

THE CONNECTION

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Wreaths Across America Touches Fairfax County

PAGE 4

ENTERTAINMENT, PAGE 9 ♦ CLASSIFIEDS, PAGE 10 ♦ SPORTS, PAGE 8, 12

PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

Protecting Vulnerable Road Users Is that You?

PAGE 3

Leading for Racial Justice

PAGE 5

Maggie McIntosh, 10, lays a remembrance wreath at Chestnut Grove Cemetery in Herndon as part of Wreaths Across America. The 25-acre historic cemetery in northwestern Fairfax County is the final resting place for 927 United States veterans, representing every branch of the military service.

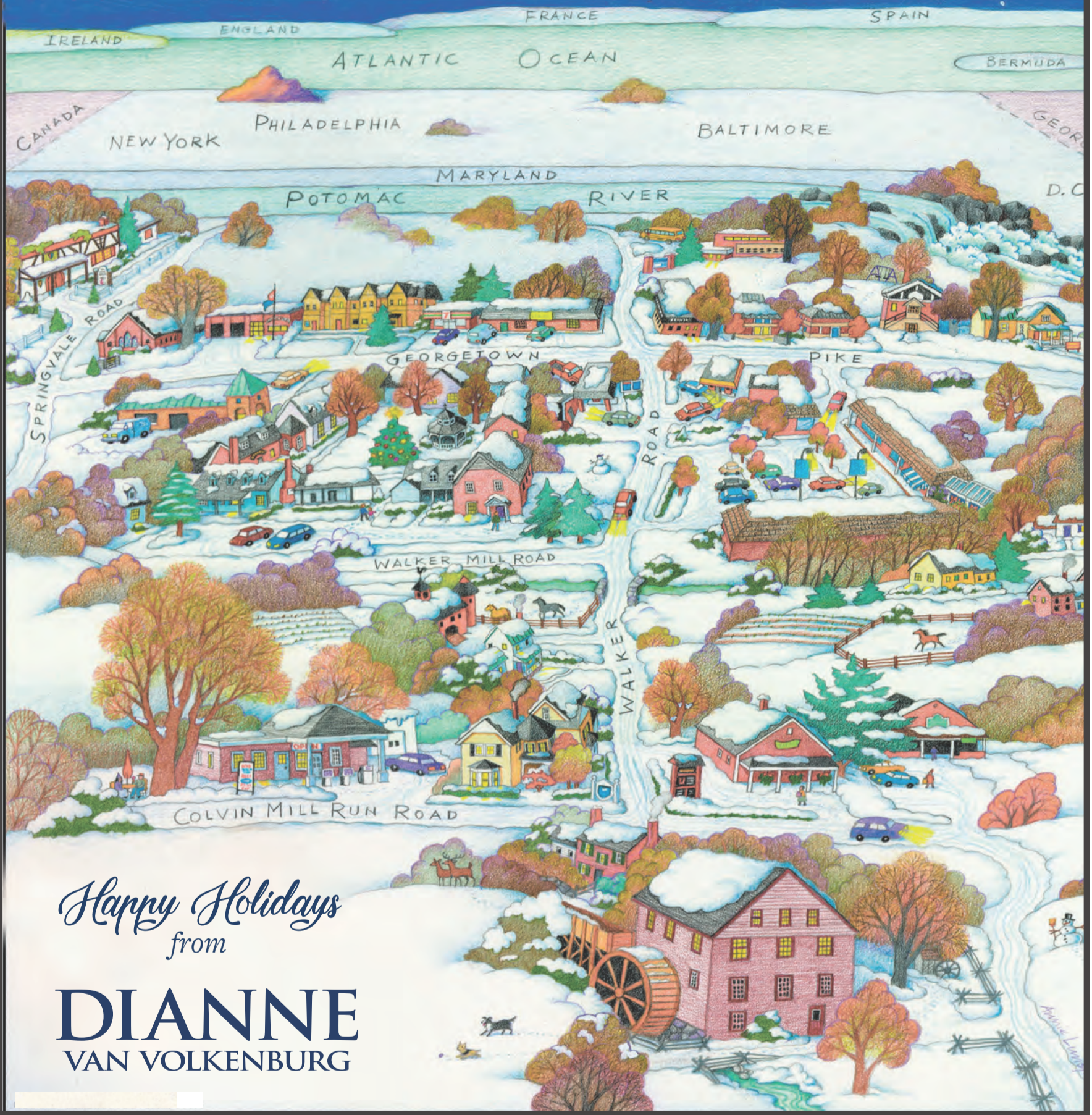
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Dianne Van Volkenburg donates a portion of each sale to the Embry Rucker Community Shelter



Merry Christmas

“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

The pages of the Connection Newspapers (including the Alexandria Gazette Packet, the Mount Vernon Gazette, the Potomac Almanac and the Centre View) have been full of holiday spirit, beginning before Thanksgiving. Group and individual efforts to help the needy, holiday parades, Santa arriving by boat, Santa arriving by horse-drawn carriage, Santa arriving by tractor-pulled hayride, Santa arriving at the Malls, tree lightings, Menorah lightings, stories of giving, secular celebrations, religious celebrations. Shopping locally. Giving locally.

Christmas is about the birth of Jesus Christ. Whether you believe the Christmas story literally or in spirit, you know it is the story of joy, hope and love, with the promise of redemption.

It is also about embracing the teachings of Jesus: to love thy neighbor as thyself; to help the needy; to feed the hungry and clothe the poor; to care for those who are sick; to invite and welcome strangers; to treat others as you would have them treat you.

Matthew 7:12:

“So in everything, do to others what you

would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

Matthew 25:35-40:

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

Whether you embrace the Christmas story literally or in spirit, it is the story of joy, hope and love, with the promise of redemption.

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

SO LET US SHARE the verse relating the birth of Jesus from the Bible, Luke 2: 4-19:

“And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David.) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

“And there were in the same country, shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

“And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.”

— MARY KIMM

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Editor’s Note About the Rest of 2022

This is our last edition of 2022. This week we offer a larger edition including local news from around the county. Let me know what you think.

Our next edition will publish Jan.11, 2023, with deadlines for content and advertising of Jan. 5, 2023 (late ads accepted).

In the meantime you can email the editors at editors@connectionnewspapers.com. You can reach sales/marketing/advertising at sales@connectionnewspapers.com.

Digital replica editions of the most recent week’s papers are available at www.ConnectionNewspapers.com/PDFs

Did you miss the Children’s editions? Take a look. They are special.

— MARY KIMM

MKIMM@CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

Vying for a Slice of Pedestrian & Cyclist Safety

Community association hosts meeting with FCDOT; speed cameras with fines coming.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Every year in Fairfax County, the number of pedestrian and cyclist fatalities and injuries continues to rise. With so many transportation initiatives in and around Fairfax County and the record number of pedestrian-related fatalities on county roads in 2022, communities in the county, like McLean, will vie for limited funding.

The Fairfax County Police Department reported 13 pedestrian-related fatalities in 2021, including two in McLean. On Dec. 29, 2021, a driver at Dolley Madison Boulevard and Ingleside Avenue hit and killed 33-year-old cyclist Matthew Jaeger. On Dec. 30, 2021 Annandale pedestrian Filadelfo Ramos Marquez, 74, was struck and killed by a driver while crossing the 1900 block of Chain Bridge Road south of Tysons Boulevard.

On Dec. 18, 2022, detectives from Fairfax County’s Crash Reconstruction Unit investigated the 22nd fatal pedestrian crash in www.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

Fairfax County this year. It occurred at 5:54 a.m. at Arlington Boulevard and Westmoreland Road in the Falls Church section of Fairfax County. Thomas Escudero Machado, 76 of Falls Church, was attempting to cross the eastbound lanes of Arlington Boulevard from the north side of the road to the south. The driver of a 2003 Honda Accord traveling eastbound on Arlington Boulevard struck Machado in the roadway. Police reported that there is no crosswalk at that intersection.

On Dec. 19, Fairfax County Police reported a fatal pedestrian crash at Fairfax County Parkway and Old Keene Mill Road when a bus driver struck a man, marking the 23rd pedestrian crash in the county.

The McLean Citizens Association held a 90-minute virtual public meeting with Fairfax County Department of Transportation (FCDOT) director Tom Biesiadny on Nov. 30. Biesiadny said the Board of Supervisors set a goal of \$100 million in local funding over six years to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety in the county.



VIA LINKEDIN

Fairfax County Department of Transportation director Tom Biesiadny.

The \$100 million commitment arose from the Joint Board Matter, “Funding Safer Pedestrian and Bicyclist Facilities,” Oct. 5, 2021, presented by Supervisor John Foust (D-Dranesville). Aside from the monetary commitment, the board directed the Department of Transportation to develop a list of potential projects

SEE SAFETY, PAGE 14



Pedestrian

HIGH RISK CORRIDORS
High Risk Corridors
Top 10 High Crash Rate Corridors

ActiveFAIRFAX
Data Source: Fairfax County, TIGER 1027
Map Published: 3/18/2022
By: Aja Fleming + Design

VIA FAIRFAX COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Pedestrian High-Risk Corridors & Locations: High-Risk Corridors and the Top 10 High Crash Rate Corridors.



The tractor-trailer arrives with precious cargo



Volunteers from Herndon Woman's Club present Jones with a service gift

PHOTOS BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

Wreaths Across America Day 2022 Comes to Herndon

“Teach the Next Generation in 2022 and Beyond.”

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Chestnut Grove, a 25-acre historic cemetery in northwestern Fairfax County is the final resting place for 927 United States veterans, representing every branch of the military service and the majority of U.S. conflicts. Perhaps there are more that have yet to be discovered. They are a diverse group of veterans, sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers from various religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds who sacrificed in service going back to the War of 1812.

On Saturday, Dec. 16, approximately 700 volunteers gathered at the cemetery shortly before noon. The diverse population spread out over the grounds and called to mind the waves of an ebbing sea, flowing up and over the hills at Chestnut Grove Cemetery, located at 831 Dranesville Road in Herndon.

Like Arlington National Cemetery, Chestnut Grove is a participating location for a Wreaths Across America (WAA) Day wreath-laying ceremony. VA0143P can be searched on the Wreaths Across America website for testimonials and remembrances.

Freedom has to be protected and passed on for our children to do the same, or “one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children’s children what it was like in the United States where men were free,” said Susy Ledgerwood, member of host and organizing group, Herndon Woman’s Club.

Many young people, families, and elderly could be seen among the crowds of



Nearly 1,000 people registered to take part in the ceremony.



Servicemembers from all branches of the military present their ceremonial memorial wreaths and one for POWs and MIAs



Charlotte Catalano, left, and Alexis Dusza of Troop 56076, Crossfield ES FCPS, in Reston help with wreaths at Chestnut Grove Cemetery in Herndon.



Volunteer driver Maurice Jones is still smiling, having traveled from Norfolk, Virginia, to Maine, meandering back into Virginia and stopping at Chestnut Grove Cemetery in Fairfax County’s Town of Herndon.

SEE TEACH, PAGE 12

Leading with Deeds to Equity

Local woman's grassroots efforts and support of community make her an agent of change.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

“Higher, higher,” commanded a 10-year-old boy as Ann Burke pushed him in a tree swing in the backyard of his new home in Vienna. He’s the oldest son and third child of a single mother and until earlier this month, he lived in a low-income apartment in a neighborhood marred by gun violence, a lack of access to quality education and the safety of afterschool programs. Now the family will have a new home for the holidays.

With leaves crunching under foot, Burke walked through her own backyard in Alexandria blinking back tears as she recounted the family’s rise from a life of poverty and instability to one of safety and possibility. She gave the family money for a down payment and cosigned a loan so that the family could purchase a home in Vienna, Virginia. This display of generosity underscores Burke’s commitment to slavery reparations which she says are critical to healing this country’s racial divide.

“Am I responsible for slavery and the im-

change. Having begun her work years before the racial protests after the murder of George Floyd by a police officer, she says her ideas were seen as controversial. “I think that people saw me as the Marcus Garvey of the 21st Century.”

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PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Ann Burke, pictured at her family’s summer home, is committed to finding solutions to end racial injustice.

One such group is ACT for Alexandria, a community foundation that serves the city in part by mobilizing the residents around issues like racial equity and economic opportunity. One of the group’s current initiatives is work-

ing as a collaborating partner on ARISE, a guaranteed income pilot program by the City of Alexandria.

“It will help low-income families receive \$500 per month for two years,” said Kyle Reardon, Marketing & Communications Manager, ACT for Alexandria. “These are critical resources that will help families move up the economic ladder. One hundred seventy households will be randomly selected to participate and will begin receiving payments in February 2023.”

Burke will begin a new project in the new year in which she plans to teach others how to use meditation as a means of increasing awareness of one’s thoughts and the role that they play in our personal biases. “Recognition and acknowledgment are the first steps in the process,” she said. “As long as we keep moving forward, we can make change one person at a time.”

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OPINION

Yes, Virginia, There is a Santa Claus II

BY DEL. KENNETH R. "KEN"
PLUM

When eight-year-old Virginia O'Hanlon in 1897 wrote to the editor of the New York Sun asking if there was a Santa Claus because her friends told her there wasn't one, the editor's response to her question became the most often quoted editorial in history. He told her, "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy."

The editor's response to the young girl is as relevant today as it was more than a hundred years ago. Our nation, state and community are filled with the kind of love and generosity that our religious and secular holidays and traditions cel-



brate. There is much to be done to make love and generosity more abundant and more universal, but there is reason to believe that we are moving in the right direction. Whether we celebrate Hanukkah, Navaratri, Vijayadashami, Diwali, Christmas, Kwanzaa, or the many other religious holidays that exist throughout the year, we can engage in the kind of love and generosity that Santa Claus has come to symbolize to some people.

Yes, Virginia, (the Commonwealth, not the inquiring young girl), there is an opportunity for us to adopt policies and laws that will deliver the "love and generosity" that can "give to your life its highest beauty and joy." Separation of church and state is an important foundation of the government we enjoy in this country, and efforts on the part of some to incorporate their own religious beliefs into a government that all

must follow must be defeated. Our system of government does not require religious beliefs in order to have the highest sense of moral obligations and ethics that would include our caring for the rights and responsibility to all for a good quality of life.

Virginia is a wealthy state financially as well as in history, traditions and culture. We have a solid basis on which we can lead the nation as the best place to work, play and raise a family. We must resist efforts to lead us in a direction that would have the government define our own healthcare decisions, who we can love and marry, what we are to learn about our own history, and who would be included in or excluded from society.

Yes, Virginia, just as love and generosity may exist in our communities for some, it can and should be available for all throughout the year and not only at holiday time! Whatever holiday you celebrate, if any, have a glorious and happy time during this special season of the year.

Reston as 2022 Winds Down

JOHN LOVAAS

As winter in the climate change era descends on Reston, I look forward to colder weather, crossing my fingers in hopes of getting some real (6-inch plus) snowfalls. Meanwhile I



keep current with Reston and regional politics and events.

Reston Town Center, still under the thumb of Boston Properties, remains more sluggish than before the disastrous parking debacle. Over 30 businesses departed with very few replaced by anything near their equal. We do miss the old days, but there are a few glimmers of hope – for example, the long-awaited arrival of Metro on RTC's southern edge, a high quality 2022 holiday parade, Fogo

INDEPENDENT PROGRESSIVE

de Chão Brazilian Steakhouse restaurant, and hopefully a replacement for the leveled Mercury fountain.

But still there are gaping holes around the ice rink and on the west end.

What about the prospect of a performing arts center across from the RTC Metro Station? The space proffered for it by BP is smaller than what Founder Robert Simon hoped would be a regional attraction for world-class entertainment. I like the idea in principle, especially along the lines Bob envisioned. However, it appears that the combined efforts of BP and Fairfax County will likely result in either a more modest (perhaps

500 seat venue), or, perhaps a compact athletic field. The latter is something sorely needed due to greatly increased demand as we grow to over 100,000 people with little space for additional fields.

2023 is another election year for Reston. We get to vote for Hunter Mill Supervisor. One-term incumbent Walter Alcorn got out of the gate early announcing he will seek a second term. Fully recovered from bypass surgery, he has proven to be a high energy Supervisor (a term I really dislike). As the centerpiece of his first term, he engineered a new model Comprehensive Plan for Reston's future to take us from about 63,000 to perhaps 120,000 a generation from now. The Plan is wending its way slowly through the Fairfax County processes to likely final approval in spring 2023.

Following demonstrations by Reston's homeless, tent resident population, Alcorn unveiled a truly major affordable housing initiative, comprising about 400 new units in north Town Center, near his office and the Reston police station. Unfortunately, the small group of existing, nice-looking brick, affordable units nearby will be torn down to accommodate part of the new project. The new project doesn't address lowest-income homeless persons such as those in tents. It will be dedicated more to median income families. But, it is a step in the right direction. This Progressive hopes that Alcorn will set his sights lower if re-elected.

In other news, I can assure you that the Reston Farmers Market will indeed return to Lake Anne for its 26th season in 2023, on Saturday, April 29 to be precise.

Let Us Know Your View

Connection Newspapers welcomes views on any public issue. Letters must be signed. Include home address and home and business numbers; we will only print your name and town name. Letters are routinely edited for length, libel, grammar, good taste, civility and factual errors.

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LETTERS

Behavioral Health, Guns and Violence

Alexandria Public Health Advisory Commission Member Richard Merritt points out that several studies confirm that mental illness contributes to only about 4% of violence. While Second Amendment advocates might read in his letter's phrase, "distracting us from taking meaningful action," as implying guns are the problem needing control, a similar statement could be

made that legal gun owners use their guns in only a similarly small percentage of violent crimes.

Mr Merritt insists that research points to a history of violence, domestic violence, alcohol and illicit drug use, and a personal history of sexual abuse or trauma as being associated with increased risk

SEE LETTERS, PAGE 7

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NEWS

Snowflake Trail Scavenger Hunt Now Open

The Snowflake Trail is now open in the forest behind the Cub Run Rec Center, 4630 Stonecroft Blvd. in Chantilly. And it's ready for visitors to come have some outdoor fun, while searching for hidden treasures in nature. By participating in this creative, winter-themed, video scavenger hunt, children will be able to help Snowflake the elf find her lost gifts for the woodland animals.

Snowflake markers have been set up along the trail with QR codes that may be scanned with a phone. Scan the code to see a video clue of what's been lost nearby and then begin searching. Some items may be off the trail, behind trees or on fallen logs. The hunt for Snowflake's lost gifts begins at the kiosk just across from the main entrance to the rec center.

The Cub Run Rec Center trail is a less than one-mile-long loop and includes both mulched and paved surfaces. The Snowflake Trail will be open through Jan. 31, 2023. No fee is required, just walk up, scan the first clue, and start the hunt.

Then when the hike is over, come inside and enjoy a winter splash-down at the leisure pool and water slides. Pool hours and admission fees are available at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/reccenter/cub-run>. There are expanded holiday hours during winter break. For more information, call 703-817-9407.

— BONNIE HOBBS

LETTERS

FROM PAGE 6

of gun violence. These sorts of conditions, however, are usually treated under the broad umbrella of "behavioral health" where mental illness also falls.

Surely, this is what Gov. Youngkin intended by suggesting that we need to bolster mental health services to prevent future mass shootings. Far from stigmatizing those struggling with mental health problems, pointing out the dire consequences which can arise from the broad category of untreated mental and behavioral health issues may prompt some sufferers to seek medical and behavioral help.

Dino Drudi
Alexandria

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CHRISTMAS



Caitlin Vannoy and daughter, Avery, 3, holding her decorated hat.



Cousins Denna Meghdadian, 7, and Sam Jamasb, 4, coloring at their table.



Santa listens while Hunter Shaw, 3, tells him he wants a firetruck for Christmas.

Having Lunch with Santa in Fairfax City

Fairfax City's annual Lunch with Santa was Saturday, Dec. 10, in Old Town Hall. Children enjoyed box lunches of chicken nuggets, applesauce, juice and a cookie, while coloring, making Christmas crafts and talking to Santa.

PHOTOS BY BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION



Elf Kelly O'Brien and Santa Claus



Natasha Sangia, 5-1/2, with the Christmas tree she colored.



Luca Palazzo, 9, with the elf hat he decorated.



The Felix brothers, Keilany, 2, and Kenrick, 6, with their elf hats.



Allison and Noel Clarin and sons Connor, 3, and Caleb, 7, pose with Santa.

CHRISTMAS

Lunch with Santa



Henry and Maria Perez pose with children Anabelle, 14, Brandon, 11, and Emma, 6, and Santa.

PHOTOS BY BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION



James and Carina McGruder and son Arness, 7, pose with Santa Claus.

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This intricate 2019 yard display with its elegant Christmas greeting and hundreds of lights, a draw for drive-bys on Lorton Rd for many years, is bucking the trend of 'bigger every year' with a simple display in 2022



Burke's Marshall Pond Road community display has been growing for several years, making Fairfax County's noted list of "Tacky Christmas Lights"



This Marshall Pond Road homeowner may soon be out of yard space or reach the extension cord limit

PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION

If It's Stays Still Long Enough, Decorate It!

Neighbors get into the holiday spirit.

BY SUSAN LAUME
THE CONNECTION

Early Germans are credited with starting the Christmas tree decorating tradition in the 16th century, and Britain's Queen Victoria spread those and new decorating traditions to English speakers after adopting and expanding on many of her German husband Prince Albert's Christmas customs. However, there can be no doubt. Americans brought new light to holiday decorating — literally.

After Thomas Edison's invention of the first successful electric light bulb, he and his partner Edward H. Johnson looked for commercial uses for the new device. Johnson created the first string of electric lights in 1882 and displayed them on a Christmas tree. Until that time candles were used to illuminate holiday trees, resulting in many fires. A third partner, Albert Sadacca, then in his teens, and his brothers, had the idea of making safer Christmas light strings available to all. Their efforts would corner the string light market until the 1960s. General Electric offered a preassembled kit of lights in 1903. Until then Christmas lights were only for the wealthy, who could afford to have an electrician perform the complicated wiring. President Calvin Coolidge lit the first electric-lighted national Christmas tree in 1923.

From then on as lights got safer, Americans were hooked on decorating, which spread well beyond lighted trees. Surveyed Americans reveal 84 percent decorate at the holidays, with an estimated \$6 billion spent annually on holiday decorations. Driving during the day, wire reindeer and blow-up creatures of many varieties can be spotted on



Richard Cotton, of Springfield Glen, is among those adding elements every year, although he says his wife Gina tells him to "Quit adding things."

lawns across the area. But of course, night still holds the most magic. Displays present the traditional and the bizarre, either a simple few lights, or a whole magical world. Drivers may come across lighted surprises or know of spots that draw them to return year after year.

SOME PLACES, whole streets join in the light celebrations, such as Marshall Pond Drive in Burke.

As one of the homeowners on Marshall Pond Drive, Holly Walsh (yes, that's her real name) says, "We get together as a community, helping each other decorate for the Christ-



Some, like Larry and Jan Gould, go for an elegant look with many white lights to decorate their yard and home along Lee Chapel Road

mas holiday, and other holidays throughout the year." The display has been going on since her now college/high school children were small and is growing every year. When one of the six military families of the seven decorating families in the cul-de-sac added an American flag light, they were soon in each yard.

How do they manage the lights high on the houses? Walsh says one neighbor used climbing and rappelling equipment. Others went together to rent a cherry picker in past years to reach the high points. Tucked away in a side street in Burke, do they get noticed? Walsh says in the pandemic year about a 1,000 people were wall to wall along the street. She expects a busy season again this year, especially during Christmas week. So much so that the



Many use traditional symbols of Christmas, such as Santa and his reindeer

community has a directional sign at the head of the court to direct drivers, viewers, and deliveries. Their street was included in Fairfax County's list, Tacky Christmas Lights in Northern Virginia and Fairfax,

From decorating trees, to bedecking our homes, tables, churches, and shopping malls; and outdoor displays on houses, in yards; and dressing ourselves and our pets, even our vehicles, decorating may help us lengthen the pleasant memories of the season ... and give us all something extra to smile about. Ask six year old Ellery Tatum her favorite decoration, after a thoughtful hesitation she replies, "Everything."



Along Hoopes Rd, a display includes both traditional religious symbolism and the quirky futuristic spiritualism of Jeti Master Yoda



Decorating ideas often spread from house to house, as Holly Walsh indicates happened with lighted American flags in her neighborhood



One may not expect to see octopus and flamingos in a winter holiday display, but Ellery, and Tatum Sloane, 7 and 2 years old, and their friend Will Russell, 5, felt drawn to the characters for a picture



There may be some "one upmanship" at play as display get bigger and the objects get larger and larger, like this two-story house-height snowman found on Schoolhouse Woods Road, Burke

Teach the Next Generation in 2022 and Beyond

FROM PAGE 4

volunteers. The older youth congregated in groups, wearing similar scout uniforms and sports team jerseys with the names of regional organizations and schools emblazoned on them. Younger children huddled beside their parents or sat high on their shoulders to watch the laying of wreaths representing each branch of the United States Armed Forces and those taken prisoner of war or missing in action. Older people walked carefully, keeping to the edges of the crowds, many with canes or walkers; loved ones helped others. At some gravesites, individuals stood alone.

They and a million other volunteers from more than 2,800 locations across the country came together that Saturday to support Wreaths Across America's mission to "Remember our fallen U.S. veterans, Honor those who serve, and Teach your children the value of freedom."

According to Ledgerwood, two of the 927 deceased veterans remembered that day at Chestnut Grove have the Star of David on their tombstones. Instead of wreaths, Herndon Woman's Club chose for volunteers to place a remembrance stone, visitation stone, at those gravesites, along with a note identifying who placed the stones.

"You should always thank the veteran when you put the wreath on their tombstone. It's a way of honoring them," said local Aiden McIntosh, 15, who came to lay a wreath.

Early this year, Wreaths Across America announced that the theme for 2022 would be "Find a Way to Serve," inspired by the American Rosie Movement™. It told the stories of the women known as "Rosie the Riveters" during World War II. The movement encouraged young people to participate in their communities and serve in small but meaningful ways. WAA has provided a redesigned educational curriculum to encourage young people to find ways to serve. "You don't have to be in military service to serve your community and country," said Karen Worcester, executive director of Wreaths Across America,

Some organizations that assisted with the Chestnut Grove ceremony included the Herndon High School Navy Junior ROTC, Fairfax County Emergency Response, Wayne M. Kidwell American Legion Post 184 Herndon-Reston, Herndon Woman's Club, and sports and scout organizations.

What Is Involved in Delivering Wreaths?

About six Woman's Club ladies welcomed an 18-wheeler delivery of balsam branch wreaths with red bows the Monday before National Wreaths Across America Day. The group, armed with small parade flags, held their hands up and waved their 6-inch American stick flags, crossing four lanes of busy Dranesville Road traffic. Only one person considered driving around them. The driver of that vehicle changed their mind when a club member cast an evil eye at them and fiercely waved her stick flag.



Crowds tighten in front of the speaker's podium

PHOTOS BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION



Too short to see over the crowd, one child sits atop an adult's shoulders to watch Robert Thompson of Wayne M. Kidwell Post 184 play TAPS.



Teammates of Virginia Lacrosse Club Great Falls take wreaths to place on the graves.



Lend a hand.



Teach the young.



Members of the National Charity League, Bluebell Chapter, Centreville/Clifton Remember them and their service. "We focus on volunteerism which is why we try to do as many veteran ceremonies as possible."

SEE WREATHS, PAGE 13

PHOTOS BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION



Watching over the gravesite and waiting for the wreath-laying.

Wreaths Across America

FROM PAGE 12

Maurice Jones, a volunteer truck driver, pulled his big rig past the cemetery entrance. He skillfully backed the tractor-trailer toward the cemetery, checking his mirrors and waving to the women who had welcomed him and the truck's cargo. Jones crossed all traffic lanes by turning the tractor-trailer 90 degrees, straightened out the semi-trailer, and backed down the cemetery road.

"Hampton Roads Moving & Storage Wreaths Across America," the truck's sign read. The company had donated its rig, gas, driver, and time to the mission. Chestnut Grove Cemetery was one of many stops on Jones' round trip from Norfolk, VA, to Columbia Falls, Maine, for the wreaths and back to Virginia. "When I left the service, I was a captain ... field artillery," Jones said. "That was back in 1992." He drove the truck in honor of his many family members who served. "The Korean War. My uncles, a few other family members," Jones added.

No matter the day, every volunteer contributed to the mission to "Remember the fallen, Honor



A volunteer takes a wreath.

those who serve, and Teach the next generation the value of freedom."

One volunteer drives one tractor-trailer. One volunteer stacks one box at a time. A volunteer removes one wreath. One volunteer, possibly accompanied by a young person, reaches out. One wreath is delivered to a veteran's grave. One veteran's name is spoken aloud, honored, and remembered. One young person is taught the values that Americans cherish. One wreath is placed on one veteran's headstone.



Finished playing the revered bugle call TAPS, Robert Thompson of Wayne M. Kidwell American Legion Post 184 stands at attention above the mausoleum built into the side of the hill



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Vying for a Slice of Pedestrian & Cyclist Safety

FROM PAGE 3

and a prioritization process for implementation.

The term “vulnerable road user” could be interchanged with pedestrian and/or cyclist. A vulnerable road user is a person on the road who isn’t behind the wheel of a car or truck. This includes pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists, roller skaters, and skateboarders. They are described as vulnerable because of their lack of protection compared to a passenger vehicle or a larger commercial vehicle.

Funding for Pedestrian and Cycling Improvements

As of Dec. 18, the board had approved a total of \$30 million of the \$100 million. “The board adopted the first \$5 million in March of this year, and subsequently, in October, they approved an additional \$25 million,” Biesiadny said. According to FCDOT News, on Nov. 1, the board approved the first tranche of \$5 million of the \$30 million for pedestrian and bicycle improvement and maintenance projects.

“The \$5 million is to be used for what staff determined were quick fixes, intersection projects, usually crosswalks that didn’t require right-of-way and didn’t require moving utilities,” said a spokesman for the Dranesville District.

All districts in Fairfax County share the \$5 million. It funds at least two projects per district. Of the \$5 million, crosswalk improvement projects receive \$2.7 million. Potential trail and sidewalk maintenance projects are funded for \$2 million, with \$200,000 in Safe Routes to School Fund matching and \$100,000 for speed display signs.

In McLean, the crosswalk improvements projects are at the intersection of Westmoreland Street and Rosewood Drive, where the proposed scope of work is to install a refuge (intended to help protect pedestrians who are crossing a multi-lane road) and a rectangular rapid-flashing beacon, and to relocate the bus stop.

The second project in Dranesville is in Great Falls, at Georgetown Pike and the Great Falls Library, where the proposed scope of work is a refuge and ramps near Bucks Lane on the west side of the Tex-Mex driveway.

In the Franconia District, where Kingstowne Village Parkway intersects with Park Village Drive, the proposed scope of work is to install a refuge and relocate the bus stop. Similar work is proposed at Kingstowne Village Parkway at the intersection of Cross Gate Lane.

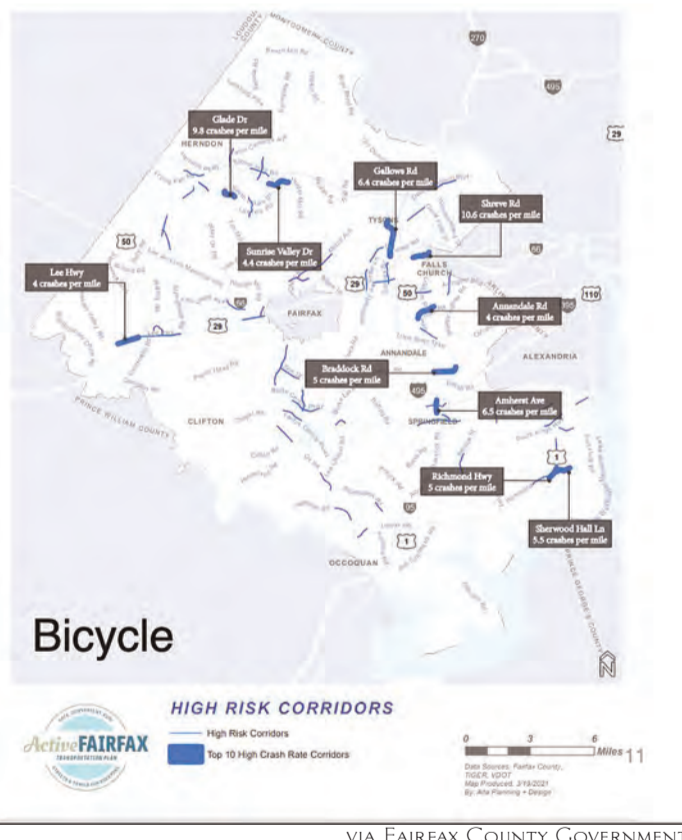
The second tranche is \$25 million. “As you can imagine, \$25 million spread out among the county is not a lot of money per project,” said a Dranesville spokesman. “Staff will be

Crosswalk Improvement Projects

Crossing Street	At/Between (Intersecting Street)	District	Proposed Tentative Scope
Guinea Road	Rutherford Park	Braddock	Install curb ramps, curb extension, and Rectangular Rapid-Flashing Beacon (RRFB)
Guinea Road	Bronte Drive	Braddock	Install refuge with lane narrowing, marked crosswalks on east and west sides and relocate bus stop (school bus)
Westmoreland Street	Rosewood Drive	Dranesville	Install refuge and RRFB, relocate bus stop
Georgetown Pike	Great Falls Library	Dranesville	Install refuge and ramps near Bucks Lane on the west side of Tex-Mex driveway
Kingstown Village Parkway	Park Village Drive	Franconia	Install refuge and relocate bus stop
Kingstown Village Parkway	Cross Gate Lane	Franconia	Install refuge and relocate bus stop
Bluemont Way	Explorer Street	Hunter Mill	Install refuge and ramps and possible RRFB
Green Range Drive	Pyrenees Court/Dogwood Pool	Hunter Mill	Install ramps and marked crosswalk
Braddock Road	Witch Hazel Road	Mason	Install refuge with truncated domes
Murray Lane	Early Street	Mason	Install marked crosswalk and ramps
Hooes Road	South Run Stream Valley Trail	Mount Vernon/Springfield	Install RRFB
Hooes Road	Dudley Drive/Laurel Cress Drive	Mount Vernon	Install new crosswalk and ramps
Blake Lane	Bushman Drive	Providence	Install refuge, RRFB, channelized right and crosswalks
Woodburn Road	Pine Ridge Park Entrance	Providence	Install refuge
Silverbrook Road	Crosspointe Drive	Springfield	Install refuge, ramps and RRFB
Hooes Road	South Run Stream Valley Trail	Springfield/Mount Vernon	Install RRFB
Stringfellow Road	Foxfield Pool	Sully	Install refuge with truncated domes
Stone Heather Drive	Franklin Farm Shopping Center at Launch Trampoline Park	Sully	Install marked crosswalk and ramps

SOURCE: FAIRFAX COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Board of Supervisors approves \$5 million for pedestrian and bicycle improvement and maintenance projects across Fairfax County.



Bicycle High-Risk Corridors & Locations: High-Risk Corridors and the Top 10 High Crash Rate Corridor

working with individual board offices early in 2023, and the vote on how that \$25 million would be spent would be sometime in March.”

Potential Projects, Prioritization and Implementation

The remaining dollars will fund priority projects identified by the board, including

additional trail and sidewalk maintenance. Staff identified them through a prioritization process and prepared a recommendation for the board to consider.

“We have collected over a period of years what we call the ‘unfunded project list,’” said Biesiadny. “Anytime anyone calls and says, ‘Hey, there is a missing sidewalk on a particular street; we can use a crosswalk or flashing light,’ that’s what goes on the list,” he said.

There are 2,800 recommended unfunded projects on the list. Biesiadny noted that the recommendations that MCA submitted earlier are included in it. Staff identified, as Step 1, a subset of what they thought of as high-priority locations. What the staff did differently this time was to look at property implications and environmental impacts before funding. “We had projects that got funded, and they had some fatal flaws,” said Biesiadny. Step 2 was to identify the locations that the board members had identified. Steps 1 and 2 are completed.

Step 3 is currently in progress. Staff is looking for gaps in the network, proximity to “pedestrian generators” such as schools, major activity centers, and employment centers, and ways to narrow the list further. At that point, they will do a feasibility study and cost estimates to develop a prioritized list.

Step 4 will happen in early 2023. Staff

will consider the ease of implementation, environmental impacts, and the order of magnitude cost of the highest-scoring projects. Public engagement occurs during steps three and four. In the spring of 2023, the board selects projects for funding.

Speed Kills; Speed Cameras Coming

On Dec. 6, the Board of Supervisors approved an ordinance to allow the Fairfax County Police Department to conduct a speed camera pilot program in 2023 and offered several additional recommendations.

“What we don’t have right now is the location of the speed camera in the Hunter Mill District,” said Supervisor Walter Alcorn on Dec. 19. “It would be in a school zone though.”

Ten cameras are planned to be installed, one in each district in a school zone and one in a work zone. Funding comes from the county; authority comes from the Virginia General Assembly. Vehicle owners will pay fines as set in the statute.

“The idea is not for the county to make money off this,” said Alcorn. “We’d be happy just for people not speeding through those areas.”

Fairfax Families for Safe Streets supports automated speed enforcement in Fairfax County.

“We have advocated for the use of automated speed enforcement throughout the region for many years and we are happy to see it coming to Fairfax County. [Automated speed enforcement] is a proven and effective tool in reducing vehicle speeds – and speed is the primary factor in determining whether or not a vulnerable road user survives or does not survive a crash with the driver of a vehicle. Speed kills.”

‘Pulled the Suspect from The Burning Vehicle’

PFC Joseph Castilon honored as Sully’s Officer of the Quarter.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

With his wife and father in attendance, PFC Joseph Castilon was named the Sully District Police Station’s Officer of the Quarter for June, July and August. He was honored at the Oct. 12 meeting of the station’s Citizens Advisory Committee.

Sgt. Kenneth Bridgeman nominated him, explaining why Castilon deserved this award. He said it stemmed from the officer’s actions on Aug. 17, after police from the Sully District Station were dispatched for a report of a hit-and-run crash in Centreville.

The driver, later identified as Suspect 1, crashed into two vehicles before leaving the area without providing his insurance or any identifying information to the male driving the vehicle he struck. However, that driver managed to get a license-plate number from Suspect 1’s vehicle.

The tag information was relayed to responding units, and Castilon began searching the surrounding area for the suspect’s vehicle. When it was located in a nearby community, the vehicle was in the middle of the road and on fire. Arriving on scene, Castilon assessed everything unfolding there.

Bridgeman wrote that another officer, PFC Serina Kan, was already at the scene and was using her fire extinguisher to try to put out the fire. Castilon grabbed his own fire extinguisher and began to help her. He also realized that the vehicle had begun rolling backward down the street, “escalating the danger and urgency of the situation.”

“Castilon quickly realized that the driver was still inside and would likely not survive if he didn’t act immediately,” wrote Bridgeman. “Despite the obvious danger to himself, he approached the vehicle and smashed the driver’s-side window with his expandable baton.

“With the assistance of a citizen, Castilon was able



BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

From left, PFC Joseph Castilon with Capt. Rachel Levy, the Sully District Station’s commander.

to get the door open, and he pulled Suspect 1 from the burning vehicle. The cabin of the vehicle was filled with noxious smoke, which would have certainly taken Suspect 1’s life, if not for PFC Castilon’s actions.”

Fire and rescue units arrived on the scene and treated Suspect 1 for his injuries. “While he was sitting in the ambulance, Suspect 1 disclosed he was experiencing a mental-health crisis,” wrote Bridgeman. “He was transported to the hospital where he received treatment and was mentally evaluated by their professional staff.” Meanwhile, because of his own proximity to the flames, Castilon had to be evaluated himself for smoke inhalation.

“As a result of the bravery and selflessness displayed by Castilon in acting to save a community member’s life, Suspect 1 was able to survive a life-threatening situation and receive the psychological treatment he so desperately needed,” wrote Bridgeman. “Castilon’s actions are deserving of praise and recognition.”

When Capt. Rachel Levy, the Sully District Station’s commander, honored Castilon at the CAC meeting, she told the audience, “PFC Castilon inhaled a lot of smoke that day, putting his own life at risk to save this person. It’s with great pride that I present the Officer of the Quarter award to him.”

Erosion and Boat Traffic Repairs Underway at Burke Lake

Water level temporarily lowered to provide access.

BY MIKE SALMON
THE GAZETTE

Boating and fishing season at Burke Lake is tapering off with winter’s arrival, so Fairfax County Park Authority officials are using the off season to do some repair work around the boathouse area that is made up of two buildings, two piers, a paved boat launch, and a gravel area where various water vessels are stored and launched into the lake.

The bank and boat-approach need to be cleared and refurbished so the water level has recently been lowered two feet to provide access to the boat ramp area for repairs. The gravel from the shoreline has eroded and deposited in the shallow area which creates challenges for launching boats and may cause damage in the process. In addition, existing storm outfall and foot traffic are

causing erosion to the shoreline adjacent to the marina.

Construction teams are using the lowered water levels to stabilize the marina’s beach area between the two existing floating dock structures to provide more effective access for boats. They are also building drainage improvements around and adjacent to existing boathouse and restroom buildings to redirect and slow down runoff. A stone material is being put down on approximately 90 feet of shoreline bank, adjacent to the launch area, the FCPA reported.

The marina area is closed during this work period, but the park remains open. The office is open at 11 a.m. instead of 9 a.m. during the season, the Frisbee Golf Course is still operating, and the trails around the lake are still open to the public. Admission is free.

On Nov. 26 the campground closed, and the park will be fully reopened in April 2023.

Here’s What’s Happening at MCC!

Presented by The Alden

Performing Arts Documentary
Thursday, Dec. 22, 1 p.m.

Free admission

**DEC
22**

OFC Winter Break Trips

Ultimate Archery & Movie
Tuesday, Dec. 27, 8 a.m.-6 p.m.

\$55/\$45 MCC district residents

**DEC
27**



OFC Winter Break Trips

Autobahn Go-Karting & Laser Tag
Wednesday, Dec. 28, 8 a.m.-6 p.m.

\$90/\$80 MCC district residents

**DEC
28**

OFC Winter Break Trips

Ice Skating & A VR Experience
Thursday, Dec. 29, 8 a.m.-6 p.m.

\$90/\$80 MCC district residents

**DEC
29**

OFC Winter Break Trips

Splatter Paint Room
& Uptown Alley

Friday, Dec. 30, 8 a.m.-6 p.m.

\$90/\$80 MCC district residents

**DEC
30**



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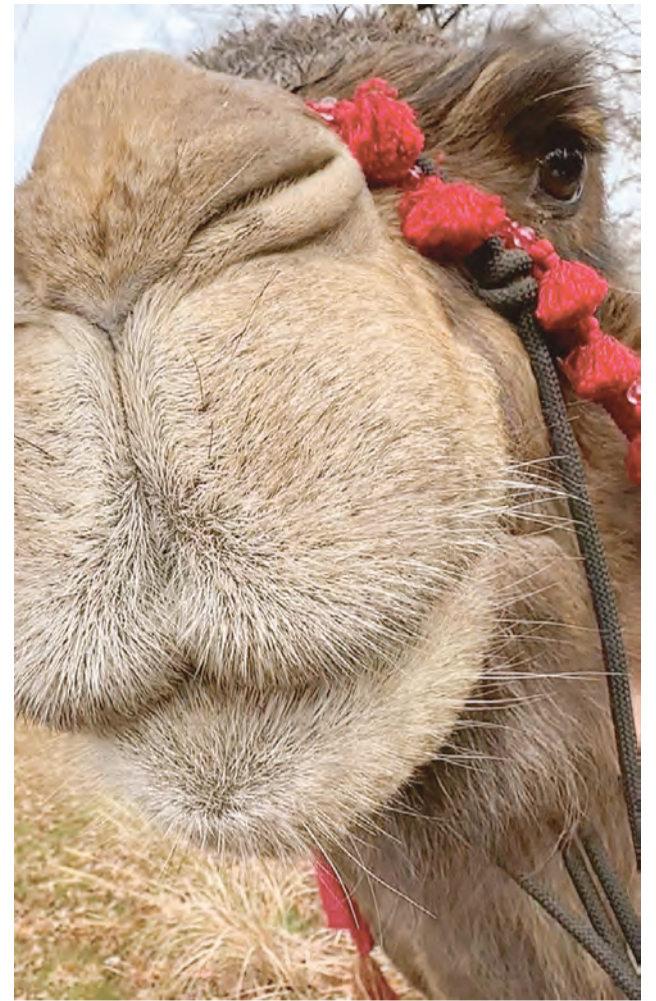
PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION



Pets, often included in holiday finery, whether they like it or not, include this reluctant elf, Tia, in Springfield



George, a finery accepting 'rein-dog' in Alexandria dresses to assist the Fairfax County Fire & Rescue Department



Of course, one must bedeck one's camel, Delilah, of Bar C Ranch



Employees Jette Hansen and Tiffany Garshak dress up in holiday brights to spread cheer while working at Trader Joe's in Springfield



Sara Evans, of Springfield, wears her seasonal red coat and snowflake earrings, as she drives her Rudolph the Reindeer car, but still can't fly over traffic congestion



Dozens of friends concoct kitschy outfits to attend an annual Christmas Tree Skirt party hosted by Mary Mulligan, of Ridge Road Estates; pictured Mandy Warble, Mary Mulligan, Melissa Burns, Brigette McGovern, Michele Dunphy



A coffee run inevitably turns up people showing off their holiday spirit, like Colleen Schaefer, 12 of Irving Middle School, and her aunt, Tricia Hill of Burke



Mistletoe to capture the romance of holiday kisses is highlighted with heart symbols



This home on Sydenstricker Road goes tall and bright with its lighted wish of love and peace for all the world

CALENDAR



The Winter Lantern Festival will be held Dec. 16 Thru Feb. 12, 2023 in Tysons Corner.

HUNTERS WOODS AT RAILS EDGE WINTER EVENTS

Wednesday evenings from 4-6 p.m.

Dec. 21 -- Welcome Party (New residents) and Karaoke
Dec. 28 -- Cooking Demo with Chef

RSVP required. RSVP to HWTE-Marketing@IntegraCare.com or call 703-429-1130.

NOW THRU FEB. 5, 2023

"Women Playing Hamlet." 8 p.m. At Workhouse Arts Center, 9518 Workhouse Way, Lorton. A non-traditional look at one of Shakespeare's most revered works, presented in modern English, Women Playing Hamlet follows a young actress tackling the role of Hamlet in a comedic romp that examines gender norms, actors' egos, and Shakespeare. Women Playing Hamlet, by William Missouri Downs. Visit the website: <https://www.workhousearts.org/calendar/women-playing-hamlet>

NOW THRU JAN. 23, 2023

8th Glass National. 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. At Workhouse Arts Center, 9518 Workhouse Way, Lorton. Oshiro's high-contrast illustrations and paintings depict surrealistic scenes of characters with unique experiences related to identity, be it from race, gender or neurodiversity.

NOW THRU JAN. 23, 2023

Off We Go to Paradise. 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. At Workhouse Arts Center, 9518 Workhouse Way, Lorton. Oshiro's high-contrast illustrations and paintings depict surrealistic scenes of characters with unique experiences related to identity, be it from race, gender or neurodiversity. Visit the website: <https://www.workhousearts.org/off-to-paradise>

NOW THRU FEB. 12

Winter Lantern Festival will debut a spectacular holiday light adventure at the Lerner Town Square, 8025 Galleria Drive in Tysons starting Dec. 16 through Feb. 12. Winter Lantern Festival will feature over 10,000-LED Chinese-inspired artisan lanterns, along with live performances and on-site food vendors. Guests will wander through a wonderland of light that includes



"Women Playing Hamlet" can be seen now thru Feb. 5, 2023 at Workhouse Arts Center in Lorton.

Chinese myths, legends, and zodiacs. In addition, they will view handmade lanterns encompassing a world of ice, including displays of mammoths, polar bears, and penguins. There will also be interactive light swings, see-saws, and tunnels. Be prepared to indulge your friends, family, and yourself in photo opportunities. Hours are Fridays to Sundays from 5-10 p.m. Visit www.winterlanternfestival.com.

FRIDAY/DEC. 30

Celtic Band IONA. 1 p.m. and 2:15 p.m. At Sully Historic Site, 3650 Historic Sully Way, Chantilly. Come hear one of the top-rated pan-Celtic groups in the world as they treat audiences to a selection of traditional Celtic tunes, as well as song and dance music arranged in their signature style for vocals. Call 703-437-1794.

NOW THRU DEC. 31

Crafts for Kids. 10 a.m. to 12 noon. At Reston Art Gallery and Studios, 11400 Washington Plaza W at Lake Anne, Reston. Free, themed art projects for children (with guardian) are offered at Reston Art Gallery and Studios every Saturday from 10 a.m. until 12 p.m. Visit the website: www.restonartgallery.com

SUNDAY/JAN. 1

New Year's Day Hike. At Burke Lake Park, 7315 Ox Road, Fairfax Station. Sunrise hike from 7-8 a.m.;

Sunset hike from 5:30-6:30 p.m. Discover hidden natural treasures right in our own community with the help of an experienced guide as you enjoy a comfortable hike at Burke Lake Park. It's also a great opportunity to take a great photo to enter in the county's First Hike Fairfax Photo Contest! Preregistration is required; enrollment is \$8 per person.

SATURDAY/DEC. 31

New Year's Eve with Anthony DeVito. 7 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. At Workhouse Arts Center 9518 Workhouse Way, Lorton. Toss out 2022 with big laughs imported from New York City from one of the hottest comics in the country, Anthony DeVito. His laid back, engaging storytelling style will satisfy all your comedic fantasies (kinda)! Hosted by Apple Brown Betty, featuring Dewayne White. Visit the website: <https://www.workhousearts.org/calendar/new-years-eve>

JAN. 5-21

"White Rabbit Red Rabbit." 7 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Thursday-Saturday, Jan. 5-7, 12-14 and 19-21, 7 p.m. No rehearsals. No director. No set. A different actor reads the script cold for the first time at each performance. Forbidden to leave his country, playwright Nassim Soleimanpour distilled the experience of an entire generation in a wild, utterly original play.

HOLIDAY ENTERTAINMENT 2022



"Snow Maiden" will be presented at Synetic Theater in Arlington through Dec. 23, 2022.

THROUGH DEC 23

"Snow Maiden." At Synetic Theater, 1800 S. Bell St, Arlington. In a frozen forest, a lonely boy builds a girl from snow. When she mysteriously comes to life, mischief, laughter, and enchantment abound. But what will happen when the ice begins to melt? Told through dazzling movement, dance, and acrobatics, Snow Maiden is a magical tale of hope, friendship and the transformative power of dreams. Based on the beloved folktale Snegurochka, Snow Maiden is a holiday treat for friends and fans of all ages.

THROUGH DEC. 31

Home for the Holidays Art Show. At Arts Herndon, 750 Center Street, Herndon. Works by local artists on display the entire month of December. Visit www.artsherdon.org. Call 703-956-6590.

SATURDAY/DEC. 31

New Year's Eve Golf Tournament. 10 a.m. Shotgun start. Annual four-person scramble. Entry fee includes green fee, cart fee, range balls and prizes. Entry deadline December 26. At Herndon Centennial Golf Course, 909 Ferndale Avenue, Herndon. Cost is \$80 per player. Call 703-471-5769 or visit herdongolf.com.

Happy Holidays from all of us as

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Obituary

Obituary



Civic leader to many and friend to all, **Thomas Ross ("T.R.") Cook Jr., 93**, of Vienna, VA, peacefully passed away on December 11th, 2022.

T.R. is survived by his longtime companion Betty Swartz of Great Falls, VA, his son Tom (Barbara) Cook III, daughter-in-law Roberta Cook, grandchildren Lucas (Andrea) Cook, Mason Cook, and Nash Cook, and by his sister Jewel (George) Frazier and brother-in-law Wilford Bookout, each of Tennessee, and a number of nieces and nephews. He is preceded in death by parents Thomas R. and Lula Lowery Cook, son Stephen Cook, brother Carson Cook, and sisters Eula Hagy, Mary Rose Moore, Joyce Sweis, Nola McHone, Quincetta Bookout, Gena Robin Reagan.

Born June 27, 1929 in the mountains of Monroe County, TN, and enjoying careers in the military and as a professional photographer, T.R. led a life of impact. He joined the Army after high school in Tennessee and was trained as a paratrooper during the Korean War. Rising to the rank of Lt. Colonel, he continued to serve in the National Guard until his military retirement in the 1970's.

Cook has been a life-long professional photographer, working primarily with the Atomic Energy Commission in Tennessee before relocating to the greater D.C. area in the mid 1960's. Area assignments then included the Smithsonian Institute and the National Zoo. He soon opened Cook's Photo Arts Studio in Vienna, focusing on portraits and weddings, and gaining assignments at the White House, Capitol Hill and the Kennedy Center.

T.R. enjoyed being very active in the community, routinely photographing a wide array of local celebrations and events. Contributions include serving as a troop leader for the Boy Scouts of America and as president of both the Optimist Club of Greater Vienna and the Optimist Club of Great Falls. T.R. founded the Great Falls club and initiated the Vienna Optimist's Youth Appreciation Awards for Excellence, which recognize the accomplishments of area high school juniors in six areas of excellence: academics, citizenship, fine arts, science, sports and technology. He also served a term as Optimists International Vice President.

T.R. was well loved and respected for his congenial personality and generous service to his country and community. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

Memorial donations may be made to the Vienna Optimist Club, P.O. Box 411, Vienna, VA 22183. Private burial will be held in Dayton Tennessee at Ogden Cemetery. Memories and condolences may be shared at <https://directcremationservicesofvirginia.com/obituaries/thomas-cook-2022/>

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From left, Emily Talbott, Molly Hobart and Keaveny Mullins. The three seventh grade students created a cookbook that is filled with holiday dessert recipes that are part of their family's Christmas tradition.

Holiday Dessert Cookbook Preserves Family Culinary Traditions

Seventh grade students share recipes in their cookbook, "Faith, Family and Food."

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

A dusting of flour covers the kitchen counter as well as the hands and faces of three Fairfax seventh grade students. Giggles fill the air as the girls roll dough on the dusted countertop to make sugar cookies. These sweet treats, golden brown and coated with sugar crystals, come with a backstory. Not only are Emily Talbott, Molly Hobart and Keaveny Mullins rolling, cutting and baking they are preserving family traditions. They've captured those traditions in a new cookbook filled with holiday family recipes.

"I've always made sugar cookies with my grandma," said Emily. "We deliver them to people in nursing homes at Christmas."

The twelve-year-old girls, friends since kindergarten, each come from families who use baking as a creative outlet between Thanksgiving and Christmas. This year, they decided to compile their favorite holiday dessert recipes into a cookbook, titled "Faith, Family and Food." The proceeds will be donated to Project Hope, an international humanitarian relief organization.

"We've always talked about the desserts we baked during the holidays," said Keaveny. "As a project for Advent, we decided to do something to help those in need."

A bustling kitchen is what Emily has come to expect each weekend during the holiday season. She can often be found churning butter and sugar to make sprinkle cookies while her mother sifts flour and espresso powder

for chocolate cake and her grandmother whisks brown sugar and pecans for cinnamon rolls. The rolls, soft and gooey and dripping with icing that is both sweet and salty, are a nod to her family's Swedish heritage.

"There are always the most amazing scents in our house," said Emily. "You can smell sugar and butter. It's so good."

While not hailing from a family of traditional bakers, Molly and her mother can be found dipping fresh berries into melted milk chocolate. The sweetness of the berries and the richness of the chocolate sauce not only combine to make a simple dessert, but they also strengthen a bond between parent and child.

"These are easy and don't take a lot of time to make, but I get to spend a lot of time with my mother," she said. "We make these every year and deliver them to our family members."

Cream cheese, butter and cinnamon are blended and baked to create sweet and spicy pumpkin cake that Keaveny and her family eat on Christmas Eve.

"After mass, we have the most amazing dinner," she said. "I make this cake and we have it for dessert."

The girls hint that their cookbook, which weaves history and faith with family holiday tradition and food, might be the first step on the road to fulfilling their culinary aspirations.

"Maybe we'll make cooking videos using our dessert recipes one day," said Emily. "We have to fit it around our homework and hockey practice."

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Between Zero and Fat



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

For those of you who know me beyond the margins of this column, this title is rhetorical. It refers to the chance that what I'm about to describe involves your truly succeeding on any level. For most of you regular readers, you only know what I tell you/admit to. Which is a lot. And I am happy and proud to be as simple and as transparent as I am. Other than picking out dessert, I'm not really your go-to person. I'm more likely your go-away person. I'm helpful, occasionally, but only to a limited degree.

Though I'm good in an emergency and usually level-headed: "Cheerful in all weathers," to quote Augustus McCray (Robert Duvall) reading the hand-carved epitaph for Deets' (Danny Glover) as written by Woodrow F. Call, in a particular sad scene from the mini-series "Lonesome Dove," I am nonetheless challenged and unhelpful in many ways (technical, mechanical, structural) other than as manual labor. What's the point? Read on.

My wife Dina and I have had cats and dogs pretty much during the entirety of our 45-year connection. Twice the brood has consisted of a puppy and kitten raised up together in the same household. But the most recent iteration, since my cancer diagnosis nearly 14 years ago, has exclusively involved cats, upwards of five in-home, all at once, with no dog. In that time, we had never bought anything resembling a 54-inch high, multi-level cat-condo/climbing-type furniture thing. Until "Black Friday," that is.

After spending time perusing the website for "Cat Trees & Condos," we decided on a carpeted piece of furniture/apparatus thing exclusively for the cats to climb, hide, bat, sleep, et cetera. Sort of a jungle jim for cats, you might say.

At any rate, we were so focused on the amenities (features and benefits) of the "thing," and anticipating the fun our four cats - once acclimated, would have, that we never even considered how the "thing" would be delivered; as in, in pieces or all already assembled. I had already paid for it when it hit me: Am I supposed to put this "thing" together? Before the call ended, I asked: "By the way, does this thing come assembled or will I have to put it together? Because, if not already together, it could present a real problem for me. Years ago, I put together a wood picnic table, but I may have peaked then." The customer-server acknowledged my concerns and put me on hold for a minute while she researched the answer. She can me back a minute later and said she couldn't find any clarification concerning the "thing" as to how it would be delivered (as in, in pieces or as seen on site) which led her to conclude that it probably required assembly. Disappointed, but undaunted, I said, "No problem, we'll deal with it."

A few days later, the "thing" arrived in a box, in pieces, assembly required. The size of the box (small-ish) confirmed my worst fears. And when I opened it and started sorting the pieces, the nuts, bolts, screws, I began to have a bad feeling (a feeling I've had many times before) that assembling this apparatus was going to be way beyond me. And as a result, it was destined to sit in our living room disassembled and emblematic of my skillset - or lack thereof. Fighting my instincts and not automatically giving in to the assembling challenges, I located the directions to see if there was any path forward where I could possibly succeed where I knew it was likely impossible.

The how-to booklet was eight pages long, not too bad, with each section of instructions written in five languages, however. That didn't bode well - for me. In addition to these varied words, there were several schematics with identifying numbers and arrows with dotted lines and easy to follow directions - for a normal person, I imagine (It looked like Egyptian hieroglyphics to me and appeared totally beyond my abilities).

Nevertheless, I sat back on the couch and began reading the manual, attempting to find any familiar elements that might enable me to shock the world. It took me five minutes to realize that I wasn't shocking anybody. Instead, I was left to stew in my own juices. "Incompetent Ken" had struck (or rather not struck) again. There would be no success story here. "MightyCasey" as it were, had swung and missed.

I then looked up at Dina. She was sitting across the room anxiously awaiting my assessment. "Well?" She asked. "Well," I said, "there's no way I can do this." A few days passed with the opened box resting against the wall waiting for divine intervention. By mid-week, lightning had struck. A neighbor, with whom Dina is very friendly, took pity on us and offered to assemble the "thing." It took him all about one hour, and during that hour, he was talking to us the whole time, barely concentrating on the task at hand. Yet, he succeeded. And all I could do was sit there, mesmerized, as to how simple it all seemed to somebody else.

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



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