



# The Arlington Connection

## Flamingo Club Cocktail Hour

NEWS, PAGE 3

## ArPets: Is He Peeing!?!?

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PHOTO BY SHIRLEY RUHE/THE CONNECTION

Sklar sits with Elvis and his red wagon ready to pour out shots for the members of the neighborhood Flamingo Club.

## Opera NOVA Upcoming

ENTERTAINMENT, PAGE 5



**Route 1 Multimodal Improvements Feasibility Study Arlington County**

**Virtual Public Information Meeting**

**Wednesday, March 3, 2021, 6:30-8 p.m.**

**[www.virginiadot.org/route1multimodalstudy](http://www.virginiadot.org/route1multimodalstudy)**

Inclement weather date: Wednesday, March 10, 2021

The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) invites you to join a public information meeting for the Route 1 Multimodal Improvements Study. This virtual meeting will provide an opportunity for the public to:

- Learn about feasibility study updates and progress
- Provide input on proposed design elements along the corridor
- Ask questions and address concerns with the study team

The purpose of this feasibility study is to identify enhanced multimodal connectivity and accommodations along Route 1 (between 12th Street to 23rd Streets South) to meet the changing transportation needs of the Crystal City and Pentagon City communities.

The meeting will be held as a **virtual/online meeting**. Information for participating in the virtual meeting is available at **[www.virginiadot.org/route1multimodalstudy](http://www.virginiadot.org/route1multimodalstudy)**. The study team will make a short presentation beginning at 6:30 p.m. followed by a question and answer period.

**Review** study information and meeting details on the webpage above or during business hours at VDOT's Northern Virginia District Office, 4975 Alliance Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030. Please call ahead at 703-259-2599 or TTY/TDD 711 to make an appointment with appropriate personnel.

**Give your comments** during the meeting, or by **March 15, 2021** via the comment form on the study website, by mail to Mr. Dan Reinhard, P.E., Virginia Department of Transportation, 4975 Alliance Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030 or by email to [route1multimodalstudy@VDOT.virginia.gov](mailto:route1multimodalstudy@VDOT.virginia.gov).

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**AR PETS:**



Sweet Hank



Any position will do.

**“Is He Peeing?”**

BY JOAN BRADY  
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

**I**s he peeing?” The tone was matter-of-fact, the implication horrifying. I’m staying with my in-laws for a bit, helping out as they recover from non-COVID illnesses. It’d been a few weeks and things were going quite smoothly. We have a great relationship and while they aren’t necessarily dog people, my in-laws are Hank people for sure. So having our 18-year-old beagle around had not been an issue.

But peeing on the good rug? This would surely put their love of four-legged Hank to the test. And there was no pretending it hadn’t happened, since he was still leg-lifted when I raced in from the kitchen. Yup, a full pee on the dining room rug. The now fully relieved Hank quietly returned to his bed, completely unaware that he might have signed his own kennel check-in paperwork.

Hank has Cushing’s syndrome, which, among other things, can cause uncontrollable peeing. If you have ever had a urinary tract infection (UTI), I think it’s kind of like that -- an urgency that simply cannot go unanswered. For Hank, the Cushing’s symptoms have been pretty well controlled through medication. I silently begged for this to be an anomaly, rather than an indication that the disease was progressing.

Red faced, I quietly finished sopping up the still-warm urine and happily there was no further mention of the incident.

Having Hank around during this stressful time has been great for the entire household. Hank is in a fairly constant state of relaxation. His bed moves to whatever room we are in and he rotates from his dog bed to the couch to the floor. Watching him resting peacefully, laughing at the disruption of his loud snoring and, when he is awake, succumbing to his relentless begging for table scraps, has had a wonderful effect on everyone.

If you are interested in adding a cat, dog or small animal pet to your household, here are a few local rescue organizations who might be able to help you find your perfect match:

- Animal Welfare League of Alexandria
- Animal Welfare League of Arlington
- Homeward Trails
- Lost Dog and Cat Rescue Foundation
- PetConnect Rescue
- Wolf Trap Animal Rescue



The scene of the most recent crime.

PHOTOS BY JOAN BRADY



Hank sleeping in his favorite dog bed.

But since the, ahem, incident, I’ve been on high alert. Fearful that at any time, I would again hear that cringeworthy question, “Is he peeing?” It had been a few days and I was just starting to think we were in the clear. And when I let my guard down, Hank jumped up on the couch where I have been sleeping at night and lifted his leg, releasing more urine than anyone should have to clean up after a long day.

Think positive thoughts for us, my mother-in-law will be learning of the most recent puddle when she reads this. I’m hopeful that when her glance turns from her computer to the sweetly sleeping Hank, her heart melts at the very joy of him, and she will forgive him his most recent transgression.

*ArPets is a weekly feature for highlighting the well-loved pets of Arlington as well as animals who are available for adoption. If you or your dog, cat, iguana, bunny, rat or any other pet, has an interesting pet story to tell, send email to: [joan@joanbradyphotography.com](mailto:joan@joanbradyphotography.com).*

*Joan is an award-winning Connection Newspapers columnist and local photographer specializing in pets, children and families and contemporary business portraits.*

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## Do Flamingos Drink Bourbon? ..or it is just my imagination?



PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUHE/THE CONNECTION

Scott Sklar (from right to left) with Jake McGuire and George McGlue in the afternoon outdoor Flamingo Club cocktail hour on Ivy Street.

Sklar sits with Elvis and his red wagon ready to pour out shots for the members of the neighborhood Flamingo Club.

BY SHIRLEY RUHE  
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

Scott Sklar, wearing his cowboy hat, sits on the curb amid the flamingos in his front yard. He is drinking a Blade & Bow bourbon out of a small plastic cup. Sklar points to George McGlue sitting on the bench six feet away. “We’re finishing the bottle today,” Sklar explains that McGlue is part of the morning Starbucks group at Lyons Village.

He adds, “Our Flamingo Club attracts a very different group—some are neighbors and some are young people walking by. I’m a professor at George Mason so some come from there.” And Sklar adds that his 16-year-old dog Elvis, sitting between his legs, doesn’t drink, but some of the dogs do. “They really lap up the Jack Daniels apple bourbon.”

Sklar has been hosting the Flamingo Club about five days a week since March “unless it’s snowing, raining or windy.”

He says, “I live alone so when COVID hit I needed some social interaction.” He has hand sanitizer and has placed the chairs six feet apart so he could meet people in a safe way. “I pour the drinks myself.” He says they used to sit on plastic paint cans until the neigh-

bor donated the chairs that he was giving away.

“Hey, here comes Jake from Kenmore Street who has been coming since day one.

He brings his own wine.” Jake McGuire comments he lives in an old house, drives an old car and drinks old wine. McGuire is sporting a kaleidoscope of modern art which he says comes from Les Halles in Paris like most of his other scarves. “I tell people I’m no longer a 22-year-old stud muffin so I need plumage.”

McGuire pulls out his bottle of Frog’s Leap Sauvignon Blanc and a copy of his latest book, “How My Heavenly Mother Saved Me From the Hellish Nuns!” (available on Amazon).

Joe Salee shows up, “I don’t drink much. I just come for the company.”

“Hey Beatrice.” Beatrice heads toward Elvis. “Where’s my baby?”

“Beatrice drinks plenty,” Sklar explains, “but not until she has walked the dog.”

Beatrice picks up the dog and walks down the street.

Patrick, in shorts and sandals, ambles by and accepts a cup of rye from the little red wagon filled with Basil Hayden’s bourbon, Tin Cup Rye and single malt scotch. Sklar says he has a bigger red wag-



Flamingo Club sign lays out times for the cocktail hour, and 50 named flamingos from all over the states decorate Scott Sklar’s front yard.

on in back for those who are “off the wagon.” Sklar explains Patrick was a member of the original neighborhood Bourbon Club.

Lucy flies by in her red dress on

her scooter “but she doesn’t drink of course.”

Sklar says the idea of the Flamingo Club grew out of a neighborhood bourbon tasting club. But

then COVID came, and they had to stop meeting. His house came with a concrete flamingo in 1921, and things just took off from there. “Everyone started giving me flamingos from all around the United States.”

Then he paid two neighbor girls to name the flamingos.

In his other life Sklar is President of the Alcovia Heights Civic Association. He owns a 20-year-old global renewal energy business and teaches three courses at George Mason University. His house is powered by solar panels and a geothermal heat pump, and his two-story office in back is powered by solar, wind and hydrogen fuel cells.

A sign in the front yard announces the cocktail hours adjusted to 4:30-6:00 p.m. during short daylight hours.

The chairs are filling up as the sun goes down. But not to worry, “I have solar lights on the trees if we need them.”

## Rotary Club Launches Drive for Thrive

Give to the Rotary Club by Feb. 28 to double your impact.

BY EDEN BROWN  
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

If there was ever a time Arlington Thrive was crucial in the lives of Arlington residents, it is now, in the 12th month of the Covid-19 crisis. The Arlington Rotary Club will offer a matching challenge campaign so Arlington Thrive can help

clients weather the continued Covid storm. Arlington Thrive provides crisis-solving cash to individuals in Arlington who are in danger of being evicted from their homes, and will help pay other crucial bills. Many pay the money back when they can.

From now until Feb. 28, an anonymous donor has offered to match contributions of up to \$10,000, dollar-for-dollar to the Arlington Rotary Club which will grant the funds to Arlington Thrive. All contributions are tax-deductible and can be made on the Arlington Rotary Club’s donation page at <https://www.arlingtonrotaryclub.org/page/donate> or checks to the Arlington Rotary Club can be mailed to P.O. Box 100038 Arlington SEE ROTARY CLUB, PAGE 6

## Virginia's Budget Focuses on Recovery

BY SEN. ADAM EBBIN

Last year was my first on the influential Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee, where I was glad to gain direct experience in the allocation of funds and the tweaking of expenses which together create our state budget. At the time, the economic outlook was strong, and we reported an incredibly bold, progressive budget. Within a month of its adoption it was clear many of our lofty funding goals would need to be put on hold due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Comparably, Virginia has weathered the economic storm well, and we were able to restore some of these funding priorities this year, as well as take important new steps to begin the process of rebuilding our economy.

Last week the Senate and House reported our respective amendments to the second-year appropriations of Virginia's biennial budget. The differences between these versions will be reconciled in the coming weeks by the joint budget conferees. The Senate bud-

get prioritizes repairing the damage COVID has done to our students' ability to learn, bolsters our education system, protects small businesses, expands access to broadband, increases affordable housing opportunities, and funds growing vaccination efforts as well as directing aid to at-risk medical patients.

In healthcare, we made prudent decisions to increase federal matching dollars for children's healthcare and foster care, and secured a large amount of federal funding to support a statewide vaccination program. Since my last column, Virginia has become one of the most successful states in vaccine distribution, and this funding will help us further advance that mission while saving nearly \$100 million for other priorities. We also appropriated dollars to add slots for Developmental Disability Waivers to support those vulnerable residents most impacted by COVID-19.

Virginia's Affordable Hous-



Ebbin

ing Trust Fund, which funds short and long term projects to reduce barriers to ownership and renting of affordable housing, as well as projects reducing homelessness, has been funded at or around \$5 million a year since its

inception.

That was simply not enough, and I am glad the Senate budget takes the issue seriously by allocating \$110 million to the Trust over the biennium. We also allocated significant federal relief dollars for rent and mortgage relief. As this year has proved, access to the Internet is not a commodity, but rather a necessity. To address this reality the Senate included nearly \$50 million for broadband infrastructure grants. We also included expansive tax breaks and small business loans to protect and bring back small businesses and jobs in the coming year -- a major priority for members of the Senate Finance Committee.

Everyone has suffered during this pandemic, but especially of

concern are Virginia's children, who have been uniquely affected during their formative years. The Senate budget moves to address those concerns in order to get kids back into even better schools than the ones they left, with more support and a higher chance at life-long success.

We increased salaries for hard-working educators, and also allocated significant dollars in order to add three additional support staff (including mental health counselors and nurses) per 1,000 students statewide. We also increased per-pupil funding for the Virginia Preschool Initiative to level the playing field, so that disadvantaged early learners have a better shot at success.

Despite economic struggles, I am glad that the Senate did not adhere to austerity economics as was done during the 2008 financial crisis. This legislative session has been one to address needs, not wants, and I am glad to support a budget that addressed those needs aggressively and responsibly. With the funds allocated in this year's budget, Virginia will recover.

## Virginia Launching Statewide Pre-Registration System

The Commonwealth is launching a Statewide Vaccine Pre-Registration System to provide a unified and comprehensive process for people in Virginia to pre-register for the COVID-19 vaccine. As a result, Arlington County's preregistration links and webpage will be replaced with a link to the new statewide system at 8 a.m. on Tuesday, Feb.

16.

Everyone who already pre-registered on Arlington County's system will be automatically imported into the new statewide system; you do not need to preregister again.

Your original preregistration date will be included and you will be able to search to confirm that you are in the new system.

### COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Update

As of Feb. 13, the Arlington County Public Health Division (ACPHD) has used 88.1 percent of the first doses it has received.

13,375 first doses of COVID-19 vaccine received

11,782 doses administered

To date in Virginia, 1,734,400 vaccine doses have been received,

and 92.8 percent of those doses have been administered, according to the Vaccine Summary Dashboard. As of Feb. 11, Virginia ranks 7th among all states for percent of the population that has received at least one dose, and 9th among all states for percent of available doses administered. <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/covid-19-vaccine-summary/>

### BULLETIN BOARD

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

### NOW THRU MARCH 31

Honey and Royal Tangerines (formerly "Temples") and Valencias are joining the Honeybells, Cara Caras, Red Grapefruit, and Mandarins lineup in the Northwest Arlington Lions' Club Citrus Direct-to-You Fundraising on or about February 8 for ordering online thru March 31 along with Maple Products with shipping direct to customers. Order online at [nwarlionscitrus.fwffb.net](http://nwarlionscitrus.fwffb.net); Maple products at [www.purintonmaple.com](http://www.purintonmaple.com). Maple Promo Code - "nwarlions" at Check Out Call 703-528-1130 or Text 703-772-3784.

### SATURDAY/FEB. 20

Sowing the Seeds of Victory: Growing

Food in Troubled Times. 10:00 - 11:30 a.m. Online. Join Extension Master Gardeners Tricia Rodgers and Anne Wilson for an overview of home food production from World War I victory gardens to the present. They will introduce you to some

of the heirloom crops that contemporary gardeners can grow in their gardens today. Free. RSVP at <https://mgmv.org/events/> to receive link to participate.

### FRIDAY/FEB. 26

Spring Lawn Care. 10-11:30. Learn what you can do now to improve and manage your lawn to make it a more environmentally friendly, less resource intensive part of your home garden. Join Extension Master Gardener Joyce Hilton to discuss the best types of grasses for our area, specific springtime turf management practices, nutrient management and soil testing, and basic pest and disease manage-

ment. Visit the website: <https://mgmv.org/event/spring-lawn-care-event-details/>

### ARLINGTON OPENS EXPRESS LIBRARY SERVICE

Effective March 9, 2021, Arlington Public Library is reopening two library branches, Shirlington and Westover, for a 15-minute Express Library Service. Express Library Service open hours are Tuesday through Thursday, 2 p.m.-7 p.m. and Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m.-4 p.m.

At Shirlington and Westover Express Service locations, library patrons will be able to:

- Browse books and media
- Pick up holds.
- Check out items by using the self-serve checkout stations
- Receive physically-distanced assistance for account management and wayfinding
- Visit [library.arlingtonva.us/express](http://library.arlingtonva.us/express).

### NEWS DEPARTMENT: [arlington@connectionnewspapers.com](mailto:arlington@connectionnewspapers.com)

#### Shirley Ruhe

Contributing Photographer and Writer [slrbc@aol.com](mailto:slrbc@aol.com)

#### Joan Brady

Contributing Photographer and Writer [joan@joanbradyphotography.com](mailto:joan@joanbradyphotography.com)

#### Eden Brown

Contributing Writer [arlington@connectionnewspapers.com](mailto:arlington@connectionnewspapers.com)

#### Ken Moore

Contributing Writer [kmoore@connectionnewspapers.com](mailto:kmoore@connectionnewspapers.com)

### ADVERTISING: [sales@connectionnewspapers.com](mailto:sales@connectionnewspapers.com) For advertising information 703-778-9431

#### Debbie Funk

Display Advertising/National Sales 703-778-9444 [debfunk@connectionnewspapers.com](mailto:debfunk@connectionnewspapers.com)

#### David Griffin

Marketing Assistant 703-778-9431 [dgriffin@connectionnewspapers.com](mailto:dgriffin@connectionnewspapers.com)

### Classified & Employment Advertising 703-778-9431

### Editor & Publisher

Mary Kimm [mkimm@connectionnewspapers.com](mailto:mkimm@connectionnewspapers.com) @MaryKimm

### Executive Vice President

Jerry Vernon 703-549-0004 [jvernon@connectionnewspapers.com](mailto:jvernon@connectionnewspapers.com)

### Art/Design:

Laurence Foong, John Heinly, Ali Khaligh

### Production Manager:

Geovani Flores

### CIRCULATION

[circulation@connectionnewspapers.com](mailto:circulation@connectionnewspapers.com)





PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Simone Brown, soprano and Sandy Lewanika, soprano and pianist.

## Opera NOVA Continues Concert Series

Opera NOVA will hold its third 30-minute virtual concert on Feb. 25. It will be available on their YouTube channel at 7 p.m. After months of a dark stage due to COVID, Opera NOVA was able to resume performances virtually in

**PREVIEW** December with their Holiday Concert.

This concert features an African American program to celebrate Black History month. The program will be presented by Simone Brown, soprano; Elise Christina Jenkins, soprano; Sandy

Lewanika, soprano and pianist and Jose Sacin, Opera NOVA Executive Director, and guitarist.

The program includes Summer-time, Take my Mother Home, Give Me Jesus, Do You Know Him, Over My Head, I'm Here, You Can Tell the World.

Opera NOVA was established in 1992 as a volunteer-based, non-profit charitable organization to bring the joy of opera to residents in the Northern Virginia area.

— SHIRLEY RUHE



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Neighbors protest planned destruction of 40-year-old Willow Oak on Utah Street.

## One More Tree Due for Destruction

BY SHIRLEY RUHE  
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

Neighbors along with Arlington Tree Action Group (ATAG) volunteers gathered Feb. 8 to protest “the unnecessary destruction of a Willow Oak in the corner of a lot at 2437 N. Utah Street.”

Kit Norland, Urban Forestry Commission, said a developer told ATAG that in a similar situation nearby the developer was able to

save that healthy Willow Oak by tweaking the plan a little. In this case Cherry Hill Custom Homes has slated the tree for destruction along with half a dozen additional trees next door.

A letter sent to ATAG by a neighbor on Utah Street states that this tree has a huge canopy that provides a lot of cooling shade to their property during the summers, and that this hilly neighborhood already suffers from severe flooding

SEE ONE MORE, PAGE 6

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## Special Edition: PET Connection

**Publishes:**  
February 24, 2021  
**Ads submitted by:**  
February 18, 2021



The Pet Connection will publish on February 24 and photos and stories of your pets with you and your family should be submitted by February 18.

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### Rotary Club Launches Drive For Thrive

FROM PAGE 3  
VA 22210.

"We are proud to be a partner of the Arlington Rotary Club. The pandemic has caused immense suffering to individuals and families, many of whom are teetering on the edge of homelessness. The matching challenge donations will help Arlington Thrive meet skyrocketing needs and alleviate the crisis so many people face and that has been made worse by the pandemic. This support is even more vital than ever in the past," said Arlington Thrive Executive Director Andrew Schneider.

"We want to have a positive impact on people's lives so that they can go on and have that extra foot up that maybe for whatever reason in their past they haven't been able to have up until this point," said Chelsi Dildine, president of the Arlington Rotary Club.

The Club has been donating to Arlington Thrive for the past two years, but Dildine says this may be the organization's biggest donation yet.

Rotary Club members are dedicated people who share a passion for community service, networking and fellowship. The Arlington Rotary Club was founded in 1929 and is driven by the motto "Service Above Self" in its efforts to provide assistance and support to those in need in Arlington County. For more information on joining the Arlington Rotary Club, scholarships, grant and community service projects, visit <https://www.arlington-rotaryclub.org/page/our-projects>

Founded in 1975, Arlington Thrive provides rapid, emergency financial assistance to County residents who experience a sudden financial crisis.

To get involved with Arlington Thrive, see <https://arlington-thrive.org>

### One More Tree

FROM PAGE 5

which the tree helps absorb.

ATAG also points out the presence of mature trees can increase the Arlington property values up to 10 percent. The tree also supports a population of song birds, hawks and owls that depend on mature trees to nest in.

Despite these efforts to get the developer to reconsider the plans for the new home, the bulldozers have begun their work and the back of the house has been removed and the roof mostly taken down. Neighbors indicate the trees are to be cut this week.

**Announcements**

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**Announcements**

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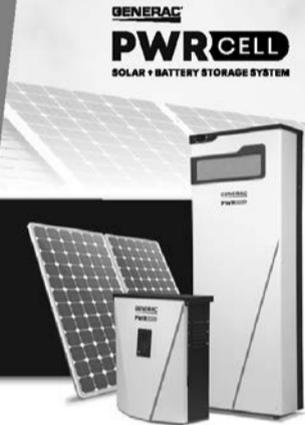
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**Announcements**

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**Announcements**

## Feeling Stressed about COVID?

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**Announcements**

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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**

# Leveling the Playing Field in School Advocating for children with special needs or learning disabilities.

By MARILYN CAMPBELL  
THE CONNECTION

When Lisa Lightner's son Kevin was two-years-old, she discovered that he would need special learning support in school. She has spent more than 12 years working to make sure he received the necessary assistance in the classroom. Now she is helping other parents avoid the frustrating and difficult process that she endured. Lightner is now a special education advocate, blogger and host of the podcast "Don't IEP Alone," a title that references an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). She uses her platforms to raise awareness and share information and resources to help other parents navigate the complicated and overwhelming path to securing the best education for special needs

"Working to get help for Kevin was a challenge. It's really an overwhelming process," said Lightner, whose son is now 14. "I'm college educated and I had so much trouble figuring it out." changes that remove barriers and provide your child with equal access to learning.

Recognizing that a child has and a learning disability, such as dyslexia or Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and determining the type of accommodations and adjustments in school to ensure that they have equal access to learning, is an arduous process. Though the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) gives children the right to have IEP that includes a learning plan tailored fit their learning differences, they don't always receive it.

"The special education climate has really changed in recent years," said Lightner. "Schools are doing more with less. Teachers have larger class sizes, fewer resources. It's very easy for a child to fall through the cracks if you don't stay on top of their progress."

Learning disabilities can often go unnoticed, but red flags that a child might have a learning disability include low grades and difficulty keeping up with their peers academically. "Parents are often the first to recognize that their child may be struggling with certain learning endeavors, for example reading, math, or writing," said Clara Hauth, PhD Associate Professor, Special Education Marymount University. "The terms for these learning disabilities are dyslexia, dyscalculia and dysgraphia." "A more obvious telltale is when the child shares with you an ongoing pattern of frustration about schoolwork or shows a lack of engagement in school," added Kelley Regan, Ph.D. Professor and academic program coordinator for special education at George Mason University. "Also, if work completion is taking an unusual amount of time or the child shows little independence or a lack of understanding of assignment or there is an avoidance of schoolwork; these could be signs that the child's needs may or may not be met."

The current virtual learning environment and the resulting restructuring of the way

that accommodations or IEPs are being administered might make noticing whether a child's academic needs are being met more challenging. "We also have seen firsthand over the last year how unprecedented circumstances like a pandemic have impacted delivery of instruction for students with disabilities," said Regan. "The delivery of services for students with disabilities had to be revamped by school districts across the nation and now we are seeing the impact of school closures on student achievement and social-emotional learning."

A diagnostic test will help identify and confirm a learning disability. "Parents who feel that their student may have a disability should contact both their family doctor and the school to request initial meetings to discuss their concerns," said Hauth.

Such tests could provide information to guide the creation of an IEP that outlines the accommodations that will meet a child's learning needs. Examples of these accommodations include additional time to take tests and complete homework and assignments or having tests administered on a one-on-one basis. Even with an IEP in place though, some children might not get the resources they need. "Research tells us that many novice special education teachers and even veteran teachers feel overwhelmed by their workloads and managing these workloads can be challenging," said Regan. "To meet the needs of students, teachers need adequate resources and materials, and they need devoted time to collaboratively design meaningful instruction for students. Limited resources and time may be one explanation as to why children with learning disabilities may not be receiving what they need."

In an ideal learning environment, a general education teacher collaborates with a special education teacher and they design specialized instruction that allows the student to succeed with the general education curriculum. "If ... the needs outlined on the child's IEP are not being met for the child, a parent should advocate."

Almost everything is more challenging within a virtual learning environment, monitoring a child's academic performance is still essential, says Lightner. "Engage in the IEP process, all of it, all year round," she said. "You have to stay engaged and in contact with your team and your child's progress. Understanding the evaluations and progress made is essential."

Sometimes, the needs of the child with learning disabilities changes. In such cases advocacy is necessary, advises Regan. "When the individualized program is not providing the supports that previously sufficed, a parent may need to and should advocate," she said. "For example, a parent may observe that his or her child appears very disorganized with his or her school materials, is turning in assignments late or not at all and needs an effective strategy in place for an observed problem. Likewise, there may be a need for adjusting the intensity or frequency of instruction. Instruction should be appropriate for the child."

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## If Michael Corleone Had Lung Cancer



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

"Just when I thought I was out ... they pull me back in." And just when I thought I had a month off from cancer-related appointments, infusions, scans and lab work, et cetera, I experienced a new symptom the other day which warranted an unexpected brain MRI. Though I delayed a few days in sharing my new symptom, on Thursday I emailed my oncologist. Within the day (not nearly soon enough for my wife, Dina), I received a call from my doctor. After a brief conversation during which I described my symptoms in more detail, a diagnostic scan was scheduled for the next day (fortunately an appointment opened up while we were talking. Otherwise, it might not have occurred so soon). According to my oncologist, what I was experiencing is called "disequilibrium." I couldn't walk a straight line. Had a police officer been present, I would have been cited for walking while intoxicated.

Amazingly I received the results from the MRI within a few hours of my appointment. The report from the radiologist was extremely thorough since I had been given "contrast," an infusion which provides better detail for the radiologist. (Given my pre-existing kidney issue, there are certain products which I cannot tolerate, ones which are filtered through the kidney, specifically "contrast.") But this time, my oncologist wanted the clearest picture/assessment possible. (Infusing "contrast" results in a kind of clarity, like the difference between viewing color and black and white.) So receiving an "unremarkable" (no metastasis, "no infarct, no hemorrhage, no intracranial abnormality," no anything) report was particularly encouraging. Now I can breathe again, except for another side effect caused by the lenvima (my thyroid cancer medicine), but that symptom is more par for the course I've been on for the last four months or so. "Disequilibrium" not so much.

Going forward, I am experiencing less balance/dizziness issues. But I'm also no longer - for the moment, taking my thyroid medicine, which I can't imagine is a good thing. However, I'm not going to worry about that in the short term. In the long term, not taking the best possible prescribed treatment for the treatment of papillary thyroid cancer is hardly reassuring to my presumptive life expectancy. Nevertheless, if I've learned anything in my nearly 12 years as a cancer patient, it is that nothing (drugs, side effects, miscellaneous treatment/protocols) lasts forever. Heck, sometimes treatment and all doesn't even last a month. It's best to sit tight and try to be patient. Getting ahead of one's immediate circumstances is unhelpful and could be much ado about nothing (at least that's been my modus).

That being clear to me, anytime I can get a month where I have no scheduled lab work, infusion, injection, diagnostic scan or appointments is to be acknowledged and celebrated almost. Presently, I am, or rather was in the middle of just such an interval until this "disequilibrium" manifested. It's sort of like being called in to work on your off day. Mentally, it really upsets the apple cart, and more specifically your peace of mind. And any time a cancer patient can get some piece of mind, it's extremely valuable. It's mind over something that's the matter.

With a month off from cancer-related activities, one can almost ('almost,' not quite though) live a cancer-free, normal-type life. It's not as if you forget your circumstances however, but it allows a certain mental break which believe me, all us cancer patients need. Without all the constant reminders, one can almost back-burner the whole cancer existence. Unfortunately, this kind of existence is also characteristic of the ups and downs and all-arounds that cancer patients experience. Granted, it's not ideal, but it's still a living, thank God!

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

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