ravensworth." Bulova recalled Sargent's lengthy list of contributions, extensive volunteer time, and "the joy that he and his wife exhibited working together for their community."

Sargent, a decorated veteran, is survived by his children, Nancy Sundal and Walter Sargent, and by 12 grand- and great-grand children. An on-line memorial service will be held by the Genderson Funeral Home, Madison Wisconsin, on Dec. 10, at 2 pm; with interment at Arlington National Cemetery in



DON SWEENEY/FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY

Richard Sargent (center), and Chet McLaren honored for park volunteerism with named pavilion and certificate bestowed by then Braddock District Supervisor, Sharon Bulova - September 1999.



PHOTO BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION

Lake Accotink Park's McLaren-Sargent hilltop pavilion as it appears today overlooking the park marina and picnic area.

2021. The Fairfax Park Foundation will accept donations made in his memory, as requested by his family. (www.fairfaxparkfoundation.org)

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

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Advertising Opportunity

THE CONNECTION

Newspapers & Online

Children's & Teens' Connection 2020



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 and Children's Almanac) is a long-time tradition.

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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."



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Isaac Nebyu and Miriam Sesay in Annandale High School production of the 'Connections.' The show is available to watch for free at: <https://youtu.be/dCU24XVaZwQ>

Threatening Lives of Others in COVID Time

Annandale High's 'Connections' is a student written and directed short film.

BY LENA WEIMAN
ST. STEPHEN'S & ST. AGNES

How many people does one teenager's negligence affect in the time of COVID? Annandale High School's short film, "Connections," explored the chain of events that could lead to a massive spread of the Coronavirus, just because of a single individual. This piece is extremely relevant and informative for the modern teenager.

CAPPIES REVIEW

The story followed a series of teenagers interacting with each other without masks and depicted how their health is threatened by their careless actions. It focused on small human connections, like petting a dog or picking up a piece of litter, and how those interactions could be dangerous without proper caution and safety measures.

The writers of this film, Hunter Duggan, Kayla Osipchak, Clara Billows, Mariam Sesay, Isaac Nebyu, Haleluya Worku, Hang Minh Nguyen, Nhi Nguyen, Sammar Saini, did a phenomenal job. While there was not much dialogue, the narrative focused on physical interactions and movement in order to tell the story and convey their message.

The film featured an ensemble cast who each contracted COVID from another character and passed it on to someone else. The continuity between these scenes was impeccable. There was no noticeable lighting shift or continuity errors even though the film was not all recorded at the same time or at the same location.

Another notable filming tech-

nique was the use of zooms and the composition of the shots. The scenes were filmed in multiple angles, which gave the viewer multiple perspectives. When the characters had an interaction that spread the virus, the camera zoomed in to emphasize that interaction and the spread of COVID.

Hunter Duggan stood out as an actor in the film as the person who initiated the chain reaction at the beginning of the film, and ultimately infect-

ed eight other teenagers. Hunter stood out most during the video collage in which all of the characters get sick. Their emotion and gut-wrenching coughs were both believable and horrifying in a time when getting sick is a large fear for most people.

The editing of the film was well thought out, and the editors, Hunter Duggan, Clara Billows, Mariam Sesay, used cuts as another medium to convey the message of the film. The most successful editing was the video collage in which all of the characters became sick. It started with the original character coughing, and they slowly added more characters showing symptoms until the screen was completely full. Showing the full impact of these small connections in the montage was a really smart way of conveying the importance of wearing masks.

Overall, the film was a fast and thoughtful warning to wear masks and stay safe. Although it was only nine minutes long, the message was very important, as it called attention to the fact that even a small interaction could put ourselves or others in danger.

Children Enjoy Fairfax's Santa on Main Street

Santa Claus recently kicked off the holiday season by taking a break from his Old Town workshop on Fairfax City's Main Street to visit with the local children. They waved to each other from a safe distance, and then the children received small stockings filled with candy canes.

Bring Toys for Tots to Fairfax City Hall

The City of Fairfax Fire Department is still collecting gifts for Toys for Tots but, due to COVID-19, its drop boxes have moved. People wishing to donate new, unwrapped toys, games and books may bring them instead to the lobby of Fairfax City Hall at 10455 Armstrong St.



Showing Santa his Fairfax City pride is Konrad Hoffman, 5.



Waving with Santa Claus is Claire Hermann, 7.

PHOTOS BY BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

Sidewalk and Bike Trail Project Connects to Lee District Park

A ground clearing operation is underway along Telegraph Road in Alexandria for a pedestrian connection project linking the intersection of South Kings Highway to Lee District Park in the Rose Hill area.

This project will construct 2,670 feet of sidewalk along the south side of Telegraph Road from 500 feet north of S. Kings Highway to Lee District Park. The project will also widen the road and install curb and gutter, storm drainage pipe and a retaining wall. The construction schedule is slated to run from October 2020 to Summer 2021.

The walkway project is on the opposite side of the Greendale Golf Course per coordination with Lee District Supervisor's office at the time when Jeff McKay was the District Supervisor according to Robin P. Geiger, Head of Communications at the Fairfax County Department of Transportation. This project will include a turn lane and it is one of several along Telegraph Road to keep things moving.

There is another project planned on Telegraph Road about two miles south of South Kings Highway at the Hayfield Road intersection that will add a second north-bound through lane on Telegraph

Road to a spot just north of the Coast Guard Station. This project aims to reduce congestion and improve safety and operations in the area of Telegraph Road and Hayfield Road, VDOT says.

In the pre-pandemic schedule that was on the VDOT website, the meetings on this \$3 million project were supposed to be held last summer. Construction was originally supposed to start in the fall 2022, and be completed the next year.

A few years ago, another lane was added in the Fort Belvoir area when Jeff Todd Way was put in, and this was financed with federal money because it was part of the Base Realignment and Closure program. At the same time, the Telegraph Road intersection with Huntington Avenue was rebuilt, adding lanes and ramps to handle more traffic. Then the intersection of Telegraph Road and South Kings Highway was rebuilt, relieving a rush-hour bottleneck in 2013.

These spot improvements are all part of the traffic flow upgrades on this north-south corridor that sees much traffic from the subdivisions along this road.

— MIKE SALMON

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Legals

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The French Roast LLC, trading as Grounded Coffee Shop, 6919 Telegraph Rd, Alexandria VA 22310. The above establishment is applying to the VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE CONTROL (ABC) for a Wine And Beer On and Off premises license to sell or manufacture alcoholic beverages. Sebastien Rondier, Owner. NOTE: Objections to the issuance of this license must be submitted to ABC no later than 30 days from the publishing date of the first of two required newspaper legal notices. Objections should be registered at www.abc.virginia.gov or 800-552-3200.

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CALENDAR

FROM PAGE 7

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 show-time. 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/>



PHOTO BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION

Beauty in Our Backyards

Nature displays seasonal colors to greet visitors to Mason Neck State Park displaying a beauty of seasonal colors.

SUNDAY/DEC. 13

McLean Uncorked Part 2. 5 p.m. Virtual event. Wine down the fall, get ready for the holidays, and enjoy this fun, virtual, live and interactive wine tasting event. Four unique wines for this tasting are available (two whites and two reds) to pre-purchase by registrants at The Wine Outlet in McLean. Selected wines are from regions and wineries around the globe. A wine expert will lead this session and explore the selected wines as well as other interesting aspects of the art of wine. For beginners and connoisseurs alike, this wine experience will not disappoint. Visit www.mcleancenter.org

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.

WEDNESDAY/DEC. 16

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 show-time. Visit www.mcleancenter.org

THURSDAY/DEC. 17

Lúnasa, a Celtic Holiday. 8 p.m. At Reston Community Center Hunters Woods, CenterStage, Reston. Cost is \$25 Reston/\$50 Non-Reston. Irish band Lúnasa brings its holiday show to the CenterStage, along with Dublin-born bouzouki player Daoiri Farrell and rising star Malinda. Part of the Professional Touring Artist Series. Visit the website www.restoncommunitycenter.com/ptas.

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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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