

# The Arlington Connection

Cinderella gets transformed in her ball gown for the prince's ball in this not-so-classic tale, Encore Stage and Studio's performance of Commedia Cinderella.



## Not-So-Classic Cinderella

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ONLINE AT [WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM](http://WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM)

# Reconsidering Marijuana

Pot is still legal, but the plan to regulate its sale is in jeopardy.

By MICHAEL LEE POPE  
THE CONNECTION

Virginia is now in a marijuana daze. Pot is legal in small amounts, but nobody has a license to sell it. That has created a gray area for lawmakers, who will be considering next steps during the General Assembly session that starts this week.

When Democrats were in power, they created a complicated licensing system that was designed to benefit people who had been harmed by the so-called “war on drugs,” which disproportionately harmed people of color. Those social equity licenses may be in jeopardy now that Republicans are taking control of the House. Republicans are also talking about new criminal misdemeanor charges for possession and forcing local governments to hold referendums for voters to decide if they want to allow marijuana licenses in their jurisdiction.

“This is a common consequence in legislatures when majority control flips from one party to another,” said Jennifer Victor, associate professor of political science at George Mason University’s Schar School Policy and Government. “When partisans don’t agree and they wind up trading off control, it makes it almost impossible to get policy accomplishments done.”

The problem with abruptly halting the policy debate is that policy changes are already in motion. Last summer, public possession of up to one ounce of marijuana became legal for adults. The Cannabis Control Authority has already been stood up, and the wheels of government are already in motion preparing to regulate the new market. So far, lawmakers are not talking about re-criminalizing marijuana for less than an ounce.

“The question in 2022 is not should Virginia legalize cannabis,” said Jenn Michelle Pedini, executive director of Virginia NORML. “That was asked and answered in 2021, and is a policy favored by a supermajority of Virginia voters.”

But some are concerned about a gap in the law between a civil penalty and a felony with no criminal misdemeanor in between. Under current law, if someone is caught with amounts between one ounce and one pound, they can be charged with a civil penalty of \$25. But possession of more than a pound is



As of July 1, possession of less than an ounce of marijuana is legal in Virginia.

a felony, creating no middle ground between the civil penalty and the felony. That’s why some lawmakers are considering a plan that would create a new criminal misdemeanor

**“The question in 2022 is not should Virginia legalize cannabis. That was asked and answered in 2021, and is a policy favored by a supermajority of Virginia voters.”**

— Jenn Michelle Pedini,  
executive director of Virginia NORML

for amounts between 4 ounces and a pound.

“Whether or not it has to be one that carries a criminal record I haven’t made a final conclusion,” said Sen. Adam Ebbin (D-30), adding that perhaps increasing the dollar amount of the civil penalty might be a way to address this concern. “I think the idea of discouraging larger amounts is worthwhile, and we have to decide the best way to do that.”

**WHEN DEMOCRATS** were in power, they created a system of social equity licenses designed to counteract some of the damage done by the failed war on drugs. For exam-

ple, people who have been convicted of possession of marijuana might end up receiving preferential treatment for licenses. Family members of people who have been convicted of possession could also get priority. Residents of neighborhoods that have been disproportionately policed may also end up getting preferential treatment.

“I never realized the way to get ahead in life was to break the law,” cracked Del. Glenn Davis (R-84) in a tweet about the social equity licenses last year.

Democrats were able to secure a victory for the social equity licenses in the House and Senate, but lingering concerns over the complexities of standing up the new Cannabis Control Authority led to a “reenactment clause.” That means that none of the rules around social equity licenses passed by Democrats will be enacted unless the new Republican majority decides to put their stamp of approval on it. Considering the opposition among Republicans to this part of the plan, a reenactment of social equity clauses seems unlikely.

“You cannot provide preferential treatment lifting up one class or group of citizens without diminishing the rights of another,” said Sen. Bill DeSteph (R-8).

**ANOTHER POTENTIAL** change Republicans



Sen. Adam Ebbin (D)

would have to hold a referendum in which a majority of voters would have to agree to prohibit marijuana sales in their community. Some Republicans say that’s backwards.

“It will be legal in jurisdictions for a period of time before a referendum could even be held by the locality to determine whether they want to opt out,” said Sen. Ryan McDougle (R-4).

“I have some concerns about whether a jurisdiction can take away that right without it being a taking once it’s vested and someone has established a shop.”

Now Republicans are now talking about flipping that and forcing jurisdictions to opt in instead of opt out. If local government leaders wanted licenses for marijuana sales to be issued in their community, they would have to hold a referendum in which a majority of voters would have to approve licenses for marijuana sales.

“At a minimum, we must ensure that localities will get to decide through a local referendum whether they want marijuana retail shops in their communities,” said Family Foundation President Victoria Cobb. “Pushing back against the deep-pocketed marijuana industry will be a tall order, but we’ll do everything we can on behalf of families.”

**THE INTERSECTION OF** drug laws and labor laws will also be part of the conversation in Richmond this year. One of the features Democrats built into the law was a protection for workers in the newly created marijuana industry. The law Democrats passed ensured workers in the new industry would have the right to collective bargaining. But along with everything else in the bill, that provision is subject to the reenactment clause that now would require Republicans to agree

“I’m a realistic person, and I don’t know that there would be support in the House of Delegates for that,” said Ebbin. “So we’ll have to work together to come up with something that we can all live with.”

## BULLETIN BOARD

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

### FRIDAY/JAN. 21

Keystone Species of Native Plants. 10-11:30 a.m. Online. Certain groups of native plants referred to as “keystone plants” have been found to be especially supportive of wildlife. In this program Extension Master

Gardeners Elaine Mills and Kathie Clements describe selected species of trees, shrubs, vines, and perennials native to the Mid-Atlantic region which offer food and shelter for pollinators and birds and provide sustenance to the full lifecycle of our local butterflies and moths. Free. RSVP at <https://mgnv.org/events/> to receive link to participate.

### WEDNESDAY/JAN. 26

Introduction to OverDrive/Libby ebooks, eAudiobooks, and

eMagazines. 1-2:30 p.m. At Arlington Central Library, 1015 N. Quincy Street, Arlington. Learn how to find, access, and download OverDrive eBooks, eAudiobooks, and digital magazines including using the Libby app. Registration required at <https://arlingtonva.libcal.com/event/8580276>

### FRIDAY/JAN. 28

Grass to Garden: Creating a New Garden Space. 10-11:30 a.m. Online. Many of us would like to

create more gardening spaces and reduce our lawns, but we dread the back-breaking hard work involved. Good news! The days of digging deep and flipping or cutting turf are over. In this class, Extension Master Gardener Becky Halbe will describe methods she has used on her property and elsewhere to spare her back and quickly and more easily go from grass to a garden filled with flowers, native plants, or vegetables. Becky is also a Virginia Master Naturalist and

currently serves on the Board for the Arlington Friends of Urban Agriculture. She grows fruits, vegetables, and native plants and is adept at foraging the local urban wilds. Free. RSVP at <https://mgnv.org/events/> to receive a link to participate.

### FRIDAY/FEB. 4

Seeds: Selecting and Starting. 10-11:30 a.m. Online. Jumpstart SEE BULLETIN, PAGE 6

## Columbia Pike Construction Update – Jan 18, 2022

### Utility Undergrounding

After dealing with material delays due to supply chain and shipping, Verizon is changing their method of service delivery from copper to fiber. Fiber is a service upgrade for customers and has enabled Verizon to begin removal of their overhead lines. Dominion Energy crews have completed removal of their overhead lines, with exception of one property. Comcast's contractor has completed removal of their overhead wires. When all three companies have removed their overhead wires, the utility poles along the roadway will be removed.

❖ One eastbound and/or westbound right lane on Columbia Pike may be closed between the County line and the Four Mile Run Bridge during work hours to facilitate utility relocations and other miscellaneous work.

## Columbia Pike and S Jefferson Street

### Sculpture Foundation Construction

Work on the sculpture foundation for The Pike by artist Donald Lipski, has been completed at the intersection of Columbia Pike and South Jefferson Street. Crews may be on site for the next week as they complete punch list items and clean up the site.

Final installation of the sculpture is anticipated in the spring of 2022, following a complete cure of the concrete foundation.

## Arlington Chamber Accelerator Program

The Arlington Chamber of Commerce will launch the Small Business Accelerator Program presented by Amazon. Amazon will sponsor half of the membership dues to verified Small, Women and Minority-owned (SWaM) businesses located in Virginia joining the Chamber for their first year of membership.

New Chamber members receive all of the benefits of membership including networking and business development opportunities, the ability to join any drop-in committee, listing in the Chamber's online business directory, access to educational programming, community engagement opportunities, and will benefit from Chamber advocacy.

"Arlington and the Chamber are at our best when our membership reflects the full diversity of all who work, live, and do business in Arlington," said Kate Bates, President & CEO of the Arlington Chamber. "Amazon's support provides an opportunity for the Chamber to make a tangible, targeted effort to ensure that there is a seat at the table for everyone in our local business community."

"We are committed to helping small businesses thrive and grow in Northern Virginia, and we look forward to expanding access to the Chamber's many benefits to small businesses that represent the diversity of this region," said Patrick Phillippi, Senior Manager of Community Engagement at Amazon.

For prospective members that qualify for the Small Business Accelerator Program, Amazon will pay half of their membership dues for their first year, and they will be responsible for payment of the other half. Members who join through this program will be responsible for the full cost of renewing the membership in subsequent years.

Prospective members that qualify for this rate can contact Senior Director of Membership, Mike Rosenow, at membership@arlington-chamber.org or (703) 525-2400 ext. 202 with any questions. Limited funds are available on a first-come-first-serve basis.

## 2000 and 2001 South Bell Street

JBG SMITH started construction on a pair of multifamily towers at 2000 and 2001 South Bell Street. The planned mixed-use development is expected to bring 775 rental apartments and nearly 27,000 square feet of retail to the heart of National Landing.

Two architecture firms were retained to create two distinct towers using varied heights, colors, materials, designs and finishes to

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## NEWS



FILE PHOTO BY SHIRLEY RUHE

Campers at Encore Stage and Studio Spring Break Camp in Arlington wear masks in 2021.

# Mask Mandate—Yes or No?

BY SHIRLEY RUHE  
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

Just minutes after his inauguration as Governor of Virginia, Governor Glenn Youngkin signed Executive Order #2 empowering parents in their children's education and up-bringing by allowing K-12 parents to make decisions on whether the child wears a mask in school to be effective Jan. 24.

The explanation accompanying this executive order states, "Recent government orders requiring virtually every child in Virginia wear masks virtually every moment they are in school have proven ineffective and impractical. They have also failed to keep up with rapidly changing scientific information." In addition, it states that masks provide little or no health benefit because many children wear masks incorrectly.

The issue of mask wearing has been strongly debated as COVID cases rise, schools adjust their schedules, hospitals strain with the patient load and staff shortages, and arguments abound on the mental health impact on children of wearing masks.

Sunday evening Arlington Public School Superintendent Dr. Francisco Durán released a statement headlined "No Change to Current APS Requirements — Masks Required Inside on School Grounds and on Buses."

"This is part of our layered approach to safety. Universal mask use has proven effective in keeping COVID-19 transmission rates low in our schools and ensuring schools remain safe and open," Durán's statement continued.

APS implemented the mask mandate this school year even before Gov. Ralph Northam's K-12 mask mandate. In addition, the federal requirement from Feb. 2, 2021 is still in place requiring anyone riding public transportation, including a school bus, to wear a mask to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The Superintendent's update of Jan. 5 was a reminder that APS is committed to keeping schools open for in-person instruction in accordance with guidance



Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin (R)

from the Virginia Departments of Education and Health, the CDC and the Arlington County Public Health. It explained the layered mitigation which includes plenty of well-fitting masks, washing hands, completing the Qualtrics screener daily and outdoor lunch when possible.

Governor has overstepped his authority with this executive order. Both local school boards and the general assembly have authorities that the Governor has ignored." She says that while the Arlington School Board could vote to override the Superintendent's plan on mask mandates in schools that "personally I believe it would be tremendously irresponsible for us to do so."

**"This is part of our layered approach to safety. Universal mask use has proven effective in keeping COVID-19 transmission rates low in our schools and ensuring schools remain safe and open."**

— Arlington Public School Superintendent Dr. Francisco Durán

Arlington School Board Chair Barbara Kanninen, says, "It is my understanding that the

Kanninen adds that the board has supported the superintendent's operational planning throughout the pandemic because "we know he is the best informed and best prepared to make the decisions that will keep our students safe."

Meanwhile parents strongly debate the issue of mandatory masks.

Dan Roche reacts to Governor Youngkin's order: "The purpose of Youngkin's executive orders banning school masks mandate and CRT is not to be followed. He knows school boards hold jurisdiction here." He continues, "The purpose is to embolden parents and kids to pick fights by defying the mandates and challenging curricula. It's culture war saber rattling, which makes it all the more disappointing."

Emily Babcock agrees. "I'm furious about Youngkin's careless, anti-science executive order regarding masking in schools. It's a matter of community public health, not a freedom of choice. Mr Youngkin's children attend a school with a strict masking and vaccine

SEE MASK MANDATE, PAGE 7

## A New Day in Richmond and Many Challenges

BY SEN. SCOTT SUROVELL

As the Virginia General Assembly begins its 2022 session, my 13th, I look forward to working with Gov. Glenn Youngkin, the new House of Delegates leadership and other legislators to reach a consensus on the best direction for our state.

While I did not support them, I attended Governor Youngkin's inauguration and swearing in, along with the swearing in of Lieutenant Governor Winsome Sears and Attorney General Jason Miyares.

### Budgets Reflect Priorities

No matter what happens with other bills, one thing we are required to accomplish this session is to pass a budget. Thanks to federal pandemic funds, Virginia has significant excess revenues in our two-year budget cycle that ends on June 30, 2022. A little over half of those revenues will be appropriated to the "Rainy Day Fund" and to mandatory water quality improvement.

In the last session, we also reserved about \$1.5 billion of \$4.5 billion from the American Rescue

Plan Act in case we had a pandemic resurgence. We are limited to spending these funds on five categories of expenditures including water and sewer infrastructure and maintenance of outdoor assets. I am proposing to spend some of these

funds to (1) eliminate our state parks' \$225 million maintenance backlog, (2) install a public water line at Pohick Bay Regional Park to replace well service and water and sewer infrastructure, and (3) to construct permanent, outdoor restrooms at all Fairfax County public high schools.

The new two-year budget also projects significant new revenues. The Governor is proposing a series of ill-advised tax cuts. First, he proposes to cut our current two percent grocery tax that is dedicated solely to education and would cost Fairfax County Public Schools about \$80 million per year. The Governor also reiterated his call to suspend the \$0.08 per gallon gas tax increase enacted in 2021. His proposal would save the average Virginia driver about \$4 a month,



Surovell

but interrupt dozens of transportation projects currently planned.

### My Bills

I am carrying around 27 bills. One creates a joint study to review the state's response to the COVID-19 pandemic across all levels of government so we can learn from our mistakes and improve our system going forward. I am also carrying legislation to study multi-family housing regulation to ensure that Virginia's inspection systems and condo association policies are sufficiently strong to avoid the types of collapse we saw in Florida or partial collapse that occurred at River Towers near Belleview in Fairfax County in 2016.

The Biden Administration recently signed an agreement at the Edinburgh, Scotland, global summit to reduce methane emissions in the U.S. by 75 percent. Methane is 85 times more potent than carbon dioxide in trapping energy. I have a bill to incentivize Virginia's natural gas companies to capture loose methane from landfills or waste composting operations and

sell it to consumers to remove it from the atmosphere and curtail these greenhouse gasses that are warming the planet.

Cycling and pedestrian deaths have been increasing across the country, Virginia and our local community. At one point in 2020, three pedestrians were killed in Fairfax County one day. One major cause of these problems is that the infrastructure in our part of Northern Virginia was designed for vehicles and not pedestrians. While the legislature has provided significant new funding for transportation infrastructure, the focus has traditionally largely been for vehicle projects, with pedestrian or cycling improvements considered secondarily. I have introduced a bill to require a fixed percentage of funds to be devoted to pedestrian and cycling infrastructure going forward.

Virginia's Supreme Court significantly revised state legislative districts including the district I currently represent. I will discuss this in a future column.

If you have any feedback, please contact me at [scott@scottsuovell.org](mailto:scott@scottsuovell.org) and follow my work on Facebook and Twitter. It is an honor to serve as your state senator.

## Measuring Performance by Deeds Not Words

BY SEN. ADAM EBBIN

The Virginia General Assembly gavelled into session on Wednesday, Jan. 12 with a new House majority, and Saturday saw a political change in all three statewide offices: Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and Attorney General. The Executive branch in Virginia holds vast authority over the structure and direction of our government — including the appointment of cabinet secretaries and deputy secretaries, all agency heads, and 3,300 board and commission members, strong veto powers, and the ability to choose how to enforce and enact many of our laws and regulations. The weight of gubernatorial power is hefty in Virginia, and vested with a Constitutionally mandated single four-year-term, must be mastered and wielded quickly if an Administration is to successfully accomplish the promises made on the campaign trail.

A newcomer to Virginia government and politics, Glenn Youngkin began that process on Saturday, Jan. 14 at the Capitol in Richmond when he was inaugurated as our 74th Governor. The weather on Saturday was a frigid 30 degrees and was followed on Sunday with

an icy winter storm. Whether that signals a slippery start for Governor Youngkin is yet to be seen, but, as for any new governor, the learning curve is steep and the stakes high for their upcoming term. I will work hard to find areas where we find common interests, and think we will be able to agree on many things, particularly on much needed increases to school funding, systemic improvements at the Virginia Employment Commission, and support for our veteran community.

I was heartened by the unifying and optimistic themes Governor Youngkin outlined in his inaugural speech. However, I will be measuring Youngkin's performance by deeds, not words.

Just hours after his inclusive address, the Governor signed eleven divisive executive orders including attempts to ban the teaching of critical race theory in K-12 schools, banning local authority to mandate the wearing of facemasks for students' health in schools, and withdrawing Virginia from the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, which caps carbon outputs and provides much needed flooding resiliency funding to our community. These actions are in direct violation to our Commonwealth's

laws and the principle of separation of powers, and a sharp about face from the lofty rhetoric of his swearing in.

In fact, Article VIII of the Virginia Constitution vests the power to set curricula with the Board of Education, so the banning of critical race theory, a topic that has never been taught in our K-12 schools, is both unconstitutional and unproductive to improving public education. Under Virginia law local school boards must adhere to CDC guidance, which recommends the wearing of masks in schools to protect those not yet vaccinated. The Executive does not rule by fiat in Virginia.

Where necessary, I plan to provide a wake up call for proposals dangerous to our common safety, prosperity, and welfare. On climate change, any proposals to divert public education dollars from public schools, and attacks on reproductive rights, however, the Democratic Senate majority will serve as a firewall against the forces of short sighted partisan policies.

Challenges are coming — for sure — especially with a new House majority and new Speaker at the dais. Todd Gilbert (R-Shenandoah) took the gavel on Wednesday with a slim (52-48) majority. With

differing parties controlling each house of the legislature, the number of bills passed and signed may winnow from the close to 2,000 we passed in 2020 down to the hundreds. The reconciliation of the proposed two-year budget will be more contentious and prolonged than it has been in recent years, when one party held power over the "Money Committees" in each body. But among the strife and bustle of session, I look forward to continuing representing the 30th Senate District's interests in committees and on the floor.

Already I have heard from hundreds of constituents who are vehemently opposed to the cabinet nomination of former President Trump's EPA director Andrew Wheeler as the next Secretary of Natural Resources. A former coal lobbyist, Wheeler used his federal authority to undermine years of bipartisan environmental progress. In his first year as the EPA Administrator, Wheeler worked to restrict the use of scientific data in agency rule-making, rolled back federal efforts to clean up coal ash, reversed Clean Water Act protections, ignored EPA scientists' calls to ban asbestos, weakened a rule to cut the potent greenhouse gas

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## FLOURISHING AFTER 55

Contact: Judy Massabny, [jmassa@arlingtonva.us](mailto: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](http://registration.arlingtonva.us) or call 703-228-4747.

Line dance class, easy for beginners, no partner needed, Thursday, Jan. 20, 1 p.m., Arlington Mill 55+ Center, drop in; Friday, Jan. 21, 10:30 a.m., Aurora Hills 55+ Center, drop in.

Movies and critics, interactive, watch the movie, discussion follows, "The Assistant" (2019), Thursday, Jan. 20, 1 p.m., Arlington Mill 55+ Center. Registration # 912804-02.

Library of Virginia's genealogy series continues with legislative petitions, Thursday, Jan. 20, 3 p.m. Registration # 912400-12.

Long Bridge over the Potomac, presented by Patrick O'Neill, historian, Burke Historical Society, Thursday, Jan. 20, 1:30 p.m. Registration # 912400-23.

Woodcarvers group shares carving techniques, Thursday, Jan. 20, 1 p.m., Madison Community Center, Drop in; newcomers welcome.

Tai Chi practice, Taoist style, led by experienced practitioner, Friday, Jan. 21, 12:30 p.m., Lubber Run 55+ Center. Drop in.

Avoid gift card and cryptocurrency scams, presented by Tiffany Smedley, Federal Trade Commission, Friday, Jan. 21, 1:30 p.m. Registration # 912400-20.

Nature in Arlington, animals and ecology, presented by a naturalist from Long Branch Nature Center, Friday, Jan. 21, 11 a.m., Lubber Run 55+ Center. Registration # 912400-26.

Acoustic hour, live music by Ed Girovasi and Phil Rosen, Friday, Jan. 21, 1 p.m. Aurora Hills 55+ Center. Registration # 912301-03.

Just Play'n Country, bring an instrument, sing along or just listen, Friday, Jan. 21, 1 p.m., Madison Community Center. Drop in.

Fast Forwards, fast paced walking club, two to four mile loop, some hills, Friday, Jan. 21, 9 a.m., meet at Aurora Hills 55+ Center. Drop in.

Winter gardening presented by Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners, Monday, Jan. 24, 1 p.m. Registration # 912401-04.

Short story reading and discussion of "Bullet in the Brain" by Tobias Wolff, Monday, Jan. 24, 1 p.m. Registration # 912300-09.

Art Walks from Monet to Georgia O'Keefe with art historian Joan Hart, Monday, Jan. 24, 1 p.m., 4 sessions, \$24. Registration # 912300-06.

Recreating art masterpieces, two part program, Mondays, Jan. 24 and Jan. 31, 1 p.m., Lubber Run 55+ Center. Registration # 912303-10.

Step by step painting demonstration, Monday, Jan. 24, 10:30 a.m. Registration # 912300-06.

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Cinderella gets transformed in her ball gown for the prince's ball.



The band of troubadours on their way to the village performance in Encore Stage and Studio's performance of Commedia Cinderella.

PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUHE/THE CONNECTION

# The Show Must Go On

BY SHIRLEY RUHE  
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

**C** OVID cases escalated. Snow closed the schools. The scheduled opening of Encore Stage and Studio's performance of Commedia Cinderella was postponed until Jan. 14 and 15 at Gunston Arts Center. But it opened amid Saturday's cold and Sunday's projected snowstorm.

This version of Cinderella is based on the Italian tradition of commedia dell'arte or exaggerated

characters. It was traditionally performed by a band of troubadours who traveled from town to town giving impromptu outdoor performances. The play opens with the band of troubadours building a fire at their camping spot and practicing their dramatic abilities and boasting about their acting skills with endless squabbles.

A goatherd helps the troubadours get the needed permit to perform in the village by bargaining for a role in the play. The role gets negotiated to the "hear ye, hear ye" announcing the arrival

of the troubadours to the village. The plot then transforms into a play within a slapstick play as the lonely prince announces to the kingdom that he will hold a grand ball to choose his princess.

The not so classic Cinderella tale unfolds as Xander Tilock trades his PUNCHINELLO character for a garish wicked stepmother dress and Cinderella's stepsisters are wicked indeed.

Cinderella gets a visit from a sparkly pink fairy godmother who has brought her skills out of retirement. A pumpkin coach, built

onstage for Cinderella, carries her to the ball where the prince dances with her all night, she loses her shoe at the stroke of midnight, and you know all the rest.

**ENCORE HAS ADAPTED** to the ups and downs of COVID by shutting down for a while, holding performances outside and gradually working back to indoor performances with vaccinated actors and masked performances and all appropriate protocol for the audience. The theater attracts actors from all over the area, ranging

from Swanson, Longfellow, Gunston, Dorothy Hamm and Williamsburg middle schools, to Langley and Meridian high schools. A number of the cast and crew have participated either as actor or crew in a number of performances from Sofia Coquis with Cinderella as her first production to Xander in his 22nd production.

Encore Stage and Studio engages kids on both sides of the curtain, inspiring young people to learn, grow and succeed.

<https://www.encorestageva.org/tickets/now-playing/>

## BULLETIN BOARD

**FROM PAGE 2**  
your vegetable garden! Get the scoop on seed selection – hybrid vs. heirloom, which seeds to start indoors and what's required to get them growing. Extension Master Gardeners Jasmin DeCoursey and Pam Newton will explain how to make your own starter pots, create simple lighting systems, and practice winter sowing by starting seeds outdoors in milk-jug greenhouses. Germination is complex, but seed starting is reassuringly simple! Free. RSVP at <https://mgnv.org/events/> to receive a link to participate.

### JOIN THE 26TH COMMUNITY POLICE ACADEMY

The Arlington County Police Department is now accepting applications for the 26th Community Police Academy (CPA),

formerly the Citizen's Police Academy. The CPA is an educational program designed to create better understanding and communication between police and the community they serve. The intent of the CPA is to make participants aware of how the Arlington County Police Department operates and its role in the community.

Through an immersive, multi-week experience, participants will gain knowledge and understanding of how police officers are trained, their daily work environment, and the wide scope of work they perform in service to the Arlington community. The program includes lectures, panel discussions, question and answer sessions, and hands-on experiences, including a special session at the Northern Virginia Criminal Justice Training Academy. Some of the topics covered in the CPA curriculum include recruitment, legal considerations, use of force, mental health,

interventions, homeless outreach, community and youth outreach, criminal investigations, the K9 unit, tactical operations, and patrol operations.

The CPA is an eight-week program beginning on Thursday, March 3. Classes are presented by Departmental leadership, sworn and civilian staff from across the agency and government partners. Participants will engage in thought-provoking discussions, including those about current events and best practices in law enforcement, and can ask questions of presenters throughout the program.

Classes will take place on Thursdays from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. at the Arlington County Trades Center (2700 S. Taylor Street). One session will take place on a Saturday at an off-site location, outside of Arlington County. To receive a graduation certificate, participants must attend at least six out of eight sessions. Participants will

be required to wear a mask and social distancing protocols will be in place. Should local public health mandates change, the program may shift to a virtual format, however, every effort will be made to safely hold sessions in-person.

Interested applicants must be at least 18 years old and should live, work, attend school, or be otherwise affiliated or engaged with Arlington community organizations. Due to the nature of the material covered in the CPA, a background check will be completed on each applicant. Class size is limited, and every effort will be made to maintain a balanced enrollment reflective of Arlington's diverse community. Online applications are due no later than Friday, February 14, 2022 at 5:00 p.m.

For more information about the CPA, contact Sergeant J. Senn of the Department's Community Outreach Unit at [ACPDSouthOutreach@arlingtonva.us](mailto:ACPDSouthOutreach@arlingtonva.us).

### ARLINGTON PARKS ACCREDITED

Arlington County joins the ranks of elite park and recreation agencies across the country by earning accreditation through the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) and the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). CAPRA accreditation is the only national accreditation for park and recreation agencies, and is a measure of an agency's overall quality of operation, management and service to the community. This mark of distinction indicates that an agency has met rigorous standards related to the management and administration of lands, facilities, resources, programs, safety and services. As part of the accreditation process Arlington Parks & Recreation had to demonstrate compliance  
SEE BULLETIN, PAGE 10

# Measuring Performance By Deeds Not Words

FROM PAGE 4

methane, and blocked efforts to cut vehicle emissions and advance fuel efficiency. He is an untenable choice to oversee our shrinking natural resources — which I have been glad to work to safeguard throughout my career. In my 18 years in the Assembly I have never voted against a Governor's cabinet pick — Democratic or Republican.

Unfortunately, I expect that streak to end this session.

The outset of a new session is always an exciting and uncertain time. The beginning of a new administration even more so. Even before the official start of session on Jan. 12, things seemed to be moving at a breakneck pace. Monday the 10th saw the final meeting of the Cannabis Oversight Commission, which I chair. During that meeting, we recommended expediting sales to Jan. 1,

2023 through the existing medical cannabis providers and several industrial hemp manufacturers to ensure we can supply the market and begin to reduce unregulated, illicit sales, and received a report from the Department of Corrections on persons still incarcerated for multiple offenses which include cannabis felonies. Afterwards, I attended a meeting of the Senate Finance and Appropriations subcommittee on Health and Human Resources where we discussed critically needed funding for a number of healthcare services which we will address through the budget this year.

The next day I had another flurry of meetings with public defenders from Justice Forward, a group of brewery owners, and the Virginia Credit Unions before several hours of meetings with my Senate colleagues and staff to finalize the legislation I plan to introduce this year.

If you have thoughts on legislation which will be before me over the next two months, please email my office at [district30@senate.virginia.gov](mailto:district30@senate.virginia.gov). Due to the spike in cases caused by the Omicron variant of COVID-19, I am attempting to take as many meetings as feasible virtually, which I hope will protect all of our safety and increase the ability for constituents to access my office without trekking down I-95 to Richmond.

Please join local colleagues and me at an upcoming Virtual Town Meeting Saturday, Jan. 22, at 1 p.m. for the Mount Vernon and Lee Delegation <https://bit.ly/MtVernonLeeTownHall>

Delegates Elizabeth Bennett Parker and Alfonso Lopez for an Alexandria and Arlington Town Hall on Saturday, Jan. 29 at 10 a.m.

# Mask Mandate—Yes or No?

FROM PAGE 3

mandate, so this feels especially egregious."

Melanie Preisser, parent of a Yorktown High School student says, "I don't mind the mask mandate. What I want is for the kids to be able to stay in school."

Reade Bush, on the other hand, has two children with mask exemptions. His daughter has a speech disorder and is difficult to understand without a mask. "With a mask I can't understand much of anything she says. When she can't

communicate, it makes her isolated at school."

Bush says his son has autism but had made great success in school before COVID. Then last year "he deteriorated; he had so many setbacks trying to work at home and then in a school setting where he didn't get the appropriate assistance." As a result it is critical that he be in school.

However, he says, "our son has sensory issues and we tried for a year to get him in a face covering. It just didn't work. I call him a sag-

ger. The face covering was always down around his chin."

Bush says he wasn't worried about his son getting COVID without a face covering. "He is 10-years-old, extremely healthy with no risk factors."

And, he adds, "the anxiety, depression it causes; the children can't relate to one another; can't see each other's faces. We have to ask, how is this going to end."

<https://www.apsva.us/school-year-2021-22/health-safety-information/>

## ARLINGTON NEWS BRIEFS

FROM PAGE 3

further shape and enhance National Landing's skyline. Global architecture firm KPF designed 2000 South Bell Street to be a modern, 25-story glass tower with 355 multifamily units situated above approximately 15,000 square feet of street-level retail. The adjacent 2001 South Bell Street was designed by international design practice STUDIOS to be a 420-unit, 19-story tower that emphasizes architectural verticality with a bold, green-glazed brick façade and approximately 10,000 square feet of street-level retail. SK+I will serve as the architect of record for both towers.

Plans for both buildings include rooftop amenity spaces with unobstructed, panoramic views of National Landing and the Washington DC skyline, as well as pools, fitness centers, 24-hour concierges, large co-working spaces, community rooms and dog-grooming stations. The plans also call for in-garage bike parking and electric vehicle charging stations for residents. Balfour Beatty will serve as general contractor.

Both buildings are targeting LEED Gold Certification.

The buildings are expected to benefit from the planned redesign of Route 1, which will bring portions of the roadway to grade and feature a pedestrian-friendly design with large sidewalks intended to improve and promote walkability.

The approved project includes numerous site and adjacent infrastructure improvements, dedicated parks and open space funding, funding for a new library to be located in National Landing and dedicated affordable housing.

In March of 2021, construction started at 1900 Crystal Drive, a planned 808-unit multifamily building with more than 38,000 square feet of street-level retail across two 300-foot towers. JBG SMITH has 1,583 units currently under construction, and an additional 1,760 units in the pipeline in National Landing to meet the demand anticipated from Amazon HQ2 and the Virginia Tech Innovation Campus. [www.jbgsmith.com](http://www.jbgsmith.com)

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Thank you to the hundreds of supporters who helped to keep all your Connection Newspapers alive throughout Alexandria, Fairfax County Arlington County and Potomac, Md. along with affiliated websites and digital media. Now we need help again in 2022.

Each local newspapers mission aspires to provide greater community service, and we do know that our communities are better off if we continue to publish. Last year's financial support from readers and supporters like you bridged the shortfall before Federal PPP funding arrived, and both made our survival possible. We now await a decision for a grant from Rebuild Virginia in early February that we hope will help us in 2022 and beyond. But we need help to survive the first quarter, always a brutal time for cash flow in weekly newspapers. Thank you.

Please, help save these historical papers.

All gifts will be used to fund our printed newspapers and websites and to meet obligations to our loyal and patient employees, writers, contractors and suppliers.

The ongoing pandemic continues to crush many newspapers across the country, and our newspapers continue to be at risk.

The Northern Virginia area's best read and most trusted source for community news includes the Alexandria Gazette Packet, Mount Vernon Gazette and all Con-

nection Newspapers in the metropolitan region.

The pandemic has hit small businesses hard, which in turn has reduced advertising revenue that keeps these local newspapers alive to provide hyper local news to residents. It feels like no small miracle to be looking forward into 2022.

The pandemic has been a bear, financially and otherwise. Revenue plummeted at the beginning in 2020. Some beloved advertisers have stayed the course supporting us throughout, and many more have done what they can. In the fall of 2021 we saw the return of some advertising for events and Grand Openings, but now omicron clouds the horizon in so many ways. Revenue still remains short of expenses despite our greatly curtailed costs.

Connection Newspapers has been offering these local newspapers to residents for over 200 years. Countless residents have grown up with these papers covering significant moments in the lives of family and children, news, community events, school activities, and even pictures of your dogs and cats. Internet news and large national newspapers cannot provide the local connection or historical connection that local papers like Connection Newspapers and the Alexandria Gazette Packet provide. If your child, dog, mother, father, neighborhood, school has been featured, you understand the value of local community newspapers.

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# Parks = Innovation



Meadowlark Winter Walk of Lights in Vienna.

BY PAUL GILBERT  
NOVA PARKS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**W**hat words do you associate with “parks?” Maybe you thought of words like trees, trails, picnic-bench, and nature? What about innovation?

While innovation may not have been at the top of your list, maybe it should have been. With the pandemic, the public has gravitated to parks. Outdoors is the safest place to be around others and the best place to seek a mental and physical break from the nearly two years of COVID-related stress we have all felt.

Innovation ranks high in the values of NOVA Parks employees. And, during this time, NOVA Parks has been creating new and expanded ways to experience parks.

#### Trails:

NOVA Parks has over 100 miles of trails that have seen more use in the last two years than ever before. Everywhere there is parking for trail access, those lots have been full. The most popular trail in Virginia is the 45-mile long W&OD Trail. Before the pandemic, this trail saw over two million uses a year. Recently, many areas have seen two to four times the previous use. This year, NOVA Parks, the City of Falls Church, and the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority opened a new section of the trail that has two separate lanes, one for pedestrians and one for cyclists. This will soon be the national model for busy urban trails. Many low-impact building techniques were used or pioneered with this project.

#### Adventure:

Also, in the fall, NOVA Parks cut the ribbon on an all-new feature. Climb UPTon is the largest and

**Climb UPTon is the largest and most challenging ropes course in the mid-Atlantic states and is located at Upton Hill Park in Arlington.**



This year, NOVA Parks, the City of Falls Church, and the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority opened a new section of the W&OD Trail that has two separate lanes, one for pedestrians and one for cyclists.

most challenging ropes course in the mid-Atlantic states and is located at Upton Hill Park in Arlington. This innovative German technology has 90 challenging elements built into the three-story tower. Look for this new feature to reopen in mid-March.

#### Winter Lights:

Winters used to be a slow time for parks. Then 15 years ago, NOVA Parks created the first all-LED holiday light show in the region with

the Bull Run Festival of Lights in Centreville. This show has grown in popularity, and for the 2020 season, the show had twice the capacity, with two lanes going through the whole show. Around 70,000 vehicles packed with eager families have already made their way through the ever-expanding drive-through light show in 2021.

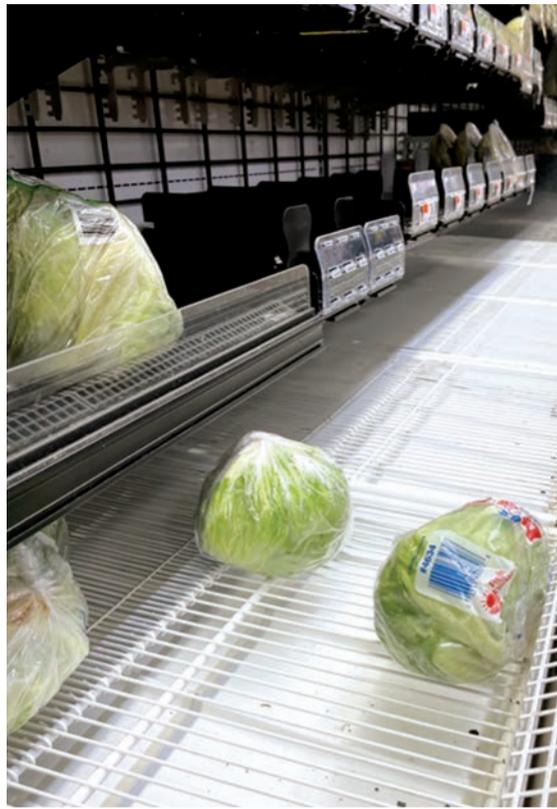
NOVA Parks created the Meadowlark Winter Walk of Lights in Vienna eight years ago. This show has also grown rapidly. Today we

see over 70,000 individuals enjoy this half-a-mile walk-through show that delights everyone. In 2020 the Volgenau Conservatory was added. This glasshouse allows people to enjoy a hot drink, souvenir, or something to eat.

In Alexandria, Cameron Run Ice & Lights offers both lights and an ice skating rink. This unique site just celebrated its 50,000th visitor since it first opened just three years ago.

Through reinvention, growth, and innovation, people in North-

ern Virginia have more varied park offerings than ever before to help us all have safe things to do during the pandemic. Parkland is more valued today by most people than ever before, and the range of things you can do in regional parks has grown to keep pace with demand. Many activities like golf, boating, and camping have seen new and sustained levels of interest as people look to get outside for both exercise and stress relief during this long pandemic.



**Grocery Store Shortages Reported County Wide**

The meat manager at one of Arlington's large grocery store chains rearranges the few remaining packages of chicken on Sunday at noon. "The truck arrived at 6 a.m. today, and the chicken is almost gone. I put it all out." He added, "You better buy what you want because I don't know when I'll get anymore." He explains they are short on drivers for their stores around the state and down 150 delivery trucks. In the produce section, the lettuce bins are nearly empty. The grocery stockers say they are mostly back to normal in produce except for the lettuce. "There was a lettuce recall a couple of weeks ago and we just have trouble catching up."

**FLOURISHING AFTER 55**

- FROM PAGE 5
- tration # 912303-18. a.m., Aurora Hill 55+ Center. Drop in.
- Evergreen trees discussion with Park Naturalist Madeline Koenig, Tuesday, Jan. 25, 7 p.m. Registration # 912400-27. Library of Virginia's genealogy series continues with researching clemency records, Thursday, Jan 27, 3 p.m. Registration # 912400-13.
- Genealogy 101, led by experienced genealogist Eileen Bogdanoff, Tuesday, Jan. 25, 11:30 a.m., Lubber Run 55+ Center. Registration # 912402-16. It takes a village in Arlington, presented by Wendy Zenker, executive director, Arlington Neighborhood Village, Thursday, Jan. 27, 11:30 a.m. Registration # 912400-28.
- Drop in basketball for 50+ age women, Wednesday, Jan. 26, 7 p.m., Lubber Run 55+ Center, Bring white and dark shirts. Drop in.
- Tai Chi practice, Taoist style, Wednesday, Jan. 26 and Friday, Jan. 28, 12:30 p.m., Lubber Run 55+ Center. Drop in.
- Who was John M. Langston, presented by Sandra Brown, Langston Boulevard Alliance, Thursday, Jan. 27, 1:30 p.m. Registration # 912400-29.
- Uber and Lyft, overview of ride sharing apps, presented by Tech enthusiast Nick Englund, Wednesday, Jan. 26, 3 p.m., Arlington Mill 55+ Center. Registration # 912403-04. Social art swap between 55+ members, Thursday, Jan. 27, 10:30 a.m., Arlington Mill 55+ Center. Details and registration # 912300-04.
- Movie at Aurora Hills 55+ Center, "Downton Abbey" (2019), Wednesday, Jan. 26, 12:30 p.m. Registration # 912804-05. Just beneath the surface of paintings by three famous artists, Friday, Jan. 28, 10 a.m. Presented by community arts programmer Jim Halloran. Registration # 912302-05.
- Understanding osteoporosis, presented by Kate Chutaupé, Virginia Hospital Center, Wednesday, Jan. 26, 11 a.m. Registration # 912500-10. Salsa instruction for beginners, no partner needed, Friday, Jan. 28, 2 p.m., Aurora Hill 55+ Center. Registration # 912802-01.
- Introduction to line dance, basic steps, Wednesday, Jan. 26, 10 a.m., Aurora Hill 55+ Center. Registration # 912899-02.
- Arts & Crafts Show featuring works by members of the 55+ community, Saturday, Jan. 29, 11 a.m. - 2 p.m., Arlington Mill 55+ Center. Registration # 912899-02.

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**ENTERTAINMENT**

**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. 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.

**SATURDAY/FEB. 12**

NCE Valentine Concert. 7:30 p.m. At Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington, 4444 Arlington Blvd, Arlington. Visit www.ncearlington.org.

lington. National Chamber Ensemble presents Beguiling Brahms and Schumann (Valentine's Concert). February's Valentine's Concert will present two great Brahms Sonatas for Violin and Piano - exciting, moving, superb and deeply passionate works reflecting Brahms' wonderful lyricism and romantic flair. These works will be paired with Robert Schumann's riveting Sonata in A Minor. Schumann, another great composer, was a personal friend of Brahms, and his music will provide the perfect addition. An exquisite program featuring romantic music for violin and piano with the artistry of pianist Carlos Cesar Rodriguez and violinist Leonid Sushansky. Visit https://www.nationalchamberensemble.org/tickets.htm.

**BULLETIN BOARD**

FROM PAGE 6

with 154 recognized standards and document all policies and procedures. Often the process helps identify efficiencies and heighten areas of accountability, all of which translate into higher quality service and operation to benefit the community.

**DONATIONS NEEDED**

Pet Food Bank. AWLA has established a Pet Food Bank to serve qualifying residents of Arlington County and the City of Falls Church. In consideration of the effect financial obstacles have on a pet owner's ability to

afford pet care, the AWLA Pet Food Bank program's goal is to keep family pets out of shelters. If you are an Arlington County or City of Falls Church resident and are in need of assistance in feeding your pet, follow this link and fill out a pre-registration form. Visit goo.gl/forms/s2FuFdaYWdZm4tPw2.

**ONGOING**

Online Salary Negotiation Workshop. AAUW (American Association of University Women) Work Smart is free online for anyone looking to learn how to negotiate a salary increase or promotion. Why is negotiation so important? AAUW's research on

the gender pay gap shows that, one year out of college, women are already paid significantly less than men. Visit salary.aauw.org. Create a Wildlife Sanctuary. The Audubon at Home Wildlife Sanctuary certification program assists homeowners in restoring their home's natural habitat by providing information on sustainable gardening practices. These practices include using native plants, removing invasive species, reducing use of pesticides and fertilizers, and creating space for native flora and fauna. Visit audubonva.org/audubon-at-home-1/ for more.

**For Rent**

Parking space for rent in Alexandria west end. Near Shirlington, Baileys & King St. 100/month. Indoor, CCTV, 24/7 access. rarpropertiesva@gmail.com

**Employment**

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# Earning College Credit with Work Experience and Training

Program expansions makes college degree accessible and affordable for many.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL  
THE CONNECTION

Now in the 17th year of his career in information technology (IT), Eric Hayes wants to work toward a college degree at Northern Virginia Community College. While he has taken a variety of on-the-job training courses, he believes that a formal education will lead to professional gains. Thanks to the expansion of a program in Virginia called Credits for Prior Learning Portal, Credits-2Careers program, he and other adults can turn life work experiences into college credit.

"The hours of course study will help me continue to grow in my career field," he said. "Course work, group collaboration, and lectures are a part of the responsibility of being an active IT professional," he said. "You can easily get left behind if you

do not keep your eyes and ears open. Constant change can be beneficial because it can quickly solve problems as well as streamline convoluted processes. With that being said, knowing about the change or even being a part of it is much more gratifying."

Adults who are interested in using work and life experience to earn credit at Northern Virginia Community College and other schools in the Virginia Community College System, can create an account on the Credits2Careers website ([www.credits2careers.org](http://www.credits2careers.org)) and list information such as work experience, prior training, certificates or standardized tests. This information is evaluated by the organization's career advisors who will then let the prospective student know how many college credits they are eligible to receive.

"This initiative is predicated on serving the needs of all students from various backgrounds who have a wealth of knowledge and experience," said Jenny Carter, Direc-

tor of Workforce Partnerships and Projects, Virginia Community College System. "Recognizing the expertise that is contained in a student's background is one way of honoring their past efforts and meeting them where they are in their educational journey, in the arc of their career, and most importantly, where they are in life."

A grant from the Lumina Foundation, as part of its All Learning Counts Initiative, provided the funding for the expansion. Professional development, workforce training,

professional certifications, exams and standardized test are examples of the types of experiences that students use to earn college credit while taking fewer classes, says Carter

"By awarding credit for prior learning, students are able to avoid any redundancy in training and save crucial time and money," she said. "Research has shown

that by awarding credit for prior learning, students are ultimately assisted in a meaningful, tangible way to accelerate their pathway to earning a degree or licensure leading directly to a well-paying career. Life is full of rich experiences that deserve to be recognized wherever they align to formal training outcomes."

This path to education is designed to create a level playing field for those who want to access to higher education. "Credit for prior learning is one tool to ensure education is available to all, from students with traditional backgrounds to those who have followed another path," said Emily Jones-Green, Virginia Community College System. "The greatest thing about education, knowledge, skills, and capabilities is that they are not confined to a formal classroom."

Having diverse life experiences enhances the classroom atmosphere and makes the fabric of our society and our workforce stronger."

**"The greatest thing about education, knowledge, skills, and capabilities is that they are not confined to a formal classroom. Having diverse life experiences enhances the classroom atmosphere and makes the fabric of our society and our workforce stronger."**

— Jenny Carter,  
Director of Workforce Partnerships and  
Projects, Virginia Community College System.

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## Immuno-Confused



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

I wouldn't say, as a cancer patient, that I'm immuno-compromised, as a CNN news report today, Dec. 24th, described us similarly-diagnosed individuals, but my wife certainly would. Nevertheless, as a cancer patient undergoing treatment, I do realize that I need to be vigilant, especially since I have pre-existing breathing issues because the thyroid cancer I have had long ago moved into my lungs. Moreover, to complicate matters more, the main side effect of the medicine that I'm taking daily to treat my thyroid cancer has as its main side effect: shortness of breath. Having read what I've just written, it sounds likely that if anybody is immuno-compromised, it's someone who has cancerous tumors in their lungs and whose treatment for said tumors has as its primary side effect: shortness of breath. A trifecta of trouble when one considers that covid adversely impacts one's ability to breathe.

When covid first became a thing, my wife, Dina wouldn't let me out of the house. Even after we received our initial two vaccinations, Dina was still cautiously unoptimistic. I was allowed out of the house, but within very strict parameters. I wouldn't say I understand science/medicine, but even I could see the risks of exposure and the likely compounded problems it would present for a cancer patient like me whose lungs are already weakened by the presence of a dozen or more malignant papillary thyroid cancer tumors. And whose body has been negatively affected (I wouldn't say ravaged) by nearly 13 years of non-stop cancer treatment. Not exactly the most challenging host for a semi-incurable respiratory virus.

However, in the past three months or so since I've been boosted, I have returned to some of my pre-covid activities; in moderation, and always wearing a mask. I am out and about running errands as had been my area of responsibility previously. Now however, omicron has become the dominant variant/threat and presented a new level of concern even for fully vaccinated/boosted people like me. Though the side effects, hospitalizations and deaths seem statistically somewhat less than previous variants, still a cancer patient with pre-existing lung/breathing issues seems an attractive host. And not that the variant picks its targets, but its super transmissibility presents challenges/fears for those whose immune systems have already been weakened by years of toxic chemotherapy. As I describe myself, I think I might be the poster child for this disease. If anybody presents with the ideal/worst-case scenario, it's me. I can see the poster now: A picture of me with a black circle surrounding my chest with a black line diagonally across my torso.

Because, if there's anything I understand about my condition, it is that my weakest link is the area where the virus does its most initial damage: the lungs. And given that one's ability to breathe is kind of important, in whatever scheme of things/context one wants to consider, I should probably once again stay in the house and avoid all human contact (at least I would have five cats to keep me company). I mean, who's to say/know really, whether a lung cancer/thyroid patient like me could even survive the most modest of covid symptoms. Which, given my medical history, it's unlikely any symptoms I experienced could be described as moderate. I imagine if the virus found a home in my lungs, it might very well be, as they say in Boston: "Katie bar the door." There's probably no such thing as a moderate impact for a person with cancer/lung issues like me. In fact, if I want to be honest about my cancer/lung history, practically/prudently speaking, I should be disqualified from everything until further notice. I can't afford to take a chance/risk any exposure. I have very little margin for error. My life would be at stake, if I understand the warnings/susceptibility correctly concerning someone with my medical condition.

I suppose if I want to live my life moving forward, I'll have to utilize my sales background and pre-qualify any person with whom I'm possibly having contact/sharing space. I've survived/overcome an initial "terminal" diagnosis of stage IV non-small cell lung cancer with a "13 month to two-year" prognosis to be approaching my 13-year anniversary come the end of February 2022. Given all I've endured in the last 13 years since I felt pain in my left rib cage in late December 2008, it would be irresponsible and stupid for me to get careless and throw away all I've been gained. This is no time to throw caution to the wind. Quite the contrary.

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



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