



Water overflowed the banks of Long Branch and damaged newly-paved Newington Road.

Repairs could take a few days on this valuable transportation link.

Summer Thunderstorm Impacts Roads, Bridges

Hot, humid weather paves the way for extreme storms.

By MIKE SALMON
THE CONNECTION

The severe thunderstorm that hit in the early morning hours of Sunday, Aug. 15 dumped a few inches of rain, causing waters to overflow the banks of Long Branch in southern Fairfax County, damaging the new asphalt on Newington Road, and closing this transportation link for several days following the storm.

Road crews were out the following Monday morning, and the road was reopened that afternoon, though the pavement was only milled.

Other damage this storm did in the Mount Vernon area included stream damage in Hollin Hills, trees down, including on the hiking path in Huntley Meadows Park, and another at Lake Accotink in Springfield that closed the main park entrance for about 24 hours. It reopened the following Monday morning.

According to the National Weather Service, the storm dumped 2.62 inches of rain in one storm which is about half of the rainfall this area received in the month of July. These rainfall amounts were recorded at Reagan National Airport.

Jeremy Geiger at the local National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration office looked at the storm as a normal occurrence, that seemed to hang over the southern Fairfax County area.

"When there is heavy rain over a short time period, the impacts are a lot higher," Geiger said. For this storm, there was a "flash flooding



In McCalley Park in the Hollin Hills area, the flooded stream carried debris that impacted a foot bridge.

concern," he added.

The social media feed for the Fairfax County Emergency Management was on it by 2:41 a.m. on Sunday morning. "Wow that was a lot of rain in a short period of time," it said, recommending people to stay indoors during and shortly after the storm.

"July is typically the world's warmest month of the year, but July 2021 outdid itself as the hottest July and month ever recorded," said NOAA Administrator Rick Spinrad, Ph.D. "This new record adds to the disturbing and disruptive path that climate change has



Parts of this tree came down along the Mount Vernon trail.

PHOTOS BY
MIKE SALMON/GAZETTE

A thunderstorm caused this tree to topple over, damaging this house in Franconia.



set for the globe." Several Western states had blistering months setting records for heat.

But here on the East Coast, the month of July was mild for weather, according to NWS. Only 4.24 inches of rain was recorded and the average temperature was near normal. The total precipitation was 98 percent of normal and the NWS said it was the driest July since 2016, when only 3.13 inches of precipitation fell.

Nevertheless, a record warm low temperature of 78 degrees was set July 12th. This broke the old record of 77 last set in 2017.



Looking east, the shifted pavement went in the direction of the water.

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Big Money for Big Biz, Not as Much for Poor

Lawmakers go on a spending spree with billions of dollars from Uncle Sam.

BY MICHAEL LEE POPE
GAZETTE PACKET

Big business cleaned up this week, taking home the biggest prizes in the special session to spend \$3 billion in stimulus cash. Next year, their taxes will be lower because of an \$862 million investment into the unemployment insurance trust fund. And telecommunications giants will bankroll windfall profits from the \$700 million available to expand broadband internet.

Meanwhile, low-income Virginians didn't fare quite as well.

Gov. Ralph Northam and Democratic majorities in the House and Senate rejected a proposal from the Virginia Housing Alliance to build 7,000 new units of affordable housing. And they rejected a proposal from the Fund Our Schools coalition that would have used local schools as community hubs to distribute wrap-around services such as housing assistance or food security. Some argued that spending this pot of money on broadband is a mistake, especially considering the money Congress is about to unleash.

"This is not an equity budget," said Kim Bobo, executive director of the Virginia Poverty Law Center. "The big-ticket items really are large-scale infrastructure and long-term projects that really will do little in the short term to help low-income families."

Democratic leaders in the House and Senate cut a deal late Friday afternoon in a closed-door meeting that was not open to the public or the press, making some slight changes around the edges of the governor's proposal. Sheriff's deputies will get bonuses, as will correctional officers and home health care workers. But for the most part, the \$3 billion spending plan was essentially the document Northam handed them last month — plus a \$1 billion pot of money for him to spend next year.

"While other states are closing budget gaps, we are investing in Virginians," said Northam in a written statement after House Democrats and Senate Democrats cut a deal. "We have consistently put resources into helping families, businesses, and communities recover from this pandemic and prepare for the future."

THE APPEALS COURT was also on the agenda for the special session, allowing Democrats to install eight new judges to a 17-member court, expanding its jurisdiction and shifting its politics. Democratic leaders finally got around to announcing the names of the judges they wanted to appoint Mon-



PHOTO BY MICHAEL LEE POPE/GAZETTE PACKET

Democrats who wield the gavel in the House and Senate crafted a plan to spend \$3 billion of stimulus cash. They also appointed an entirely new slate of judges to the appeals court, expanding its jurisdiction and shifting its politics.

day afternoon, a few hours before parading them through two committee hearings and giving them a final vote. The new judges include four women and four African Americans, a counterbalance to the current bench that's disproportionately white and male.

"We elected an unprecedented level of diversity to the bench," said House Majority Leader Charniele Herring of Alexandria. "Today we took a historic step forward in making our legal system more equitable and expanding people's rights as the Virginia Court of Appeals comes in step with state appellate courts across the country."

One of the new appeals court judges is Fairfax County Circuit Court Judge Daniel Ortiz, who is the only one to draw opposition during the judicial interviews. Two Democrats refrained from voting for Ortiz after concerns were raised over his role in the guardianship system, which was complicated by his former job as a lawyer for Inova. In 2019, the Richmond Times-Dispatch published a three-part series called "Unguarded" that revealed how the guardianship process leaves vulnerable people unprotected.

"I'm not necessarily saying Ortiz should be blamed for all this," said Del. Mark Levine (D-45), who was one of the two to take a walk on Ortiz. "I felt that if we did not do what we did that no one would bring attention to this problem, and I do think it's a

very important problem that I want to bring attention to."

THE SPECIAL SESSION offered an opportunity for lawmakers to spread billions of dollars in federal stimulus money, creating an opportunity to help people in need and also fund specific projects in House districts where Democratic incumbents are in difficult elections. The \$1 million appropriation for an African-American cultural center in Virginia Beach will likely be a talking point for several House Democrats in Hampton Roads who are in swing districts, and oth-

"This is not an equity budget."

— Kim Bobo,
executive director of the Virginia Poverty Law Center

er pork barrel spending is aimed at Henrico County and Fredericksburg. Across Virginia, businesses will benefit from a \$250 million appropriation for the Rebuild VA Economic Recovery Fund.

"We are making monumental investments in businesses through the Rebuild Virginia program," said Senate Majority Leader Dick Saslaw. "Our response since March 2020 has helped Virginia maintain our best state for business rating from CNBC and made sure we continue that growth as we begin to come out on the other side of the economic crisis."

The approach taken by the Democratic leadership aligns with much of the agenda outlined by the Virginia Chamber of Commerce in advance of the special ses-

sion. Meanwhile, groups advocating for low-income Virginians had a harder time. Many advocates were hoping to persuade the governor and lawmakers on the merits of affordable housing, a need that is expected to become more pronounced when a federal eviction moratorium expires. They were not successful, despite a detailed plan to construct 7,000 new units of affordable housing circulated by the Virginia Housing Alliance.

"We would have preferred that there would be more money for unemployment and other things such as affordable housing and some other things under family and child welfare we would have preferred," said Jay Speer, executive director of the Virginia Poverty Law Center. "But we're certainly hopeful that in the next budget cycle next year we'll see some of these things."

YET ANOTHER PROPOSAL for stimulus spending that was rejected by the Democratic leadership was a proposal to use local neighborhood schools as a community hub for offering social services. The idea was that the school wouldn't just offer educational services, it would also be a community hub where people could get other services that wrapped around public education — things like food security, housing, internet access or health needs. The Fund Our Schools coalition presented research showing these kinds of schools allow students to focus on learning rather than economic insecurity.

"Most advocates in the coalition are disappointed that we didn't see any funding during the special session for community schools," said Chad Stewart, manager of education policy at the Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis. "We really see it as a pressing issue that we're going to need to continue working with lawmakers on over the coming months and into the next legislative session."

The community schools model has been implemented in states as large as California and as small as Vermont. New York City used its federal stimulus money to expand community school models by nearly 150 school sites. The problem for Virginia is that it doesn't have an existing state office to implement it, which is why the coalition is asking for dedicated funding to establish community schools in school divisions with the most poverty. That's why advocates are pressing for the Virginia Department of Education to form an office to work with school divisions on implementation.

"These services can create access for the community to get health services, nutrition, housing support, tutoring, expanded learning time — all of which are shown to improve student outcomes," said James Federman, president of the Virginia Education Association. "Not to have to deal with the toxic stress created by food insecurity, inadequate housing, lack of internet access or unmet health needs."

Itching to Know Cause of Local Phenomenon

Possible invasion of the oak leaf itch mite.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

People in Northern Virginia may reconsider where they enjoy the outdoors. A mite so tiny the naked eye cannot see it may insert her tiny stylets and secret saliva into residents and suck their fluids. Its bite packs such a punch for some its after-effects cause sleepless nights and visits to physicians.

Reports popped up in Northern Virginia in late July and early August, neighborhood social media posts seeking cause and relief for what appeared to be an outbreak of human pruritic dermatitis, itchy rashes, and lesions from bites, possibly from the oak leaf itch mite. How to get rid of the pests? The Arlington Facebook group, "Arlington Neighbors Helping Each Other Through COVID-19," recorded nearly 300 posts on the matter by Aug. 10. The discussion appeared in other local online groups as well.

Some entomologists and scientists say that the source of mysterious bites may be the anthropoid, the oak leaf itch mite, *Pyemotes herfsi*. The eight-legged parasite could be giving humans and pets a "mite shower" as the invisible pests fall from flagging pin oak tree branches or crawl onto them, sight unseen as they garden or sit in the grass.

Other Virginia entomologists and scientists say the cause has yet to be scientifically qualified. The biter's identity is not supported in the area by a sample, the gold confirmation standard. The oak leaf itch mite, *Pyemotes herfsi*, was confirmed when a sample was submitted to the Insect Diagnostic Lab at Kansas State University in 2014, after that region experienced similar experiences, according to ksal.com.

On Monday, Aug. 9, Eric Day, Department of Entomology, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, and State University said, "This is not a mite we have received in the lab...They [the oak leaf tree mite] are often associated with insect galls. Midges [any small two-winged fly] make the gall, a protective structure for them to live in." The mites feed on midge larva inside the galls.

"This is very interesting," wrote Lori Chamberlain, Virginia Department of Forestry, in an email to the Connection the same day. "Unfortunately...there has not been a sample submitted to the Virginia Tech Insect Identification Lab this year."

Photos of the apparent bites, like the ones taken Aug. 7 on the arms of two Herndon residents, John Pilcicki, a wildlife biologist at DOD, and Heather, showed areas approximately two centimeters in diameter, with a central vesicle, pustule- or blister-like swelling.

IN A RANDOM SAMPLE of ten individuals in Herndon over two days, six reported near word-for-word complaints. The bites, similar to scores of ones posted and described online, occurred mainly on the Herndon residents' necks, shoulders, upper torsos, arms,



Oak trees with branch dieback, "flagging," possibly harboring oak leaf itch mites as they feed on cicada eggs and larvae.

and hands, although they were described elsewhere on the body as well.

Based on complaints, a pattern of similar descriptions emerged: extremely itchy, painful welts, and extended redness, with symptoms lasting 7 to 14 days. Some of Heather's bites were on her hand. She had been gardening and did not see or feel anything until the next day. According to the CDC, persons bitten by *Pyemotes herfsi*, the oak leaf itch mite, generally do not recall being bitten but feel an itchy discomfort (which can be intense) beginning 10 to 16 hours afterward, and lasting up to 14 days.

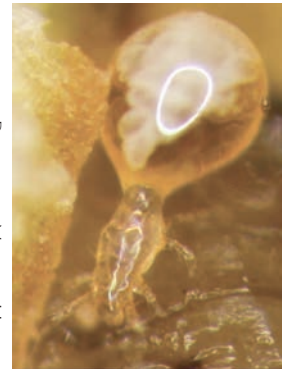
Kirsten Burls, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech Virginia State University, said, "I've never heard anybody suggest a way to obtain the actual insect identification. They're too small ... My advice to individuals about this phenomenon [is] to say, 'This too will pass.'"

People should just be vigilant and rule out other possibilities. She ran through other pests whose bites also cause raised red areas but noted the differences. "Ticks, there's generally a tip ... People are aware of when they are bitten by mosquitoes ... Bed bugs are harder to spot but do result in finding evidence ... Chiggers are active this time of year, but it is not a big problem in a metropolitan area."

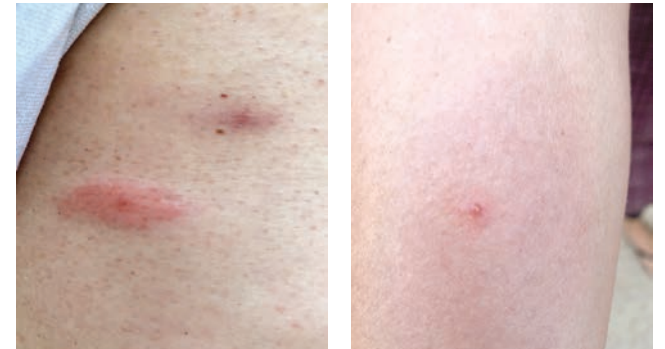
During the summer of 2007, a bite rash outbreak occurred in the western suburbs of Chicago, reported U.S. Pharmacist. They, too, were not only dealing with the mysterious bites but the return of swarms of cicadas, like Northern Virginia.

According to the Illinois Natural History Survey report, Entomologist Ed Zaborski deduced a connection between the bites and the cicadas' return. Zaborski believed the bites came from the *Pyemotes* (itch mites) appearing to feed on the cicada eggs. In 2004, Kansas reported a significant infestation of the oak leaf itch mite and Nebraska in 2005 when the mites fed on midge larva inside galls on pin oak trees.

"Weather associated with spring cold fronts or human or animal migration patterns may have carried the *Pyemotes* [itch mites] to Illinois from neighboring states,



Pin oak leaves.



Possible oak leaf itch mite bites on Fairfax County residents in the Town of Herndon.



PHOTO BY ERIC ERBE/USDA AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICE, BUGWOOD.ORG
A close-up of an itch mite.



PHOTO BY RAYMOND CLOYD, KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Tyvek suit to avoid bites from oak leaf itch mites.

such as Kansas and Nebraska," cited the report.

Dr. Raymond Cloyd, Department of Entomology Kansas State University said in Extension Entomology Oak Leaf Itch Mite that for "the first time in Kansas ... the oak leaf itch mite has been a problem in successive years (2015 and 2016), which is likely associated with the mild winters we have experienced."

Adria Bordas is the Unit Coordinator Se-

PHOTOS BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

nior Extension Agent-Horticulture Virginia Cooperative Extension Fairfax County Office. She said that although they had volunteers report bites, itching rash, "We don't have anyone who has submitted a sample because they [the suspected mites] are microscopic...No one can say for definite that this is what it is ... However, as far back as 2004, when we had the 17 year Brood X, there have been reports that these [mites] might tend to brew up a little bit more in population and nuisance."

While Northern Virginia has a large oak tree population, Bordas said the mites might not just be in oak trees. "I would say not just in oaks, though probably oaks in general."

If the culprit is verified in the region as the oak tree itch mite, it makes a sci-fi horror story. Invisible, fully mature male and female alien invaders emerge from an ovisac at the end of their mother's hugely swelling abdomen, then mate. The males die, but the fertilized females with 200 to 300 eggs are laser-focused to eat and seek out their prey. They enter their home sight unseen through minute openings. The female invaders inject their prey with a potent neurotoxin and saliva mixture capable of paralyzing victims 166,000 times their size. The saliva liquifies the prey's tissue, so the females can feed on their fluids, nourishing their progeny to adulthood in one week when they emerge. Dispersed via the wind, they can drop onto humans.

THE OAK LEAF ITCH MITE is a tiny reddish-tan parasite with a shiny exoskeleton and four pairs of legs. It is invisible to the naked eye. According to Raymond A. Cloyd, an entomology professor at Kansas State, "The oak leaf itch mite has one of the highest rates of population increase ... Millions can be produced in a very short time."

Cloyd reported the oak leaf itch mite was first detected in the Midwest in 2004. It was responsible for the 2014 and 2017 widespread itching bites. "A single female can produce between 200 and 300 eggs," according to Cloyd in Oak Leaf Itch Mite. Cloyd said that the oak leaf itch mite is thought to be exclusive to pin oak trees.

Although the oak leaf itch mite typically preys on midge eggs from the tiny two-winged flies commonly called "no-see-ums" that target pin oaks, the mites may not be as specific a feeder as previously thought. Instead of feeding solely on midge eggs in the pin oak trees, the mites might also be devouring the massive numbers of cicada

SEE POSSIBLE INVASION, PAGE 5
WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

Amazon Continues 'Right Now Needs Fund' with Additional \$1 Million

To help close the gap in basic-needs support for students and families in Northern Virginia.

Launched last year to support 59 Northern Virginia schools during the pandemic, Amazon's "Right Now Needs Fund" gives students immediate access to clothing, hygiene products, and other basic supplies to help them focus on their studies.

Amazon will leverage the Fund to kick-start the 2021-22 academic year by giving away backpacks filled with thousands of essential back-to-school supplies to elementary and middle school students.

Amazon will continue its commitment to the Right Now Needs Fund in Northern Virginia for the upcoming academic year with an additional \$1 million investment to support students attending Arlington Public Schools, Alexandria City Public Schools, and Fairfax County Public Schools. The Fund, in partnership with Communities In Schools NOVA, helps remove barriers to learning and works to meet the basic needs of thousands of schoolchildren from underserved communities.

Launched in October 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Amazon Right Now Needs Fund in Northern Virginia was initially made available to students across all 41 Arlington Public Schools and Programs and all 18 Alexandria City Public Schools. In its first year, the Fund provided 8,500 students with immediate access to essential items.

This year, the Fund will continue to provide support for immediate needs like clothing, hygiene products, and school supplies to students in the region. Site coordinators with the nonprofit Communities In Schools NOVA will work with school social workers to distribute Amazon-provided supplies tailored to specific community needs. School social workers and site coordinators will also help support individual school students who could access the Fund for much-needed items throughout the year, from books to winter coats.

Support is provided through prepaid Amazon Vouchers, or Amazon Education Assistance Product Vouchers,

which students can redeem online at their convenience. The Fund will also be leveraged to provide educational community programs and events, including tech literacy workshops and career panels.

"Amazon is committed to ensuring children and families from historically underrepresented and underserved communities are supported, which is why we are renewing our Right Now Needs Fund in Northern Virginia," said Andrea Muscadin, head of Partnerships, Right Now Needs at Amazon. "While we have already been able to support thousands of families in the Northern Virginia area, we recognize many families are facing unique challenges as students prepare to return to school in-person."

To begin the yearlong \$1 million investment for the 2021-22 school year, Amazon will donate new backpacks filled with thousands of essential school supplies to qualifying elementary and middle schools in Northern Virginia.

"These backpacks will help many students, some returning to school in-person for the first time since the pandemic began, start the year with supplies to help set them up for success," said Patrick Brennan, executive director of Communities In Schools NOVA.

Amazon employees will fill and deliver the backpacks to elementary and middle schools across the three districts before the school year begins. "We know a strong foundation in education is essential to a child's success and are proud to partner with Communities In Schools NOVA," said Brian Huseman, Amazon's Vice President of Public Policy. "However, Amazon's contributions are just a small piece of the puzzle. ... In addition to partnering with organizations like Communities in Schools NOVA, we are also actively supporting policies at the federal and state level to address education as a top priority when it comes to the success of students and their families."

Possible Invasion of the Oak Leaf Itch Mite

FROM PAGE 4

eggs left behind by the region's 2021 Brood X invasion, according to John Dudzinsky, Community Forester and Society of Municipal Arborists Virginia Liaison.

The bountiful cicada eggs deposited by the female Brood X cicadas over several weeks in May and June into slits of healthy and now flagging pin oak branches, among other trees, make easy feeding for the female mites to nourish their progeny.

Because of the vast, possibly unprecedented quantities of cicada eggs in Northern Virginia, the mites' seven-day life cycle, and the number of offspring produced by each mite, the oak leaf itch mite population may be exploding this year.

"Of course, oak leaf itch mites don't fly," Dudzinsky said. "The wind will catch them. They can even fit through the mesh of screens. They're extremely tiny, 1/125 of an inch," he said.

"Whatever is happening right now seems to be the same year as the cicadas," Day said, "I think it is a case of two and two together — make five."

Prevention and Elimination

There are very few strategies to prevent oak leaf

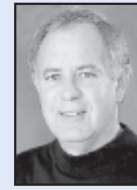
itch mite bites. Dudzinsky said to minimize exposure to oak trees, especially pin oaks. Do not sit under them.

If you are picking up leaves or fallen flagging branches from the cicadas [or working near them], wear long rubber gloves, a long-sleeved shirt, hat, pants, and socks pulled up and over pant cuffs.

Bordas, who works outside in four to five-hour stretches, understands how hard it is to dress with mite-protection when temperatures soar. She recommended wearing a shirt pretreated with DEET at a 30 percent level, no higher, and wearing it over a regular shirt to avoid skin exposure. "I put that on over a lighter shirt," Bordas said. She added not to spray the skin of older adults with DEET because their skin is thinner, likewise for children.

"Be cognizant of when you come indoors, immediately take a shower... and wash clothes in hot water," Bordas said.

Controlling the mites at their source may be impossible. There is nothing to treat mites on the trees "because the mites themselves are inside the galls," according to Bordas.



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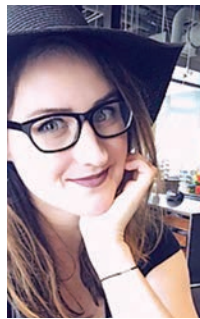
Childcare in Fairfax County: A Labor of Love

BY ELLISA BLAKE

Ellisa Blake is Fairfax County School Aged Child Care head teacher and SEIU Virginia 512 union member.

As our Fairfax community is preparing to return to school in just a couple of weeks, we're also approaching a major opportunity to transform our county for the better. While the Board of Supervisors moves closer to passing a collective bargaining ordinance, workers are uniting in our union, SEIU Virginia 512, to ensure that the Board provides the meaningful rights necessary to strengthen workers' voices and improve resources. Like many county employees, I am pushing for the right to collectively bargain. My colleagues and I are in this fight because of our love for Fairfax families and our dedication to providing essential services.

My name is Ellisa Blake. Every day, I educate and care for the incredible children in Fairfax County. For more than two years, I've worked in the county's School Aged Child Care (SACC) program. I'm one of many county employees tasked with empowering local fam-



Ellisa Blake

ilies through comprehensive support. Guiding developing humans can be messy and difficult. Still, my colleagues and I love our work and go the extra mile daily to help children play cooperatively and grow emotionally. Through original programming, we constantly seek ways to introduce our children to ideas and experiences that challenge them to solve problems, think outside the box, and create something exceptional. All this requires high levels of expertise, patience, and energy.

During the pandemic in 2020, we were among the very first to offer full-day programs in schools for working families. We took every measure to create the safest environment possible and we taught children proper disease prevention habits. We frequently adapted to new safety standards and changing circumstances. Supporting Re-

turn to School (SRS) teachers were pioneers in creating healthy and engaging classrooms in the midst of a pandemic. Because of our success, FCPS teachers were looking to the systems we had in place for guidance on how to create a safe learning environment when they returned to in-person school months later.

That's why it's troubling that so many in SACC and throughout the county workforce are overworked, overwhelmed, and struggling to get by. We face inadequate staffing levels, last-minute communication about county decisions, and insufficient wages. SACC teachers largely cannot afford to live in the communities they serve. Inexplicably, numerous SACC employees are categorized as "non-merit." This means that many essential caregivers in Fairfax County are denied health care, benefits, paid time off, and are forced into part-time work. Numerous qualified educators are forced out of the program because their position offers no reliable way for them to provide for themselves and their families.

Workers' rights and quality programs are intertwined. Data shows

that industries that unionize see significant improvement in the services they provide, and it's not hard to see why. When organizations support workers, workers are able to take care of themselves and their communities. And who deserves a higher standard of care than children -- our future community leaders? There's currently an empty seat at the decision-making table that needs to be occupied by employees working directly with the community. We must have a say in negotiating our wages, benefits, and working conditions. Our voice should be represented, especially in times of emergency. We know most intimately what is needed in our programs and for our families. Through collective bargaining, we could develop more comprehensive programs, minimize wasted resources, and support practical policy choices. We could attract the best applicants and retain our most qualified workers. SACC's unique before-and-after school program could be a nationwide example of exceptional, community-based childcare. It's time for us to elevate Fairfax County to new heights with strong collective bargaining.

Virginia State Police Funding

BY DELEGATE PAUL KRIZEK

Next year in 2022, the Virginia Department of State Police (VSP) will celebrate its 90th anniversary. A critical agency for public safety in the Commonwealth, over the last several years, the VSP has faced a crisis of workforce shortages due to a decline in new trooper applicants combined with an unprecedented increase in departures of experienced employees. With a vacancy rate approaching 27%, the VSP risks the inability to carry out their mission, to respond to emergencies throughout the Commonwealth, and they cannot adequately compete for applicants who reflect the diversity and culturally responsive values that Virginians expect and deserve.

Over the last several years, trooper applicants have steadily declined for various reasons, from 2,594 applicants in 2017, to 1,556 in 2020, with many of those applicants withdrawing from the initial hiring process. The loss in applicants and a rise in those who withdraw from hiring culminates in a 60% decline in applicants, resulting in the remaining applicant pool being minimally qualified and

less educated. The state police rigorously target minority recruitment; however, disparities in compensation when compared with other police forces detracts applicants.

Unfortunately, the State Police operate at a competitive disadvantage when it comes to compensation. The average starting salary for a VSP trooper is just \$47,833 statewide — here in Northern Virginia, that figure is adjusted to just under \$60,000. These amounts are lower than other jurisdictions. The national average salary for State Police officers is \$53,000. Counties such as Henrico and Hanover outside of Richmond pay between \$50k and \$52k, and Fairfax County Police has starting salaries up to \$68,880. In addition, existing experienced law enforcement officers often leave the State Police for higher salaries offered by county police departments.

Not only do the State Police face challenges in recruitment due to compensation, but troopers joining the Virginia State Police cannot be guaranteed they will remain close to home: new troopers can



Krizek

be sent anywhere in the Commonwealth for their first assignments and may need to relocate their families. In addition, troopers are regularly deployed throughout the state for emergency situations, requiring weeks away from home. At local agencies, officers know they will work in their home city or county, and will never be far from home.

To fill in the gaps and to ensure patrol coverage, existing State Police officers must take extra-long shifts, have days off cancelled, and an increased number are deployed to different areas of the state. This has increased overtime costs, as well as put significant strain on current employees who are at risk of burnout, mental health issues, as well as a higher propensity to make errors in judgment.

During the recent Special Session, after collaboration between the members in the House and Senate, as well as support from Governor Northam, a compromise was reached to include in the new

budget \$20 million to the Department of State Police to implement a new compensation plan for sworn, law enforcement positions to address recruitment of new officers, retention of the existing law enforcement workforce, and pay compression among the various levels of the sworn, law enforcement positions in the department. This plan will also provide an edu-

SEE VIRGINIA STATE, PAGE 7

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A Connection Newspaper



When Will We Recognize How Important Afterschool Programs Are to Fairfax County Families?

BY BLAIRE U. DENSON
AND MARK H. EMERY

When COVID-19 closed schools across Virginia more than a year ago, afterschool and summer enrichment programs didn't skip a beat. They transformed in-person programming into online classes for reading, arts, STEM, and sports. They opened facilitated learning sites, keeping kids safe, supervised, and supported while they attended virtual school and parents worked. And now, as the Delta variant may upend "normal" reopening plans, afterschool programs will continue to be critical partners for schools and parents.

But as valuable as these programs are, they have been historically underfunded in Virginia. Right now, 3 out of 4 programs across the country are at risk of losing staff or closing their doors completely, despite the ever-growing demand for them. Currently, more than 600,000 Virginia youth are waiting for an available spot in an afterschool program.

Fortunately, we have a tremendous opportunity through the American Rescue Plan to fund afterschool and summer enrichment programs that our kids and families rely on. The plan gives Virginia's state and school district leaders decision-making power over more than \$2 billion to help students recover. This means there's potential to ensure access to afterschool and summer enrichment for every child who wants to enroll. But only if our state legislators and agencies choose to fund them.

Decades of research stand behind these programs. Studies show kids who attend afterschool and summer enrichment make gains in math and reading, and improve their school attendance, work habits, grades, and classroom behavior. They are less likely to repeat a grade or use drugs, and more likely to graduate.

Fairfax County Public Schools and the county government's Department of Neighborhood and Community Services worked with partners and providers to provide virtual after-school activities across 26 middle schools shortly after COVID-19 hit. Partners

collaborated and innovated to provide students creative, enriching opportunities. Through partners like Capital One, Arena Stage, Literacy Council of Northern Virginia, Step Afrika, MyChef Shirley, EduTutorVa, George Mason University, and Asian American Lead, and grants from the Arby's Foundation, Panda Express, and 21st Century Community Learning Centers, students took cooking, photography, fine arts, theater arts, dance, enhanced literacy for English Language Learners, coding, STEM, and sports and fitness activities. The program followed the ebb and flow of in-person, hybrid, and virtual school-day schedules and in its full capacity when COVID-19 mandates were lifted. Now, we're offering in-person, five-week summer programs with full in-person afterschool programming in the fall. In addition, FCPS has invested American Rescue Plan resources to expand afterschool opportunities at the high school level.

This summer, hundreds of other similar programs are operating across Virginia -- something that's especially critical for kids to re-ignite their love of learning, working parents, and parents who need time to seek employment. A recent survey found 88% of Virginia parents favor public funding of afterschool and summer learning opportunities; and 79% say they help them keep their jobs or work more hours.

But without more state and local investment, many of our afterschool and summer programs won't survive. With the American Rescue Plan, we have the opportunity to provide programs across our state that are proven to help kids reach their full potential.

We urge our legislators and district leaders to ask kids what their local program means to them, and use resources from the American Rescue Plan to address the unmet demand for afterschool and summer enrichment programs so no more kids are left out.

About the authors: Blaire U. Denson, Executive Director, Virginia Partnership for Out-of-School Time (VPOST) (blaire.denson@v-post.org) and Mark H. Emery, Administrator, After-School Programs, Fairfax County Public Schools (mhemery@fcps.edu)

Virginia State Police Funding

FROM PAGE 6

relocation that create barriers to maintaining a diverse, high-quality law enforcement workforce.

As the Chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation and Public Safety, I am pleased that this 90-year-old agency will be utilizing American Rescue Plan Funds (ARPA) to give law enforcement officers a well-deserved raise, and support violence prevention programs to keep our communities safe. Certainly, this \$20 million investment pales in comparison to the over \$125 million the Department has lost over the last 5 years to turnover and mandatory overtime costs.

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New Law Could Help Save Turtles

Wild turtles need protection; enjoy them by seeing them but leave them be.

By GLENDA C. BOOTH
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

From scratchy ancient petroglyphs to the children's book heroine, Myrtle the turtle, to fictional superheroes Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, turtles have long fascinated people. While intriguing, turtles need protection, not human homes, say wildlife officials.

When some people find quarter-sized turtles and think they are "cute," they take the animal home and soon learn that turtles outgrow their new "home." Others buy turtles in pet shops or at exotic animal shows in states where their sale is legal. All too often, these turtles are abandoned, say area park managers.

In 2020, Fairfax County officers were summoned to capture a 65-pound alligator snapping turtle wandering through yards near Telegraph Road. Its owner probably released it after it became large, J.D. Kleopfer, a state herpetologist told the Washington Post. "It likely outgrew the housing or the owner's life changed and instead of finding it a proper home they just dumped it," Kleopfer said. "They live a long time and have a specific diet and lighting needs. The novelty wears off. People get bored with them or kids stop taking care of them, and then parents go and dump them in the neighborhood ponds." Turtles live a long time.

Then there's poaching. People take turtles from parks and natural areas for fun, pets, the illegal pet trade and food, say local wildlife officials.

Illegal wildlife trade is a \$20 billion a year problem worldwide involving 7,000 species, according to the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR).

"Much of this is the illegal pet trade," says DWR. "The DWR has unfortunately seen a steady increase in the illegal trafficking of reptiles, turtles in particular. This trend is not limited to Virginia but is occurring throughout much of the eastern United States, where the greatest abundance and diversity of turtle species occur in North America."

New Restrictions

Under a new Virginia regulation, it is unlawful to possess more than one native or naturalized reptile or amphibian per address; collect native or naturalized reptiles or amphibians on public lands, including roads and other publicly-owned properties; and possess any rep-



Woodland Box Turtle.



Snapping Turtle at Dyke Marsh.



A baby Snapping Turtle - the size of a quarter - at Dyke Marsh.

tiles or amphibians listed as species of greatest conservation need (<http://bewildvirginia.org/species/>) because they are in decline. These new restrictions apply to many common native reptiles and amphibians such as turtles, garter snakes and bullfrogs.

Virginia has 25 species and subspecies of native turtles, plus some non-native ones, and has 15 turtle species on the state list.

The new rules are needed because poachers exploited the previous regulation for the illegal wildlife trade, state officials contend. One person could possess five of most species of reptiles or amphibians. This allowed, for example, a family of four to have up to 20 box turtles. Now, anyone who keeps a pet box turtle or more than one of the listed reptiles or amphibians could be found guilty of a Class 3 misdemeanor and fined up to \$500.

Fairfax County

In Fairfax County, people take turtles from the wild as pets, for consumption or for the illegal pet trade, according to Katherine Edwards, the county's Wildlife Management Specialist. People leave turtles at the county's animal shelter, some with signs of inadequate care.

In addition to dumping and injuries, area turtle populations are stressed by habitat loss, road mortality, predation, pollution and other factors, Edwards says.

"The most common call for service that the Animal Protection Police receive involving turtles are people calling to report an injured turtle," Edwards reports. From July 1, 2020, to July 1, 2021, they received 109 calls about injured turtles, many of which were hit by car or got tangled in a fishing line. In that year, other calls involved questions about turtles crossing roads and nesting. Officials found one turtle with a hand-painted shell.

Arlington wildlife officers have found turtles chewed by dogs.

"People commonly call when they find a snapping turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*) that is not near water and think it is in danger," says Edwards. In spring and summer, snapping turtles move upland to find a nest location and lay eggs. "Snapping turtles are found crossing roads and can travel a considerable distance away from water," says Edwards.

She highlights the non-native, red-eared slider turtle, one of the most prolific species in the pet trade. They were introduced in Virginia from the Midwest. "Red-



Spotted Turtle.



Eastern painted turtle.

eared sliders have been sold widely in pet stores in many states and most populations originated from pet turtles that were released or escaped. Although they are now considered naturalized in Virginia, red-eared sliders may displace or outcompete native turtle species for food, nesting and basking sites."

Many animal shelters will not accept turtles and most reptile rescues and nature centers cannot take more, local officials agree. Local officials who end up with native turtles coordinate with state officials to place the animals with a permitted rescue group, educator or zoo.

"Turtles are wonderful to see in the wild and that is where they should remain," advises Rachel Tolman, an Arlington County Parks manager. Edwards concurs: "Native turtles belong in the wild and should not be collected or kept as pets. We want people to appreciate turtles and have the opportunity to observe them in their natural habitat, but there is no need to take them home. Doing so may have negative repercussions for local turtle populations."

Turtle Tips

The best thing to do for any turtle is to leave it alone. Turtles

may be searching for a place to lay eggs, a new source of water and other resources.

Turtles instinctively know what direction to go. Do not relocate them.

If a turtle needs to be moved, for example, out of a driveway, be cautious. Snapping turtles can bite. You can grab smaller turtles by the shell around the back legs and tail.

The Fairfax County Animal Shelter is not equipped to humanely house turtles. They refer people to rescue groups and nature centers that provide specialized care.

If You Own a Turtle

If you legally possessed a native or naturalized reptile or amphibian species under the previous regulation, you can keep it as long as you register it with the state. Visit <https://dwr.virginia.gov/wildlife/reptile-and-amphibian-registry/> for details or email VAHerpRegistry@dwr.virginia.gov.

More Information

Turtle Species, <http://www.virginiaherpetologicalsociety.com/>

Turtle Dos and Don'ts, Wildlife Center of Virginia, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-PuEInESLXs>

Reptile Rescue, <https://www.vareptilerescue.org/>

Area Campgrounds Offer a Rustic Oasis Just Outside the Beltway

Various levels of camping varies from roughing it in tents, to RV sites with running water.

By MIKE SALMON
GAZETTE PACKET

At a time when the travel and vacation industry took a hit from the pandemic, the few campgrounds in Northern Virginia stayed busy as people looked around for something to do within the COVID-19 restrictions.

There are several parks in the Fairfax County Park Authority system and Nova Parks where campers can sit around the campfire, telling ghost stories and roasting marshmallows, but still be a few miles from home.

"It was one of the few things you could do," said Nova Parks CEO Paul Gilbert. "It is an amazing alternative," he added.

At FCPA, there are campgrounds at Burke Lake Park and Lake Fairfax, and in Nova Parks, formerly the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, there are cabins, cottages and camping at Bull Run, Pohick Bay and Algonkian Regional Parks in the area.

AT POHICK BAY, Vanessa Ryan was in from California to camp with her family members in a big recreational vehicle-type camper. The camper was hooked up to water and electricity, and the campfire was the central gathering spot. Although campers at Pohick can only stay up to two weeks, their "Welcome to the Nelson's" sign was up.

"It's like saying 'this is us,' in a welcoming way," said Ryan. They were right up the hill from Pohick Bay, and if there were any fisherman amongst the campers, they could just go down the trail and cast their line in. Pohick Bay has catfish, bass, crappie and other game fish.

Ryan's son is a resident of Woodbridge, right across the Occoquan River, but to them, the campsite was a vacation. "Truly a treat for me," said Ryan. She's not alone either. According to the numbers, the popularity of camping is soaring too at Nova Parks. In FY2020, there were 10,910 nights of camping vs 13,800 in FY2021, and a projected 15,000 in FY2022. "That is a huge uptick for one year," Gilbert said.

Pohick Bay Regional Park's family campground features 150 shaded sites -- 100 with electric 50/30-amp hookups and 50 tent sites.



Campers track the states they've visited on a map on the side of the RV.

Pohick has three campgrounds: family campground, youth and non-electric which was for tent campers who are closer to "roughing it."

Burke Lake Campground is open daily beginning Friday, April 9. Last night to camp is Saturday, Oct. 30. Lake Fairfax camping is open March to November.

At Nova Parks, the variety of campsites available at Bull Run Campground are RV sites with electric only service, RV sites with full-service (which includes sewer, water and electric), rustic cabins and group camping areas. All campsites have a charcoal grill, fire ring and picnic table. There are two bathhouses in the campground that offer hot showers, sinks, toilets and laundry facilities. The camp store sells camping supplies, snacks, ice and firewood and is open daily from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Fees range from \$31 a night to \$55 a night.

At FCPS, the busiest season is fall, followed by spring. Summer sees regular RV visitation but the tent usage drops off due to the heat, they said.

Nearly eighty percent of FCPA campers are from the DMV area. The others are from just about anywhere in the country. The close proximity to the nation's capital makes Fairfax County a destination location for both RVs and tourists while they are in town.

Camp Culture and Nomadland

The camping culture may have gotten a boost from the recent movie hit "Nomadland." The plot is about a woman in her sixties em-

barking on a journey through the American West after losing everything in the recent recession, living as a van-dwelling modern-day nomad. Although the limit at Nova Parks campgrounds is two weeks, the folks in Nomadland find ways around stay-limits and other conventional rules. The movie, starring Frances McDormand, won three Oscars.

There is a two-week limit at FCPA too, but in the off season between Labor Day to Memorial Day, campers can stay the maximum of 28 consecutive nights.

One way to get free camping is to work at the campground as a camp host, and in FCPA, there is a three-month contract, and the host "provides services for the benefit of the campground," said Brad Jackson, the assistant park manager at Pohick.

It's a year-round effort with each camp host putting in a 16-20 hour week cleaning cabins, bathrooms, campsites and even manning the check-in counter in the office but then the site fee is waived, Jackson said. In Nomadland, the camp host job was one way they got by, and the other was working for Amazon.

At Lake Fairfax, Campground Hosts serve as a "live-in" host for a four week period, the park website said.

On occasion some campers may become a little loud after quiet hours. Generally the campground host resolves these behavioral situations, park officials said. Fairfax County Police support the campground operation with routine patrols through the Fairfax County parks.



This RV was from California.



A couple of cabins are part of the camping experience at Pohick Bay.



Pohick's assistant manager Brad Jackson.

PHOTOS BY
MIKE SALMON
THE CONNECTION



At Pohick Bay, Vanessa Ryan was in from California to camp with her family members.

NEWS

Senior Olympics Profile Orienteering

Which way is north again?

BY SHIRLEY RUHE

Grab a compass and detailed topographical map and head out over unfamiliar terrain to navigate a set course in the fastest time. Orienteering is a recent addition to the over fifty sports offered at Northern Virginia Senior Olympics (NVSVO) this year, due to begin Sept. 19.

Keg Good from Woodbridge and Sid Sachs, who lives at Greenspring Senior Living, are co-directors of the orienteering event. They have been orienteering for decades and pushed to get it added to the list of NVSVO sports in 2016 in order to get visibility for the sport. Sachs has been orienteering for 48 years. "My wife and I used to go orienteering with our 3-1/2-year-old." Good has been orienteering since 1997 when she was back in college and is a former USA National Team Member for Orienteering and has competed nationally.

Good says orienteering will be back at Lake Accotink in Spring-

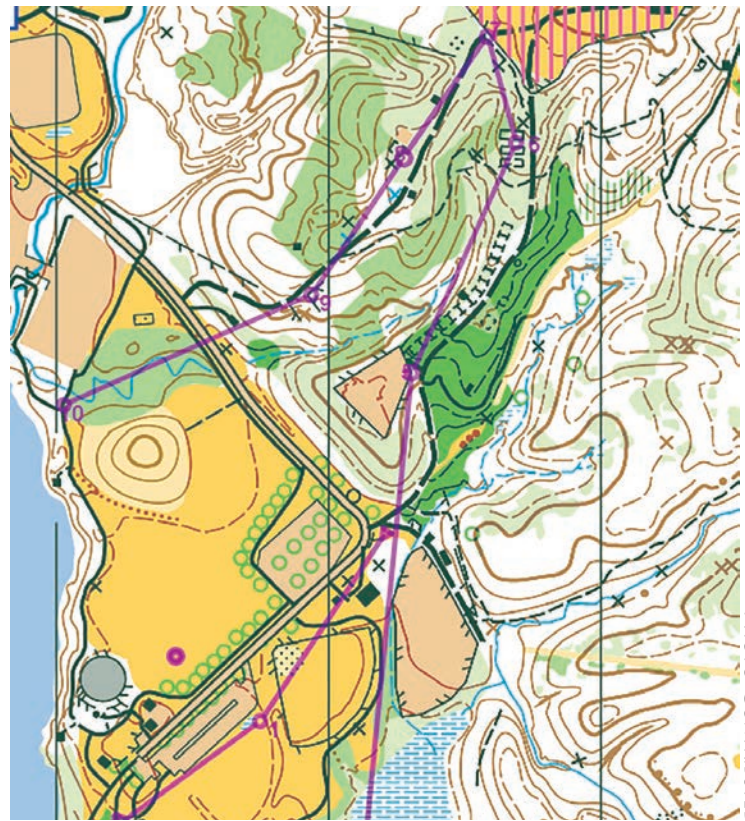


PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Topographical map at Occoquan Regional Park used for beginning orienteering competition in 2018 NVSVO.

field this year. "You don't want to have it at the same place every year because people will have memorized the terrain." This year's event will be held Sept. 19. Meet SEE SENIOR, PAGE 13

Back to School

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ENTERTAINMENT

How Sweet It Is Carlyle restaurants win commercial beautification awards.

BY JEANNE THEISMANN
GAZETTE PACKET

For 18 months, businesses across the city have adjusted to an ever-changing pandemic landscape, and none more so than restaurants. As sidewalks gave way to expanded outdoor dining options, city neighborhoods took on a new vibe and on Aug. 6, the Alexandria Beautification Commission recognized two Carlyle restaurants with a special commercial beautification award.

Sweet Fire Donna's and Tequila and Taco, both of the HomeGrown Restaurant Group, were presented with the top award "for demonstrating business resilience while providing a wonderful customer experience by creatively embracing their outdoor environment during unprecedented times."

"We all owe the city and [Mayor] Justin Wilson for allowing us to build these parklets," said Sweet Fire Donna's owner Donna Anderson. "We appreciate the recognition from the Beautification Commission and our neighbors, who have voiced how the parklets have been a great addition to their neighborhood."

Morgan Babcock of the Carlyle Council provided the funding for the award-winning parklets.

"We could not have done this without Morgan," added the HomeGrown Restaurant Group's "Mango" Mike Anderson, who constructed the parklets.

Nominations were comprised of feedback from the community and Commission members who toured the city looking for candidates who represent the best of beautification by bringing the indoors outdoors in Alexandria during COVID-19.

Wilson and City Councilman Canek Aguirre presented the awards to Anderson and her staff. Honorable mentions went to: Cheesetique in Del Ray; Fontaine Caffe and Creperie in Old Town; Ramparts Tavern and Grill in North Ridge; and Silver Diner in the West End.



Honorable mention: Cheesetique -- Del Ray.



Honorable mention: Silver Diner -- West End.

"We appreciate the recognition from the Beautification Commission and our neighbors, who have voiced how the parklets have been a great addition to their neighborhood."

— Sweet Fire Donna's owner Donna Anderson



Chelsea Anderson and Donna Anderson, center, of the HomeGrown Restaurant Group, receive the commercial beautification award Aug. 6 on behalf of Carlyle restaurants Sweet Fire Donna's and Tequila and Taco from Mayor Justin Wilson, right, and City Councilman Canek Aguirre.



Honorable Mention: Fontaine Caffe and Creperie -- Old Town.



Honorable mention: Ramparts Tavern and Grill -- North Ridge.

CALENDAR

AUG. 6-28

"Together" Art Exhibit. At Del Ray Artisans Gallery in the Colasanto Center, 2704 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria. "Together" is an art exhibit (August 6-28, 2021) of works by Del Ray Artisans' outstanding volunteers and board of directors. Celebrate their dedication and enjoy their artwork. Visit <https://delrayartisans.org/event/together>.

THURSDAY/AUG. 19

Summer Garden Tour and Tea to Go. 1-2 p.m. At Green Spring Gardens, 4603 Green Spring Road, Alexandria. (Adult) Tour the vibrant demonstration gardens with a master gardener docent who will inspire you with dazzling plant combinations and tales of Green Spring past and present. Tour only: \$12/ Optional tea box: \$24. Register online at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/

partakes with program code (code 03T.8AQS) or call Green Spring Gardens at 703-642-5173.

AUG. 20-29

Alexandria Restaurant Week. For 10 days and two weekends, more than 70 restaurants in Alexandria will offer a \$49 in-person and/or to-go dinner for two during Alexandria Restaurant Week.

Nearly 50 of the restaurants will

offer solo diners a \$25 in-person and/or to-go dinner for one in addition to serving the \$49 dinner for two. The online menu book makes it easy

to browse selections from dozens of Alexandria eateries and enjoy special menus in-person or from the comfort of your own home. View the menu flip-book and view participating restaurants at www.AlexandriaRestaurantWeek.com.

SATURDAY/AUG. 21

Summer Safari. 11 a.m.-12 p.m. At Green Spring Gardens, 4603 Green Spring Road, Alexandria. (5-Adult) Salamanders, snakes, toads, turtles... summer is their favorite season and all are out and about. Come on a safari to explore the habitats and activities of these creatures and more! Binoculars and magnifying
SEE CALENDAR, PAGE 7

ENTERTAINMENT



Barca Pier and Wine Bar also offers dock service. Pull up to Robinson Landing to be assisted by the Robinson Landing dockmaster, for an hourly fee.



Lena's Oasis, located on top of the Lena's Wood-Fired Pizza & Tap parking deck.

4 Restaurants With Weather-Resistant Outdoor Dining

BY HOPE NELSON
GAZETTE PACKET

In the Before Times, it was easy to know what to do in the face of extreme weather: Dine indoors. But now, as the delta variant of the covid-19 virus continues to work its way through the country, many diners are still leery of the dining room.

So what's a hungry Alexandrian to do when extreme heat or wet weather take their toll?

Answer: Choose their locations carefully.

Barca, 2 Pioneer Mill Way

It may be broiling-hot in the sun, but the weather on Barca's pier is nice and cool. The Potomac River certainly assists in this climate control, and the gauzy rooftop pitch-

es in too. (Pro tip: Bring sunglasses or a hat regardless – the sun is still quite bright!) So with the temperature adjustments out of the way, you can enjoy the food, starting with an array of tapas (don't miss the papas bravas and its decadent aioli) and perhaps moving on to a sandwich.

The weather is positively crying out for a glass of white wine – to complete your meal, don't deny the call.

Yunnan by Potomac, 814 N. Fairfax St.

Is the drizzly weather getting you down? The tents outside Yunnan by Potomac may not be able to withstand a deluge, but they can certainly handle some light rain. (Your trusty "Appetite" columnist has tested this out herself.) And the mixian specialities at Yunnan by Potomac also fit the rainy mood: With steaming bowls of brothy soup as well

as salads and lettuce wraps, noodles are at the forefront of the proceedings.

Do yourself a favor and order some bao buns and dumplings to accompany the feast and you'll chase those storm clouds right out.

Cafe 44, 44 Canal Center Plaza, Suite 401

With Café 44, you've got weather protection in two different ways: The overhang on the balcony both shades from sun and keeps you dry from rain. Feeling the heat? Cool off with a refreshing cocktail (the Mule 44, a takeoff of the Moscow Mule, is always a winner) and then dive into your meal. The flatbreads are always a hit – go simple with a Quattro Formaggi or more complex with the Garden Truffle – and don't ignore the entrée salads, from the seafood Cobb to the Potomac peach.

Lena's, 401 E. Braddock Road

Since its arrival on scene last year, Lena's Oasis has taken outdoor dining to a new level. The Oasis takes diners to a place far, far away, while never leaving the city limits (or darkening the doorstep of an indoor restaurant). In fact, diners never leave the parking deck, taking up residence on the top floor. But don't worry – this isn't a tailgating experience as much as it is a fine-dining excursion. The space is transformed into a feast for the senses, and the food a feast for the taste buds. You'll spy some of Lena's favorites – the giant meatball, anyone? – alongside an array of pastas, pizzas and salads. It's been a long year. Live it up.

Hope Nelson is the author of "Classic Restaurants of Alexandria" and owns the Kitchen Recessionista blog, located at www.kitchenrecessionista.com. Email her any time at hope@kitchenrecessionista.com.

CALENDAR

FROM PAGE 11

glasses will be provided to aid you in your summer safari. All attendees must be registered for this program. \$8 per person. Register online at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/parktakes (code AQ9.67LK) or call Green Spring Gardens at 703-642-5173.

THURSDAY/AUG. 26

Outdoor NSO Strings. 5:30-6:30 p.m. At The Rectory on Princess Street, 711 Princess Street, Alexandria. Musicians from the National Symphony Orchestra celebrate summer. Last Stand Quartet returns to offer a program of stimulating music for string quartet. Then hilarious duo "The String Thing" leads a Guess the Composer Challenge. Test your knowledge of the great works of classical music – and see



Alexandria Restaurant Week will be held Aug. 20-29 and feature more than 70 restaurants.

if special guest Jeff Weisner can keep his NSO colleagues on their best behavior. Cost is \$42. Visit the website: <https://www.classicalmovements.com/secretgardenconcerts>

[com/secretgardenconcerts](https://www.classicalmovements.com/secretgardenconcerts)

FRIDAY/AUG. 27

Jane Franklin Dance Season Kick-

Off. 7:30 p.m. At The Athenaeum, 201 Prince Street, Alexandria. Engage with art and dance and find synergy that activates and connects you with the community. An August 27 in-person performance at NVFAA at the Athenaeum gets the season underway. Tickets \$20. Visit <https://www.janefranklin.com/kick-off>

SATURDAY/AUG. 28

Crystallized Floral Workshop. 10-11:30 a.m.. At Green Spring Gardens, 4603 Green Spring Road, Alexandria. Flowers aren't just pretty to look at – they can be fun to eat, too. At the "Crystallized Flower Workshop," discover the beautiful Victorian art of crystallizing flowers. Follow simple steps to sugarcoat a variety of edible blooms and petals to use as gorgeous garnishes for desserts and other dishes. Take home your candied creations, along with decorat-

ing ideas and tips. This program for adults runs from 10 to 11:30 a.m., and refreshments will be served. The cost is \$40 per person. Call 703-642-5173; or visit Green Spring Gardens.

SEPT. 3-25

The STIGMA exhibit features art that shines a light on stigma—how it feels, how it can affect and/or disrupt lives, how it can be overcome. Stigma affects many different people in many different ways including those with mental health disorders, HIV, homelessness, disabilities, and more. View at Del Ray Artisans Gallery, 2704 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria VA. Open Thursdays 12-6pm, Fridays 12-9pm, Saturdays & Sundays 12-6pm (Closed September 26). DelRayArtisans.org/exhibits

Senior Olympics

FROM PAGE 10

at McLaren Sargent Shelter at Lake Accotink Park to check in at 11-11:30 a.m.

GOOD ESTIMATES that it could take a beginner “who kind of knows a little” about 20 minutes to finish the course but it is more typically 60 minutes. An advanced competitor could finish in 40 minutes but more typically it would take 60-70 minutes. There will be no intermediate offered this year. NSVO works in conjunction with the Quantico Orienteering Club and this allows them to use the Club’s detailed maps. “Otherwise it would be impossible for us to do it.”

Sachs says, “This is a thinking man’s sport. You have to watch where you are all the time; it’s for people with a visual mind.” He adds, “You can take the whole family. Get your grandchildren away from the cell phone.”

Sachs says he doesn’t compete to win. “I compete against myself. I am 84 and have a bad knee so I’m slower and very careful. But it’s an activity you can do for life.”

Good says across senior Olympics events there are professionals in some jurisdictions that compete at the state and national level and others who are just entering for fun. NVSO is more recreational. She says she sometimes carries around NVSO flyers to give people information about the games because some people think they aren’t good enough to compete. But she says the concept for NVSO is to get out and stay active and do something you love.

Good is also director of the 3K event this year. “It used to be a three-mile walk around a track and took a long time. People walked around and around and lost track of the laps. We got behind the schedule for the other events because of the massive amount of people.”

And the competitors would stroll or run. “They didn’t know how to power walk.” She is hoping that moving the venue to Falls Church High School track and judging by power walk standards will make things smoother.

THE NVSO will be hosting its 39th competition from Sept. 19-30 at venues around the area. To be eligible participants must be 50 years old by Dec. 31, 2021 and live in the counties of Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, Prince William, Fauquier and the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax and Falls Church. To register by Sept. 5: nvso.fusesport.com.

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Hopping and Hoping



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

As I approach my four-week anniversary of “the burning,” I do so with cautious optimism that one day soon, I’ll be walking upright once again and doing so without the assistance of my walker. No more leaning over at the waist to grab the walker’s waist-high grab bars. No more pulling/pushing myself up as I try to gain leverage in order to balance my weight so as not to fall backwards or to the side. And finally, once standing, no more hopping on my right foot as I favor the left; the location where the podiatrist pointed to and said at our last appointment: “You can see where that is ground zero;” meaning, the worst of the burn. And four weeks later, ‘ground zero’ is still ultra sensitive and not bearing too much weight. The emergency room doctor had said the healing will “likely take weeks, not months.” And four-plus weeks into my recovery, I would say her assessment/prediction was spot on. But I’m not there yet. I’m somewhat better than I have been, but I’m still not ready to solo. Although I did drive for the first time yesterday. It was no problem (my driving foot is my right foot so pressing on the pedals was not the least bit painful. However, if there had been a clutch involved, I wouldn’t have been up to driving). Still, success, and a feeling of independence once again.

Fortunately, the clown shoes that the local emergency room provided finally are proving to be useful. The strappy, cushiony, black, open-toe sandals with the thick white soles I’m now wearing all day were designed to give the foot breathing room along with some support. However, in the early weeks following “the burning,” when I placed my foot in the sandal, the insole felt rough as if it were tearing up the bottoms of my feet, exactly where the second degree burns had occurred. Since it seemed like it was hindering my recovery, I rarely wore them and instead put on thick socks (over the bandages lined with medication) and walked around on the heels of my feet while attempting to keep the balls of my feet (where the burns were) elevated and off the floor. It enabled me to mostly get around, but now, being able to wear the sandals, I’m much more ambulatory.

And so it finally feels as if the worm has turned, as they say. The sole on my right foot is exhibiting all the proper signs of new skin having formed and is a few days away, according to my nurse-wife, Dina (who has been bandaging my feet up to three times daily since “the burning”) of returning to its pre-burned status. As such, I am nearly able to put all my weight on my right foot as necessary as I continue to favor the “ground-zero” left foot. However, if I ever inadvertently place my full weight on my left foot, I am transported emotionally back to July 17 when I first stepped on that hot pavement. I don’t exactly see stars, but I certainly feel pain until I lift up that left foot and start to hop on my right. Oh, what a relief that is, as I attempt to retrieve my bearings and find some place to sit, immediately.

That being said, I am most definitely on the mend. Getting on my feet, still with the aid of my walker, doesn’t conjure the same fear and loathing and pain as it once did. Urges to visit the bathroom are no longer delayed as much as possible. Nor are they fraught with anxiety and exasperation concerning the effort required to make the short walk to water the closet, especially in the middle of the night when the house is dark. But today, I can just about see the future (and a return to normal/independence) which may include a visit to close friends who live in Ocean City, Maryland, a k a the beach. And when I do, I’ll certainly be upright and walking normally, but I won’t ever be barefoot, inside or out. I can’t take any chances. As slow as my recovery has been, I don’t suppose its pace has anything to do with my underlying medical condition: thyroid cancer. Nevertheless, I don’t see any benefit to stressing my immune system anymore than is absolutely necessary. It already has more than enough to do attempting to keep the cancer in check.

Kenny Lourie is an Advertising Representative for The Potomac Almanac & The Connection Newspapers.

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As part of the Virginia Foundation for Independent Colleges' Heat Watch project, EcoAction Arlington volunteers (from left) Marissa O'Neill and Aisha Husain joined Executive Director Elenor Hodges, holding sensor devices that measure ground level heat.

Universities Measure Heat Disparities in Virginia

Marymount professor and student join 'Heat Watch' effort to measure heat disparities in Virginia.

By MARILYN CAMPBELL
GAZETTE PACKET

Enduring dangerously high temperatures, Marymount University student Susan Agolini spent a day working as community scientists. The collected data that will help locate northern Virginia's heat islands, urban areas that experience higher temperatures than suburban neighborhoods.

Volunteers from Northern Virginia, including students, faculty and representatives from EcoAction Arlington and the Virginia Department of Forestry, recorded air temperatures and humidity using handheld thermal sensors. Their work was part of the Virginia Foundation for Independent Colleges' (VFIC) Heat Watch project.

“The information that we gather can better inform policymakers and urban planners as they allocate funding for green spaces and invest in urban designs that can minimize the heat islands,” said Susan Agolini, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Biology, Marymount University.

More than 20 students, faculty and volunteers from northern Virginia joined the project as part of their commitment to protecting the environment.

“I participated in ‘Heat Watch’ because I wanted to give back to the community,” said Bader Hakami, a nursing student at Marymount. “I learned how the heat-mapping process is conducted and most importantly how the information might be put to good use for the environment.”

July 2021 was the world's hottest month ever recorded, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Centers for Environmental Information. ‘Heat Watch’ was conducted on July

“Information that we gather can better inform policymakers and urban planners as they allocate funding for green spaces and invest in urban designs that can minimize the heat islands.”

— Susan Agolini, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Biology, Marymount University

15.

Previous VFIC collections have revealed temperature differences as significant as 16 degrees between the coolest and hottest areas. Heat islands are often found in low-income communities, says Agolini.

Poor housing conditions including lack of air conditioning and small living spaces put these communities in danger of heat-related illnesses and deaths.

“Being aware of these heat islands can also help health care providers and advocates know which areas, and therefore populations, are going to be most susceptible to heat-related health issues,” she said.

Angelino estimates that the group will be able to identify heat island within the next eight weeks.

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