

Mount Vernon Gazette

MOUNT VERNON'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER • A CONNECTION NEWSPAPER

JANUARY 20, 2022



Republicans are hoping to spend \$150 million to create 20 new charter schools, but they'll be facing opposition in the Senate Education Committee, which has nine Democrats and only six Republicans.



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL LEE POPE/GAZETTE PACKET

One issue where Democrats and Republicans might find common ground is banning political contributions from public utilities.

Era of Divided Government

Mask mandates, anti-racist curriculum and campaign finance on the agenda.

BY MICHAEL LEE POPE
GAZETTE PACKET

Virginia is under new management, and it's a sharp turn from how things have worked in the commonwealth for the last two years. Republicans are now in control of the Executive Mansion and the House of Delegates. But Democrats still control the state Senate, ushering in a new era of divided government. The 2022 General Assembly session has just started, and already Democrats and Republicans are fighting over everything from mask mandates and anti-racist curriculum to marijuana legalization and voting rights.

"It's quite dysfunctional from a policymaking standpoint," said Jennifer Victor, associate professor of political science at George Mason University's Schar School of Policy and Government. "It's a very antagonistic form of politicking that is unfortunately quite common across state legislatures, and it's one of the unfortunate consequences in the partisan and polarized era that we're living through."

On the campaign trail, Republican candidate Glenn Youngkin often talked about what he called his "day-one agenda," things like banning critical race theory from schools and getting rid of mask mandates. Shortly after his inauguration as governor, he signed executive orders to deliver on both of those campaign promises although the details of how that might actually work remain unclear. Critical



Gov. Glenn Youngkin began his day one agenda by issuing executive orders to ban critical race theory from public schools and allow parents to decide whether their children wear masks in schools.

race theory isn't actually taught in Virginia schools, and many local school board members reject the idea that a governor can dictate covid protocol to school divisions.

"Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) will continue to abide by the health and safety guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Alexandria Health Department (AHD) and continue to require all individuals to wear masks that cover the nose and mouth in ACPS schools, facilities and buses," wrote Superintendent Gregory Hutchings in an email to parents last weekend.

EDUCATION IS AT the top of the agenda for the new administration, although the new governor will likely hit a roadblock when

his initiatives face the cold hard reality of the Senate committee system. During a speech to a joint assembly earlier this week, Youngkin announced he wanted to spend \$150 million to create 20 new charter schools. But the Senate Education Committee has nine Democrats and only six Republicans. So getting a bill expanding charter schools to the Senate floor would require two Democrats on the committee to cross over and vote with the Republicans, which seems unlikely.

"If you look at some of the charter schools, you're going to find that some of them are mostly students who are African American," said Sen. Louise Lucas (D-18), chairwoman of the Senate Education Committee. "I don't like sepa-

rating students. I think there ought to be a blend, and I think students ought to be able to have interaction among students other than students who look just like them."

Although critical race theory is not taught in Virginia schools, Republicans have been critical of the anti-racist teacher training that emerged after the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. During his speech to the joint assembly this week, Youngkin said his executive order was intended to prohibit what he called "inherently divisive concepts in schools, including critical race theory." Members of the Legislative Black Caucus say they're skeptical that the new governor is interested in making sure students understand some of the more unsavory chapters of race relations in Virginia history.

"If you don't want the truth taught, just say that's what you don't want," said Sen. Mamie Locke (D-2). "If you are going to stand there and say you want to teach the good, the bad and the ugly of Virginia history and then sign an executive order saying we are going to ban critical race theory, you're being a hypocrite."

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM may be one issue where members of opposing parties can come to some kind of agreement. For example, Democrats and Republicans joined forces to reject a bill that would have put limits on campaign contributions. Currently, Virginia has no limits on the amount of money that donors can contrib-

ute. Some senators were interested in setting some kind of limit, and two separate bills would have set a ceiling of \$20,000 or \$25,000. A bipartisan coalition emerged to kill that idea.

"Contributions are speech," said Sen. Jill Vogel (R-27). "When you set up artificial barriers to speech people find ways around it."

Virginia and 10 other states had no limits on contributions from individuals in state races in 2019, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

On the campaign trail, Youngkin said he would disrupt entrenched interests in Richmond. He might have an opportunity to do that if lawmakers are able to put together a bipartisan coalition to prohibit campaign contributions from public utilities. Sen. Chap Petersen (D-34) is working with Del. Lee Ware (R-65) to ban campaign cash from public utilities, including Dominion Energy, which has long been a major force in Virginia politics and a generous donor. Petersen and Ware say it's a bad idea to have a utility that is regulated by the state to have so much influence over lawmakers.

"I can get a portion of my caucus. I can't get them all. I certainly can't get the ones who are more senior in leadership," said Petersen. "But I need -- we need, the commonwealth needs -- the new governor to take a firm stand on this issue and my hope is that will change the dynamic."

A spokeswoman for the governor said Youngkin will review all legislation that comes to his desk.

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Shirley Miles, Virginia Attorney General Jason Miyares, and incoming Deputy Attorney General Monique Miles celebrate at the inaugural festivities Jan. 15 in Richmond.



Former Alexandria vice mayor Bill Cleveland, left, is joined by his wife Ruth and Jack Delnegro at the inauguration of Governor Glenn Youngkin Jan. 15 in Richmond.

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED



JANET BARNETT/GAZETTE PACKET

Corinna da Fonseca-Wollheim, left, speaks with Rabbi Jack Moline following her presentation of "The Bus to Buchenwald" Nov. 7 at Agudas Achim Congregation. da Fonseca-Wollheim's grandfather perished in the Nazi concentration camp in 1944.

Power Shift Locals celebrate Youngkin inauguration.

BY JEANNE THEISMANN
GAZETTE PACKET

Several Alexandria residents took a road trip to Richmond Jan. 15 as Northern Virginia businessman Glenn Youngkin took the oath of office as the 74th Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

"What an incredible experience it was to witness the inauguration," said former Alexandria Vice Mayor Bill Cleveland. "We knocked on a lot of doors last year to help make this happen."

Youngkin, a former private equity executive, became the first Republican governor in 12 years. History was made when Lt. Gov. Winsome Sears and Attorney General Jason Miyares were inaugurated, with Sears becoming the first woman of color to serve in a state-wide office, and Miyares as the first Latino to serve in his role.

"It was fantastic being there to see Winsome Sears, Jason Miyares and Glenn Youngkin make history," Cleveland said. "Voters chose the perfect combination – a diverse team of people who know what they are doing. They are the people's choice."

The inauguration took place on the steps of the State Capitol in front of crowds estimated to be 6,000 deep. Among the many in attendance was Alexandria civil rights attorney Monique Miles, who was named by Miyares as Deputy Attorney General for Government Operations and Transactions.

Youngkin's inauguration, themed

"We knocked on a lot of doors last year to help make this happen."

— Former Alexandria vice mayor
Bill Cleveland



Northern Virginia businessman Glenn Youngkin waves to the crowd after being sworn in as the 74th Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia Jan. 15 in Richmond.

"Strengthen the Spirit of Virginia Together," was attended by notable national Republican leaders including RNC Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel, former Speaker of the House Paul Ryan, former head of the Heritage Foundation Kay Coles James, former EPA administrator Andrew Wheeler and former Secretary of Transportation and wife to Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, Elaine Chao.

During the campaign, the 55-year-old Youngkin ran on a "Day One" game plan, which included eliminating Virginia's grocery tax, firing the parole board and creating new charter schools among other pledges.

"It was just a wonderful experience," said Cleveland. "It was so great to be there and experience the camaraderie and the celebrations. It was stupendous."

"It's Day One. Let's get to work," Youngkin said in his inaugural remarks. "And no matter who you voted for, I pledge to be your advocate, your voice, your governor."

Youngkin's victory in November over former Governor Terry McAuliffe marked a seismic shift for Virginia Republicans, just a year after President Joe Biden won the state by 10 points. The party now controls the governor's mansion, the lieutenant governor's office, the attorney general's office and the House of Delegates.

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'The Bus to Buchenwald' da Fonseca-Wollheim is featured speaker at Agudas Achim.

BY JEANNE THEISMANN
GAZETTE PACKET

Corinna da Fonseca-Wollheim, most notably known as music critic for the New York Times, was the featured speaker at the annual Rabbi Jack Moline Lecture Series Nov. 7 at Agudas Achim Congregation.

da Fonseca-Wollheim is the granddaughter of Hermann da Fonseca-Wollheim, a doctor in Hamburg, Germany. In 1944 Hermann was sent to the Buchenwald Concentration Camp for being too friendly to Ukrainian forced laborers. He perished there that same year.

da Fonseca-Wollheim's presentation was titled "The Bus to Buchenwald" and detailed the daring journey her grandmother took to Buchenwald to try to recover her husband's ashes and learn more about the details of his death.

The annual lecture series honors Jack Moline, the congregational Rabbi who served Agudas Achim for 27 years. He retired in 2014, becoming Rabbi Emeritus. The series presents speakers who are making important contributions to American Jewish society.

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NEWS

West Potomac High School junior Peter Reistad, center, is congratulated by American Legion Post 24 Commander Henry Dorton on taking first place in the Legion's Oratorical contest Jan. 9 in Old Town as contest coordinator Patrick Hawley applauds. Reistad advances to the District 17 competition Jan. 23 in Fairfax.



Peter Reistad Wins
 Post 24 Oratorical

West Potomac junior
 advances to District
 17 competition.

BY JEANNE THEISMANN
 GAZETTE PACKET

Peter Reistad, a junior at West Potomac High School, took first place Jan. 9 in the American Legion Post 24 Oratorical contest to advance to the District 17 competition slated for Jan. 23 in Fairfax.

Held at Post 24 in Old Town, Reistad's presentation topic described the importance of the Judicial Branch of the U.S. government as defined within the U.S. Constitution. His second speech, a 3-5 minute assigned topic speech, was on Amendment XXV, Section 4, which provides for the powers of the Presidency to transfer to the Vice-President in the event that the President cannot perform his duties.

First held in 1938, the American Legion

Oratorical aims to develop knowledge and appreciation for the U.S. Constitution among high school students. The contest is open to girls and boys in grades 9-12 who each write their own 8-10-minute prepared oration. Contestants memorize and deliver their speech on any aspect of the Constitution in front of an audience of multiple judges, timekeepers and other attendees.

Nationally, more than \$203,500 in scholarships are awarded each year with the overall national contest winner receiving a \$25,000 scholarship. Each state winner receives a \$2,000 scholarship which can be used at any college or university in the United States.

Applications for next year's Post 24 contest, tentatively scheduled for Jan. 8, 2023, will open in August and early entry is recommended.

Reistad now advances to the American Legion District 17 Contest at Post 177 in Fairfax.

For more information about the Oratorical Speech Contest or other youth programs, contact: VAPost24Oratorical@gmail.com.

NEWS BRIEF

Library Staff Shortages
 Require Hours Change

Because of the current surge in COVID-19 cases and a high number of vacancies among Fairfax County Public Library staff, all regional and community Fairfax County Public Library branches will be closed every Sunday and Monday beginning Sunday, Jan. 16 through April 1. Branches will open in keeping with their regularly scheduled hours Tuesday through Saturday.

Regional libraries will be open Tuesday and Wednesday 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Thursday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Community libraries will be open Tuesday 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Wednes-

day through Saturday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

The Access Services branch located at the Fairfax County Government Center will maintain its usual hours Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library/branches/branch-locations-and-hours.

Fairfax County Public Libraries are always available online. Search digital offerings via Libby <https://research.fairfaxcounty.gov/c.php?g=756428&p=5423169>

Explore ten other ways to enjoy your local library from home. <https://research.fairfaxcounty.gov/unlimited/at-home>

NEWS

Pampered Pet Boutique & Barkery Is Open

Pampered Pet Boutique & Barkery in Belle View Shopping Center held a ribbon cutting ceremony on Saturday, Dec. 18, with (left to right) Supervisor Dan Storck; Karen Echeverri, mother of the business owner; Karencita Echeverri, Pampered Pet Boutique & Barkery owner; Mark Murray, Mount Vernon Lee Chamber of Commerce; and loyal customers.



Karen Echeverri, of Pampered Pet Boutique & Barkery, welcomes your four-legged fur baby and has products for healthy, happy pets.



New Bistro at Courtyard by Marriott in Springfield

Celebrating the opening of the new Bistro at the Courtyard by Marriott in Springfield were (left to right) Kevin McNulty, Mount Vernon Lee Chamber of Commerce; Supervisor Rodney Lusk; Mark George, Senior VP of Sales, Island Hospitality; Sufian Unseri, General Manager, Courtyard by Marriott; Faiqa Clark, Director of Sales, Courtyard by Marriott; Melody Haislip, FP of National Sales, Island Hospitality; Brandon Frederick, Regional VP, Island Hospitality.



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SOLD



Alex/Riverside Estates \$731,150
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Make this Christmas special by visiting this incredible 3 level Colonial in popular Riverside Estates. This home has been updated & meticulously maintained: baths remodeled, interior painted, hwdw floors refinished all in 2021. Basement remodeled in 2020-New chimney liners & DBL pane windows in 2019-Electric panel upgraded & HWH, siding & gutters replaced in 2018-Firrnace 2012-Roof 2008-A/C 2004-MBA & Kitchen in 2012-Kitchen has granite counters, maple cabinets, SS appliances. Main level includes living rm, w/FPL, dining rm, kitchen & family rm w/access to carport & storage shed plus beautiful sliding glass doors to patio & gorgeous bkyd. Upper level has 4BRs, (2nd BR almost the same size as the spacious MBR), a MBA & 2nd half bath-the lower level has a 2nd FPL in the rec rm, a den/office area & rear door for access to the bkyd. Additional storage available in a 17x11 rm w/built-in shelving & 2 large cedar closets. Finally, a 13x12 utility rm complete w/built-in table for folding clothes. Fabulous location.

SOLD



Alex/Riverside Estates \$699,500
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This stunning, meticulously updated & maintained Split in popular Riverside Estates is NOW Available! 4BRs, 2.5BAs, carport, screened porch--loads of upgrades. The main level offers 3BRs, 2BAs, beautiful hwdw floors, double pane windows, kitchen, living & dining rooms & screened porch. The updated kitchen will take your breath away w/its granite counters, dazzling white cabinets & marble tiled floor. The living rm has a large, brilliant bay window and opens to the dining rm that provides access to a spectacular screened porch, perfect for chilling or entertaining. The lower level offers a charming family rm w/a gorgeous FPL, 4th BR, remodeled half bath, & approximately 600sf of storage/utility/workshop space. The backyard is a perfect blend of landscaping, (stone patios, & walls) & beautiful landscaping-Ideal for entertaining. If you desire a fabulous, turn-key home...Here it is!! Great location: 1 mile (S) to Mt. Vernon Plantation, 5 mins (S) to Ft. Belvoir, 15 mins (N) to Alex, 27 mins (N) to National Airport, 27-35 mins (N) to Pentagon/D.C.

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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 gov-

ernment 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 and follow my work on Facebook and Twitter. It is an honor to serve as your state senator.

First Week of Session

BY DEL. PAUL KRIZEK

We are one week into the 2022 General Assembly session down in Richmond, and much has happened already. On the first day of session, my colleagues and I finished introducing



Krizek

all of our legislation for the year. Please visit the Legislative Information System at lis.virginia.gov to view my legislative agenda, as well as all of the other hundreds of bills filed this session. I look forward to sharing more about my legislation, much of which comes from constituents, in the coming weeks as my bills go before the many subcommittees.

Each year, the memberships on each House committee can be shuffled. But with the change of leadership in the House, a new Speaker, and 17 new members, many new committee assignments were needed. After the Speaker announced the changes, I was pleased that I remain on the critical House Appropriations Committee, as well as the General Laws Committee, and Privileges and Elections. I will serve on two Appropri-

ations Subcommittees: General Government and Capital Outlay, and Transportation and Public Safety (of which I previously served as Chairman). I will serve on Subcommittee #3 in Privileges and Elections, and we are still waiting on the announcement of

my subcommittee assignments in General Laws, but I expect to serve on two of them.

Another important deadline that has just passed was for filing budget amendments last Friday afternoon. Budget amendments are requests to amend the Governor's proposed budget (HB29 or HB30) to fund legislation that we pass during the session, but also to fulfill funding requests from state agencies, county governments, nonprofits, and other entities. To view the current proposed budget, please visit budget.lis.virginia.gov. I submitted eighteen amendments to the Governor's budget.

Several of my budget amendments will infuse funds back into our community here in Mount Vernon and Lee, as well as benefit the greater Northern Virginia region. For example, I have a

budget amendment to appropriate \$250,000 from the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families block grant (TANF) to benefit one of our local charities, Good Shepherd Housing. Good Shepherd Housing will use these funds to continue their work providing housing, emergency services, children's services, and budget counseling, among many other resources for low-income families in our area. Senators Ebbin and Surovell are

also requesting funds to benefit Good Shepherd Housing in the Senate budget package.

I am carrying an amendment to support George Mason University's efforts to construct a new building to house the Institute for Digital Innovation (IDIA) on the Arlington campus. George Mason is growing quickly; in fact, over the last 5 years, over 70 percent of enrollment growth in Virginia higher ed-

SEE FIRST WEEK, PAGE 7

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OPINION

First Week Of Session

FROM PAGE 6

ucation was attributable to Mason. Mason has committed to graduating an additional 7,600 computer science, computer engineering, and software engineering majors: over and above the 16,000 degrees the university is already on track to produce in these vital and rapidly expanding industries.

Regarding the critical area of transportation to our region, I have filed an amendment to the caboose budget (HB29) to appropriate American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to support pay for Virginia transit workers. Transit organizations across the Commonwealth have faced unique challenges during the pandemic, most of all a shortage of qualified transit operators, who must be highly trained to safely transport our citizens.

At the request of Supervisor Rodney Lusk in Lee District, I am requesting funding to support the purchasing of equipment and other infrastructure for outfitting the new Lee District Community and Workforce Development Center. This facility will be the first of its kind in the region, serving residents up and down Richmond Highway by providing recreational opportunities and childcare, as well as a classroom and workshop space that will be utilized to upskill and train residents for employment in the trades and technology jobs of the future.

Finally, I have requested that 10% of funds allocated to the Virginia Housing Trust Fund be put towards enabling the acquisition, stabilization, and improvement of manufactured home parks, five of which are located here in the 44th district. Manufactured homes, especially those located in manufactured home parks, are the only form of nonsubsidized affordable housing available for homeownership in Virginia. By providing a source of funding for nonprofit housing providers, the tenants, and others committed to housing affordability to purchase and maintain manufactured housing parks, this budget amendment will improve the lives of thousands of families living in these parks in Virginia.

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FCPS Superintendent Releases FY 2023 Proposed Budget



Fairfax County School Board in session on Jan. 13, 2022.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
GAZETTE PACKET

Fairfax County Schools Superintendent Dr. Scott Brabrand released his Fiscal Year (FY) 2022-23 Proposed Budget on Thursday, Jan. 13, at the Fairfax County School Board Meeting. In total, 86 percent of the \$3.3 billion proposed operating budget for FY23 is allocated to instruction, according to the presentation.

“Tonight, I am delivering you a good news budget that will lead Fairfax County Public Schools out of this pandemic,” Brabrand said.

Brabrand described a budget that provides what its students need to learn, grow and flourish. He said FCPS will continue to pursue strong compensation for all of its 24,000 FCPS employees. The budget includes a 4 percent market scale adjustment for all employees and a step increase for eligible employees.

FCPS is one of the largest school divisions in the nation with a workforce of 24,392 full-time employees. With a projected enrollment of 177,570 students, FCPS serves students from 204 countries who speak more than 200 different languages at home. A total of 56,112 students are economically disadvantaged. FCPS also serves 26,828 special education students and 33,806 English learners.

Brabrand’s FY 2023 proposed budget’s expenditures and adjustments focus on three key areas, compensation, opportunity and access, and critical operational needs. Brabrand is requesting an additional \$112 million or about a 5.2 percent additional county transfer to equate to \$2.28 billion. State aid (\$621.4 million), sales tax (\$248.3 million), federal aid (47.1 million), beginning balance (\$21.9 million), City of Fairfax (\$51.2 million), and other (\$24.8 million) complete revenue sources.

Expenditures as itemized in the FY 2023 Proposed Operating Budget, compensation adjustments in the FY 2023 budget represent a net increase of over \$150 million. Over \$55 million is to provide an average step increase of 2.68 percent for eligible employees; \$8 million for health benefits; \$4.4 million for recurring substitute pay; and \$3.3 million for bus driver salaries. All FCPS transportation employees will receive a 2.3 percent increase at the beginning of the year.

Adjustments represent a decrease of \$300 million and 768 positions. The enrollment adjustments include savings of \$88.2 million and 917 positions. The



Superintendent Scott Brabrand

budget reflects the revised lower enrollment numbers.

Brabrand said that he had additional dollars to restore 33 positions to the staffing reserve and dollars for another 50 positions to the staffing reserve.

Opportunity and Access, the second main area of the budget, represented an increase of over \$68 million and 233 positions. Brabrand included funding in this budget of \$32 million to provide three additional professional development days.

“I have almost \$15 million to put a special education lead teacher full time in every single elementary school,” Brabrand said. “It is long overdue. This will ... allow our special education lead teachers to lead best practices and special education instruction and provide timely and tailored monitoring of special education in all of our elementary schools.”

There was also \$10 million for anticipated requirements from the Virginia General Assembly, given over 1,100 bills have been introduced. The county must monitor the unfunded mandates to be as prudent and fiscally responsible as possible.

The budget also provides, Brabrand said, nearly \$3 million and 26 positions to implement FCPS’ second of its third year plan for Advanced Academic Program Phase II.

It includes a full-time twice-exceptional (2e) specialist and 20 additional school-based positions so that 40 more elementary schools can have local level for advanced academic programs.

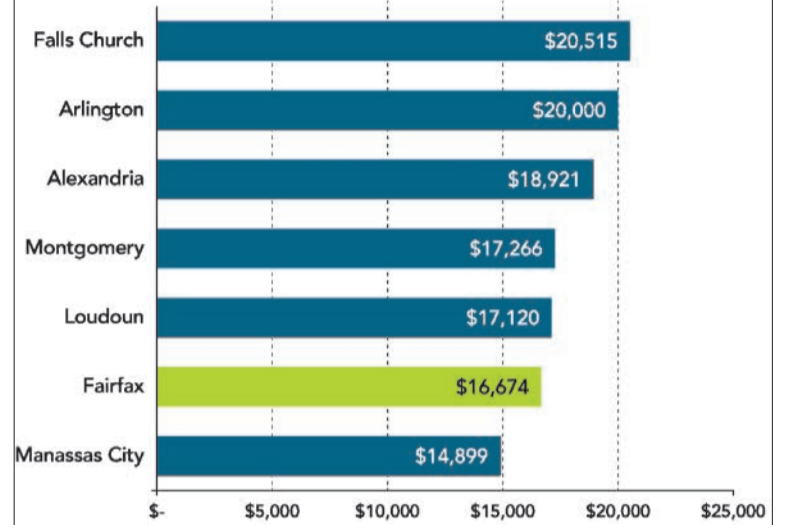
Critical Operational Needs is the third area which totaled \$13.6 million and 87 positions. Highlights include \$8 million for assistant principals and \$900,000 to extend high school assistant principal positions to 12 months. There is \$700,000 for 13 half middle school flexible office positions. They also have \$1.4 million to enhance the HR staffing support to respond to increased demands by the pandemic, \$0.9 million and five positions to provide cybersecurity upgrades, and \$300,000 for two additional planning positions to help with data analysis.

FCPS will continue to collaborate with the Board of Supervisors and County Executive during the county budget process.

A public hearing on the budget will be held on Jan. 24, and work sessions will be held in January and February by the Fairfax County School Board. On Feb. 24, the Board will vote on the FY23 Advertised Budget.

FCPS COST PER PUPIL

FY 2022 WABE Comparison to Other School Divisions^{1,2,3}

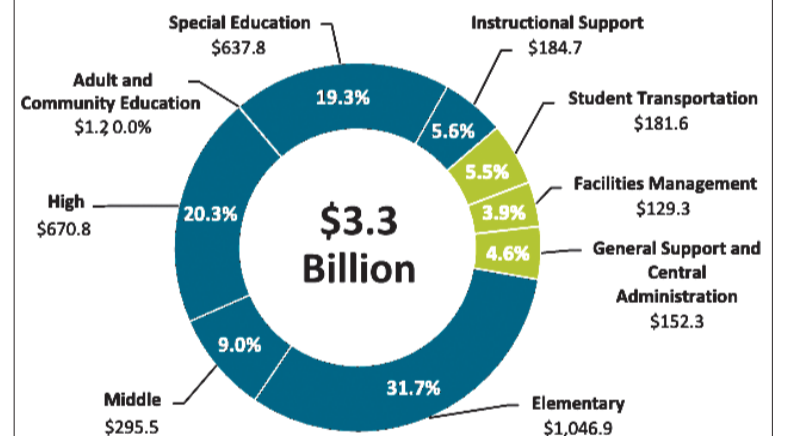


¹ Source: FY 2022 Washington Area Boards of Education (WABE) Guide.
² Uniform formulas were developed by the WABE committee for consistency area wide. These numbers are comparable; however, the cost per pupil reported here may differ from that reported in individual districts' budget documents or other reports.
³ Data not available at time of compilation for Prince George's County, Prince William County, and Manassas Park City.

FCPS Cost per Pupil.

Where It Goes—Expenditures by Program*

FY 2023 Proposed School Operating Fund (\$ in millions)

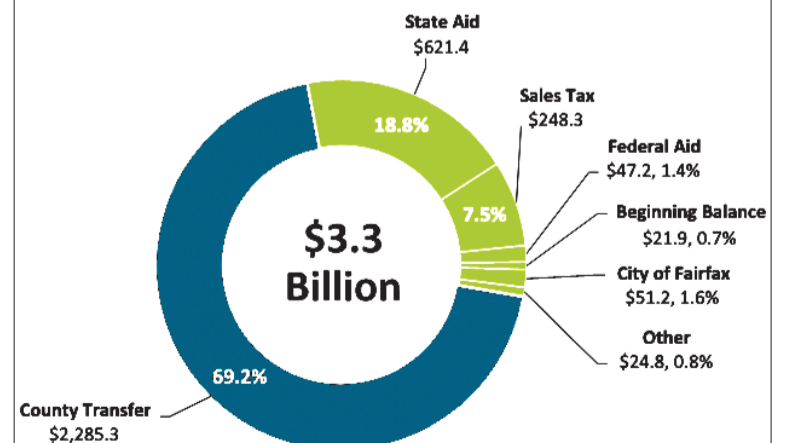


*Does not add due to rounding.

Expenditures by Program.

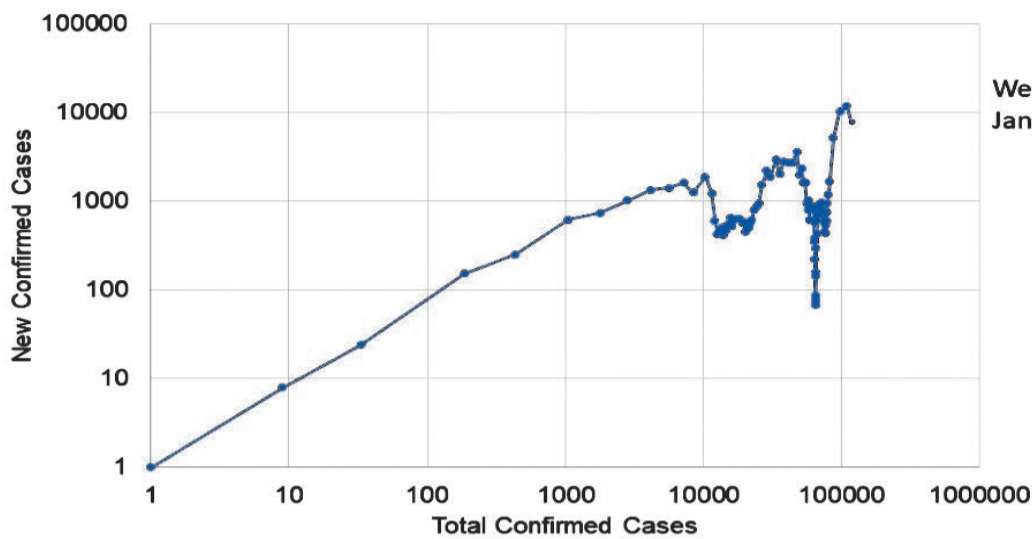
Where It Comes From—Revenue

FY 2023 Proposed School Operating Fund (\$ in millions)



Revenue Sources.

Current Week 2: (Jan 9 – Jan 15)



Week 1:
Jan 1 – Jan 8

SCREENSHOT FAIRFAX COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Covid-19 Case Data for Fairfax Health District, Trajectory of Cases for Fairfax County.

New Governor Revokes Mask Mandate for Schools

FCPS says masks requirement remains in effect.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
GAZETTE PACKET



Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin (R)

Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin (R) signed Executive Order Number Two on his Inauguration Day, Saturday, Jan. 15, to fulfill his promise “to empower Virginia parents in their children’s education and upbringing by allowing parents to make decisions on whether their child wears a mask in school.” The Order states that masks are not the only method to reduce transmission of COVID-19. It lists mitigation measures, including improvements to indoor air quality in school facilities.

Fairfax County Public Schools issued a reminder that its policy on wearing masks has not changed. FCPS would continue to follow recommendations from local and national experts instead, requiring all students and staff to wear masks, except at times and on occasions already designated in (eating). Arlington Public Schools and Alexandria City Public Schools also announced masks would stay on.

FCPS Superintendent Scott Brabrand sent a message to parents: “As we return to school after the holiday weekend, we want to let you know that FCPS will continue universal masking for all students and staff ... in alignment with CDC guidance. Our layered prevention strategies have proven effective in keeping transmission rates low in our schools. We know our students are best served by in-person instruction. Adhering to our layered prevention strategies, especially universal masking, keeps our schools open and safe places for students to learn.”

According to Virginia Senate Bill (SB) 1303 effective July 1, 2021, each school board is to offer in-person instruction to students enrolled in the local school division “in a manner in which it adheres, to the maximum extent practicable, to any currently applicable mitigation strategies ... to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 that have been provided by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.”

Fairfax Sen. Chap Petersen, co-author and lead Democratic sponsor of the bill to reopen schools, said: “The law gives flexibility to local School Boards to open schools in a safe way while reflecting the practice-
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FILE PHOTOS BY MERCIA HOBSON/GAZETTE PACKET

Masked students enter the FCPS’ Great Falls Elementary School.

cal realities of educating children. It does not require School Boards to follow any certain COVID protocols, such as mandatory masking for all children, nor does it preclude it.”

But Petersen added that schools should have a plan to phase out mandatory masking in the “next few weeks or months. Mandatory masking should not be a permanent feature of public education.”

John Cook, former member of the Board of Supervisors, said on Twitter: “If we are concerned about parents’ rights, do I have the right as a parent not to have the government compel my child to sit next to a maskless person all day?”

FCPS as of Jan. 14, 2022, reported 620 cases of COVID-19 for the month of January. That number might be lower than actual cases because schools were closed from Dec. 20, 2021 to Jan. 10, 2022 for winter break and then winter weather, according to an FCPS spokesman.

The Fairfax County COVID-19 Case Data for Fairfax Health District reported on Sunday, Jan. 16, the highest number of new confirmed COVID-19 cases to date, slightly over 10,000 for Week 1: Jan. 1-8 according to its Trajectory of Cases in the county.

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Changes Coming to Workhouse Arts Center

Creative reuse of current vacant structures and new Ox Road streetscape on the way.

BY DAVID SIEGEL
GAZETTE PACKET

Taking additional actions to develop a lively campus, The Workhouse Arts Center Foundation, which operates the Workhouse Arts Center, has been collaborating with Fairfax County on the renovation of two prominently visible, long time unoccupied buildings. The two buildings; W13 and W15, front the busy Ox Road (Route 123).

“Fairfax County’s commitment to renovate these two buildings means so much to the Workhouse Arts Center,” said Leon Scioscia, President and CEO, Workhouse Arts Center Foundation. “Once the initial renovation is completed, then possible future tenants, such as a restaurant, or a brewery, or a coffee shop, can finish the renovation for their own particular needs.”

“Having these retail establishments located on our campus will allow our [visitors] to have dining options available to them without having to leave campus.”

The Workhouse campus buildings’ makeovers will also include Ox Road streetscape overhaul and creation of a public plaza in between the two buildings, according to Sharon North, Fairfax County Department of Public Works and Environmental Services. The work is scheduled to begin in early 2022. The initial work is likely to include the interior building renovations followed by the exterior and landscaping work toward the fall 2022.

After renovation, the buildings can accommodate food and beverage tenants who will provide the tenant fit-out for their specific use. The plaza area between the two buildings will be equipped with outdoor dining areas including an activity boardwalk connecting the two buildings. The plaza will



COURTESY FAIRFAX COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Exterior of un-renovated Workhouse campus buildings W-13 and W-15



FILE PHOTO BY MIKE SALMON

Exterior of un-renovated Workhouse Arts Center campus building.

Where and when:

Workhouse Arts Center, 9518 Workhouse Way, Lorton, VA 22079. 703-584-2900. For information about Workhouse Arts Center’s artists who work and display their art here and its performing arts, visual arts, arts education, and history programming, visit www.workhousearts.org

be constructed with an area for storm-water management. Total project cost is estimated at \$6.3 million and funded by the county.

The Workhouse campus is a historically significant County-owned property, previously owned by the

federal government and operated by the District of Columbia as the Lorton Reformatory. Fairfax County acquired the 2,440-acre property which is on the National Historic Registry. The Workhouse Arts Foundation, Inc., has a license and lease agreement with the Fairfax County Government to operate the on-campus renovated buildings in an arts center capacity.

“The Workhouse Arts Foundation is so pleased to have such a great partner in Fairfax County – helping us realize the initial dream of the Workhouse Arts Center serving as a cultural anchor for South Fairfax County,” said Scioscia.



Leon Scioscia, President and CEO Workhouse Arts Center Foundation

BULLETIN BOARD

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

WEDNESDAY/JAN. 26

Community Listening Session. 6-8 p.m. Virtual. Join AlexRenew for the next RiverRenew Community Listening Session. Get a behind-the-scenes look at ongoing construction activity, direct insight from our team, and all the most up-to-date information on the RiverRenew Tunnel

Project. Visit the website: <https://www.riverrenew.com/community/community-listening-sessions>

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

STEM VOLUNTEERS. The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) needs scientists, engineers, mathematicians, and physicians to assist K-12 STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) teachers in the Northern Virginia Area, during the 2016-17 school year. In the 2015-16 school year, the numbers of STEM volunteers in Northern Virginia

were: Fairfax County - 40, Arlington - 20, and Alexandria - one. Details of the collaboration are worked out between the teacher and the volunteer, and may involve giving demonstrations, assisting in lab experiments, lecturing on special topics, assisting with homework, etc. The hours are flexible, and volunteers attend a one-day training in September before being assigned to schools. To see how volunteers are assisting their teachers, view the video clips at www.senior-scientist.org. To volunteer, contact donaledge@aol.com.

Feb. 10 Business Breakfast Speed Networking

It may be February but we are still celebrating the New Year. Join the Mount Vernon Lee Chamber for speed networking with the Alexandria City Chamber and get ready to grow your contacts. Bring plenty of business cards for the new people you will meet. There’s the delicious breakfast buffet before networking begins on Thursday, Feb. 10, 8 – 9:30 am, at Belle Haven Country Club. For more information or to register please visit www.MtVernon-LeeChamber.org or call 703-360-6925.

ENTERTAINMENT

Warm Up and Try Something New During Winter Restaurant Week

BY HOPE NELSON
GAZETTE PACKET

Like a beacon in the dead of January, Alexandria's Winter Restaurant Week is drawing near once more. From Jan. 21-30, restaurants city-wide will concoct special menus priced at either \$35 per person or per couple to tempt diners to try something new (or venture back to old favorites). As with the past several years, many eateries' deals are also good for carry-out, so be sure to call before weighing your options.

Ada's on the River, 3 Pioneer Mill Way

Potomac views and a good meal deal, too? It's the best of both worlds. For \$35 per person, Ada's on the River is offering up a choice of appetizers (yellow tuna tartare, Waldorf salad or charred mortadella) and entrée (spiced rockfish or flank steak) to warm you up



Ada's on the River

during a cold month.

City Kitchen, 330 S. Pickett St.

Out on the West End, City Kitchen is offering a \$35-for-two meal featuring a choice of entrees (chicken pot pie, gnocchi or pork chops) and cheesecake or Devil's Latte Cream Cake – dark chocolate cake soaked in Irish cream and

filled with cream mousse – to finish things off.

Haute Dogs and Fries, 610 Montgomery St.

Forget the fussy prix fixe menus – Haute Dogs gets straight to the good stuff with its \$35-for-two deal. The eatery's Restaurant Week menu offers two local German

brats complete with sauerkraut and brown mustard with a side of chips, paired with a Hofbrau helles lager. Order for takeout or delivery, or dine at the restaurant indoors or out.

Junction Bakery and Bistro, 1508 Mount Vernon Ave.

Junction's two-person deal comes with a bountiful amount of food – one small plate, one large plate and one dessert per person. Choose between mojo mac and cheese, General Tso cauliflower and beet salad to start, then dive into the main event – pot roast, a falafel bowl or a burger. Finally, choose between coconut cake and blackberry cheesecake.

Piece Out Del Ray, 2419 Mount Vernon Ave.

Del Ray's newest pizza joint offers much more than just the signature pies, and Piece Out aims to showcase the breadth of its menu through Restaurant Week. The eatery's dinner for two offers one starter – a Greek or tomato moz-

zarella salad – and two entrees, ranging from baked spinach manicotti to squid ink fettuccine fra diavolo and more. Finally, sweeten the deal with three cannoli. Want a little tittle to wash down the meal? Piece Out is offering a bottle of house red or white for an additional \$15.

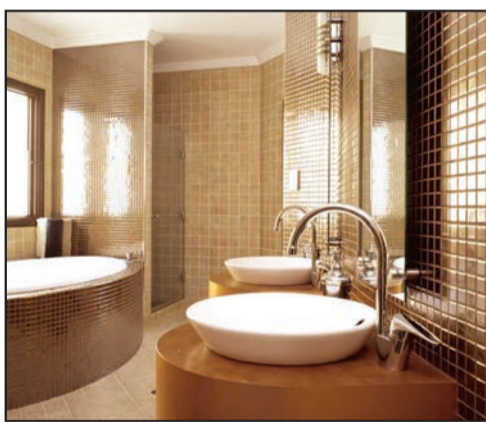
Thai Signature, 722 King St.

Thai Signature is offering a three-course meal for \$35 per person. Start off with a choice of crab Rangoon or kratong thong (patty shells with shrimp and mixed chicken). Proceed on to a selection of lad na mee krob – shrimp and squid in a gravy sauce atop wonton noodles – or Siamese steak, and then finish things out with pumpkin sweet coconut milk for a sweet treat.

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

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CENTRE VIEW

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 newspaper's 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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ENTERTAINMENT

Hot, Hot, Hot

Chili contest benefits Girls State.

BY JEANNE THEISMANN
GAZETTE PACKET

Amber Berry took top honors with her white chicken chili in the American Legion Auxiliary Unit 24 chili cook-off Dec. 11 at Post 24 in Old Town.

The chili competition was the centerpiece of the Army-Navy game day festivities and served as a fundraiser for the Auxiliary's 2022 Girls State Program.

"A very special thanks to everyone who helped out to make this event a huge success," said Unit 24 representative Amy Soller. "Everyone who came out to enjoy the game and the chili, and those who donated graciously, helped us raise funds to send young women to this season's Girls State experience."

The event enabled Unit 24 to provide five local rising seniors scholarships for Girls State, which takes place in June.

"Unit 24 expresses our deepest thanks to our donors and community for graciously supporting this important educational opportunity," Soller added.

www.valegionpost24.com/unit-24-auxiliary

"Everyone who came out .. and donated graciously helped us raise funds to send young women to this season's Girls State experience."

—American Legion Auxiliary representative Amy Soller

Amber Berry celebrates winning the American Legion Auxiliary Unit 24 chili cook-off Dec. 11 at Post 24 in Old Town. Berry took top honors with her white chicken chili recipe.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

CALENDAR

JAN. 7-29

Little Monsters Exhibit. At Del Ray Artisans Gallery in the Colasanto Center, 2704 Mount Vernon Ave., Alexandria. At Del Ray Artisans gallery features artists' interpretation of their own little monsters — from scary to funny. Check out related workshops. Gallery hours are Thursday 12-6 p.m., Friday 12-9 p.m., Saturday 12-6 p.m., and Sunday 12-6 p.m. Details at: <https://DelRayArtisans.org/event/little-monsters>

NOW THRU JAN. 23

Post-Grad Residents Exhibition. At Target Gallery, Alexandria. Target Gallery, the contemporary exhibition space at Torpedo Factory Art Center, celebrates the work of the Post-Grad Resident artists—Eliza Clifford, Lindsey Kircher, Danny Varillas, and Nicole Wandera — in 2021 Post-Grad Residency. The exhibition will be on view through Sunday, Jan. 23, 2022. Target Gallery is in Studio 2 in the Art Center, located at 105 N. Union St., Alexandria.

JAN. 16-22

Prohibition Week. 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. At The Loft at Lena's, 401 E. Braddock Road, Alexandria. Speakeasy style dining experience Velvet & Rye, which is the latest seasonal concept from The Loft at Lena's, announces Prohibition Week Jan. 16-22. Velvet & Rye will celebrate the 101st anniversary of Prohibition — or more fittingly, the birth of speakeasies and bootlegging — with a week of activities include



Alexandria Restaurant Week will be held Jan. 21-30, 2022 in Alexandria neighborhoods.

Prohibition Cocktail Classes, trivia, a Roaring '20s Cocktail and Costume Party, and chances to win cocktail-related prizes. Visit the website: <https://www.theloftatlenas.com/>

JAN. 21-30

Alexandria Restaurant Week. At neighborhoods throughout Alexandria, including Old Town, Del Ray, Carlyle and Eisenhower, and the West End. For 10 days and two weekends, nearly 70 restaurants in Alexandria will offer a \$35 prix fixe dinner for one or two people. Special menus are available in-person at all participating restaurants, many with heated outdoor dining available. Fifty restaurants will also offer to-go options in addition to in-person meals. The online menu

book makes it easy to browse delicious selections from dozens of Alexandria eateries and enjoy special menus at some of Alexandria's winterized dining destinations or from the comfort of your own home. Visit AlexandriaRestaurant-Week.com.

JAN. 21-30

Annual Fooduary Event. At National Harbor, Md. Restaurants will offer pre fixe menus including Succotash, Bond 45, Fiorella Italian Kitchen & Pizzeria, Rosa Mexicano, Grace's Mandarin, and Mason's Famous Lobster Roll. MGM National Harbor's restaurants Voltaggio brothers, Diablo Cantina and TAP Sports Bar. Visitors are invited to enjoy options via dine-in, carryout or delivery. Visit www.nationalharbor.com/fooduary/.

bor.com/fooduary/.

sans.org/event/snowy-trees/

SUNDAY/JAN. 23

GTMS Virtual Trivia. 7 p.m. Via Zoom. Warm Up with a Virtual Trivia Night to Benefit Gadsby's Tavern. Grab your favorite beverage and settle down for some trivia fun (with prizes!) that will test your knowledge of American history, the Presidents, and George Washington in honor of his birthday in February. Cost: \$20.00 per household. Purchase your ticket at https://www.gadsbystavernmuseum.us/events_1/trivia-night

SUNDAY/JAN. 23

"Virtual Winter Lecture: Native Shrubs for Birds." 1:30-2:30 p.m. At Green Spring Gardens, 4603 Green Spring Road, Alexandria. Anne Little, co-founder of the Virginia Bluebird Society and founder of Tree Fredericksburg, will introduce you to native trees and shrubs that help sustain our bird populations. Learn how creating the proper habitat in our yards and public spaces can help slow the decline in the bird population in North America. Register for Native Shrubs for Birds. call 703-642-5173, or visit Green Spring Gardens.

FRIDAY/JAN. 28

Snowy Trees in Watercolor Workshop. 6-8 p.m. Via Zoom. Learn to use many watercolor techniques such as wet in wet, salt texture, lifting, splattering and more, as you paint a very colorful snowy tree scene. For details and to register: <https://delrayartisans.org/event/snowy-trees>. Cost: \$50 Del Ray Artisans member / \$55 Non-members. Website: <https://delrayarti->

THE BIRCHMERE

At 3701 Mount Vernon Ave., Alexandria. All shows are at 7:30 p.m., unless otherwise noted. Tickets available at Ticketmaster.com. Contact The Birchmere at 703-549-7500 or www.Birchmere.com.

January

Thu/Fri. Jan. 20 & 21: Keb' Mo' Band with special guest The Brother Brothers \$89.50
Sat. Jan. 22: A Tribute to JOHNNY ARTIS featuring Johnny Artis Legacy Band & Friends with Ron Holloway, Regina Blackman, Stacy Brooks & Gary Thomas \$35.00
Sun. Jan. 23: JOSH ABBOTT BAND \$35.00
Mon. Jan. 24: J. BROWN \$35.00
Wed. Jan. 26: SWEET HONEY IN THE ROCK \$45.00
Thu. Jan. 27: The Gilmour Project \$35.00
Fri. Jan. 28: Raheem DeVaughn \$69.50
Sat. Jan. 29: Who's Bad – The Ultimate Michael Jackson Experience \$39.50

February

Wed. Feb. 2: MARC COHN \$55.00
Fri/Sat. Feb. 4&5: Will Downing \$79.50
Fri. Feb. 11: Drew & Ellie Holcomb: The You & Me Tour \$45.00
Sat. Feb. 12: BURLLESQUE-A-PADES In Loveland! Hosted by Murray Hill with Live Music from The Brian Newman Band starring Angie Pontani, The Maine Attraction, Mr Gorgeous, Gal Friday, \$29.50

NEWS BRIEF

Grant For Preservation of Historic Court Records

The Library of Virginia has awarded Fairfax Circuit Court Clerk John T. Frey a grant for local historic records preservation through the Circuit Court Records Preservation Program (CCRP). <https://www.lva.virginia.gov/agencies/ccrp/>

The funds totaling \$20,877 will be used to conserve: Fairfax Court Order Book, for cases from 1783-1788
Fairfax Court Order Book, for cases from 1791-1793
Sheriff's Docket Book 1799-1802
Rule Docket 1793-1795
Fairfax Record of Roads 1860-1904
Late 18th century Will Books E-1, F-1, and G-1

The process of preservation, described by Fairfax County, can vary. Preservation of the court records aims to prolong their life for continued access by the public. How they were originally bound, their storage conditions, and the amount of handling these documents have endured over 250 years affects the preservation approach. For example, prior to the invention of air conditioning, court records were generally stored in humid, moist conditions. Impurities collect over time, such as dirt from people handling the pages. Iron gall ink, used by the Clerks for writing in the 18th and 19th centuries, is naturally highly acidic and can eat through paper. The documents, like those that will be preserved with this grant funding, are placed in a chemical bath to remove impurities that have accumulated over time, and carefully dried flat. The dried pages are each placed in a neutral Mylar sleeve, so that today's researchers can easily flip the pages, without pulling the page from a fixed binding or touching the pages with bare hands. Once the documents are

repaired, they will be digitized to be made available online to the public through the Court Public Access Network (CPAN) . <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/circuit/online-services/court-public-access-network>

Renew Dog License

Fairfax County asks: Did you get a pandemic pooch this past year?

Then you should know that every dog four months or older must be licensed with Fairfax County.

Get your annual dog license or renew it by Tuesday, Feb. 1. The fee is \$10 per dog, except for service dogs which are given licenses for free. <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/taxes/dog-license-information>

After you submit your license application or renewal, you'll be mailed a tag for your dog's collar.

If you are getting a license for the first time, you must provide a current rabies vaccination certificate. When renewing, proof of vaccination isn't required unless the certificate has expired.

If your dog is already licensed, you should have received a renewal notice in the mail in November from the Department of Tax Administration.

You can renew and pay online. There is a third-party service fee for e-check, credit and debit card payments online. <https://ffxpayments.virginiainteractive.org/Payments/Doglicense>

Check your renewal notice to find your dog's registration number and previous license number which you'll need to renew online. If you don't have this information handy or didn't get a renewal notice, contact the Department of Tax Administration at 703-222-8234, TTY 711, on weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/news/renew-or-get-your-2022-dog-license-feb-1>

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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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By MARILYN CAMPBELL
GAZETTE PACKET

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) 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

"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.

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."



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