

Mount Vernon Businesses Recognized by Chamber

BY HOLLY DOUGHERTY

MOUNT VERNON LEE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Six outstanding local businesses were recognized with Excellence in Business 2020 awards on Friday, Jan. 30 by Mount Vernon Lee Chamber of Commerce.

"These awards recognize businesses that embody the values and culture of the chamber of commerce," said Mark Murray, Chamber Chairman. "We are pleased to recognize these businesses for their valuable services and also for the way they give back to the community."

Awards were presented to Michael Murphy, Mount Vernon Columbus Club; Kenneth Wood, The Skrimp Shack; Ellen Meyer, In Stitches Needlework; Don Cammarata, Covanta Fairfax; and Michael Drobnis, OptfinITY.

Joel Bernstein, ECCA Payroll, was recognized as the Chamber Citizen of the Year. Joel has consistently provided outstanding service to many local businesses and mentored entrepreneurs starting a business.

Bernstein has served several terms on the Mount Vernon Lee Chamber Board of Directors.

He also serves on the Board of the Alexandria Salvation Army, is a member of the Arlington/Alexandria Workforce Council and a Board member of the West End Business Association.

Covanta Fairfax's outstanding efforts to provide environmentally sustainable waste



From left, Mark Murray, Chamber chairman; Michael Murphy, Mount Vernon Columbus Club; Mauricio Rojas and Kenneth Wood, The Skrimp Shack; Joel Bernstein, ECCA Payroll; Ellen Meyer, In Stitches Needlework; Don Cammarata, Covanta Fairfax; Michael Drobnis, OptfinITY.

management and their commitment to the local community show the important role it has played in Fairfax County and the greater DC region. Covanta fights climate change by processing more than one million tons of waste every year, preventing that waste from going to landfills and creating greenhouse gas pollution. Our community is fortunate to have one of their modern waste-to-energy facilities in Lorton. Covanta Fairfax has been an active community member and strong supporter of local organizations.

OptfinITY and founder Michael Drobnis were recognized with an award. OptfinITY

is a managed IT Services firm founded in 2002 and located in Springfield. It provides 24x7 support and monitoring of systems. It provides Virtual CIO services, network security, security training. CEO Michael Drobnis is the proud father of three daughters and is actively involved in coaching youth sports teams, teaching youth cybersecurity, and providing leadership for many chambers of commerce in Northern Virginia.

In Stitches Needlework was recognized as a stellar example of a locally owned, one-of-a-kind, small business. Its loyal customers visit the shop for the latest designs in both

counted cross-stitch and needlepoint.

Owner Ellen Meyer celebrated owning In Stitches for 25 years last September. She said needlework had helped many through the pandemic.

Ellen is also very active in Nelly's Needlers, serving as treasurer in this all-volunteer organization that contributes both money and time to Woodlawn. Named after Eleanor "Nelly" Custis, a granddaughter of Martha Washington, Nelly's Needlers just passed the million dollar mark in funds contributed to Woodlawn.

Mount Vernon Columbus Club was recognized as the nonprofit organization of the year. For more than 35 years, the Mount Vernon Columbus Club — a nonprofit charitable corporation with deep Catholic roots — has been dedicated to supporting our neighbors and strengthening the surrounding communities.

The proceeds from their weekly Bingo sessions are donated to numerous 501(c)(3) charities to benefit local, national, and global causes. In the last two years, their total charitable donations were \$450,000. In addition, they provide dollars and volunteers to support many local projects.

The 2020 New Business of the Year was The Skrimp Shack, a restaurant specializing in fast, fresh seafood in Mount Vernon Plaza. Owner Kenneth McLeon, a retired Marine, didn't expect a pandemic when he made plans to open the restaurant, but persevered through many difficulties to a grand opening in October.

Delivery Vehicles Are Everywhere

The stay-at-home lifestyle could be here to stay.

BY MIKE SALMON
GAZETTE PACKET

Delivery trucks are not a new thing to area neighborhoods but with the pandemic and the stay-at-home lifestyle many have adopted over the last 10 years, everyone delivers these days.

Starting early morning, it starts out as a delivery service, such as Amazon or UPS, and evolves to include the U.S. Postal trucks in the afternoon, and then the pizza and food vehicles in the evening. Delivery is a long-day-into-night event.

The American Automobile Association has been on top of this increased delivery traffic, and noted that demand also increased for deliveries to restaurants, hospitals, businesses, and to homes after the onset of the pandemic.

"Across the country, neigh-



This Fed Ex truck in Old Town, Alexandria is not only blocking the street in both directions, but also the side street that feeds into it.

bors are complaining about delivery trucks clogging streets and blocking traffic lanes due to more home deliveries during the pandemic," said John Townsend of AAA.

In April 2020, 29 percent of food truck vendors in the region

reportedly increased their delivery services during the early stages of the coronavirus stay-at-home orders and shutdowns, according to a survey by the DMV Food Truck Association.

Townsend cited one report that said "With social distancing and

shelter in place becoming the new norm though, these companies [food delivery services] have started to see dramatic increases in their stock price as food delivery is seeing large demands. Restaurants are seeking ways to mitigate losses and are turning to pickup and delivery options as their main means of income."

Even before the pandemic manifested itself, AAA said delivery was picking up. "The delivery industry saw a huge increase in business from the rise of e-commerce shopping in the last 5 years with shopping online quickly becoming a standard for most Americans."

Visit Fairfax has created the "Take Out Trail," to support local restaurants, coffee shops, breweries, and wineries during this unprecedented time, with many places now offering delivery for the first time, using existing delivery services such as Uber Eats or Door Dash.

Barry Biggar, the CEO at Visit Fairfax and looks at the advent of "Take Out Trail," as a way to keep some struggling businesses afloat during the pandemic. "Delivery will probably remain as a permanent offering of these businesses," Biggar said.

With the quick stop drop off nature of the delivery business, it's not surprising to see a delivery car or truck in the community several times a day, boxing in cars or squeezing traffic into the middle of the street.

From the law enforcement side, their message is to follow the rules. "We would encourage drivers to be familiar with the local laws and practice common courtesy," said Fairfax County Police officer James Curry. "If anticipated to take an extended amount of time away from your vehicle, find a safe location to park that would not impede

SEE DELIVERY, ON PAGE 7

PHOTO BY MIKE SALMON/CONNECTION

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www.KristenJones.com



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VIRTUAL OPEN SAT 2/6, 11 AM

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Sealing the Record

House and Senate Democrats disagree on how old convictions should be expunged.

BY MICHAEL LEE POPE
GAZETTE PACKET

For people haunted by a conviction for felony drug possession or misdemeanor disorderly conduct, a debate now happening in the Virginia General Assembly is one that could have dramatic consequences for finding a place to live or landing a job. Lawmakers are considering legislation that would allow those people to seal their criminal record, expunging old convictions and helping them wipe the slate clean.

But Democrats are bitterly divided over how to accomplish that goal.

House Democrats are pressing for an automatic model for sealing the record on many crimes, allowing people to wipe the slate clean without needing to hire a lawyer or missing a day of work. Senate Democrats are rejecting that approach, holding out for a petition-based process where judges would review individual cases to determine whether they deserve to have convictions or charges sealed. Neither side appears to be willing to back down as the legislation heads toward a closed-door conference committee, where lawmakers will either cut a deal or end the session without taking action.

"It's time to act during this session to have the robust debate about how to best conduct the process of expunging people's records," said Gov. Ralph Northam in his State of the Commonwealth address. "This will make our system more just and equal — and it needs action this session."

Although the governor told lawmakers he wants them to find a resolution before they end the session, he pointedly declined to take a position. The lack of leadership from the governor has intensified the struggle between Senate Democrats and House Democrats as the General Assembly session reaches its halfway mark this week. At this point, the most likely scenario is that each side would insist on its version, sending the legislation into a conference committee where lawmakers might end up adopting some kind of hybrid approach, expunging some crimes automatically while requiring a petition to seal others.

"For the relatively low-level, mi-



House Majority Leader Charniele Herring of Alexandria, shown here on the House floor last year, is leading the fight to automatically expunge criminal records, sealing records of old cases ranging from felony drug possession to misdemeanors like larceny to disorderly conduct.

nor offenses I think there ought to be some sort of automatic mechanism where those records are at least sealed," said Attorney General Mark Herring. "We should give a clean slate and a second chance to more Virginians who have earned it."

HOUSE DEMOCRATIC LEADER
Charniele Herring of Alexandria

"Keeping people branded with a scarlet letter for misdemeanor offenses is disgraceful."

— House Majority Leader Charniele Herring

says many misdemeanors and even some felonies should be automatically expunged from the record after eight years. The bill that she introduced in the House has automatic expungement sealing the record for many low-level misdemeanors like petty larceny and trespassing, although it does not apply to sex crimes or violent crimes. Her bill also includes automatic expungement for felony drug possession. If expungement for those crimes requires a petition, she says, only a privileged few would benefit while most people would suffer.

"Who benefits from petitions for misdemeanors? Attorneys," said Herring, who is the chairwoman of the House Courts of Justice. "Keeping people branded with a scarlet letter for misdemeanor offenses is disgraceful."

Opponents of automatic expungement say it's a mistake to automate any court proceeding, because it excludes the role of judges to make individual determinations about defendants and their circumstances. Lawmakers are considering a separate bill that would eliminate many mandatory minimums, and advocates for petition-based expungement compare automatic expungement to the problems associated with mandatory minimums. That's an approach supporters of the House bill reject.

"When expungement is not free or automatic, very few people avail themselves of it," said Ashna Khanna, legislative director at the ACLU of Virginia. "We need a system that will not create more inequities when it comes to race and socioeconomic status."

SENATE DEMOCRATS are taking a much more conservative approach.

Sen. Scott Surovell (D-36) has a bill that would allow automatic expungement for some minor offenses, like speeding or shopping cart theft. Felony drug possession and jailable misdemeanor like larceny or trespassing would require a judge to review an individual's case and get a sense of who the defendants are and what happened in their lives that resulted in the criminal record. That way judges can identify significant drug problems or mental health problems.

"What somebody is convicted of is often a legal fiction to achieve a compromise in a criminal proceeding," said Surovell. "And from my perspective the circumstances of the crime that led to the compromise are partly what need to be considered before a charge is expunged."

Although Herring's bill has automatic expungement for a narrow set of offenses, Surovell's bill has a petition-based process for a much larger list of crimes. Currently, Virginia law offers no way for people to seal old convictions, and the Senate bill would create a new process for expunging the record for hundreds of crimes. Surovell's bill also includes a provision to provide legal services to some people who can't afford lawyers and penalties for private companies that sell expunged criminal

records online, a grift that's often used to extract money out of people who are trying to clear their names on the internet.

"The more expungement available the better," Andrew Elders, policy director for Justice Forward Virginia. "I keep wanting to take the best parts of these bills and smash them together until we get the most expansive reform possible."

THE CONTOURS of a final bill might end up taking bits and pieces from two approaches, and advocates have a wide range of opinions about what should happen. Alexandria Commonwealth's Attorney Bryan Porter says he supports automatic expungement for any charges that have been dismissed or where the defendant has been found not guilty. He also supports an automatic process for sealing all misdemeanor convictions, including convictions for larceny or trespassing. But, he says, he would like to see a petition-based process for felony drug convictions.

"There currently is no process by which you could ever have those convictions sealed, and I'm supportive of allowing people a process by which they can have those convictions sealed," said Porter, who is part of a group known as the Progressive Prosecutors for Justice. "But I do think it's reasonable in those circumstances where someone has actually been convicted of a criminal offense that there be a petition-based system."

The ongoing impasse between the House and Senate on this issue has been going on for more than a year. House and Senate Democrats were unable to come to a resolution on their differences last March, and the session concluded without a bill. Then the Crime Commission released a report supporting the automatic process, and people were hopeful that a special session on criminal justice reform might have been an opportunity for compromise. But once again the House and Senate were not able to reach an agreement and the special session ended without a deal.

Now lawmakers are back at it again for a third time, and each side seems to be digging in its heels and refusing to back down.

"The problem they have is the votes don't exist in our body to do what they want," said Surovell. "And if they tell me the votes don't exist to do what I want in their body I guess we won't have a bill again."

PHOTO BY MICHAEL LEE POPE/GAZETTE PACKET

Legislature Is Moving Bills, Addressing Problems

BY SCOTT SUROVELL
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

As the General Assembly begins its fourth week in session this year, vaccine deployment for Covid-19 has started to accelerate and we are discussing how to jump-start in-person schooling. Virginia's Secretary of Education believes all school personnel will be vaccinated by March 1 and a bill is pending to require in-person elementary-secondary school options no later than July 1. Depending on how discussions go, the General Assembly might pass a mandate to require in-person learning sooner.

My Bills Are Advancing

Due to the pandemic, all Senators were limited to introducing a maximum of 12 bills. At this point, the Senate has approved three of my bills and the other nine are working their way through the legislature.

The federal government allows immigrant children who have been abused, abandoned or neglected to claim "Special Immigrant Juvenile Status" (SIJS) after state courts have made certain findings through an immigrant's 21st birthday. In 2019, I passed legislation restoring the authority of Virginia's courts to make such findings, but

the courts lose jurisdiction on a child's 18th birthday. My bill harmonizes Virginia and federal rules to allow countless young adults between the ages of 18 and 21 to claim SIJS status going forward.

Virginia last raised minimum vehicle insurance policy limits in 1975. Today, Virginia has one of the lowest minimum auto policies in America. This means hundreds of Virginians receive \$25,000 settlements when their medical bills and lost wages can total hundreds of thousands of dollars every year. My bill raises Virginia's minimum policy to \$50,000 and passed the Senate on a 27-11 vote.

This week, the Senate will debate my legislation to abolish capital punishment. My chief cosponsor is Republican Senator William Stanley and I hope to garner additional bipartisan support on the final vote.

Undergrounding Utilities

The Prince William County Board of Supervisors and Town of Dumfries have committed to fund underground utilities on all 14 miles of U.S. 1 between the Occoquan River and Quantico. The next step is to bury utilities on U.S.



Surovell

1 between the Kings Crossing and Fort Belvoir in Fairfax County as part of the \$800 million U.S. 1 Bus Rapid Transit Project. Dominion Energy, Verizon and Cox have estimated that it will cost \$84 million.

The Virginia Department of Transportation has committed \$15 million towards the cost and Verizon has agreed to cover the \$40 million cost of burying their wires if the County constructs a slightly expanded duct bank to include space for Verizon conduit. The remaining \$59 million is unfunded.

In 2019, I passed legislation allowing a \$1.00 per month county tax on electric meters to fund undergrounded utilities on U.S. 1 so that undergrounding utilities would not compete with County taxpayer funds for schools or other local priorities.

The concept is supported by the Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Associations and the Mount Vernon-Lee Chamber of Commerce and is cosponsored by Sen. Adam Ebbin and Delegates Paul Krizek, Mark Sickles and Kathy Tran. I am working with Chairman Jeff McKay and Supervisors Dan Storck and Rodney Lusk on clarifications that Fairfax County has requested

which the Senate will likely approve this week.

Del. Paul Krizek has introduced a budget amendment to fund a County request for part of the balance, but the state does not have any existing funding programs for local, non-residential, utility undergrounding projects. Special programs for one of the wealthiest counties in America is often a difficult sell in Richmond but we are fighting for a contribution.

Finally, it is difficult for Virginians to "expunge" or erase certain convictions from their records. These records can make finding jobs and enjoying a full life nearly impossible, even after years of not committing any offenses. The Senate will vote this week on my bill to completely modernize Virginia's expungement system. Governor Northam put \$25 million in his budget to fund computer infrastructure to facilitate major changes, including the ability to seal convictions after periods of good behavior.

Please complete my constituent survey at <http://www.scottsurovell.org/survey>.

If you have any difficulty securing a vaccine, have questions about legislation or would like to schedule an appointment with me in my "zoom room," please contact me at scott@scottsurovell.org.

Vaccine Roll Out Improving

BY DEL. PAUL KRIZEK
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

Disappointingly, Virginia hit the bottom of the national rankings in Covid-19 vaccine distribution in recent weeks, uniting both political parties here in the Commonwealth in constructive and bipartisan criticism of the Northam administration over transparency of location of doses, methods of distribution and equality in where the vaccines were going. Importantly, the Northam administration responded quickly and made some necessary improvements to the vaccine distribution system. As a result, Virginia soared up the state rankings and now sits at #15 in the nation in percentage of doses administered, which is very good news. And, significantly, the administration has locked in a permanent 16 percent increase to the amount of doses we receive from the federal government, bringing us closer to the 50,000 doses a day needed to achieve herd immunity. The largest obstacle Virginia, and the nation

as a whole, faces is still supply; even if we had the infrastructure to administer vaccines to every Virginian tomorrow, there are simply not enough vaccine doses to do so yet.

What the administration discovered was that many hospitals were holding onto thousands of doses to administer second shots to their employees, and that some health departments were uncertain about who should receive the vaccine. The storage of extra doses was deemed unnecessary, as the hospital systems will receive more doses of the vaccine 3-4 weeks after their initial vaccinations. The governor has ordered these hospitals to redistribute the vaccines immediately so that more Virginians can receive their initial dose. The administration has clarified that the health departments should allocate half of their available doses for those 65 and older, and the other half should be allocated for frontline essential workers, high risk individuals 16 and



Krizek

over, and those who live in congregate settings.

Too many of my constituents and Virginians across the Commonwealth have found it difficult to get a vaccine appointment with their local health departments even if they were eligible in groups 1a and 1b. Others had concerns about the difference between the number of doses received from the federal government and the number of shots administered. Governor Northam has directed the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) to accelerate the development of a centralized vaccination appointment system, and the VDH created a vaccine dashboard to increase transparency in the vaccination campaign. The dashboard can be found at <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines-received/>.

There are concerns about unequal distribution; that privileged, wealthy, white communities were

receiving more vaccines than lower income or minority communities. The administration is now requiring that the healthcare volunteers who administer the vaccine record the race and ethnicity of the recipient so that this critical data can be tracked.

On the General Assembly side,
SEE VACCINE ROLL, PAGE 5

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LETTER

Abolish the Death Penalty

To the Editor:

On behalf of the Virginia Justice and Witness Action Network (of the Central Atlantic Conference, United Church of Christ), we write to urge support for legislation to abolish the death penalty in Virginia. We have an unprecedented opportunity to end this immoral and flawed criminal justice penalty with bills pending in both houses of the General Assembly and support from Governor Northam.

The reasons to abolish the death penalty are myriad. It is racially biased in its application. Research shows that a person is more than three times as likely to be sentenced to death when the murder victim is white versus when the

victim is black. The death penalty is expensive.

Life in prison protects the public from dangerous criminals at a significantly lower cost. The death penalty has no deterrent value.

There is no credible evidence that the death penalty deters homicide.

And perhaps most persuasive, nationwide since 1976, 172 persons convicted and sentenced to death have been released from death row with evidence of their innocence. One person wrongly executed is one too many!

As people of faith, we believe in human dignity and redemption. And, as Virginians committed to

racial justice who understand our shameful and brutal history of lynching, we believe we must end this inhumane practice that disproportionately affects people of color. We urge readers to contact their legislators to support Senate Bill 1165 and House Bill 2263.

Rev. Kristen McBrayer,
Senior Minister,
Emmanuel United Church
of Christ, Vienna
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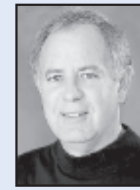
Vaccine Roll Out Improving

FROM PAGE 4

we are rushing to pass legislation to aid the vaccination efforts. Del. Bagby's emergency House Bill 2333 passed all House committees, the House Floor, the Senate Committees and Senate floor unanimously. House Bill 2333 will dramatically expand eligibility to administer the vaccine to medical and nursing students, and those who had a license to practice medicine in Virginia in the last 20 years, opening the door to even

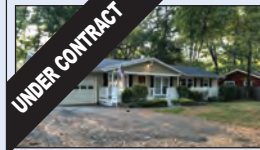
more experienced personnel to aid in vaccination efforts. This bill eliminates some licensing barriers and helps lay the personnel infrastructure groundwork for the day soon when Virginia will receive enough doses of the vaccine to administer the necessary 50,000 a day. This bill also will require ethnicity and race to be recorded to ensure that the vaccines are being distributed in an equitable manner. Also, HB 2333 will

SEE VACCINE ROLL, PAGE 6



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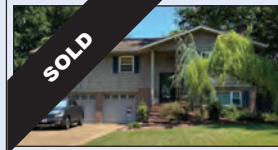
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MOUNT VERNON

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For more information, call the Mount Vernon District Office at 703-780-7518, TTY 711, visit the office at 2511 Parkers Lane, or send your questions/comments to mtvernon@fairfaxcounty.gov.

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Fairfax County School Board Votes for In-Person Learning

Students who opt-in would be due back by March 16.

By MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Fairfax County Public School students, whose parents or guardians opt for in-person learning for their children, are headed back to the classroom at least two days a week by March 16.

On Feb. 2, the School Board unanimously consented during its work session to support Superintendent Scott Brabrand to proceed with his proposed timeline presented that day in the Return to School Update. According to Megan McLaughlin, Braddock District School Board member, the School Board has the ultimate authority to open and close schools.

During the final minutes of the work session and before the consensus vote, given the Board's apparent agreement on the proposed timeline, Laura Jane Cohen, Springfield District School Board member, said, "I can only vote to support this plan, Dr. Brabrand, if you are going to keep your foot on the pedal of making sure that our teachers are getting the support that they need ... Mr. Smith [Marty Smith, chief operating officer] has done incredible work of trying to get with Inova and figuring out what teachers haven't gotten [the vaccine] and prioritize. But we have to keep going in both directions, full tilt, of continuing to put pressure on to get those vaccines in people's arms and also to make



FCPS Superintendent Scott Brabrand

sure folks have what they need in the buildings to be successful," said Cohen.

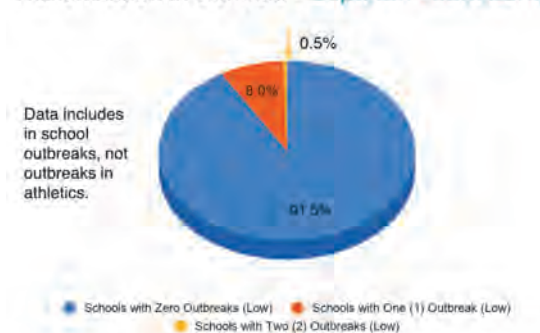
Cohen added that data must be released in real-time. "Our staff and families deserve to know what they are walking into."

Brabrand said, "We've come this far. I'm not about to quit on the Board, the community, or FCPS. We will see this through."

Brabrand acknowledged the vaccines and the plan for getting children back into schools was only "step one" of getting out of the pandemic. There would be challenges, and they needed to turn their time and attention to doing this well. "I will honor that commitment to you and your colleagues," said Brabrand.

The Board first supported, in a vote of 8-to-2, a procedural action to move forward with a pending consensus vote on the timeline, rather than wait and formally take action during the upcoming Feb. 4 regular meeting. School Board members Karen Keys-Gamarra (At-large) and Tamara Derenak Kaufax (Lee) opposed the consideration to vote on the matter on Feb. 2. "I don't believe that's how we inform the community," said Keys-Gamar-

Level of School Impact: COVID-19 Outbreaks in FCPS Transmission in Schools - Sept. 8th - Jan. 23rd



Level of School Impact

Criteria	Low	Medium	High
Transmission within Schools	Zero or sporadic cases with no evidence of transmission in school	Two outbreaks within a short time period (14 days) or sporadic outbreaks in school. Size of outbreaks remains small.	Several outbreaks in school within short time period (14 days); size of outbreaks is large or scope of outbreaks is significant (e.g. multiple classrooms or grade levels are impacted)

FCPS' COVID Cases/Outbreaks and the Level of School Impact from 09/08-20-01/23/21.



Getting vaccinations to FCPS employees who want them is critical to in-person learning.

ra. Given the eight votes of support to move forward with the consensus vote, the Board went ahead. Reading out the votes by name,

McLaughlin announced the superintendent's proposed timeline's unanimous support as presented.

"I hope you can see this is a more positive overall outcome," said McLaughlin. "We support this school division moving forward with its best efforts to educate our children. ... This next step to returning to in-person learning for those who have elected it is critical."

Since the start of 2021, when all FCPS students returned to virtual learning after coronavirus infection rates surged regionally and nationally, the school division worked on a plan to get all students back in the classroom.

The current downward trend in Covid cases and percent positivity in the County led Brabrand and his leadership team to present their Return to School Update on Feb. 2.

According to Brabrand, those recent COVID trends, along with the Jan. 14 issue of "Interim Guidance

for Reopening PreK-12" by the Virginia Department of Education and Virginia Department of Health, the partnership with Inova to vaccinate all staff and educators who wanted it, and finally staffing and operational changes gave him and his leadership team confidence to move forward.

Brabrand had said, "It is our desire to return all our students to in-person learning by March 16, for at least two days a week of in-person instruction."

Brabrand acknowledged the challenges, variants of COVID-19 emerging, recommendations for masking, the vaccine process and supply. "However, our return to in-person plan that we are presenting today is not impacted by these issues at this time."

View The Decision-Making Model for Return to In-Person Learning on the Fairfax County Public School website.

Vaccine Roll Out Improving

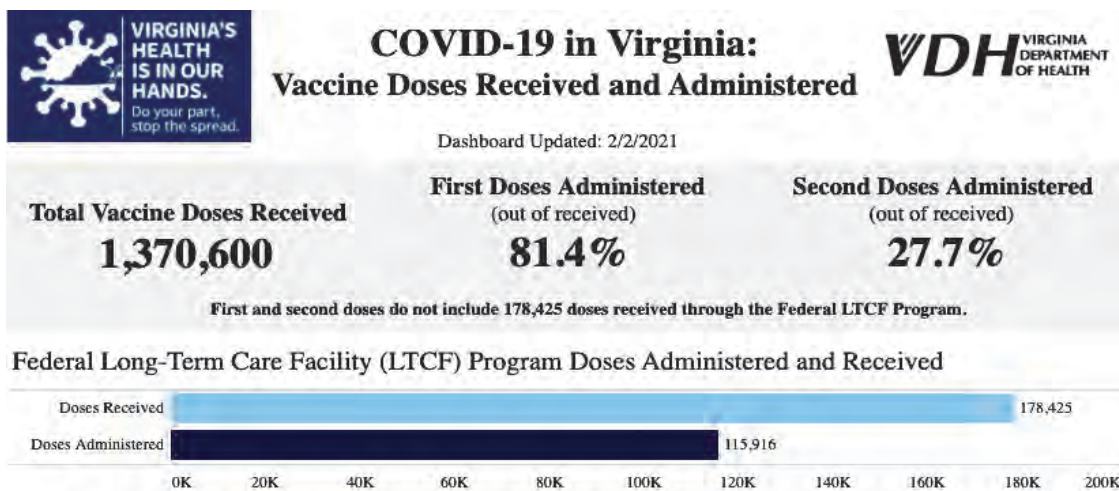
FROM PAGE 5

create an online infrastructure to make volunteering to give the vaccine easy and accessible.

The recent inclement weather we have experienced has also caused some delays with first and second dose vaccinations across Fairfax County. Inova was originally scheduled to vaccinate FCPS teachers and staff on Sunday and Monday.

Please visit <https://fairfaxcountyemergency.wpc>

comstaging.com/2021/01/30/winter-weather-advisory-impacts-health-department-operations-sunday-jan-31/ to reschedule an appointment if you are unable to travel for your appointment due to the weather or to make a new appointment if you are a Fairfax County resident eligible under the 1a and 1b vaccination categories. For more Fairfax County information, please visit here: <https://fairfaxcountyemergency.wpc>



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NEWS

Workhouse Arts Center Hosts Mardi Gras Celebration Family-friendly in-person and virtual events including drive-thru parade and decoration contest.

BY DAVID SIEGEL
THE CONNECTION

No need to make a trip to New Orleans to celebrate Mardi Gras this year. Stay close to home to revel thanks to the nimble, out-of-the box thinking of the Workhouse Arts Center; celebrate Mardi Gras right here in Northern Virginia.

"We are thrilled to announce the first-ever Mardi Gras celebration at the Workhouse," said Elena Romanova, Chief Development Officer, Workhouse Arts Center. The celebration will feature two weeks of wide-ranging, family-friendly events. The events will be both virtual and in-person, at a social distance.

"Our activities are planned in response to an unprecedented community engagement with arts offerings at the Workhouse during the pandemic," added Romanova. "In the last ten months, the Workhouse Board and staff renewed their commitment to the organization's mission by adapting and creating opportunities to engage with art. The art makes life more bearable, and we are offering this new event so we can while away the winter blues together.

"We have designed family-friendly activities that will provide learning opportunities, bring joy and comfort, and allow for a safe space to interact with art," said Romanova.

The Workhouse mini-Mardi Gras festival begins with free on-line mixology sessions, classes on festive mask making, workshops on decorating cars and floats, and plenty more. On Saturday, Feb. 13, there will be "Let the Good Times Roll" events at the Workhouse Mardi Gras such as safe in-person activities, including socially distant glass bead demonstrations, and "Taste of Mardi Gras" culinary art



COURTESY OF WORKHOUSE ARTS CENTER

**Workhouse House Arts Center
Mardi Gras celebration: 'Masked
up': Elena Romanova, Chief De-
velopment Officer, Workhouse
Arts Center.**

Where and When

Workhouse Arts Center presents a virtual and in-person Mardi Gras celebration. Socially distant, in-person events at 9518 Workhouse Way, Building W16, Lorton. Virtual and in-person Mardi Gras events are Feb. 1 to Feb. 13, 2021. Tickets: Some events are free, others require paid tickets starting at \$10. For details visit www.workhousearts.org or call 703-584-2900. Workhouse staff request early registration since space is limited

classes.

Other highlights of the Workhouse Mardi Gras gala will be a unique COVID-safe and family friendly Workhouse Mardi Gras Parade and Decoration Contest scheduled for Feb. 13 at 3 p.m.. There will also be two live drive-in comedy shows by "Rahmein and Friends" later on Feb. 13.

For the Workhouse Mardi Gras parade contest there are a number of categories to be judged including: Best Float, Best Decorated Car, Best Costume, Best Wagon, and Best Stroller. Double Feature Comedy Rahmein and Friends is a live drive-in event. There is a parade entry fee of \$10.

Delivery Vehicles Are Everywhere

FROM PAGE 1

any other driver or emergency personnel's progress." Curry advised companies with planned deliveries on a regular basis to work together to establish a clear parking area for deliveries to avoid any conflicts.

The parking and planning for future housing complexes might have to create venues for delivery vehicles.

"I think this is one of these things that won't go away," Townsend said.

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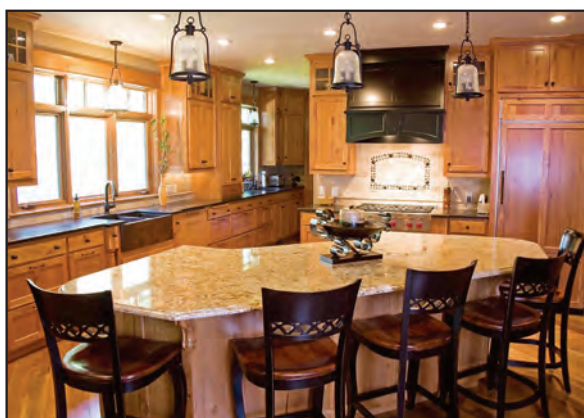
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St. Elmo's Comes to Old Town (with Cocktails)

BY HOPE NELSON
GAZETTE

Just in time for a January cold snap, Old Town North has gotten a little bit warmer.

Del Ray staple St. Elmo's opened its doors at 529 Montgomery Street earlier this month – a moment of celebration after more than a year of planning.

"We go back awhile here, in April or May of 2019," said co-owner Larry Ponzi. "We

APPETITE started talking and ended up signing a lease by November of

2019. We were moving forward, we were in the architectural design phase, and submitted for permits in February -- and then when we got hit with Covid restrictions and all of the aftermath of the virus, we had to go to [the landlord] and say 'Look, we have to put this on pause until we figure out where we are financially.' ... The landlord was very good about it and helped us financially pause the project."

Once the daily routine of the pandemic set in, Larry and Christine Ponzi were able to continue on with their plans – and the new St. Elmo's came to fruition.

But don't expect the new outpost to be a cookie-cutter version of the Del Ray original. No, instead, the



Some sandwich favorites from @market2market-delray are featured at St. Elmo's Old Town North. For instance the 116: prosciutto di parma, genoa salami, hot capicola, provolone cheese, lettuce, white onions, hot peppers, sweet peppers and house dressing served on a soft french roll.

Old Town variety brings a little mix of all the Ponzi eateries under one roof.

"This St. Elmo's is really a culmination of our Market 2 Market and St. Elmo's [Del Ray]," Larry Ponzi said. As a result, expect some of the most popular items from both stores, as well as a beer and cocktail bar element. "It's like an all-day coffee shop/cafe."

And while coffee will of course always remain one of the gems of the shop, there's more on the menu to try.

"We love our homemade soups. We have a homemade chicken noodle and a tomato soup. We have a Cuban sub, which is really popular. We're known for our Reubens, and we took our best Italian sub from the market, our 116, and that's



Coffee will always remain one of the gems of the shop.

been popular as well," he said.

But the Old Town crowd has brought different requests from Del Ray, Christine Ponzi said. To wit: Gluten-free and vegan options. And as a result, the new St. Elmo's is contouring to fit.

"We were trying to keep them similar, but what we're realizing early on is that we're going to have to tweak the menus a bit," she

said. "We'll share the successes of each location and hopefully end up with a final menu."

And about those cocktails: The new St. Elmo's has a full bar and intends to use it.

"We've developed some fantastic cocktails. I highly recommend the espresso martini and the old fashioned," Christine Ponzi said. As the café continues to evolve over the coming months, look for a mimosa program with all juices made in-house.

To be sure, opening amid a pandemic brings some interesting challenges. Gone is the business-as-usual style of lingering about the coffee house for hours on end. In its place: Grab-and-go.

"We do have some people that will sit down, open their laptop, have a coffee, have a sandwich, but it's probably 85 percent walk in, walk out," Larry Ponzi said.

But post-pandemic, St. Elmo's regulars can look forward to open-mic nights again, as well as other live entertainment.

"We're excited for the future," Larry Ponzi said.

Hope Nelson is the author of "Classic Restaurants of Alexandria" and owns the Kitchen Recessionista blog, located at www.kitchenrecessionista.com. Email her any time at hope@kitchenrecessionista.com.

CALENDAR

NOW THRU FEB. 7

Alexandria Restaurant Week To-Go. More than 60 restaurants in Alexandria will offer a \$49 takeout, delivery or curbside pick-up dinner for two during Alexandria Restaurant Week To-Go. New this winter, more than half of these restaurants will offer a \$25 takeout dinner for one in addition to the \$49 for two deal. This expanded offering was created in response to popular demand from single diners during Alexandria's first Restaurant Week To-Go in August 2020. New Alexandria Restaurant Week participants include Aldo's Italian Kitchen, an Italian eatery on Eisenhower Ave.; Barkhaus, Alexandria's new dog bar; Carlyle neighborhood eatery Pasara Thai and The Alexandrian hotel's new restaurant King & Rye. Restaurants offering to-go deals for one and two people include Los Cuates, Rus Uz, Sonoma Cellar, Village Brauhaus and more. View the menu flip-book and make reservations at www.AlexandriaRestaurantWeek.com or 703-838-5005.

JAN. 27 TO MARCH 24

Wednesday Morning Study Group. 10:30-11:30 a.m. Via zoom. Fairlington UMC 3900 King St.,

Alexandria. Join in a nine-week study of Laudato Si: Caring for Our Common Home, the groundbreaking encyclical letter by Pope Francis on climate issues and a Christian faith-based response. Visit the website: www.fairlingtonumc.org.

FEB. 1-FEB. 26

Dreams and Nightmares. 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. At Gallery Underground, 2120 Crystal Drive, Arlington. National Juried Show, compelling artworks on the theme of Dreams and Nightmares, pieces chosen from all over the country.

From the beautiful and sublime to the dark and twisted. Featuring artwork by Colleen Smith, Peter Hargreaves and Lindsay Cronk. Visit the website: <http://galleryunderground.org/>

WEDNESDAY/FEB. 3

Mindful Happy Hour. 5:30-6:30 p.m. Virtual via WebEx. Join Erin Sonn, owner of eat.YOGA.drink, and the National Landing BID for virtual happy hour flow. Learn the basics of mindfulness and how you can practice throughout your day in a way that is accessible and enjoyable – all while winding down with your drink of choice. Visit the website: <https://nationallanding.org/do/mindful-virtual-happy-hour>

FEB. 5-27

In the "After Edward Hopper: Themes of Solitude and Isolation" exhibit, artists present their interpretations of what makes Hopper's imagery quintessentially American: perseverance, fortitude, diversity, and an egalitarian spirit in spite of adversity, impoverishment, and social injustice. This exhibit expresses the anthem of a new dawn: still we rise as one, stronger together. Runs February 5-27, 2021 at Del Ray Artisans Gallery, 2704 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria VA. Details: www.DelRayArtisans.org/exhibits

SATURDAY, FEB. 6

Garden Tour: Winter Trunks and Bark. 10-11:30 a.m. At Green Spring Gardens, 4603 Green Spring Road, Alexandria. (Adults) During winter, tree trunks and branches are revealed in all their glory. Explore the gardens with a master gardener docent who highlights a stunning variety of bark color, texture and form and showcases the best trees for ornamental value in the winter landscape. \$15 per person. Register online at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/parktakes (code RKS. MIQD) or call 703-642-5173.

SATURDAY/FEB. 6

Garden Talk: Attracting Butterflies. 10-11 a.m. At Green Spring Gar-

dens, 4603 Green Spring Road, Alexandria. (Adults) Want to have a stunning garden and attract a variety of butterflies? Learn from Extension Master Gardeners how to incorporate host and nectar plants, the two kinds of plants that are essential for every butterfly, and bring your garden to life with butterflies. \$10 per person. Register online at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/parktakes (code 2F1. P4HQ) or call Green Spring Gardens at 703-642-5173.

SUNDAY/FEB. 7

Family Hilltop Outing. 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. At Historic Huntley, 6918 Harrison Lane, Alexandria. Enjoy a family-friendly tour of Historic Huntley, which was built high atop a hill overlooking the unique Huntley Meadows Park area. On this tour, you will hop back in time to discover what life was like in days past. Learn why this villa was significant to one of our founding fathers. Cost is \$8 per person. Call 703-768-2525.

SUNDAY/FEB. 7

Virtual Tea Party: Love Lessons from Jane Austen. 2-3 p.m. During this virtual tea party, you will learn about the strict prohibitions and rules of etiquette surrounding courtship in Jane Austen's day. Treat yourself to an optional

afternoon tea-to-go to enjoy along with the program. Green Spring will provide individual tea boxes available for pickup on the day of the program. The tea boxes include finger sandwiches, assorted cakes/pastries, scone, cream, jam and tea bag. The cost is \$12 for the lecture; \$24 for the optional tea box. Call 703-941-7987.

THURSDAY/FEB. 11

The Ramsey Homes. 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Via Zoom. The City of Alexandria invites the general public, especially residents of Parker-Gray, to a symposium on the Ramsey Homes, which served as affordable housing units from 1953 to 2018. Originally built as temporary housing for African American war industry workers in the 1940s, the homes served as permanent affordable housing for Alexandria residents for 65 years. The Ramsey Homes were located in the heart of the Parker-Gray Historic District and the African American enclave known as Uptown. This symposium tackles issues of race and equity in housing, of community and community memory, segregation's impact on the African American workforce and the landscape of public housing.

When a Loved One Is Hospitalized with Covid-19

Coping with separation and uncertainty.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
GAZETTE PACKET

For years, being able to talk with his mother, Carole Isaacs, nearly every day was a gift that Marc Stern treasured, so when he was unable to reach her for several days, he became concerned. After contacting the assisted living facility in which she resided, he learned that she had been found unconscious in her room and suffering from a high fever. Rushed to the emergency room, Isaacs tested positive COVID-19 and placed in the intensive care unit. While her life remained in limbo, Stern and the rest of his family could not see or visit her due to hospital safety policy. He was overcome with anguish and anger as he realized that he might never see her again. Having someone listen as he discussed those feelings provided relief in his period of helplessness. Now he is offering that service to others.

"The pandemic is still new, still



After testing positive for COVID-19, Carole Isaacs was hospitalized and isolated from loved ones.

raging, still scary," said Marc Stern, who is a self-described professional listener and runs Need to be Heard, a service in which others – by telephone or video conferencing – can express their feelings freely as another person listens

empathetically and without judgment. "Fear stalks us wherever we are. Compounding that with the potential of losing someone you love is enough to rock the foundation of your center and provoke extreme anxiety and sadness. The main coping strategy comes down to two simple yet powerful words; loving and listening."

When a loved one is hospitalized with COVID-19, the agony of being separated from them while they are battling a life-threatening and unpredictable illness can feel overwhelming. Often occurring without warning or time to prepare, the sudden life change can lead to a tidal wave of emotions.

Those feelings vary from person to person and are affected by the resources available to them, says Lisa Jackson-Cherry, Ph.D., Professor of Counseling at Marymount University's College of Health and Education. "Normal reactions for the majority of [people] may in-

SEE COPING, PAGE 10

Obituary



Willie Emmett Cox, 70, of Ft. Washington, Maryland (formerly of Gum Springs), departed this life on January 30, 2021 at Adventist HealthCare Ft. Washington Hospital Medical Center from complications related to a stroke. The family will be holding a public visitation and private funeral service. For more information about services please contact the funeral home or family. Please view and sign the family guestbook at www.jeffersonfuneralchapel.com.

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

Progress, I Guess?

By KENNETH B. LOURIE



I received in the mail today what in the sales/marketing world, we'd call a "pre-ap-proach" letter. It was a letter confirming that my health care provider is aware of me and my covid needs. Moreover, it offered up the tantalizing notion that one day (although they didn't specify) when it is my turn, I will indeed get contacted/scheduled for my inoculation. Unfortunately, they couldn't be any more specific because their allotment of vaccines barely scratches the surface of the actual need. Nevertheless, both my wife and I have been assured that we are on a list. I suppose that's something. As "Forrest, Forrest Gump" would say: "One less thing."

Not that I'm paranoid about catching the virus or ever do I throw caution to the wind by actually integrating into the outside/formerly normal world, especially considering the comorbidity I represent: cancer, but all things being equal, I'd sure like to receive my inoculation. I'd just as soon die of old age. And my wife is doing everything she can to make that happen. She has me on a very short leash. I'm barely able to heel. A pandemic will do that.

As we begin our second year of living dangerously, the vaccines certainly offer hope. Hope can't iron out the logistics, however. Apparently, at least according to the daily news coverage, inoculating so many people in so many places with or without the proper refrigeration is a nearly overwhelming task. Then add in the necessary ingredients: ppe, masks, syringes, swabs, trained inoculators, et cetera, and you've got a hurdle Edwin Moses couldn't overcome. To see that this virus has killed more Americans than died in World War II is a stunning reality to behold. Seeing the death tally rise every day is a jaw-dropping/head-shaking moment. Progress, so far, has been hard to come by. Though there are some alternative theories and explanations about the actual numbers, I tend to believe what the news organizations are telling us. I really don't see the motivation to do otherwise.

Ultimately, we're all responsible for our own actions - and inactions, and the consequences that follow (I only heard that a million times from my father while growing up). If I was to contract covid, I'd have no one to blame but myself. My wife might blame others as she's very impatient/indignant of people who are not adhering to public health advisories and who don't abide by the Vulcan philosophy, especially during a worldwide pandemic: "The good of the many outweigh the good of the few." And it doesn't seem a stretch to ask/expect that your fellow man - and woman, should respect the constriction of some of our freedoms as together, hopefully, we work to overcome this once-in-a-century health crisis. In an odd kind of karma, what goes around does indeed come around. And to prevent this virus from continually coming around, we must be mindful of the scientific facts as more and more is known about this virus.

Still for those of us who have survived this worst pandemic since the Spanish Flu, it's one year and counting. I don't view it as much of an accomplishment, more a series of random strokes that add up to luck. However, since luck doesn't last forever, and can't exactly be counted on, I was happy to receive today's letter acknowledging that the health care powers that be know who I am and where to find me and that I need a vaccination. Presuming otherwise, in the midst of an organizational challenge the likes of which haven't ever been experienced by the current generation in charge, or previous generations for that matter, would be illogical. Here's hoping we all "live long and prosper."

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

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WELLBEING

Coping with Separation And Uncertainty

FROM PAGE 9

clude feelings of anxiety, depression, helplessness, hopelessness ... and thoughts of abandoning their loved one," she said. "This may be exacerbated if the caretaker also has health issues, lack of support or a clinical mental health diagnosis or history."

A lack of control can exacerbate those feelings. "Gaining any control over the situation — even when limited — is helpful," said Jackson-Cherry. "This could mean gaining as much information as possible about the medical situation in order to make decisions [and] trying to build in some normalcy in the abnormality of the situation."

Drawing up one's support systems and creating a collection of soothing or supportive remedies or a 'mental health tool box', such as taking a walk with a friend or meditating, are useful when dealing with the stress and anxiety, advises Dr. Anton C. Bizzell, MD. "This is the time to shore up all the support you have," he said. "For some people, this could mean contacting close friends and family, clergy, or neighbors to ask for emotional support. Ask for help with child care, household tasks, or other needs that could be alleviated to allow you to focus on your loved one."

It is important not to be in solitude, added Jackson-Cherry. "Isolation is not helpful and can be harmful."

As she began to heal, Stern was able to have telephone conversations with his mother. "Use technology as possible," he said. "If they are able to converse, technology is your friend," Stern said.

There are cases, says Bizzell, when one needs more support and guidance than self-help strategies can provide. "For many others, this is a time to call a counselor or family physician for help with adding extra support services and care," he said. "This is a traumatic situation, no matter the outcome, and it's not only okay to ask for help, it's essential. There is no one right way to do this. Find what works for you."

For those might have a friend whose loved one is battling Covid-19, there are uncomplicated ways to offer comfort. "We can support friends and loved ones by expressing interest and concern," added Jerome Short, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychology, George Mason University.

Reaching out to a friend and offering non-judgmental presence cannot be underesti-



As his mother remained hospitalized in the intensive care unit, Marc Stern was overcome with sadness as he realized that he might never see her again.

mated. "Seems simple, but ... be there," said Jackson-Cherry. "Listen to their feelings and thoughts. If needed, assist in advocating for information. Offer to step in for day-to-day errands, meals and making sure they are taking care of themselves."

Understand that anger, anxiety and stress are a normal response to an abnormal situation, Bizzell says, "Don't try to tell them how to feel or think, instead, listen and support. ... Rather than waiting for them to tell you what they need, offer a list of things you could help with: for example, mow their lawn, send a grocery delivery, set up a meal train, help them with technology for video visits, or offer to give their child a ride home from school." Though it might be awkward or fraught with discomfort, take care to observe when a friend might need professional mental healthcare, cautions, Jackson-Cherry. "Look for signs of increased daily living disruptions such as not withdrawing, isolating or sleeping or eating, that are beyond what is normal in these situations," she said. "Listen for signs of increased hopelessness and statements of despair, especially with those who may have a history of suicidal ideation or behaviors."

Recognize that these are unprecedented times, advises Bizzell. "We are now nearly a year into a crisis of unimaginable proportions," he said. "People are suffering. We have never needed our support community more. You don't have to have all the answers; you just need to be there."

BULLETIN BOARD

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

SATURDAY/FEB 6

34th Annual Town Meeting. 9 a.m. to noon. Virtual. Are you passionate about your family, home or community? If so, join virtually for the 34th Mount Vernon Town Meeting to listen to and engage with your local leaders. Meet your Supervisor and County, state and federal leaders. Have your questions answered, learn about issues important to you, connect with County agencies and community service providers. The highlight

of the morning will be taking a "virtual flying tour" of all that is happening in the District with your "pilot" Supervisor Storck. Speakers: Board of Supervisors Chairman Jeffrey C. McKay, County Executive Bryan Hill, Mount Vernon District School Board Member Karen Corbett Sanders, Health Department Director Dr. Gloria Addo-Ayensu, Fort Belvoir Garrison Commander Col. Joshua SeGraves and Special Guests Congressmen Gerry Connolly and Don Beyer. Televised on Cox Channel 1016 and Verizon/Comcast Channel 16 Streamed at: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/cableconsumer/channel-16/live-video-stream> Facebook Live: @SupervisorDanStorck. Public Listen Line (Listen Only) 703-324-5300.

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