

Mount Vernon Gazette

MOUNT VERNON'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER • A CONNECTION NEWSPAPER

MARCH 9, 2023

Owls Awe All Up close and personal with three special owls at Friends of Little Hunting Creek annual meeting.

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

A barred owl has 9,600 feathers. Barn owls have the best hearing of any animal. There are 250 documented owl species in the world, 19 in North America and eight in Northern Virginia.

These are some of the many intriguing owl facts that Liz Dennison reeled off on March 4 to 35 members of the Friends of Little Hunting Creek (FOLHC), including state Sen. Scott Surovell and Del. Paul Krizek. Dennison is president of the all-volunteer Secret Garden Birds and Bees. Assisted by her husband, Tim Dennison, and Nancy McDonald, she presented four different live owl species, three injured in the wild that cannot survive on their own and a fourth, a barn owl, raised in captivity. This was Friends of Little Hunting Creek's annual meeting, held at the Gum Springs Community Center.

Owl Basics

Dennison opened her power point presentation with "What Is an Owl?" and explained that four owl species nest in Virginia: barred, great horned, eastern screech and barn owls. Another four are seen occasionally: snowy owls, short-eared owls, long-eared owls and northern saw-whet owls.

Owls have excellent hearing. Their satellite-dish-shaped face funnels sounds to their asymmetrical ears. Unlike most birds which have eyes on the sides of their heads, owls' eyes face forward. Owls have an upper and lower eyelid and a third one called a nictitating membrane. They can swivel their heads 270 degrees. Their beak curves downward.

Owls are usually hard to see, but a cacophony of calling crows can signal that an owl is nearby. Most owls are excellent at camouflaging and their feather colors blend in with tree bark. Many are primarily active at night.

Fringes on the leading and trailing edges of their wings enable them to fly silently. With sharp talons, they can catch and squeeze prey, like mice, shrews, voles, lizards and small birds. Dennison called them "ambush predators," birds that sit motionless awaiting prey to come close before pounc-



A great horned owl..



The attentive audience of owl fans.



Nancy McDonald showed the group a barred owl.



An Eastern screech owl.

How to Help Owls

Keep yards natural, plant native plants and create brush piles. Visit <https://www.audubonva.org/audubon-at-home>. If safe, leave dead trees in place. Dead wood is part of nature's cycle. Wildlife use them for nesting, roosting, foraging, perching and other purposes. Dead trees are habitat for over 1,000 wildlife species, says the National Wildlife Federation. Avoid rodenticides, pesticides, herbicides and insecticides. Visit www.RaptorsAreTheSolution.org and <https://www.beyondpesticides.org/>. Keep cats indoors. Visit <https://abcbirds.org/program/cats-indoors/>. Make windows bird safe. Visit <https://abcbirds.org/blog20/make-windows-safe/>. Reduce night lighting. Visit <https://abcbirds.org/news/new-lighting-collisions-recommendations/>.

More Information

<http://www.secretgardenbirdsandbees.com>
<http://friendsoflittlehuntingcreek.org>
If you find a sick, injured or orphaned animal, contact the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, 855-571-9003, <https://dwr.virginia.gov/wildlife>, or the Wildlife Rescue League, 703-440-0800, www.WildlifeRescueLeague.com.

ing. Adult owls eat their prey whole and the parts that they cannot digest, like bones, they spit out as pellets.

Barred Owl

The first avian guest "on stage"

was Scarlet, a barred owl, a bird that likes forests and nearby water for bathing. Barred owls are around 21 inches long and a pound in weight. The name comes from their "bars" or striped plumage. "You will hear barred owls even if you don't see them," Denni-

son commented. She played a recording of their baritone call which some say sounds like "who cooks for you, who cooks for you-all."

They are crepuscular, which means they are most active at dawn and dusk. That timing can put them at risk because these are common commuting times. Attracted to animals seeking food in discarded trash along the road, they can collide with vehicles.



Great horned owls do not build nests but commandeer other birds' nests. They are found in forests, wetlands, grasslands, backyards, cities and other semi-open habitats. They mate for life and are raising their young now, Dennison said. She played their hooting call.

Eastern Screech Owl

Next up was Kvosir, a gray eastern screech owl with eyes injured in a vehicle collision. Compared to most owls, these are small, 8.5 inches in length and around six ounces in weight. Some are gray; some are reddish brown. They blend in well with the tree bark as they perch and nest in the holes and hollows of trunks. They camouflage so effectively, "If they close their eyes, they 'disappear,'" said Dennison. They have several calls -- a trill, whinny and squeal.

Great Horned Owl

Hodor, a great horned owl, sat patiently erect on Tim Dennison's glove, staring with his intimidating eyes and sporting feathered head tufts, called plumicorns, which are not horns, Dennison explained. These owls are 22 inches long and weigh around three pounds.

They too are ambush predators and eat anything they can catch, including skunks and pet cats.

Barn Owl

Tim Dennison introduced Phantom, a barn owl with a heart-shaped face, a bird around 16 inches long and one pound in weight. Females are more speckled than males, Liz Dennison pointed out, and barn owls have the best hearing of any animal. Cornell University's All about Birds, concurs. "The barn owl has excellent low-light vision and can easily find prey at night by sight. But its ability to lo-

SEE OWLS, PAGE 3

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This 1770s Georgian home was modest to begin with, but as the needs of various owners changed the house was expanded. Today its just under 3,000 finished SF with 3/4 bedrooms, 2.5 baths, and 2 gardens which provide abundant natural light. 304 N Pitt Street
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Beautiful 4-bedroom, 2-bath, mid-century home with refinished wood floors on a large, peaceful corner lot with patio/deck area. Living room, with a gas fireplace, modern, updated, eat-in kitchen. Lower level rec room with gas fireplace, kitchenette & walk out. 5856 Doris Dr
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Retirements Reshuffle Assembly

Historic upheaval will see new faces in a third of the House and a fourth of the Senate.

BY MICHAEL LEE POPE
GAZETTE PACKET

A massive wave of retirements is sweeping over the Virginia General Assembly, a move prompted by radical new court-drawn district maps that are reshuffling Virginia politics. The retirements are coming after the Redistricting Commission failed to agree on new maps, leading a court-appointment special master to draw new districts without considering the home addresses of incumbents. As a result, dozens of incumbent members faced a difficult choice — find another district to call home, run against a colleague or call it quits.

“It’s not really appealing to try and move to a new district or try and run against a fellow incumbent,” said Chaz Nuttycombe, director of the nonpartisan election analysis group CNAlysis. “You can’t really blame a politician for not wanting to run headfirst into what is likely to be a loss.”

Senate Majority Leader Dick Saslaw says he will not be seeking reelection, a move that will allow him to sidestep facing incumbent Sen. Dave Marsden (D-37). Senate Minority Leader Tommy Norment will also be stepping down, allowing him to avoid a messy primary fight with Sen. Ryan McDougle (R-4). They are two of the eight senators who are not seeking reelection, and more are expected to make a decision in the next few weeks. That means the next Senate will have new leadership on both sides of the aisle as well as new committee chairmen.

“The more senior members have gotten used to not having contested campaigns and not being challenged within their parties,” said former Republican Del. David Ramadan, now with the Schar School at George Mason University. “They’re gotten used to having safe districts in the general elections, and now they’re saying, ‘You know what? I’m done.’”

The House of Delegates will see an even greater upheaval, with at least a third of its members leaving this year. So far, 13 incum-

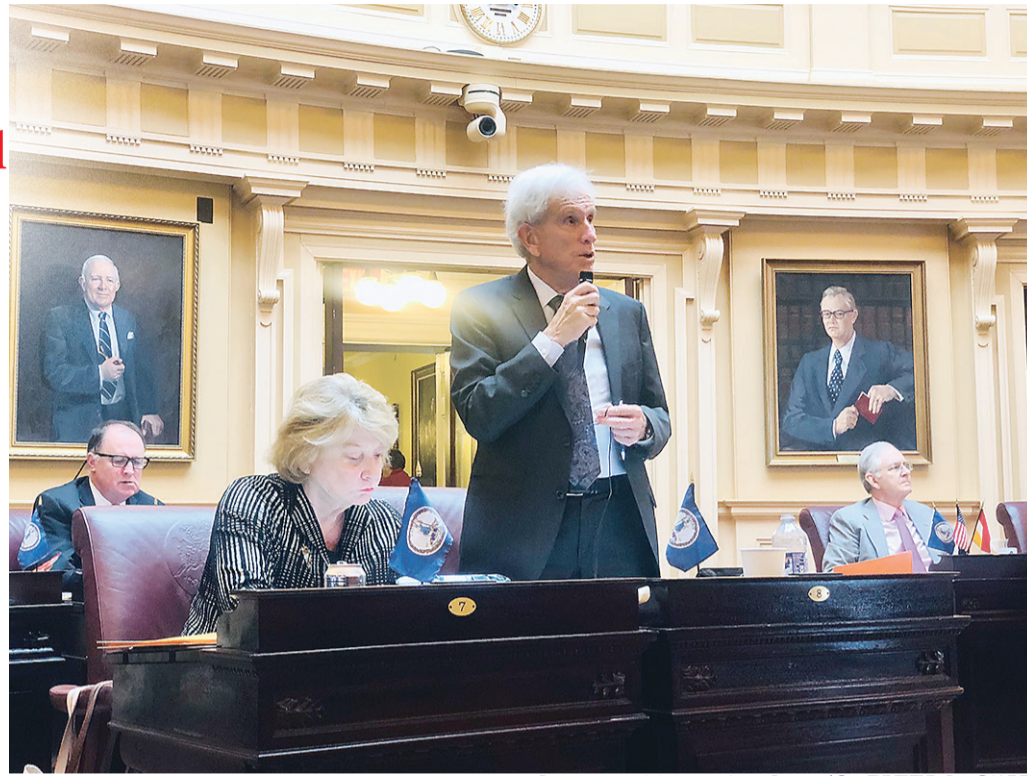


PHOTO BY MICHAEL LEE POPE/GAZETTE PACKET

Senate Majority Leader Dick Saslaw, standing, will not be seeking reelection. He would have had to face incumbent Sen. Dave Marsden (D-37). To the right, Senate Minority Leader Tommy Norment will not be seeking reelection. He would have had to face incumbent Sen. Ryan McDougle (R-4). To the left, Sen. Janet Howell (D-32) will not be seeking reelection. She would have had to have faced incumbent Sen. Jennifer Boysko (D-33). In the back, Sen. Creigh Deeds (D-25) had to move from Bath County to Charlottesville to avoid a primary fight against Sen. Mark Obenshain (R-26) and Sen. Emmett Hanger (R-24).

ent House members say they will be stepping down instead of seeking reelection. And then another 13 say they won’t be seeking reelection in their House seats so they can run in a Senate primary. More are expected before the veto session in April, creating an unprecedented election cycle.

“Someone who has been there a long time might say, ‘I’m not interested in knocking on 10,000 doors this cycle. I’d rather retire and travel the world with my spouse.’ I understand that,” said Democratic strategist Ben Tribbett. “But these younger incumbents who quit because they are drawn into tough areas — politics shouldn’t be about picking a district and running for it because you think you are favored to win.”

THE COLD HARD politics of this redistricting cycle is unlike any previous decade, when maps were drawn by elected officials

“It shows you how messed up the maps were to start with that the new maps are so different from the old ones.”

— Stephen Farnsworth, Center for Leadership and Media Studies, University of Mary Washington

with partisan interests. They also drew maps to benefit incumbents, even incumbents in the oppose party most of the time. That meant they rarely drew more than one incumbent into the same district. But now the court-appointed special master who drew the new maps specifically avoided considering home addresses of incumbents, leading to a set of maps that had many members looking into the mirror and making a difficult calculation.

“If you draw compact districts that respect

existing boundaries and keep communities of interest together, they are going to tend to draw non-competitive seats,” said Nick Goedert, assistant professor of political science at Virginia Tech. “The fact that the state Supreme Court actually drew three of Virginia’s 11 districts to be competitive is relatively speaking a high number.”

The retirements include a number of the most prominent people in the General Assembly. Former Speaker Eileen Filler Corn chose retirement rather than facing a tough primary fight against incumbent Del. Kathy Tran (D-42), which could have been an uphill fight for the former speaker. Longtime Del. Kathleen Murphy (D-34) is leaving office rather than face incumbent Del. Rip Sullivan (D-48).

“It shows you how messed up the maps were to start with that the new maps are so different from the old ones,” said Stephen Farnsworth, director of the Center for Leadership and Media Studies at the University of Mary Washington. “This current line-drawing system is sort of undoing the damage of the incumbent protection acts that have been passed by Democratic and Republican majorities.”

One of the more notable retirements is the most senior member of the House of Delegates, Del. Ken Plum (D-36). First elected in 1977, a young Ken Plum had to campaign in a five-member district that covered a huge swath of Northern Virginia. The multi-member district system was later determined to be unconstitutional and discontinued, a vestige of a time when redistricting of a Byrd Machine fixation with controlling the outcome of elections. Plum says his early career was spent dismantling the machine in its final days by demanding merit selection of judges.

“Circuit court judges were key to the way the machine operated, I knew the way to dismantle the machine was to dismantle that piece of it,” said Plum in his office as budget negotiators huddled in secret last month. “But the problem was I went to the people who were in the machine running this thing to ask them to change it.”

Owls Awe All

FROM PAGE 1

cate prey by sound alone is the best of any animal that has ever been tested. It can catch mice in complete darkness in the lab or hidden by vegetation or snow out in the real world.”

Barn owls have probably inspired ghost stories, Dennison speculated, because they are whitish, active at night,

glide silently and have a loud banshee-like scream. They like to live in barns, she said, because typically there are many rodents there, a staple of their diet.

Dennison lamented the spread of avian influenza, a contagious, lethal virus. She said that both waterfowl crowded close together and some poultry in close quarters can enhance the spread. A hot, dry summer could

help kill the virus, she maintained.

Friends Meeting

On Saturday, the Friends group elected their Board of Directors and re-elected incumbent President Elizabeth Martin. Alyssa Hemler, with the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, described her organization’s work on

their property which borders Little Hunting Creek along Stockton Parkway, including planting trees, installing wood duck boxes and putting in two benches. FOL-HC Board member Bryan Birch reported progress in creating access to the creek from the Martin Luther King Park, noting that the Fairfax County Park Authority has designated \$600,000 to develop a plan.

County Budget and Assessment Meetings Next Week

By DAN STORCK

I have heard from many of you again this year that your real estate assessments have increased. I know we are all proud to live in Fairfax County and enjoy the many services the County and the area offer. This makes our area a very desirable, vibrant and thriving place to live and this, in turn, is driving up home prices.

As you may know, real estate assessments are set by the market based on sales of similar homes in your area and not by the Board of Supervisors. Per the Constitution of Virginia, Fairfax County's real estate assessments must reflect fair market value. For most residential property, that value is determined by comparing a property to sales of comparable properties. That value is reflected in the assessment you recently received, with your estimated 2023 real es-

tate tax levy, which is just that, an estimate, based on current tax rate of \$1.11 per \$100 of assessed value.

I am strongly supporting a reduction in the real estate tax rate to better balance the increase in home valuations homeowners are seeing in their assessments. We have just begun the budget consideration process, and I look forward to listening to the community, while learning more about what the County Executive has proposed.

The Board will be holding public budget hearings on April 11, 12 and 13, and I encourage you to share your comments, which you can do by phone, video, in-person and in writing. More information is in the link below.

It is unfortunate that in Virginia,



Storck

real estate and personal property taxes are one of the few sources of revenue available to pay for the services Fairfax County residents need and expect, especially for our acclaimed schools, best in U.S. police/fire, economy, parks, etc. The state

only funds approximately 23% of our school's budget, which constitutes more than half of our County budget. In most other counties in the state, the state funds schools at 50% or higher.

Please join me and School Board Member Karen Corbett Sanders, with co-hosts the Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Associations and South County Federation, for the County and FCPS staff in-person and virtual budget presentation and Q&A on March 15 at 7 p.m.

After hearing from so many of you about your assessments, I am also hosting a virtual community meeting on March 16 at 7 p.m. with the Department of Tax Administration to discuss how assessments are done, as well as your options for appeal and tax relief. This will be a general discussion. Specific questions regarding your property should be directed to Department of Tax Administration staff who are standing by to talk with you, explain your individual assessment and the appeal process.

More information about all of the above can be viewed on our budget and assessment meeting pages at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/mountvernon/>. Additional budget and meeting information will be sent out through our regular newsletters. Sign up here: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/mountvernon/>.

Updating Bus Camera Laws Are Helping Protect Virginia Kids

By DEL. PAUL KRIZEK

Like many residents of Fairfax County, I am alarmed by the growing frequency of accidents and near-misses of students boarding and exiting school buses. The headlines of small children nearly struck by speeding motorists as they get on and off the bus are difficult to swallow.

A simple covenant exists for parents – we drop our kids off at the bus stop for school and they are returned home safe and sound. That yellow school bus has always served as a symbol of safety, but when a flurry of motorists can willfully ignore the flashing lights and stop-arm sign, it requires a smarter approach to enforcing the law.

Across Virginia, communities are beginning to take action to protect their children from reckless drivers. I was proud to patron a law in 2020 that gives local governments the ability to implement school bus camera enforcement programs. These programs utilize automated technology solutions that reduce the number of stop-arm violations and drive behavioral change through effective enforcement of the law.

While illegally passing a stopped school bus is one of the most dangerous traffic violations you can commit, it's also one of the most difficult to enforce. In Fairfax County, with a school bus fleet greater than Greyhound, it

is not practical to ask our hardworking law enforcement officers to monitor every bus and bus stop for illegal passings. Similarly, we cannot expect bus drivers to note down the license plates of offending vehicles, while also taking care of the

50 young lives aboard their bus. As a result, hundreds of violations go uncited every single school day. What's worse is that the current laws do not give our law enforcement adequate time to fully review these violations to ascertain whether a violation has occurred. While Virginia has made considerable progress by making these safety tools widely available across the state, further action is necessary.

So, this General Assembly session I was proud to introduce HB 1995 that would give our law enforcement personnel more time to review whether a school bus violation occurred and to issue the ticket, a \$250 fine. A simple fix that could save lives and prevent a tragedy, this bipartisan bill passed both chambers overwhelmingly and awaits the Governor's signature. I worked across the aisle with Sen. John Cosgrove of Chesapeake on the legislation. This bill will expand the time to issue a citation from 10 days to 30 business days – consistent with other states that implement similar programs.



Krizek

This is a commonsense measure that is supported by local governments in other parts of Virginia as well.

By ensuring that school buses are outfitted with photo-enforcement technology, we are finally giving "eyes" to our buses, thereby removing responsibility from our dedicated bus drivers who witness these violations every day, and already shoulder an enormous responsibility. The premise is simple – break the law, get a ticket. By equipping buses in a community with automated en-

forcement technology, motorists learn to exercise caution around a school bus. The results speak for themselves. Data shows that 98% of first-time violators do not get a second ticket when issued through a full fleet stop-arm safety program.

It is my sincere hope that Fairfax County follows the lead of their neighboring counties to implement a program of its own. There is no excuse not to act. I urge every parent to urge their local leaders to act on behalf of protecting their children. Child safety is all our responsibility, and we must not sit by and wait for a tragedy to happen.

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NEWS

Board of Supervisors Seeks to Raise its Salaries

Supervisors Herrity and Alcorn vote no.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE GAZETTE

At its March 7 meeting, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors voted 8 to 2 to consider a pay raise for themselves beginning Jan. 1, 2024. Supervisor John Foust (D-Dranesville) brought up the proposed compensation increases, although he will no longer be on the board by the time the raises would go into effect.

Compensation for board members would rise from \$95,000 to a range of \$125,000-\$130,000, and for the chairman, from \$100,000 to \$140,000-\$145,000.

According to Foust, the proposed salaries for Board members are “consistent with both with surrounding large jurisdictions as well as what Board members’ compensation would be if they had

received the same pay increase County staff received since 2015.”

The Board’s compensations have not changed since 2015 and can only be adjusted following a public hearing in an election year. The change can only be applied to the next Board.

Foust said that the Board of Supervisors is not a part-time governing body. “Every Supervisor and the Chairman maintains full office hours throughout the year, and the Board meets most Tuesdays,” he said.

Supervisors Walter Alcorn (D-Hunter Mill) and Patrick Herrity (R-Springfield) voted against the measure. “I do not support raising supervisor salaries more than what county employees have received during the past eight years,” Alcorn said.

“It is unbelievable that this Board would propose a 37 percent raise for themselves when our residents are struggling with high inflation, a 50 percent increase in



Supervisor John Foust (D-Dranesville)



Supervisors Walter Alcorn (D-Hunter Mill)



Patrick Herrity (R-Springfield)

homeowner taxes over the last decade, and in a budget that does not address the staffing crisis in public safety and other critical county positions,” Herrity said.

Residents can sign up to testify at the March 21 public hearing scheduled at 4:30 pm. regarding the increase. Here are ways for residents to testify that day: <https://fairfaxcounty.gov/clerkservices/>

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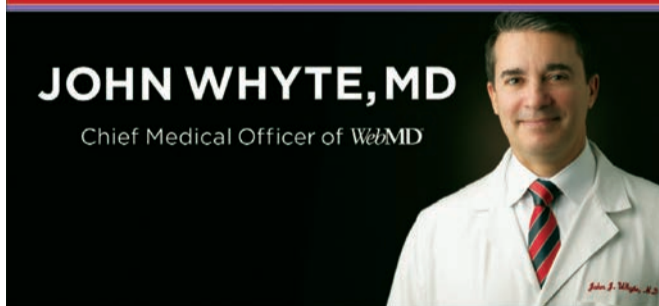
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Dr. Whyte's New Book

Released February 14, 2023



Heart disease is the leading cause of death among Americans. You have the power to reduce your risk, and WebMD's Dr. John Whyte, MD will show you just how easy it is to do it.

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Education Reparations Await Governor's Signature

Bill would extend benefits to descendants of those directly impacted by massive resistance in Virginia through the Brown v. Board of Education Scholarship Program.

BY SUSAN LAUME
THE GAZETTE

The first bill that Delegate Kaye Kory (D-38) filed for the 2023 session of the General Assembly sought to expand reparations for Virginia's failure to educate African American students in the 1950s and '60s. At that time, state leaders sought to circumvent the U.S. Supreme Court desegregation decision in the 1954 case of Brown v Board of Education. The landmark decision would eventually end segregation in schools. But in 1958 and 1959 Virginia politicians declared a "massive resistance" strategy to avoid integration. Many schools were shut down until the Virginia Supreme Court and a panel of Federal judges from the Eastern District of Virginia declared the resistance policies unconstitutional.

In 2004, the General Assembly created a scholarship program and fund to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the landmark Brown v Board of Education decision. The program was designed to assist those who were enrolled in the public schools of Virginia during the ten year period of Massive Resistance between 1954 and 1964, but denied an education. Several jurisdictions closed their public schools to avoid desegregation. Better off financially, white students could seek out private school alternatives, but most African American families were left with no options to educate their children.

Under the 2004 scholarship program, applicants could request awards to obtain an adult high school diploma, the GED certificate, CLEP credit, career or technical education or training, transitional education services, or a two-or four-year degree from an accredited public or private Virginia institute of higher education. An awards committee was established and an application cycle starts each January, operating now for almost two decades.

The State appropriated initial funding and regularly approved administration funds. The fund also received an early \$1 million donation from a Charlottesville foundation created by philanthropist John Kluge. Several smaller donations raised the available starting funds to more than \$2 million. The state has awarded scholarship money to about 88 students over the years since its establishment. However, far more than that number were denied an education during the massive resistance years.

Kory noticed that the scholarship awards had used only a little over half of the available funds. She made this discovery as she looked for scholarship funds scattered throughout Virginia code that might aid her constituents. As a former elected school board member for ten years and an education advocate, she said she knew "a good educational foundation from K-12 prepares people for success, crucial for participating fully in our economy and society." She also noted that little use of the funds had been made since 2019 and that, by law, the funds could only be used for the stated purpose of the law: education of those impacted by massive resistance. She said she "saw the opportunity



PHOTO COURTESY KAYE KORY

Del. Kaye Kory

HB 1419 Brown v. Board of Education Scholarship Program; extension of eligibility. Extends eligibility for the Brown v. Board of Education Scholarship Program to the lineal and collateral descendants of persons who were residing in jurisdictions in Virginia in which the public schools were closed to avoid desegregation between 1954 and 1964 and whose educations were affected by the school closings. Currently, only persons who resided in such jurisdictions at the time of the school closings are eligible for the program. This bill is identical to SB 1498.

to help a lot of people" by making the funds available to more than the few people still alive who could apply under the existing Code. She felt that unless the criteria changed, it was unlikely the money would be used. Recognizing the need to "stem the tide of permanent economic loss that could still be reverberating in impacted families" she sponsored her bill to extend the coverage to descendants of those directly impacted.

Her bill added the language to §30-231-2 of the Code of Virginia to define "eligible student" to also mean "a lineal or collateral descendant of such person." This new language means, Kory said, "the fund will open to benefit a lot of people who would want a higher education." Kory knows of several who plan to apply once the bill is enacted. It now awaits the signature of the governor, due by March 27, in order to become law.

Will the bill meet success in this final step? Consider that HB 1419 was one of only 27 percent of bills sponsored by House delegates to pass in the 2023 session. The bill passed by unanimous vote in both the House and Senate.

Kory has another idea regarding the fund. She notes that it has not received additional contributions since it was established, beyond administrative funding for the awards committee staff which accepts applications and makes the awards. Kory thinks it is likely that members of the public would wish to contribute to the fund. She plans to work on ways to make public contributions to the fund possible.

For more information about the fund, including eligibility details and an application packet, see <http://brownscholarship.virginia.gov>. The current deadline for applying under this cycle and current law is March 31, 2023.

Earthquake Relief

The death toll in Turkey from last month's earthquake has risen to over 45,000. The earthquake and aftershocks injured more than 108,000 people in Turkey and left millions sheltering in tents or seeking to move to other cities. More than 160,000 Turkish buildings collapsed or were severely damaged in the disaster, the worst in the country's modern history.

This past Friday, the Board of Supervisors held an Earthquake Relief Press Conference partnering with Northern Virginia Regional Commission and made a commitment as a community to raise \$25,000 to Embrace Relief.

Embrace Relief is working to provide food assistance directly on the ground in Turkey. Any donation will make a difference. Visit www.helpearthquakevictims.org



From left: Torrey Piper, Operations Manager, Fairfax County Neighborhood & Community Services Region 2; Theresa Brown, Assistant Division Director, NCS Region 2; Keesha Jackson-Muir, Principal, Braddock Elementary School; Pedro Herrera Santiago, 5th grade student, Braddock Elementary School; James Walkinshaw, Braddock District rep, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors; Jeffrey McKay, Chairman, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors; Penny Gross, Mason District rep, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors; Pallas Washington, Deputy Director, Fairfax County Neighborhood & Community Services; Jim Almond, Senior Vice President of Operations, Boys & Girls Club of Greater Washington; Chris Scales, Division Director, Fairfax County Neighborhood & Community Services.

Annandale Community Center Opens

On Saturday, March 4, 2023, county leaders, the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Washington and community members gathered to celebrate the grand opening of the new Annandale Community Center at the Heritage Shopping Plaza.

The 2,100-square-foot center features two multipurpose rooms, small lounge, a kitchen and restrooms. Fairfax County is partnering with the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Washington (BGCWG) to offer affordable youth programming and afterschool activities in the new space. Additional programs and resources will be added following the grand opening.

"This shows the many true partnerships we have in Fairfax County to improve the lives of our young people," said Fairfax County Supervisor Chair Jeffrey McKay of the new facility.

NCS Deputy Director Pallas Washington said it was vital that the community's voice was heard in the multiple public engagement sessions on the new facility's features.

"We are committed to making sure that everything that happens here to support families is definitely a reflection of [the community]," she said.

Open Hire Events March 14

The Fairfax County Department of Neighborhood and Community Services is holding two Open Hire events on Tuesday, March 14, 5 - 7 p.m.

Locations:
Pennino Building, Room 206, 12011 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax, VA, 20035

Herndon Neighborhood Resource Center, 1086 Elden Street, Herndon, VA, 20170

Apply and interview on the spot for multiple positions. Applicants should bring several copies of their resume. Available positions throughout the county include: Community-based Programs and Services - Recreation Leader II and III; School Age Child Care - Day Care Center Teacher I and Day Care Center Assistant Teacher; Therapeutic Recreation Services - Therapeutic Recreation Leader, Unit Leader and Director

Local Film Tackles a Health Issue in the Horror Genre

Filmmaker shot scenes in spots up and down Potomac River.

BY MIKE SALMON
THE GAZETTE

In Michael Taylor's horror film, "There is a Monster," lots of scenes were filmed around Alexandria and Mount Vernon, where he lived for a while honing his filmmaking career that landed him in the entertainment limelight for the last few years. In this latest production, he filmed scenes at the Southside 815 restaurant, Bradley Medical Center, and a house in Great Falls to tell a story that is indirectly about a real-life disease that haunts many including his sister, who died of the disease.

In the world of "spoiler alerts," he didn't want to give away too much before audiences get a chance to sit on the edge of their seats, so he threw out a teaser. "A man is haunted by a monster that only he can see," Taylor said. This monster affects his speech and then spreads to his whole body. "My sister had this disease and it killed her," he said.

The filming process for "Monster," started in December 2021 and he's just about through with all the post-production work before it hits the film festival circuit and possibly more. The pandemic got in the way a few times but the crew persevered. "There's always a market for horror films," he said.

The actors came from around this area and the Screen Actor's Guild. "Most of my actors are from Virginia," he said, mentioning Prince William County and from Maryland too. The lead actor, Joey Collins, lives in Arlington and has been seen in the latest theater version of "To Kill a Mockingbird" on Broadway. In Mockingbird, Collins plays the character of villain Bob Ewell in the trial. In addition to being in several

Broadway hits in his career, Collins recently volunteered with Arlington Public Health as a COVID-19 vaccine greeter, where he used his acting skills to calm people getting the vaccine.

Silver Screen Stops and Starts

Taylor's filmmaking career has some stops and starts that is common in the industry, so he keeps his skill alive making commercials. He's done things for the Veterans Health Administration, the Army National Guard, the Virginia Railway Express, Alexandria Pastry Shop and the Navy Federal Credit Union where he directed a national campaign. "The commercials paid the bills," he said.

At the Alexandria Pastry Shop in the Fairlington area, scenes of the pastry chefs, cakes and flowing coffee jump right off the screen. "There's a place nearby with fresh made deliciousness," the commercial voice-over says.

Pandemic Pandemonium

Filming during the pandemic had its challenges, but "we wrapped up right before Omicron arrived," he said. At one point in early Covid days, toilet paper was scarce so he focused on that. "During the pandemic I did a film about a guy that was out of toilet paper," he said. It was called "Making Do," and follows the guy around the house looking for a spare piece of tissue, with his pants around his ankles. Nothing R rated, but it colorfully deals with a situation that everybody has faced one time or another.

In the film industry, before anyone will look at a film you've made, they have to see something that has already been successful, which creates a certain quandary that haunts artists and others along the way. You have to have experience before anyone gives you the chance to get experience. With a need to attract investors, Taylor has experienced the same. "You've got to make a film before you can make a film," he said.

Presently, he's juggling around four different scripts that may see the light of day sometime in the future.



Filmmaker Michael Taylor, in the red hat, taking a break on the set with Joey Collins from Arlington and Ena O'Rourke who plays Carol in the movie.

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED



Director Michael Taylor getting everything right.



Powdering the nose of Arlington resident Joey Collins takes the shine off when the camera lights are on.



At Southside 815 restaurant in Old Town, shooting a scene at the bar.



On a set in a house in Great Falls, the windows provide natural lighting.

BULLETIN BOARD

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

FOSTER PARENTS NEEDED

Interested in becoming a foster parent? There is always a need for caring foster parents looking to open their homes to foster youth. Get in touch to learn more. Visit fcsvanow@gmail.com or www.FCSVA.org. Or call

703-817-9890.

LOOKING FOR SOFTBALL PLAYERS

The Golden Girls of Northern Virginia, a senior women's softball league, is looking for players. Any woman over the age of 40 is encouraged to join. All skill levels are welcome.

They play most Wednesday evenings and Saturday mornings in Vienna from May-July and September-October. For more information, visit the web site www.goldengirls.org.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

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.

NEWS

Reservoir Planned for Current Quarry Site in Lorton

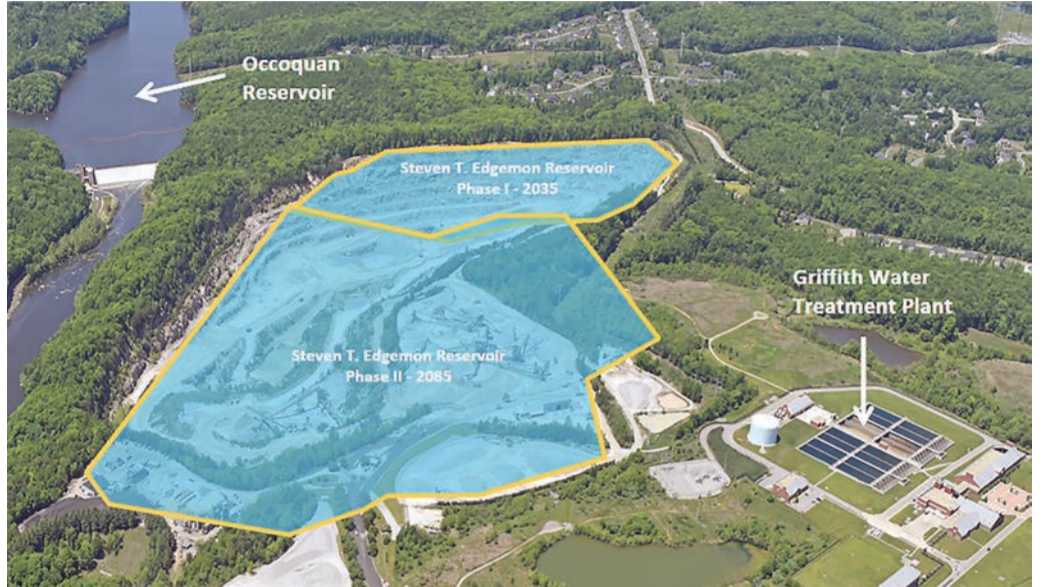
Fairfax Water will address future droughts.

BY MIKE SALMON
THE GAZETTE

In an effort to prepare for a possible future water shortage, Fairfax Water is planning to add a reservoir in southern Fairfax County in a Vulcan Materials Company space currently in use.

The reservoir will be named the “Steven T. Edgemon Reservoir” after a former Fairfax Water Board manager who unexpectedly died recently. “The reservoir represents a significant milestone of his life’s work, and future generations will greatly benefit from the resiliency that comes with having an additional source of drinking water,” Fairfax Water said.

Vulcan Materials is currently under operation at the site so the new reservoir is still a few years away from being filled and used. Water will start flowing into the space in 2040 for Phase I, and Phase II won’t be filled until the end of 2085. Phase 1 will amount to about 75 acres of reservoir area equaling 1.8 billion



MAP BY FAIRFAX WATER

The reservoir will be in two phases.

gallons of storage and Phase 2 will add another 125 acres to create a combined reservoir of about 200 acres which is up to 15 billion gallons of storage, Fairfax Water said.

Plans for this reservoir were finalized in 2017. “Between 2010 and 2040 the population served by Fairfax Water, including both retail

and wholesale areas, will increase by over 650,000 residents and nearly 550,000 employees working in the area,” said Fairfax Water’s Chairman Philip W. Allin at the agreement signing with Vulcan. “The Vulcan Quarry can meet future water supply demands brought on by this growth,” he added.

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Off the Menu: Restaurant News and Notes

BY HOPE NELSON
GAZETTE PACKET

Springtime is synonymous with new beginnings, and Alexandria's food scene is fitting right in. From new Italian flair in the middle of Old Town to a beloved milkshake bar's arrival on King Street to a new restaurant history tour in the warmth of springtime, there are plenty of new and novel experiences to be enjoyed around town as the days get longer and the temperatures milder (we hope!).

Thompson Italian Opens at 1024 King Street

The popular Falls Church-based Thompson Italian recently opened its doors at a new Old Town Alexandria outpost, bringing a host of Italian favorites along for the ride. With a menu just begging for family-style sharing, Thompson boasts such favorites as lamb meatballs, tagliatelle with hen of the woods mushrooms and chestnuts, squid ink bucatini and gnocchi with braised chicken ragu. And don't forget the desserts: Olive oil cake, lemon tiramisu, coconut rice pudding and a half-dozen more selections are waiting to sweeten the evening.

The Crazy Mason Milkshake Bar Plans Expansion Into Old Town

Already a staple in Ellicott City, Md., and beyond, the Crazy Mason Milkshake Bar has announced plans to open a storefront at 716 King St. This location will

mark the franchise's tenth in total and the second in Virginia. The Crazy Mason is known for its over-the-top sundaes and milkshakes, many of which teem well above the top of their signature Mason jars.

"We fell in love with the Crazy Mason brand while on a family vacation in Myrtle Beach in 2021, and we opened our first location in 2022 in Ellicott City, Maryland. We wanted to bring our crazy treats to the DC metro area, and Old Town Alexandria is one of our favorite places," the franchise owners, Erin and Robert Struder, said in a statement. "With the waterfront, the cosmopolitan feel and the walkable nature of the town, we are so excited to announce our next location on King Street."

Alexandria Food Tours Gears Up for Springtime

Looking for something a bit different to do with family and friends? Learn about the history of some of Old Town's classic restaurants while taking this hour-long walking tour hosted by Alexandria Food Tours. Hear tales about long-ago eateries, share memories about more recent establishments – and try to decide whether one landmark location is cursed, or just unlucky. From Chadwicks to Gadsby's to many stops in between, you're sure to learn something new – and whet your appetite for more. Visit alxfoodtours.com to reserve a spot.

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.

CALENDAR

MARCH 1-31

60th Anniversary Woodlawn Needlework Show. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. every day, expect Tuesdays. At Woodlawn & Pope-Leighey House, 9000 Richmond Hwy, Alexandria. In 2023, Woodlawn celebrates 60 years of the Annual Needlework Show with the timeless theme of comfort and joy. Sixty years ago, Adelaide Bolte and Emma "Pinky" Matheson, co-founders of the Nelly's Needlers, started the needlework show exhibiting work of their own. Since that time, the show has grown exponentially to become the largest judged show of needle arts in the nation, displaying thousands of embroidery pieces by artists from all over the world. Returning this year will be in-house seating in Nelly's Café and needlework demonstrations. Special exhibits and online events are returning with new embroidery subjects and needlework displays.

NOW THRU MARCH 15

"Mount Vernon" At Nepenthe Gallery. Hollin Hall Shopping Center, 7918 Fort Hunt Road, Alexandria. Nepenthe Gallery, in partnership with Mount Vernon estate and Woodlawn mansion, presents a special "Mount Vernon" exhibit from Feb. 1 through March 15. This exhibit has been organized in conjunction with Mount Vernon's national birthday celebration of George Washington and Woodlawn's 60th Annual Needlepoint Show. Woodlawn was once part of George



NOVA Plein Air Art Exhibit. At River Farm, 7931 East Blvd. Drive, Alexandria. Nova Plein Air Artists (NPPA) will be presenting "Celebrations of the Land, Inspired by River Farm," an art exhibit of over 50 paintings inspired by nature. Reception will be held from 1 – 3 p.m. on March 12. Many of the paintings were created onsite at River Farm, and all are available to purchase. Reception free and open to the public.

Washington's original extensive Mount Vernon estate. This "Mount Vernon" exhibit will showcase an important work by Thomas Sully – his 19th century "Athenaeum Portrait of George Washington." Other original works by Pamela Patrick White, Bryant White, Gwen Bragg, Debbie Dartez

and Renée C. Gage will be included and for sale, as well as several original works by Pamela and Bryant White that will be on loan by local collectors for display in the exhibit. There will also be giclée prints available for sale of important works from the Mount

SEE CALENDAR, PAGE 10

Legals

Legals

**PUBLIC NOTICE
NOTICE OF VOLUNTARY REMEDIATION**

Pursuant to the Virginia Voluntary Remediation Regulations, Virginia Administrative Code section 9VAC20-160-120, Virginia CVS Pharmacy, LLC (The Participant), with an address of One CVS Drive, Mail Code 2340, Woonsocket, RI 02895, hereby provides notice of voluntary remediation at the following site (Site):

CVS 2004
3117 Lockhead Boulevard
Alexandria, Virginia 22306
VRP Number VRP00641

Environmental investigations conducted at the property between 2012 and 2013 identified soil and groundwater impacts from petroleum related compounds and chlorinated volatile organic compounds (VOCs). These impacts were determined to pose a potential risk to the onsite commercial workers if no remedial actions were implemented. In 2015, during the construction of the current CVS retail store, 1,647.85 tons of petroleum-impacted soil were excavated and removed from the site, and a passive subslab depressurization system (SSDS) was installed in the CVS building to mitigate vapor intrusion. Environmental sampling conducted at the property after redevelopment in early 2016 indicated that soil excavation and natural attenuation successfully mitigated the risk from the petroleum-related compounds. However, while the vapor mitigation system addressed potential risks inside the building, concentrations of chlorinated VOCs detected in the groundwater remained consistent with historical concentrations.

ECS prepared a Risk Assessment and Remedial Action Plan for the Site on January 10, 2021. Vinyl Chloride and Chloroform were the only analytes detected exceeding residential risk screening for soil vapor. Based on more recent soil vapor and sub-slab vapor sampling, ECS concluded that the passive sub-slab depressurization system (SSDS) addressed any potential risk from vapor intrusion (VI) on and offsite. Moreover, vapor concentrations in the source area continue to decline. The current and future uses of the property are limited to commercial purposes through local zoning restrictions and associated patterns of occupancy and business activity. Groundwater is not used onsite or on neighboring properties for consumptive or irrigation purposes. The CVS is a slab-on-grade structure with no below grade areas intersecting the seasonally highest water table; therefore, no sumps or other dewatering devices are necessary, which reduces the likelihood for contact and exposure.

Given the data collected at the site thus far, the remedial action plan employed consists of a multi-faceted pathway elimination strategy. Engineering and institutional controls will continue to be employed to eliminate risk of exposure to contaminated soil, groundwater, and soil vapor, and will be listed in the deed restrictions.

Persons wishing to comment on the voluntary remedial action or request additional information should contact the following person who is familiar with the Site:

Michaela Humby
ECS Mid-Atlantic, LLC
14026 Thunderbolt Place, Suite 100
Chantilly, VA 20151-3232
703-471-8400
mhumbly@ecslimited.com

Any person who would like to receive additional information about, or provide comments on, this VRP project must do so in writing within 30 days from the date of this publication.

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FROM PAGE 9
Vernon estate collection. Nepenthe will host the following Thursday night "ART+WINE+CHEESE" events related to this exhibit:
March 9th: Nelly's Needlers Needlework Group. Established in 1975 to help preserve Woodlawn, the group was named after Martha Washington's granddaughter, Eleanor ("Nelly") Parke Custis, who was raised at Mount Vernon, later lived at Woodlawn, and learned her needlework skills from her cherished grandmother. Nelly's Needlers will be at Nepenthe Gallery to display works from their 60th Annual Needlepoint Show and discuss their organization and needlepointing as an art form.

NOW THRU MARCH 19
Nicole Santiago Exhibition. At the Athenaeum, Alexandria. Poetry Workshop on Feb. 25 from 1:30-3:30 p.m. Nicole Santiago's work consists of semi-autobiographical narrative paintings and drawings that depict scenes of love, loss, and duty, thinly veiled in the mundane debris of everyday life. While the impetus for Nicole's work is highly personal, she intends to construct something more universal that stretches beyond the limits of her own experiences, expanding into broader familiar theme.

NOW THRU APRIL 3
NOVA Plein Air Art Exhibit. At River Farm, 7931 East Blvd. Drive, Alexandria. Nova Plein Air Artists (NPPA) will be presenting "Celebrations of the Land, Inspired by River Farm," an art exhibit of over 50 paintings inspired by nature. Reception will be held from 1 - 3 p.m. on March 12. Many of the paintings were created onsite at River Farm, and all are available to purchase. Reception free and open to the public.

MARCH 3 TO APRIL 1
The "Fun With One" exhibit. At Del Ray Artisans features monochromatic artwork by members. Come see the variety that can be accomplished using just one color. The artist awards are juried by Robin Croft. View at Del Ray Artisans Gallery, 2704 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria VA. Opening Reception: Friday, March 3 from 7-9pm. Gallery hours: Thursdays 12-6 p.m., Fridays 12-9 p.m., Saturdays & Sundays 12-6 p.m. (closed on April 2). Details: DelRayArtisans.org/exhibits

FRIDAY/MARCH 10
Music by Bach and Handel. 7:30 p.m. At St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 228 S. Pitt Street, Alexandria. Members of the Alexandria Symphony Orchestra, led by Music Director James Ross, present music by Bach and Handel in the intimate setting of St. Paul's Episcopal Church on Friday night and an additional performance at Westminster Presbyterian Church on Sunday afternoon, March 12 at 3 p.m. The program also features a world premiere by Alexandria-based composer Jonathan Kolm, commissioned by the ASO.

FRIDAY/MARCH 10
Brandenburg & Blue - Alexandria Symphony Orchestra. 7:30 p.m. At St. Paul's Episcopal Church,

CALENDAR



Nepenthe Gallery will celebrate its One-Year Anniversary on Thursday, March 16, 2023.

Nepenthe Gallery's One-Year Anniversary

6-7:30 p.m. At Nepenthe Gallery's Thursday ART+WINE+CHEESE event, Nepenthe Gallery is celebrating its one-year Anniversary with happy cheer and love, along with a collection of original works by the world-renowned Brazilian artist, Romero Britto. The exhibit that evening will also feature works from several artists who have partnered with us this inaugural year.

FROM PAGE 10

228 South Pitt Street, Alexandria. Visit www.alexsym.org.

SATURDAY/MARCH 11

"Live Fully." 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. At First Baptist Church of Alexandria. NorthStar Women's Network is hosting speaker Jada Edwards, along with special guest Whitney Capps and worship leader Kimberly Williams for a special women's event celebrating 20 years of connecting women in the Northern Virginia area. The event is called "Live Fully" and is open to all local women. It will focus on encouraging women because "changed women change lives." Tickets can be purchased at <https://www.nswomensnet.org/2023>

SATURDAY/MARCH 11

Lena's Meatball Madness Race. 11 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. At Lenny Harris Memorial Fields at Braddock Park, 1005 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria. Celebrate National Meatball Day at Lena's Second Annual Meatball Madness! Gather your winning team of four to see if you can balance Lena's giant meatball on a spoon without dropping it in record time. As you win, you advance to the next round in this fast-paced tournament. Sixteen teams begin, but only one team will be named the 2022 Meatball Madness Winner! Visit <https://www.lenaswoodfire.com/meatball-madness>

SATURDAY/MARCH 11

Garden Talk - Spring Veggies and Herbs. 10:30-11:30 a.m. At Green Springs Garden, Alexandria. (Adults) If you have never grown a vegetable garden before, then this is the year to start! Extension Master Gardener docents show you how to plan a vegetable and herb garden that will conserve water, reduce waste, and reduce grocery bills. \$12 per person. Register online at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/parktakes> or call Green Spring Gardens at 703-642-5173. Code HBR.SJC0.

SATURDAY/MARCH 11

March 150 Art Party and Exhibition. 7 to 9:30 p.m. At Torpedo Factory Art Center, 105 N. Union St., Alexandria. Torpedo Factory Art Center's annual exhibition and art sale returns for the 13th year featuring more than 100 works of art priced at \$150 by local artists in the Target Gallery. Each piece of artwork is sized at 10" x 10". The ticketed art party allows guests to enjoy discounts, food and drinks and art activations.

SATURDAY/MARCH 11

Write Like a Woman Workshop. 1-3 p.m. At The Athenaeum, Alexandria. Enjoy an afternoon of engaging conversation and writing! Facilitated by poet, author, and Poet Laureate of Alexandria, KaNikki Jakarta, this workshop welcomes amateur to professional women writers ages 18-100. Each workshop centers on uplifting and inspiring through writing and allows participants to enhance their writing styles.

SUNDAY/MARCH 12

Tea Program: Leading Ladies. 1-3 p.m. At Green Spring Gardens, Alexandria. (Adults) Discover extraordinary women who didn't make it into the history books. Many little-known female innovators, entrepreneurs, inventors, and adventurers achieved historical "firsts" yet often went unacknowledged. Learn why "HERstory" was so often omitted from "HISstory" and celebrate these unsung leading ladies and their inspiring lives. \$38 (lecture + tea); \$15 (lecture only). A traditional British afternoon tea served in the 1784 Historic House follows each program. Full tea includes finger sandwiches, pastries, and scone with cream and jam. Programs are by reservation only. Call (703) 941-7987, TTY (703) 324-3988.

SUNDAY/MARCH 12

Brandenburg & Blue - Alexandria Symphony Orchestra. 3 p.m. At Westminster Presbyterian Church, 2701 Cameron Mills Road, Alexandria. Visit www.alexsym.org

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CENTRE VIEW

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

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

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

The ongoing pandemic continues to crush many newspapers across the country, and our newspapers continue to be at risk. The Northern Virginia area's best read and most trusted source for community news includes the Alexandria Gazette Packet, Mount Vernon Gazette and all 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 ominous clouds the horizon in so many ways. Revenue still remains short of expenses despite our greatly curtailed costs.

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

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Do or Die, and I Did; So Far Anyway



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

On or about Feb. 20, 2023, I celebrated (you bet I celebrated; every single day that I'm still alive I do) the 14th anniversary of my date with destiny, the date when Team Lourie (my wife, Dina; my brother, Richard, and me) attended our initial meeting with an oncologist (a specialty with which I don't believe I was familiar at the time). He was referred by my internal medicine doctor (who also had been the doctor who had called me the previous week with the results of my surgical biopsy). We had never met this man/oncologist before. Nevertheless, here we all were sitting across from one another in his office as he proceeded to read the reports from all the doctors who had been involved in the previous seven-plus weeks of various diagnostic tests to determine what had caused the pain in my rib cage. Pain which subsequently migrated to the other side of my rib cage and then completely disappeared. It all began, innocently enough (or so I thought) when I first went to Urgent Care on Jan. 1, 2009, for an assessment. (Yes, New Year's Day, of all days to go to an Urgent Care). However, it wasn't until this Feb. appointment that I learned the results of the two different sets of X-Rays, one CT scan, one PET scan and a surgical biopsy which had occurred since that first fateful day when the pain in my rib had made it difficult to breathe, especially inhale - and even bend over to tie my sneakers, as I got dressed to drive to the emergency room: non-small cell lung cancer, stage IV, a killer if there ever was one, and unfortunately, in medicine, there are many.

As the oncologist read all the reports/summaries from the physicians who had been investigating the cause of my rib pain, I couldn't quite believe what I thought I was hearing. I mean, I heard all the words from the oncologist, as he was sitting less than 10 feet away but really couldn't process what I was hearing. I remember saying "What?!" However, I clearly remember being told that I had a "terminal" diagnosis. The prognosis: "13 months to two years."

At that time, I was 54 and half and I had never spent a night in a hospital, broken a bone, or barely even had any stitches. Yet, here I was, in major harm's way. My luck, such as it had been, had officially changed. The worm, figuratively speaking, as so many have said in similar circumstances, had turned (along with everything else. Topsy turvy, inside out and upside down, might give you a sense of the total upheaval in your life when a boom such as this is lowered. Actually, it's more like kaboom). The most common description/word I can use to respond to being given a "terminal" diagnosis like this, out of the blue, no less, is/was surreal. It's hardly a unique reaction. I've heard others in similar do or die-type scenarios use the exact same word.

After receiving this life-changing news, the ride home, with Dina and I alone in the car, and my brother a phone call away, was one of stunned silence. Whatever words we exchanged are lost in the ether. I remember, we were barely able to converse. In a matter of 30 minutes or so, our world of possibilities just shrank to next to nothing. What little we understood about cancer, the treatment, my prospects, et cetera, paled in comparison to the fear and anxiety that enveloped us. Lung Cancer!? I thought was a smoker's disease? I never smoked a cigarette in my life, and moreover, being an outside salesman my entire adult work life until then, I rarely spent time in an office and so had never been around much second-hand smoke either. Yet here I was: jackpot city.

But I survived it all. And every February, I take stock and count (figuratively speaking) my blessings. As for the future, I sort of play it dumb and try to go about my business/life as if I haven't been afflicted with a "terminal" form of cancer. Not dying gives one a certain amount of hope. In the early days of every-three-month in person appointments and regular scans, I would often ask my oncologist what if-type questions about various scenarios and side effects and so forth. He was always hesitant to answer my questions. He didn't want to talk too much about scenarios that might never arise or side effects that I might not experience. Eventually, I got the message and the process: thinking too much (or constantly) about something unpleasant/impactful that may or may not happen health wise in the future was counterproductive. And I've been rewarded for my attitude and understanding ever since. And it's never clearer to me than it is every February: My favorite month of the year.

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



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