Controversial Solutions At Play for Springvale Road Bridge

News, Page 6

Jennifer Falcone and John Halacy, members of the Springvale Road Working Group of the Great Falls Citizens Association, stand with their backs to the single-lane Springvale Road Bridge, leading to a sharp left turn.

Doctor Pleads Guilty to Not Paying Employment Taxes

News, Page 7

Sealing the Record

News, Page 3
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Sealing the Record

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

By Michael Lee Pope
THE CONNECTION

F or 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.

“The law needs to be fixed,” said 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.

“Keeping people branded with a scarlet letter for misdemeanor offenses is disgraceful.” — House Majority Leader Charniele Herring

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, minor 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 convictions or charges sealed,” said Attorney General Mark Herring. “We should give a clean slate and a second chance to more Virginians who have convictions or charges sealed.”

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 Asha Khan, director of 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 misdemeanors 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 gift 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 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 my body I guess we won’t have a bill again.”

House and Senate Democrats disagree on how old convictions should be expunged.
Virginia’s Budget Focuses on Recovery

By Sen. Adam Ebin

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 committees. The Senate budget priorities repairing the damage COVID has done to our students’ ability to learn, bolster 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 our 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 Housing 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 waver 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.

Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is!

By Kenneth R. “Ken” Plum

State Delegate (D-36)

I have never known a politician who has not promised better schools, quality of life, and safety. Although these standards are defined differently by the persuasion of the persons making them, the promises share one thing in common: to be realized fully will cost money. The true measure of an offshoreholder or commander is not in the promises made but whether that person is willing to put their money where their mouth is. I could not be prouder as a member of the House of Delegates and the Appropriations Committee of the budget passed in the House of Delegates last week. The Senate passed a very similar budget with the differences between the two to be resolved in a conference committee over the next couple of weeks.

While debate over the budget is most often about spending, discussions need also to take into account revenues and investments. There had been dire predictions about state revenues heading into the pandemic, but the loss in revenue has not been nearly as great as feared. In addition, federal monies coming to the state for education and for COVID relief helped make up for lost revenue. The Governor’s proposed budget already had more than a billion dollars in revenue, and the House added $150 million to that amount to soften the impact of a decline of revenue next year without the same level of federal relief.

Both the House and the Senate funded the biggest investment in preschool education ever made. I term it an investment for much of this year’s budget provides paid sick leave for essential workers, increased funding for nursing homes, and worker compensation for health care workers and first responders. The budget makes investments in the future of the economy and our environment. Funding is provided to expand broadband access throughout the state. A one-time five million dollar capitalization fund is established for rebates on the purchase of electric vehicles for persons whose income qualifies them. The largest ever amount is provided for agricultural best-management practices to meet Chesapeake Bay clean-up benchmarks.

The best compliment that I and my colleagues could receive is that we put the public’s money where we have been told that it should be.

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Both the House and the Senate funded the biggest investment in preschool education ever made. I term it an investment for much more. Funding is provided to expand broadband access throughout the state. A one-time five million dollar capitalization fund is established for rebates on the purchase of electric vehicles for persons whose income qualifies them. The largest ever amount is provided for agricultural best-management practices to meet Chesapeake Bay clean-up benchmarks.

The best compliment that I and my colleagues could receive is that we put the public’s money where we have been told that it should be.
Doctor PLEADS GUILTY to Not Paying Employment Taxes

Arshad Pervez Cheema, formerly of Great Falls, did not pay more than $2 million in employment and corporate taxes.

According to court documents, from 2011 through 2018, Arshad Pervez Cheema owned and operated Walk-In Medical Center, PC, a medical practice located in Falls Church and Herndon. Cheema was responsible for collecting and paying to the IRS payroll taxes, which consisted of Social Security, Medicare, and income taxes that had been withheld from his employees' wages, as well as an employer portion. Over a four-year period from 2012 to 2016, Cheema willfully did not pay more than $500,000 in payroll taxes. Instead, he used some of the withheld funds for other business ventures, including to open and run a restaurant in Washington, D.C. In addition, Cheema did not pay corporate taxes for Walk-In Medical Center, PC, nor did he pay employment taxes for another doctor's office, Falls Church Family Care PC, which he operated. In total, Cheema did not pay more than $2 million in employment and corporate taxes.

U.S. District Judge Anthony J. Trenga scheduled sentencing for June 23, 2021. At sentencing, Cheema faces a maximum sentence of five years' imprisonment. Cheema also faces a period of supervised release, restitution, and a fine.

Acting Deputy Assistant Attorney General Goldberg and Acting U.S. Attorney Parekh commended special agents of IRS-Criminal Investigation, who conducted the investigation, and Trial Attorney Casey S. Smith and Assistant U.S. Attorney Russell L. Carlberg, who are prosecuting the case.
Controversial Solutions At Play for Springvale Road Bridge

Great Falls Citizens Association invites VDOT to Feb. 25 Town Hall.

By Mercia Hobson
The Connection

Policies passed down to state levels encouraging single-lane deteriorating bridges to be replaced with two-lane bridges because of purported safety concerns are once again at the forefront for discussion between the Great Falls Citizens Association, community members, Fairfax County Supervisor John Foust (D-Dranesville District), and the Virginia Department of Transportation. At issue is the 22 feet long, 19 feet wide, single-lane Springvale Road Bridge built in 1932. To some, it contains cultural value, community heritage, and other more tangible attributes. To others, it is an obsolete structure that needs to be replaced with a two-lane bridge. The dichotomy sets up a complicated situation.

The Springvale Road Working Group of the Great Falls Citizens Association met on Feb. 9. Their purpose was to prepare for the upcoming Feb. 25 Town Hall on the Springvale Road Bridge Replacement by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). Supervisor John Foust (D-Dranesville) requested that GFCA provide him feedback on the community’s position to replace the current deteriorating bridge with a two-lane structure.

The Town Hall is an opportunity for the Great Falls community to speak to preserve the one-lane bridge design or build it out with a two-lane structure, according to Jennifer Falcone, the meeting moderator.

It also provides GFCA members with a chance to describe what they see as drawbacks to VDOT’s proposal, identify the impact of what they consider will be more traffic in the village, and the effect on Georgetown Pike. Falcone said that the town hall’s format would differ from other slide-heavy VDOT presentations.

“Instead, we will provide attendees with key points of view on both sides of the issue. We will also set aside time for the attendees who have pre-registered to speak on the subject, and we will respond to written questions submitted during the meeting.”

Comments are limited to three minutes. John Halacy, the Springvale Road Bridge Working Group coordinator, will line up positions and the critical points of the group’s efforts, followed by the principal representative of VDOT, offering VDOT’s rationale. Supervisor Foust will also speak during the meeting.

Henry Lippincott brought forward his findings. Unable to identify similarly contested one-lane vs. two-lane bridge issues in Virginia, he turned to national data. In Ohio, a replaced two-lane bridge resulted in “worsome traffic speed,” a similar concern for the GFCA working group. Another trend Lippincott found interesting in conversations he had with the Department of Transportation was “dishonorable statements” such as “a two-lane bridge will increase safety.”

Lippincott said the responsibility should be on VDOT to prove a two-lane bridge won’t increase traffic, safety hazards, and speeding “because it defies logic.”

John Halacy questioned if a two-lane Springvale Road Bridge would instead just be “moving a bottle-neck at the one-lane bridge and dumping it on Georgetown Pike and are we enticing people to go to Georgetown Pike.”

Bill Canis considered the “tenor” of the meeting. He cautioned word choices would influence the meeting’s tone.

Dennis Huber said another question to consider would be accident rates as they move from a one-lane bridge to a two-lane bridge. “If you’ve got good data, that would be great to bring to the front.”

Halacy said they had accident data VDOT gave them on bridge-related data spanning the past 19 years.

Candice Burt reminded the working group of the 2013 single-lane rustic replacement bridge over Nichols Run on Beach Mill Road. It demanded that she question VDOT’s number of cars per minute and the number of accidents on the bridge.

She got the police report for accidents. “It never was on the bridge,” she said. Burt spoke of her advocacy that the original bridge’s single-lane configuration be retained to slow down and discourage cut-through traffic along Beach Mill Road.

“IT wasn’t easy, and I was panicked that it was going to be something else. But you know we stuck our ground, and in the end, VDOT was so pleased because our design bridge was one of the first in the area...We wanted a wooden deck... We wanted to keep it in the character of Great Falls.”

The Great Falls Citizens Association Town Hall-Springvale Road Bridge Replacement is Feb. 25, 2021, at 7 p.m. Registration to attend with the indication of whether the registrant wishes to speak is available at the Great Falls Citizens Association website.
Return to School Begins This Week

School Board member Elaine Tholen, Dranesville District, has shared the following return to school update with the community:

The Fairfax County School Board gave unanimous support for an updated timeline at the 2/2 Work Session that will offer all students the opportunity to return to school buildings two days a week beginning Feb. 16 through March 16. The 2/2 Return to Work Session recording can be viewed here. The next Return to School update will be 3/16.

Under the updated timeline presented by Dr. Briar, the first students, including students with disabilities, English Language Learners and younger students, will begin returning to in-person learning on Feb. 16. Learn more about the in-person return to school timeline here.

In preparation for students’ return, schools have created staffing plans based on the number of students who selected in-person instruction earlier this school year. Students who have already selected to return to in-person instruction will be able to do so two days a week. Due to social distancing requirements, schools may not be able to accommodate additional students who wish to change their selection from virtual to in-person instruction.

For parents requesting changes from full-time virtual to in-person instruction, principals will do their best to accommodate the requests, however, it may not be possible to accommodate changes if classes are at capacity.

Elaine Tholen

The School Board has given its support, and FCPS’ health and safety plans are tested and in place for students to return to the classroom. Watch the Ready to Return video on the Return to School website. FCPS has implemented Safety Teams that are monitoring FCPS’ adherence to five health and safety mitigation strategies that the CDC says will help to keep school transmission rates low. FCPS schools currently rate “low” in terms of infection risk.

In addition, vaccinations of FCPS staff began Jan. 16 and are continuing. Ninety percent of FCPS staff have requested or scheduled appointments to receive the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. The Fairfax County Health Department is also working closely with Inova Health System and FCPS to ensure that staff will have access to their second dose in the course of the next few weeks.

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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 that daunting and difficult process by educating and advocating for their children.

Through her work advocating for her son Kevin, now 14, Lisa Lightner helps other parents advocate for their children with learning disabilities or 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.”

“Working together, we hope to provide even better and more impactful services to seniors in Northern Virginia.”

— Philip Pifer, president of the Shepherd’s Center of Great Falls

Shepherd’s Center Expands to Serve Northern Virginia

The Shepherd’s Center serving Oakton, Vienna, Reston and Herndon and the Shepherd’s Center of Great Falls join forces to better serve area seniors.

The merger is expected to be time of the merger, allowing for a seamless transition. "We at SCGF are delighted with the potential of this partnership, and with SCOVH as our partner," Pifer said. "We evaluated a number of organizations who expressed interest in joining forces, and SCOVH was both the best fit and, in our opinion, offers the best potential. Working together, we hope to provide even better and more impactful services to seniors in Northern Virginia."

Since 1998, Shepherd’s Center Oakton-Vienna-Reston-Herndon, a 501 (C)(3) non-profit organization, has been dedicated to improving the quality of life as we age, through supportive programs and services, personal enrichment and volunteer engagement that enable senior neighbors to live full and productive lives while aging in place. Its more than 260 trained and vetted volunteers are medical and companion transportation drivers, friendly callers and visitors, food delivery drivers, handy helpers, health care advocates, and lifelong learning and cultural enrichment enthusiasts. This volunteer engagement network offers stability, encouragement and hope for connected and healthy lifestyles.

Established in 2018, the Shepherd’s Center of Great Falls, a 501(c)3 charity, has provided free transportation for non-driving seniors in Great Falls, as well as other services supporting seniors wishing to age in place in their homes.

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Inspiring Young People in Creative Learning Activities

Fairfax Symphony named a Dominion ArtStar.

By David Siegel
The Connection

With more than five decades as an honored symphony, Fairfax Symphony Orchestra (FSO) adds 2021 Dominion Energy ArtStar to its accolades. FSO received the ArtStar award for its innovative music-learning program, “Link Up,” in partnership with Carnegie Hall. The award was received at the Virginia Commission for the Arts’ “Art Works for VA” virtual conference.

FSO was one of five organizations from Virginia that received the ArtStars award for inspiring people in creative endeavors. The organizations represent Virginia organizations with annual operating budgets under $1 million. Each received a $10,000 grant to support their winning arts or cultural education program.

“These organizations show ways the creative spirit continues to thrive—whether through outdoor, virtual or digital programming,” said Hunter A. Applewhite, president of the Dominion Energy Charitable Foundation. “Virginia is very fortunate to have these talented organizations.”

The Virginia Commission for the Arts (VCA) congratulates all the ArtStars Award recipients, including the Fairfax Symphony Orchestra, said Janet Starke, Executive Director, VCA. “This award affirms the good work being done by the FSO, and their peers from across the state.”

Where and When

To learn more about the Fairfax Symphony Orchestra partnership with the Carnegie Hall “Link Up” program and other Fairfax Symphony education programs, visit www.fairfaxsymphony.org. Additional support for the Fairfax Symphony “Link Up” program provided by ArtFairfax, The Rea Charitable Trust, and the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation.

Developed by the Weill Music Institute at Carnegie Hall, FSO’s “Link Up” program provides a unique opportunity for students in Grades 3-5 to come together for a shared cultural experience. “We are thrilled and honored to be a Dominion ArtStar in recognition of our work to serve teachers and students by implementing our much-needed “Link Up” education program virtually this year,” said Jonathan Kerr, Executive Director, FSO. “Our commitment to our community is stronger than ever, only strengthened by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. By sharing our concerts and education programs virtually, we are filling a critical need for quality arts programs to entertain, educate, inspire, sustain, and unite the communities we serve. This prestigious award furthers our work to provide unique, innovative, and uplifting arts experiences for thousands in Fairfax County and across our region.”

For Aaron Clay, “as a bassist, who performs both classical music and jazz, I’m particularly excited to be part of the FSO “Link Up” program. It’s wonderful to see students exploring what happens when jazz and classical music come together. Studying composers including Florence Price, Duke Ellington, Leonard Bernstein, George Gershwin, and Courtney Bryan, students are learning concepts of rhythm, form, improvisation, and communication and how they contribute to that magical moment in the orchestra when jazz and classical music come together to really “swing!”

County Department of Public Works, Environmental Services Wins Eight Awards

By Mike Salmon
The Connection

The Noman M. Cole Jr. Pollution Control wastewater treatment plant was recently recognized for their “Tertiary Filters Rehabilitation Project,” and “Rehabilitation of Three Equalization Basin and Ancillary Facilities,” by the Mid-Atlantic Chapter of the American Public Works Association (APWA) in its annual Mid-Atlantic Region awards.

The Noman M. Cole Jr. plant was among eight Fairfax County’s Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES) facilities awarded by the Mid-Atlantic Chapter of the APWA in its annual Mid-Atlantic Region awards. Five of the awards were for Project of the Year and three honorable mentions.

“Having Mid-Atlantic APWA recognize the work of DPWES and our partners with these awards acknowledges the excellence in the building and enhancement of the county’s infrastructure,” said DPWES Assistant Director Juan Reyes.

Reyes was featured in the county video documentary that focuses on the water cycle, and the activities at the Noman M. Cole Jr. Pollution Control wastewater treatment plant. They discuss the process and focus on the clean water going back into the waters of Gunston Cove “clean enough to sustain life,” one of the officials said. Mau- reen Gable, the science department chair at Lake Braddock Secondary School, uses examples from the plant to teach students in her AP Environmental Science class.

Noman M. Cole Jr might be best known for his efforts to improve the water quality in the Potomac River. He was principal author of the 1971 Occoquan Watershed Policy, which prompted establishment of the Upper Occoquan Sewage Authority and the creation of one of the world’s most advanced sewage treatment plants. Cole died in 1997 at age 63.

The following projects were selected for 2021 awards. Each winning project was completed by either the Wastewater Design and Construction Division, the Building Design and Construction Division or the Utilities Design and Construction Division. All three divisions are in the DPWES Capital Facilities business area.

Winner - Backlick Run Gravity Sewer Emergency Abandonment Project - Project of the Year Award for the category of Disaster or Emergency Construction/Repair Less than $5 million

Winner - Tertiary Filters Rehabilitation Project at the Noman M Cole Pollution Control Plant - Project of the Year Award for the category of Environment $5 - $25 million

Winner - Reston Community Center Aquatics Facility Renovations - Project of the Year Award for the category of Structures $5 - $25 million

Winner - Scotts Run Trail Project - Project of the Year Award for the category of Transportation Less than $5 million

Winner - Innovation Center Station Parking Garage Project - Project of the Year Award for the category of Structures $25 - $75 million

Honorable Mention for the Rehabilitation of Three Equalization Basins and Ancillary Facilities - Project of the Year Award for the category of Environmental $5 - $25 million

Honorable Mention for the Department of Vehicle Services West Ox Facility Renovation - Project of the Year Award for the category of Structures $5 - $25 million

Honorable Mention for the McLean Metro Gravity Sewer Capacity Improvements Project - Project of the Year Award for the category of Environment Less than $5 million

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the awards will be announced during a virtual ceremony. The date is pending.

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In Loving Memory of Bobbie Jo Vest Falk

August 8, 1940-January 23, 2021

On Saturday, January 23, 2021, Bobbie Jo Vest Falk, the loving wife, devoted mother and grandmother, passed peacefully, surrounded by family. Bobbie Jo was born to Bessie Taylor Vest and Robert McAdoo Vest in Tucson, Arizona, and spent her early years in Arizona. A member of Immanuel Presbyterian Church, she was a member of and held various advisory positions in the Temperance No. 27 of the Order of the Rainbow Girls. She attended University Heights Elementary School, Roosevelt Junior High School and graduated from Tucson High School where she was a Songleader. She earned her bachelor’s degree from the University of Arizona where she was a member of Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority and a Rotary Scholarship winner. In 1960, she married James H. Falk, her high school love and they had three children, Jim, John and Kathryn. She later moved with her family to the McLean, and then Great Falls, Virginia where she spent most of her life. She worked on the staff of Congressman John L. Robs, of Arizona, then Minority Leader of the U.S. House of Representatives and later Congressman William Mohrman of Ohio. Bobbie Jo helped establish and operate the Falk Law Firm in Washington, D.C. for more than two decades that included her husband and sons as well as others. She enjoyed 40 years at her family farm in Cornwell Farm in Great Falls, Virginia where she enjoyed her flower gardens and helping to manage a successful family thoroughbred breeding and horse racing operation. Bobbie Jo very proudly celebrated her 60th wedding anniversary and her 50th year as a member of the Junior League of Washington last year. Bobbie Jo was a pillar of the community, deeply committed to her faith with an enormous desire to help others. Bobbie Jo will be remembered by countless people across her native Arizona and Virginia for her smiling eyes, her generosity of spirit, her kindness and her grace.

She is survived by her husband, James H. Falk, Sr., her son John M. Falk and her daughter Kathryn Falk Brandus, along with her grandchildren whom she deeply cherished, Jack M. Falk of San Francisco, CA, Olivia G. Falk of Baton Rouge, LA, Grayson T. Falk of Vero Beach, FL, and Julia T. Brandus of Reston, VA along with her son-in-law Paul Brandus and a sister Mary Bowen in Trinity Center, California, and her family. Her eldest son James H. Falk, Jr. predeceased her in passing. A private family service was held to honor her and she was laid to rest at Trinity Episcopal Church in Upperville, Virginia. In lieu of flowers, Donations may be sent in her honor and memory to Trinity Episcopal Church, P.O. Box 127, Upperville, Virginia 20184 and https://trinityupperville.org/give.

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
The Learning Connection. At The Old Firehouse, McLean. The Old Firehouse Learning Connection is a supervised e-learning program supervised by staff, for ages 5-18. The program will provide a supervised environment for students to complete their school assignments and virtual instruction. Staff will provide limited socially distant recreation opportunities for students during their breaks. Program waivers, participant contracts and additional information will be sent to all registered participants prior to the start of the program. To register, visit: www.oldfirehouse.org or call 703-448-8336, TTY: 711.

FRIDAY/ FEB. 19
Virtual Family Bingo Night. 7-9 p.m. Virtual event sponsored by the Old Firehouse, McLean. You get it $5 per family (per device) join in a virtual evening of fun and prizes with your family. Winners will take their pick of prizes. Pre-registration is recommended. Register online at www.oldfirehouse.org or call OCF at 703-448-8336 (8336).

FEB. 21 AND FEB. 22
Doktor Kaboom! “Look Out! Science is Coming!” FEB. 21 AND FEB. 22
Doktor Kaboom! “Look Out! Science is Coming!” Even if it is in your kitchen! Doktor Kaboom! is known around the world for taking anyone—whether an audience on an educational tour of the modern scientific method, using humor and comedy while demonstrating spectacular applications of the physical sciences. “Better than Bill Nye” — DC Theatre Scene. $15/$10 MCC tax district residents (this fee is per device). To purchase tickets or for more information, visit: www.aldentheatre.org.

SUNDAY/ FEB. 21
Sing the Bay Ballad. 7-8:40 p.m. Online. Hilarious and poignant songs about the people who live on America’s waterways featuring Janie Menedee (Chesapeake Bay), Lee Murdoch (the Great Lakes), and George Ward (the Erie Canal and upstate New York). Visit the website: https://www.oldfirehouse.org/event/417590. Concert is also a stealth publication party for Janie’s new book, “Sing the Bay Ballad,” which highlights the music, history, and culture of America’s waterways.

TUESDAY/ FEB. 23
Search for Winter Waterfowl. 10-11 a.m. At Burke Lake Park, 7315 Ox Road, Fairfax Station. Burke Lake Park is teeming with wildlife, even in the coldest months of winter. See what birds are calling the lake home this season with the park’s “Waterfowl” program during the program, participants will walk the shores of Burke Lake in search of winter waterfowl. Be on the lookout for birds, such as loons, lesser scapous and ring-necked ducks. Bring binoculars and dress for the weather. This program is designed for participants age 12 to join. Cost: $8 per person. Call 703-523-6600.

WEDNESDAY/ FEB. 24
Unruly Theatre Project Virtual Improv Show. 7 p.m. Virtual at The Alden Theatre, McLean. Join the Unruly Theatre Project’s virtual fall improve shows from the comfort of your couch! Register online and a Zoom link and password for the show will be emailed to you. Participants must register two hours in advance of showroom. Register online at www.aldentheatre.org.

THURSDAY/ FEB. 25
Voices of Woodlawn: A Reckoning by 4 Poets
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Voices of Woodlawn: A Reckoning by 4 Poets. 7 p.m. Virtual event sponsored by the Old Firehouse, McLean. That is $5 per family (per device) join in a virtual evening of fun and prizes with your family. Winners will take their pick of prizes. Pre-registration is recommended. Register online at www.oldfirehouse.org or call OCF at 703-448-8336, TTY: 711.

FRIDAY/ FEB. 26
Color Utilization. 10 a.m. to noon. Via Zoom. Walt Bartman, the founder and director of Yellow Labrador Studios and Gallery, will be giving a demonstration on color utilization at the Friday, February 26 Meeting of the McLean Art League. Walt will demonstrate personal interpretation in rendering landscapes, still life and figure painting. He received his M.F.A., from American University and studied in Belgium and Holland on a Fulbright Fellowship. Guests are welcome; contact M.A.S. President Ray Goodrow at raygoodrow@aol.com.

FRIDAY/ FEB. 26
Vital at Virginia Trivia Night. 7-9 p.m. Virtual at the Old Firehouse, McLean. Gather the whole family around the computer or tablet and get ready for some socially distant trivia. Prizes for winning teams! To register for Old Firehouse events, visit: www.oldfirehouse.org or call 703-448-8336, TTY: 711.

FRIDAY/ FEB. 26
A Taste of California - Virtual Wine Tasting event with host, Vienna Vintner - 6:30-7:45 p.m. via Zoom. A benefit for Shepherd’s Center serving Oakton-Vienna-Reston-Herndon. During the tasting, Vienna Vintner’s Victor Mendes, will be presenting a selection of 3 wine fines from his own winery in California’s Russian River Valley. He will lead the group through wines from his VIX selection. To participate in this private tasting experience, contact Vi- enna Vintner by Feb. 25 at 703-242-9463, or viennavintner@gmail.com, or visit the company website: viennavintner.com. VIVIN, 320 Maple Ave E, Vienna, VA 22180 to register and purchase your wine. Visit www.vivon.com/announcements.

SATURDAY/ FEB. 27
Blaze Historical Society Meeting. 4 p.m. Via Zoom. The speaker will be Christine West, with a talk called “The Mayflower and Early New England Immigration.” They will go beyond what we usually hear in school history — they will talk about what the Pilgrims actually did. They will talk about the pilgrims’ journey and what did they find in the New World. They will talk about the people they met and the things they saw there. They will also talk about the Mayflower Compact. The presentation, originally developed by the New England Genealogical Society, will summarize some of the major events leading up to and following—the Mayflower voyage. Visit burkehistoricalsociety.org.

SATURDAY/ FEB. 27
Geocaching Workshop. 2-4 p.m. At Lake Fairfax, 1400 Lake Fairfax Drive, Reston. Channel your inner pirate and go on a treasure hunt using a handheld Global Positioning System, better known as GPS. Discover how you can use GPS units to locate hidden treasure caches within the park. After learning how to enter latitude and longitude coordinates into a GPS, participants will follow the coordinates to find a hidden object, container or unique geological feature. Bring a GPS to participate. Cost is $22 per person. Call 703-471-5414.

SUNDAY/ FEB. 28
Protection & Inspection. 2-3:30 p.m. Virtual at The Alden Theatre, McLean. The War ICBM force commander who also led the movement to build the Strategic Defense Initiative, better known as the missile defense system, was speaking at the Burke Historical Society meeting. As a former missile defense system commander, he shared some of his experiences during the Cold War. He described some of the significant events that led to the creation of the Strategic Defense Initiative, also known as “Star Wars.” The presentation included a discussion of the political, military, and technical challenges that were faced during the development of the SDI. He shared some of the key lessons learned from his time in the military. The presentation concluded with a Q&A session where participants had the opportunity to ask questions and share their thoughts about the topic. Visit burkehistoricalsociety.org.

If Michael Had Lung Cancer
If Michael 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 mouth full of cancer-related appointments, infusions, scans, etc., all the way to the end of December, things have taken a new turn, a new symptom the other day which warranted an unexpected brain MRI. Though I delayed a few days in sharing this, on Thursday, 1/21, I emailed my oncologist. Within the day (not near enough for my wife, Dina), I received a call from my doctor. After a brief conversation during which he described my symptoms and 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 “contrad,” an infusion which provides better detail for the radiologist. (Given my pre-existing kidney issues, there are certain products which I cannot tolerate, ones which are filtered through the kidney, specifically “contrast,” but here, my radiologist wanted the clearest picture/assessment possible. Infusing “contrast” results in a kind of clarity, like the difference between viewing color and black and white. In my case, receiving an “unremarkable” (no metastasis, “no infarct, no hemorrhage, no intracranial abnormality”) any imaging was particularly encouraging. Now I can breathe again, except for another side effect caused by the leumiva (my thyroid cancer medicine) that 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 hallucinations. But I am also longer - for the moment, taking my thyroid medicine, which I cannot imagine is a good thing. However, I am 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 learned anything in my nearly 12 years as a cancer patient, it is that nothing (drugs, side effects, miscellaneous treatmentprotocols) last forever. Neck pain treatments for example, do not last even just a month. It’s best to sit tight and try to be patient. Getting ahead of one’s bad luck, or worse, is irrational and could be much more ado about nothing (at least that’s 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 appointment 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 upset the “slice 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 everything that’s the matter.

With a month off from cancer-related activities, one can almost ‘almost,’ not quite though live a cancer-free, normal-life type of life. It’s not as if I forget your circumstances however; but that it allows a certain mental break which believe me, all us cancer patients need. Without all the constant reminders, one can almost begin to feel the whole cancer existence. Unfortunately, this kind of existence is also characteristic of the ups and downs and all-arounds that cancer patients experience, and 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.

Great Falls Connections • February 17-23, 2021 • 11
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