Lake Braddock Bruins Win Season-opening Game

Lake Braddock quarterback Billy Edwards #4 drops back for a pass during the game with Westfield; Bruins won a season-opening game, 26-7.

County’s Budget Plan Faces ‘Robust Conversations’

‘A Way for Us To Get Back on Track’
TSASmall.png

TSA Is Filling Up in Southern Springfield

Access improvements are still to come for this Federal facility.

By Mike Salmon
The Connection

As the winter winds down, the spring will bring new life into southern Springfield with the Transportation Security Administration completing their move into a nine-story, 625,000 square-foot building a few hundred yards from the Franconia-Springfield Metro Station.

The TSA relocation is combining five locations around the metro area into this one building, and when complete, this will be a boon to the businesses in this part of Springfield and Kingstowne.

“We’ll be reaching out to the community to meet our food needs,” said Peter M McVey, Director, of the TSA National Capital Region Consolidation and Re-location Project on a conference call sponsored by the Lee-Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce. The snowstorm blanketed the area the morning of the call, which was attended by 30 business leaders, elected officials and residents to hear about the latest developments with the new facility.

Currently there are 1,000 employees in the building, but that number will move up to 1,250 in the coming weeks, and top out at 3,100 when it is full. McVey narrated a slide show that showcased the facilities in the building, including secure offices, transportation and logistics for the government employees coming to Springfield. From the Metro station, there is a shuttle for federal employees only and a walkway for others, as well as a six-level parking garage. The main entrance will be on the second floor where there is a secured entry facility, a coffee area and “Mission Hall,” a museum-like place that tells the story of the TSA. There are some appliances that have not been delivered, and McVey said “we are still feeling the impacts of covid with appliance delivery,” so for now, some rely on the vending machines.

Transportation is being pieced together, and right now, the building can only be accessed by a single road from Loisdale Road. Supervisor Rodney Lusk (D-Lee) noted the importance of the Frontier Drive extension, which is a Virginia Department of Transportation project to extend Frontier Drive through the Metro station, by the TSA building as one improvement that could bring transportation and logistics for the government employees coming to Springfield. From the Metro station, there is a shuttle for federal employees only and a walkway for others, as well as a six-level parking garage. The main entrance will be on the second floor where there is a secured entry facility, a coffee area and “Mission Hall,” a museum-like place that tells the story of the TSA. There are some appliances that have not been delivered, and McVey said “we are still feeling the impacts of covid with appliance delivery,” so for now, some rely on the vending machines.

Transportation is being pieced together, and right now, the building can only be accessed by a single road from Loisdale Road. Supervisor Rodney Lusk (D-Lee) noted the importance of the Frontier Drive extension, which is a Virginia Department of Transportation project to extend Frontier Drive through the Metro station, by the TSA building, and eventually linking to Loisdale Road. “The Frontier Drive extension is the main improvement but it’s not funded,” he said, adding that officials on various levels are working on that.

Frontier Drive Project

According to VDOT, the $140 million Frontier Drive project is currently in the preliminary design stage. VDOT describes the project as a four-lane divided roadway, which includes a combination of new construction and improvements to Springfield Center Drive and a new bridge over Long Branch, with on-road bicycle facilities, as well as a shared-use path on one side and a sidewalk on the other side. Braided ramps at the Frontier Drive and Franconia-Springfield Parkway interchange to improve access and eliminate weaving movements.

The project includes improvements to the Franconia-Springfield Metro station circulatory road and access to the Metro station parking structures, including three new bus bays and a direct connection from the transit center to eastbound Franconia-Springfield Parkway. “I believe we’ll be able to find money to get this done,” Lusk said, noting that the Frontier Drive project is third in a row of road projects that are up for funding.

James Glenn, a nearby resident on the conference call, suggested a monorail from the station right into the TSA building as one improvement that could bring Metro riders to the office easily.

In the same area, Inova Health System plans to expand on recently acquired property adjacent to the current Inova HealthPlex – Franconia/Springfield.

Inova medical facilities is looking to build a hospital at Beulah Street and the Springfield-Franconia Parkway intersection, and Lusk looked at that project as another plus for this immediate area as a training and employment venue for residents.

In addition, Lusk is enthusiastic about renewing the effort to bring the FBI Headquarters to a parcel of land that is currently occupied by the General Services Administration. He’s working on this with U.S. Sen. Mark Warner (D-VA).

“We think the new administration is going to be open to this,” Lusk said.

Photos contributed
Lee District Supervisor Rodney Lusk participates in the chamber’s Zoom call.

"We think the new administration is going to be open to this," Lusk said.

By Mike Salmon
The Connection
County’s Budget Plan Faces ‘Robust Conversations’

Focusses resources in targeted areas.

By Mercia Hobson
The Connection

“W hat a difference a year makes,” said Fairfax County Executive Bryan Hill.

On Feb. 23, Hill presented his FY2022 Budget Plan to the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. The fiscal year will run from July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022.

The FY2022 Advertised Budget is not a done deal; it is the county executive’s recommendation. The final FY2022 Adopted Budget will happen May 4 after what Chair- man Jeff McKay called “robust conversations with the community in order to prioritize funding.”

Hill’s proposed plan builds on the County’s success to utilize federal stimulus funds, most notably the $200.2 million CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Fund.

“I THINK IT’S CLEAR that we won’t be able to do everything we want to, just like our residents and businesses can’t in these unprecedented times,” said Chairman McKay. “And obviously, we want to, just like our residents won’t be able to do everything.”

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“... Fairfax County’s unemployment rate stands at 4.4 percent – far greater than the 1.9 percent we saw one year ago.”

According to Hill, with the proposed reduction in the Real Estate Tax rate, additional revenue available to the County for FY 2022 is $42.23 million – an increase of only 1.51 percent over the current FY 2021 estimate.

Hill’s recommendation includes reducing the Real Estate Tax rate by one cent, bringing the rate from $1.15 to $1.14 per $100 of assessed value. In Hill’s Message to the Chairman and Board, he said, “I recognize that many of our homeowners may be struggling. … Fairfax County’s unemployment rate stands at 4.4 percent – far greater than the 1.9 percent we saw one year ago.”

Looking Ahead, the Board will advertise a tax rate at its March 9 meeting. Various district meetings will occur in February and March, and the Board will hold public hearings from April 13-15.

McKay said that for FY20-22, the County expected revenue loss to approach $300 million to the General Fund. He said that while appreciative of prior stimulus money and hoped additional stimulus money was on its way to the County, “hope is not really what you base a budget on; it’s reality.”

Vice Chairman Penny Gross (D-Mason District) discussed non-residential real estate. The amount of empty office space increased to 18.5 million square feet out of 119.2 million square feet.

“I don’t tell me that we need to gobansters on our repurposing of vacant buildings,” Gross said.

Supervisor James Walkinshaw (D-Braddock) said that Fairfax County is one of the thousands of jurisdictions across the country that Congress members watch, which is why he appreciated the prudent proposal Hill released. “If I think we had a budget proposal that showed us with a lot of new spending initiatives or dramatic tax increases, it would have made our job more difficult as we’re making the necessary case for additional federal support for state and local governments at this point.”

Supervisor Pat Herrity (R-Springfield) said he hoped to see a “flat tax bill,” especially given the pandemic. “I expect things, especially in the commercial real estate world, will probably get a lot worse next year. But this budget still represents a 3.4 percent tax increase on our residents ... I believe we have a lot of work to do.”

Housing Values Increase and This Will Soon Be Felt in Tax Bills

By Mike Salmon
The Connection

Despite the impact of job losses, deaths and sickness that swept over the nation over the last year, the housing values in Fairfax County have increased, and this will trickle down to the taxes paid by homeowners, including seniors that live on a fixed income.

The tax rate proposed by County Executive Bryan Hill is reduced from last year, but the average homeowner will still pay more because of increased home values. The Board of Supervisors won’t advertise a tax rate until March 9.

According to the county, residential real estate assessments are up an average of 4.25 percent countywide and about 88 percent of homeowners saw an increase in their home’s value. The county says these are market-driven increases or decreases to values. Only 4.4 percent saw a decrease in value, and assessments are unchanged for the remaining 7.6 percent. This year the average assessment for all homes is $607,752, compared to $582,976 in 2020.

The southern part of Fairfax County saw the biggest assessment increases. Houses in Lee District went up the most at 6.32 percent followed by Braddock at 6.06 percent, and Mount Vernon at 5.29 percent. In the Sully District, values raised 4.6 percent, while in the Providence District there is a 3.91 percent increase, followed by a 3.67 percent increase in Hunter Mill, 2.53 percent in Dranesville and 5.3 percent in Mason.

The ASSESSMENTS are based on the market value, and the county assesses all properties on an annual basis, using sales records as one way to determine a property’s value. If the market is hot, the housing prices go up, and eventually the taxes paid go up. According to the county, an annual real estate assessment of all real estate property ensures that they are uniformly and fairly assessed properties at their fair market value.

For example, the seniors that have paid off their mortgage will simply write a bigger check this summer when the county tax bill is due. Others who pay their county taxes as part of the escrow account will pay an increased monthly mortgage bill for 2022.

In Springfield, where the increase in housing values rose 4.89 percent, Supervisor Pat Herrity is not satisfied with the taxpayers increase at this time. The advertised county budget increase for fiscal 2022 includes a 3.4 percent increase in the tax on homeowners. “This year’s advertised budget continues to raise rates on homeowners and is unsustainable,” Herrity said in a release.

He shared ideas though on budget items. “Instead of focusing on the pandemic response and providing tax relief to our residents, this budget includes staffing new programs and facilities. We need to be doing what our residents are having to do and figure out ways to work within our means.”

Specifically, Herrity said some reductions in the school budget could be made, and four facilities that are planned could be delayed to save the money for now. These are the South County Police Station, the Scotts Run Fire Station, and new community centers in Lee and Sully Districts.

“We can defer opening these,” Herrity said. None of his proposed deferrals are in his district.

The county executive’s proposed budget already provides less money for schools than the school board’s budget calls for.

HOMEOWNERS can also contest their appraisals, possibly lowering the amount of the value of their homes, and therefore the amount of their tax bill. There are two levels of appeal, the county said. The first one is an administrative appeal to the Department of Tax Administration, and the second level is to the Board of Review and Appeal.

See Home Assessments, Page 5
A Progressive State if We Can Keep It

By Kenneth R. “Ken” Plum
STATE DELEGATE (D-35)

T
o paraphrase Benjamin Franklin who when asked at the conclusion of the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia what kind of government had been formed replied, “a republic if we can keep it!” As the General Assembly concluded the work of its annual session this past weekend the same kind of question could be posed as the changes in the Commonwealth’s laws and governance have been so profound. The answer I believe is a progressive state measured not by southern standards but by comparison to all the other states. At the ballot box the state over the last several years has gone from red to purple to blue. All statewide elected officials are Democrats, and both houses of the General Assembly have been controlled by Democrats since the elections in 2019. Far more meaningful than the partisan legislature controlled by Democrats since the elections in the Commonwealth’s laws and governance has been so profound. The answer I believe is a progressive state measured not by southern standards but by comparison to all the other states.

As one who served during years when the news coming from Richmond was not so good. I am aware that these reforms passed with barely a majority of Democratic legislator votes and a rare and scant few of Republican legislator votes. Attention is already shifting to the fall when the governor, lieutenant governor and attorney general will be elected along with all 100 members of the House of Delegates. The progressive reforms will be on the ballot: do we build on them in the future or do we turn back the clock? Already a former governor, two Black women, and a self-avowed socialist are running for the Democratic nomination for governor and a self-proclaimed “Trump in high heels” and a staunch opponent of abortion rights are among those seeking the Republican nomination. There is likely to be a record number of candidates running for the House of Delegates. The voters in November will ultimately decide if we keep our progressive state!

Brain Injury Awareness: A Personal Story

By Katy Schnitger

I
n 2007, my kids and I were at a fireworks show in Vienna that was so grand we were in awe of each burst. But then there was a misfire and a three-inch mortar shot through the crowd and into our tent.

The force of the explosion turned buttons from my shorts into projectiles that were surgically removed from my left thigh. I spent 12 days in the burn unit at Washington Hospital Center. I was released from the hospital to recover at home with a nurse. I cried a lot and didn’t want to get out of bed, but my kids needed me.

I focused on taking care of my family. It soon became apparent that my own mental health and cognitive capabilities were suffering. I struggled to do things I used to do so easily as a stay at home mom. I could not manage our family’s schedule, grocery shopping was impossible, and I could no longer do simple math. I was diagnosed with depression, but I knew I was struggling with more.

In December 2008, I met Dr. Gregory J. O’Shanick, President & Medical Director at the Center for Neurorehabilitation Services, PC in Richmond. After a 3-hour evaluation, he recognized that I had a blast Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). My feelings were validated that my symptoms were beyond depression. But what did having a TBI mean going forward?

I met with Dr. O’Shanick’s team for physical and occupational therapy. I also discovered Brain Injury Services (BIS), a nonprofit based in Northern Virginia that serves adults and children with TBIs. BIS empowered me to feel whole again. I joined a monthly support group and did not feel so alone. I began public speaking with their Speakers Bureau. That gave me purpose, confidence and independence that opened the door to employment.

March is Brain Injury Awareness Month. I share my story to help others who have experienced trauma to the brain to help them and their caregivers recognize some of the signs of a TBI. According to Dr. O’Shanick, common indications of a TBI are loss of balance, inability to track with the eyes, sensitivity to sound, and difficulty with executive functions. All of these challenges can lead to frustration, anxiety, and isolation. But know you are not alone. There is a community at BIS who see you and support your transition to live your best life.

Katy Schnitger is the Office Manager and Outreach Specialist at Brain Injury Services. Katy has been involved with BIS since 2010 as a client and as a volunteer with the Speaker’s Bureau. She has been employed at Brain Injury Services since 2015. She has lived in Vienna, Virginia for over fifteen years.

‘Unique Yard Sale’ to Benefit Fairfax Salvation Army

By Katy Schnitger

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‘Unique Yard Sale’ to Benefit Fairfax Salvation Army

The Fairfax Salvation Army Women’s Auxiliary will hold a “Unique Yard Sale” Saturday, March 27, at the Fairfax Salva- tion Army Corps, 4915 Ox Road, Fairfax. Hours of sale are 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. On sale will be new items from the canceled 2020 Silent Auction and other donated new and lightly used items, such as: housewares, handicrafts, Easter, Spring and Christmas items, ladies apparel, jewelry, children’s items and much more. All proceeds raised will support several programs at the Salva- tion Army. The Salvation Army plays a vital role in the community by assisting those in need. Some of the projects the local corps sponsors are: disaster relief in the form of food and clothing, backpacks with supplies to school age children, food baskets at Thanksgiving and Christmas, toys and gifts for families at Christmas and any other needs that arise.

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Home Assessments Increase

Herrity did note that some of the seniors in his district have moved out because of the increased taxes.

“Older adults are being taxed out of Fairfax County,” Herrity said.

County residents can look for an opportunity to speak out on taxes over the next few weeks. There are public hearings about the county budget from April 13-15. A mark-up of the final budget draft is turned in on April 27 and the new budget comes out May 4.

To see where your real estate taxes are spent, visit the real estate calculator at: https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/taxcalc/

‘Winter in Fairfax City’ Blanket Campaign

The Winter in Fairfax City campaign launched Tuesday, March 2, Using CARES Act funds, Fairfax City’s Economic Development Authority has purchased blankets and is providing them to City restaurants at no cost. The idea is to promote outdoor dining by offering patrons the option to purchase a blanket to keep warm while dining outside.

Blankets will be available at 20 Fairfax City restaurants. When patrons buy a blanket for $20, the participating restaurant will keep the proceeds and the customer will receive a free hot chocolate, coffee or tea. Then, when they return for another outdoor-dining experience there with their blanket, they’ll receive an additional, free, hot beverage.

This new initiative is a continuation of the Fairfax City Winter Preparedness Initiative Micro-Grant program’s goal of helping the City’s restaurants attract customers during the cooler months.

— Bonnie Hobbs

What’s NEXT for the greater good of the region

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Mount Vernon-Leesburg Chamber of Commerce
Springfield Chamber of Commerce
Virginia Transportation Construction Alliance
Prince William Chamber of Commerce
Northern Virginia Building Industry Association
Apartment and Office Building Association
Virginia Self Storage Association
Washington Area New Automobile Dealers Association
And many more...
‘A Way for Us to Get Back on Track’
Fairfax City manager unveils proposed FY 22 budget.

By Bonnie Hobbs
The Connection

Fairfax City Manager Rob Stalzer unveiled his proposed City budget for FY 22 at last Tuesday’s City Council meeting. But first, Mayor David Meyer addressed the residents watching the Feb. 23 presentation.

He stressed all the services the City provides across 6 square miles to Fairfax’s 24,000 people to keep them safe and well-educated and also give them health services and public-workers services. Knowing that, said Meyer, “It is remarkable – the high quality of services provided – for the reasonable amounts of tax resources we require.”

He said it’s possible because of “our people.” He then commended all the City staff members, officials and department heads involved in preparing the budget. And he encouraged all Fairfax residents to be part of this document’s public-hearing process, over the next couple months, before it’s adopted on May 5.

“We’ve been working on the budget for six months,” said Stalzer. “The FY 21 and FY 22 proposed amounts are very similar. We’re looking at this budget as a way for us to get back on track and do the things we deemed important when we adopted our last budget, pre-COVID – and before we had to reduce it by $18 million because of it.”

He proposes a modest, residential real-estate tax hike of $0.005 – from the current $1.075 per $100 assessed valuation to $1.08 – of which $0.035 would support the City’s Stormwater Fund. Still, because it would come on top of raised home assessments for calendar year 2021, the owner of an average home in Fairfax valued at $541,554 would pay $20/month more in real-estate taxes for an annual increase of $235.

However, said Stalzer, “Our tax rate is the lowest, by far, of any of the cities and towns in Northern Virginia, when you look at the tax dollars per square mile. And the 3.5-cent stormwater fund tax rate is equivalent to approximately $2.3 million dedicated to fund stormwater projects. The money is needed for improvements to our stormwater infrastructure.”

He also recommends a 6-percent jump in the Wastewater Fund rate. And his budget would fully fund the City School Board’s adopted FY 22 contract with Fairfax County Public Schools for $53,480,000 – about $2 million more than in FY 21.

THE PROPOSED CITY BUDGET includes pay raises for City employees – 3.5-percent merit increases, effective Jan. 1, 2022, plus market-rate salary adjustments of 2.3 percent. “We need to take care of the people who got us through COVID-19 and will be here to take us forward,” explained Stalzer.

He said the budget focuses on the Council’s goals of economic development and redevelopment – as well as quality transportation, neighborhoods and governance – while complying with fiscal policies, maintaining the City’s AAA bond rating and delivering the services Fairfax residents have come to expect. However, although the City’s tax base has increased, it lags behind the region’s average, and nearly half of the $154,514,318 General Fund budget is for non-discretionary expenses, such as schools, human services and debt repayment.

“Education is our biggest expense, just under 40 percent of the General Fund expenditures,” said Stalzer. “Police and Fire are about 20 percent, and Public Works is just under 10 percent.”

Real-estate taxes – 35 percent commercial and 65 percent residential – comprise 50 percent of General Fund revenues, but Stalzer said all the City’s revenue sources are important to offset its expenses. “We have a good mix of retail – especially grocery and hardware stores, and pharmacies – that have done well during the pandemic,” he said. “But we want to do even better.”

“The tax base grew 3.17 percent – about $204 million,” he continued. “But to do what we want to do for the City, we need it to grow by 6.6 to 7.9 percent a year – which will be a challenge.”

Stalzer said Fairfax did “a good and purposeful job with the CARES Act funds we received, and we got 100-percent reimbursement from FEMA for our COVID [response] activities.” He also noted the ongoing interest in the City by developers wishing to build here, plus Fairfax’s success in leveraging outside sources to help fund its transportation and other projects.

Among his proposed FY 22 General Fund expenditures is a $1.5 million increase in salaries for existing and some new personnel. And Stalzer called the total $8.7 million transfer to the CIP (Capital Improvement Projects) budget from this fund “a significant bump because the design of Sherwood/Willard begins in FY 22.”

Fairfax Restores Some FY 21 Budget Cuts

Concerned about a potential shortfall of nearly $18 million in its FY 21 budget, the Fairfax City Council took decisive action during its Jan. 5 quarterly budget review. At the urging of City Manager Rob Stalzer, it slashed its capital and operating budgets and placed $7.9 million of budgeted expenses on hold.

Now, though, Fairfax’s financial picture has gotten brighter, and it’s been able to restore some $1.4 million of those previously frozen items into its current, General Fund expenditure budget. The Council did so during its meeting last Tuesday, Feb. 23.

Factors contributing to the City’s rosier-than-expected economic situation included additional meals-tax revenue coming from Fairfax’s grocery stores, plus strong sales-tax revenue from hardware stores, as well as a continued upward trend in the residential, real-estate market. Indeed, according to Chief Financial Officer Dave Hodgkins, the City ended 2020 with a balanced budget and a slight surplus. And FY 2021 is currently projected to end with a $2.4 million surplus. So restoring the $1.4 million in reserved expenditures to the current budget will still leave Fairfax with about a $1 million surplus.

So Stalzer was able to return to the Council last week and request the reinstatement of $1,462,500 of items from the FY 21 General Fund expenditure budget that had been held in reserve. Their categories and dollar amounts restored are as follows:

- Hiring Freeze ($225,000 restored of $450,000 in reserve), Temporary Employees ($175,000 of $350,000 in reserve), Over-time ($287,500 of $575,000 in reserve), Suspending Two Holidays ($70,000 of $70,000 in reserve), Furloughs/Layoffs ($455,000 of $455,000 in reserve) and Small Area Plans ($250,000 of $500,000 in reserve).

Following Stalzer’s presentation, Councilwoman Janice Miller made a motion to approve his request and Councilman Jon Stehle seconded it. The Council then approved it unanimously.

— Bonnie Hobbs
News

Congregation Adat Reyim Welcomes New Rabbi

Rabbi Chana Leslie Glazer helps congregation grow despite pandemic.

By Mercia Hobson
The Connection

Rabbi Chana Leslie Glazer is a collaborator. In July of 2020, the educator of all ages became the spiritual leader of Congregation Adat Reyim, located at 6500 Westbury Oaks Court in Springfield. Despite a pandemic and almost everything being virtual, Rabbi Glazer made her mark on the growing congregation, known for its diversity of Jewish practitioners and interfaith families.

“In the first few months of online services and programs, members often commented in the Zoom chat, ‘We got the right rabbi,’” said congregant Eileen Kugler.

According to a press release, “Rabbi Glazer has kept a busy schedule of congregational and community events. Her thoughtful sermons during these difficult days have provided valuable insights, comforted us, and at times, encouraged us to live up to our Jewish values.”

Rabbi Glazer maintains that before she arrived, Adat Reyim was already a participatory congregation. Her goal became for engagement to be “meaningful and successful,” but she was challenged because it is different for different people. Wanting to reach the diverse populations, Rabbi Glazer looked at prayer, education, and other activities through a different lens - the time of day, the vehicle, and the initiative.

For instance, Rabbi Glazer offers Jewish meditation on a weekday morning. It attracts a population different from other programs and events. Her Exploring Judaism class is on Sundays, composed of adults from various religious backgrounds and all ages. An ongoing book group about racism and anti-racism is held on weekday evenings. It sees a different group participating.

“The congregation already offered a variety of programs to its members when I got here, and my work so far has been to help broaden those offerings and to name what we are doing and help the community be proud of that because it is part of what makes this community great,” Rabbi Glazer said.

She is also helping the congregation in its stated interest of thinking and acting to be more inclusive of minorities and marginalized groups – who still isn’t here at the table now, and why? According to Glazer, she asked herself how Adat Reyim could be even more inclusive. She wanted to “normalize different approaches and remove any judgment on how people connect to different things in different ways.”

“I have been a practicing Jew all my life but have never before felt as engaged in prayer as I have since Rabbi Glazer came to Congregation Adat Reyim. She has a way of introducing prayers and leading with intention that helps me to connect with the words on the page and allows them to real-

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Viewpoints

What do you think of the legalization of marijuana in Virginia?

“Personally, it’s taking too long. The state could use the tax revenue, my son wouldn’t have gotten busted, I could relax a bit.”

– Joe Klemmer, Fairfax, tobacconist

“I would prefer decriminalization, we don’t need to be taxing drugs.”

– Steve Gagliano, Springfield, contractor

“Go for it, people have their right and should be able to do what they want to do.”

– Sam Evans, Springfield

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Viewpoints and Photos by Mike Salmon/Connection

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Steel beam outlines of the new Lorton community center dwarf the old library (right rear)

Lofty Progress for Lorton Community Center

By Susan Laume
The Connection

Steel beams now rise high in the sky dwarfing the former Lorton Library on Richmond Highway. As we welcome Spring, construction of the new Lorton Library and Community Center, at the site of the existing facilities, has made noticeable progress and is about one year away from its projected completion in Spring 2022.

Camela Spear, of Mount Vernon District Supervisor’s office, reports, “The Lorton Community Center and Library project is proceeding on schedule with no delays, setbacks or design changes. Phase 1a is complete and the interim park is open and actively being used. Steel framing continues at the Community Center building, and construction has started on the new Library addition.”

Mount Vernon Supervisor Dan Storck shared, “It is very exciting to see our new community center and library literally rising from the ground! I am very pleased that we are little over a year away from celebrating these great new community learning centers with our neighbors. I can imagine the sounds of our new facilities - from whispers to cheers, running to roaming through the stacks, seeing people of all ages, abilities and interests coming together is an experience we should all be eagerly excited to be a part of. See you there next year!”

The Lorton community broke ground in August 2020 for the multi-million dollar project that will combine a modernized and larger library with a new combination community and senior center. (See The Connection, Aug. 27, 2020)

‘Jurassic Park’ at Robinson

Robinson Secondary School presents ‘Life Finds a Way.’

By Susan Weinhardt
James Madison High School

In a time where live theatre is just as rare as seeing a velociraptor roaming about, creativity and inspiration can be scarce, but not for Robinson Secondary School. Their production of Life Finds a Way was a fresh take on a world we know and love, Jurassic Park, and how it is relevant in 2021.

The structure of the play differed from the traditional act by act format in that they made it into two parts. In the first part, the CEO of Jurassic Park addressed the investors’ board of InGen with an update on the reopening of the park after the escape of countless dinosaurs caused it to close for two months. The second section was from the perspective of a low-level employee at the park running an unofficial TikTok account for the park.

Despite how short this production was, it was incredibly detailed oriented. Part one was satirical and humorously compared reopening Jurassic Park with reopening the US during the COVID-19 pandemic, while the second half showed the reality of the situation in the park. There was a brilliant contrast between the rich CEO who only cared about money and success and the sacrificial employee who needed the job to live but could care less about the park’s reputation.

The performance started out with the CEO of the park, Dianna Soerrie (Abigail Camp), who was all consumed with impressing the investors and making money, despite safety concerns with opening the park. Her character build-up was entertaining to watch because of her lack of empathy and unbothered attitude. Camp’s physicality and the way she kept a straight face while there were constant velociraptor roars in the background elevated the satirical.

In the second half of Life Finds a Way, the point of view switches to an employee at Jurassic Park and wrangler of the dinosaurs, Tracy Cerato (Katherne “KP” Porter), who seemed to be oblivious of most things around her. One of the best parts of this innovative story was the use of TikTok and all its classic features like comments and the green screen effect, which was a welcome addition to the prerecorded storytelling. Porter used these features to her advantage, even though no one attended her live stream.

The set team (Brooke Hanser, Harry Glicklin, Katherine “KP” Porter) created different settings like Costco, the woods, and virtual backgrounds, which added an interesting touch and kept the video engaging. The editing throughout, from the clever camera cutoffs to the intro card for the InGen investor meeting, made for a simple but elevated final product. Also, the sound effects (Beau Baldassari) created velociraptor roars and gunshots that were placed perfectly and helped with the comedic timing.

Even though there was a small cast, this show had the same energy and humor, if not more, of a large show. The challenges of virtual theatre are ever present, but not as far as the dinosaur wranglers are concerned. Be sure to visit Jurassic Park in the middle of a deadly pandemic and remember that “keeping visitors safe is their number one priority!”

To Watch

Life Finds a Way can be found in 2 episodes at: https://youtu.be/w84hr29HIs5

‘Jurassic Park’ at Robinson

Katherine “KP” Porter

BULLETIN BOARD

April 6 – 7:00 – 8:15 p.m. Investing for Your Spending Plan (AKA the Budget)

Free Finance Classes.

Via Zoom. Sponsored by St. John’s United Methodist Church, Springfield. Free Personal Finance Mgmt Classes, taught by accredited finance counselor. Classes deal with budgeting, credit/debt management, saving and investing, etc. These are individual classes taught once a week. Register at website www.saintjohnsumc.org to receive Zoom link from the instructor.

March 9 – 7:00 – 8:15 p.m. Developing Your Spending Plan (AKA the Budget)

March 16 – 7:00 – 8:15 p.m. Take Control of Your Finances: Managing Credit/Debt

March 23 – 7:00 – 8:15 p.m. Saving and Investing

April 6 – 7:00 – 8:15 p.m. Investing for Retirement

April 13 – 7:00 – 8:15 p.m. Tax Efficient Charitable Giving

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

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UPDATE FROM BURKE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Burke Historical Society speaker Kayleen Reusser has released a new book based on her interviews with WWII veterans, this one documenting the experiences of prisoners of war. Her interviewees include previous BHS speaker Jerry Wolf.

https://kayleenreusser.com/

In addition, you might enjoy Channel 16’s program based on the Fairfax County Inventory of Historic Sites: https://www.fairfaxcountgov/cable-consumer/channel-16/history-commission-inventory-historic-sites

Fairfax County Public Library has virtual programs for Black History Month:

March 5 & 6, the International Conference on World War II will be presented as a free virtual program:

https://www2conference.com/
A Schedule Can Anchor Your Day

How creating a daily routine can ease anxiety during times of uncertainty.

By Marilyn Campbell
The Connection

Her days were overwhelmingly stressful. Holly Platt, a Bethesda mother of two, was preparing to sell her home and searching for a new one, homeschooling all while running her full time math tutoring business. She often ran late to appointments or missed them entirely. A friend suggested that she create a daily routine for herself that included blocking off specific time each day to complete tasks.

“Even morning, I pull up my daily calendar and enter yoga for 30 minutes, making and eating breakfast, and walking my dog Leo,” she said. “Covid has been hard for everyone, but I hear a lot of people saying now that they are scheduling a specific time for daily activities to force them into a routine.”

Platt is not alone in her strategy. Creating a routine – even for those who consider themselves to be whimsical and balk at the idea of strict scheduling – can benefit from setting aside a specific time to complete at least one or two activities each day.

“Creating a daily routine is fundamental in developing a healthy relationship with one’s own needs,” said Jennifer Ha, Ph.D., Visiting Professor of Counseling at Marymount University. “Without this regular and intentional mindful attention, your mood and overall mental health can deteriorate, sometimes without one even realizing it.”

Part of protecting mental health is having a sense of stability. “As human beings we thrive with a degree of predictability and certainty,” added Diana Fuchs, Ph.D., a retired clinical psychologist based in Springfield. “We want to know that we have some control over our lives and what’s going on around us, especially when we have major world pandemic that makes us feel as if the fabric of society is being unraveled.”

In fact, studies show that undertaking some activities on a schedule helps to reduce stress during negative life events, including one study found in the Occupational Therapy Journal of Research. “Daily routine gives us a sense of predictability, decreases anxiety related to uncertainty and provides a comfort that no matter how difficult the day might be, some things will be predictable and as we prefer them,” said Dr. Gail Saltz, Clinical Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the NY Presbyterian Hospital Weill-Cornell School of Medicine. “This may be especially true for people that find change anxiety-producing and find transitions difficult.”

From improving sleep quality to pledging to drink more water each day, a routine can improve one’s physical, but also mentally by decreasing stress and improving mood,” said Saltz. “Having predictable work hours, separate from other hours, decreases likelihood of burn out.”

Though the end result might be similar for most people, creating a routine is a highly individualized process, said Fuchs. “It can be helpful to visualize our day by writing it out. For example, At 3pm I get to leave work and see my son. At 8pm, I get to snuggle up with a cup of tea and read a good book.”

Treat a routine like a medical appointment that you schedule in advance and commit to keeping, suggest Fuchs. “No doubt most of us already have some form of routine when it comes to self-care, brushing teeth and taking a shower, for example,” she said. “Break down your day into smaller, manageable time frames. Ultimately you want to construct a time frame that works best for you.”

“Covid has been hard for everyone, but I hear a lot of people saying now that they are scheduling a specific time for daily activities to force them into a routine.” — Holly Platt

Photos by Will Palenscar

The Lake Braddock Bruins take the field before their game with the Westfield Bulldogs

Bruins Beat Bulldogs in Season-opening Game

Lake Braddock 26 Westfield 7.

The Westfield Bulldogs and the Lake Braddock Bruins battled it out in a cold rain in Burke on Feb. 26, in both teams’ first game of the season.

Lake Braddock would open scoring with a field goal, midway through the first quarter. Later Westfield would take the lead 7-3 after a 55 yard touchdown by Mikal Legall. The Bruins would add another field goal to pull within a point, 7-6 in the 2nd quarter. Lake Braddock would hold the Bulldogs scoreless in the final 3 quarters, while scoring 3 touchdowns in the second half, including the second half kickoff by Dillon Corey. The Bruins final two touchdowns were scored by QB Billy Edwards and Elliot Meine to give the Bruins a 26-7 win.

Lake Braddock will play at Robinson on March 5. Westfield will host West Potomac on March 4.

— Will Palenscar

Lake Braddock WR Alex Richards stiff arms a Lake Braddock defender

Mikal Legall #28 scored Westfield’s lone touchdown

From improving sleep quality to pledging to drink more water each day, a routine can improve one’s overall wellbeing. “An exercise routine is healthy physically, but also mentally by decreasing stress and improving mood,” said Saltz. “Having predictable work hours, separate from other hours, decreases likelihood of burn out.”
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**Area Roundups**

**Fairfax Church to Host Drive Thru Food Distribution**

The Evangelism and Missionary Ministry of Greater Little Zion Baptist Church, Fairfax, will be hosting a Drive Thru Food Distribution that will be open to the public. The prepared boxes will be distributed on a first come first served basis while supplies last.

To ensure the health safety of volunteers, community and other recipients, we must adhere to the CDC guidelines. This will be a contactless operation and we ask that you please remain in your vehicle and open the trunk when it is your turn in line.

The distribution will take place on Saturday, March 20, 2021, 10 a.m.–noon, at Greater Little Zion Baptist Church (Sanctuary Parking Area), 10185 Zion Drive, Fairfax, VA 22032.

**Contact:** Call the Church Administration Office at 703-239-9111, if you need additional information.
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