

CONNECTION

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Lamb Center's Spring Festival

PAGE 7

Hannah Carey is happily holding a lamb at the Lamb Center Spring Festival on Saturday, April 16.

ENTERTAINMENT, PAGE 11 ♦ CLASSIFIEDS, PAGE 14

PHOTO BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

'Into the Woods' At Fairfax High

PAGE 4

School Chief Named Amid Protests

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Sooo Coold

PAGE 9

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Student protest over the superintendent selection process at McLean High School last week.



Students stages walk out protests at McLean, Westfield and Mount Vernon High Schools, among others.



PHOTOS BY MERCIA HOBSON/CONNECTION NEWSPAPERS

Protestors at McLean High School (from left): Atticus Gore, Sierra Balleisen, Ava Farivar, and Layla Bizri, climb up on the school sign after demonstrating to raise awareness, advocate for their rights, and for students to have a voice in the selection of the new FCPS superintendent.

No Stopping School Board Naming New Division Superintendent

Student protests, petition and NAACP objections fail to derail the endgame.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

On April 14, 250 high school students in Fairfax County staged walkouts and protests at multiple schools, including Westfield, McLean, Oakton, and Mount Vernon high schools

organized by the Pride Liberation Project. It is a student-led coalition of queer and allied FCPS students who advocate for the rights of LGBTQIA students.

The Fairfax County School Board was scheduled to vote that evening naming Michelle Reid, Ed.D., as Fairfax County Public Schools' next superintendent. Reid

is currently the superintendent of the Northshore School District in Washington state.

Sierra Balleisen, a McLean High School student protestor, said, "I'm here as a neurodivergent student trying to advocate for our rights and allow the students to have a voice in the new superintendent ... There should be nothing about us

without us."

According to Pride Liberation Projects' Student Statement Supporting NAACP Letter Regarding Superintendent Search, outreach to the community during the search for new superintendents was limited to fifteen days in January. The only outreach to students was an 11-student panel, chosen

through a process not revealed to the general student body. "Though these 11 students are likely immensely qualified, they nonetheless cannot represent the views of a 180,000+ student body that attends 198 schools and centers, speaks 200+ languages, and belongs to a diverse range of socio-
SEE STUDENT PROTEST, PAGE 6

Fairfax School Board's Frustration Shows

Does the process diminish new superintendent's appointment?

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

At its regular meeting on April 14, the Fairfax County School Board voted 9 to 3 to appoint Michelle Reid, Ed.D. as division superintendent of Fairfax County Public Schools, effective July 1, 2022, and ending June 30, 2026, replacing Superintendent Scott Brabrand, who is stepping down. The appointment was accompanied by concern and angst by

school board members. Laura Jane Cohen (Springfield) described the board as "a collective group of 12 very different people."

Rachna Sizemore Heizer (Vice Chair and Member-at-Large) said that Reid performed consistently at the top of the candidates for superintendent of FCPS, impressing them with her "thoughtful, brilliant, and insightful analysis, her work around STEM, and strong academics for all students, and an understanding that our focus must also be on the whole child." Sizemore Heizer said she was

also impressed with Reid's work on racial and educational justice and inclusion, demonstrating support for and deep understanding of LGBTQIA students, students of color, students from various re-



Rachna Sizemore Heizer (Vice Chair and Member-at-Large)

ligious backgrounds, English language learner students, immigrants, students with disabilities, and those with different gender identity. "She was the only one to talk about ableism and demonstrate understanding of the concepts of neurodiversity."

Karen Keys-Gamarra (Member-at-Large) made a motion to delay the vote, seconded by Dr. Ricardy Anderson (Mason District). Keys-Gamarra addressed
SEE FAIRFAX SCHOOL, PAGE 8

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HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL

‘The Audience Will Love the Magic of It All’

Fairfax High presents the musical, ‘Into the Woods.’

BY BONNIE HOBBS
 THE CONNECTION

Fairfax High’s spring musical is “Into the Woods,” and Director Chris Whitney says it’s the perfect time for this production. Its composer, Stephen Sondheim, died in December; so, said Whitney, “This is our tribute to him.”

Show times are Thursday-Friday, April 28-29, at 7 p.m.; and Saturday, April 30, at 2 and 7 p.m. Tickets are \$12, adults; \$10, students and children, at the door or via www.fxplayers.org.

Nearly 70 people comprise the cast, crew and live orchestra, and Whitney said rehearsals are going wonderfully. “There are lots of really experienced actors, plus some new faces,” he said. “The music is challenging, but these talented students are persevering and just blowing us away with their work ethic and musical chops. It’s great to collaborate with them and with our vocal-music director, Evie Korovesis.”

In the story, fairytale characters all try to make their wishes come true and learn what happens when they become selfish. They realize they have to work together to fix the problems they’ve created. Some scenes take place in the homes of Cinderella, the Baker and Jack (from “Jack and the Beanstalk”), but most happen in the woods.

“Besides the set, we’re excited to also use a projector to show different images of the woods, sky, shadows of the Giant, etc., throughout the production,” said Whitney. “And student Maevé Donohue is both making and pulling together the costumes with help from a drama mom.”

Over the past few years, said Whitney, “Many people have lost their moral compass, so this is a great show to provide us with words of wisdom and guidance about how to work together and live with each other. Audiences are going to love the overall, theatrical experience of the singing, lights, sets, costumes and storytelling. I’m really excited to see it all come together on the stage.”

Senior Charlotte Bronaugh, the stage manager, discussed the production aspects that make this musical take shape. “I oversee a lot of the technical elements,” she said. “With the new projector, we’ll be able to show, for example, the beanstalk swaying and crashing, plus the depth of the woods. And the sky’s color will reflect the characters’ changing emotions – happiness, fear, etc.”

She said one of the special effects is a shadow screen with a scene playing behind it, and light in front of it, so the actors are sometimes seen in silhouette. And the Baker’s house was built in two halves, so it can be broken apart at an especially dramatic part in the story to foreshadow what’s going to happen.

“Cinderella talks to birds, so we’re going to hang fake birds from the ceiling,” said Bronaugh. “Her ball gown will also make its entrance to her from above. This is a tech-heavy show, so we’re capitalizing on it. There’ll be lots of sound effects to add to the crashing and booming sounds onstage.”

In addition, she said, “We have a runway in the orchestra pit so the actors can get closer to the audience and have bigger moments to express themselves. And the walls around the stage will be covered with vines and leaves – and augmented with green lights – for an



BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

Back row, from left, Maddie Tyler (Cinderella), Isabella Jackson (the Witch) and Charlie Bicknell (the Baker); in front are Kaylee Williams (Little Red) and Hank Hawkins (Jack).

immersive experience into the forest.”

Loving her job, Bronaugh called it a special and unique opportunity. “I get to help Mr. Whitney’s vision come to life on the stage,” she said. “And I see the actors every day and interact with so many of the show’s technical aspects.”

Playing the Baker’s Wife is senior Evie Izdepski. “She’s confident and wants a baby more than anything else,” explained Izdepski. “And she’s willing to make hard choices to get it – even if it’s not the most traditionally moral route.”

Izdepski is enjoying her role because of “the opportunity to explore her relationship with her husband and how she conducts herself. Her complex idea of morality gives me lots of different elements of her character to investigate. She’s also fun to play because I get to show another side of her and how she acts when her husband’s not there.”

Izdepski’s favorite song – sung by Hank Hawkins as Jack – is “Giants in the Sky” because of “its sense of adventure and exploration. It’s also melodic and purposeful.” As for the audience, she said, “People will enjoy seeing familiar characters in a different light, and the actors are all giving wonderful performances.”

Junior Isabella Jackson portrays the witch close to Rapunzel’s character in Disney’s “Tangled” movie. “She has many layers and transforms throughout the show,” said Jackson. “In act one, she’s bitter and no one likes her. I think lots of her bitterness comes because she looks ugly, old and helpless. She also manipulates people, especially Rapunzel.

“But in act two, you’ll get to see her true character because – deep down – she’s a caring person. She was controlling before because she loved Rapunzel so much and didn’t want to lose her. And overall, she feels betrayed by the world, so that’s why she takes out her anger on everyone.”

SEE FAIRFAX HIGH, PAGE 5
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HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL

Fairfax High presents 'Into the Woods'

FROM PAGE 4

Jackson said it's fun to play the witch because "She gets to be mean and randomly put spells on people. And even though she's evil, she's very comedic, so I never feel too bad about all the mean things she does."

Jackson especially likes singing "Last Midnight," her character's final number in the show. "It relates to how she views the world and her commentary on it," she said. "Right before this song, all the characters are arguing and blaming each other for all the catastrophes that have happened. And this song makes the audience think about themselves, too, because it says, 'You're so quick to point blame at others, but you should first look at yourself.'"

On the whole, said Jackson, "The audience will love the magic of it all. The way Sondheim's able to portray realistic relationships in such a fantastical way is so exciting to watch. It's a show for all ages, and anyone can learn something from it."

Playing Cinderella is senior Maddie Tyler. "She's kind and poised and not afraid to work hard," said Tyler. "She's 17 and learning about life and what she wants. And she's also a little confused about whether she wants the prince to find out her identity or keep it a secret."

Calling this her dream role, Tyler said, "Getting to play Cinderella is really special.



BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

On the left are Cinderella, her family and the prince; in middle are Charlie Bicknell and Evie Izdepski (as the Baker and his wife); and at right are Jack, his mom, the Witch and Little Red.

Something about Sondheim's music really speaks to me, and all of Cinderella's songs are so elegant and beautiful. I've loved her since I was a child."

Getting to sing "No One is Alone" is one of the main reasons Tyler wanted this role. "It'll be meaningful to sing it in my senior year," she explained. "The lyrics talk about how everybody has somebody, and no one is truly by themselves. And I think that's important to remember as I move into the next chapter of my life; it's important for everybody."

She said audiences will appreciate "the unity among the ensemble members. It's a heartfelt show that I hope will touch many young people in the audience and give them an appreciation for the arts."

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Student Protests, Petition and NAACP Objections Fail to Derail the Endgame



Jaya Nachnani, Mount Vernon High School student, was an organizer of the protest.

FROM PAGE 3

economic backgrounds,” said PLP’s statement.

The student statement referenced Reid’s record on closing achievement gaps and protecting students’ free speech, describing it as “lackluster.” “Moreover, Northshore School District’s history on protecting neurodivergent and disabled students is poor. For example, community members raised concerns of the restraint and seclusion of disabled students.”

“The need to hear our voices is more important than ever given the various concerns that have emerged over Dr. Reid’s approach to student journalism, neurodivergent students, and students of color,” protest organizer and Westfield student Aaryan Rawal said.

Reid and Dr. Cheryl Logan, the superintendent of Omaha Public Schools, had been the two finalists for the FCPS superintendent position. A select community panel met with the two candidates on March 28 and 29.

According to the April 9 Fairfax County NAACP release, the panel was made up of “individual members of selected School Board Advisory Committees; a few chosen FCPS elementary, middle, and high school principals; five members from the Fairfax County Council of PTAs (FCCPTA) to represent the five FCPS geographic regions; a representative from Northern Virginia Community College; a representative of the Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations (whose mission is to protect Homeowners Association interests); and the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce.”

The panel did not include representatives from the Fairfax NAACP or the Pride Liberation Project.

The Fairfax NAACP said that it had been “inundated with messages from whistleblowers (serving on the panel) sharing names and data points as well as overall impressions.”

The Fairfax NAACP said that many panelists were “shocked” that a superintendent (Reid) with only a \$400 million budget vs. a \$2.7 billion FCPS budget, 2,100 employees vs. 25,000 FCPS employees, and achievement gaps despite relatively high wealth and low poverty could have ended up as one of FCPS’s final two candidates.

The Fairfax NAACP reached out to school board members. While they received responses from a few, the members’ reactions were not about the data or comparative characteristics of the divisions but rather to express their dismay that whistleblowers reached out to Fairfax NAACP and Fairfax NAACP acted on their behalf.

“With so much at stake, we have determined to share this information with the public,” the Fairfax NAACP said.

The Omaha World-Herald reported on April 15 that Dr. Cheryl Logan informed the Omaha Public School board a week before that she had taken her name out of the FCPS superintendent search. Logan’s announcement and the NAACP’s release occurred on the same day. With Logan’s withdrawal, Reid was now the leading candidate to succeed Dr. Scott Brabrand, the current FCPS Superintendent.

In the 72 hours leading up to the protests and the school board’s pending confirmation vote for Reid, the Pride Liberation Project circulated amongst FCPS high school students its petition addressed to FCPS school board members and



Student protestors at Westfield High School.

GR Consulting. “FCPS cannot select a new Superintendent without thoroughly reaching out to students and addressing concerns,” the student group said.

In their petition, PLP requested that “FCPS conduct a public audit of the Superintendent search process and publicly release clear indications that the Superintendent was chosen for demonstrating success in key areas, including community outreach, closing achievement and opportunity gaps, mental health access for all students, and equitable school experiences for vulnerable student populations, such as neurodivergent, people of color, LGBTQIA+, and English language learner students.”

Westfield student Aaryan Rawal reported that over 500 students signed the petition requesting that GR Consulting and the school board do more to reach out to students during the final stages of the superintendent search. PLP proposed holding student town hall meetings during high school free (advisory) time to allow students to voice concerns and provide board members with “important context.”

Jaya Nachnani was the primary organizer of the Mount Vernon High School protest. On April 14, she tweeted that they had two protest goals: “to get more time to investigate the allegations made against Reid and raise concerns regarding the difference in demographics between the counties (FCPS and Northshore school districts).”

FCPS has an enrollment nearly



Student protestors at McLean High School



Student protest at Mount Vernon High School.

COMMUNITY



Petting a pair of lambs is Emerson Hilferty, 7.

PHOTOS BY BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION



Mom Yorleni Orozco and dad Jayro Gabriel with daughters Jasmine, 2, and Angeline, 4, decorating Easter eggs.

Lamb Center Celebrates Spring with the Community

The Lamb Center in Fairfax City held its first Spring Festival on Sunday, April 10, in Van Dyck Park. Some 150 children and parents enjoyed an Easter Egg Hunt, face painting, egg dyeing, chalk art and mural painting. They also loved petting lambs from a private farm.

"This was our way of celebrating spring with the families who know us and introducing younger families to The Lamb Center and what it does," said Lamb Center Executive Director Tara Ruszkowski. It's a daytime, drop-in shelter for people experiencing homelessness, and it provides them with a variety of services and spiritual guidance.



Children attending the festival created this mural to hang in The Lamb Center.



The Rosen siblings, (from left) Jeremy, 8-1/2, and Juliet, 6-1/2, tenderly pet the lambs.

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Fairfax School Board's Frustration Shows

FROM PAGE 3

Reid, who sat in the audience, saying that what she was about to say had little to do with Reid but with the process. "As many people know, our community has expressed some outrage. I can't blame them," Keys-Gamarra said. The people who reached out were community members, according to Keys-Gamarra. "It is our job to hear them. For a public school system, our school system belongs to the public. So, my objection today has to do with the fact that we seem to be rushing this decision ... This is their community, and they care. It's our responsibility to listen and not to jam this vote through. In my opinion, it is sending them a message that they don't matter."



Karen Keys-Gamarra
(Member-at-Large)

Dr. Ricardy Anderson (Mason District) concurred, saying that the community bombarded them with emails and phone calls. "They have asked to be heard. I strongly believe that we should afford ourselves the gift of time to reach out to those who have expressed their concerns and to listen more closely before finalizing our decision."



Dr. Ricardy Anderson
(Mason District)

Laura Jane Cohen (Springfield) said she respected how Keys-Gamarra and Anderson felt and would not pretend to say that she understood their hurt. She said the system was imperfect, run by human beings. "There's not a person up here who does not understand how high the stakes are ... I'm proud of who we chose, and I trust you to get us to where we need to be. I hope that we're all going to do our best to work together and figure out how in the heck we got here."



Laura Jane Cohen
(Springfield)

Elaine Tholen (Dranesville) said she struggled with this as the board worked for months and held public sessions. "We tried to hear from the public. I am really hurt people feel disenfranchised ... All I can say is I worked in good faith. I have read resumes. I have interviewed people over and over and over. What we put these candidates through

was so intense. We got to a point where we had two incredible, incredible people. As we slowly went through the interview process, the decision was tough ... We voted as the board, and Dr. Michelle Reid came out on top, fair and square."



Elaine Tholen
(Dranesville)

Megan McLaughlin (Braddock) expressed empathy for her colleagues and the public, who felt hurt and concerned about the process. She reaffirmed that the board was transparent in publishing the calendar and the process. It would be a confidential search because the board was trying to attract the best candidate, and they didn't necessarily want to leave their districts. She said that the recruiting company had found strong candidates, and she wanted to celebrate the board's incredible finalist. "I don't believe that we are discounting the people who we were elected to represent. I don't feel that we've rushed this process or had a lack of transparency. Our calendar, our timeline, our entire process was all published ... I believe all 12 of us care deeply, and we recognize that, sadly, there are hurt members in our community."



Megan McLaughlin
(Braddock)

Tamara Derenak Kaufax (Lee) welcomed Reid as the board's top candidate. "We knew that when we extended the offer to you on April 2, we were getting a visionary educator who was known both regionally and nationally for your outstanding instructional leadership." Kaufax said that FCPS is not without its challenges, but Reid had described herself as a "visionary, as an incurable optimist."



Tamara Derenak Kaufax
(Lee)

"You will need that here," Kaufax said. "I look forward to working with you to build community trust and to bring our community together."

Melanie K. Meren (Hunter Mill) described Reid as a "thought leader," saying it is an accomplishment few people can obtain because it demands discipline of curiosity, investigation of data, and the calculated

risk of innovation. Meren said Dr. Reid demonstrated intimate knowledge of data about Fairfax, and she heard in her voice the eagerness to see and experience for herself that data as it comes to life through the county's students, staff, and communities. Meren appreciated how Reid understood the value of play. "I believe that Dr. Reid will lead Fairfax County into fulfilling the birthright that is public education in America."



Melanie K. Meren
(Hunter Mill)

Karen Corbett Sanders (Mount Vernon) said that this had been a difficult decision for this whole board. "It impacts everything FCPS does as a system and each student in ways that the school board knows and ways that they do not yet know. ... As stewards of a \$3.3 billion entity, we know that FCPS is both a complex business entity and an academic center of excellence," Sanders said. She knew the application process had been extensive, yet FCPS's needs were vast and differed from those of the district Reid currently serves as superintendent. "My decision to vote no tonight is a difficult one, and it is based on my concerns that center around the ability to scale up from a small school system ... to a system the size of Fairfax County with 180,000 students, (and) the absence of experience in a large, diverse district."



Karen Corbett Sanders
(Mount Vernon)

Karl Frisch (Providence) said he was thrilled when the school system received dozens of "amazing, qualified, and impressive applicants." "Through round after round of interviews, with tough, probing questions, I was always impressed with Dr. Reid's answers, not only for the clarity and detail with which she described her work as superintendent, but with her insights about Fairfax County Public Schools," Frisch said. According to Frisch, Dr. Reid "routinely spoke unprompted about the ways she addressed the equity needs of her student body: LGBTQ students, Muslim students, students of color, English language learners, students with special needs, and more." Her commitment to eq-



Karl Frisch
(Providence)

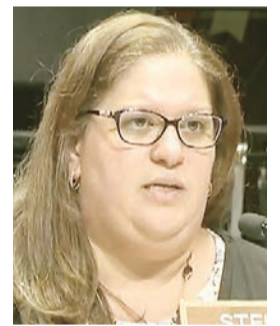
uity was woven through her answers and accomplishments, he said.

Abbar Omeish (Member-at-Large) said, "Today, I am asking for a rare commodity in our public arena, and all I can offer you is good faith, hard work, thoughtful consideration, and a track record of sincerity, dedication, and advocacy for equity and inclusion. I'm not here to dismiss anyone's feelings nor discredit the multitude of perspectives, and insights community members have around how we experienced today." Omeish added that she agreed that there were concerns. She had her own reservations. But the reality was that "the work of democracy is always messy to bring 12 people behind one decision. I'm supporting Dr. Reid today for several exciting reasons, one of which is because she had the most holistic equity responses we've encountered."



Abbar Omeish
(Member-at-Large)

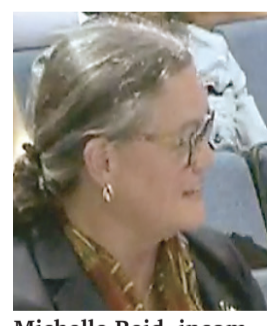
Stella Pekarsky (Chair, Sully) spoke directly to Reid. "Nothing is easy in Fairfax. But I am sorry, I am sorry because you deserve a much warmer, better welcome than we were able to give you tonight. And it is my opinion that none of this has to do with you. You are an exceptional educator- exceptional; and those who strive for excellence, never settle for anything else."



Stella Pekarsky
(Chair, Sully)

Pekarsky said she was honored to have Reid present, selected by the school board, as it begins writing the next chapter for Fairfax County Public Schools in partnership with the community.

"**Dr. Michelle Reed** exemplifies the critical characteristics of servant leadership in every way and is driven by a vision for public schools that is resolutely student-centered, a vision not for what education is today, but what it could be, what it must be for kids who will be the leaders of tomorrow."



Michelle Reid, incoming superintendent

Reid received her doctorate in Educational Leadership from the University of Washington, master's degree in educational administration from University of Washington, and her bachelor's degree in natural science and chemistry from the University of Puget Sound.

VIEWPOINTS

Everyone's Feeling the Cold Temps in April

Those in the plant industry are taking steps to protect the crop.

By MIKE SALMON
THE CONNECTION

April snowflakes bring May plant covers? There's no rhyme in this spring ditty but area plant lovers and warm weather fans are still waiting for the warm sun here in Fairfax County. It's been a cool month that brought even unexpected snowfall in places around the area.

The National Weather Service forecast for April 20-22 reports that "much of the eastern U.S. will remain mired within an abnor-

mally chilly air-mass for mid-April through mid-week. There are also freeze warnings and frost advisories in the Mid-Atlantic. Some pockets of measurable snowfall are also expected in parts of the central Appalachians today. In mid-April?

"It's a little extreme this year but not unusual," said Anne Zimmerman at Nalls Produce in Franconia. She's bringing some plants in and covering others, and definitely not putting out the tomato plants until after May 1, which she is recommending to any customers. "I do recommend May 1 unless you want to babysit them," she said.

How are you dealing with the colder weather this April?

"Ordering stuff that's cold hearty, cover up when we need to"

– Isaiah Weinstein, garden market manager in Springfield



"Layers and hot chocolate"

– Kate Adams, Burke, garden market and Target manager



"I'm going to put them out anyway"

– Aimee Lalime with tomato plants, Springfield, acoustic consultant



"Cover the azaleas and the annuals with cloth"

– Dylan Haggerty, Nalls Produce in Franconia



At Nalls Produce, the azaleas get covered.



PHOTOS BY MIKE SALMON/THE CONNECTION

VDOT
Virginia Department of Transportation

DRPT
Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation

Public Hearings



Funding the Right Transportation Projects

You are invited to share comments on transportation projects that have been recommended for funding in the FY2023-2028 Six-Year Improvement Program (SYIP). Additionally, pursuant to §33.2-202, comments will be accepted for new projects valued in excess of \$25 million. The Commonwealth Transportation Board will take your comments into consideration as it develops the FY2023-2028 SYIP. The program allocates public funds to highway, road, bridge, rail, bicycle, pedestrian and public transportation projects. All federally eligible projects in the SYIP will be included in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program to document how Virginia will obligate its federal funds.

Meeting materials will be available <https://www.ctb.virginia.gov/planning/springmeetings2022/default.asp> before April 25, 2022.

Public meetings begin at 4 p.m. in each of the locations except as noted below:
A formal comment period will be held at these meetings.

<p>Monday, April 25 Fredericksburg District James Monroe High School 2300 Washington Avenue Fredericksburg, Virginia 22401</p>	<p>Tuesday, April 26 Culpeper District Culpeper District Auditorium 1601 Orange Road Culpeper, Virginia 22701</p>	<p>Thursday, April 28 Richmond District Richmond District Auditorium 2430 Pine Forest Drive Colonial Heights, Virginia 23834</p>
<p>Monday, May 2 Staunton District Blue Ridge Community College Plecker Center 1 College Lane Weyers Cave, Virginia 24486</p>	<p>Tuesday, May 3 Lynchburg District Virginian Hotel, 712 Church Street Lynchburg, Virginia 24504</p>	<p>Wednesday, May 4 *Northern Virginia District Northern Virginia District Office Potomac Conference Room 4975 Alliance Drive Fairfax, Virginia 22030 <i>*meeting begins at 5:30 p.m.</i></p>
<p>Monday, May 9 Hampton Roads District Hampton Roads District Auditorium 7511 Burbage Drive, Suffolk, Virginia 23435</p>	<p>Wednesday, May 11 Bristol District Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center One Partnership Circle Abingdon, Virginia 24210</p>	<p>Thursday, May 12 Salem District Holiday Inn Valley View 3315 Ordway Drive NW Roanoke, Virginia 24017</p>

*The Northern Virginia District meeting will serve as the required joint public meeting with the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority, the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission, the Virginia Railway Express, and the CTB per § 33.2-214.3 of the Code of Virginia.

You can submit comments by email or mail by May 23, 2022.

For roads and highways: Six-YearProgram@VDOT.Virginia.gov, or Infrastructure Investment Director, Virginia Department of Transportation 1401 East Broad St., Richmond, VA 23219.

For rail and public transportation: DRPTPR@drpt.virginia.gov, Public Information Office, Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation 600 East Main Street, Suite 2102, Richmond VA, 23219.

The Commonwealth is committed to ensuring that no person is excluded from participation in, or denied the benefits of its services on the basis of race, color or national origin, as protected by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. If you need further information on these policies or special assistance for persons with disabilities or limited English proficiency, please contact the Virginia Department of Transportation's Title VI Compliance Officer at 804-786-2730 or the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation's Title VI Compliance Officer at 804-786-4440 (TTY users call 711).



CASA members at the April 14 rally support the proposed Trust Policy.



CASA members hold signs urging FCSB to adopt the Trust Policy.



A CASA speaker advocates for the Trust Policy.



Diane Burkley Alejandro, Lead Advocate for Fairfax Virginia People Power.

FCPS to Consider Trust Policy

CASA members and allies speak out at rally and public hearing.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

CASA, a nonprofit immigrant advocacy group, held a press conference and rally outside Luther Jackson Middle School in Falls Church early on the evening of April 14, the site of the Fairfax County School Board's regular meeting. Public hearings were planned to start at 6 p.m.

"We are here to support the Fairfax School Board Trust Policy and have community members coming to speak to the school board members," said Christian Martinez, CASA Advocacy Specialist. "We've been involved throughout the whole process, and we have not seen any (cause for) concern."

As a new item for discussion on the school board's agenda, there would be no vote on the policy that night, but the school board is expected to vote on the policy on April 28, according to Martinez. The Fairfax County Public Schools Trust Policy aligns with Fairfax County's Public Trust and Confidentiality Policy, adopted on Jan. 26, 2021. <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/topics/sites/topics/files/assets/documents/pdf/fairfax-county-trust-policy.pdf>

For students, if the new policy is adopted, the most noticeable change, Martinez said, "would be that they'd be able to have trust when they go to school. ... They won't have to worry about anything else besides getting a good education," he said.

Approximately 30 attendees, dressed in CASA sweatshirts, gathered around a microphone set up near the front sidewalk of the school. In their remarks, representatives from immigrant organizations as well as immigrants themselves expressed their mistrust in FCPS and their support for the proposed School Public Trust and Confidentiality Policy.



Outside Luther Jackson Middle School, where the Fairfax County School Board would be meeting that evening, a CASA speaker advocates for the Trust Policy.

Diane Burkley Alejandro, the lead advocate for Fairfax Virginia People Power, a grassroots organization founded by the national ACLU, described how CASA welcomed the organization into the fight for immigration rights before the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors adopted its Trust Policy (2021) to help immigrants remain safe from police and other cooperating agencies.

"Now it's time for the schools to do their part ... Schools would have the same trust policies that the county does," Alejandro said. "We know that a lot of you came to Fairfax for your children. My husband and I came to Fairfax for our children because they have good schools. Your children have a right to be safe and to get a good educa-

tion," she said.

According to the Trust Policy, its purpose is to confirm the school board's commitment to providing a safe and welcoming environment for all students and their families, protecting them from fear of deportation.

Janis of Honduras said she immigrated to the United States 16 years ago because of poverty and a lack of opportunities in her home country. "For a long time, I have felt insecure because... [of my] immigration status. And despite the fact that my son was born in this country, in the United States, and attends school, due to my legal status, I am always afraid that my information is going to be exposed to these immigration

entities." She talked about the fear parents have of being deported and how it is essential to keep information private so that students can access services without exposing family details to Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

If adopted, the Trust Policy would end any collaboration with federal immigration agencies such as the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.), which helps in detaining and deporting immigrants without documentation.

A. Hernandez, an immigrant living in Springfield, is the mother of an FCPS elementary school student. "I am often afraid when it comes to personal information because I am an undocumented mother. I am afraid my information will be shared with other agencies or with I.C.E. For many reasons, many times, I am afraid at school. It is difficult for my son to enroll in different educational programs. We always have to give all our personal data or present an identification from our country, which makes it more obvious that I am undocumented ... The policy provides us with well-being, security, and confidence by ensuring that parents and immigrant children of our country will be able to access school benefits and services without fear that the information we share will be disclosed to federal immigration officials."

Under the proposed school Trust Policy, FCPS employees would refer all requests for information or records from immigration enforcement officials or agents to the Office of Division Counsel for review. Employees could not grant access to school sites without approval from the Office of Division Counsel.

According to the April 14 agenda, the recommendation is that the Board approves the Trust Policy. An overview of the FCPS Trust Policy-New is available at <https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/fairfax/Board.nsf/Public>. A video of Video - Spring Public Hearing is available at <https://www.fcps.edu/node/43732>.

CALENDAR

NOW THRU MAY 1

Apopheia by Zack Rimbaud. At Torpedo Factory Artists at Mosaic 2905 District Avenue, #105, Fairfax. Open Wednesday thru Sunday 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. The Torpedo Factory Artists' Association is presenting a solo show at Torpedo Factory Artists at Mosaic, its satellite gallery. Painter Zack Rimbaud uses a variety of liquid mediums to discover fresh possibilities in this new work. Rimbaud sees his artistic process as an event, a rhythmic dialogue between the materiality of the medium and himself. Opening Reception: Friday, April 15, 6 - 9 p.m.



The Beau Soir Concert will take place Sunday, April 24 in Burke.

SATURDAY/APRIL 23

Community Yard Sale. 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. At King of Kings Lutheran Church, 4025 Kings Way. For a \$25 fee, each seller will receive two reserved parking spaces in the lot to set up. Tables can be rented from the church for an additional \$10/table. You need to stay with your items during the sale. Proceeds will benefit our youth to assist them with upcoming mission trips. Any unsold items must go home with the seller. To reserve your spot, find the signup here: <https://tinyurl.com/yp6fksuh>. Contact the church office at 703-378-7272 or churchoffice@kofk.org.

SATURDAY/APRIL 23

Fairfax Symphony Orchestra. 8 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, Fairfax. Featuring Christopher Zimmerman, music director and conductor and Simone Dinnerstein, piano. The Center for the Arts is proud to co-present a thrilling classical music program by the Fairfax Symphony Orchestra (FSO) featuring piano virtuoso Simone Dinnerstein, who The Washington Post has praised as "an artist of strikingly original ideas and irrefutable integrity." Learn More: <https://cfa.calendar.gmu.edu/fairfax-symphony-orchestra/>

Garden, Gourmet and More. There is something for everyone. Hosted by the Woman's Club of Springfield. Visit the website: womansclubofspringfield.com

SATURDAY/APRIL 23

Hearth Cooking Workshop. 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. At Gunston Hall, 10709 Gunston Road, Lorton. Gunston Hall is excited to welcome kid and adult duos for a two-and-a-half hour workshop in our hearth kitchen. This program is perfect for young people ages 8-16 with an adult for the ultimate hands-on experience with history. Price: \$70 per pair or \$55 per Gunston Hall Member pair. Visit the website: <https://gunstonhall.org/events/family-hearth-cooking-workshop-2/>

SATURDAY/APRIL 23

Children's Consignment Sale. 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. At Grace Weekday Preschool, 7434 Bath Street, Springfield. Cash only and all sales final. They will require face masks to enter the building.

SATURDAY/APRIL 23

Annual Spring Faire Craft and Vendor Show. 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. At Burke United Methodist church, 6200 Burke Centre Parkway, Burke. Jewelry, Fashion, Home Decor, Kitchen,

SEE CALENDAR, PAGE 13

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APRIL

4/6/2022.....Wellbeing
4/13/2022.....HomeLifeStyle
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Needing More at County Budget Hearings

Comments favor funding for low-income and affordable housing, police and first responders pay increases, parks, and more.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Key concerns at the Board of Supervisors last week included competitive compensation for county employees, particularly police and first responders; support for vital nonprofit community programs and county parks; and affordable and low-income housing on an ongoing basis.

Fairfax County Board of Supervisors held their Public Hearing on the County Executive's Proposed FY 2023 Advertised Budget Plan, the Advertised Capital Improvement Program for Fiscal Years 2023-2027 (CIP) (With Future Fiscal Years to 2032) and the Current Appropriation in the FY 2022 Revised Budget Plan from April 12-14. Residents, employees, and nonprofit and organization leaders testified.

Stella Pekarsky, chair of the Fairfax County School Board, said she appreciated the collaboration with the Board of Supervisors and thanked County Executive Bryan Hill. He had presented the Board with an advertised budget that "fully funds the superintendent's fiscal year 2023 proposed budget. "Our schools are the cornerstone of a strong community, educating the leaders of tomorrow," she said.

Fairfax County employees, including SEIU Virginia 512 members, testified. Last October, a collective bargaining ordinance passed in Fairfax County, allowing employees more voice for improved pay, benefits, and working conditions. Members requested fully-funded pay plans and lowered health care expenditures.

SEIU member Karen Johnson is a child educator who testified on housing challenges. "I can't afford to live in Fairfax, so I live in Fredericksburg," she said, leading to a four-hour daily round-trip commute.

SEIU member Sunny Carito is a county librarian. Carito says fully-funded raises would help offset rising healthcare costs that have been "gobbling up" her earnings. "[Due to rising healthcare costs,] my take-home pay, with the same benefit choices, has fallen \$75 per paycheck," she said.

Scott Spitzer, president of the McLean Citizens Association, testified that there were "reasonable and prudent budgetary approaches and specific proposed funding that the MCA urges the Board of Supervisors to revise from the advertised budget." MCA advocated for funding the Park Authority's proposal for an additional \$751,954 for natural resource management and sustainability. He expressed concern about the county police department's 200 open positions.

An MCA resolution encouraged the county to reduce the transfer to the Fairfax County Public Schools to pay for additional spending on maintenance, including natural resource management for the Park Authority, and larger raises for new, less senior police officers. "FCPS student enrollment has de-



Penny Gross



Elizabeth Villatoro



Kerrie Wilson



James Waller



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY SEIU VIRGINIA 512

Karen Johnson, SEIU Virginia 512 member.

clined and is projected to continue declining through FY 2027," Spitzer said.

"There is no human service response without the nonprofits," said Allison DeCoursey, president and CEO of United Community. The organization provides human services along Richmond Highway in Mount Vernon and Lee districts. DeCoursey described the poverty and unequal opportunity there, particularly in two of the county's three poorest census tracts, calling it an island.

"The life expectancy of folks on this island is ten years less than the mean of the county; 31 percent are uninsured. The median household income for Fairfax is \$112,000. On this island, it's \$55,000."

The nonprofit is working to change islands of disadvantage and create communities of opportunity. The organization's first Lived Experience Consultant is Elizabeth Villatoro. She said, "Sixteen years ago, I am a person who lived in the shadows as a woman, a mother, and an immigrant for 14 years. Nobody saw me." Villatoro started as a school volunteer, then became a Neighborhood Ambassador.

"This country gave me a lot even when I

was in the shadow. Today I feel like I am a part of this country because I can give you something back." She said when she first came here, she had only cereal to eat. "I remember how terrible that feels. So, my message to you today is, please don't give up. We need you; we need your support. We really need you."

Anita Irvin is the executive director of Insight Memory Care Center. "As of 2020, an estimated 14 percent of Fairfax County residents are 65 or older, and by 2035, this number is projected to be 17.6 percent. Funding from [Consolidated Community Funding Pool] will support our programs, services, and financial assistance fund, allowing more residents in Fairfax County to receive the care and support that they desperately need."

Deborah Hammer, chair of the Fairfax Area Disability Service Board (FA-DSB), said that 87,000 citizens of Fairfax County have a disability. She requested the board's support and proposed a funding increase for the co-responder model, allowing first responders in Fairfax County to better meet

the needs of people having a behavioral health crisis. She also advocated for permanent funding for one nurse in each Fairfax County public school; and funding for five new positions in the county's Department of Housing and Community Development to support the creation, rehabilitation, and preservation of affordable housing throughout Fairfax County.

"FA-DSB specifically requests that the current 5 percent set aside for accessible housing be increased to 10 percent due to the extensive need in the county for housing that can be accessed by those with physical or motor disabilities," Hammer said.

James Waller, president of the Friends of Colvin Run Mill, member of the Alliance of Park Friends, said that at another budget hearing, Supervisor James Walkinshaw, "hit the nail on the head."

"To win the new competition to attract firms with remote workers, and thereby help drive the county's budget and economic growth ... more investment is needed in schools and our premier parks," he said.

Waller said parks had received low priority in the budget, half of what they were 30 years ago. The tax of the park taxpayer budget was the equivalent of 2.6 cents of our real estate taxes and now is the equivalent of one cent, he said. "Give parks a higher priority ... Give them two cents."

Kerrie Wilson spoke on behalf of the Affordable Housing Advisory Council: housing is foundational to the county's prosperity, its communities, and families. The board recently adopted a new minimum goal of 10,000 affordable homes by 2034.

"But I want to put that in the context of the initial need that was documented in 2018, where we have a gap of nearly 31,000 homes already existing, in addition to making room for the new workers and people we want in our county," she said. According to Wilson, reaching the county's minimum goal and the unmet housing needs requires a dedicated recurring source of funds to get to the resource equivalent of the two pennies of the real estate tax that was committed.

According to Wilson, short-term carryover funds, federal ARPA, and other nonrecurring resources are essential. "But they won't meet the needs to sustain the pipeline that is already underway with the good efforts of FCRHA and the housing department."

"Recovery is years in the making," said Wilson. "I want to acknowledge Supervisor Alcorn; we serve in his district. I think he would agree that there has been recent awareness and sort of maybe awakening to the plight, particularly of people who remain unhoused."

According to the Budget Process Timeline, on April 22, the Board of Supervisors Budget Committee meets for pre-markup. On April 26, the Board of Supervisors marks up the FY 2023 Budget, and on May 10, the Board of Supervisors adopts FY 2023 Budget. On May 26, the School Board adopts its FY2023 Approved Budget. The FY 2023 Budget year begins on July 1, 2022.

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Student Protests, Petition And NAACP Objections Fail to Derail the Endgame

FROM PAGE 6

ten times larger than Northshore (20K v.180K students). According to a demographic and program comparison released by the Fairfax County NAACP on April 9, 2022, FCPS has five times the percentage of Black students, slightly more than twice the percentage of Hispanic students, more than twice the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced priced meals, and nearly three times the number of English Language Learners. The differences in actual numbers of students in each category are vast.

In one of its final attempts to be heard, Pride Liberation Project issued an April 14 release, stating: "Don't confirm Dr. Reid or any other candidate on Thursday, April 14 ... until students and community members are allowed to participate in the process through student town-halls in each of FCPS' regions during advisory periods, along with community panels open to any organization."

On the evening of April 14, student Aaryan Rawal said, as the Fairfax County School Board was preparing to vote on Reid's confirmation. that PLP sent its petition to school board members and GR Consulting that evening.

When asked what response they received, Rawal said that the only response from FCPS was a call from someone in the division's communications office who "pressured us not to criticize Dr. Reid until after tonight's meeting."

Following nearly two hours of discussion, the FCSB voted 9 to 3 naming Michelle Reid, Ed.D., as the next division superintendent of Fairfax County Public Schools, effective July 1, 2022, and ending June 30, 2026.

School Board members Melanie K. Meren, Elaine V. Tholen, Megan McLaughlin, Tamara D. Kaufax, Rachna S. Heizer - vice chair, Stella Pekarsky - chair, Laura Jane H. Cohen, Karl V. Frisch, and Abrar Omeish all voted in favor. Ricardy J. Anderson, Karen A. Keys-Gamarra, and Karen Corbett Sanders voted no.

Westfield student Aaryan Rawal followed up in a second email, "We are incredibly disappointed that the school board ignored the voices of student protestors, petitioners, and the countless others who were simply

"Dr. Michelle Reid, incoming superintendent exemplifies the critical characteristics of servant leadership in every way and is driven by a vision for public schools that is resolutely student-centered, a vision not for what education is today, but what it could be, what it must be for kids who will be the leaders of tomorrow."

— Stella Pekarsky (Chair, Sully)

never given the needed information by our schools to participate in this process ... We will continue to organize and advocate for our community ... It's up to the county to acknowledge our voice. We sincerely hope Dr. Reid proves us wrong."

Fairfax County NAACP tweeted, "We are appalled that despite community outcry, the @fcpsnews SB has chosen to plow through a superintendent vote tonight. Revelations regarding Special Education practices make the Northshore candidate (Reid) even less suitable than we knew." The following day, Jaya Nachnani, a student protestor at Mount Vernon High School, tweeted, "Today

we met with Dr. Reid and members of the school board. Here's what I have to say: this entire protest is not against Dr. Reid (but) rather FCPS. FCPS chose not to listen to the students and the teachers, and I'm highly disappointed."

According to NSD.org, Reid was unanimously chosen as superintendent by the Northshore School District Board of Directors in June 2016. Before Northshore, Reid was the superintendent of South Kitsap School District, her first position as superintendent. The South Kitsap school board unanimously approved Reid as superintendent in February 2013, reported the Kitsap Sun.

CALENDAR

FROM PAGE 11

SUNDAY/APRIL 24

Beau Soir Concert. 4-5:15 p.m. At St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, 6509 Sydenstricker Road, Burke. The Beau Soir Ensemble is an acclaimed flute, viola, and harp trio, based in the Washington, D.C. area, dedicated to the performance of standard and contemporary chamber music repertoire. All are welcome to come and enjoy their music; masks are recommended but optional. Visit the website: www.standrews.net

SUNDAY/APRIL 24

Mainstreet at Spotlight. 4-5:30 p.m. At Sherwood Community Center, 3740 Old Lee Highway, Fairfax. The Main Street Community Band celebrates the Joy of Spring in a concert as part of the City of Fairfax's Spotlight on the Arts Festival. Visit the website: <https://www.fairfaxband.org/>

SUNDAY/APRIL 24

Burke Historical Society. 3-5 p.m. At Pohick Regional Library/Virtual, 6450 Sydenstricker Road, Burke. Cindy Bennett will present "Who was General Braddock and Where is his Gold?" Registration for either in person or Zoom is available here: <https://librarycalendar.fairfaxcounty.gov/event/9023190>

SUNDAY/APRIL 24

Lila Downs. 7 p.m. at GMU Center for the Arts, at Monson Grand Tier, which is located on the third level of the GMU Center for the Arts

Lobby, 45 minutes prior to curtain. Lila Downs is one of the most influential artists in Latin America. Whether it's a full-throated mariachi song, an achingly tender bolero, or sultry jazz tune, this Grammy Award-winning singer-songwriter draws audiences in with her unmistakable charisma and inspiring storytelling. Learn More: <https://cfa.calendar.gmu.edu/lila-downs>

MONDAY/APRIL 25

Mason Jazz Vocal Night. 8 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, Fairfax. Join Dr. Darden Purcell, the Mason Jazz Voice studio and Mason Jazz Vocal Ensemble for an evening of swinging standards and classic hits from the Great American Songbook! With special guests, Herndon High School Vocal Jazz, directed by Dana Van Slyke. Learn More: <https://cfa.calendar.gmu.edu/mason-jazz-vocal-night/>

TUESDAY/APRIL 26

Fairfax Station Railroad Museum in Tour. 1-4 p.m. Ticket holders for this year's Historic Garden Week tour, sponsored by the Garden Club of Virginia, will be able to tour the Railroad Museum with its historic displays of railroading and railroad artifacts as well as displays of local history. The Museum is a Certified Natural Habitat, making it an ideal site for our participants to explore Virginia's history and natural treasures. For garden tour tickets, visit vagardenweek.org. www.fairfax-station.org, www.facebook.com/FFXSRR.

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True West

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

The City of Fairfax Theatre Co. (CFTC) started rehearsing "True West" in February 2020 – but then came the pandemic. Now, though, this modern-day western without horses is ready to take the stage.

The show runs April 29 through May 8, upstairs, in Fairfax City's Old Town Hall, 3999 University Drive. Go to <https://fairfaxcitytheatre.ticketleap.com/> for the specific dates, times and ticket prices. Due to mature themes, it's for ages 13 and up. It stars Mikael Johnson, Chris Andersen, Jessie Roberts and D. Scott Graham.

"This is a talented group of actors, and we were really fortunate to retain all four of them from two years ago," said Director Matt Chapman. "Both Chris and Michael have strong backgrounds in improvisation, and that informed their portrayals of their characters' back stories that they bring to light. And our producer, Michael O'Dell, has been our champion in moving this play forward, through the pandemic and afterward."

Actor Sam Shepard wrote the stage play. Set in the early 1980s, it tells the story of two brothers estranged for five years and accidentally reconnecting at their mother's home in Southern California, while she's away.

"It doesn't go particularly easily, although each brother has something to offer the other," said Chapman. "How they eventually negotiate the distance between them is the lifeblood of this story. It's a drama with some humor, and there'll be times the audience will be laughing and other times when they'll be holding their breath. The play also includes a fire and a fight – for which we enlisted the help of fight choreographer Casey Kaleba.

"Our set designer, Tina Dempsey, designed a beautiful interior of a house with functional features.

SEE "TRUE WEST", PAGE 15

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'True West' Is City of Fairfax Theatre Co.'s New Show

FROM PAGE 14

And we worked with a young, local musician and composer, Ellis Hamilton, to create some original, percussion soundscapes to accompany the show from start to finish. This adds a layer to the play's emotions, and it was fun to see how Ellis interpreted the story through percussion."

Chapman said the show has a great balance of humor and intensity. "I think different people will laugh at different places," he said. "But ultimately, it has an undercurrent of tension, the whole time. The older brother, Lee, is kind of a bully, but we get to see the chinks in his armor and where he cares about his younger brother. But both men are at breaking points in their own lives, and that leads to the continued friction between them."

He said the storyline isn't predictable, so the audience will be surprised by its twists and turns. "People think they'd always be able to make the right choice in difficult situations," explained Chapman. "But the reality is more complicated, and how we react in the moment is often flawed. The play explores that theme in original ways, so I think audiences will enjoy it."

"It's an exciting production and a nice opportunity for people to see something different," he added. "And it'll create great questions for them to ponder and discuss with others after they leave."

Mikael Johnson plays the younger brother, Austin. "He's the hero child of a broken, dysfunctional family," said Johnson. "But he's decided to make a name for himself by attending an Ivy League school and going into screenwriting and show business, which offers the potential of fortune and fame."

"He's buttoned-up, intellectual, studious and introspective. But underneath it all, he's also partly like his father and brother in their tempers and fondness for drinking to escape their problems. They all want to live in the barest way possible, free of responsibility and accountability."

Johnson loves his role because he identifies with Austin. "I relate to his escapism," he said. "It's also challenging interpreting his feelings toward himself, his brother and the world. And I like my character's life arc and how layered he is."

Describing this play as darker and more offbeat than others, Johnson said audiences will enjoy it. "We've got a great cast and – with Matt's direction, the set design, fight choreography, talent and preparation – a lot of hard work has gone into its production," he said. "And I think it'll pay off in a quality show."

Portraying the older brother, Lee, is Chris Andersen. "He didn't go to college and has spent most of his life drifting, burgling houses and living in the Mojave Desert," said Andersen. "He's antisocial, has trouble dealing with people in civilization and doesn't fit well in society. He's deeply jealous of his college-educated brother who's selling screenplays in L.A. Lee's the kind of guy who sets fire to things to see them burn. He's also a hustler, convincing people to give him money – and he has a raging temper."

Andersen's enjoying his role, too, because Lee is "alternately funny and violent. And I like his aggressive games with Austin, always trying to keep a step ahead of him. He's also very physical – a real man of the



BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

From left, Chris Andersen (Lee) taunts younger brother, Mikael Johnson (Austin).

western desert – and he has no impulse control, so I get to let it all hang out."

He said the audience will like how funny and aggressive the brothers are. "They'll also like watching them spiral down together and implode and explode," said Andersen. "And they'll see them struggle to keep their brotherly bond in the face of their own, internal conflicts."

Jessie Roberts portrays their mom (who is unnamed). "She's disconnected from her sons and just returned from Alaska," said Roberts. "She left a bad marriage, hoping to change her situation and find a new life there, but it didn't happen. She hasn't been close to Lee in a while, but hasn't had the best relationship with Austin, either. The fault is partly hers and partly their father's and the environment they were raised in."

Although the mom gets excited about art, Roberts described her as reserved, detached and dispassionate. "She has to struggle to find moments of joy," said Roberts. "I want to give her as much life as possible, but there's not much life in her. So I like playing her because it's challenging to keep her low-key and disconnected."

Saying there's "a rawness to the story," Roberts said, "It'll make the audience think about family relationships. And it'll leave them wondering what'll happen next. And hopefully, people will talk about it and about how they relate to their own families."

D. Scott Graham plays Saul Kimmer, a movie producer and colleague of Austin's, working on a script with him. "He's a wheeler and a dealer and a Hollywood schemer, and his dream is to make the next, big blockbuster," said Graham. "He has a big personality, is headstrong and has a clear vision of how things should be."

Graham said it's fun portraying Kimmer because "He's very different than me. He's also the fly in the ointment between the two brothers and, inadvertently, has stepped into the middle of their family dynamic."

"This show is about interpersonal relationships, family, brothers, friends, business associates and how that interaction plays out – especially when not all the characters are truthful," said Graham. "Everybody has their own agenda. It's funny, touching and inspirational and hits on a lot of dynamics that we all experience. And it really is a thought-provoking play that makes you think about the human condition."

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The Cancer Effect



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

From February 28th until April 9th, approximately 40 days – and nights, I had 19 medical commitments; among them being pre- and post-surgery/procedure, actual procedure and separate surgery, lab tests, infusions, covid tests, diagnostic scans, nuclear medicine; and telephone and video appointments. This was hardly a normal month. It was abnormal and not necessarily cancer related but most likely cancer affected.

As you might imagine, being infused for nearly 10 years with extremely toxic substances will wear and tear the recipient's body, inside and out. Consider further that said recipient (yours truly) began this cancer business at age 54 and a half and over this 10-year period, I have not been getting any younger. And what you end up with is a perfect storm of an age and an immune-compromised patient succumbing to the cumulative side effects of cancer treatment, direct and indirect.

Nevertheless, having some kind of medical appointment every other day – on average, over 40 days is likely to make a Kenny a very dull boy. Not that I wasn't in control of my time or had to adhere to a schedule not of my own choosing; on the contrary, I was very much in control as I set my own appointments and times and places convenient to me. Still, the commitment of time and energy – and the anxiety associated with all these appointments, especially given my underlying medical diagnosis, was unpleasant and unsettling but thankfully very uncharacteristic of my previous cancer life, which was overall, unremarkable medically speaking, other than I didn't die within the "13 month to two years" prognosis I was initially given by my oncologist.

Typically, my cancer life has been very similar to my non-cancer life. There are things I must do, things I can't do, things I wish I could do and finally things that others require me to do. The only difference: the original stage IV non-small cell lung cancer "terminal" diagnosis I received in late February 2009. That kind of news puts a damper on any scenario, real or imagined. Moreover, a scenario which offered no guarantees other than the presumptive normal life expectancy I anticipated was no longer normal. In summary, your future is in doubt, your present is in crisis and your past hopes and dreams are fading fast unless you find a safety valve to help manage the emotional, physical, and spiritual upheaval dominating your life. Or the more likely you are to suffer at the hands of your disease and become another casualty of the cancer wars.

So, I had a lousy month. So what? I'm alive, aren't I? Thirteen-plus years later. Granted, fulfilling all these medical obligations of the last 40 days wouldn't have been my first choice of how I wanted to spend part of my retirement. However, given that I had no choice – after my diagnosis, to live my life as a cancer patient/survivor, as my friend Frank would say: "I'm in pretty good shape for the shape I'm in."

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



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