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CONNECTION

Reston ♦ Oak Hill Herndon ♦ Chantilly ♦ CENTRE VIEW

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Ice skating under the lights at the open air rink at Reston Town Center attracts people of all ages during the pandemic.

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PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

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Reston to Honor Dr. King's Legacy

Reston Community Center's events to celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. vision.

BY DAVID SIEGEL
THE CONNECTION

With extra health and safety vigilance in response to COVID-19, there will be three days of virtual and live events to celebrate the life and works of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The events aim to highlight Dr. King's dreams and actions to bring forth a society free of prejudice and racial divisions.

"The Reston Community Center (RCC) has responded to the challenges of COVID-19 with a modified weekend of activities that reflect our ongoing commitment to racial and social justice. We will continue with service projects to support families who are

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RESTON COMMUNITY CENTER



Leila Gordon, Executive Director, Reston Community Center

most impacted by the pandemic," said Leila Gordon, Executive Director, RCC.

"As we do every year, we will use the arts as a vehicle to remind us of the power of Dr. King's vision," added Gordon. "The concert with Akua Allrich and the Tribe will channel the beliefs, emotions and calls to action of the civil rights movement."

For those less familiar with Allrich, she is a jazz vocalist and Washington, DC, native noted for her extraordinary talent and passion. Her musical roots have a clear ground-



Akua Allrich will perform at the Reston Community Center's annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration.

ing in jazz and pan-African music. She sings in many languages including Portuguese, French, Spanish, English, Xhosa, and Twi.

"Our community – indeed our country – can't truly rise to the height of a 'beloved community' unless and until the scourges of racism and poverty are defeated. Until then, we move onward in the struggle and try daily to keep the promise of the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and all others who have given everything to make us all free at last," said Gordon.

Where and When

Reston Community Center's 2021 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration from Jan. 16 to Jan. 18, 2021. COVID-19 health and safety precautions can be located at www.restoncommunitycenter.com

Events include:

- ❖ Akua Allrich and The Tribe: A Nina Simone and Miriam Makeba Tribute at CenterStage, Reston Community Center, Hunters Woods, 2310 Colts Neck Road, Reston, Sunday, Jan. 17 at 2 p.m. Tickets: \$15. Non-Reston Ticket Price: \$30. Visit www.restoncommunitycenter.com or call 703-390-6167.

- ❖ Community Service Projects on Saturday, Jan. 16, 2021 and Monday, Jan. 18, 2021. The 2021 Community Service Projects will be a series of smaller projects for those 6 years and older. In an abundance of health and safety precautions there will be fewer volunteers at each project. For community service project information go to www.restoncommunitycenter.com. To volunteer, contact Ha Brock, Reston Association Volunteer & Community Outreach Coordinator, at 703-435-7986 or habrock@reston.org.

- ❖ Reston Community Orchestra "Keeping the Dream" virtual performance. The 15th Annual Tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr will celebrate the life and work of Dr. King on Saturday, Jan. 16, 2021 at 2 p.m. The virtual performance will be on the Reston Community Center YouTube Channel. RCC YouTube Channel. For information go to www.restoncommunitycenter.com

Reflecting on 2020, Looking to the Future

Centreville Immigration Forum still has more work to do.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Despite the pandemic, the nonprofit Centreville Immigration Forum (CIF) and its Centreville Labor Resource Center (CLRC) are pressing on, as best they can. And during the CIF's recent, annual meeting – held online – it highlighted the work it's done in 2020, plus its plans for 2021.

"This year has been one of change, challenge and COVID," said Interim Executive Director Carol Robinson. "But nevertheless, the CIF has continued meeting the needs of the community."

Its Board of Directors encourages, represents, organizes and advocates for the CLRC workers, most of whom are from Nebaj, Guatemala. And the CIF's new Board members for 2021 are Claudia Alvarez, Brayan Perez Brito, Lauriano Bernal Brito, Tomas Ramirez, Antonio Raymundo, Lisa Shea and Pedro Velasco.

Their efforts are sorely needed because, sometimes, unscrupulous employers take advantage of the day laborers and refuse to pay them for their long hours of work. And that's where Community Organizer John Cano comes in. "We had 21 cases of wage theft, amounting to \$31,124 in unpaid wages," he said. "So we did workshops to train the workers about their rights."

He stressed, however, that wage-theft complaints stem from jobs the workers sometimes get on their own, instead of

through the CLRC. That's not the case at the center, explained Cano, because "Our employers and workers sign a contract clearly explaining what work they're going to do, for how many hours and what they'll be paid."

Furthermore, he said, "Our community also has limited access to health information and education because of our Mayan language. So we've had our own training sessions to train 12 people to interpret for them. We've also identified particular problems women face, such as lack of transportation, access to classes and lack of wealth. We've had meetings to empower them in the community and told them about their rights as workers, too."

REGARDING ADVOCACY, Cano said the Drive Virginia Forward coalition helped pass a bill granting driver's licenses to Virginia's immigrants. "We also established forums to educate the community and the Virginia Legislature about wage theft and will continue combatting this problem."

CLRC Manager Colleen Dowling said most of the male workers were hired for landscaping jobs, this year, and the female workers, mainly housekeeping. It was difficult because COVID-19 forced the center's closure in March and April; but when they worked, employer satisfaction was high.



The CIF's 2021 Board of Directors

"I was originally an employer," said Linnea Ober, a CLRC lead volunteer. "And a few days after a worker did a job, I'd get a call from the center asking how they did. I was always pleased, and now I refer people looking for a handyman, or someone to do landscaping or housecleaning, to the CLRC."

Another lead volunteer, Murray Bradley, noted that "Linnea was so impressed with the center that she became a volunteer and is now our main data analyzer. Colleen came as a volunteer during college and now runs the CLRC. And as a GMU student, Katia Luna created a health and wellbeing workshop for us. She's now the office administrator for the volunteers and interns. We thank all the volunteers who've given so many hours of service to us and our programs."

Interim CIF Vice President Alice Foltz said 20 volunteers – comprising several groups and individuals – help the workers in a variety of ways. They accompany them to school registrations for their children and provide referrals to medical appointments and emergency food distributions.

They also help the workers obtain rental assistance, provide transportation to immigration check-ins and give them referrals to immigration attorneys. But, added Foltz, "With COVID-19, we've also needed people to help them fill out paperwork to qualify for aid from organizations such as WFCM [Western Fairfax Christian Ministries]. And we're very grateful for all of them." Foltz actually founded the CIF and, for many years, served as its president. Now, she teaches English classes to the volunteers at night.

Also critical to the CIF's success is Mary Supley, its development and communications director. She helps secure in-kind funding, organizes annual events and was instrumental in the launching of the organization's first, peer-to-peer, fundraising campaign, reaching out to new donors through existing supporters.

"I'm deeply moved by the commitment and dedication of our staff and volunteers, especially in these difficult times,"

SEE NEXT, PAGE 8

NEWS

Local Hospitals Rollout First COVID-19 Vaccines

Communities keep lights up for healthcare heroes.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

PHOTOS BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

December 2020 held the darkest days yet during the pandemic but also lights of hope. COVID-19 case counts climbed, and the economic undertow of the worst health emergency in a century pulled small businesses down. Days stumbled onto the threshold of 2021 with Senate Republicans blocking a final request to get the chamber to take up the House-passed bill to increase the \$600 stimulus checks to Americans to \$2,000.

Good news came in the vials of hope offered by the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine and the Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine. Todd McGovern, a spokesperson for Reston Hospital Center, said, "We started vaccinating doctors, nurses and care team members on Wednesday, Dec. 16." Inova Fairfax Hospital also received their initial distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine and began their immunization of frontline team members providing care and support to patients. According to its website, "Inova will be a core site for public administration of the COVID-19 vaccine when it is available to the local community."

LIFE across the state and in the local region continued under additional restrictions announced by Gov. Northam and implemented Dec. 14. In Reston Town Center, masked skaters moved over the ice gracefully and not so gracefully under a canopy of twinkling lights. The holidays came and went.

On Dec. 30, the Virginia Department of Health held a Tele-Press Conference on Virginia's Vaccine Rollout and Response Efforts. Christy Gray, VDH's Director of the Division of Immunization, said a successful vaccine rollout across the Commonwealth was critical to flattening the curve and stopping the spread of COVID-19. "As of this morning, Dec. 30, Virginia has received approximately 285,000 vaccine doses from two manufacturers. And has administered 54,295 doses



A home in McLean keeps its lights up in January.



A home in the Town of Herndon's Historic District keeps its lights up in January.

to people in the Commonwealth... Eighteen Virginia hospitals received the initial shipment of the Pfizer vaccine the week of Dec. 18 and began dispersing those shipments of 72,125 doses to our front line healthcare workers... I also wanted to update you on our vaccine dashboard that went live last week. There are two tabs. One is a vaccine summary, and one is a vaccine demographic. This new information will keep the public informed about the number of COVID-19 vaccines distributed and administered in Virginia," Gray said.

THE WEEKEND after New Year's, homes in McLean, Great Falls, Vienna, Reston, Herndon, and beyond appeared to have kept their holiday lights up. "We want healthcare heroes...to see the support and gratitude from our communities and our colleagues. As they drive to or from their shift, the holiday lights will express



Christine Knoell, RN (left), vaccinates Dr. Kathleen Sachse (right) during the first days of the Reston Hospital Center Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine effort for healthcare providers.

PHOTO COURTESY OF
RESTON HOSPITAL CENTER

Fairfax County General Assembly Delegation to Hold Public Hearing

The Fairfax County delegation to the General Assembly will hold a public hearing on the 2021 session on Saturday, Jan. 9, from 9 a.m. to noon. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the hearing will be held virtually. County residents may provide testimony by phone or video submission. Fairfax County is assisting with logistics for the delegation's event.

County residents who want to speak at the hearing can register beginning Monday, Jan. 4 through the Clerk to the Board of Supervisors page under Related Resources, or contact the Department of Clerk Services at 703-324-3151, TTY 711, by 5 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 6.

There will be no sign ups on the day of the event. Speakers will be limited to 70 and must be Fairfax County residents. Assistance will be provided to speakers as needed.

Additional guidelines are as follows:

Each speaker will be given up to two minutes to address the delegation.

Speaking slots will be numbered based on a first come, first served basis.

County residents may register to speak as an individual or on behalf of an organization serving county residents.

Organizations are encouraged to limit their presentation to one speaker.

Requests for ADA accommodations should be made as soon as possible but no later

than 48 hours before the public hearing.

The Chair reserves the right to modify the guidelines on site for the smooth operation of the public forum.

The hearing will be televised live on Fairfax County Television Channel 16 (Channel 1016 in HD on Cox; Channel 16 on Verizon or Comcast), and can also be viewed on-line through the Channel 16 live stream.

Phone Testimony: If providing phone testimony, callers will receive a phone call, originating from 703-324-1000, just before their turn. For the best connection into the meeting, use a landline or, if using a cell phone, do not use the speaker function while testifying.

Video Testimony: Video testimony is subject to the same two-minute time limit as phone testimony and must be uploaded to, and playable from, YouTube.

Speakers may only testify once during the public hearing; speakers may not testify via video and phone.

Further information on the public hearing is available from members of the Fairfax County legislative delegation. Contact information for individual delegation members is available on the Virginia General Assembly web page.

For questions or requests for ADA accommodations contact Arielle McAloon, 703-324-2649, or Rebecca Chenette, 703-324-2683.

A Push in the Right Direction

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



COMMENTARY

I can remember every word of the conversation as if it took place yesterday, but it happened in 1959. I am reminded of the talk as the person speaking to me, Mrs. Lena Kite, passed away last week at age 94. She was the first person to hold the position of guidance counselor at then Shenandoah High School. She called me into her office one day just as I was entering my senior year of high school. She said, "Kenneth (no one called me Ken in those days), it is time for you to think about applying to go to college." I was dumbfounded! I hardly knew how to respond. I finally uttered, "I cannot go to college; no one in my family has ever gone to college." She assured me that yes I could go to college.

Mrs. Kite changed the entire trajectory of my life that day. I was about to graduate from high school which was the expectation for me. My parents who taught me so much of the basics

of life of honesty, decency, and hard work had themselves finished but a couple of years of schooling. They had not talked to me about college for it was beyond their knowledge and beyond what they thought could be their children's aspirations. But Mrs. Kite in her new role as guidance counselor knew better and got me to thinking differently about my future. I owe her a great debt of gratitude and told her that the couple of times I saw her over the last decade when we talked about the two degrees I have. Her obituary said that in her role first as a teacher of typing and shorthand and later as guidance counselor she touched the lives of more than 6,000 children. I am sure she had as equally a positive impact on them as well.

In my first years in the General Assembly there was a debate over several sessions about adding guidance counselors in the elementary schools. My experiences personally and as

an educator convinced me of the importance of early intervention with children who have needs beyond what classroom teachers have the time or expertise with which to respond. Evaluations of school programs have clearly shown the importance of and value of support personnel in schools to include counselors, social workers and psychologists.

Children in our schools represent the broad cross section of communities. Some have limited exposure to education as I had; others have had traumatic experiences that must be taken into account if their school experience is going to be successful. As we look to end the classroom to prison pipeline as part of criminal justice reform we have come to recognize the importance of early school experiences for students to be successful. Most everyone needs a push or at least a nudge from time to time in order to go in the right direction. I look forward to the continuance of establishing early childhood programs, improved ratios for teachers and counselors, and other improvements to our public schools as the General Assembly convenes next week.

Lunasa Performance — a Holiday Success at RCC

BY JOHN LOVAAS
COMMUNITY ACTIVIST AND
FOUNDER OF RESTON
FARMERS MARKET



INDEPENDENT
PROGRESSIVE

Finally! 2020 is gone, barely visible in my rearview mirror. Let's hope the inauguration of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris and the mass vaccination campaign against Covid 19 are only the beginning of a much better year. But I digress. My subject is one of the highlights of the holiday season. The week before Christmas we were fortunate enough to have tickets to a special live performance of traditional Irish music at the Reston Community Center. Imagine an in-person concert during a peak of the Covid 19 pandemic! Actually, the irony is that staging such an event safely is simply a matter of pretty straightforward organization and management.

Lunasa is a remarkable musical group that has been coming to perform in Reston since shortly after its founding 24 years ago. Being one-half Irish myself, I am particularly fond of their music, and Lunasa is renowned for their instrumental Irish music and most delightful jigs. This evening they were accompanied by guest vocalist David King as well as the instrumentalists.

The Lunasa band members were in blue jeans and countryside pub attire. Still, they looked right at home on Center Stage. Kevin Crawford was the leader of the group, the emcee and chief teller of Irish jokes as well as playing the flute and whistles. The rest of the band included Ed Boyd, a prolific composer and guitar player; Cillian Vallely on the Uilleann bagpipes; Trevor Hutchinson, a founding member and double bass player; and, Sean Smyth on the fiddle and whistles. What a fascinating and to



PHOTO BY JOHN LOVAAS

For everyone in the modest audience — 48 people in a theatre built for five times that many — the evening was two hours of pure enjoyment.

mine ear, unusual, combination of instruments and sounds.

We were treated to a lively evening of very Irish jigs and Irish Christmas songs telling their unique Irish tales. Among the tunes was one composed that same day by Mr. Boyd who was near completing a unique mission of musical composition. He set out at the beginning of 2020 to compose one new, original song or tune each and every day for one year. He had no way of knowing that the year he chose would contain substantial Covid 19 pandemic lockdown periods of time which, it turned out, according to him, actually facilitated achieving his goal. He had a lot of extra time available as many gigs and travel plans were cancelled!

Along with our reduced Center Stage audience, Fran and I found ourselves clapping our hands and/or stamping our feet with many of the tunes throughout the evening. For us and it

seemed everyone in the modest audience—48 people in a theatre built for five times that many (see photo)—the evening was two hours of pure enjoyment! In fact, we may have felt even more comfortable because of the smaller audience size. We certainly were not shoehorned into our seats as one sometimes feels when the house is packed!

So, how did RCC pull it off and deliver such an enjoyable event while adhering to the requisite precautions and assuring we felt safe?

Everyone was warned to not attend if they felt at all ill or had been exposed to anyone known to have been ill or tested positive for the virus. All wore face masks, had socially distanced assigned seating and maintained social distances throughout the evening. And, RCC staff were present to assure we stayed safe. For me, it was more proof positive that such events and others can be conducted safely if organized and managed competently... as was also the case with the Reston Farmers Market for the full 2020 season. IMHO a modern society with competent governance should in fact be able to conduct operations at many venues ...including schools, entertainment and sports arenas, and churches, for example, at safely reduced numbers with effective precautions and oversight.

I think it is unfortunate that we as a county and a country have not yet learned how to do so. To date, we seem to know only the extremes of near total lockdown or foolhardy openness which exposes our people to unacceptably high risk of illness or death. In nearly a year, we don't seem to have progressed very far along the learning curve. And, don't even get me started on failed leadership beginning at the top!

Accordingly, I am pleased to give a hardy hat's off and salute to County Supervisor Walter Alcorn, long-time RCC Executive Director Leila Gordon, and RCC staff for setting a fine example showing what can be done by competent people with a bit of sustained effort.

NEWS DEPARTMENT:
reston@connectionnewspapers.com

Kemal Kurspahic
Editor ♦ 703-778-9414
kemal@connectionnewspapers.com

Mercia Hobson
Community Reporter
mhobson@connectionnewspapers.com

Bonnie Hobbs
Community Reporter, 703-778-9415
bhobbs@connectionnewspapers.com

Ken Moore
Contributing Writer
kmoore@connectionnewspapers.com

ADVERTISING:
For advertising information
sales@connectionnewspapers.com
703-778-9431

Debbie Funk
Display Advertising/National Sales
703-778-9444
debfunk@connectionnewspapers.com

David Griffin
Marketing Assistant
703-778-9431
dgriffin@connectionnewspapers.com

Classified & Employment
Advertising
703-778-9431

Editor & Publisher
Mary Kimm
mkimm@connectionnewspapers.com
@MaryKimm

Executive Vice President
Jerry Vernon
703-549-0004
jvernon@connectionnewspapers.com

Managing Editor
Kemal Kurspahic
Art/Design:
Laurence Foong, John Heinly,
Ali Khaligh
Production Manager:
Geovani Flores

CIRCULATION
circulation@connectionnewspapers.com



Local Wreaths Across America Site Remembers, Honors, Teaches

Veterans did not give up and neither did Herndon Woman's Club: 863 remembrance wreaths remain in place.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Herndon Woman's Club (VA0143P) found a different way to carry out and join Wreaths Across America on National Wreaths Across America Day, Dec. 19, 2020. Since 2014, the Town of Herndon, in partnership with Herndon Woman's Club, has joined the national nonprofit organization Wreaths Across America in their mission to remember the Fallen, honor those who Serve and to teach the children the value of Freedom by coordinating a wreath-laying ceremony and laying of remembrance wreaths on

gravesites of United States veterans at Chestnut Grove Cemetery 831 Dranesville Road, Herndon.

"Thank you HWC for this wonderful opportunity and may all those who have loved and in their way served this great country in life, in death know our gratitude," wrote Jack McNulty on the Wreaths Across America message page from supporters.

The historic cemetery is owned and operated by the Town that requested no public ceremony in 2020 due to coronavirus and restrictions. Members of Herndon Woman's Club made logistic and restrictive changes to the event, limiting gathering size to only a handful of members and their spouses. All wore masks.



A remembrance wreath is placed at the gravesite of Private First Class United States Army World War II veteran Thomas Henry Kephart Sr. on Wreaths Across America Day, Dec. 19, 2020, at Chestnut Grove Cemetery in Herndon.

Following the ceremonial Placing of Wreaths to honor those who serve and served in each branch of the United States military - the Army, Marines, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, and Merchant Marines plus one wreath representing all prisoners of war/missing in ac-

tion (POW/MIA), the small group placed 863 fresh balsam remembrance wreaths at the headstones of veterans' graves.

Suzy Ledgerwood, president of Herndon Woman's Club, said, "Plans are to remove the wreaths by Friday, Jan. 15."



Wreaths Across America coordinated its annual tradition held this year on Dec. 19 to Remember, Honor, and Teach about the sacrifices made by community veterans and their families. At Chestnut Grove Cemetery, a handful of Herndon Woman's Club members and their spouses, in partnership with the Town of Herndon, placed 863 remembrance wreaths at the headstones of United States veterans.

Recent messages on the Wreaths Across America memories page from supporters about local veterans interred at Chestnut Grove Cemetery:

"Thank you for your service. We honor you and all those fallen heroes. Forever remembered and celebrated."- Dianna Fisher for Doug Heckman

"Thank you for your service, Earl. You were taken way too early. I love and miss you, my twin brother Earl." - Coulter for Earl Preston, Navy



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Snowflake Trail Fun by Cub Run RECenter

The Fairfax County Park Authority is offering a free scavenger hunt with video clues in the Cub Run Stream Valley. Called the Snowflake Trail, it opened Dec. 18 and will remain marked through Jan. 11.

According to the story, Grandmother Frost has lost her gifts for the woodland animals, and participants must help her find the presents while walking through the forest behind the Cub Run RECenter. Videos at stops along the trail lead to the goal and teach children about the animals in the woods.

Visitors scan QR codes with a smartphone to learn the gifts the animals are receiving. Snowflake



PHOTO COURTESY OF LINDA CRONE
 One of the many clues along the Snowflake Trail.

markers along the path guide participants to each clue. The Snowflake Trail starts at a kiosk at the Cub Run RECenter circle, across from the center's main entrance at 4630 Stonecroft Blvd, in Chantilly.

It follows a loop trail through forest and other habitats back to the center's parking area. The trail, on both paved and mulched surfaces, is less than a mile long. No RECenter entry pass is needed to participate.

Parking is available in the RECenter's parking lot. An introductory video is available online at <https://youtu.be/LSsFFHnMOEs>.

— BONNIE HOBBS

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Centreville Troop Honors 'Mitch' Simmons

Troop 30 of Centreville recognized Mitchell "Mitch" Simmons for his 12 years of service to Troop 30 when he stepped down from the troop on Dec. 31, 2020. During his tenure, he served as the Troop Secretary, Assistant Scoutmaster, and finished as the Committee Chair. In that time frame, he helped Troop 30 grow to be a greatly respected troop in the Sully District and he had a front row seat to watch each of his three sons earn Eagle Scout—Eric in 2014,



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED
 All three Simmons brothers achieved Eagle Scout rank: Eric in 2014, Evan in 2017, and John in 2020.

Evan in 2017, and John in 2020. This was the first time in Troop's 20+ year history that a single family saw three brothers achieve the rank of Eagle Scout. Troop

30 is a mid-sized troop known for its home-town community feel and its outstanding program

has been helping mold boys into men prepared for life's challenges since 1999.

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connectionnewspapers.com/Calendar

An expert is someone who knows some of the worst mistakes that can be made in his subject and how to avoid them.
 -Werner Heisenberg

PHOTOS BY STACEY CURTIS



Gillian Bushée of Reston, a Herndon High School freshman, runs the inaugural Shenandoah Valley Cross Country League 5k course and is set to break school records.



(From left) Tea Geary, 15, of Herndon, teammate and friend gives Gillian Bushée of Reston a hug after her winning cross country race.

Herndon High Runner Captures First At Cross Country League 5k Race

Gillian Bushée flies through school's cross county record.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

The most challenging distance to go for Herndon High School freshman and cross country runner Gillian Bushée of Reston was the distance from her bed to the front door each morning. When the executive committee of the Virginia High School League made official in late July that there would be no public high school sports in Virginia this fall, the hard work and long and lonely morning runs paid off for the fifteen-year-old on Saturday, Nov. 21. Gillian had found a way to compete outside the normal bounds of high school track and crossed the finish line first at the inaugural Shenandoah Valley Cross Country League 5k. With a recorded time of 18:04.6 Gillian broke the record held by Herndon High student, Carolyn Hennessey 2011 by nearly 8 seconds. Her average mile speed was 5.48.7.

COMPOSED of four "regular seasons," the purpose of the league's race series was to provide a safe opportunity during COVID-19 for all runners, especially those at the mid-

dle school, high school, and college and post-collegiate levels. They could compete and keep their competitive edge according to the Shenandoah Valley Cross County League website.

"This race was a long time coming," said James Luehrs Coach. "She (Gillian) has been training hard since the spring, so I'm not that surprised she ran the time. What surprised me is her dedication, maturity, and trust in the training. Only the great ones have that," he said.

Gillian's stunning performance catapulted the newcomer to running to #3 all-time in course history, .61 behind Libby Davidson at E.C. Glass ranked #1 with a time of 17:43, and Weini Kelati at Heritage (Leesburg) ranked #2 with a time of 17:55.60.

"Well executed race on a tough course. With the lack of a season, she stayed consistent and motivated and had a personal best time. Great work Gillian," said Chris Geary of Herndon.

Gillian said the league enforced COVID-19 protocols. Except for warming up, racing, and cooling down, every human on the property wore a mask, even after warming up. Athletes might remove their masks when their wave moved up to the starting line. Each wave at the 5k started 90-seconds apart, seeded fastest to slowest, to ensure that no one caught up to the group in front of them.

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New Year, Old Problem: Cancer



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

As I sit and write here, with too much time on my hands, I can't help but consider my lot in life. In a little less than two months: Feb. 20, I will celebrate (if that's even the right word), the 12-year anniversary of my original cancer diagnosis. On that date, I received a phone call at work from my internal medicine doctor advising me that the previous week's surgical biopsy indicated a malignancy in my lungs. The following week, Team Lourie was sitting in an oncologist's office waiting for the other shoe to drop. And boy, did it drop: non small cell lung cancer, stage IV. Accompanied by a "13 month to two year" prognosis with very little encouragement or statistical probability to give us much reason to hope. In answer to our predictable question, the soon-to-be my oncologist offered up a tantalizing prospect: "Could you be the one" (literally) that outlives your prognosis? It was hardly heartfelt, but his answer was "Yes."

So off I didn't fly into the wild blue yonder. Instead, I shuffled out his office and with my head down, exited the building and staggered into my car where my wife, Dina and I attempted to process the information we had just been given. I don't recall there being much discussion during the 30-minute drive home or even after we had arrived. To tell you the truth, beside still processing the information we had just received, we were pretty much in a daze (hence the overall name for my columns: "Daze of My Life") and were so blindsided by the seriousness of what we had just heard (no cancer history in my immediate family as well as my being a lifelong non-smoker), we almost couldn't talk, probably didn't talk and any talking we did was likely empty and hollow. Imagine being told, out of the blue, that you could be dead in less than a year, maybe even before your 55th birthday. Heck, both my parents lived past 85. That's what I've been anticipating. To think that 30 years yet of my future life had just been taken away was almost too much to believe. But since the oncologist was not the least bit in doubt about any of the results or how to proceed (we didn't feel the need, given the urgency and conviction with which the oncologist spoke, to even get a second opinion), we decided and committed that very day to starting chemotherapy the following week. It seemed clear that there was absolutely no time like the present.

Though the dozen or so tumors in my lungs "never acted" as my oncologist expected (growing and moving) it wasn't until Dec. '19 a year or so after a large tumor appeared below my Adam's apple that a new surgical biopsy was performed. The results of which indicated thyroid cancer which a few weeks later led to my having a thyroidectomy (thyroid removed) per the direction of my newest doctor, an endocrinologist (who has been treating me ever since). When the post-surgical biopsy confirmed yet again the existence of thyroid cancer, my reclassification as a thyroid cancer patient was official. Soon thereafter, my treatment for thyroid cancer began, first an overnight at the hospital and then daily levothyroxine pills. As a result, I am no longer being treated for lung cancer, just thyroid. The question has raised its ugly head in these last few months: Was I misdiagnosed or did I have two types of cancer? And if I do have two types of cancer and one/the lung cancer is not being treated, am I in reality a "dead man walking?" Ignoring/not treating lung cancer is generally speaking, not advisable. As my oncologist said to me many years ago about my having lung cancer: "I can treat you but I can't cure you." Not exactly words to live by.

It's on these anniversaries and the last few months leading up to them when I focus even more on my circumstances. How does that actually occur when my having cancer already consumes my conscience and subconscious? I can't really explain it other than to express the amazement and good fortune that I'm still alive. All I know is, I'm always happy when I wake up the next day and the anniversary has finally passed.

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

Next: Women's Empowerment Project

FROM PAGE 2

she said. Supley also acknowledged several organizations – such as the International Mayan League, WFCM, Drive Virginia Forward, CASA, the Legal Aid Justice Center and Cornerstones – for all their help during the pandemic. She noted, as well, the Meyer Foundation, which gave CIF a grant to offset its pandemic-related revenue losses.

In addition, the nonprofit received the

\$100,000 Opportunity Challenge grant from the WES Mariam Assefa Fund and the Tarsadia Foundation. CIF was one of just 12 out of 470 applicants to be awarded this grant. It'll use the money to launch the Women's Empowerment Project – meeting regularly with low-income, immigrant women to identify their needs, provide mutual support, teach them about community resources available to them, and develop and advocate for opportunities such as jobs, education, childcare

and improved physical and mental wellbeing.

OVER THE YEARS, the number of women using the CLRC has increased, with women now comprising about 15 percent of the people registering there to find work, attend ESOL classes or pursue wage-theft claims. Most of these women don't wait at the labor center for work; instead, they request housecleaning jobs and ask to be contacted by phone when work is available.

"So to improve employment opportunities for women, the system either needs to change or an alternative one developed," said Supley. "This decision must be made by the women in the CLRC community – who best understand their own needs and what it'll take for them to be successful."

To hire workers from the CLRC, call 703-543-6272 in advance or go to centervilleimmigrationforum.org/hire. To donate to CIF, text CIF10 to 44-321 or visit <http://centervilleimmigrationforum.org/our-impact/donate/>.

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Pictured: One of the several historical buildings that has housed the Alexandria Gazette Packet since its 1784 founding.

The pandemic has crushed many newspapers across the country, and one of America's oldest newspapers and its affiliated Connection Newspapers, websites and digital media is at risk. The Northern Virginia, DC, and MD area's best read and most trusted source for community news, which includes the Alexandria Gazette Packet, Mount Vernon Gazette and all Connection Newspapers in the metropolitan region. The pandemic has hit small businesses hard, which in turn has reduced advertising revenue that keeps these local newspapers alive to provide hyperlocal news to residents. Connection Newspapers has been offering these local newspapers to residents for over 200 years - countless residents have grown up with this local paper covering significant moments in the life of your family and children, news, sporting events,

school activities, and even pictures of your dogs and cars. Internet news and large national newspapers do not provide the local connection or historical connection that local papers like Connection Newspapers provide.

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Runner

FROM PAGE 7

"We didn't all start at the same time...I was pretty much in the lead, and I ended up catching up with the group in front of me. I used them as my motivation," Gillian said. She'd get close to each person, speed up, pass that person, and keep going on to the next. "There were a lot of hills, so I made sure I passed people on the hills because that is when most people slow down." With half a mile to go, Gillian said she knew she couldn't give up and ended up going "pretty fast." "The last half mile is basically all downhill. It felt crazy. I could not feel my legs; I was basically falling down the hill...I didn't realize I got 18:04 until I settled down."

AT THE URGING of her mother, Sandy Curtis who is a runner, Gillian decided to give it a try. The former soccer player never looked back. "It was so exciting to see Gillian emerge from the woods and start passing runners who were in heats that started before her... Seeing her run to the finish line was amazing. I knew she had run a very solid race and gotten an excellent time," said Curtis.

Herndon High School teammate and friend Tea Geary, 15, of Herndon, said, "Gillian worked super hard this year throughout quarantine and it was amazing to see it being payed off during these races."

After the race, Kernstown Battlefield Cross Country tweeted to Gillian, "Congrats ma'am! You had a tremendous season, thank you for trusting us."