Volunteer Michelle Baidoo removing invasive porcelain berry vines at Laurel Hill Park. Virginia House and Senate just passed a resolution on invasive plant species proposed by Del. David Bulova and supported by Sen. Dave Marsden.
Is it ‘A Solution Looking for a Problem’?

City of Fairfax enacts new firearms ordinance.

By Bonnie Hobbs
The Connection

Virginia recently adopted legislation allowing localities to enact ordinances prohibiting firearms and ammunition in and on certain public properties or at permitted public events. And last week, Fairfax City took advantage of this opportunity to do just that.

But it didn’t do it lightly or without careful consideration of the new law’s possible ramifications. City Council members discussed the ordinance at an October work session, a January meeting and last Tuesday’s public hearing.

They also read emails from City residents expressing their opinions on the issue, listened to more citizen comments during the Feb. 9 hearing and consulted with City Attorney Brian Lubkeman. And even then, they still disagreed on some points and made amendments to each other’s motions. But in the end, they came together and passed an ordinance they believe will be in the best interests of the City and its residents.

It prohibits firearms in buildings owned or used by the City, in the City’s public parks, and in any recreation facility or community center owned or operated by the City. This ban includes trails, sidewalks, and parking areas within public-park boundaries. And while there are certain exemptions, there are none for people holding concealed-carry permits. Violators of this ordinance could be convicted of a Class 4 misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of up to $250.

The new City ordinance is effective immediately, but full enforcement won’t happen until the appropriate notices and signs are posted, where required. Go to http://www.fairfaxva.gov/ for a list of all the locations where the firearms prohibition will apply.

AT THE OUTSET of the public hearing, Councilmember Sang Yi had questions about whether the ordinance would apply to color guards. “Their rifles are blank, but could be readily converted to live ammunition,” he said. “And I doubt that anyone wants to prohibit them.”

He also wondered if the responsibility for security measures, such as installing metal detectors inside public buildings, would rest solely on the city manager. His questions were among a multitude asked by the Council members. For example, Yi also wanted to know if the City’s police officers are trained to detect concealed weapons on people.

Police Capt. Natalie Hinesley replied that the officers get this training “through experience and observation.” However, she added, “Police couldn’t approach them about [having a possible, concealed weapon] unless there was suspicion of some other crime.”

She also noted that police would require training on the new ordinance.

Over the past 10 years, Fairfax police received 109 total calls for service dispatched as “weapons violations or brandishing a firearm.” Six of them gave the location as City-owned buildings or parks, and four listed Lanier Middle School.

But, explained Hinesley, “The majority of the 109 calls weren’t weapons violations. At Lanier, two of the calls were about BB guns, one was a social-media post and the other was a verbal threat. But they all came out as ‘weapons violations.’”

Councilmember Janice Miller asked if, besides City buildings, the ordinance would include, for example, the City Hall and Sherwood Community Center grounds. Lubkeman said it would not include those outdoor areas.

In the proposed ordinance, asked Councilmember Jon Stehle, “If I have a license to carry concealed and I’m walking on the sidewalk around Old Town Square, I’m not in violation of the ordinance?”

“That is correct,” answered Lubkeman. “But [doing that] during a public event might put you in violation.” Stehle then asked how people would know what’s in and out of the gun-prohibited area, and Lubkeman said, “You’d have to have a number of temporary signs.”

Councilmember Tom Ross asked if the ordinance could be passed with a “sunset provision, with a specific date for a review, to see if the ordinance is working.” Lubkeman said the Council could do that for either a review or repeal of the ordinance.

Parks and Rec Director Cathy Salgado said the City issues a dozen or more permits/year for large, special events, such as the Fall Festival, Rock the Block and the Fourth of July Parade. In addition, it issues hundreds of permits annually for picnics in the City’s park pavilions, plus 20-30 more permits for church and nonprofit gatherings at Old Town Square and other City locations.

“These special-event permits are reviewed by City staff and police to determine the level of service they’d need,” explained Salgado.

“More guns don’t make us safer; that’s obvious by the number of guns in the U.S. and the level of gun crimes. Pass an ordinance which enhances our safety – as several of you have acknowledged that the majority of Fairfax City citizens favor. I urge you to respect the will of the people.” — Judy Fisher

Councilmember Yi also made a motion to change the trespassing penalty for a Class I to a Class II misdemeanor, plus a smaller fine, and the Council approved this measure, as well. In addition, Miller made a motion to exempt from the ordinance educational events and programs, historical re-enactments, color guards, plus events involving weapons unloaded or loaded with blanks. This motion passed unanimously.

“Pass an ordinance which enhances our safety – as several of you have acknowledged that the majority of Fairfax City citizens favor. I urge you to respect the will of the people.”

Describing himself as a military veteran and a concealed-carry permit-holder, Andrew Pratt said the ordinance would be of no benefit. “If someone wants to commit a criminal act with a gun, no law is going to stop them,” he said. The result, said Pratt, would be citizens losing their right to protect themselves against criminals.
Finding Solutions in the General Assembly

By Sen. Scott Surovell
(D-36)

Both the Senate of Virginia and the House of Delegates have released proposed budgets and we will vote on the budget soon. We are also working to resolve some complex bills and to accelerate vaccinations.

Vaccination Progress

Health care providers have administered over 2.1 million COVID-19 vaccinations in Virginia as of Feb. 12, nine of ten available first doses. As of last week, that means that Virginia ranked seventh among states as a proportion of our population. The state also announced a unified vaccination scheduling system although Fairfax County chose to opt out. Virginia is now receiving 129,000 doses per week which is up 23 percent from our initial allocation. We have also expanded the vaccination program to 36 CVS drugstores around the state. We expect the pace to pick up once the Food and Drug Administration approves the new single-shot vaccines.

Back to School, River Farm, Mason Neck

On Wednesday, both chambers announced amendments to our two-year budget. Fortunately, revenues have been better than anticipated. The Senate budget includes a three percent adoption it was clear many of our lofty fund raising goals would need to be put on hold due to the pandemic.

Managing Criminal Records

Because the minority (Republicans) refused to extend our “short” session to 46 days, we had to formally move legislation from the regular session to the special session. This forced us to take two days off which gave us some additional time to collaborate to resolve some important disputes. On Tuesday, I met in the Governor’s Office with approximately ten legislators and the Governor’s policy staff to resolve an impasse on the expungement or sealing of convictions and records relating to certain dismissals of criminal charges.

I am very optimistic that we will be able to accommodate that will provide hope to the 1.6 million Virginians who have a misdemeanor or felony conviction but served their sentence and have long since moved on and led law-abiding lives. Enacting this bill will help people move beyond their past and support their families, and will also give employers a bigger pool of employees.

The Senate also accepted my amendment that requires Virginia’s Compensation Board to revamp staffing formulas for the state’s Commonwealth’s attorneys. Today, staffing is determined solely based on felony counts indicted and convictions obtained which incentivizes prosecutors to overcharge and over convict people.

The Senate also agreed to increase and retain about $35 million that I requested to fund the computer infrastructure necessary to facilitate the expungement and sealing reforms, and my initiative to expand the Court of Appeals of Virginia by seven judges. Virginia is the only state in America in which litigants do not have a right of appeal after a civil or criminal case and more judges are necessary to help with the new cases.

Our budget also prioritizes $136 million to extend rail service to the New River Valley in southwest Virginia. This means you might be able to take a train to Virginia Tech in Blacksburg soon. The budget also reallocates $3.9 million per year saved from abolishing capital punishment to a public defender office for Chesterfield County and new public defender appellate positions. A public defender will help provide thousands of people with enhanced legal defense instead of just a handful of people.

Please continue to respond to my constituent survey at www.scottlsruvell.org/survey. It is an honor to serve as your state senator.

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 conference. The Senate budget prioritizes 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 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 Housing Trust Fund, which funds short and long term projects to reduce barriers to homeownership 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 common modity, 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 Study of Plant Invaders Set

Del. Bulova’s resolution on control of invasive plant species unanimously passes both House and Senate by voice vote.

By Susan Laume
The Connection

Ecologists advise that invasive plant species grow at the expense of our ecosystem and our pocketbooks. Without any natural biological deterrents, plants and trees not native to our area are able to grow unrestricted, choking out the native plants and trees upon which our native insects, birds, and animals depend upon for food and habitat.

Local county governments, and individual home owners too, annually expend considerable time, effort, and dollars on management of a number of common invaders that are without natural pests and enemies here. Fairfax County runs a staffed Invasive Management Area (IMA) volunteer program and has an Urban Forestry Department with responsibility for controlling invasive species in the park system and providing information and support to citizens county-wide.

Invasive Management Area (IMA) Program Manager, Patricia Greenberg, new to the position this year, oversees more than 2,000 volunteers and site leaders, and a fiscal year budget of $250,000 granted by the County’s Energy and Environment Fund.

Greenberg indicates volunteers are working on 61 active sites, with the most prevalent invasive being multi-flora rose, English ivy, and porcelain berry. Those plant names and other invasive plants and tree names are likely familiar to readers, including: Bradford pear (Callery pear), Japanese honeysuckle, Mimosa, and Norway Maple, to name a few of the 90 on Virginia’s invasive plants list.

THOSE PLANTS and other non-natives are often still sold in area plant nurseries across the Commonwealth, even though significant sums are spent each year to try to control their growth and eradicate them. In an effort to manage this plant-and-destroy circle, Del. David Bulova (D-37) introduced his invasive plant species joint resolution (HJ527) in the Virginia House of Delegates. As Bulova testified before the Senate Rule Committee, “Arlington County spends about a quarter of a million and Fairfax County about a third of a million dollars on removal efforts each year.” Bulova’s resolution, supported by Sen. Dave Marsden’s (D-37) budget language, creates a work group to study the sale and use of invasive plants. Varied interest groups will join to discuss and make recommendations on possible statutory and regulatory changes to reduce or eliminate non-native plant and tree sale and use, in favor of the sale and use of native plants. Possible strategies could include labeling plants as invasive at point of sale, taxing invasive species and using revenues toward their removal and restoration of native plant habitats, adding invasive plants to the Commonwealth’s noxious weed list, supporting education and outreach for better public understanding of the damage done to the ecosystem, and increasing the use of native plants on government properties.

BULOVA’S RESOLUTION, which unanimously passed the House, and Senate by voice vote, now awaits sig-
New Police Station and Animal Shelter Planned for Lorton

As the South County area grows, facilities are needed to meet the demand.

By Mike Salmon
The Connection

The Lorton-South County area will take another step away from being in the county when the future South County Police Station and Animal Shelter is built on a parcel of land on Lorton Road, just east of the Ox Road intersection. This area of the county is now patrolled by units from the Franconia and West Springfield District Police Stations, which are some distance away, so the additional police station will allow the department to organize smaller patrol areas and decrease response times throughout the county, Fairfax County said.

The new station will be in the Mount Vernon District, which is under Supervisor Dan Storck, who has been behind the project since the early days when the money was allocated for the station in 2015. Construction on the project should begin in March, but due to COVID restrictions, Storck’s office is holding off on the groundbreaking ceremony with the community until later this year.

The new facility includes an approximate 34,000 square-foot police station and an approximately 23,000 square-foot animal shelter, the county said. The station includes space for the Animal Protection Police and a community room. The site will also include 20,000 square-feet of outdoor space for the animal shelter, a fuel island to support fleet vehicles, and associated parking. There will be a need for 15 new officers to run the station.

Funding for the South County Police Station and South County Animal Shelter was approved in the 2015 Public Safety Bond Referendum that was $151 million. Citizens voted overwhelmingly to approve the needed projects (74.5 percent voted yes). The new facility is projected to cost $30 million to design and construct.

In a presentation the county made to a citizen group in June 2018, they talked about an 8-member steering committee that was involved from surrounding HOA’s, So Co HS and So Co Federation. Money from Nov 2015 Public Safety Bond Referendum, 2013

Roof is Raised on Indoor Riding Arena in Clifton

The indoor facility will expand the success for the Northern Virginia Therapeutic Riding Program.

By Mike Salmon
The Connection

The Northern Virginia Therapeutic Riding Program will spread their program indoors this spring when they open a 17,000 square foot Jean and Ric Edelman Indoor Riding Arena, where they can provide therapeutic riding for many that are in need of riding therapy.

One mother, Mara Sibley, noted the value of the riding program with her son Carson, who looked forward to riding day every week. “Riding at NVTRP is so much more than just a riding lesson. NVTRP helps Carson focus and concentrate; it provides a sense of comfort and inclusion; it gives him an opportunity to do what he has so much confidence doing, and to thrive in such a welcoming environment,” she said. The indoor riding ring will expand his riding season options.

Omy Emami’s husband was introduced to NVTRP in 2016 through programs provided by Ft Belvoir clinics and Wounded Warrior Project. They participated in family events, and now Emami hopes that with an indoor arena, they’ll be able to do that throughout the year. “He gained so much during his time at NVTRP that he sought ways to get our family involved,” she said.

The therapy on horseback works too, said Olivia Taylor, NVTRP Program Director. “The tranquil farm atmosphere and non-judgemental horses creates an ideal atmosphere for learning and practicing new skills,” she said, adding that the therapy delivers in a few different ways. “Through riding and horsemanship session goals, our clients work on increasing strength, balance, motor planning, confidence, and emotional regulation,” Taylor said.

In order to meet the growing demand for NVTRP services, and provide an enhanced experience for current riders, their families, and volunteers, they are conducting a whole scale capital improvement project that will unleash the potential of the arena. Phase I, including the new, lit outdoor Trefry Riding Arena, expanded parking, accessible Kristen P Cubbage Memorial playground, and extensive foundation and infrastructure work needed to prepare the site for the indoor riding arena. Cubbage was the late wife of long-time NVTRP Board member and Building Committee Chair, Gary Cubbage. Gary and Kristen have two daughters, Caroline and Emma; who have benefited from the program.

According to NVTRP, the new space will allow current riders to ride year-round, regardless of the weather, and also allow services to increase by 60 percent, hopefully eliminating the typical one year waiting list.
St. John’s United Methodist Church – Springfield, VA is offering a complimentary series of finance education classes on ZOOM. Brad Duty, an accredited and experienced financial counselor, will lead these informal and informational classes. To register for these classes, go to www.saintjohnsumc.org and click on the icon for Personal Finance Management Seminars.

- Tue 2 Mar 7-8:15 pm Stretching Your Money
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- Tue 23 Mar 7-8:15 pm Saving and Investing
- Tue 6 Apr 7-8:15 pm Investing for Retirement
- Tue 13 Apr 7-8:15 pm Tax Efficient Charitable Giving and the SECURE Act

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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 ArtsFairfax, 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 Structures $5 - $25 million

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

Honorable Mention for the Rehabilitation of Three Equalization Basin and Ancillary Facilities - 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.
Fairfax Academy Students to Hear from the Pros

The Fairfax Academy's 3rd annual Career Experience Expo is next Monday, Feb. 22. This fully virtual event for all current Fairfax Academy students will begin at 9:30 a.m. with keynote speaker, David “DEZ” Zambrano, followed by three 45-minute workshop sessions led by a wide variety of industry professionals. During this full-day conference, students will choose which three workshop sessions they’d like to attend.

The sessions include: David Zobell and Matt Strote from Signature Theatre; Fairfax City Cultural Arts Manager, Megan Dubois; (Contact Coaching owner Julie Johnston; Academia alumna and Oklahoma Admissions Counselor, Monica Brown; Academia alumna and textile designer Sarah Dowell; Longwood University Associate Professor, Ryan Stroff;; Academy alumni Brian Rose and Sarah Heaton from Movoly Productions; music director, conductor and pianist, Jose Simbulan; Encore Ballroom Couture owner, Julie Wilson; Dance Instructor, Andrew Black; Director and Choreographer from J.A.M. the Revue, Jeremy McShan; Rob Sanchez and Marc Collier from Xtend Reality Junkies; Deliberately Designed College and Career owner and Marshall Academy Counselor, Niki Hauber; Academia alumni and U.S. State Department employee, Bebe Tran; and movie director, Hyung Tae Kim.

As for Zambrano, he was raised in Northern Virginia and draws inspiration from his life experiences. His love of art began with graffiti.Later, while riding the Red Line between Virginia and Maryland, he was captivated by the incredible artwork he saw covering the walls as the train went by.

Self-taught, Zambrano became an accomplished, custom-airbrush artist, muralist and canvas artist, using mixed media to create a visual masterpiece. He’s garnered wide acclaim for his custom artwork on footwear and has created commissioned work for athletes including Steph Curry, Tom Brady, Julio Jones and Steve Smith Sr.

More Performance Dates for CFTC’s Magic Show, ‘Spellbound’

Due to popular demand, the City of Fairfax Theatre Co. (CFTC) has added extra performance dates to its production of “Spellbound,” magician Lars Kløres’ one-man show celebrating the art of magic. Using Zoom in ways no one has previously imagined, audience members will discover the mystery and shock happening right in their own homes, via their own hands.

The new performances will be held Friday-Saturday, Feb. 26-27, from 6-9:30 p.m.; and Sunday, Feb. 28, from 3-4:30 p.m. A Zoom link will be emailed to ticket holders, the day of the performance they’ve chosen to attend.

Each show will run about 80 minutes. They’re intended for adults, but are also appropriate for supervised children, 8 and older, with an interest in magic. Buy tickets at www.fairfaxcitytheatre.org/spellbound.html. However, tickets for all performances must be purchased by Monday Feb. 22, at 6 p.m., so mystery packages integral to each show will have time to arrive.

Only one ticket is needed per household – and shows are selling out fast, so potential attendees are encouraged to buy their tickets quickly. For questions and further information, contact Artistic Director Amanda Snellings at cfctcadirector@gmail.com.

“Spellbound” is a reality-bending, virtual performance featuring astounding acts of magic and mind-reading, with effects that happen in your own home,” said Snellings. “This show will manipulate your eyes, your mind and even your hands, altering perception until you won’t know what to believe.”

Springfield Church Offers Free Finance Management Seminars

St. John’s United Methodist Church in Springfield is offering a complimentary series of finance education classes on ZOOM. Brad Duty, an accredited and experienced financial counselor, will lead these informal and informational classes. To register for these classes, go to www.saintjohnsumc.org and click on the icon for Personal Finance Management Seminars:

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- Tuesday, March 23, 7-8:15 p.m. – Saving and Investing
- Tuesday, April 6, 7-8:15 p.m. – Investing for Retirement
- Tuesday, April 13, 7-8:15 p.m. – Tax Efficient Charitable Giving and the SECURE Act
Celebrating Our “Happily Ever After”
A Tribute to Ravi Panth
February 13, 1952-January 28, 2021

February 2021

Dear Ravi,

When we met February 14, 1991, we never imagined the incredible journey we would start together. It all began, the night before Valentine’s Day, when my neighbor, who was about 75 at that time, had been missing. I accompanied her to one of her social events. She had asked me so many times, that I always turn down her offers. This time, I decided to accompany her; not knowing that my world would forever change.

Who would have known? We both relocated to Virginia from countries that are thousands of miles away and with different cultural backgrounds. We never imagined the incredible miracle that was about to occur when the Puerto Rican woman and Indian man would start their “Valentine’s Eve” after this special, unforgettable and magical Valentine’s event.

We were blessed indeed. The connection and chemistry was present from the very beginning. I remember you standing at the corner of the room near the food table holding a diet Pepsi and nibbling on some of the finger foods. You were wearing the olive green casual jacket that is an incredible olive green jacket that I have been searching for unsuccessfully for years, over the white shirt and tie. You looked so stylish and so well put together. This jacket and its story has always been one of our favorite topics of conversation, especially on Valentine’s Day. Our faces would light up as we related those memories. Well, I would give anything to find that olive green jacket, and, who knows, as we both have come to realize during our journey together, everything is possible. That evening our eyes met, and it was a mesmerizing experience. You walked slowly towards me with what you call your “John Wayne” walk and in a low voice asked, “Can I place my jacket here behind your chair?” My firm “no” did not allow me to say anything but, “Yes, of course.” My face blushed as my heart beat so, so fast.

Then, you asked me to dance and turns and turns out that you were talented at that. You had my hand and lead me to the dance floor. I found out that you loved all kinds of music, whether slow, rock and roll, country, line dancing, or Latin. On occasions, further on in the relationship, you even tried dancing merengue and salsa. You loved it all, and you certainly made my heart beat with each step I took. You were a natural turning an eye or two as your charming self with the rhythms on the dance floor.

There was something about you. It was a glow, a special glow that certainly lit up a room and you definitely stood out with that beautiful smile of yours, laughter and charming personality. Years later, when I asked you what was so special about your name, you told me that “Ravi” in Hindi meant “Sun”. Well, that explains the glow. You were a ray of sunshine in the lives of so many.

We finally had a chance to find a quiet sitting area and you immediately pulled out a picture from your wallet. It was a picture of you, Aviseh as a toddler. Your daddy love was evident as your eyes sparkled sharing stories about him. You also talked fondly about your mother, brothers and your career as an economist. You manifested yourself in so many incredible ways. Your talents were confirmed as our relationship slowly grew and evolved into a reflection of you. He has certainly grown in so many incredible ways. Our relationship is enriched as we were destined to help one another grow in so many incredible ways. Our relationship, “ours” was the most normal, unique and fulfilling of all. The type of relationship that comes only once in a lifetime.

Our “Happily Ever After” started from the day we met. From that moment on, our lives were enriched as we were destined to help one another grow in so many incredible ways. Our love, commitment and support towards one another will always be present as a unique, incredible and memorable love story that will live on forever.

Even through your health struggles, we supported and learned on one another and as you would put it, “Together always through thick and thin.” I thank God each day for allowing us to cross paths because we are indeed what society identifies as “soulmates.” We have lived life under our own terms, and regardless of the obstacles, our relationship and experience as a “happily ever after” was the most normal, unique and fulfilling of all.

I cherish all of our memories together but especially those simple and caring tender moments when you held my hand in the car and the protective way you held my wrist when crossing a street. I cherish our quiet movie nights and the way you would recite the script from one of the scenes of the Bruce Lee movie, Enter the Dragon. You had watched that movie so many times that you knew it inside and out.

I remember in detail how you stroked my lips and hair, and the way you cut in half the last shrimp on a plate and shared it with me. I cherish the first time you had a “bacalaito” with your bare hands and shared it with me. I cherish that you would pull out your wallet and put it to me and say, “I can’t get it.” And with your calm self would say, “It is OK. Do not worry.”

I love you because no matter what, you were always there for me. I love you because you dream with me and you know how to make me laugh. I love you because you are my best friends and you know how to make my heart skip a beat. I love you because you’re not only my partner but also my best friend. I love you because you’re there when times are hard and you make the good times even better. I love you because no matter what, you love me too. I love you.

Happy Valentine’s Day and Anniversary my love.

Loving you always,
Ivette
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Kenny Lourie is an Advertising Representative for The Potomac Almanac & The Connection Newspapers.

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

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If Michael Corleone Had Lung Cancer

By KENNETH B. LOURIE

“If 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 was 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. (Influsing “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 experienced a few times. Having a police officer been present, I would have been cited for walking while intoxicated.

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