Pets of Herndon, Reston: Nothing But the Best for Family

“Lucky me; Cleo is helping me with my taxes.” - Sheila Olem, Town of Herndon Mayor

Farmington Wild Cats Win State Championship

Celebrating Black History
Fox Mill Road and Pinecrest Road Intersection Improvements Fairfax County

Virtual Public Information Meeting

Monday, March 15, 2021, 7-8:30 p.m.
www.virginiadot.org/FoxMillPinecrest

Find out about planned improvements at the intersection of Fox Mill Road (Route 665) and Pinecrest Road. The improvements include installing a new traffic signal and constructing left-turn lanes on northbound and southbound Fox Mill Road.

The meeting will be held as a virtual/online meeting. Information for accessing and participating in the virtual meeting is available at www.virginiadot.org/FoxMillPinecrest. The project team will make a short presentation beginning at 7 p.m. and answer questions for about an hour after the presentation.

Review project 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 703-259-2768 or TTY/TDD 711 to make an appointment with appropriate personnel.

Give your comments during the meeting, or by March 25, 2021 via the comment form on the project website, by mail to Mr. Christopher Barksdale, P.E., Virginia Department of Transportation, 4975 Alliance Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030 or by email to meetingcomments@VDOT.virginia.gov. Please reference “Fox Mill Road and Pinecrest Road Intersection Improvements” in the subject line.

VDOT ensures nondiscrimination and equal employment in all programs and activities in accordance with Title VI and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. If you need more information or special assistance for persons with disabilities or limited English proficiency, contact VDOT Civil Rights at 703-259-1775.

State Project: 0665-029-428, P101, R201, C501
UPC: 118460

In case an alternate date is needed, the meeting will be held Monday, March 22, 2021 at the same time.

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News

‘Tireless Devotion to Traffic Safety and the Community’

Whisenhunt is Sully District Station’s Officer of the Year.

By Bonnie Hobbs
The Connection

POLICE Officer First Class (PFC) Richard “Rick” Whisenhunt has been selected as the Sully District Police Station’s 2020 Officer of the Year. He was honored at the Feb. 10 meeting of the station’s Citizens Advisory Committee.

Nominating him for this award was 2nd Lt. Brian Calfee. And in his write-up, he explained several reasons why Whisenhunt was deserving of this special accolade.

“PFC Whisenhunt has consistently exhibited an incredible amount of dedication, hard work and passion for police work that deserves recognition as the Sully District Station’s 2020 Officer of the Year,” wrote Calfee. He then elaborated on the officer’s long career devoted to keeping the public safe.

When Whisenhunt graduated from the Fairfax County Criminal Justice Academy, he already had three decades in law enforcement under his belt. Prior to coming to work, he had served for eight years as an undercover agent for the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation. He then served as a unit and section chief with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) for 24-1/2 years.

So when Whisenhunt joined the county Police Department, it was a continuation of his long career in law-enforcement and the start of a new chapter with a different branch. But this time, the emphasis was on community policing.

AFTER GRADUATING from the academy in February 2015, Whisenhunt was assigned to the Sully District Station Midnights B shift and has remained there ever since. In that capacity, wrote Calfee, “He has proven to be a tireless and consistent workhorse, making the community’s roadways safer by focusing his efforts on taking impaired drivers off the road.”

Stressing how “incredibly dangerous” driving under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol is for everyone on the road, Calfee noted that, in 2019, Fairfax County had 413 alcohol-related crashes. Seven of them were fatal, and 32 involved serious injuries. The Sully District had 72 alcohol-related crashes, one with a fatality and six with serious injuries.

In the past four years – to help stop these crashes from happening – Whisenhunt has taken 95 drunk drivers off Sully’s roadways,” wrote Calfee. “This total includes 13 arrests in 2017, 27 in 2018, 27 in 2019, and 28 in 2020. Currently, he leads the Sully District Station [in drunk-driving arrests] and is the fifth-leading officer in Fairfax County for DWI enforcement.”

Besides that, Calfee described Whisenhunt as “a well-rounded officer who also balances his passion for DWI enforcement and education with community policing. He has often assisted his squad members with domestic disputes or runaway juveniles, due to his knowledge and experience with so many community members in the Sully District.”

Throughout his shift, Whisenhunt will be seen initiating traffic stops and providing his full attention in enforcing the traffic code,” continued Calfee. “Yet at the same time, he’ll also be busy assisting disabled motorists, giving help changing tires and, if needed, providing a ride home.”

CALFEE said the value of getting to know so many community members is something Whisenhunt takes to heart. During each opportunity he has to speak with local residents, wrote Calfee, “He takes time to interact with them, provide genuine advice if needed, and get to know them.” In his free time, he even enjoys volunteering with a local Boy Scout troop.

“These are but a few examples of PFC Whisenhunt’s work that are a benefit to his fellow officers, the Sully District and Fairfax County,” added Calfee. “For his tireless devotion to traffic safety and the community, he deserves special recognition, and we proudly honor him with the Sully District Station 2020 Officer of the Year Award.”

— 2nd Lt. Brian Calfee

PFC Richard Whisenhunt is the Sully District Station’s 2020 Officer of the Year.

Photo Courtesy of Lt. Josh Laitinen

State Project: 0665-029-428, P101, R201, C501
UPC: 118460

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Sen. Boysko’s ‘Literary Kitties’
State Sen. Jennifer Boysko’s rescue cat, Jane Eyre, stands ready (well actually, lays) to have the Senator’s back (well actually, shoulder) and give input on all manner of important bills. Jane, and a second cat, Elizabeth Bennett, were adopted by Senator Boysko and her family, as what Boysko calls their “literary kitties.”

Nothing But the Best for Family
Pets of Reston and Herndon.

By Mercia Hobson
The Connection

For us lucky ones, pets are part of our lives. Most pets, regardless if they’re furry, feathered, finned, or otherwise, elicit our unconditional love. It doesn’t matter the responsibilities and expenses. We are there for them every day, from their cute wide-eyed early weeks of life and for many during their last car ride, our hearts aching.

Unknown to pets, they are the best of human mood-boosters, most of the time. Pets increase our physical levels, even when we growl, crawling out of our warm beds in the predawn darkness and schlumping outside with them or filling their dishes with food and water before making our cups of coffee.

And we take pictures of our pets because their faces are friendly, their lives generally short, and they are our adopted family members, welcomed into our homes and cherished in our hearts.

“Lily is a German Shepherd and Corgi mix who’s half sweetheart, half crotchety old lady. She’s stingy with cuddles but loves giving kisses.” - Abby and Matt Springmann of Herndon

“You are loved.”

“My Cleo, looking for trouble and looking for a yoga partner.” - Sheila Olem, Town of Herndon Mayor

Blu, Molly and Samantha waiting for the pumpkin bread.

On a Brighter Side of Lockout
Cindy Morrow, of Reston, writes:
“My neighbors, George and Margie Dellagiarino, and their dog, Molly, have been in a bubble with myself, and my dogs, Blu and Samantha, since the COVID-19 pandemic began. We take daily walks, did a virtual walk around at Burke Lake Park in support of Briggs Animal Adoption Center and have celebrated Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s Day together. One of the dogs’ favorite activities is a weekly car ride/walk in a different area of Reston, followed by a stop at a Starbucks for some doggie treats and at times, a few pieces of pumpkin bread.”

Myself with Blu and Sam at Burke Lake Park - Sam has never met a bench that she didn’t like.
Celebrating Black History

There are ample reasons to be celebrating Black history in Virginia this month and throughout the year.

By Kenneth R. “Ken” Plum
State Delegate (D-36)

One of the meaningful traditions that has evolved in the Virginia House of Delegates over the last couple of decades has been the celebration of Black History Month by having a speech each day on the House floor about famous Black persons and their struggles and accomplishments in the Commonwealth. According to History magazine, Black History Month is an annual celebration of achievements by African Americans and a time for recognizing their central role in U.S. history. Also known as African American History Month, the event grew out of “Negro History Week,” the brainchild of noted historian Carter G. Woodson and other prominent African Americans. Since 1976 the month of February has been designated as Black History Month and is celebrated around the world, including in Canada and the United Kingdom.

Virginia has a unique role in Black history with each other.

Pal system to enable members to build community among themselves and to safely engage with each other.

Active Minds Club, Centreville High School -- Seniors Gabrielle Martis, Anna McNulty, and Lydia Kim are officers of the Centreville High School chapter, an organization dedicated to mental health awareness and education for young adults. The club has experienced an increase in membership from students in lower grades as well as greater gender diversity. During the pandemic, the club instituted a pen pal system to enable members to build community among themselves and to safely engage with each other.

The Teen Town Hall Project, Chantilly High School -- Nayaran Celine Xavier led a group of seven Chantilly students to establish a virtual town hall to explore the concerns of underrepresented students. The group held a Zoom call in which they fielded questions on race, culture, ethnicity, and gender issues and the program has expanded to cover issues concerning Asian-Americans, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ students, as well as the attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Aamirah “Molly” Malik, Herndon High School -- As part of a group of students, she gave gifts through Heifer International of a cow and chickens to a family in Africa in honor of their geography teacher. The animals have enabled the family to become self-sustaining entrepreneurs through the sale of milk and eggs. She is a member of When We All Vote, registering people to vote and taking an organizational role.

Shreya Puppalga, Langley High School established the nonprofit CHAPS - Children’s Health Awareness Program in Schools to help enable school children to make health-conscious decisions. The organization has provided information to students and parents about health and nutrition and provided them with information on local resources and held food drives. During the COVID pandemic, the program raised more than $5,000 for the charity Real Food for Kids through outreach and a GoFundMe account.

Kumming Chen, Mountain View High School spreads peace through advocacy and kung fu, sharing his deep respect for life and belief in the value of diverse ideas. In addition to his full-time studies at Mountain View, Chen works as a kung fu instructor and provides his students who are struggling with free tutoring and counseling. On the FCPS district-wide Student Council Association, he provides a voice for ESOL students in an effort to break both language and cultural barriers that impede student success.

Diana Ho, South Lakes High School is a mental health advocate, working to get more services in FCPS. As a member of Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement (VOICE), she spoke in support of VOICE’s budget proposal to Governor Ralph Northam for funding mental health services in schools. She and other students founded the VOICE Teen Team and lobbied the Virginia General Assembly in 2019 about their proposals. Based on her own experiences, Diana offers advice to those new to mental health self-care and self-awareness through her Take Care website.

Westfield Minds Matter, Westfield High School works to change the school culture regarding mental health. Group members have organized open conversations about mental health to increase behavior, promote connections, and increase healthy habits and coping skills. They established a teacher and administrator mental health panel in the hope that their concerns will be addressed by adults outside of their meetings. They are also working to ensure students have access to needed resources for mental health.

High School Students Receive Peace Awards

Students from 24 Fairfax County public schools have been named recipients of the 2021 Student Peace Awards of Fairfax County, designed to recognize young people who work as peacemakers. Recipients will be recognized at a virtual reception in March. The Student Peace Awards of Fairfax County were begun in 2006 to encourage people to think more about peace as both a means and an end, and to recognize young people who work as peacemakers. Every year, the high schools in Fairfax County are asked to select one junior or senior, or a group of students, whose work has promoted peace. The project is organized by volunteers and funded by donations from 17 secular and religious sponsoring organizations.

The 2021 recipients include the following students from our area:

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Commentary

Black history in Virginia this month and throughout the year.

Black persons supported the lifestyle of Virginia’s growing state. It was Black slave labor that built the early Virginia tobacco economy while being denied all but the most limited income. Black persons supported the lifestyle of the most prominent Virginia families with no public recognition of their accomplishments. As significant as were Jefferson’s words that “all men are created equal” in the Declaration of Independence, they did not apply to the slaves in his household nor to the Constitution that counted them as 3/5ths of a person.

The Emancipation Proclamation, the outcome of the Civil War and the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment did not result in equal recognition of their accomplishments. As stated by African Americans and a time for recognizing Black history in Virginia this month and throughout the year.

Black men running for lieutenant governor and governor, and for the nominations to run this year.

The recent history of voting in Virginia offers reasons to celebrate. There are more Black members of the Virginia General Assembly today than at any time since Reconstruction.

There are ample reasons to be celebrating Black history in Virginia this month and throughout the year.
One year after being named co-champions with South County High School, the Centreville Wildcats took the Virginia Class 6 Boys State Championship at Centreville High School on Feb. 20. The Wildcats came in with only two losses during the season, one to Hayfield who they defeated 64-55 in the state semi final game on Feb. 17 and Paul VI on Jan. 8. The Wildcats opponent for the Class 6 championship was previously undefeated Potomac, who advanced to the final by beating Landstown 79-73. After Potomac tied the game late in the second half, Centreville would pull away in the closing minutes of the game and win 63-49.

Centreville was led by Chris Kuzemka with 21 points in the championship game. Avery Ford added 17 points, Mason Jones 11, Paul McClain 10, and Reece Schirmer added 4 points. Potomac was led by Tyrell Harris with 17 and Kyle Honore with 15.

— Will Palenscar

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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
Pirnat noted a drop in the number of robberies and burglaries. Robberies decreased from a reported 344 in 2019 to 314 in 2020. While there were decreases, a number of increases occurred. According to Pirnat, in 2019, the County cited 495 weapons and illegal weapon calls compared to the upsurge of 518 in 2020. Motor vehicle thefts jumped from 863 in 2019 to 1,273 in 2020. “I believe that is related to the pandemic,” Pirnat said. Mental health calls ticked upwards slightly in 2020, to a total of 5000 calls compared to the previous year’s count of 4,715. “I do think some of those extra calls for service were related to the fact that individuals weren’t able to get their normal service provider, contact that they had prior years, due to the pandemic (and) due to telehealth being implemented,” Pirnat said.

Overall, Pirnat considered that Reston maintained a “very safe atmosphere,” even though she acknowledged a September 2020 homicide remained an active case. It involved the Sept. 17 shooting of a 19-year-old Iris Ponce Garcia that took place in the area of Coles Neck Road and Gladie Drive. In another Reston homicide, the Feb. 10, 2021, deadly shooting of Samuel Onyeuka in the 2300 block of Branchleigh Park Court, police arrested a man within days. Pirnat said they had been getting “a lot of calls in particular that are causing concerns for sounds of what are gunshots and that causes obviously a great deal of tension.”

In response to a recent community meeting, Pirnat said the Station launched (on Jan. 4) its RESET initiative, the Reston Engagement and Safety Enforcement Team. Pirnat described it as a blended team composed of officers from patrol and bike, a detective and a community engagement officer to communicate with community members, building rapport and trust while increasing visibility and suppressing crime. Pirnat recognized that police work is a changing profession. “We will continue to evolve. There’s always room for growth and improvement. Fairfax County prides itself on being a role model on how to do it right… Our goal has always been to use voluntary compliance and not use force.” Pirnat said chokeholds had not been used for 20 years and are prohibited. Their pursuit policy had been revised.

Assistant Commander Lt. Mitchell provided an overview on the promise to become a Fairfax County police officer, a position he described as ethical. The Academy is a 6-month training program for new officers. Their background checks are thorough, and they serve in a probationary capacity under the direction of an FTI (Field Training Instructor), where the newly learned skills are given real-life experience in the community. Once they pass, they become a senior officer.

The hour-long meeting is recorded and posted on Alcorn’s YouTube channel for public viewing.
Construction Begins Soon on Route 28 Widening

By Bonnie Hobbs  The Connection

Fairfax County’s Department of Transportation will soon begin construction to widen Route 28 in Centreville. This heavily traveled road will be increased from four to six lanes between the bridge over Bull Run (south of Compton Road) and the Route 29 Interchange. Work is currently slated to start around March 1. The first stage of construction will include paving and strengthening portions of the existing shoulders along the entire length of the project. This work will be done as follows:

* In the southern portion of the project, between the bridge over Bull Run and the intersection of Route 28 and Old Mill Road/Green Trails Boulevard, construction will be completed along the outside (right) shoulder going southbound, and along * in the northern portion of the project, between the intersection of Route 28 and Old Mill Road/Green Trails Boulevard and the interchange at Route 29, work will be completed on the outside (right) in both the southbound and northbound directions.

In future construction stages, traffic will be shifted onto the newly paved shoulders to enable the widening to be accomplished with minimal impact to traffic flow during peak travel periods. Beginning this week, the contractor will install construction signs and message boards in advance of construction activities.

Drivers should expect delays and be on the lookout for temporary lane closures during off-peak hours for both the advance, construction-sign installation and shoulder-paving and strengthening work.

Temporary lane closures on Route 28 will be restricted from 9:30 a.m.-3 p.m., Monday through Thursday, and 9:30 a.m.-2 p.m., on Fridays. Lane closures will be allowed during peak travel periods and holidays. Weekend and nighttime work activities aren’t currently planned during this stage of the project but will improve for future stages. All work is weather-dependent and will be rescheduled if inclement conditions occur.

Besides widening Route 28, the fully funded $88.35 million project will also yield additional lanes on the side streets to ease traffic flow. It will improve intersection operations, as well, by upgrading existing traffic signals and improving bicycle and pedestrian crossings. Furthermore, new, 10-foot-wide, shared-use paths will be created on both sides of Route 28, the median (left) shoulder, heading north.

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

**CONSTRUCTION TO BEGIN ON ROUTE 28 WIDENING**

The Fairfax County Department of Transportation will begin construction to widen Route 28 from four to six lanes between the bridge over Bull Run (south of Compton Road) and the interchange at Route 29 in Centreville on or about March 1, 2021. The first stage of construction will include paving and strengthening portions of the existing shoulders along the entire length of the project, specifically:

In the southern portion of the project, between the bridge over Bull Run and the intersection of Route 28 and Old Mill Road/Green Trails Boulevard, work will be completed along the outside (right) shoulder in the southbound direction and along the inside (left) shoulder in the northbound direction.

In the northern portion of the project, between the intersection of Route 28 and Old Mill Road/Green Trails Boulevard and the interchange at Route 29, work will be completed on the outside (right) in both the southbound and northbound directions.