

Rodrigo Torres Sharp, 6, of Great Falls, and his mother, Zulay Torres Sharp, enjoy Mother's Day at the Great Falls Grange Playground.

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PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

Mother's Day 2021, With Love

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Police Chief Begins Job with Trust Deficit

Faith leaders question 'flawed' selection process and Supervisors' values during prayer vigil.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Approximately thirty interfaith leaders from across Fairfax County gathered in the "First Amendment" area outside the Fairfax County Government Center at noon, Tuesday, May 4. They exercised their Constitutional right of free speech to lead a prayer vigil in response to the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors' recent selection of Kevin Davis as the County Police Chief. Inside the Government Center, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors meeting was about to get underway at 1 p.m.

"[The hiring of Davis] was a decision made in the dark," said Denise Wilson, President of Baptist Ministries of Northern Virginia.

Moderator Rev. Dr. Vernon Walton, the First Baptist Church Vienna senior pastor, addressed his fellow faith leaders from different traditions, denominations, and worship styles, yet holding a common interest. Walton said that they were there to pray and lift to God the concerns of their people and those of County residents about the selection of Kevin Davis as the new police chief.

"No one, especially a police chief, should begin a job with a trust deficit," said Walton, senior pastor of the First Baptist Church Vienna.

"Specifically, many are concerned about the integrity of the process and the more



Rev. Dr. Vernon Walton, the First Baptist Church Vienna senior pastor, leads his fellow faith leaders in prayer.

PHOTOS BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

Board of Supervisors: Davis 'Has Our Trust'

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors released the following statement Tuesday, May 4, in support of Police Chief Kevin Davis:

"Police Chief Kevin Davis was chosen with the full support and confidence of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. Following extensive community outreach and input, he was selected after a nationwide search. Chief Davis demonstrated to the Board that he can lead reform efforts, strengthen community relationships, and successfully manage change.

We are aware of the incidents reported in the local media. While they occurred decades ago, we understand the concerns of the community. We expect Chief Davis to respond to questions regarding those incidents in the media and directly with the

community and the Board of Supervisors. He has also demonstrated through his leadership that his past experiences have shaped his focus on reform. He has our trust to guide the Fairfax County Police Department through the challenges ahead and build on the reform efforts already made.

As the Chief, we also expect him to be a strong and effective advocate for the types of reforms that are designed to protect at risk communities from police misconduct. The Board will accept nothing less going forward. We know and agree that this is critical to collectively reforming policing and continuing our journey toward One Fairfax.

The Police Chief is hired by the Board of Supervisors and as such, his performance will be evaluated at least annually.

recent findings that have become public since the announcement of the hire. Many are concerned about the lack of transparency and obvious due diligence in this search process," said Walton. "Speaking the truth is not always comfortable, but it is necessary. Either we are facing a process issue or values issue. Either way, there's a flaw," he said.

Walton referenced incidents involving Davis solely by the years 1993 and 1999 when Davis was a police officer. He did not say the incidents led to lawsuits against Davis with claims he used excessive force. Walton did not need to; those gathered learned from the media and other sources after the County Supervisors selected Davis in a closed door meeting.

Walton said Supervisors acknowledged they were not aware of the 1993 or 1999 incidents regarding the new Chief. "That's a flaw," Davis said. He questioned how the Board could make an informed decision without dialogue. "Either you, [Supervisors] knew of the history of our Chief and have made a determination that it was so insignificant that you are standing by your choice. Or you didn't know of these events. And as a result, you are grieved by the fact that critical information with regard to one's professional career has been purposely withheld, and you want to revisit your decision," he said.

Walton said it is the Board of Supervisors' responsibility to tell the community why they selected Davis, and in light of recent findings, why they are remaining with him. Walton said the trust deficit is not Davis' alone to own. It is a burden the Board of Supervisors also carries.

"The moment there is a questionable stop, or God forbid, something worse, it will also be on your hands [Supervisors] because of your decision-making process. And so, we gather to pray, praying for God's will to be done."



Rabbi Michael G. Holzman, Northern Virginia Hebrew Congregation, Reston.



Rev. Dr. Scott Ramsey, Pastor at Lewinsville Presbyterian Church in McLean.



Rev. Dr. Vernon Walton, the First Baptist Church Vienna senior pastor.



Rev. Dr. Denise Wilson, Baptist Ministries of Northern Virginia



Rev. Jacquelyn Hollingsworth, (Ret.) Pastor of AME Church.

Faith Leaders: Why are We at the Vigil

"Justice, transparency that can shed light on truth. That the Supervisors do not operate behind closed doors in the process of a police chief. We, the People, have the right to hear the whole story."

- BISHOP CARROLL A. BALTIMORE, C.A.B. OUTREACH INTERNATIONAL MINISTRIES, INC. CHANTILLY

"To shine a light on the truth."

- REV. JACQUELYN HOLLINGSWORTH, RET. PASTOR OF AME CHURCH

"I'm here to ask the County Supervisors to fix their mistake and rescind the contract of the new police chief... We need the right person for the job."

- REV. SEAN S. ROBERDS, FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF HERNDON

"Lord, you are about that work of building the beloved community...and you are about that work right here in Fairfax County...Let your spirit fall upon all who are citizens of this County. Let your spirit fall upon the Board of Supervisors. Let

your spirit fall upon the Police Department."

-REV. DR. SCOTT RAMSEY, PASTOR AT LEWINSVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN MCLEAN

"We are here to do what is right and just for the Fairfax County community."

- REV. DR. PAUL A. SHEPPARD FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF MERRIFIELD

"It's appropriate for us to be here today as clergy because what we are talking about is atonement ... The mistakes that we have to accept, the hardest ones, are the mistakes we make. Atonement comes when we are given

the opportunity to make the same mistake, we choose a different path. And we can only do that when we know what we've done is wrong."

- RABBI MICHAEL G. HOLZMAN, NORTHERN VIRGINIA HEBREW CONGREGATION, RESTON

"We would like to see justice served by the rescinding of the contract of new Chief Davis. The residents of Fairfax County are depending on us to do the right thing."

- REV. DR. DENISE WILSON, BAPTIST MINISTRIES OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA

Community Presses New Police Chief and Chairman for Answers

Citizens plead FXCO not be part of Davis' redemptive career journey.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

On day four in his new position as Chief of Police Fairfax County, the ghosts of Kevin Davis' law enforcement past clung heavily in the County's public arena of the May 6 virtual Community Input Session hosted by Chairman Jeffrey C. McKay (D-At-large), Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, and Supervisor Rodney Lusk (D-Lee District). The problem was the community's concerns were no longer confined to the Board's hiring process and appointment of Davis as chief of police. Also, while the non-disclosure of decades-old civil lawsuits with judgments entered against Davis from incidents as a young sworn law enforcement officer, including use-of-force and ruling of violation of constitutional rights was old news community concerns escalated with new findings and reactions the week of May 3.

County residents questioned a litany of recent incidents, 2016-2018, that came to light, this time with Davis employed not as a young cop in 1993 and 1996 but in high-ranking law enforcement leadership roles. These and other matters shook the trust and unhinged for many any possible faith in Davis's ability and transparency as Police Chief of Fairfax County.

Davis shared at the forum three words that held meaning for him-transformation, accountability, and transparency. "I'm all about accountability, both for police officers [and] myself; and people who commit crimes. There has to be a pathway back to success," he said. "My track record of nearly three decades is a journey," Davis said. As reported May 7 by FCPD: "I think 2021 is the perfect opportunity for me to return to what I love. – Chief Kevin Davis"

THE TWO-HOUR VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT on May 6 provided a platform for Davis to share his track record, lay out his vision for policing in Fairfax County, and community speakers to comment and question him and Chairman McKay with immediate response.

McKay said they were aware of Davis' incidents that caused community concern. "We believe in Fairfax County and community engagement, not one session, not one meeting, not one phone call, not one testimony," He added, "No one is perfect. No agency is perfect. We always strive to improve."

Chief Davis opened by saying that he learned the importance and value of community early in his police career, to hear the voices of those telling how they want to be protected.

Davis provided background information by listing his recent accomplishments as police chief in Prince George's and Anne
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MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION
Kevin Davis, Chief of Police Fairfax County Police Department at his first News Conference held May 7, 2021.

Arundel counties, Police Commissioner Baltimore City, and recipient of a 2019 fellowship award. According to Davis, he was the fifth police chief in the country to implement Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion, "an immediate opportunity for police officers to offer those suffering from drug addictions to break the pipeline to prison."

Davis did not refer to or allude to negative incidents, such as lawsuits where juries ruled against him in his role as a sworn police officer, incidents 1993 and 1996.

Davis omitted his six-day lockdown of Black Harlem Baltimore in 2017, resulting in an ACLU lawsuit after African American Baltimore police homicide Detective Sean Suiter was killed with his service revolver. Davis did not say the detective was to testify to a grand jury regarding police corruption.

There was no discussion by Davis about his termination as Baltimore Commissioner by Mayor Pugh, who cited rising crime.

Davis previewed his 100-day plan for Fairfax County. He focused on critical areas the community demanded improvement: use of force--particularly, time, distance, and de-escalation; tactical repositioning of police officers in critical situations; implicit [unconscious] bias training and use of CompStat [Computer Statistics] that gathers real-time information and intelligence. Davis said FCPD would realign with One Fairfax.

HIGHLIGHTS OF COMMENTS DURING THE COMMUNITY INPUT SESSION Q & A

Alicia Plerhoples of Dranesville testified regarding the County's process in hiring the



Chairman Jeffrey C. McKay (D-At-large) Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and Supervisor Rodney Lusk hosted the May 6 Community Input Session with Chief Davis.

chief. Addressing the Board of Supervisors, she said they must now do the difficult work to ensure racial justice in County policing. She said, "That begins with acknowledging your mistakes in hiring Chief Davis whose past misconduct was not disclosed to the public and possibly to the Board of Supervisors prior to his appointment." Plerhoples called on the Board "to remove Chief Davis from his position and conduct a transparent and thorough search for a new Chief of Police."

Jeremy Monat of Burke addressed the Supervisors, saying while they defended their selection of Davis since incidents [1993, 1999] occurred decades ago, "contrary to the thrust of your statement, those are not the end of Davis's abuses of power." Monat said that in 2016, Davis, as Commissioner of the Baltimore Police Department, worked secretly with Persistent Surveillance Systems to fly a plane over the city of Baltimore. "[It] continuously transmitted real-time images to analysts on the ground...Even the mayor and the city council had not been told. Davis' response did not take responsibility." Monat said Davis should not be in another position of authority, this time over the people of Fairfax. Davis said, "I've certainly changed, and grown, and learned many lessons throughout the course of my career... I have served communities that not only need public safety, but good public safety, and I look forward to bringing those reform efforts."

Amanda Andere of Reston is the Ex. Director of Funders Together to End Homelessness. She served on Chairman McKay's Task Force on Equity and Opportunity, leading the Equitable Communities Committee. She believed then that the Board embraced the essence of the recommendations in decision-making during the task force, and the Board would use them going forward.

"And so, I felt like my time on the chairman's committee was in vain and disrespected," she said. "I 'hope you understand that how we feel about the process, the result, and your response to our concerns does not



Chairman Jeffrey C. McKay (D-At-large) Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and Supervisor Rodney Lusk hosted the May 6 Community Input Session with Chief Davis.

build trust in communities where government mistrust has been central to our experiences."

Vicki Fishman is the Director of Government and Community Relations for Northern Virginia, Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington. It is the public affairs arm of the organized Jewish community, representing over 100 synagogues, schools, and institutions throughout the region. Fishman expressed disappointment at the lack of transparency by the Board of Supervisors in the hiring process and the need for adequate stakeholder input.

Ron Kuley is the president of the local firefighters' union. He said McKay and Supervisor Lusk conducted countywide meetings to seek community input before the selection. He understood that Lusk put in considerable time meeting with community representatives and employee groups. "As a longtime employee and labor leader, I have faith in Chairman McKay, Supervisor Lusk, and the Board of Supervisors in their process and selection of Chief Davis," he said

Kuley asked, "How do you, Chief Davis, plan on overcoming the negative comments and feedback that we've been hearing this evening and in the last couple of days here in Fairfax?"

Davis responded: "By being the best, Chief of Police, you can possibly be. And that's what I intend to do, and I'm going to put in the work and demonstrate to the entire community that I am the right person to lead this great agency."

Terry Adams said that hundreds of police officers served in Prince George's County who never used excessive force during Davis' years of service. "It is difficult to sue a police officer for the performance of his or her duties... It's even harder because of qualified immunity to find a police officer liable. Mr. Davis was twice found liable for either excessive force or false imprisonment," Adams said.

Challenge for Supervisors AND a New Police Chief

BY JOHN LOVAAS

COMMUNITY ACTIVIST AND FOUNDER OF RESTON FARMERS MARKET

Here we go again! We have another major Fairfax County Police controversy. I had thought our new, more progressive, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors would pay closer attention to police performance and to its role in oversight of the Police Department than its predecessors had. Not so, it seems.

The BOS unanimously approved hiring Kevin Davis as Police Chief after a supposedly thorough, nationwide search process. All of Davis's prior service was within 30 miles of us, a history with multiple incidents of flagrant abuse of black citizens—two resulting in civil litigation which Davis lost in Prince George's County, another resulting in an ACLU suit in Baltimore where as Chief he locked down an entire black neighborhood for 6 days in 2017 after a white detective died, possibly from suicide!

Incredibly, Board members claim to be unaware of these disturbing misdeeds, all occurring very close to home! It seems they were not told by either the candidate, the search contractor or Deputy County Executive David Rohrer who presumably managed the search. This is hardly the due diligence one would expect from Supervisors in considering this sensitive, high profile appointment.

In fact, obliviousness by the entire Board is reminiscent of a prior Board's failure to respond for six months to the 2013 police murder of unarmed John Geer, while FCPD stonewalled the

community, refusing to reveal the killer or to explain what had happened. It took the intervention of a US Senator and mounting public pressure to get the Supes to take action, belatedly forming the Ad Hoc Commission to Review Police Practices on which I served.

What or who is it that somehow prevents Fairfax County's top elected body from doing its job when it comes to supervising the 1,400-man force in blue? How is it that a supposedly nationwide search ends up picking a flawed candidate who'd served only in our back yard. Was he perhaps known to some in the FCPD?

There is a lot riding on this appointment. The troubled Police Department has major structural and policy problems. However, there are solutions within reach if obstacles to solving them are forthrightly addressed by a new Chief ...and if the BOS develops the political will to support him. Here are the critical issues:

First, this force neither resembles nor lives in the community it serves. According to the FCPD's own "Diversity Scorecard" of April 2021, Fairfax County's population is over 35 percent Asian (19 percent) and Latino (16 percent) while the force in blue is barely 13 percent (5 & 7 respectively). Blacks make up 9 percent of the residents, 8 percent of the force. But, if you go a bit deeper, looking at managerial levels, the mix is even worse. Whites make up 78 percent of the force, more at management ranks. And, most officers do not live in the County, although their pay would enable them to do so. A starting rookie makes over \$50K; many clear \$100K with overtime.

It is a huge challenge for police neither re-

sembling people they serve nor living near them, to develop mutual trust. There are no signs of improvement.

Turning to the framework for transformation of the force provided by a unanimous Ad Hoc Commission, we find key recommendations throughout the report either have been dropped, not been implemented, watered down or still delayed seven years after the report. (To see for yourself, go to the Ad Hoc Commission Report and the last implementation "progress report", April 2021). Pushback from the four police associations (would-be unions) and acquiescence of the former Police Chief have watered down crucial recommendations to improve transparency (see Communications section). Recommendations targeting accountability (see Use of Force and Independent [civilian] Oversight) have been crippled. And, the section dealing with civilian oversight by a new Civilian Review Panel has been reduced to a toothless farce. Look closely at the carefully targeted edits that assure no civilian is allowed behind the steel blue curtain. Police misbehavior will continue to be investigated only by fellow officers.

In sum, what's essential for the transformative reform intended by the Commission is a strong new Chief dedicated to known principles for reform and the backing of a Board of Supervisors with more effort and courage than we've seen to date. Prospects look pretty grim right now. While Fairfax civic groups and residents object and cite chapter and verse of Davis's flaws, Chairman McKay and his colleagues appear content with Davis and with the status quo. Stay tuned.

Respecting the Feelings of 'Other'

BY FARAH AHMAD

When I was in elementary school back in the '80s, I came to school after celebrating Eid and closed my sweaty hands into fists. I was trying to hide the henna designs on my hand.

But a girl noticed, scrunched up her nose in disgust, and asked me. "What is that orange stuff on your hand?" "Is that a disease or something?" I shook my head and muttered under my breath, "not unless a disease forms pretty flower and teardrop designs."

Back then, knowledge of Islam was minimal. Teachers were unaware of Ramadan or Eid. It got tiring explaining to kids why I was fasting and that, no, I could not even drink water.

Then September 11th happened.

Islam became the new headline. People swarmed bookstores looking for Qur'anic sources about terrorism or jihad. They pointed to the oppression of women in hijabs. They misquoted and misled. Anyone brown or "Middle-Eastern" looking became a suspicious person who might be carrying a bomb inside their jacket.

I bought into the negative hype myself, becoming defensive, and internalizing the responsibility of being the sole representative of my faith everywhere I went. As an American-born and raised girl, I was suddenly being treated like an "other."

I began learning my civil rights and advocating for myself. I trained FBI agents and po-

lice officers on Islam. I spoke up at schools, to educate teachers about the Islamic faith and make teachers and coaches aware of students who were fasting during classes, exams, track meets, and games. Some educators listened and others shook their heads meaning, "this is not my problem."

I hoped my children would have it better than I did. But as students at Fairfax County Public Schools, they still feel like they have to hide who they are or choose between spiritually significant days and tests and schoolwork. Standardized tests, like the SOEs are still scheduled during the month of Ramadan and the celebration of Eid. Children are still receiving the message that their religious needs are, "not my problem" by school leaders.

In an effort to advocate for my son and other Muslim kids, I joined the board-appointed Fairfax County Public School's religious task force committee. I hoped that FCPS administrators and board members would find just and equitable solutions for the many Muslims across our county.

But my experience trying to represent a minority community within the school system left me feeling appalled and heartbroken. I felt I was again the "other" in our public school community.

I was disheartened watching the FCPS board debate and decision against closing school on four days coinciding with major faith groups in our community. Seemingly educated people displayed a complete lack of understanding about the people of diverse faiths in our community.

Muslims shouldn't be measured by our absences during Ramadan or Eid. We should be recognized as people who give back in charity during this time and ask our children to do the same. On these days, we reflect, rejuvenate and model for our children the importance of gratitude, forgiveness, and a connection with something greater than ourselves—lessons that are as valuable as the ones they learn inside the classroom. We aren't statistics in a database: We are Muslim families, who like our Christian friends would like to spend time with our loved ones on our most holy days, especially after a tumultuous year of losses.

Honoring the holy days of diverse faith communities provides an opportunity to create awareness and cultural sensitivity. Maybe teachers or students who have never met a Muslim, or who don't know about Islam, will pause and ask, why are all these friends gone today? Perhaps students will learn to respect a classmate who is fasting, or not to pull off a hijab. Maybe it will teach someone that Islam is more than just a headline or a stereotype.

FCPS prides itself on being diverse, but diversity is more than a bullet point on letterhead. In Islam, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) says that our words and actions should be the same. FCPS needs to heed these words and truly listen to the soul and the needs of their faith-based communities.

— Farah Ahmad is a Fairfax County parent and a member of leadership at the McLean Islamic Center.

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Pranav Choudhary

Langley High Junior Elected Student Representative

Pranav Choudhary to serve a one-year term beginning July 1.

Pranav Choudhary, a junior at Langley High School, has been elected by the countywide Student Advisory Council (SAC) to serve a one-year term as student representative to the Fairfax County School Board, beginning July 1. Choudhary will participate in School Board meetings as a nonvoting member, filling the position currently held by Nathan Onibudo, a senior at South County High School. He will be the 51st student representative to the School Board - Fairfax County Public Schools announced.

Choudhary has three main focuses as student representative: academic support, expanding accessibility and communication for resources, and mental wellness. "At the end of the day, everything comes down to communication; even when resources are available in our schools, they are often nearly impossible to find," he states, adding that combining the relationships he's built with his personal experiences will enable him to work toward meaningful change.

Specifically, Choudhary wants to develop a multi-language Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) student newsletter that includes mental health and academic resources. He also wants to help connect students with Systems of Support Advisors (SOSA), full-time academic support counselors in high schools, and expand the program to middle schools. According to Choudhary, this would provide intervention for struggling students as early as possible with vis-

ible results.

And as a representative for all students, he also plans to actively seek out the voices of students from all areas of the county and all walks of life and, in doing so, to gain additional insight on existing problems "in order to develop tangible, workable solutions to solve those problems."

"I would particularly emphasize the value of direct student support and how it can prevent both mental health struggles and school withdrawal." His focus on mental health includes suicide risk screenings every year "to ensure that students who are in crisis can get the support they so desperately need as soon as possible."

Choudhary has been a consensus builder as a student government contributor. "I'm drawn to building bridges and actively seeking people out," he explains. "On the Student Advisory Council (SAC) School Community Committee and Relationships Subcommittee, I've worked on developing ambitious, goal-oriented solutions to tackle the problems we face." Choudhary says his efforts have included feedback from students of all different backgrounds, school communities, and academic experiences.

Choudhary is Langley's Student Advisory Committee delegate; co-founder and co-chair of the Virginia Teen Democrats; a reporter at the Saxon Scope, Langley High's student newspaper; Journalism Club president; and a Cappies critic. In high school, he has studied Russian, Journalism, Theater Arts, and Personal Development along with core courses in English, social studies, science, and math. As a senior, he will study leadership, English, Advanced Placement (AP) government, AP Russian, precalculus with trigonometry, journalism, physics, and economics and personal finance.

"I would particularly emphasize the value of direct student support and how it can prevent both mental health struggles and school withdrawal."

— Pranav Choudhary

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Mother's Day 2021, With Love

Motherhood is a messy, complex state of being.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Motherhood comes in all shapes and sizes, not designated by birth or raising another human. It is a state of being, constantly reimagining itself from depths of selfless caring and nurturing. Motherhood knows when to expand and when to trust in its gift of love and step aside.

Kate Janich, the co-founder of Rowan Tree located on the Herndon- Reston boundary, wrote "A Thank You to Moms": "Motherhood is messy, it's complex, it challenges us to define ourselves -- constantly. Some of us have lost a mother. Some of us have lost a child. Some of us didn't have the ideal mom, but that love is still there -- or not. Many women dream of having children, but the universe has a different plan. Some women made a choice to not have children."

"Some mothers aren't women. Some mothers aren't biological or legally mothers but have become a stand-in and a rock for other human beings."

The Connection asked not the mothers but those under their wings what they loved best about their moms.



(From left) Teresa Vo, mother of Alicia Vo, 15, and daughter-in-law of Suong Vo of Vienna whose adult son, Bao, Teresa's husband, is formerly of Reston, Alicia, and Suong spend Mother's Day at Lake Anne Village Center in Reston. Alicia Vo, 15 - My mom has given me so much advice in my life. Mom is loving, caring, and helps me to be the best I can be in everything I do. Teresa Vo- I enjoy hearing stories from my mother-in-law, Suong Vo. Suong taught me a lot about how resilient she's been over the years. Suong taught me about history and culture, how it relates to life, and how she brought it from Vietnam to the United States.

PHOTOS BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION



(From left) Kenci Santamaria of Herndon, her daughter, Jaritza Santamaria, 9, and son, Jefferson Jose, 6, enjoy Mother's Day on the Town Square in front of the Old Town Hall in Herndon. Jaritza Santamaria, 9 - Mom plays with me and takes me to the mall.

JEFFERSON JOSE, 6 - I LIKE MOM'S EGGS.



Rodrigo Torres Sharp, 6, of Great Falls, and his mother, Zulay Torres Sharp, enjoy Mother's Day at the Great Falls Grange Playground. Rodrigo - What I would miss the most is all the kindness because my mom gives me hugs and kisses and presents. I give her lots of kisses and hugs. I like that my mom makes me her salmon rice with lime and ketchup. I chose daisies for my mom yesterday.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FCPS



Dr. Ellen Reilly, Principal, McLean High School



Jeff Litz, Principal, Marshall High School

Pomp & Odd Circumstance

Area high schools innovate to plan pandemic-time graduations.

By CJ

The COVID-19 pandemic might have kept area students out of school for a time, but it hasn't stopped high schoolers from graduating and leaving for good.

Social distancing and other health protocols abound, high schools across the country have been faced with the dilemma now posed by the impossibility of traditional ceremonies. Still, area schools have persisted and gotten creative with planning the 2020 and 2021 graduations alike.

"Last year we were in a mode of understanding that we couldn't be together," said Dr. Ellen Reilly, Principal of McLean High School, "it was really [about] how we honor the kids and their families".

McLean's 2020 graduation was a different one for sure. Spanning over 4 consecutive 10-hour days for the school's staff, pre-divided groups of students and their families who wanted to participate formed a procession of vehicles carrying graduates-to-be in the school's parking lot.

As "Pomp and Circumstance" played in the open air, students rolled up to a makeshift stage, had their names called, and were honored at a distance one by one.

"We found it was really important for them to have it - I really enjoyed it, actually!" said Dr. Reilly, "and I think the parents enjoyed it, you know, they got to see their kid up on the stage."

Behind the scenes, though, unique events like this one require extensive planning and preparation.

"We have had to move to doing a lot of things virtually or moving them outdoors," said Jeff Litz, principal of Marshall

High School, "For example, normally we would have an end of year awards ceremony in our main gym and broadcast it to the entire school. This year we are moving to our stadium and abiding by social distancing guidelines."

Understandably, the unprecedented circumstances of the time we're living in have made these planning processes extremely difficult.

"It's just that frustration," said Dr. Reilly, "I want to get information out to the families, and my goal is to do it this week. And now, I just left a meeting and I got new information. So, it's just been frustrating and we just want a great day for our seniors and their families, that's all we're trying to do".

Despite the great response Dr. Reilly said last year's graduation received from parents, her and her staff wanted to get a bit closer to their customary ceremony at Constitution Hall: This year McLean's graduates will be honored at Jiffy Lube Live.

The continuous efforts of school staffs have not gone unnoticed, according to Principal Jeff Litz:

"I feel that students and parents recognize the challenges we have faced over the past year and a half and are appreciative of the effort we have put forth to find ways to celebrate and recognize them as often as possible"

"It's been a long year," said Dr. Reilly, "and to look back where we were a year ago and where we are now, you know, sometimes it gets emotional for me because I know how much it means to these kids and their families.

"I think that the class of 2021 sometimes feels like they're forgotten about," Dr. Reilly continued, "and they're not".

CALENDAR

NOW THRU JUNE 26

Ken Britz, Artist of the Year. At VAS Gallery in the Village Green, 513 Maple Ave. W, Vienna. The Vienna Arts Society is thrilled to present a collection of "Favored Subjects", artworks by Artist of the Year Ken Britz. The exhibition is open April 12 through June 26, Mon. - Sat., 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Discover more about Ken on the website: www.ViennaArtsSociety.org

THURSDAY/MAY 13

Free Artist Demonstration. 10:30 a.m. to noon. The Vienna Arts Society invites the public to free virtual art demonstrations the second Thursday of each month. Popular Art Instructor Bryan Jernigan will Zoom as he demonstrates the art of Abstract painting. You can click on the invitation to join the demo on the website: www.ViennaArtsSociety.org

MAY 14-31

Dinosaur Drive-Thru Experience. The Dinosaurs are ready to return from extinction. The drive-thru dinosaur exhibit is the first of its kind at the Bull Run Events Center in Centreville. The Museum quality exhibit, with more than 75+ animatronic and static dinosaurs, runs May 14 through May 31. Tours are available Wednesday through Sunday, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily. Visit www.drivethrudinos.com or call 800-830-3976.

NOW THRU MAY 16

The Carnival is Coming. 5:30-10 p.m. Springfield Town Center is bringing the carnival to town. From May 6th - 16th customers will be able to enjoy everyone's carnival favorites including games, rides and fair food. Tickets will be on sale at the event for rides and games. For unlimited rides, customers can purchase a \$25 Pay One Price Wristband. Any customer who shows a mall receipt dated May 6 - 16 will receive \$3 off the price of a wristband. At 6500 Springfield Mall, Springfield, VA 22150 - Lot adjacent to JCPenney, Enter by JCPenney garage.



The NextStop Theatre Company will present Abby Middleton in "First Date" from April 30 to May 16, 2021.

APRIL 30 TO MAY 16

"First Date". NextStop Theatre Company announces the premiere of the Broadway musical comedy, "First Date," streaming through ShowTix4U.com. Filmed at NextStop Theatre and around downtown Herndon, this light-hearted musical romantic comedy tells the story of Casey and Aaron, two young singles set up on a blind date by friends and family, even though they seemingly have absolutely nothing in common. Performances will have scheduled start times on Friday and Saturday evenings at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 7 p.m. from April 30 to May 16, 2021. Tickets are \$25 each (plus processing fees) and are good for one stream per household. Visit www.NextStopTheatre.org. "First Date" tickets are \$25 per household/stream. Visit for more information and to book: <https://www.nextstoptheatre.org/shows/first-date>.

MAY 13-15

"Lunch." At Lake Braddock High School. Thursday, May 13th at 7:30 p.m., Friday, May 14th 8 p.m. and Saturday, May 15th at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$12 and available at Lake Braddock High School Tickets (etix.com). Raging hormones, inane fights and first love

all revolve around lunch period in this hilarious and heartwarming rock/grunge musical that remind us just what middle school is all about. Tickets available at LBTheatre.com. At 9200 Burke Lake Road, Burke.

SATURDAY/MAY 15

"I Ain't Made that Way." 7 p.m. At Shoestring Theatre at Arts Herndon, 750 Center Street, Herndon. When the Van Buren family and the

people of Keokee, Virginia, gather to celebrate the accomplishments of their favorite son, cultural clashes, old resentments, tall tales and lies are served up alongside the banana pudding and potato salad. Tickets \$10 at www.shoestringtheatrecompany.com or 703-731-2895.

SATURDAY/MAY 15

Golf Tournament. 8 a.m. to noon. At Burke Lake Golf Course, 6915 Ox Road, Fairfax Station. Put your vows to the test at the "For Better or Worse Couples Tournament" at Burke Lake Golf Course. Teams of two players will compete in an 18-hole scramble format. There will be closest-to-the-pin contests and prizes for first-, second- and third-place teams. Cost is \$75 per team. The fee, which is due at time of registration, includes lunch. Registration begins 30 days before the event and is limited to the first 48 teams. Players must be age 18 or older. There is no rain date. Call 703-323-1641.

SATURDAY/MAY 15

Better Angels Concert. 8 p.m. Jesse Palidofsky and Seth Kibel: Better Angels CD Release Concert. Hear powerful songs of social justice and healing in a free online concert/CD release party by Azalea City Recordings artist and Washington Folk Festival favorite Jesse Palidofsky. Jesse will team up with clarinetist/saxophonist Seth Kibel, violinist Christine Kharazian and bass virtuoso Herman Burney to celebrate the release of Jesse's new recording of original songs, Our Better Angels. Website: <https://www.fsgw.org/Concerts>

MONDAY/MAY 17

Writing for Wellness. 7-8 p.m. Online. Learn about wellness and other benefits of personal writing with life story ghostwriter Karen Bender. Prepare to be inspired! Age 16 to Adult. Register online at www.tiny.one/writelife

BULLETIN BOARD

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

STARTING MAY 14

McLean Farmers Market. 8 a.m. to 12 noon. At Lewinsville Park, 1659 Chain Bridge Road, McLean. Operates every Friday through November 13. Local farmers and producers sell fresh produce and fruits; breads and pastries; prepared foods; herbs; flowers, and more. All products are grown or produced by the vendors and come from within 125 miles. Visit the website: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/farmersmarkets/>

SATURDAY/MAY 15

Author James Johnston. 2-3 p.m. Virtual event. Local author James Johnston discusses "Murder, Inc.: the CIA under John F. Kennedy", streaming through Fairfax County Public Library. Register at <https://librarycalendar.fairfaxcounty.gov/event/7327825>

HEALTHY KIDS GRANTS

The Community Foundation for Northern Virginia, announced today the opening of its 2021 Healthy Kids Grants cycle. The grants are available for the 2021-2022 academic school year. Eligible public schools in the region with programs focused on healthy lifestyles through increased exercise and physical activity or healthy nutrition may apply for grants up to \$2,000 each. Healthy Kids Grants are possible through

support from The Permanent Fund for Northern Virginia, our endowment supporting critical need throughout the region and with support from the Chin Family Charitable Fund and the J.O.Y. Charitable Fund, donor established funds. The deadline for nonprofits to apply is 5 p.m. on Monday, June 7, 2021. Winners will be announced on August 1, 2021. If you have questions contact sari.raskin@cfnova.org or jennifer.cochran@cfnova.org

WALMART AND SAM'S CLUB OFFER WALK-UP COVID VACCINES

Walmart and Sam's Club today announced a new COVID-19 vaccine milestone: Immunizations are now available to customers and associates in all of their more than 5,100 pharmacy locations nationwide, across 49 states, Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C. This includes the 149 Walmart and Sam's Club pharmacies in Virginia. Vaccines are being administered via both walk-up and scheduled appointments, providing convenient options for customers and members to get protected against COVID-19 where they already shop for groceries and health care essentials. Appointments can be made at walmart.com/COVIDvaccine and samsclub.com/covid.

SEE BULLETIN. PAGE 10

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The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to withdraw its June 23, 2020, concurrence with the special exception application filed by Milestone Tower Limited Partnership IV and its agent, Donohue and Stearns, PLC, on Tax Map Parcel 19-3 ((1)) 20, located at 1315 Beulah Road, to construct a telecommunication facility at Wolf Trap Fire Station #42.



PHOTOS BY MERCIA HOBSON/
THE CONNECTION

It's a No to Fire Station #49 Monopole

County and Milestone had not reached a lease agreement.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
CONNECTION NEWSPAPERS

The proposal to construct a telecommunication facility, with a 114-foot monopole tower at County-owned Wolf Trap Fire Station #42 in Vienna died on May 4 after Supervisor John W. Foust (D-Dranesville District) presented a Board Matter concerning Milestone Communications/Special Exception to the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors during its regular meeting. The fire station is located at the intersection of 1315 Beulah Road at the intersection of Leesburg Pike.

According to Foust, the County and Milestone engaged in negotiations related to Milestone's request to lease the Wolf Trap Fire Station but had not reached an agreement. Since the County owns the Wolf Trap Fire Station and the lease negotiations between the County and Milestone paused, Foust requested that the Board withdraw its consent for Milestone's application.

"As the Board knows, as a property owner, the County places a high value on community participation and feedback on projects located on its land and expects its potential tenants to provide the same level of commitment to soliciting public input," Foust said.

GREAT FALLS Citizens Association held a March 15 webinar featuring a presentation by Milestone Towers as its guest and a community-wide call-in about the proposed monopole at Fire Station #42 Wolf Trap. At the time, callers voiced concerns over aesthetics, residential property values, radiofrequency emissions exposure levels, macro vs. small cell technology, and 5G preference. John Nelson, President of Ciara Estates Homeowners Association, said, "This (seeing an image of the monopole superimposed on a photo of the neighborhood) is an eyesore...visible from most of the homes in our homeowners' association."

Som Venkatanarayan of Vienna said, "This is industrial power, not [appropriate] in an R-2 zone."

Chris Harold, Vice President of Milestone Towers said at the webinar that Milestone planned to install a 50 by 50-foot fenced compound, remove five trees, and plant fifteen to twenty trees and install an access road.

Hearing that the tower was now off the table was good news to Randy and Diane Schumacher, whose



The sightline of a home near the corner of Bent Creek Lane and Stone Meadow Way in Vienna would have had a view of the monopole to the left of the garage.

property was one of five or possibly six. Diane said that would have been in a direct sightline with the tower. "The backs of their homes directly face the open field," she said. According to Diane, the community had a meeting with Supervisor Foust a few months back to present their concerns.

"I will say we are grateful to him, and we applaud the Supervisor's decision, leadership, and listening to our community and other communities' concerns," Diane said.

Asked if she thought this was the end of the monopole proposal; Diane said, "The honest answer is, no...We hope it is put to bed, but you just never know when someone will come forward again."

Randy added that the community needed to be vigilant and engaged with the local government in these situations. "Stay involved as an active civic community to make sure that the community maintains its character," he said.

IN THE FALL of 2020, applicant Milestone Tower Limited Partnership IV and the Board of Supervisors of Fairfax County filed a Proffered Condition Amendment to amend RZ 78D060 for modifications and development conditions to allow telecommunications facilities. Since the proposed site, public property Fire Station #42, was in an R-2 Residential District, per Fairfax County Zoning Ordinance, monopole structures required a Special Exception approval. The Planning Commission hearing on the Special Exception was scheduled for May 5, and the Board of Supervisors' hearing with the tentative final vote on the matter was to be on June 8.

As of press time, Milestone could not be reached for comment.



PHOTO BY MIKE SALMON/CONNECTION

Pit stops like this one from years' past will not be as social this year.

Biking and Trail Use Continues to Grow

Pit Stop gathering is out, but Bike to Work Day is Still on for May 21.

BY MIKE SALMON
THE CONNECTION



It's been 20 years since Bike to Work Day began, and it grows each year showing that there is another side to commuting that uses no gas, has health benefits and is fun, even if it's only one day a year for many.

As with everything else in the covid year of 2021, it's going to be a little different this year but a good thing nonetheless. There will be tee shirts with the skyline logo, like years past, but at the pit stops, it will be a quick stop for the tee shirt, and onto points beyond - no convoys, no chit chat at the pit stop or a local mechanic checking the brakes as seen in previous years. Since many are working from home still, it will be grab the tee shirt and head back to the home office. The Bike to Work organizers are fine with that, it says on the website.

One change is the "pit stop," name, it's now called "tee shirt pickup point." At the stops, there will be a strict covid policy, which includes a mask requirement, no hanging out and socializing, any food is required to be pre-packaged and not consumed on the premises, and no live raffles. "The emphasis will be on bicycling for exercise and mental well-being," the Bike to Work website said. Cyclists will travel on a one-way path to pick up the tee shirt and each rider will be socially distanced.

Hitting the Trail

According to Colin Browne, Communications Director at the

Washington Area Bicyclist Association, Bike to Work Day is run by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' Commuter Connections program. WABA is part of the steering committee and manages the registration process. Although it was cancelled last year to comply with CDC recommendations about gathering, participation has grown every year. In 2018, about 17,000 people signed up for the event and in 2019, just under 20,000 people signed up. This year is impacted by the pandemic with offices closed and many working from home, although people working from home can still ride up and get a tee shirt. "We're expecting 10,000 or so riders this year, as many people are still working from home, and pit stop activities have been scaled back," said Browne.

Trail Use and the Pandemic

The Capital Trails Coalition looked into trail use, and found that across the nation, trails are seeing more users than ever before. According to data provided by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, nearly every week in 2020 saw an increase in trail users compared to numbers of the same week in 2019. Several weeks in March and April even saw as many as 1.5 - 2 times the number of trail users as the year before. In Arlington at the W&OD Bon Air Park counter, there was a 37 percent increase in bike use, and a 23 percent increase in people running and walking.

Elevating the Bathroom

Ideas for budget and luxury bathrooms

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

PHOTOS BY STACY ZARIN GOLDBERG



White countertop, dark wood cabinets, floating vanity, black fixtures create a spa-like atmosphere in this bathroom by InSite Builders & Remodeling.

Sometimes regarded as a strictly functional space, bathrooms might bring to mind brushing and flossing rather than style and comfort. Whether you're working on a tight budget or creating the bathroom of your dreams, two local designers offer inspiration.

"Even if you're only able to spend a limited amount of money, creativity is a necessity," said Marcie Taylor of Marcie Taylor Designs in Alexandria.

Taylor recalls helping a couple who'd grown tired of the outdated master bathroom in their Springfield home, but couldn't afford a total overhaul.

"I told them that they needed to invest in one statement piece and then add some less expensive accessories," she said. "We salvaged a crystal chandelier and hung it over the bathtub to create a focal point. We replaced the grout around the tub and sink which looked dingy against the existing white tile. We then added a matte black faucet and found a shower head in the same color."

When designers at InSite Builders & Remodeling transformed a cramped and outdated Jack and Jill bathroom in Bethesda into a master bath suite befitting a luxury spa, they had to expand the footprint of the bathroom by using square footage from an adjacent bedroom. The additional space was used to add a double sink, a new closet and a large zero-entry glass shower.



The hinged glass shower door are consistent with the contemporary design of this bathroom by InSite Builders & Remodeling.



Full-size porcelain slabs make the shower a major focal point in this bathroom by InSite Builders & Remodeling.

Helping to create a sense of tranquility, the design team used materials such as a white countertop, dark wood cabinets, a floating vanity, black fixtures, and a hinged glass shower door. "The shower is a major focal point," said Stephen Gordon, InSite Builders & Remodeling. "It [has] full-size porcelain slabs which eliminate grout lines."

"Even if you're just doing a spruce-up, a bathroom project can seem like a major undertaking," said Taylor. "But I can't recall anyone who didn't think it was worth the effort."

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DEADLINE: Completed ballots must be received at MCC by 5 p.m. on Saturday, May 15.



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BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 7

CVS HEALTH OFFERS WALK-IN COVID VACCINES

CVS Health is now accepting walk-in COVID-19 appointments at CVS Pharmacy locations across the country, including 342 locations in Virginia, with no appointment necessary. Same-day scheduling, including appointments as soon as one hour from time of scheduling, is also available at CVS.com. The company's COVID-19 vaccine scheduler is updated throughout the day to account for same-day cancellations.

GIANT FOOD ACCEPTS WALK-INS FOR COVID VACCINES

Beginning today, May 3, Giant Food is offering COVID-19 vaccines to all approved ages (16-and-older for Pfizer, 18-and-older for Moderna and Johnson & Johnson) every Monday and Thursday from 6 a.m.-9 a.m. at all 152 of its pharmacy locations throughout Washington, D.C., Maryland, Virginia, and Delaware with no appointment needed. Walk-in vaccinations are available for individuals receiving either their first or second dose of the vaccine. During the vaccination, Giant Pharmacists will work with the individual to schedule their second dose, if needed. For more information, visit giantfood.com/covid-info.

MAY 3-21

Soccer Tryouts. Coaches from Spain return to Villarreal Virginia Academy for soccer tryouts in May. The soccer academy based in Northern Virginia will be hosting tryouts from May 3-21, 2021. The tryouts will take place at Mason District Park, Pine Ridge Park, Ossian Hall Park and Thomas Jefferson High School. Leading coaches from Villarreal CF, the Spanish club that works alongside VIVA, intend to be there in person for the first time since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, after previously offering support online throughout the pandemic. Visit www.villarrealva.org.

MAY 5-JUNE 23, WEDNESDAYS

Virtual Active Aging Exercise Classes. (Virtual via Zoom). Sponsored by Shepherd's Center of Northern Virginia (SCNOVA) 10:45 a.m. - 11:45 a.m. Exercise classes for older adults focusing on offering balance coordination, stretching and improved mobility. Class meets for 1 hour, once a week, for eight weeks. Cost: \$50 for 8 week session - payable to Sun Fitness LLC. To register or for more info, contact Casey Tarr at 703-821-6838 or eileentarr1@verizon.net. After registering, you will be contacted with payment instructions and will be provided with an invitation link to connect to the Zoom virtual class.

NOW THROUGH JUNE 16

Virtual Active Aging Exercise Classes sponsored by Shepherd's Center of Northern Virginia (SCNOVA). Wednesdays, 10:45 a.m. - 11:45 a.m. Exercise class for older adults focusing on low impact aerobics, balance, coordination and stretching. Class meets for 1 hour, once a week, for eight weeks. Cost: \$50 for 8 week session - payable to Sun Fitness LLC. To register or for more info, contact Casey Tarr at 703-821-6838 or eileentarr1@verizon.net. After registering, you will be contacted with payment instructions.



PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

Fairfax County Public Safety Headquarters

Petition: Recall Davis

FROM PAGE 3

“I am disappointed in the decision of the Board...So, when you are a 21-year-old, you get a badge. You get a gun; you swear to protect and defend the Constitution of your locality, as well as the United States, and you violate that not once but twice there can be personal redemption. Professional redemption cannot be part of that. Not today.”

“This wasn’t a conversation with the community; we were simply allowed to vent. Many specific questions were asked about what happened, but we received no answers at all from Chair McKay and nonresponsive ones from Chief Davis.”

— Diane Burkley Alejandro, ACLU People Power Fairfax

“I have learned. I’ve grown, and I’ve matured. And I’ve served elsewhere with distinction,” he said.

Chief Davis called his first News Conference the next day, May 7. He retold his background story he shared the night before.

On Sunday, May 9, Diane Burkley Alejandro, ACLU People Power Fairfax reflected on the Public Input Session. “Virtually everyone who spoke voiced strong opposition to the process used to select Chief Davis and questioned his past misconduct, including

the six-day lockdown of a Black Baltimore neighborhood in 2017, which resulted in an ACLU lawsuit. This wasn’t a conversation with the community; we were simply allowed to vent. Many specific questions were asked about what happened, but we received no answers at all from Chair McKay and nonresponsive ones from Chief Davis. He now says what’s past is past, it is time to move on. We will work with him on police reform and intend to hold him to his progressive words. But this process has shaken community trust in Fairfax, including the Board and the Chief. Unanswered questions and a trust deficit is not a good way to start,” she said.

Kelly Hebron Chair, Fairfax Democratic Black Caucus started a petition to Chair, Board of Supervisor Jeff McKay and Rodney Lusk Lee District Supervisor and Penny Gross Mason District Supervisor to recall Kevin Davis as Fairfax County Police Chief. Petition · Recall Kevin Davis as Fairfax County Police Chief · Change.org.

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A False Sense of Security



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

As previously referred to in a recent column, even though I am hardly cancer-free; nonetheless, I am cancer interruptus for the next four weeks. That means I have no cancer-related activities: no lab work, no scans, no infusions, no injections, no appointments, no video visits, no interaction whatsoever. Other than taking my daily thyroid cancer pill (the side effects of which are marginal at worst), with which I ingest another 50-plus pills (supplements and so forth), I am, too quote my late father, “unencumbered” by my less-than-ideal circumstances. I wouldn’t say I’m actually on vacation, but I’m certainly willing to say, there’s a definite break in the action. It’s not exactly a “staycation,” nevertheless, it is a positive occasion, and one with which I can live.

Not that being diagnosed with “terminal” (originally) cancer and/or still undergoing active treatment is ever fun; tolerable is as grandiose a description as I’ll accept. However, four weeks without any involvement with my oncologist and endocrinologist or with any health care-related staff, puts a real bounce in my step; my neuropathy notwithstanding. Though I have difficulty walking and especially running, I am, for the next four weeks anyway, on easy street, figuratively speaking. The psychological wear and tear us cancer patients (especially the ones characterized as “terminal”) endure is ever present and any excuse/opportunity to let one’s mind wander to a place other than your presumptive demise, is a mental trip very much worth taking.

Oddly enough, a month of not having anything to do with my cancer team/healthcare facility is hardly the norm. Usually, there’s more than enough cancer-related activities to keep me preoccupied. In its own unique way, the nothingness is kind of challenging. I keep looking over my shoulder, almost literally, as the great Satchel Page once said (“to see if anybody’s gaining on me”), and flipping the pages on my appointment book to see if I’ve whiffed somehow on some of my usual and customary obligations. I mean: it is so rare to be so disconnected when you’ve been diagnosed with a “terminal” disease. As you might imagine, cancer treatment is very hands-on. Not much is left to chance. Moreover, cancer is very unpredictable and insidious. Often it is in control, despite the oncologist’s best effort. To be thrown into this cancer-centric world after mostly standing still, healthwise, for 54 and a half years, is a fate not worse than death, but one, depending on the type of cancer you have, which could very well lead to a premature death.

After decades of neglect, the last 15 or so years has seen a huge increase in funding for lung cancer research which in turn has led to more than a dozen new drugs - and an entire new class of drugs: immunotherapy, for the treatment of lung cancer. The result has been increased survivability and quality of life for those of us so diagnosed. And very directly, I have been the beneficiary of some of these drugs: avastin, alimta and tarceva having been my life extenders. Where despair once dominated the initial prognosis, now there is hope. It’s not so much a cure as it is a way to make cancer a chronic disease, one which requires a lifetime of monitoring, like diabetes, as an example; but it’s potentially for a lifetime, not for a life with very little time.

At this immediate juncture, I am being treated, but still living my life - outside, and rarely ever in a medical facility. Not having to endure the ongoing exposure and reminder that I have cancer and a shortened life expectancy to boot, enables me not only to breathe easier, but also allows me to take an occasional deep breath as well. A deep breath which doesn’t lead to a coughing fit, a fit which, for us lung cancer patients is never a good sign.

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