Protestors rally against clearing for the entrance and development of Marmota Farm at 9800 Georgetown Pike, which Toll Brothers does by right. Concerns focus on the width of the entrance to the development, tree loss, and preserving the integrity of Georgetown Pike, and the developer is working to address the concerns.

Protest On Georgetown Pike

News, Page 2

Kemal Kurspahic Dies at 74

News, Page 6
The Alzheimer’s Association Walk to End Alzheimer’s® is full of flowers, each carried by someone committed to ending this disease. Because like flowers, our participants don’t stop when something’s in their way. They keep raising funds and awareness for a breakthrough in the fight against Alzheimer’s and all other dementia.

It’s time to add your flower to the fight.

JOIN US AT ALZ.ORG/WALK

Additional Walks available. Find one near you at alz.org/walk

OCTOBER 9   THE NATIONAL MALL
OCTOBER 24   RESTON TOWN CENTER

Saving Historic Georgetown Pike

200-year-old tree and a National Register of Historic Places structure threatened.

Concerned residents and Great Falls Citizens Association members protested Wednesday morning, Sept. 15, at the corner of Innsbruck Road and Georgetown Pike. Standing a short distance west of what will be the entrance to Marmota Farm, a 22.78-acre development for 11 homes under construction by Toll Brothers, protesters held up signs voicing concerns, words visibly lettered on their signs.

The first was “Respect our Heritage.” The area of concern is part of the Georgetown Pike property, running 15 feet in width from the pavement’s edge. To the untrained eye, it appears a natural grassy swale, deep in sections, overgrown with underbrush and treed. Some specimens appear very old; some look scraggily, their pike-facing branches previously pruned to protect overhead power lines.

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The United States Department of the Interior National Park Service lists Georgetown Pike as a registered property on the National Register of Historic Places and the summer road, one of the property’s contributing structures.

By Mercia Hobson
The Connection

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“In a half-hour, hundreds of people have been honking their horns because they agree that this is the right step to save those trees,” Canis said.

The protestors’ third key concern was to stop the ongoing clearing. Protestors could see several trees recently cut to the ground outside the marked limit of disturbance line east of the construction entrance, according to Jennifer Falcone, chair of the Land Use and Zoning Committee of Great Falls Citizens Association; new grading also occurred between the pavement edge and the limit of disturbance line, she said. In addition, the actual construction entrance was larger than the finished roadbed width.

The next day, Thursday, Sept. 16, email between Falcone and Supervisor John Foust and his staff indicated an attempt to redesign the entry and protect the trees. “The latest revised plan for the entry road was received by the county on 8.11.21, per Quy Nguyen. This road entry...removes the tapered entry and protects the trees,” Falcone wrote in the email.

However, by late afternoon, Falcone received notice from the staff at Supervisor Foust’s office, the plan was not approved, and they expected a resubmission “within the next week.”

Foust (Dranesville) responded to the week’s unfolding events. In an email dated Thursday, Sept. 16, Foust said that he was “disappointed that the development at Marmota Farm is not consistent with the important goal of preserving the historic integrity of Georgetown Pike.”

Foust added he and his staff are working with the Great Falls Citizens Association and the developer to reduce some of the project’s adverse impacts.

“We were successful in minimizing the loss of trees along Georgetown Pike and Innsbruck Avenue, reducing the size of the entrance to the project, protecting portions of the historic Georgetown Pike roadbed from construction disturbance, and improving stormwater controls on the site,” he said.

“We are currently working to determine the health of a 100-year old oak tree that fronts Georgetown Pike and to determine whether it can be preserved by relocating planned construction activity.”

From Page 2

Located at the Marmota Farm project site, freshly cut tree stumps remain between the pavement edge of Georgetown Pike and the limit of disturbance line. The area is a “contributing structure” within the property of Georgetown Pike as designated by the National Register of Historic Places [2012].

The entrance width to Marmota Farm is reduced slightly following collaborative discussions.

The Southern Red Oak (Quercus falcata), estimated by an arborist to be over 200 years old, grows within the easement of the historic ‘summer road’ part of the Georgetown Pike property in Great Falls. The tree is deemed healthy and well-anchored but is threatened by a proposed underground pipe installation by Fairfax Water for the Marmota Farm development.

Saving the Integrity of Historic Georgetown Pike

Protestors rally against clearing for the entrance and development of Marmota Farm at 9800 Georgetown Pike, which Toll Brothers does by right. Concerns focus on the width of the entrance to the development, tree loss, and preserving the integrity of Georgetown Pike.
Covid Pain Reaches Far

By Kenneth R. “Ken” Plum

The trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to extend its painful reach. The number of COVID cases in Virginia continues to move towards a million cases, over 35,000 hospitalizations, and over 12,000 deaths. Fairfax County alone has had more than a thousand deaths. There is a glimmer of hope that the vaccination rates of eligible persons now exceeds sixty percent.

Beyond the medical issues and deaths, the pandemic has had a profound impact on our economy, our institutions, and our way of life. A serious additional profound impact has been on the workforce. People lost their jobs and their businesses as the pandemic spread. The Virginia Employment Commission processed 136,000 claims in 2019, but that number surged by ten times to 1.4 million in 2020 with the advent of the pandemic.

Virginia has historically had a low unemployment rate over the years. The impact of COVID was like a tsunami. The relatively small agency increased its staff overtime by 1,600 percent and hired a net of 473 full-time staff between January 2000 and August 2021 in an attempt to respond to the surge of unemployment claims.

At the same time, the Virginia Employment Commission added six additional programs that provided financial relief to those previously ineligible. For those in need of financial support for the first time in their lives, the system was not able to keep up.

The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) which I chair has had its staff of nonpartisan researchers taking a hard look at the Virginia Employment Commission during this turbulent year to determine how to improve the services of the agency to be more responsive to those filing claims. An interim report was made by the JLARC staff earlier this week that laid out in detail the challenges the agency has had and what is being done to improve performance. A copy of the interim report is at http://jlarc.virginia.gov/reports.asp.

The report came as no surprise to legislators. My legislative office as well as the offices of all other legislative offices have been spending nearly full time intervening for constituents who deserved better instructions and faster turn-around on their requests. The federal court intervened to require the state to take care of its case backlog.

Slow progress is being made, but still too many people are waiting for the relief for which they are eligible and which they need because their jobs have been eliminated and no other work was available.

My legislative assistant and staff persons in other legislative offices have been spending nearly full time intervening for constituents who deserved better instructions and faster turn-around on their requests. The federal court intervened to require the state to take care of its case backlog.

It is probably inevitable that this unfortunate circumstance becomes politicized. Finger pointing will not solve it, however. Application of needed resources and a commitment to meet the challenge are essential to address this aspect of COVID-related pain.
On Friday, Sept. 17, Michael Clagett, an ISA arborist and lead arborist at the U.S. Naval Academy submitted a tree assessment for the Southern Red Oak (Quercus falcata), the “old tree” growing within the easement of the historic summer road along Georgetown Pike in Great Falls.

Clagett estimates the tree to be over 200-years-old. The oak tree’s diameter is greater than 50-inches and height between 55 to 65 feet. His inspection of the base indicates no presence of rot, insect damage, or defects in root flair visible. The tree appears well-anchored, and “failure due to lean is considered unlikely.”

“The tree in question is considered a significant asset within the Great Falls area and is a source of historical connection for many residents and people that appreciate the history of the Georgetown Pike and the region more generally,” Clagett said. “It is proper and important to consider the connection to history that these large trees provide.”

One of the concerns to the tree involves a bike path that is to be constructed and a 12-inch drainage pipe installed underground within the zone of the Red Oak’s major structural roots. “The pipe installation should avoid severing major roots, and the bike path should be rerouted to avoid damaging roots,” he said.

On Saturday, Sept. 17, Toll Brothers responded. In an email, Heather Reeves, vice president of public relations and social media at Toll Brothers, said they had been working closely with several Fairfax County officials and community organizations to refine the community’s design. “We have also been responsive in addressing concerns related to the community, including continuing to work cooperatively with the county to save trees throughout the site, as well as preserve the historic nature of the Georgetown Pike roadway.”
Obituary

Kemal Kurspahic, the managing editor of The Connection Newspapers, died unexpectedly Sept. 17 as a result of a stroke he suffered after a minor surgery. He was 74, a resident of McLean.

“We are heartbroken and devastated,” said Connection Newspapers publisher Mary Kimm. “There aren’t words for what having Kemal as our heart and anchor at the Connection has meant to us, or how crushed we are by losing him.”

Kurspahic was the acclaimed editor-in-chief of Oslobodjenje, Sarajevo’s daily newspaper, from 1988-1994. He oversaw the publication of the newspaper during the three-year siege of the city in the 1990s. During that time he survived grievous injuries suffered during a car crash while under intense sniper fire.

“Global journalism lost a hero today,” said NPR correspondent Tom Gjelten upon learning of Kurspahic’s death. “Kemal Kurspahic, the legendary editor-in-chief of Oslobodjenje, Sarajevo’s daily newspaper, died as an exile in northern Virginia after suffering a stroke following minor surgery. I met Kemal in Sarajevo in 1993. He oversaw the publication of his newspaper every single day during the three-year siege of his city by murderous Serb nationalists who were determined to shut the city down. Kemal negotiated with the U.N. for newsprint and with local warlords to get fuel on the black market to keep his presses running. He promised his staff that Oslobodjenje would continue publishing “as long as Sarajevo exists,” and he kept that promise. The paper got smaller and the press run was limited, but Oslobodjenje under his leadership became a symbol for Sarajevo of its own determination to survive. But not just as a symbol of perseverance. It represented as well the city’s commitment to its own multi-ethnic identity. A Muslim married to a Serb, Kemal presided over a multi-ethnic staff, and the newspaper thereby stood for Sarajevo’s remarkable cosmopolitan character. He also insisted that his reporters tell the war story honestly and accurately, even when it meant challenging his own government’s interpretation of events. I was so inspired by the Oslobodjenje story under Kemal’s leadership that I wrote a book about it, seeing its struggle as representing the ideological element of the larger Bosnian war story. After suffering grievous injuries during a car crash under intense sniper fire, Kemal went into exile and wrote his own book, titled appropriately “As Long As Sarajevo Exists.” Remarkably, he ended up in northern Virginia as editor-in-chief of the Connection newspapers, serving a suburban DC population that exemplified the same multi-ethnic character he had defended in Bosnia. His journalistic and human values are an example for journalists everywhere. RIP, Kemal.”

“Global journalism lost a hero today.”
— Tom Gjelten, NPR correspondent

Kemal Kurspahic with his wife Vesna.

“Global Journalism Lost a Hero Today”
Tom Gjelten www.facebook.com/tgjelten

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waged three battles for freedom of press: breaking from the League of Communists control; defending its independence against nationalist parties in power in 1991; and publishing daily from an atomic bomb shelter during the siege of Sarajevo, 1992-1996.

For his efforts, Kurspahic received numerous awards, including the Courage in Journalism Award in 1992 (International Women’s Media Foundation); the International Editor of the Year (World Press Review) and the Bruno Kreisky Award for Human Rights in 1993; the World Press Freedom Hero in 2000 (International Press Institute); and the Dr. Erhard Busek Award for Better Understanding in the Region in 2003 (South Eastern Europe Media Organization).

In 2000, Kurspahic was named one of the 50 Press Freedom Heroes from the last 50 years by the International Press Institute, citing “significant contributions to the maintenance of press freedom and freedom of expression” and “indomitable courage.”

Kurspahic was a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University, a Clark Fellow at Cornell University, and a Senior Fellow at the U.S. Institute of Peace. He held lectures and seminars at universities across the U.S. and advised the highest-level decision makers of U.S. foreign policy, including President Bill Clinton and then-Senator Joe Biden.

In recent years, Kurspahic served as the Managing Editor of The Connection Newspapers in Northern Virginia. Former editor Steven Mauren was a longtime colleague of Kurspahic.

“When publisher Mary Kimm first received Kemal’s resume with his international stature for a position as a community newspaper editor at the Connection, she thought we could benefit just from meeting him, never thinking he would join,” Mauren said. “He did; and our newsroom benefited inestimably from his depth of experience, his collegial leadership, and his always unruffled, reassuring demeanor.”

Kurspahic was the Chairman and Founder of the Media in Democracy Institute, based in the Washington, D.C., area. He was the author of four books: “Prime Time Crime: Balkan Media in War and Peace” (US Institute of Peace Press, 2003); “As Long as Sarajevo Exists” (Pamphleteer’s Press, 1997); “Letters from War” (Ideje, Sarajevo 1992); and “The White House” (Oslobodjenje, Sarajevo, 1984).

As a diplomat he worked for five years (2001-2006) for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, first as the Spokesman in Vienna and then as the Caribbean Regional Representative, responsible for 29 states and territories.

Kurspahic is survived by his high school sweetheart and wife of 52 years Vesna Kurspahic of McLean, their two sons Tarik (Mary Beth), of Lexington, Mass., and Mirza (Kristine), of Centreville, and four grandchildren (Andrew, Brynna, Rory, and Nev).

“Having a leader like Kemal in our newsroom was special magic,” Kimm said. “He was always teaching, sometimes directly, always by example.

He embraced community journalism and helped reinforce how important local reporting is to the community.”
Fairfax Symphony Orchestra Opens New Capital One Hall

Celebrating the return of joyous live music at a Northern Virginia destination like no other:

By David Siegel
The Connection

The Fairfax Symphony Orchestra opens its 64th concert season at the new 1600 seat Capital One Hall in Tysons. The FSO brings the beauty of live, in-person, indoor, orchestral music to patrons for the first time since concerts were cancelled due to the pandemic in early 2020.

Under the baton of FSO music director and conductor Christopher Zimmerman, the concert will include works from Bernstein, Beethoven and Saint-Saëns. Joining the FSO will be Israeli-American cellist Amit Peled performing the Cello Concerto No.1 by Saint-Saëns.

“We’re thrilled to return to the stage in our concert debut at the gorgeous Capital One Hall. We invite all music lovers to join us to experience the joyous music of Bernstein and Beethoven, and the excitement of hearing Amit Peled—one of the most engaging cellists of our time — play Saint-Saëns’ beautiful cello concerto within the architectural splendor and distinctive acoustics of this stunning venue,” said Zimmerman.

“We want our audiences not to be simply entertained, but to be moved, inspired, and energized as we come together to experience great, live music again,” added Zimmerman.

“The FSO is proud to serve as the first Fairfax County arts organization to perform in the beautiful new Capital One Hall. We entertain our audience to Capital One, Arts Fairfax, and our partners at Fairfax County for making this new venue a reality,” said Jonathan Kerr, FSO Executive Director. The FSO’s season will span multiple venues including George Mason University’s Center for the Arts.

True to its long-standing mission, the FSO will deepen its service to Fairfax County schools and teachers across the region through its virtual education programs. “This season, we continue expanding our programs with the launch of our Diversity Fellowship to enhance opportunities for student musicians from backgrounds currently under-represented in professional orchestras today,” added Kerr.

“We are thrilled for the opening of Capital One Hall, a dynamic arts and entertainment destination located just steps from the McLean Metro Station in Tysons,” said Jonathan Griffith, managing director, Capital One Center. “To celebrate our inaugural season, we are delighted to welcome the Fairfax Symphony Orchestra for a magical evening of music and artistry.”

Join the celebration as the FSO performs at the glorious Capital One Hall.

Note: Capital One Hall Health and Safety Mask & Vaccination Policy: All event attendees regardless of age or vaccination status entering Capital One Hall must provide proof of full vaccination, the last dose of which was administered at least 14 days prior to entering Capital One Hall, or a COVID-19 negative test approved by the CDC taken no more than 48 hours before entering Capital One Hall. Proof of vaccination can be your physical vaccine card or a photo of your card. The name on the card must match the name on your photo ID. All attendees, regardless of age or vaccination status, must wear protective masks while inside Capital One Hall except when actively eating or drinking. For details go to www.CapitalOneHall.com

WHERE AND WHEN
FAIRFAX SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA with Christopher Zimmerman conductor and guest artist Amit Peled, presents Bernstein, Saint-Saëns, & Beethoven, at Main Theater, Capital One Hall, 7750 Capital One Tower Rd, Tysons, VA 22102. Saturday, Oct. 9, 2021 at 8 p.m.
Program includes:
Bernstein: 3 Dance Episodes from “On the Town;” Bernstein: “Take Care of this House;” Saint-Saëns: Cello Concerto No.1 with Amit Peled, cello; and Beethoven: Symphony No. 7.
Tickets: $25, $39, $55, $65.
For tickets visit www.fairfaxsymphony.org or call 703-563-1990

COURTESY FAIRFAX SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
FSO will open its season on Oct 9 at the new 1,600 seat Capital One Hall in Tysons, VA, which nears completion

Cellist Amit Peled will join the Fairfax Symphony on Oct. 9 at Capital One Hall

The Harvest Happenings Festival will take place Saturday, Sept. 25, 2021 in McLean.

de to 2 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Harvest Happenings is an indoor-outdoor festival with live entertainment including a petting zoo, a soccer demonstration, an arts and crafts project and games. Patrons can also purchase pumpkins and decorate them at the event. The activities are geared towards children ages 3 to 8 years old. In addition, Magician Michael Chamberlin will perform at the festival to keep both the youngsters and those young at heart enthralled with his sleight of hand. Call the Center at 703-790-0123, TTY: 711, or visit the website, www.mcleancenter.org.

SATURDAY/SEPT. 25
GFUMC Tool Sale. 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. At Great Falls United Methodist Church, 10100 Georgetown Pike, Great Falls. Tools and baked treats sale. Sponsored by the Great Falls United Methodist Men and Women. Funds will be used to help people who are in need. Quality tool donations of value accepted. Call 703-759-3705.

SATURDAY/SEPT. 25
Reston Multicultural Festival. 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. At Lake Anne Plaza, 1609-A Washington Plaza, Reston. The Festival will open with a Land Blessing Ceremony and Round Dance performance featuring Rose Powlahan of the Pohwahan Museum of Indigenous Arts and Culture. The World Stage, Global Stage and the Gallery Stage will feature free, all-day entertainment schedules, showcasing traditions and cultures from Vietnam, China, India, the Caribbean and many more. Festival performances will include two National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellows, Reverend Paschall & Company and the Chuck Brown Band. Reverend Paschall & Company, a longtime Norfolk-based ensemble, keep alive the tradition of a cappella Tidewater gospel. The group will perform on the World Stage at 2 p.m. The Chuck Brown Band will play the Global Stage at 12:30 p.m. Visit www.restoncommunitycenter.com/mcf

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**Come Celebrate**

Live, in-person show-time returns to Center for the Arts.

By David Siegel

The Connection

“**W**e are eagerly anticipating the return of live performances to the Center for the Arts,” said Rick Davis, Dean of the George Mason University College of Visual and Performing Arts. “Our signature kickoff event, known for 15 years as ARTS by George! has been reimagined this year in response to the pandemic. We’re calling it ‘Arts Emerging’ as a way of celebrating resilience and recovery, and the role the arts have played and continue to play in our communities.”

“Arts Emerging” will be a festive, energetic, outdoor/indoor, family-friendly showcase of artistry, and a perfect way to turn the corner into a new season,” added Davis. The event is on Sept. 25, 2021.

The 2021-22 season includes some artists and events that the Center for the Arts was able to reschedule after pandemic cancellations last year, including "Cartography," an innovative and timely work about five young refugees who have set out searching for a new place to call home. It is an extraordinary multidisciplinary creation and includes an artist residency component led by co-creator Kaneza Schaal in which the artists will spend time interacting with various Fairfax communities both on and off the Mason campus.

"Cartography" creates an interactive onstage virtual storm that rises up in response to the actors’ voices, and uses cell phones to depict memories. It features live sculpture creation to represent their journeys. And the audience has an active part to play.

The performance will be on Saturday, Oct. 2, 2021.

With the pandemic, “We’ve counted our breaths. We are also in a crisis of global proportions; many people are newly understanding their connection to other parts of the world, their direct connection to the breaths of others. Theater has always lived at this intersection – a small immediate community sharing big questions about the world,” said Schaal.

And this is what “Cartography” is about, how we can gather in the theater together to remember all the journeys, recent and generations passed, that brought us here.”

Mason’s Center for the Arts has a long history of presenting outstanding artistic experiences for the Northern Virginia community. The CFA opened to the public in October 1990 and has grown as Northern Virginia’s go-to performance venue. The CFA’s 2021-2022 season of “Great Performances at Mason” is no exception, presenting an incredible range of diverse artists and events.

**Where and When**

"ARTS EMERGING" AND "CARTOGRAPHY"

presented by George Mason University Center for the Arts, 4400 University Drive, Fairfax, VA. 22030.

*“Arts Emerging,” Saturday, Sept. 25, 2021, 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. Tickets: $10 per person. Proceeds support student scholarships in Mason’s College of Visual Performing Arts, Mason Community Arts Academy, Green Machine Ensembles, and the Great Performances at Mason season at the Center for the Arts. Sponsorship opportunities also available.

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sept. 25</td>
<td>&quot;Arts Emerging,&quot; Saturday, 5 p.m. to 9 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 2</td>
<td>&quot;Cartography&quot; on Saturday, Oct. 2, 2021, 7 p.m.</td>
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For information and tickets go to: www.gmu.cfa.edu or call 703-993-2787.

Note: Health and safety requirements.

Everyone, even those who are fully vaccinated, must wear a face covering when inside university property (buildings and vehicles). Seating will be at full capacity for indoor performances except for Family Series events. Outside fresh air supply has been increased by 50% and ventilation systems are running continuously to increase the exchange of air. Details at www.cfa.gmu.edu/plan-your-visit/what-expect
SATURDAY/SEPT. 25
Showcase of Bands. 10:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. At Herndon High School Stadium, 700 Bennett Street, Herndon. Pricing - 13 years and over $10; 6-12 years $5; 5 years and younger free. Free entry to kids wearing a Herndon Pyramid school shirt with a paying adult. Come and attend this event filled with marching band performances. Over 25 high schools are planning to participate in this marching band competition.

SUNDAY/SEPT. 26
<cal2>Bichon Bash. 11 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. At Bull Run Regional Park, 7700 Bull Run Drive, Shelter 1, Centreville. Bichon Bash is a family and dog friendly charity event open to everyone. It will have a Parade of Rescued Pups, dog or bichon mixes may come and run leash free with their owners in a safely fenced area and families are welcome to picnic. Cost: $20 adult, $5 Child. Bichons Free. Visit the website: www.bichonrescue.org/bichonbash.

SUNDAY/SEPT. 26
Virginia Run Classic Car Show. 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. At the Virginia Run Community Center Lower Parking Lot, 15355 Wetherburn Court, Centreville. The Virginia Run Community will host its first Classic Car Show showcasing its homeowners’ unique cars and motorcycles. A food truck on site will provide lunch options for purchase.

SUNDAY/SEPT. 26
Concert on the Green. 6-8 p.m. At the Village Centre Green, behind the Old Brogue, Great Falls. Featuring Wes Tucker and The Skillets; sponsored by Oliver’s Corner Butcher Shop.

VIENNA OKTOBERFEST CELEBRATES 13TH ANNIVERSARY Saturday, Oct. 1, 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. Tens of thousands flock to Vienna Oktoberfest for music, shopping, food, fun and beer. Choice food, vendors, music & entertainment, plenty of kids’ activities, locally-sourced beer and wine selections.

The festival has historically drawn 20,000-30,000 attendees and increases each year. Proceeds from Oktoberfest benefit the VBA Foundation, which supports charitable organizations in the Greater Vienna area.

Presented by the Vienna Business Association and Town of Vienna, on historic Church Street. All ages are welcome, and admission is free.

Live entertainment on three stages: Main Stage, Kid’s Stage, Acoustic Stage
Beer/Wine/German Food Garden featuring the Caboose Brewing Company
Beer and Multinational Food offerings located on Mill Street
Free kids activities, games and entertainment on the Town Green
Business Expo Showcase
Vendor Marketplace

RCC OFFERING ESPORTS
Reston Community Center is excited to offer participation in an esports league this fall. Teamming with GGLeagues, a new national program for recreation departments, will give gamers of all ages access to affordable, socially distanced competition.

For FREE Medicare Supplement information from Physicians Life Insurance Company, call: 1-833-657-1636 or visit MedSupBenefit.com/vapress
By engaging in mentally stimulating activities you are helping your brain, irrespective of what those activities may be.

— Catherine Diaz-Asper, Ph.D., Marymount University

“Remaining mentally engaged is essential. Think of the brain as a muscle and activate it daily.”

— Tracey Smith-Bryant, Montgomery College

Consistent brain fitness connected to improved memory, reasoning and processing.

By Marilyn Campbell

The Connection

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every Sunday evening after church, 78-year-old Roger Knight has dinner with his two children and five grandchildren at his home in Alexandria. He plays chess with his 16-year-old grandson and does crossword puzzles with his 8-year-old granddaughter.

“Playing games is a way of having fun with my grandchildren,” he said. “They keep me feeling young, especially when I beat them.”

In the same way that exercise is credited with maintaining physical health, mental exercise has been linked to slowing down cognitive decline that can come with age.

“Memory, reasoning and processing ... are three cognitive domains which do decline with age,” said Catherine Di-

az-Asper, Ph.D., Department of Psychology at Marymount University, who studies mild cognitive decline and Alzhei-

mer’s disease. “However, I think the message here should be that by engaging in mentally stimulating activities you are helping your brain, irrespective of what those activities may be.”

Programs like ElderLink, a nonprofit partnership between Inova Health System and the Fairfax Area Agency on Aging Programs, can provide resources for seniors who are looking for mentally challenging activities. “We recognize that brain exer-

cises reduce the risk of cognitive decline,” said Tri-

na Mayhan-Webb, director of the Fairfax County De-

partment of Family Services’ Adult and Aging Divi-

sions. “We provide evidenced-based, structured, fun activities to enhance cognitive memory skills.”

“Research demonstrates that there are sev-

eral steps aging adults may take to maintain and support brain functioning,” said Tracey Smith-Bryant, Professor of Psychology at Montgomery College. “Remaining mentally engaged is essential. Think of the brain as a muscle and activate it daily.” She recom-

mends apps like Lumosity and Elevate, and activities like chess, sudoku or working cross-

word puzzles. AARP offers a brain health pro-

gram called Stay-

ing Sharp, but cautions against believing that en-

gaging in mentally challenging games is a mag-

ic formula for eliminating cognitive decline.

“Games can be fun and engaging, but they are not the answer to prevent dementia the way many people think due to advertise-

ements they have seen for brain games,” said Sarah Lenz Lock, AARP senior vice presi-

dent of policy, and Global Council on Brain Health executive director.

“People who use their brain like a mus-

cle, exercising it by thinking, learning new things and challenging themselves seem to build up [their] cognitive reserve as they age so they might be more resistant to adult cogni-

tive diseases,” Lock said. Engaging in activi-

ties that stimulate your brain could delay onset of the symptoms of de-

cline that some people experience as they age, said Lock. “Scientists de-

scribe that as cognitive resilience,” she said. “If you truly want to slow cognitive decline, choos-

ing a healthy lifestyle with habits like regular exercise and physical activity, a heart healthy diet, regular sleep, so-

cial interaction, and effectively managing stress combined with engaging your brain is rec-

ommended.”

There are a variety of games that target specific areas of concern such as memory or processing. “Certain games help you practice specific areas of concern such as memory or processing,” said Lock. “By engaging in those activities you to work on a particular skill enough, and ... what you do to play it becomes pro-

gressively more difficult, you will likely get better at those skills over time. That is even true for skills that generally seem to get harder as we age, like recalling names or the ability to pay attention.”

“While the science is still develop-

ing on this is-

sue, there is some evidence that high quality cognitive training can help you main-

tain your abilities because of the practice effects, and because that training becomes progressively more difficult so that you con-

inue to learn new things,” said Lock.

“My recommendation would be to seek out varied activities that interest you and really make you think,” added Diaz-Asper. “You don’t need to invest in expensive apps or computer training programs to see benefits.”
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