

Mount Vernon Gazette

MOUNT VERNON'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER • A CONNECTION NEWSPAPER

DECEMBER 22, 2022

Traffic Safety Under the Microscope Once Again

Lusk's Virtual Town Hall Meeting brings out VDOT, police.

Traffic-FCPD Snapshot:

- 53 active traffic cases
- 12,000 traffic calls in 2022
- DWI enforcement is up 21%
- 37 intersections being studied in the Active Transportation Plan
- \$100 million allocated to pedestrian and bicycle safety
- Two bus stops under study in Kingstowne for pedestrian refuge improvement

By MIKE SALMON
THE GAZETTE

At the Franconia Traffic Safety Town Hall on Dec. 7, the questions from local residents echoed concerns that surround this road-centric part of Fairfax County that is bisected by Backlick Road, Richmond Highway and Franconia Road where most of the traffic is concentrated.

Questions:

What are you doing about the cyclists and the pedestrians getting hit?

What about the loud, obnoxious mufflers that are sounding out all night?

What's happening to the Franconia Road-Rose Hill Drive intersection?

What about all the commercial

vehicles parked on the roads?

Is there a possibility that the speed limits are going to be decreased?

This is what the drivers in the Franconia District want to know, and Supervisor Rodney Lusk (D-Franconia) as well as the police, VDOT and FCDOT addressed the concerns as well as they could. Speeding seems to be a big issue.

"It's never about enforcement or tickets," said Franconia Police Captain John Lieb. "Total crashes and injuries are up," he said.

This was a meeting Supervisor Lusk set up to address the traffic situation in the Franconia-eastern Springfield area with the county's Active Transportation Plan. Fairfax County is studying 37 intersections in the area and dedicating funding. The county is starting a pilot program to address the speeding using speed cameras in school or



PHOTO BY MIKE SALMON/CONNECTION

Pedestrian and cars were part of the discussion at the town hall meeting.

work zones and possibly lowering the speed limits in some neighborhoods to 20 or 15 miles per hour.

"We're still exploring this with the county attorney's office," Lusk said.

A few weeks ago there was a meeting at Edison High School, to see if the students were following

the rules, and officials partnered with the officers at the Mount Vernon police station to see what was going on. There were 283 citations handed out in Mount Vernon in 2022.

"We've had our challenges in the county this year," said Captain

Al Hanson, the commander of the traffic division at FCPD.

Another improvement in the form of new sidewalks is being installed on the Richmond Highway side of Huntley Meadows park as part of the "Safer Routes to School" program.

Plants and Animals Center the Stage at Huntley Meadows

Park photo contest reveals the variety of species in this county park.



The picture contest was put on by the Friends of Huntley Meadows.

By MIKE SALMON
THE GAZETTE

Who knew there was such a variety of plants, birds, reptiles and amphibians alive and well in Huntley Meadows Park? The photographers knew and were proud to display their works at the recent Huntley Meadows Photo Show on Sunday, Dec. 11.

"You wonder, do frogs think?" said Muala Hastings, looking at one of the four top winners of a tree frog on a leaf looking for a place to jump. "It's a story," she said.

The first place ribbon was on a picture of a green heron fishing off a log, with the water reflection, and a yellow leaf, giving it another dimension. "This is kind of luck," said photographer Eric Steiner. The photo was taken on June 30 at 6:23 a.m. He had two pictures in the top four and one honorable mention.

"The frog is my favorite one," said his wife Jennifer. "He takes our family picture once in a while," she joked.

This year, there were 60 photo submis-

sions hung in the Huntley Meadows Center, submitted by 25 different photographers. There were three overall winners and one in the youth category, and seven "honorable mentions."

Each year, there are three judges for the competition, and the previous year's winner is automatically a judge for the next year. "It's a tradition, we ask our past winner to judge," said Katie Baker, part of the Friends of Huntley Meadows.

During the judging, there was a lot of camera and f-stop jargon going around the room, but Baker admitted that equipment of the top level is not needed, especially in a time where whipping out the cell phone camera is almost a natural reaction. "We do have some cell phone camera entries," she said, but added "the top photos tend to be taken with a professional camera."

James Fatemi is a McLean High School sophomore that took the award-winning shot last year of a toad he called "King of His Domain." He was one of the judges this year. "He was brought here to Huntley Meadows

SEE PARK PHOTO, PAGE 6

McENEARNEY ASSOCIATES



WISHES YOU A

MERRY & BRIGHT

HOLIDAY SEASON AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR

During the holiday season, our thoughts turn gratefully to our communities and to our clients. From our family to yours, we hope your holidays are filled with warmth and cheer.

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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 Alexandria Gazette Packet, the Mount Vernon Gazette and sister papers have been full of holiday spirit, beginning before Thanksgiving. Amazing 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.”

“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 HERE IS 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

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

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. 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.Connection-Newspapers.com/PDFs

Did you miss the Children's Gazettes? Take a look. They are special.

<http://connectionarchives.com/PDF/2022/121422/Alexandria.pdf>

<http://connectionarchives.com/PDF/2022/121422/Mt%20Vernon.pdf>

— MARY KIMM

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EDITORIAL

Come Take a Hike with Me!

BY SUPERVISOR DAN STORCK

The out-of-doors is absolutely my favorite place to be, at any time. While January may not be the time of year you think of hiking, I started my annual tradition of taking First Day Hikes with our community six years ago. I love getting out on the first day of a new year, clearing my head, meeting new people, enjoying the trees and wildlife of the park we are in and so much more. I invite you to join me on Sunday, January 1 at 10 a.m. at Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve for my 2023 First Day Hike Nature Walk. We will enjoy the natural world around us, talk about our friends, family and community, while taking the opportunity to rejuvenate as we kick off the new year together!

This year, we are especially pleased to be partnering with the Friends of Dyke Marsh for a nature walk through this beautiful wildlife preserve. Along the way we will discuss the marsh's many valuable natural resources, tid-



al marsh ecology, wetlands' importance and challenges facing the marsh. These challenges are not unlike those we are seeing across the world, as well as here in the Mount Vernon District, as a result of climate change and the rising

temperature of the earth. To address these challenges and engage all our residents and businesses in helping to mitigate these changes, the County Board recently reviewed the Community-wide Energy and Climate Action Plan (CECAP) implementation. You will be hearing much more about this in the next year and how you can make a difference!

What to do: Park in the Belle Haven Park south parking lot. Walk to the Haul Road trail entrance and meet by the bulletin board. Bring water. Wear warm layers, long sleeves and pants, gloves and sturdy shoes. And, binoculars are recommended.

Come join us! Registration requested, but not necessary, by sending an email to info@fodm.org and putting New Year's Walk in the subject box.

Wishing you and yours a safe, healthy and Happy Holiday!

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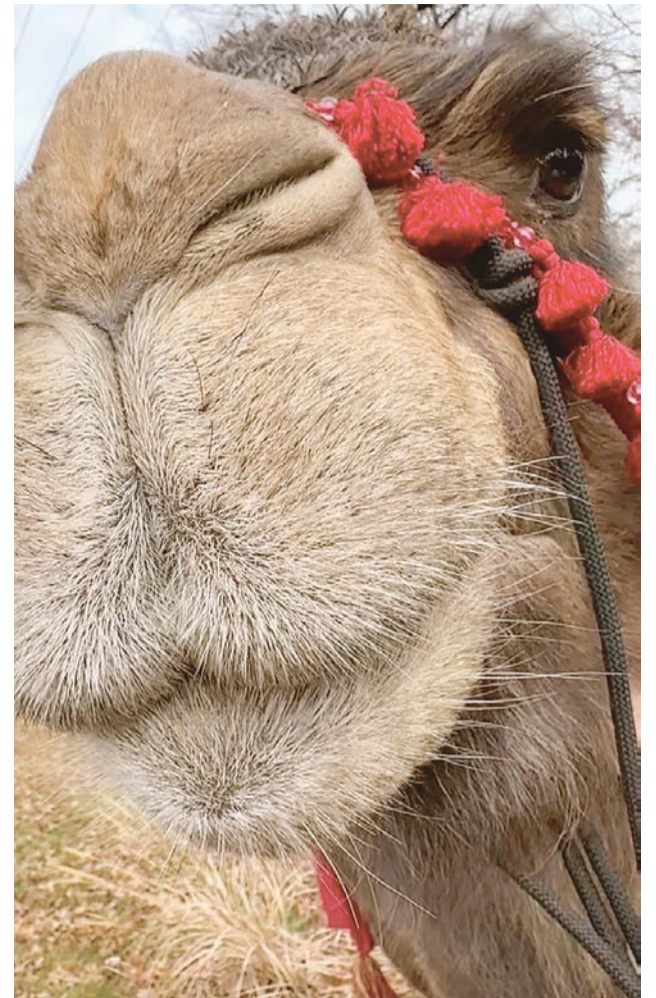
PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION



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

OPINION

Legislation to Keep Schools Informed Of Felony Convictions

Sen. Scott Surovell (D-Mt. Vernon) introduced legislation this week that would keep schools informed when one of their employees is arrested or convicted of certain felony offenses including sex offenses or facilitation of prostitution. Earlier this year, Fairfax County Public Schools discovered that a school counselor had continued employment for two years following an arrest for solicitation of prostitution from a minor after he was arrested for the same violation two years later. At this time, it is still unclear where the breakdown in legally required notification occurred, but it also appears the individual failed to provide accurate employment information after his first arrest. Surovell's bill would ensure notification, an employment verification, and a paper trail to verify that notification had taken place by both law enforcement and the court.

Protecting children from employees with certain felony records has been a priority for the General Assembly and Surovell specifically for several years. In 2021, Surovell worked with Delegate Charniele Herring (D-Alexandria) to modernize Virginia's criminal conviction record keeping and reporting system. Surovell and Herring's 2021 legislation, SB1339/HB1283, came at the recommendation of the Virginia Crime Commission and it will provide fully automated notification of criminal record changes to public and private employers who request criminal background checks. That system is powered by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Next Generation Identification Record of Arrest and Prosecution Back

service (also known as RAP Back). The Virginia State Police is slated to begin utilizing that service upon deployment of their new criminal recordkeeping system on July 1, 2025.

As a transition to the RAP Back system, Surovell's bill, SB821, would require that each school division superintendent provide updated contact information to the Department of Education for the purposes of receiving reports when a division employee is arrested for certain offenses and requires notification to occur through specifically designated means. The bill requires notification by both law enforcement and the Clerk of Court, and requires that the arresting agency verify a defendant's employment information from the Virginia Employment Commission to determine whether the arrestee requires such a report to be filed in case the defendant does not provide accurate employment information. A report will also be filed anytime someone with a Board of Education license is convicted of certain felonies.

"Pending the deployment of RAP Back, this legislation is intended to resolve a problem where a clerical error can put children in danger," Surovell said. "I think we all wish it wasn't necessary to take precautions like this, but we need to be sure that proper notification gets to the right person when certain convictions are handed down and when arrests are made."

The next step for the legislation will be a committee hearing in the Senate of Virginia sometime soon after the General Assembly convenes in Richmond on Jan. 11, 2023.

BULLETIN BOARD

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

FREE HOLIDAY LYFT RIDES

Preparing to combat that time of year when, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, nearly half of all U.S. traffic deaths involve drunk drivers (39% Christmas; 49% New Year's Day - NHTSA, 2020), a local nonprofit organization announced today that free safe rides will be offered to would-be drunk drivers throughout the Washington-metropolitan area during the winter holidays begin-

ning on December 16th.

Offered by the nonprofit Washington Regional Alcohol Program (WRAP), the 2022 Holiday SoberRide program will be in operation nightly from 10:00 p.m. until 4:00 a.m. from December 16, 2022 to January 1, 2023 as way to keep local roads safe from impaired drivers during this traditionally high-risk holiday period.

Each evening during this six-hour period, area residents ages 21 and older celebrating with alcohol may download Lyft to their phones, then enter a SoberRide code in the app's 'Promo' section to receive their no-cost (up to \$15)

SEE BULLETIN, PAGE 6



Good Shepherd Catholic Church

JOIN US FOR CHRISTMAS!

Saturday, December 24

4pm*, 6pm, 8pm, Midnight (español)
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Eric Steiner got down low to take this shot of the green heron.



A clump of water snakes.



Tree frogs seem out of the Amazon rain forest, but they live in Huntley Meadows too.

Park Photo Contest Reveals the Variety of Species in This County Park

FROM PAGE 1

for the first time when he was still in the stroller," said his father Fredrick Fatemi.

Tyler Reber was another past winner that was judging this year. "I look for sharpness, clarity, color composition – all the qualities of a nice image," he said.

One of the top four was a raccoon staring at the camera while holding a baby raccoon in its mouth.

Monica Martin took the picture when she was at the boardwalk in the park that goes over the wetland. "I saw this cute little face pop up," she said.



Raccoons aren't pictured frequently with their babies in their mouth.

PHOTOS BY
MIKE SALMON
THE GAZETTE

Eric Steiner explains his picture titled "What Happens Next?"



BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 5

safe transportation home. A separate Holiday SoberRide® promo code will be posted at 9:00 p.m. on December 16, 23 and 31 on www.SoberRide.com.

ADOPT A WARRIOR FAMILY FOR CHRISTMAS

So many of our Military families today find themselves in financial crisis, now more than ever.

This will be especially true during this Holiday Season. To give back, Able Forces Foundation (AFF) is once again sponsoring the Adopt-A-Warrior Family Christmas program. As in years past, Able Forces Foundation will adopt families from each of the five Military Service branches. All adopted families are identified by military Advocates on military bases or military Recovery programs in the Washington, DC Metro area. These families have

been vetted and referred to AFF. Based on need, financial support will ensure each family will have:

- A Christmas Tree
- Complete Christmas Dinner (for up to 8)
- Stocking Stuffers
- the ability to provide up to 5 gifts per child

100% of all donations go directly to support this program. There are no administrative or overhead fees taken out of donations. All donations contributed between Oct. 25 and Christmas will go directly to

support this program. If you can help, go to: www.ableforces.org/adopt to make a contribution.

VOLUNTEERS WANTED

Alexandria Families for Safer Streets - Executive Assistant to AFSS Board of Directors. The agency is seeking an executive assistant to help coordinate a diverse group of tasks necessary to keep us on track and moving forward. Someone with office manager skills would be

the ideal candidate. www.volunteeralexandria.org
ALIVE! Volunteers are needed to assist with multiple programs relating to their Food Program, ALIVE! House, and Alexandria Eviction Prevention Partnership Program will distribute food at Mobile Pop-ups and Truck to Trunk events, etc. <https://www.volunteeralexandria.org/ALIVE>

SEE BULLETIN, PAGE 12

Vying for a Slice of Pedestrian & Cyclist Safety

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

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE GAZETTE

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

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 13



VIA FAIRFAX COUNTY GOVERNMENT
Pedestrian High-Risk Corridors & Locations: High-Risk Corridors and the Top 10 High Crash Rate Corridors.

Happy Holidays from all of us as

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WATER TREATMENT



Mike McGrath, Director of Wastewater Treatment, explains primary treatment at a settling tank.



Overhead view of the Noman Cole plant, a poster on display there.

PHOTOS BY GLENDA BOOTH

Down the Toilet. Down the Drain. Then What?

Locals tour the Noman Cole Plant in Lorton.

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
GAZETTE PACKET

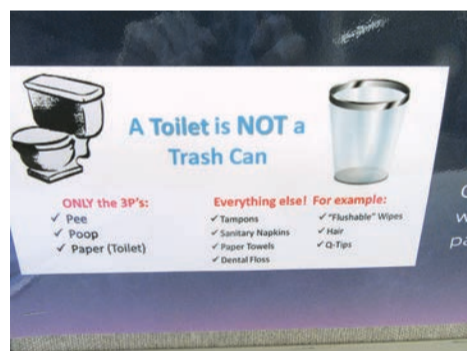
In Fairfax County, one person generates 90 gallons of wastewater a day, on average. Once that water disappears down the drain or toilet, most people forget about it. It's gone.

But it's not really gone. The water and everything it carries along with it travel through underground pipes to a wastewater treatment facility, commonly called "the sewage plant."

Fairfax County, a 407-square-mile jurisdiction with 1.1 million people who flush, bathe, clean, wash and water lawns, has 3,380 miles of sanitary sewer infrastructure, including 63 pumping stations that move wastewater to five treatment plants.

On Nov. 19, officials with the county's Noman Cole Pollution Control Plant at 9399 Richmond Highway in Lorton conducted a public tour of the facility's 360 acres of grounds, buildings, streets, pipes, pumps, holding tanks, deodorizers, disinfectors, ponds and control room. They explained the five steps that clean the water before sending it into Pohick Creek, ultimately the Potomac River. Visitors studied tanks of bubbling water, some water appearing to just be sitting there and some with foamy surfaces, all steps that the initially chocolaty liquids go through in the cleanup process.

The Noman Cole plant is the only plant the county owns. Built in the 1970s, it was originally designed to handle 18 million gallons a day. Today, every day, it treats 40 million gallons, equivalent to 60 Olympic swimming pools, and can treat up to 67 million gallons



Exhibits gave visitors guidance on what not to flush.

No-no's

Exhibits explained how to prevent backups and overflows. The drain lines from homes to the county's sewer system are only big enough to carry water, toilet paper and human waste. Here are the most common, problematic "unflushables."

- ❖ Wipes, even those labeled "flushable"
- ❖ Cotton balls and swabs, feminine hygiene products, dental floss, paper towels
- ❖ Fats, oils and grease, including oils and grease from cooking
- ❖ Medications

for its 300,000 customers. This translates into more than 420 million gallons of wastewater a year, explained Mike McGrath, the county's Director of Wastewater Treatment. These numbers represent 40 percent of the county's total wastewater flow or volume.

The Cole facility has more than 7,000 "major assets," said McGrath. The instrumentation and control system has more than 20,000 "tags." Each tag is a signal that is collected, usually multiple times a minute.



Simranjit Chauhan showed visitors felt tube liner material and described a way to replace old pipes without digging them up.

Instruments and equipment may have multiple tags. The plant operates 24 hours every day and has five backup generators for power outages.

These statistics are mind-numbing numbers, but explicit indicators of an engineering marvel that most residents take for granted. From the dirty wastewater that enters the plant, called influent, to the cleaner water that leaves, effluent, wastewater treatment is a complicated process involving biology, chemistry, engineering, technology and human expertise.

How Wastewater Is Cleaned Up

McGrath literally and verbally walked the group through wastewater treatment stages, including what experts call "preliminary, primary, secondary and tertiary treatment." On average, depending on the distance, it takes up to five hours for a drop of water to get to the Noman Cole plant. One drop that comes in leaves the plant cleaner in about 22 hours.

SEE NOMAN COLE PLANT, PAGE 9
WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

WATER TREATMENT



Kelvin Villacourta released air from a balloon to demonstrate how a pump works to move water.



The compacted "leftovers," solid materials removed from wastewater, like plastics, fabrics and fast food wrappers.

PHOTOS BY GLENDA BOOTH



This wastewater is undergoing secondary or biological treatment using bacteria.

Noman Cole Plant

FROM PAGE 8

Raw sewage coming in is mostly water and carries items like plastics, sticks, rags, rocks, socks and even dead animals. Mechanical screens remove these objects and pumps whoosh the wastewater to clarification tanks where solid matter settles (sludge) or floats (scum).

At another stage, biological and physical methods consume and remove organic matter. The plant grows 20 tons of microbes a day to treat wastewater. Microorganisms can reduce nitrogen levels and clarifiers help remove phosphorus. A disinfection process uses ultraviolet light to kill 99 percent of the pathogens.

Visitors got a mild olfactory hit a few times – clearly not chocolate -- and McGrath offered, "We invested over \$20 million to keep the odors down." Pointing to the bio-tower, he said, "It has enormous sponges to remove odors."

The plant removes 90 percent of pollutants, McGrath noted, like pathogens. "Without adequate sewage collection and treatment, more citizens would get sick from waterborne diseases and our county's streams would be more polluted. Before the implementation of reliable drinking water and wastewater treatment, thousands of people in the United States died of waterborne diseases like cholera, dysentery, typhoid, polio and hepatitis." Decaying organics rob the water column of oxygen and suffocate fish. Solids silt up streams.

Wastewater plants in the Chesapeake Bay region target nitrogen and phosphorus for



McGrath explains the stages of wastewater treatment as visitors peered into tanks

reduction. Nitrogen and phosphorus can stimulate excessive algae which block sunlight needed by submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV). SAV beds help improve water quality and serve as fish nurseries.

Everyday, two full dump trucks haul solids in the form of ash to the I-95/Lorton landfill, the material removed from the incoming wastewater.

Plant employees conduct 25,000 tests a year to meet Clean Water Act and other requirements. For 30 years, George Mason University scientists have monitored the outgoing water at Gunston Cove and found improvements in recent years. While the

discharged water is much cleaner going out than coming in, it is not potable for humans.

Why tour a sewage plant?

Julia Christ, an eleventh grader is studying the nitrogen cycle at West Springfield High School and wanted to learn more. Mount Vernonite Greg Crider remarked, "I was curious about how wastewater is treated. I'm impressed."

McGrath applauds the plant's staff. "Every hour of the year, the 130 or so employees at the Noman Cole plant are protecting public health and improving the environment by reclaiming clean water from sewage. Read-



A biotower, odor control technology.

Information

Tutorial on the wastewater treatment process, U.S. Geological Survey, <https://www.usgs.gov/special-topics/water-science-school/science/visit-wastewater-treatment-plant>

Fairfax County treatment plant service areas, <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/publicworks/wastewater/wastewater-treatment>

ers Digest readers rank it as the second most important job in the United States."

Pointing to a pipe crammed with grayish-brown, compacted detritus removed from the wastewater, McGrath told the group, "Every month or so we get calls asking if we've found a diamond ring." And while he's proud of the plant's operations, he said with a laugh, "No, no diamond rings."

WINTER PLANTS



The corkscrew hazel plant's twisty limbs stand out in winter.

Warming Up to Plants in the Winter

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

PHOTOS BY GLENDA BOOTH

The limbs are curvy, squiggly and intertwined. Shrouded in leaves in the summer, in the winter, the gnarly patterns jump out. This is the corkscrew hazel or Harry Lauder's walking stick, a deciduous shrub named for a Scottish gent who had a crooked walking stick.

This intriguing plant on the east side of River Farm's mansion is but one of winter's delights at the headquarters of the American Horticultural Society on East Boulevard Drive in Mount Vernon. And while the winter gardens do not have the razzle-dazzle of summer and are not ablaze with fall's leaf colors, it's a time to savor winter's quiet and study nature's "bones." Though most plants go dormant in the winter, some are show-stoppers, at a time when the sun is low and human disturbances are fewer.

"Winter is about structure," says Tammy Burke, AHS's chief horticulturalist. "The stems, fruits and buds of plants reveal functional patterns," she notes. Bare tree limbs reach to the sky like outstretched arms. Last spring's bird and squirrel nests stand out in the leafless shrubs and trees. Seedheads sway in the breeze.

Winter is an opportune time to study tree bark. One standout at AHS is a Chinese elm which has contrasting tan, brown and orange exfoliating bark, a series of vertical splotches resembling a Jackson Pollock painting. The crape myrtles' cinnamon-colored bark naturally peels away, exposing lighter tones underneath. There's beauty in the browns and tans, like the brown hydrangea blossoms that point skyward. The arched Japanese bristle grass shimmers in the breeze, like little tan squirrel tails.

A close study of twigs offers hints of spring. Next year's growth is in buds at tree branches' tips, called terminal or end buds.



The splotchy bark of the Chinese elm is an attention-getter.

The bud is dormant throughout the winter, awaiting spring sun and warmth to open. Twigs also have scars where leaves used to be.

AHS has a magnificent Osage orange tree, estimated to be at least 200 years old and listed on the Virginia Big Tree Register. In 2019, it was measured to be 65 feet tall with an average crown spread of more than 90 feet. It has a furrowed gray-brown to orange-brown bark.



Crape myrtles shed their darker bark in winter. Winterberry's red berries are food for birds.

Spots of color punctuate the landscape. The rose hips of *Rosa rugosa* and winterberry shrubs' red berries brighten the landscape. Ditto the yellow fruit of the Surattense or yellow-fruit nightshade and the pink muhly grass or hairgrass, a bushy grass that's up to four feet tall.

What's Happening?

And while many plants are dormant in the winter and plant life may look dead, in

the leaf litter or leaves on the ground are decomposers like bacteria, fungi, beetles, earthworms and many microscopic critters. Many invertebrates overwinter in leaves and other organic debris, like great spangled fritillary and woolly bear caterpillars. Plant stems hollow out in winter and some insects spend time there.

Some birds probe tree bark for tiny over-

SEE WINTER PLANTS, PAGE 11
WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

WINTER PLANTS

PHOTOS BY GLENDA BOOTH



Echinacea or coneflower plant in its fall glory.



AHS has a champion Osage orange tree.



AHS gardeners leave goldenrod seedheads intact.

FROM PAGE 10

wintering insects or insect egg cases. Others feed on plant seedheads and others feast on holly and other berries. "Leaving seed heads in the garden over winter benefits nature in many ways," Burke recommends. "Seed heads from plants add interesting winter structure, the seed heads feed the birds naturally and the stems are beneficial for overwintering insects."

Winter is a good time for spotting wildlife too at AHS. Staffers there see red foxes, turkeys, deer, rabbits, raccoons, coyotes and raptors. Spring will hopefully bring the return of a bald eagle pair that has successfully raised young there in recent years.

Take it all in. "The soft winter light reveals the muted palette of colors in soft grays and tawny browns, beautiful textured bark, colorful stems and beautiful berries of red and deep purples, rose hips and the flowering witch hazel and camellias in all their glory," offers Burke.



Rosa Rugosa hips dot the landscape with bright red spots of color.

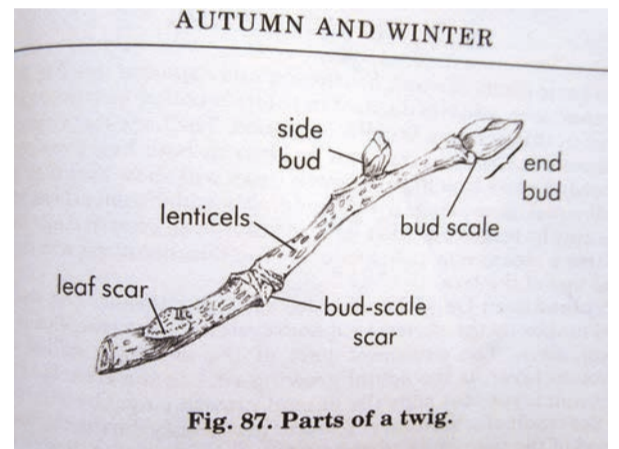


Fig. 87. Parts of a twig.

Anatomy of a twig, from Ecology of Eastern Forests, Peterson Field Guide.



This plant is also aptly called "hairgrass."



Japanese or nodding bristlegrass shimmers in the breeze



Now brown, hydrangea's fall blossoms have a beauty all their own.

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First Night

PHOTO BY JOHN BORDNER/GAZETTE PACKET

Fireworks will light up the sky over the Potomac River as the finale to First Night Alexandria on Dec. 31. A day-long series of New Year's Eve events includes live entertainment at venues across the city beginning at noon and ending with fireworks along the waterfront. View performance schedules and purchase tickets at www.firstnightalexandria.org

3 Restaurant Options For Christmas Weekend

BY HOPE NELSON

Life is stressful enough around the holidays; why not let your favorite restaurant pitch in with the food? Here are three eateries that are certainly up to the task – no cleanup required.

Brunch at Café 44, 44 Canal Center Plaza Suite 401

From 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. throughout Christmas weekend (including the big day itself), celebrate the holiday with a festive brunch at Café

44. The restaurant's brunch menu will be in full force with such favorites as omelets, breakfast burritos and sandwiches, eggs benedict, a vegan breakfast bowl and more. Also on display: the café's holiday cocktails, along with some chef's specials to round things out. Reservations recommended.

Christmas Eve dinner at Spice Kraft, 2607 Mount Vernon Ave.

Looking to branch out from the usual turkey and dressing? Spice Kraft has you covered with an Indian flair. Whether you're vegetarian or a die-hard carnivore, there are plenty of options in the eatery's prix fixe menu. Start off with the likes of brussel sprouts pakora or chicken sheek kebab, then proceed to a feast of (depending on your dietary choices) jackfruit, dhal, eggplant and corn, seafood biryani, lamb gongura and much more. Finish things out with a gulab jamun black forest cake and toast to the evening! Preorder your feast and the restaurant



Festive decor at Café 44

will have everything ready on Dec. 24.

Christmas Day delivery from South China, 1302 Mount Vernon Ave.

It's a holiday favorite for many families (including your humble columnist's over the past few years) – a feast of Chinese takeaway is sometimes the perfect meal for Christmas Day. South China is certainly up to the task. From fried rice to lo mein to kung pao to egg foo young to all your other favorites, the restaurant delivers on every front.

Pro tip: Order more than you'll want so you can have plenty of leftovers. And pro tip 2: Call early in the day for speedier service (the restaurant gets popular!).

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

APPETITE

BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 6

Assistance League of Northern Virginia is an all-volunteer non-profit organization that feeds, clothes and provides reading assistance and books to children in need. Assistance League's programs touch the lives of hundreds of children in Fairfax and Prince William Counties and the City of Alexandria. There are many volunteer opportunities for community members to contribute to helping those in need. To learn more, email info@alnv.org or visit www.alnv.org.
 Join Friends' Board. Those who care about mental health, the Alexandria community, and collaborating with fellow residents to make sure the City's most vulnerable residents have a chance to thrive, then consider joining the Board of Friends of the Alexandria Mental Health Center. The Friends Board is an all-volunteer group of residents that oversees the administration of one of Alexandria's top mental health charities. Friends has no paid staff, so Board members, working on average 10 hours per month, share the day-to-day work

needed to accomplish its goals. Interested candidates should email FriendsofAMHC@gmail.com.
 STEM Professionals Needed. Help assist K-12 STEM teachers as part of the American Association for the Advancement of Science's STEM Volunteer Program, stemvolunteers.org, during the 2018-19 school year. In the 2017-18 school year, there are 85 volunteers in 6 Northern Virginia school districts. Contact Don Rea at 571-551-2488, or donaldrea@aol.com.
 Volunteer Adult Mentors Needed. Help assist the Department of Family Services' BeFriendA-Child mentoring program. The mentors provide opportunities for companionship, guidance and support to children who have been abused and neglected, or who are at risk of abuse and neglect. Contact Ibrahim Khalil (Ibrahim.khalil@fairfaxcounty.gov) at 703-324-4547.
 ALIVE! offers numerous programs that aid low-income families in Alexandria that rely on volunteers: monthly food distributions, fur-

CALENDAR

NOW THRU DEC. 29

An Eye for Nature Exhibition. At Mount Vernon Unitarian Church, 1909 Windmill Lane, Alexandria. Nina Tisara and Steven Halperson have teamed up for an exhibition of Tisara's mosaic art and Halperson's fine art photography. The exhibit may be seen from 10 a.m. to noon, Mondays and Tuesdays and 7 to 9 p.m. on Thursdays except for Thanksgiving. To schedule other hours contact ninat@ninatisara.com.

NOW THRU JAN. 8, 2023

The Botanical Gourmet. Presented by the Botanical Arts Society of the National Capital Region. At The Athenaeum, Alexandria. For eons, animals ranging from massive leaf-eating dinosaurs to minuscule nectar sipping insects have been attuned to the healthful benefits of a plant-based diet. For their part, plants have enlisted the help of animals by attracting them with visual and other cues for purposes of reproduction. These interactions, while necessary, are purely transactional. They lack the aesthetic spirit. That's where botanical artists step in. Botanical art is neither scientific illustration nor decorative floral composition,

but an engaging combination of the two. Like blue jays or cabbage moths, botanical artists are drawn to shiny red berries and bright yellow flowers, but unlike other creatures, they have the means to depict their attraction. The works in this exhibit focus specifically on plants that have health-giving nutritional properties for people.

THE BIRCHMERE

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

DECEMBER

Thu. 22: MAYSA – A Very MAYSA Christmas! \$69.50
 Fri. 23: Charles Esten w/ N'est Pas \$59.50
 Thu. 29: Bela Dona Band \$35.00
 Fri. 30: 25th Annual HANK WILLIAMS Tribute with Robin & Linda Williams, Daryl Davis, Cathy Fink & Marcy Marxer, Patrick McAvinue, & Alex Lacquement \$35.00
 Sat. 31: New Year's Eve with The Seldom Scene, Eastman String Band & Wicked Sycamore – 8 p.m.-- \$49.50

JANUARY

Fri. 6: Ricky Skaggs & Kentucky Thunder \$45.00
 Sat. 7: Ricky Skaggs & Kentucky Thunder \$45.00
 Sun. 8: Judy Collins \$59.50 (Rescheduled from 9/11/22. All 9/11/22 tix honored) SOLD OUT!
 Fri. 13: Newmyer Flyer Presents Dream Discs: A Tribute to Van Morrison's "Moondance" and Bruce Springsteen's "The Wild, The Innocent & The E Street Shuffle" performed in their entirety. \$35.00
 Sat. 14: Last Train Home \$29.50
 Sun. 15: Kenny Lattimore \$59.50
 Fri. 20: TEX RUBINOWITZ & THE BAD BOYS Reunion Show featuring Tex Rubinowitz, Eddie Angel, Ratso, Johnny Castle, Scotty Flowers with special guest Martha Hull \$35.00
 Sat. 21: Who's Bad: The Ultimate Michael Jackson Experience \$39.50
 Sun. 22: Glenn Jones with special guest Alyson Williams \$55.00
 Thu. 26: Jerry Lee Lewis Tribute featuring Jason D. Williams \$45.00
 Fri. 27: Raheem DeV Vaughn \$85.00
 Sat. 28: Tarsha Fitzgerald Prod. Presents: DEVOTION: A Tribute to Earth, Wind, & Fire \$35.00
 Sun. 29: Norman Brown \$59.50

Vying for a Slice of Pedestrian & Cyclist Safety

FROM PAGE 7

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.

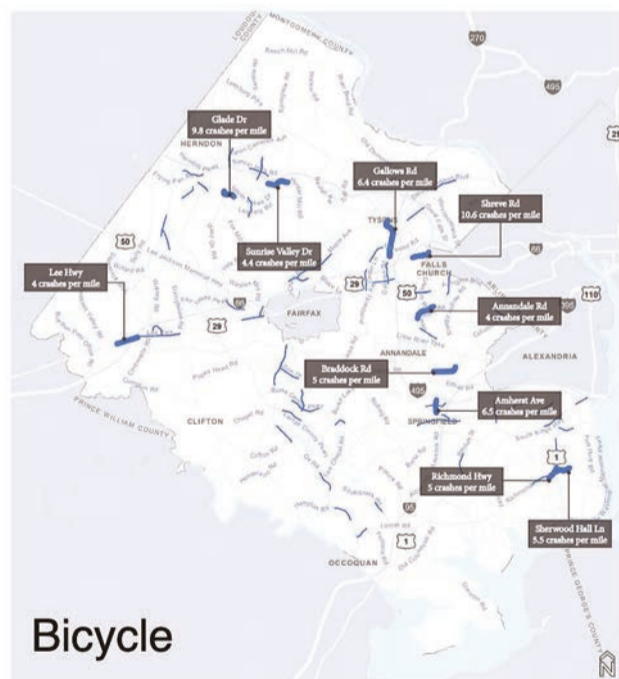
The second tranche is \$25 million. “As you can imagine, \$25 million spread out among the county is not a lot of money per project,” said a Dranesville spokesman. “Staff will be

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.”

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Senior Living, fourth week of every month.

Questions?

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Obituary



SCHLHORN, Carlton "Shady", LTC., 91, of Mechanicsville, formerly of Alexandria, passed away on December 14, 2022. He is survived by his devoted wife of 68 years, Pat; children, Chip Schelhorn (Julie), Lynn Michaux (Jody), Cathy D'Antuono (Steve), and Nancy Bennett (Mark); 9 grandchildren; and 4 great-grandchildren. Shady was a 1955 University of Virginia graduate, where he played football and was a member of Phi Delta Theta. He proudly served his country in the U.S. Army for 23 years, retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel. Known for his incredible sense of humor and charm, Shady never met a stranger. He was always the loudest voice in the room, an excellent dancer, and fond of martinis. His family was his greatest pride and joy; "G-Dad" was adored in return. Some of his favorite pastimes included golfing, especially with the Over-The-Hill Hoos, spending winters in Marco Island, Florida and lately watching "Grit" TV. The family received friends from 2-4pm on Wednesday, December 21st, at the Bennett Funeral Home, Mechanicsville Chapel, 8014 Lee Davis Rd., where funeral service followed at 4pm. Interment will take place in Arlington National Cemetery at a later date.

Obituary

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PHOTO BY FAIRFAX COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE

Fire in Kingstowne

Kingstowne Fire Possibly Started by a Laptop

BY MIKE SALMON
THE GAZETTE

On Thursday, Dec. 1 at 2:24 p.m., units were dispatched for a reported house fire in the 7200 block of Devereux Court in the Kingstowne area of Fairfax County. Fairfax County Fire and Rescue arrived on the scene of a two and half-story, single-family home with fire showing from the attached garage, extending to the roof. The fire was quickly located and extinguished, fire officials said. Five occupants were home at the time of the fire but there were no reported injuries for either the residents or the fire fighters.

One occupant heard a loud “popping” noise coming from the garage. Upon investigating, the occupant discovered smoke and fire in the garage. All occupants exited the house and called 9-1-1. Smoke alarms were present inside the home but not in the garage. The smoke alarms did not activate due to the location of the fire. Fire Investigators determined the fire was accidental in nature and started in the garage on a work table. The fire was caused by an electrical event involving a laptop computer. Five occupants were displaced because of the fire. Red Cross assistance was offered and declined. Damages as a result of the fire were approximately \$43,750.

BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 12

niture, houseware and emergency food deliveries, and community food drives. Individuals, families and groups are encouraged to participate. Students can earn community service hours by participating. Visit www.alive-inc.org/volunteer.htm or contact the Volunteer Coordinator at volunteers@alive-inc.org.

Volunteer Drivers Needed. Drivers needed by the American Cancer Society to take cancer patients to treatment in Northern Virginia. To volunteer, call 1-800-227-2345 or go to cancer.org/drive.

RSVP, a volunteer network for seniors seeking service opportunities in and around Fairfax County, Arlington County and the City of Alexandria, offers a wide array of opportunities for volunteers 55 and older. RSVP volunteers enjoy flexible schedules, free accident and liability insurance while serving, optional mileage and meal reimbursement and are invited to volunteer group projects and social gatherings. To sign up for an upcoming orientation, email Carly Hubicki at chubicki@volunteerfairfax.org or call RSVP at 703-403-5360. To learn more about RSVP, visit

www.rsvpnova.org.

Mentors Wanted. Two creative programs that help transform the lives of Alexandria's preteens are seeking volunteer mentors. SOHO, which stands for “Space of Her Own,” and “Space of His Own,” serves vulnerable fifth graders in Alexandria. The programs pair men and women with youth in need of positive adult role models, to help support and guide youth in making healthy choices and succeeding in school and in life. Visit www.spaceofherown.org and www.spaceofhisown.org. For more information on how to become a SOHO mentor, contact Sarah Maroney at sarah.maroney@alexandriava.gov or phone at 703-746-4687.

Farmer's Market Volunteers Needed. To volunteer for the Farmer's Markets, email Brian Morreale, brianmorreale@gmail.com

Arts and Crafts Festival. Volunteers are needed on June 10 to help with the event including: greet and check-in vendors, children's area, clean up and tear down and beer tent. Shifts are available between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. Visit www.volunteeralexandria.org/ for more.

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

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

Please, help save these historical papers. All gifts will be used to fund our printed newspapers and websites and to meet obligations to our loyal and patient employees, writers, contractors and suppliers.

The ongoing pandemic continues to crush many newspapers across the country, and our newspapers continue to be at risk. The Northern Virginia area's best read and most trusted source for community news includes the Alexandria Gazette Packet, Mount Vernon Gazette and all Connection Newspapers in the metropolitan region.

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

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

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

Visit connectionnewspapers.com or <https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-keep-your-newspaper-printing>

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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. "Mighty Casey" 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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