

The Arlington Connection

Let It Snow

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Josh Hennessy-Davis and his mother sledding the hill in front of their house in Arlington. They recently moved from Australia where they'd never seen snow like this.

WELLBEING

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Overdose Crisis

NEWS, PAGE 4

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PHOTO BY SHIRLEY RUHE/THE CONNECTION

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NEWS

Grocery Tax Change Proposed

Alternative revenue source not identified.

BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION

Since the dumping of chests of tea in Boston Harbor by American colonists in 1773, American citizens have shown a distaste for taxes on food. The topic of eliminating Virginia's grocery tax was raised again during this year's gubernatorial race by then candidate, now Governor-elect, Glen Youngkin. This is not the first time elimination or reduction of the grocery tax has been proposed, by both Democratic and Republican politicians.

Today the grocery tax remains a major source of funding for education, transportation, and localities, according to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, a total of \$341 million in revenue that could be lost if the tax were abolished.

Gov. Ralph Northam (D) has proposed elimination of the 1.5 percent state portion of the tax; however the one percent portion going to localities would remain under his budget proposal. The budget proposed by the outgoing governor is under a two year cycle that must be reviewed and agreed upon by the General Assembly and enacted by the incoming governor.

Virginia now enjoys an unprecedented \$2.6 billion surplus following record economic growth and federal subsidy under the American Rescue plan. The Northam budget adds \$1.1 billion in the Revenue Stabilization fund, raising reserves to \$3.8 Billion.

With the new Youngkin administration's lofty goals to "restore excellence in education ... rebuilding schools,

raising teacher pay, and investing in special education," Youngkin has not said what funds would be put toward those goals if the grocery tax source is eliminated.

Originally enacted in 1966, the University of Virginia attributes adoption of the two percent state-wide retail sales and use tax and one percent local option sales tax, to a "public mood change to a desire for significant progress in public services and specifically to public education." The primary purpose of the tax was for upgrading public education. The first year's revenue of \$109.6 million had grown to \$349.8 million five years later in 1972. Interest in public education remains high as evidenced in the recent Youngkin-McAuliffe race.

The grocery tax became a campaign issue in the 1973 campaign between incumbent Governor Mills E Godwin Jr., who had enacted the tax, and Democratic challenger Henry Howell, who was then the Lieutenant Governor. Godwin narrowly won election to his second term. Democratic Gov. Douglas Wilder (1990-1994) also ran on the populist message of "no new taxes" and sought to remove taxes on prescription drugs and groceries.

Such taxes are considered "regressive" meaning they have a greater impact on low income people than the wealthy. Because the tax is applied uniformly it has the effect of taking a greater percentage of income from low income earners than from high income earners; the average tax burden decreases with income.

Although 45 states have general sales taxes, only 13, including Virginia, still tax groceries; Virginia is one of ten that impose a lower rate on groceries than their general sales tax rate, according to the Center On Budget and Policy Priorities (April 2020).

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NEWS

PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUHE/THE CONNECTION



Four and a half year old Josh Hennessy-Davis is building his first snowman with his mother while his father shovels snow off the car nearby. The family has just moved to Arlington in December from Australia. "Out of the street mate," Josh's mother yells as he scampers all around the yard.

Josh Hennessy-Davis and his mother try out sledding the hill in front of their house in Arlington where they had recently moved from Australia where they'd never seen snow like this

Let it Snow, Let it Snow

BY SHIRLEY RUHE
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

Holiday vacations were set to end on Monday, Jan. 3 with the 2022 school year ready to begin. Then Sunday night at 8 p.m. Arlington Parks and Recreation sent out a notice that due to impending weather conditions most parks and recreation programs would be canceled. Children started looking for their sleds while parents went to gas up the car and find their snow boots.

Then Monday at 5:13 a.m. the update indicated all County buildings would be closed with all indoor parks and recreation facilities and in-person activities and programs canceled.

In addition, Arlington County Public Schools announced Sunday night that all county schools would be closed as well as libraries and county-run COVID-19 vaccination and testing sites. Trash collections and recycling scheduled for Monday were pushed back one day. The only good news is that parking meters will not be enforced on Monday.

National Airport reported a storm total accumulation of 6.9 inches of snow.

Arlington County Government shifted to virtual operations on Tuesday, Jan. 4, 2022. In-person facilities and programming were canceled. Schools were closed for the second day. Arlington County Courthouse was closed and in-person and virtual court hearings were canceled.

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Where's Waldo? This dark-eyed junco is camouflaged sitting on a bird feeder in the middle of Monday's snowstorm.

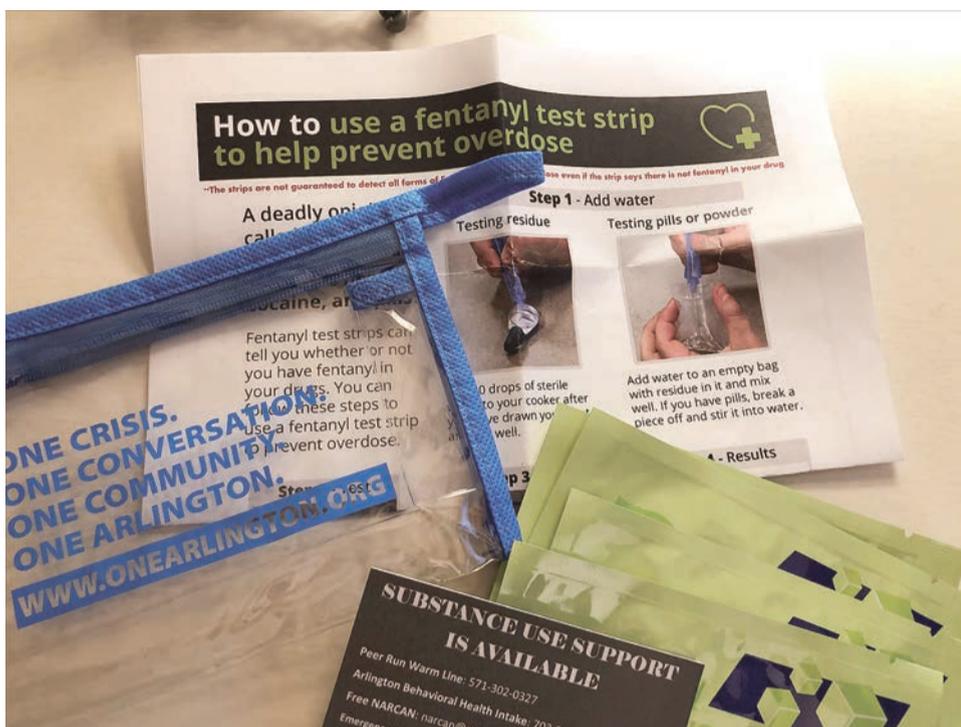
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Hamburger anyone? Saturday's balmy 65-degree temperature plunged to 29 degrees overnight on Sunday.



Snow brings down power lines along Glebe Road but the good news is that power is still on for this house despite neighboring reports of outages.



Information provided to residents who may be about to use drugs potentially fatal if contaminated by Fentanyl.



Test Strip packet to identify Fentanyl contamination in drugs.

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED

Arlington Hands Out Fentanyl Test Strips To Save Lives

Program helps keep fatal Fentanyl overdoses at bay.

BY EDEN BROWN
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

Two Splash Girls were treading water in the Yorktown High pool; Ruth Neikirk, 81, shouted over to another swimmer about Arlington’s program of handing out Fentanyl test strips so opioid users could avoid a fatal overdose. “Someone needs to let people know about this program,” Neikirk said. “It’s important to save the lives of these people.”

“Good,” said Emily Siqveland, opioids program manager, Arlington County Department of Human Services, “because normalizing these conversations about addiction, making sure these conversations do take place at the pool and over the dinner table, is important. Addiction is affecting all of us. It’s a disease, like cancer, or hepatitis, and we need to talk about it, not sweep it under the rug.”

Arlington’s Department of Human Services started the program on Aug. 12. “We had been thinking about this on and off for some time and decided the time was right,” said Siqveland. Reports were coming out of CDC saying the majority of overdose deaths were Fentanyl related. So we ordered 100 test strips as a pilot program. By Aug. 20 we were out of strips.”

Siqveland and her team got the word out. “We put out a press release on test strips; we put out information on social media, and we pretty much made it clear, however we can get strips to you, we will get them to you.”

“As of Aug. 31, we started handing them out at the county jail. Even if someone was incarcerated for a short time, even just the weekend, if they were identified as using

opioids, we gave them test strips. We even put up a sign in the magistrate’s office. All of our staff in Behavioral Health were aware of the program and if their clients were using, we handed out strips.” Siqveland has now handed out over 748 test strip packets since August.

“We make a real effort to keep people safe if they are using drugs. We offer NARCAN when we offer test strips, and we tell people not to use alone, and to make sure they have someone with them, and have Narcan out on the counter where it can be seen.”

What result is Siqveland seeing?

“We don’t necessarily know if it’s fentanyl strip related, but since we started dispensing the test strips, from Aug. 16 thru Dec. 20 there have been five fatal overdoses; prior to that, from January 2021 to Aug. 12 there were 21 fatal overdoses.”

“We get anecdotal evidence that Narcan is being used, but we try not to be too inquisitive because that creates a barrier. Police data tells us there have been 64 applications of Narcan this calendar year.”

People are dying in Arlington because they buy an opioid pill from a buddy who bought it from a friend, they may not know it’s counterfeit or contaminated.

“But if it’s purchased from anyone but a pharmacy,” says Siqveland, “it could be laced or contaminated with fentanyl.”

You only need a tiny bit to overdose. Cocaine and other drugs can also be contaminated.

“Anecdotally, we have had someone tell us she bought four bags of cocaine. She used our test strips and two of the bags came back positive for fentanyl,” said Siqveland. “She threw out the two bags that were contaminated. And that also proves the point that people who are suffering from addiction don’t have a death wish. They are suffering from a disease. They want to be alive. This young woman could have died from an overdose if she hadn’t tested first.”

The response in Arlington to the test strip

program has been very positive. “Arlington is a community which understands this is an addiction: these aren’t bad people, they are sick people. We emphasize the hope of recovery. You can’t recover if you aren’t alive.”

Money for the program comes from the Virginia Opioid Response Grant and a CareFirst grant.

Siqveland feels strongly about what she does. “I have wanted to be a therapist since I was a kid: peer support was my first training in middle school. This particular role in terms of helping people with opioid addiction is great, because while I still have clients I provide therapy to, I can help people on a macro level too.”

Siqveland is guided by her sense that these are people who are hurting a lot and who are misunderstood by society. They are lonely. Helping people who are hurting is why she is engaged in her career as a therapist in the first place.

“Our behavioral healthcare counselors remind addicts, ‘I was once an addict, and I made it through to recovery. There is a better life waiting for you when you get past this.’ Helping them survive to the point where they can recover is key.

For more information: see:
www.facebook.com/onearlington

This is a public group open to anyone in the community.

Frequently Asked Questions Fentanyl Test Strip Program

What are fentanyl test strips?

Fentanyl test strips let active users test for the presence of fentanyl and fentanyl analogs in their drugs, which can reduce harm from using dangerous substances.

How effective are fentanyl test strips?

Initial findings from a recent study conducted by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and Rhode Island Hospital/Brown University with support from the Bloomberg American Health Initiative indicates that this kind of drug checking presents an important opportunity for a public health approach to the fentanyl overdose crisis. A survey conducted during the study found that 84% of respondents were concerned that the drugs they use contain fentanyl, and only about 1:4 stated a preference for drugs laced with fentanyl. Drug checking was viewed as an important means of overdose prevention, with 89% agreeing that it would make them feel better about protecting themselves from overdose. Importantly, 70 % of respondents reported that knowing that their drugs contained fentanyl would lead them to modify their behavior by not using the drugs at all, using the drugs more slowly, using the drugs with others who have Naloxone (i.e. Narcan) or changing their purchasing behaviors.

How is fentanyl affecting the national and local landscapes?

In 2015, more people in the U.S. died from drug overdoses than from firearm homicides, melanoma, auto accidents or HIV-related causes--and those numbers have only climbed since. The recent, national increase in overdoses has been traced to fentanyl and other incredibly strong synthetic opioids that are increasingly mixed into heroin and other street drugs, making them even more deadly. Over the past three years, fentanyl-related deaths are up 540% nationally.

Wouldn’t this program just promote continued drug use?

No. This program is one of many harm-reduction tools we can offer our community members to decrease the risk of fatal overdoses in Arlington. It is the cornerstone of

SEE ARLINGTON HANDS OUT. PAGE 7

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FLOURISHING AFTER 55

Contact: Judy Massabny, jmassa@arlingtonva.us

55+ Programs are virtual, indoors at 55+ Centers and outdoors. A 55+ Membership is required to participate (\$20 annual fee). To join or register, go to registration.arlingtonva.us or call 703-228-4747.

Hearing aids, beware and be wise, Monday, Jan. 10, 10:30 a.m., Aurora Hills 55+ Center. Presented by Bonnie O'Leary, Northern Virginia Resource Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. In-depth discussion and demonstration. Registration # 912500-13.

Dealing with others' dementia changes, presented by reps from George

Washington Institute for Brain Health and Dementia, Monday, Jan. 10, 6 p.m., Lubber Run 55+ Center. Registration # 912500-16.

Estate planning 101 with attorney Alison Lambeth, Monday, Jan. 10, 1 p.m., Arlington Mill 55+ Center. Learn about wills, revocable living trusts, advance medical directives, power of attorney and probate. Registration # 912404-01.

Wake up early to join art activities with community arts programmer Jennifer Droblyen, Monday, Jan. 10, 9 a.m. Registration # 912303-02.

Morning meetup, friendly conversation
SEE FLOURISHING, PAGE 7

Visit www.janefranklin.com or call 703-933-1111.

JAN. 15-30
"A Midsummer Night's Dream." At Thomas Jefferson Community Theater, Arlington. Presented by The Arlington Players. Adapted by Erin Branigan and Katie Rey Bogdan. A Midsummer Night's Dream takes you into the Athenian woods, full of magic and fairies, to celebrate the wedding of Duke Theseus of Athens and the Amazon queen, Hippolyta. However, a feud between the king and queen of the fairies has caused the natural world to become unbalanced. Visit www.thearlingtonplayers.org.

CALENDAR

JAN. 4 TO FEB. 22

Jane Franklin Dance Presents Forty+ Project. 12:30-1:30 p.m. At 3700 S Four Mile Run Drive, Arlington. Forty+ is starting a new project with choreographer Andie deVaulx. Designed for movers who enjoy participating with others, the upcoming Forty+ Project is a rewarding experience. The weekly sessions help dancers to hone physical skills and dance technique while engaging in the creative process. This project culminates with performances at Arlington's Theatre on the Run, February 26 at 7:30 pm and February 27 at 5 pm. The project is open to people of all physical facilities. No previous performance experience is necessary.

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WELLBEING

Making Decisions During COVID

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
 THE CONNECTION

“Should I allow my 12-year-old daughter to go the movies with a group of friends, two of whom haven’t been vaccinated?” “Should I let my son play in games with the basketball team when players on both teams haven’t been vaccinated?”

These are the types of questions that Potomac parents Elaine and Brett Madden ask themselves almost daily. In the age of the coronavirus pandemic and omicron variant, the Maddens, like many others, face making decisions that have the potential to cause a major chain of events. This cycle often leads to stress that impacts one’s overall health and wellbeing.

“It’s like living with a low grade anxiety that is subtle, but builds up if we’re not in tune with our body,” said Elaine Madden, a licensed therapist who specializes in stress management. “Almost 99% of the clients I’m seeing are dealing with anxiety around making decisions that are related to COVID. If they make the wrong decision, will they catch the disease or spread it to others? Will their job be affected by COVID? Should they begin looking for a new job? With the spike in new cases, there’s been a new wave of uncertainty.”

Madden points to a recent study by the American Psychological Association, which showed that daily tasks and decision-making have become more difficult during the pandemic, particularly for parents.

“I’ve been telling my patients to take a step back, breathe and really think through the ramifications of each decision and write them down,” she said. “This can work for decisions that range from small things like what to pack in your kids’ lunches, to larger ones like whether to plan a vacation.”

For larger decisions, like a career or job change, Madden suggests enlisting the help of a few trusted advisors who can offer objective guidance.

“You need someone who has experience dealing with your issues, but won’t be impacted by them,” she said. “For example, a college student who is deciding whether or not to study abroad might get

SEE MAKING, PAGE 7

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GENERAC

Arlington Hands Out Fentanyl Test Strips To Save Lives

FROM PAGE 4

the therapeutic approach of “meeting a person where they are.”

It is important to 1) note that this tool would be used as part of a larger overdose prevention campaign with strong messaging around overdose prevention education and treatment resources and 2) underscore that the strips cannot prevent overdoses or make drugs safe for use. This program would allow those using drugs to gain more information about their substances in order to make informed decisions around using.

Are other jurisdictions utilizing Fentanyl Test Strip Programs?

Yes. Cities around the country have implemented Fentanyl Test Strip Programs. Nationally, there are large programs in Columbus, Ohio; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and several large districts across California, South Carolina and Washington State.

FLOURISHING AFTER 55

FROM PAGE 5

tion, BYOC (bring your own coffee, Monday, Jan. 10, 10 a.m., Lubber Run 55+ Center. Drop in.

Registration open to join the acclaimed Encore Chorale, Tuesday, Jan. 11, 1:45 p.m., Lubber Run 55+ Center. 15 weeks of classes, no audition required. Fee, \$160 and \$25 for materials. Registration # 912301-05 or call 301-261-5747.

Rock music legends, rock and roll pioneers, Tuesday, Jan. 11, 1:30 p.m. Registration # 912400-33.

Intro to line dance, basic steps Wednesday, Jan. 12, 10 a.m., Aurora Hills 55+ Center. Drop in.

Making Decisions During COVID

FROM PAGE 6

the opinion of an older adult who has actually spent a semester abroad rather than, or in addition to, a parent who would be paying for that semester. If you’re deciding to change jobs, someone with a financial stake in your decision should not be the only person offering an opinion. But just know that these opinions are just advice. The final decision should be made jointly with those closest to you.”

Some decisions are minor, but can feel monumental. “Many of us are on decision overload, so we start shutting down, and things like deciding what to wear or what to eat can feel paralyzing,” said Great Falls psychologist Rachel Cohen. “Try planning ahead during a time when you’re feeling relaxed. For example, my husband and I gather our kids on Saturday and we decide on a menu for the week for breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks. We create a chart and pre-make as much of those meals as we can. The same goes for our clothes for the week.”

“Know your limits and boundaries and have a backup plan,” said Alexandria-based therapist Lee Tripp, MSW. “If going into the office is mandatory for you, but your child

Locally, the City of Alexandria has launched a program with assistance from the Chris Atwood Foundation and Fairfax County and Loudoun County are preparing to launch programs.

There are thriving programs in both Baltimore and the District of Columbia. Many of these programs are a hybrid initiative between the local health departments and local governing agencies.

Are there any legal implications for this program?

According to the Commonwealth’s Attorney’s Office, the short answer is no for adults over the age of 18. Arlington County’s distribution program serves only persons ages 18 and older.

Participants also should be aware that a prosecutor from another jurisdiction might interpret the law differently, including for adults over the age of 18.

History roundtable topic, the impact of art on history, Wednesday, Jan. 12, 11:15 a.m. Registration # 912402-08.

Movie group to discuss, “Don’t Look Up” (2021), Thursday, Jan. 13, 3 p.m. Registration # 912402-05.

Black women and the civil rights movement, Thursday, Jan. 13, 1:30 p.m., presented by a representative from the National Women’s History Museum. Registration # 912400-01.

About Clara Barton, founder of the Red Cross, Saturday, Jan. 15, 10 a.m. Illustrated talk by a Park Ranger from the Clara Barton National Historic Site. Registration # 912400-05.

has to quarantine and miss school unexpectedly, what is your childcare plan? At what point will you decide to have your child tested for COVID? When you hear snuffles? When they have a persistent cough? Having these guidelines in place can cut down on the number of last minute decisions.”

“Try not to get stuck on over-analyzing,” added Cohen. “At the end of the day, we just need to make a decision, take a chance and stop procrastinating.”

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No Car and No Computer



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Due to circumstances beyond my control, for two days after the deer accident, I had no car and as it happened, no computer either. The no-car situation you regular readers know about from the previous edition’s column: “Oh Deer.” The no-computer element just occurred as machines, technology, almost anything I guess, eventually succumbs to old age/extended use. As a result of this dual inconvenience, I can’t get anywhere, literally, and figuratively. Moreover, with these two losses, temporary though they may be, I’ve sort of lost my way. To invoke author Robert A. Heinlein: I’m a “stranger in a strange land.”

Though I now have a courtesy rental care, I don’t yet have a computer. It’s being delivered later in the week by Amazon. It won’t be an expense as it is being paid for my part-time employer. When the computer arrives, my brother’s IT guy will come over and set it up. That means I won’t have that problem to solve. As for the car, in five days or so, I was told, I’ll learn whether my car can be repaired or if it will be declared a total loss. Soon thereafter I imagine, if the car is “totaled,” I’ll be receiving a settlement check from the insurance company. Then the fun will begin.

If in fact, I receive a settlement check, since the car I was driving was a model year 2000 Honda Accord, unfortunately the amount will be nowhere near what I’ll need to purchase a new car. The net effect will be an increase in my monthly car payment from zero dollars to likely multiple hundreds. Money, I don’t really have and are not eager to spend. However, the new computer can’t arrive quickly enough. And given the evolution in technology since I last bought a computer, 10 years ago at least, I can well imagine the improvement/benefit in my life it will provide. As for the improvement/benefits in my life a new car will provide? Not really important to me if it costs money, which it will. I am not looking to add another car with bells and whistles since I already have a new-ish car with all the bells and whistles already. I was not looking to whistle any more bells however. What I/we need is only one car payment. Which, for the past 13 years, since my mother passed away in 2008, and I inherited her car, I’ve had. And I’ve enjoyed every minute of it. Now, I’m afraid, the party is over.

Now this is where not having a working computer at home becomes a problem. I can’t research a potential solution. Consequently, I’m stuck in a kind of limbo between the car I used to own and the car I’m about to own. Right now, I’m driving a rental car, a temporary solution. What I need is a permanent solution. Sure, I receive a daily newspaper and I do have a car to drive, but I’m not going to drive randomly around and/or trust the classified ads to direct me to a proper solution. What I need is a version of Indeed.

The conclusion: I need a computer before I need the car. In fact, it’s very likely that if I’m told the Honda is totaled, having a new computer will provide me with the tools and information necessary to perhaps make an intelligent and acceptable decision. Acceptable meaning a moderate impact to our finances. For me, it’s not so much about creature comforts as it is about this creature’s comfort.

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



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