

THE CONNECTION

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Madison Girls, 4-in-a-Row!

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Madison Coach Kirsten Stone takes a selfie with her team after winning the schools 4th consecutive Class 6 State Basketball Championship



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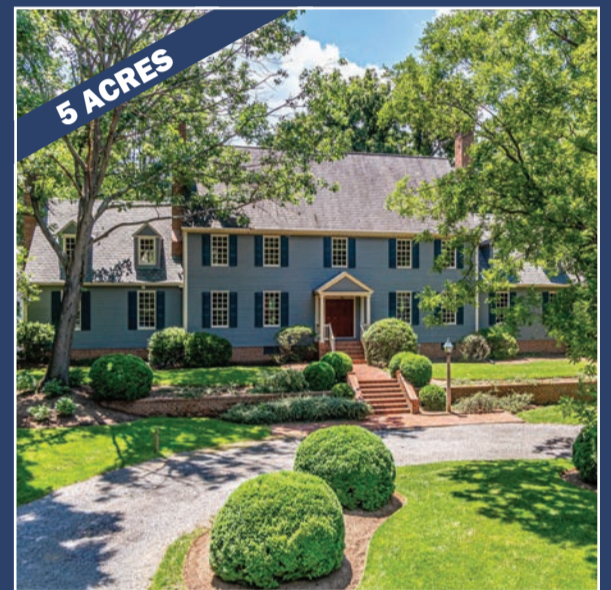
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Collective Bargaining for Teachers and Some Employees

Adoption of resolution shifts labor relations.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

The Fairfax County School Board voted 11-0 to approve the FCPS Collective Bargaining Resolution during its March 9 meeting. Vice-Chair Tamara Dere-nak Kaufax (Franconia) was away from the dais at the vote. According to FCPS, “Collective bargaining is a process by which an employer (such as FCPS) negotiates with a group of employees (a bargaining unit) that is represented by a bargaining agent (such as a union or association) over terms and conditions of employment.”

“We know that our actions tonight, albeit the beginning of a process, will make us more competitive,” said Karen Corbet Sanders (Mt. Vernon).

Karl Frisch (Providence) introduced the motion seconded by Stella Pekar-sky (Sully). The rationale for the vote extended beyond collective bargaining discussions focused solely on employee compensation and working conditions but how such would enhance educational quality for FCPS students.

“This vote is a demonstration not only of our commitment to improving school staffing, pay, and morale but also better outcomes for students,” Frisch said. “Everyone wins when teachers and staff have pay increases, better working conditions, reduced turnover, and workers have a seat at the decision-making table.”

Frisch said. “Our family’s stable middle-class status was a direct result of their hard work and the transformative power of collective bargaining. Our tireless educators and staff deserve nothing less.”

Pekar-sky said there should be no doubt where FCPS stands. “We stand for our employees to have a voice and a seat at the table.”

The Virginia General Assembly approved Virginia House Bill 582 in 2020, which became effective May 1, 2021 — letting county, city, town, and school boards opt-in to allowing bargaining collectively with employees upon adopting an authorizing ordinance or resolution. House Bill 582 did not alter Virginia’s ban on public employees striking.

With the passage of its Collective



Karl Frisch (Providence District)



Rachna Sizemore Heizer, chair



Karen Corbet Sander (Mt. Vernon)



Stella Pekar-sky (Sully District)



Fairfax County School Boards votes 11-0 to approve a resolution regarding collective bargaining.

PHOTOS SCREENSHOTS

In August 2022, a Gallup poll indicated that 71 percent of those polled approved of labor unions, the highest percentage since September 1967. FCPS says that joining or participating in a union or association in a bargaining unit will be entirely up to the individual. Employees have the option of joining or not joining. Those who choose to join a union/association that charges dues are charged a fee set by the union/association, which may change over time.

Employees who choose not to join a union/association will not be required to pay dues. Once an agreement is reached with a union/association (bargaining agent) serving as the exclusive representative for a bargaining unit, the terms of the agreement apply to all employees in the bargaining unit, and the bargaining agent represents all employees in the specific collective bargaining unit they represent.

School Board representative Karen Corbett Sanders (Mt. Vernon) proposed a follow-on motion that the Board directs the superintendent and her staff to develop a process for considering additional bargaining units and bring that process to the Governance Committee by July 1, 2023, for consideration. Abrar Omeish (Member-at-Large)

seconded. According to Corbett Sanders, some FCPS employees were concerned that there might not be opportunities to introduce additional bargaining units beyond the three established.

“We heard that especially from our bus drivers and transportation workers,” Corbett Sanders said. She reminded all that when the school board embarked on the process three years ago, it talked “about the importance of starting small with a manageable number of bargaining units.”

“We never suggested that it was going to be a fixed process,” she said.

County Precedent

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors established a precedent for the school board’s resolution when the Board of Supervisors approved its October 19, 2021, Collective Bargaining Ordinance. The Labor Relations Administrator (LRA), a neutral party, would enforce the rules established by the supervisors’ ordinance. On June 7, 2022, County Executive Bryan Hill appointed, and the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors confirmed Sarah Miller Espinosa as the county’s Labor Relations Administrator (LRA). The ordinance establishes separate bargaining units for (1) police, (2) fire and emergency medical services, and (3) general government employees, except those excluded by definition in Section 3-10-2 of the ordinance.

Bargaining Resolution, the Fairfax County School Board can recognize an employee bargaining agent for a unit for the first time. The School Board will recognize three bargaining units: (1) licensed instructional staff, (2) operational employees, and (3) administrators and supervisors. Substitutes and temporary employees are excluded from bargaining units.

The school board proceeded “thoughtfully,” Frisch said, by

initiating a process using an interest-based model to draft the resolution. According to the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA), there are two types of collective bargaining: positional, also known as “adversarial,” and integrative, or interest-based. VSBA defined the interest-based bargaining approach as “centered on jointly identifying issues and exploring the different possible solutions. The parties present problems that

must be solved and work together to find solutions.” Positional bargaining is a negotiation strategy that entails clinging to a fixed idea or position.

Seventeen certified employee associations were invited to join a collective bargaining workgroup to draft the FCPS resolution. Frisch described the process as “painstakingly collaborative, deliberate, and transparent, making the resolution more thoughtful and durable.” The workgroup met 23 times for over 61 hours, according to the FCPS Collective Bargaining Proposed presentation on Feb. 28, 2023,

“We stand to ensure our schools can recruit and retain staff and provide a world-class education for all students,” said Pekar-sky, who seconded the motion.

The FCPS certification process is the next step. Employee organizations interested in becoming certified for exclusive representation of any of Fairfax County Public Schools’ bargaining units should contact Lydia Martinez, director of the Office of Labor Relations, at Lmmartinez1@fcps.edu.

OAK HILL PLAN AMENDMENTS PART 3

Houses At Risk if Developed in Wrong Way

More proposals for property in the Sully District.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

This is Part 3 of the Site-Specific Plan Amendments various entities have proposed for land in the Sully District.

Proposed amendments, or nominations, to Fairfax County's Comprehensive plan were discussed during virtual meetings Jan. 25 and Jan. 30, presented by the Department of Planning and Development and moderated by Michael Burton. Online attendees were also able to comment.

Then members of the West Fairfax County Citizens Assn. (WFCCA) and Sully District Council (SDC) Joint Land-Use Committee received their own presentation, Feb. 20, and made recommendations.

"County staff will screen each proposal for its merits," said Burton. "We haven't fully evaluated these ideas and won't do so until we're authorized to by the Board of Supervisors. Then, after Planning Commission workshops, the Planning Commission will recommend to the Board which amendments should go forward."

❖ **West Ox Road and Southfield Drive – This involves six land parcels totaling 4.35 acres at 3155 West Ox Road in Oak Hill. Formerly the site of Burke Nursery & Garden Centre, it's currently zoned for retail and low-density residential use, and is now proposed for up to eight, single-family, detached residential units at a density of two homes/acre (R-2).**

Burton said the county would like some open space there and wondered how the additional density would benefit the county. He also urged the potential developer to work with the single-family homeowners east of this property.

Representing the nominator, land-use attorney Sara Mariska said the site is zoned C-8 for intense commercial use and had been planned for retail by the garden center. But, she said, "It's out of character with its [residential] surroundings."

As it stands now, said Mariska, "Up to 13,000 square feet of retail use could be built there by right – or five, large, single-family homes. We propose removing the commercial designation – because the garden center is no longer there – and rezoning that site to R-2. This could be really attractive, and we could have open space and better pedestrian connectivity with the neighborhood."

Ramesh Kalwala, a Southfield Drive homeowner, worried how the grading for the new homes would affect his property. "The civil engineer said they'll follow Fairfax County ordinances and improve stormwater runoff," replied Mariska. "We don't expect any im-



A mix of residential and commercial uses are proposed for Oak Hill's Discovery Square.

pacts to your property."

Environmentalist Dale McGrath, Kalwala's neighbor, has lived there 22 years and said, "We all agree they should get rid of the commercial designation, but we want to keep it R-1 [one home per/acre]. We have water-runoff issues, there's environmentally sensitive land here and we all have septic systems. We live in a floodplain and we're scared to death of more flooding."

"Every house is at risk if this is developed in the wrong way," she continued. "And there's a stream that eventually feeds into our drinking water. It's a bonafide wetlands area. Plus, many animals – owls, foxes, raccoons, snakes and turtles – live there, and I'm concerned what would happen to them."

Another neighbor, Kumar Chandran, lives next to one of the six parcels. "We purchased [our home] for the R-1 zoning, but now we'd have a neighbor eight feet away," he said. "My lot is below grade, and we already have flooding. This zoning change would drastically increase the flooding for us, and the other five properties abutting this site, and would impact our septic fields. The commercial property was previously used for fuel storage, and disturbing it would adversely affect the environment, as well."

Resident Bud Higgins said all six lots in question are in the Southfield subdivision, and homebuyers there were promised they'd remain R-1 forever. "Changing it to R-2 would renege on that promise," he said. "And there'd be less setback lines and more density. This rezoning would totally change the character of our lots."

Aki Pezeshki lives on the lot closest to the site proposed for redevelopment. "We all don't want our environmentally sensitive land disturbed," he said. "This won't create green space – it will just add more impervious surface."

Later on, the Joint Land-Use Committee had no objections to this amendment, but recommended decreasing the number of home units from eight to seven,

❖ **Centreville and Wall roads – This Oak Hill site at the intersection of Centreville and Wall roads is next to the Chantilly Highlands community and the new Sully District community Center. It's currently planned for**



Artist's rendition of the 177 townhouses (in brown, in foreground) proposed for 3078 Centreville Road in Oak Hill.

offices, with an option for mixed-use, including 47,600 square feet of retail.

However, the nominator wants residential use instead of offices there, with just 1.5 to 2 percent of the parcel developed commercially, instead of 5 percent, as it's presently designated. Attorney Mariska also represents this nominator, Potomac Land Group, and said this proposal is for a mix of up to 29,000 square feet of commercial use, 50 townhouses and four live/work units – residential above ground-floor commercial – along Atlantis Street.

"This is part of Discovery Square, and this 8-acre parcel doesn't make sense for so much commercial use," she explained. "A 50-foot buffer along Centreville Road affects the viability of commercial uses there, so we relocated them to Atlantis Street. We'd also remove a roundabout there."

"The open spaces could include a village green," continued Mariska. "We're excited about a community-gathering space here. We'd establish walkable, community connections and would complete the Discovery Square community. We've been talking with the community about this for about a year."

Tim Keating, president of the Discovery Square Homeowners Assn., said, "Our residents – especially the original ones – welcome having the retail, walkable uses and amenities here as soon as possible. We don't want all residential added, so this is a good plan for the land uses."

Chantilly Highlands resident Jeff Parnes noted that Discovery Center was initially proposed as a mix of homes, office and retail – but then all the commercial and office uses were removed from the plan, while more residential was added. "This makes it harder to make the retail serve the community, like the restaurants, etc., first proposed to us, years ago," he said. "So I'm against this because, unless we get that retail shortly, I'm afraid more residential will be added later on."

However, a man named Jordan said, "We want retail within walking distance of our homes. But it seems like developers only develop the profitable part and sell the rest to someone else – who doesn't want to do what was originally agreed on. So I don't blame the current developer for proposing this. It's the best they can do today."

Discovery Square resident Bryan Goldwyn then thanked the developer for spending time with the community. "I'm in favor of the plan, but I want the developer to build the retail first," he said. "My request is that he can't build the homes first and then stop."

The Joint Land-Use Committee had no objections but said it "would prefer to see the retail uses built concurrently with the homes."

❖ **Lincoln Park – This 10-acre site is at 3078 Centreville Road in Oak Hill. Originally planned for offices, K. Hovnanian Homes instead wants to build 177 attached townhouses there for a density of 17 units/acre. Representing the developer, land-use attorney David Gill said the project would be called Lincoln Park.**

"Residential there would support the nearby retail businesses, and we'd provide a pedestrian connection to them and to Rachel Carson Middle School," he said. "There'd be a central open space of 2/3 acre, with fountains, a lawn, grilling area, park, fitness and play areas to mirror the look and feel of Discovery Square to the south, but with slightly less density." Saying homes would generate much less traffic than offices, Gill added, "We want to bring some excitement to this north end of the [Discovery South] project."

However, resident Tim K. said the neighbors in Discovery Square are "concerned that adding 177 homes would put a strain on the neighborhood, traffic and schools. And without adding something like restaurants, it's just more people." Gill said their focus has been on the open space, but he could discuss this idea with the residents.

Another man said, "Our schools are already crowded, so we have to make sure we have enough capacity in them, or the quality of education will suffer. And we need to do this before building new houses."

But Christofer Zumot countered, "If you want to have good retail, you need the density. I think this is a solid option."

The Joint Land-Use Committee had no objections but recommended improving the east/west access road from EDS Drive to Centreville Road. It also suggested that "As this parcel is under Dulles Airport's east-west runway approach, any structures should be built with noise mitigation in mind."

Lake Anne Economic Visioning Workshop

Streetsense will hold a public workshop for the Lake Anne Economic Visioning Study on Monday, April 10, 2023, from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the Reston Community Center in Lake Anne.

Supervisor Walter Alcorn (D-Hunter Mill) commissioned an Economic Visioning Study of the Lake Anne Commercial Revitalization Area. Its goal is to develop a market-appropriate economic vision that builds on Lake Anne's strengths to provide future economic success. Fairfax County hired the consulting firm Streetsense to lead the public workshop.

As part of the study, an online survey was developed to understand the perspectives of residents, business

owners, and visitors of Lake Anne and what they saw as challenges and opportunities for Lake Anne.

The survey closed on March 11.

On Feb. 9 and 10, Streetsense conducted four virtual focus groups and highlights of the focus group discussions are available for review and feedback. <https://www.fcsevite.org/sites/default/files/Assets/documents/Lake-Anne/EVS/Lake-Anne-Focus-Group-Summary.pdf>

To leave comments, and subscribe to sign-up for email updates, visit Lake Anne Economic Visioning Study | Fairfax County - OCR. Comments and questions are welcome and encouraged throughout the study.

<https://www.fcsevite.org/lake-anne/economic-visioning-study>

— Mercia Hobson

Native Plant Sale To Benefit Friends of Riverbend Park

Friends of Riverbend Park (FORB) is nearing the end of its online 2023 Native Plant Sale, which will conclude on April 1. See the variety of plants available, and help support FORB's programs and activities. <https://forb.wildapricot.org/page-1828477>

Try the heat-tolerant white achillea millefolium, a yarrow that also attracts pollinators and is clay-tolerant. The eastern woodfern is an evergreen that thrives in partial to full shade. It is deer and rabbit resistant and provides winter interest. Virginia bluebells welcome spring with their arching stems and nodding clusters of pink buds that open to light blue trumpet-shaped flowers. Growing in masses, bluebells do well in partial to full shade and are resistant to rabbits and black walnut.

Purchasers must pick up their orders at the Riverbend Park Educational Pavilion, 8700 Potomac Hills St.,

Great Falls, Va., on Saturday, April 29, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. For a complete list of native plants and to purchase native plants, visit the Friends of Riverbend Park website.

Saturday, April 8, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., is Riverbend Park's Bluebells at the Bend Festival. Until April 6, tickets are \$10 online and \$12 at the gate. Two ticketed sessions are available: from 10 a.m. to noon and noon to 2 p.m.

Enjoy the wildflower walks, animals, exhibitors, live music, crafts, and food trucks. See the bluebells in bloom under the trees along the Potomac River. Bluebells will be sold during the festival at the Riverbend Park Visitor Center. Plants are \$12 each and available for purchase with cash, check, or credit card while supplies last.

— Mercia Hobson

ROUNDUPS

Route 29 South in Centreville Closed, March 17-20

Drivers beware – Route 29 south at I-66 in Centreville will be completely closed this weekend – including during the daytime – for drainage work. While the southbound lanes are out of service, two-way traffic will be reduced to a single travel lane in each direction on the northbound lanes.

The closure will begin at 10 p.m. Friday, March 17, at 10 p.m. and continue through 5 a.m. Monday, March 20, at 5 a.m., during both daytime and nighttime hours. This work is part of the Transform 66 Outside the Beltway Project.

Drivers using ramps to and from I-66 will not be allowed to make left turns

SEE ROUNDUPS, PAGE 11

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Public Notice

Updated weight limits on Virginia bridges and culverts

In accord with state and federal law, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) has imposed new or changed existing weight restrictions and installed new signage indicating the updated weight restrictions on the following bridges and culverts (structures) in Virginia within the last 30 days.

Jurisdiction	Fed Struc Id	Route #	Route Name	Crossing	Posted Date
FAIRFAX	6767	645	CLIFTON RD	SANDY RUN	2/23/2023
GILES	8436	635	BIG STONY CK RD/RTE 635	LAUREL BRANCH	2/22/2023
ROANOKE (M)	21702	118	RTE 0118	BRANCH	2/22/2023
LOUISA	11554	714	HORSESHOE FARM RD	SMALL BRANCH	2/21/2023
ROANOKE (M)	21611	0	RTE 0000	MUDLICK CREEK	2/21/2023
ROANOKE (M)	21731	221	RTE 0221	BRAMBLTN AV O MURRAY RUN	2/21/2023
CULPEPER	5642	628	HAZEL RIVER RD	STREAM	2/16/2023
WYTHE	19508	0F044	EAST LEE HWY	LITTLE PINE RUN	2/14/2023
PATRICK	13283	631	DOE RUN RD/RTE 631	ARARAT RIVER	2/14/2023
BLAND	2980	61	WOLF CREEK HWY	SPRING BRANCH	2/13/2023
BLAND	2982	61	WOLF CREEK HWY	SPRING BRANCH	2/13/2023
WYTHE	19774	701	OGLESBY RD	STREAM	2/10/2023
ROANOKE	15011	620	MILLER COVE RD/RTE 620	TROUT CREEK	2/10/2023
WYTHE	19710	649	ATKINS MILL RD	SPILLER BRANCH	2/9/2023
MONTGOMERY	12235	629	BRADSHAW RD/ RTE 629	BRADSHAW CREEK	2/7/2023
BEDFORD	2798	680	MURRELLS GAP RD	SHEEP CREEK	1/31/2023

The list above is not a comprehensive list of all structures with weight restrictions in the Commonwealth, but shows only structures that have new or changed weight restrictions within the last 30 days. The list contains only basic structure identification and location information and the date the new or changed weight restriction and signage became effective.

For a full listing of all bridge and culvert weight restrictions with detailed information about specific structures, including location data and actual weight limits, visit <https://www.virginiadot.org> and navigate to Info Center/Trucking Resources. This page references a posted structures report and a GIS map tool that contain detailed information about restricted structures in Virginia. To receive email notifications regarding new or updated weight restrictions for structures statewide, complete the sign-up form on the web page.

Notices regarding bridges and culverts with new or updated weight restrictions are published monthly by VDOT. For additional information or questions, please contact haulingpermits@vdot.virginia.gov.

The Virginia Department of Transportation is committed to ensuring that no person is excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any of its programs or activities on the basis of race, color, or national origin, as protected by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. If you need further information on VDOT's Title VI Program or special assistance for persons with disabilities or limited English proficiency, please contact the Virginia Department of Transportation's Title VI Program Specialist at 804-786-2730.

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Langley Orchestra Takes the Stage at Carnegie Hall

BY MICHAEL DZWONCZYK

On Friday evening March 10, 144 members of the Langley High School Orchestra took the stage at Carnegie Hall as part of the Director's Choice Premier Performance Invitational Series under the direction of Dr. Scott "Doc" McCormick. Langley's Concert Orchestra, composed of freshmen and sophomores, opened the concert with rousing renditions of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, Sibelius's *Finlandia*, and Bizet's *Carmen Suite*. Langley's Symphonic Orchestra, composed primarily of juniors and seniors, brilliantly performed Paganini's *Variations* followed by five movements of Grieg's *Peer Gynt Highlights*, concluding with the electrifying *In the Hall of the Mountain King*. Langley's Philharmonic Orchestra, an audition-only orchestra, dazzled the audience with Wren's *Serenade for Strings*, Vivaldi's *Winter*, Meyer's *Elements*, and Gardel's *Tango: Por una Cabeza*. Langley junior and concertmistress Audrey Goodner, also the concertmistress for the 2023 All-VA Orchestra, made her Carnegie Hall debut with a breathtakingly passionate solo performance of Vivaldi's *Winter*, receiving a standing ovation from the



Langley Orchestra Group in Times Square.

stunned Hall. The Langley Orchestra then moved to the audience to listen to an amazing performance by the 93-member strong College Station High School Orchestra which featured selections from Holst, Vivaldi, Elgar and Bloch.

As part of their spring trip, Langley Orchestra students enjoyed 4 days sightseeing in NYC. Students not only played in the prestigious Carnegie Hall, but were able to visit Top of the Rock, explore Times

Square and several museums, enjoy the Broadway show *Hedestown*, and take a trip on a ferry to see the Statue of Liberty. Senior Allen D. remarked "Carnegie [was] really amazing, the acoustics of the hall are spectacular! The trip was also an excellent experience, and all the activities were well selected and very fun."

Orchestra seniors were especially excited to have this opportunity to travel and perform together as

the pandemic closures beginning in 2020 had prevented this class from enjoying any orchestra trips. Senior violist Caroline Fox also commented on Carnegie's "amazing" acoustics and commented on the orchestra's rebound since the pandemic saying "I loved seeing how proud Doc was [after our Carnegie performance]."

Michael Dzwonczyk is a senior cellist at Langley High School

PHOTO BY KEVIN MCCORMICK/GroupPhotos.com

Celebrating a Virginia Woman History-Maker

BY DEL. KENNETH R. PLUM

March is Women's History Month, and this March we can celebrate the many women who contributed to our past history and who are contributing to our history as recently as last week. On March 7 Congresswoman Jennifer McClellan was sworn in as a member of the 118th Congress becoming the first Black woman to serve in Virginia's Congressional delegation. She succeeds the late Congressman Don McEachin who passed away recently from complications of cancer.

For Congresswoman Jennifer McClellan to be making history is no surprise to anyone who knows her. If I had my way she would be the current governor of Virginia for I had supported her in the Democratic primary to be the party's candidate for governor. It remains possible that she will in the future be the first Black woman governor of the Commonwealth for which she has the abilities.

When I was chairman of the Democratic Party of Virginia, the late Governor of Virginia Gerald L. Baliles told me about a young as-



Congresswoman Jennifer McClellan at her official swearing in with the House Speaker and her husband Dave Mills and her children Samantha and Jackson.

sociate in the law firm for which he was working after leaving the governorship and for whom he had the highest recommendation for political office and service. She was Jennifer McClellan who had only recently earned her law degree from the University of Virginia and who was already demonstrating her keen knowledge as a

native Virginian and her political acumen. He could not have been more accurate in his assessment of her.

It was less than ten years later that now Congresswoman McClellan ran successfully in the Richmond area to become a member of the Virginia House of Delegates in 2016 where she served until 2017

when she became a member of the Virginia Senate where she served until her recent election to Congress. In both the Virginia House and Senate she stood out for successfully sponsoring the most difficult and important legislation.

In its most recent edition, *Black Virginia News* reported on her first speech to the U.S. House. She talked about being the "daughter and granddaughter of men who paid poll taxes and the great-granddaughter of a man who took a literacy test and had to find three white men to vouch for him to be able to vote." She went on to say, "I stand on the shoulders of my parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents, recognizing that in a lot of ways I am fighting the same fights they did. And I stand here to ensure that my children and yours do not have to fight those same fights." I remember her making the same kind of speech in the Virginia Capitol where her work was responsible for so much positive change.

Congresswoman McClellan will serve on the House Armed Services and Science, Space, and Technology Committees and no doubt will continue to make history.

PHOTO CREDIT: BLACK VIRGINIA NEWS

Alcorn Kicks Off Re-election Bid

Incumbent on the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, Hunter Mill District gets enthusiastic kickoff.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Walter Alcorn (D) launched his 2023 Fairfax County Board of Supervisors re-election campaign at the Reston YMCA on Feb. 25, surrounded by Democratic-elected officials present and past as well as supporters.

Chairman Jeff McKay of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors spoke first. "Our values are at stake in this election. ... We need to make certain that Walter gets returned to the board because he has a long history of involvement in this community and passion for these issues that we've been able to get across the finish line."

McKay rattled off the accomplishments to the standing-room only-crowd that included guest speaker U.S. Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-11), Mark Keam, deputy assistant secretary, U.S. Department of Commerce and former member of the House of Delegates; Steve Descano, Fairfax County Commonwealth Attorney; county supervisors and school board members and supporters. Kathrine K. Hanley, former chairman of the Board of Supervisors and Providence District supervisor, attended, as did many Democratic candidates running in the upcoming elections.

McKay told of Alcorn's support for the "4,000 new affordable housing units in the pipeline ... the Human Rights Campaign for how we treat our LGBTQ communities ... fighting climate change ... (and) expanded voting access."

"We need to send a signal in Hunter Mill District, to the rest of the county, how much you support your Supervisor Walter, but how much we're going to turn out the vote and make sure all Democrats across this county win in November," McKay said.

After the 2019 election, Keam said Virginians built a strong coalition, and progressive movement focused on children, energy, and the environment. Democrats passed many bills, including adding Virginia as a RGGI state to control carbon emissions, supporting schools, funding teachers and public employees, increasing the minimum wage, and more.

"At the 2023 November (election), which is coming up, as well as June [primary] for many of you in this room ... This is a chance for Fairfax County to once again lead not only the Commonwealth of Virginia but the rest of the country to show that Democrats are back, progressive policy is working."

Keam said the Alcorn had been part of every accomplishment he mentioned. "He has been the greatest champion ... He's done

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MERCIA HOBSON/ CONNECTION NEWSPAPERS
From left, Walter Alcorn at the launch of his re-election campaign, Chairman Jeff McKay, and Mark Keam, deputy assistant secretary, U.S. Department of Commerce and former member of the House of Delegates.

a fantastic job making sure your voice is heard," said Keam. "That's why I'm here to support him," said Keam.

Connolly said, "When we find somebody who brings values and commitment, and personal empathy and caring to public life, we ought to reward that."

"Local government works in Fairfax County," said Connolly. "We are so lucky to have Walter Alcorn and the character he brings to the job representing us before the Board of Supervisors."

Alcorn explained how local government to him is the most important level of government. "That's why I do this," Alcorn said. He added that folks know the people making the decisions at the local level. "That's when you get the best government, at least when you elect the right people," Alcorn said.

Alcorn said he wanted the community involved in land use decisions.

"[Reston's] comprehensive plan should include equity in an explicit way and should include community health in an explicit way," Alcorn said.

Alcorn said in the first campaign that when it came down to Reston's two golf courses, he would listen to the community surrounding the course. He did that. On the county level, he supported the behavioral health model, "where if someone is having a mental health crisis, we don't always send a police officer with a gun and a taser," Alcorn said. Instead, people who are trained specifically in mental health crisis intervention respond. He told of fully funding FCPS and pushing for "Charge Up Fairfax" plug-in charging facilities at locations with private garages and how that "is a real challenge; is not easy."

"Remember that on election day, and actually even before election day, make sure you get out to vote, tell your neighbors, talk to them now, basically lay the groundwork now because we've got to get out [to vote]."



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Not Just Dance Presents ‘West Side Story.’

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Featuring students from Chantilly, Westfield and Oakton high schools, plus Rocky Run, Stone and Rachel Carson middle schools, Not Just Dance presents the musical, “West Side Story.” Performances are at Not Just Dance’s studio at 14225 Sullyfield Circle, Suite D, in Chantilly.

Show times are Thursday, Friday and Saturday, March 23, 24 and 25, at 7 p.m., and Sunday, March 26, at 2 p.m. Ticket information is at <https://ci.ovationtix.com/35534/production/1143988>. The cast and crew of 25 have been rehearsing since September.

“I’m so proud of them; people will be astonished by the actors’ incredible talent,” said Director Jennifer Farmer. “And our choreographer, Candace Turitto, is wonderful. Between the colorful costumes, dancing and sets, it’s a visually appealing show. For example, at the dance, the boys’ suits and girls’ fancy dresses are color-coordinated with their partners. And the two gangs are distinguished by their costume colors, as well.”

“West Side Story” transports Shakespeare’s classic, “Romeo and Juliet,” to 1950s New York City, where two young, idealistic lovers, Tony and Maria, are caught between warring street gangs, the “American” Jets and the Puerto Rican Sharks. And, said Producer Dawne LeKang, “Their struggles to survive in a world of hate, violence and prejudice create one of the most heart-wrenching and relevant musical dramas of our time.”

Farmer said the scenes take place at a bridal shop, drugstore, “the iconic fire escape and on the streets of New York, where the Sharks and Jets fight. Our technical-theater students made all the sets and props.”

Portraying Maria is Westfield sophomore Kathryn Whitis. “She’s friendly, adventurous and rebellious,” said Whitis. “She knows she’s not supposed to like the Jets, because her brother’s in the Sharks. But she falls in love with [former Jets leader] Tony, anyway.”

Since Whitis usually plays comedic characters, she said it’s “nice to branch out and try a dramatic role. I relate to Maria’s personality, and her fun songs let me show off my voice.” But her favorite song in the show is “Something’s Coming,” sung by the actor playing Tony. “I like the meaning behind it,” she explained. “It’s saying, ‘I feel like something’s going to happen – and I don’t know what – but I think it’ll be soon.’”

She said the audience will like “West Side Story” because “It’s fun, bright and colorful. It’s a tragedy, but it’s really cool to see all the singing and dancing. And everyone’s amazing, so it’ll be a great show.”

Chantilly High junior Tyler Ellison plays Tony. “There’s a big shift in Tony’s personality before and after he meets Maria,” said Ellison. “Before, he has a chip on his shoulder but believes he’s destined for something better than a gang, so he leaves the Jets. After, he realizes she was the void in his life. He becomes more energetic and vibrant and is really passionate about their relationship.”

Ellison enjoys singing Tony’s solos where

he gets to be in the spotlight and show off his personality and life goals. “And playing the lead lets me have opportunities to take more risks with my acting and singing,” he said. However, Ellison especially likes the ensemble number, “Gee, Officer Krupke,” because “It’s a happy break from all the chaos going on and provides some comic relief. It’s a catchy tune and it’s fun to watch the actors sing and dance to it.”

As for the show, he said, “There are lots of talented dancers and actors. And it plays with lots of emotions, from happiness to tragedy.”

Westfield junior Alejandro Cahoon portrays Bernardo, the leader of the Sharks and Maria’s brother. “He grew up in a place where boys have to be men quickly, so he’s tough on the people he loves,” explained Cahoon. “He wants them to be safe and not go through what he went through as a child. There were gangs where he lived, so he was in that life at an early age. But he also has a gentle, caring side, where he’s protective of Maria so she won’t get sucked into gang life.”

Cahoon loves his role because “Bernardo always makes his presence known and commands attention from the people around him. And I get to do street fighting and boxing. I also box in real life, so it’s great to put my own boxing skills into the character.” His favorite song is “Maria,” sung by Ellison, because “It’s interesting to see the emotions Tony goes through in a short span of time, and he wants to be able to tell her how he feels.”

Cahoon said audiences will love this show because “There’s something for everyone – humor, drama. Everyone will feel something, and it’ll get those emotions going. And I truly believe the cast has put in every ounce of effort they can to make the characters seem so real and make the audience engaged in everything that’s going on.”

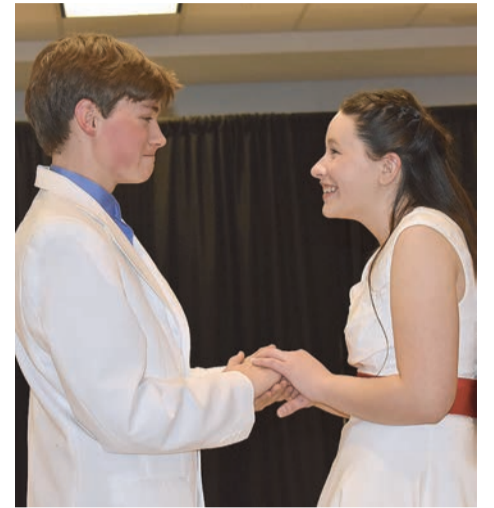
Playing Anita – Bernardo’s girlfriend and Maria’s best friend – is Ava Botros. “I’m a junior in high school, but I’m homeschooled, so I don’t get to do theater at a school, so this is a fantastic opportunity,” she said. “Once I did a play here, I was hooked.”

“Anita has a big personality with a huge, emotional range, and she loves very deeply. At first, she’s spunky, sassy and energetic. But after a tragic event, she’s mourning a loss and is hurt, angry and distraught. So my challenge is to portray all these ranges of emotions.”

Botros is “thoroughly enjoying” her role



Alejandro Cahoon and Ava Botros play Bernardo and Anita in “West Side Story.”



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DAWNE LEKANG
Portraying the lovestruck Tony and Maria, are Tyler Ellison and Kathryn Whitis.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DAWNE LEKANG
The song, “America,” features (from left) Grace Lopez, McKenzie Scheiner, Brooke Aguilar, Bonna Kim, Maddison Carroll, Ava Botros, Charlotte Jewell, Sophia Botros, Amanda DuBard and Aly Killer.

because “There’s no holding back with this character, so I completely embrace Anita and let it all out. And I also like being able to infuse her with my own zest for life.”

Botros especially likes the song, “America,” because “Of all the dance numbers I’m in, it’s the most energetic, and I like all the skirt-swishing. It’s catchy and taught me how to really belt out a song.” Overall, she said this musical is “dynamic, with lots of emotion and heart. And the audience will connect with and care about the characters as they evolve throughout the show.”

Added Producer LeKang: “Our four leads have college-level voices. Audiences will think they saw something professional and will be surprised at the caliber of talent.”

Not Just Dance teaches students musical and regular theatre, dance and music, so they may perform onstage, regardless of prior experience. It also offers several advanced programs and workshops – including theater tech, private coaching and dance classes for all ages. For more information, go to [www. NotJustDance.net](http://www.NotJustDance.net), call 571-392-3209 or email contact_us@NotJustDance.net.

CALENDAR

NOW THRU APRIL 30

Score: Mixed Media Art. 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. At Workhouse Arts Center, 9518 Workhouse Way, Lorton. Score explores 20 years of the work of Virginia-based mixed media artist, Joan Dreyer. While developing her MFA thesis at Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia, PA, Joan began taking tools, techniques and imagery that have been historically considered “women’s work” and transforming them into innovative, contemporary art that is responsive to the tone and tensions of our times. Created by combining fiber techniques with unexpected materials like X-rays, her

work is a subtle art that asks questions about life, loss, symbolism, and the impact of war instead of providing one size fits all answers. The artist’s work provides a space for the contemplation of life stages that we all encounter. The result is a body of work that allows for meaningful but also multiple interpretations by the viewer. Visit the website: <https://www.workhousearts.org/score-mixed-media>

ONGOING

Earthquake Relief Collection. Elected leaders from Northern Virginia announced the launch of a fundraising effort to collect money to

purchase food packages for those impacted by the recent earthquakes in Turkey and Syria. NVRC hopes to collect \$25,000 for this effort. To donate, visit www.helpearthquakevictims.org.

NOW THRU MAY 31

Candytopia Opens. At Tysons Corner Center, McLean. Candytopia, in partnership with Tysons Corner Center announces the arrival of its sweet interactive concept to the center. It will feature 16,000 square feet with 14

SEE CALENDAR, PAGE 9

WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

CALENDAR

FROM PAGE 8

different interactive environments, Instagram-worthy photo opportunities, and delectable tastes of your favorite sweet treats. There is a candy art gallery, a state-of-the-art candy confetti room, complete with confetti-farting pigs, a marshmallow pit filled with a quarter-million marshmallows, as well as DMV-inspired elements throughout the experience. The journey includes candy samples throughout the experience. Visit www.candytopia.com.

NOW THRU MARCH 26 (EXTENDED)

"How the Light Gets In." Presented by 1st Stage of Tysons, 1524 Spring Hill Road Tysons. Thursdays at 7:30 p.m., Fridays at 8 p.m., Saturdays at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m., and Sundays at 2 p.m. From the co-writer of the breakout hit Duck Harbor comes an uplifting story of connection and healing. Set against the backdrop of a peaceful Japanese garden, this beautifully touching story centers around four very different people who build a community of love and hope. Tickets can be purchased online at www.1ststage.org or by calling the 1st Stage box office at 703-854-1856.

NOW THRU APRIL 16

Texture Photography Exhibit. 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. At Falls Church Arts Gallery, 700-B West Broad Street, Falls Church. Sixty photographic images from 37 photographers will be featured in "Texture, A Photography Show" on view at Falls Church Arts Gallery. The submissions vary widely and range from country and city scenes to bodies of water, botanicals, and geographical formations, among others. Visit the website: www.fallschurcharts.org.

NOW THRU APRIL 2

Art Exhibition. 1-6 p.m. At Mosaic Arts Gallery, 2931-B Eskridge Road, Fairfax. An art exhibition titled "Focus on Faces" will be presented by the mosaicArts Gallery. The exhibition will feature encaustic portraits of young adults painted by Alexandria artist, Linda Lowery. Opening reception March 11 from 4:00-7:00 p.m. Visit the website: mosaicarts.site

ONGOING

Riverbend Park Plant Sale. At 8700 Potomac Hills Street, Great Falls. The Annual Plant Sale is now open! Go to www.forbpark.org, then click on "2023 Native Plant Sale" to order your plants by April 1st. Pickup is on April 29th.

WEDNESDAY/MARCH 15

The Falls Church Pyramid Art Show. 5:30-7:30 p.m. At Falls Church High School, Entrance 8 lobby. The Pyramid Art Show is held annually in Fairfax County Public Schools to promote student art from grades K through 12. Art teachers from Camelot, Fairhill, Graham Road, Mason Crest, Pine Springs, Westlawn, Woodburn, Luther Jackson and Falls Church select a number of student artworks to display in the event to represent each school.

MARCH 17-19

Super Pet Expo. At Dulles Expo Center in Chantilly. Dogs, cats, Champion Trainer, Dexter the Dog & reptiles

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Trick of the Light Theatre: "The Griegol" can be seen on Saturday, March 25, 2023 at The Alden Theater, McLean Community Center in McLean.

will highlight this show with more than 150 pet related exhibits along with entertainment and educational activities. Friday, March 17 - 3-8 p.m.; Saturday, March 18 - 10 a.m.-7 p.m.; Sunday, March 19 - 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. Admission: Adults \$15; Children aged 4-12 \$10, age 3 and under - free. Tickets: www.superpetexpo.com.

MARCH 17 TO APRIL 8

Easter Bunny Photos at Tysons Corner Center. The Easter Bunny is back at Tysons Corner Center starting on March 17. Individuals, kids and families can visit the Bunny in Fashion Court-Lower Level Nordstrom Wing, and for the easiest experience, pre-book photo sessions for your littles by visiting the link: <https://www.tysonscornercenter.com/BunnyPhotos>

SATURDAY/MARCH 18

"Makin' Cake." 6 p.m. At The Alden Theater, McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Dasha Kelly Hamilton's inspiring stage production, "Makin' Cake," reveals what the history and ingredients of cakemaking can teach us about race, class and equity in America. Filled with "Aha!" moments, poignant vignettes, digital media and two onstage bakers. Tickets are \$25, \$15 for Alden district residents and \$20 for seniors and students. Visit aldentheatre.org or call 703-790-0123, TTY: 711.

SATURDAY/MARCH 18

KODO - One Earth Tour 2023: Tsuzumi. 8 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, Fairfax. Experience the power, grace, and joy that KODO's athletic percussionists bring to the stage

in their much-anticipated 40th anniversary performance: Tsuzumi. As masters of the ancient art of Japanese taiko drumming, KODO bewitches audiences with visually stunning performances that combine raw athleticism and refined percussive virtuosity.

SATURDAY/MARCH 18

Fundraising Banquet. 6-9 p.m. At Arlington Fairfax Elks Lodge, 8421 Arlington Blvd., Fairfax. Coastal Conservation Association's Northern Virginia Chapter 20th Annual "Save a Fish - Build a Reef" Fundraising Banquet. Support CCA Virginia's efforts to ensure the health and conservation of our Chesapeake marine resources and anglers' access to them. Visit the website: ccavirginia.org

SATURDAY/MARCH 18

NOVA BPW Best Friends Luncheon. 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. At 12025 Lee Jackson Memorial Hwy, Fair Oaks. The Northern Virginia Business and Professional Women's (NOVA BPW) Club, of the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Club, Inc. will host a Best Friends Luncheon on March 18, 2023. The Best Friends Luncheon will recognize the history of true friendship and the bond of friendship between friends. A woman's best friend, male or female, positively contributes to her mental and emotional health. The proceeds from this event will support scholarship, schools, women's shelters, and other non-profit organizations in Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince Williams Counties. Tickets are available (\$85.00) online at Eventbrite at <https://BestFriendsLuncheon.eventbrite.com>

RESTON ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL MEMBERS' MEETING

Join Zoom Meeting: **April 11, 2023, 7 p.m.**

Log in at bit.ly/RA-AMM23

Meeting ID: 862 7554 6404

Passcode: 002404

Learn about the state of the association and what lies ahead for RA. The 2023 Board of Director Election results will be announced.



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Fill Us In!

In-Person Public Hearing on the McLean Community Center's FY 2025 Programs

Wednesday, March 22, 6:30 p.m.

The governing board and staff of the McLean Community Center seek **input from residents** of Dranesville Small District 1A at a Public Hearing on Programs for FY 2025 (which runs July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025).

This is an opportunity for residents to suggest class offerings, community events, theater programs, art exhibits, youth events and teen activities that are meaningful to the community.

If you would like to speak at the hearing, call the Center to have your name placed on the speakers' list. You may also submit comments to feedback@mcleancenter.org.



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Legals

PUBLIC NOTICE
AT&T proposes to modify an existing facility (new tip heights 86.5' & 89.9') on the utility pole at VEPCO #2035 off Colonial Farm Rd, McLean, VA(20230146). Interested parties may contact Scott Horn (856-809-1202) (1012 Industrial Dr., West Berlin, NJ 08091) with comments regarding potential effects on historic properties.

Employment

Pure Integration LLC seeks Software Developers (multiple openings) to develop video platforms that handle billions of requests and millions of users. Will design, develop, and deliver innovative products and services that are essential to bringing Internet, TV, and voice to more than 28 million residential and business customers. This position is for a roving employee who will work in Reston, VA, and at various unanticipated locations throughout the United States. The employee must relocate, but travel is not required from any particular location. Apply at: www.pureintegration.com/careers

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CALENDAR

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CHAMPION



PHOTO BY WILL PALENSCAR

Madison Warhawks Class 6 Girls State Basketball Champions

Madison Warhawks Win 4th State Title in OT

BY WILL PALENSCAR
THE CONNECTION

The Madison Warhawks and the Manchester Lancers took to the hardwood for the Virginia Class 6 State Championship at Virginia Commonwealth University. The Warhawks won the state title the previous 3 years.

Madison would jump out to an early 12-6 advantage after the first eight minutes of play.

The Lancers were not to be intimidated as they would outscore Madison 14-9 in the 2nd quarter.

With Madison leading 21-19 at intermission the game was still up for grabs. At the nod of the 3rd quarter the Lancers were able

to pull, within a point 32-31 with 8 minutes to play in regulation.

In the 4th quarter Manchester was able to outscore Madison 13-12, sending the game to overtime tied at 44.

In the closing seconds of OT Madison's Kayla Dixon would drive the lane and find teammate Stella Gougoufkas, who made the shot and was fouled. Gougoufkas would make the free throw and Madison was victorious 49-46 to finish the season (25-4) and winning their 4th consecutive Class 6 State Basketball Championship. Manchester ends the season (22-6). Kayla Dixon led Madison with 20 points; Avery Griepentrog, 12; and Stella Gougoufkas, 11. Manchester out rebounded Madison 46-33. Madison turned the ball over only six times to Manchester's 15.

ROUNDUPS

FROM PAGE 5

during this time. The ramp from southbound Route 29 to westbound I-66 will also be closed. Drivers should expect delays if traveling in this area and consider using alternate routes.

All work is weather dependent and will be rescheduled if inclement conditions occur. Message boards on I-66 and Route 29 will provide advance notice of lane closures and traffic stoppages.

Car Seat Inspections, March 23

Parents may get their children's car seats inspected on Thursday, March 23, from 5-8:30 p.m., outside the Sully District Police Station. It's at 4900 Stonecroft Blvd. in Chantilly. Inspections are done on a first-come, first-served basis. Participants should install the child safety seat, themselves, so the inspection can be performed. The seat will be properly re-installed, if necessary, and parents will be taught how to install the seat properly, in the future. Everyone is eligible. Another car-seat inspection is scheduled for April 6, at the same place and time.

Help Sully Police Identify Burglary Suspect

Detectives from the Sully District Police Station are asking community members to help identify the suspect involved in two commercial burglaries in Chantilly. To see a video of him, go to <https://fcpdnews.wordpress.com/2023/03/09/detectives-release-video-of-commercial-burglary-suspect/>.

The burglaries occurred last Wednesday, March 8, between midnight and 12:30 a.m. A man broke a window and entered La Tienda Confianza at 13655 Lee Jackson Memorial Highway (Route 50) in Chantilly.

Police say he stole property and then forcefully entered the Burger Shack at 13661 Lee Jackson Memorial Highway. The man left on foot with both property and money. He's described as having a thin build, and he was wearing all-black clothing, including a black baseball hat and black shoes, plus a white mask.

Detectives are asking anyone with information regarding this incident or others to call the detectives at the Sully District Police Station at 703-814-7000. Tips may also be submitted anonymously via Crime Solvers by phoning 1-866-411-TIPS (866-411-8477), texting FCCS plus the tip to 847411, or going to <http://www.fairfaxcrimesolvers.org/>.

Or download the P3 Tips' App, "Fairfax Co Crime Solvers." Anonymous tipsters are eligible for cash rewards of \$100-\$1,000 if their information leads to an arrest. If they wish to be contacted by a detective, they should leave their contact information.

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We Need Your Help Again

We are sincerely grateful and thankful to you for helping in 2021 to save one of America's oldest newspapers, the Alexandria Gazette Packet, publishing continuously since 1784

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Publishing Since 1784

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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 omicron clouds the horizon in so many ways. Revenue still remains short of expenses despite our greatly curtailed costs.

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

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Joie De Vivre



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

I guess it's time. Ever since my brother Richard's semi unexpected death on Dec. 3rd, to re-work an old B.B. King standard, the thrill has been gone. The joie has been missing from my vivre. For those of you unfamiliar with this French phrase, it means the joy of living, or more generally, "the joy of anything one might do." It's not exactly one's reason for living (raison d'etre), it's more about the intangible element that puts a proverbial bounce in your step and enables you to see the world (and your place in it) as full of possibilities. It's reminiscent of Maverick's (Tom Cruise) inability to "engage," the storyline throughout "Top Gun" after the accidental death of his "radar intercept" officer, "Goose," as played by Anthony Anderson. Maverick felt responsible for the accident and for much of the film was unable to pull the trigger, literally. Eventually, he got sorted, as the Brits say, and the result was "Top Gun: Maverick." Not so much a do-over. More like a do-it-again. As for me, here in the real world, I am not at all responsible for my brother's death, but because of it, I have been unable to engage (live with any joie and take an interest in my vivre).

Unfortunately, in this example anyway, Hollywood and where I live: Burtonsville, don't have much in common. And in so far as my brother's death is concerned, it wasn't make-believe. My inability to engage however, is real. Quite simply it's about loss. The loss of the person with whom I shared my life with for 68 years, who looked out for his younger brother (me), who I respected and looked up to and who often guided (if asked, sometimes without being asked) me on more occasions that I could possibly count.

I had no other siblings, so I didn't have to share. Though we were both married, the dynamic between us never really changed. And with both of us living in the Washington DC Area (having migrated from Newton Centre, Ma. to attend college locally), our worlds intersected regularly which enabled our relationship to evolve, even mature.

Now, due to his passing, the party is over, so to speak. Many of the expectations I took for granted, concerning my brother always being there, especially after getting a "terminal" diagnosis in 2009, haven't taken a turn - for the worse. After I was given that "13 month to two years" prognosis, I figured, even though Richard was five years older than me, I'd predecease him. And these last 14 years have/had done nothing to change my thinking. But he has died and I'm now living a life I never anticipated.

My brother's oldest friend spoke at Richard's memorial service on Dec. 10. He was shocked when Vanessa, Richard's wife, called him to tell him that Richard had died. Though he lived in Boston, he was in regular contact with both Richard and Vanessa during my brother's hospitalization and his at-home recovery as well. He had spoken to Richard and thought he was doing better (which he was). Norman said he never expected to receive that call from Vanessa. He expected, given my health situation, that the call he'd receive would be from Richard telling him that I had died.

Richard was my best friend. He was also the Best Man at my wedding. For the past few years, he's been my employer as well. Not only have I now lost one of the two most important people remaining in my life, but I have also lost my main source of income. A trifecta: brother, best friend, employer. Try recovering from that during a cancer diagnosis. Speaking of which, Richard was diagnosed with colorectal cancer in June. Now adding to all that we shared, laughed, and cried about, you can now add cancer to our mix. It was odd; him asking me all sorts of questions about what to expect with treatment, side effects, scans, et cetera; my area of expertise, you might say. We grew even closer because he was more than a brother or a friend or even a co-worker, he was now a fellow cancer patient. An unfortunately ever-increasing group, but because of his diagnosis, I was more invested in him - and his outcome, than ever. As I've written before, Vanessa and I visited him every day for nearly two months. Our relationship, as difficult as the circumstances made it, didn't suffer at all. On the contrary, it was better and stronger than ever, and we were all looking forward. Now I'm forced to look backward and think what could have been and what will never be again.

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



JD CALLANDER & ED BLANCHARD

Direct: (703) 606-7901 | (703) 712-1757

JDCallander@gmail.com
Ed@NewNovaHome.com
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