

Mount Vernon Gazette

MOUNT VERNON'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER • A CONNECTION NEWSPAPER

APRIL 20, 2023



Alicia Archer



Kelcy M. Allwein



Cyndi Jones testifies before the Board of Supervisors.

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED

Three-Days of Budget Public Hearings

**Out in force,
crying out for help
from Fairfax County.**

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE GAZETTE

The economic impact of the pandemic is not over. The level of need, following cuts in federal rent relief and food assistance, continues to be as high or higher now than during the pandemic, according to testimony by Leah Tenoria, director of Hispanic Ministry and Community Outreach at Good Shepherd Catholic Church

“I have recorded a higher number of calls for assistance each month — double the number from last year at this time — and our funds are out by the 2nd or 3rd day of the month,” Tenoria testified. She oversees the Emergency Assistance Program at Good Shepherd Catholic Church.

Fairfax County Board of Supervisors public hearings were held April 11, 12, and 13 to get public input on the County Executive’s Proposed FY 2024 Advertised Budget Plan, the Advertised Capital Improvement Program for Fiscal Years 2024-2028 with Future Fiscal Years to 2033, and the Current Appropriation Level in the FY 2023 Revised Budget Plan.



County School Board Chair Rachna Size-more Heizer



Rose Risely, member Long Term Care Coordinating Council

“These individuals have already called the county help hotline at CSP (Community Services Program) and are told that they are out of funds or that they no longer have



Lydia Lawrence, chair of the Fairfax Parks Coalition



Mary Paden, chair of the South County Task Force

COVID funds to help them,” Tenoria said. “We should continue to provide funding to support Emergency Assistance Programs and other support systems that will lift up



Arthur Purves, president of the Fairfax County Taxpayers Alliance



Therese Chaplin

families and ensure basic needs are met.” One hundred forty-seven people testified during the public hearings. From County

SEE HEARINGS, PAGE 4

SCREENSHOTS

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OPEN SAT 4/22 & SUN 4/23, 1-4

Old Town
\$1,749,000

This semi-detached row home maintains most of its rustic charm while featuring modern updates. With over 2200 square feet of living space, it's not just a home, but a lifestyle and a chance to become the next steward of one of the City's historic treasures. 126 Prince St.

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OPEN SAT 4/22 & SUN 4/23, 12-2

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\$925,000

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NEWS

Area Experts Look at the Local Economy

PHOTOS BY MIKE SALMON/GAZETTE

Chamber gives some big-picture items cover NOVA as well.

BY MIKE SALMON
THE GAZETTE

The picture of the local economy has its ups and downs according to the Mount Vernon-Springfield Chamber of Commerce “Economic Outlook 2023” meeting at Belle Haven Country Club recently. Area financial analysts laid out their perspective, but as usual, Northern Virginia is a bit different compared to other sections of the country. The federal government’s influence here is partially responsible for that.

“We are at the center of growth in the region,” said Chris LeBarton from CoStar Group.

The list of guest speakers included David Boyle from Burke & Herbert Bank, Dr. Terry Clower from the Stephen S. Fuller Institute at George Mason University, Chris LeBarton from CoStar Group and Alex Thalacker from the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority. Each area of expertise had a hiccup for the pandemic period, but things are looking up for the most part.

It’s hard to talk about the area’s economy without highlighting the real estate market, and Clower noted that it had skyrocketed in recent years, but is leveling off now, he said.

“Pent up demand for housing is still there,” said Clower. In the Richmond Highway corridor, the EMBARK Richmond Highway project will include additional housing, and also the WISH Center in the Hybla Valley area to train upcoming workers. The combination will help the economy grow.

The WISH Center is the Fairfax County Workforce Innovation and Skills Hub built within reach of neighborhoods with some of the biggest economic challenges in the county. Classes and certification programs help participants get better jobs and lift quality of life. This could be a catalyst for the whole area, creating “a pathway to high-paying tech or science-related careers,” as WISH



Housing prices may have leveled off.

center information states.

Population Shrinks

Another element of the Mount Vernon-Springfield economy is the retail sector and the job numbers have grown recently, while the unemployment numbers are down. LeBarton noted that what happens in D.C. “has an impact in Northern Virginia too,” he said.

The population in Northern Virginia has shrunk. From July 2021 to July 2022, there were 3400 fewer people living here, and some of the people leaving the area are skilled workers who are tired of high real estate prices and the high prices for childcare. The danger is that it might lead to a trickle effect. “Businesses follow the talented workers,” LeBarton said.

Clower said that hybrid office work is “here to stay” with many even continuing fully remote work. This is based on numbers looking at office demand, housing, transportation and the cost of living for young families, among other factors.

Office vacancies in general are an issue. In Fairfax County, the office vacancy rate is 16.7% and it continues to rise, according to Thalacker. “Office vacancies did increase in South County,” he said.



North Hill is part of Embark Richmond Highway.

**MOUNT VERNON SCHOOL BOARD
CANDIDATES FORUM**

Virtually on April 25, 2023 at 7:00 p.m.

Meet the Candidates!



Mateo Dunne



Harold Sims




Stori Zimmerman

Moderator: Cathy Hosek, Mount Vernon Education Advocate

Join Us On-line:
<http://bit.ly/40XHon5>

QR Code



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OF THE FAIRFAX AREA

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GUM SPRINGS

Things Get Solved...
When You Get Involved!

Mount Vernon School Board Candidates Forum April 25, 2023

A virtual League of Women Voters school board forum will take place on April 25. Do you have questions about Fairfax County Public School Board policies and vision for students and the voice of parents in the Mount Vernon Magisterial District? The three candidates

seeking to be the Mount Vernon School Board representative are participating in an open public forum (virtually) on April 25, 2023 at 7 p.m. You can ask questions during the forum or submit questions in advance to president@ngsca.org not later than April 21, 2023



The economists each highlighted different parts of the economic picture.

WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE ❖ APRIL 20-26, 2023 ❖ 3



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

About 80 residents of mobile home parks along Route 1 turned out to the budget hearings.

Budget Public Hearings

FROM PAGE 1

School Board Chair Rachna Sizemore Heizer, the first speaker on April 11, to Tenoria on April 12, to Rose James, the final speaker on April 13, they expressed a need and asked for funding or changes to the proposed budget.

Sizemore Heizer said that the School Board appreciated the advertised budget funding for all of Schools' recurring costs that the district requested. She said the division faced a teacher shortage and needed to provide "market competitive compensation."

Lydia Lawrence, chair of the Fairfax Parks Coalition, requested "targeted equity programs" as parks do not look the same, access is not the same, and the "quality of them differs" in different parts of the county. Lawrence requested funds for mobile nature center buses to go into neighborhoods that do not have access to parks, and funding of \$229,279 would be for those staff positions. Lawrence said that FCPA desperately needs to hire staff members who have the bilingual capacity and requested \$50,000 in translation and interpretation services. She told of an advocate at Burke Lake Park who noticed that most signs were in English. "The sign that was in English and Spanish was a sign for trash. What does that say to our residents?" Lawrence asked.

Arthur Purves, president of the Fairfax County Taxpayers Alliance, said that since FY 2000, the supervisors raised residential real estate taxes three times faster than household income. "If the real estate taxes had increased at the same rate as household income," the rate would be 57 cents instead of \$1.11," Purves said.

Rose Risely, a member of the Long Term Care Coordinating Council, asked the board to support funding to staff the Springfield Senior Care Center Without Walls program and that the new positions support the inclusion of adults with disabilities into the program. She asked the board to support the proposed funding increase for the Fastran contract and that human services contracts reflect the consumer price index of 7.3 percent, "which is referenced in county contracts as the basis for contract rate adjustments at a significantly higher than the advertised budget."

Mary Paden, chair of the South County Task Force, which advocates for people with low income on the Route 1 Richmond Highway Corridor, testified that the task force organized a block of speakers on be-

half of the Fairfax NAACP Housing Committee. Paden described how the county is losing housing "out the back door as rents are increased, and older garden apartments are scheduled for redevelopment"

Mobile home park communities along Route 1 with many tenants, are not all covered by the new no-net-loss policy, and are being bought by out-of-state equity firms, Paden said. "One park located in a future BRT area is ripe for sale to a developer."

"These [mobile home] parks are long standing communities of color ... In its budget guidance, the Board promised \$60 million in the FY24 budget for both building and preserving affordable housing, but only about \$30M is included in this FY24 budget. We repeat our ask for \$60M in the FY24 housing trust fund: \$30M for new housing and \$30M for preservation. ... It is imperative to increase funding now because, after a lull, development pressures are picking up, and we need to be nimble in grabbing opportunities for preservation — or they will be lost forever," Paden said. Paden also repeated a request for a new position in the Department of Housing and Community Development focused on mobile home communities. About 80 residents of mobile home parks along Route 1 turned out to the budget hearings. They asked the county to join with nonprofits in purchasing mobile home parks to save them from being developed.

Other Mount Vernon area issues include funds for home repairs, more rent relief and food assistance for residents still coping with health effects or job hour cuts from the pandemic; a right to counsel in eviction court; and repairs to the Kennedy shelter or alternate housing for people experiencing homelessness until a new shelter is completed in four years.

Therese Chaplin spoke as an individual but is also a member of St. Martin's Episcopal Church and the NAACP Housing Committee. Chaplin said housing was a life-essential building block, and people of color are disproportionately affected.

She urged the board to mandate a right to counsel in eviction court and fund legal aid attorney positions to meet the need; add funds for rent and food relief; enable lower-income minority residents to own a home so that they can build intergenerational wealth.

April 28 is the Board of Supervisors Budget Committee meeting for pre-markup. On May 2, the Board of Supervisors adopts the FY 2024 Budget, and on May 25, the School Board adopts the FY 2024 Approved Budget.

Inside Look at FCPD Civil Disturbance Unit

Purpose is to 'protect peaceful, First Amendment protests and quell violent uprisings;' unit responded to the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE GAZETTE

Not everyone knows the Fairfax County Police Department has a Civil Disturbance Unit, but it performs vital functions here and throughout the region. And one of its members, PFC Kevin Gehr, recently spoke about it at a meeting of the Sully District Police Station's Citizens Advisory Committee.



BONNIE HOBBS/GAZETTE

"We've been here five years now, and we respond to First Amendment events," he said. "With 131 members, we're the largest, non-standing unit within the county — meaning we all have other police jobs as our main job. Our purpose is to protect peaceful, First Amendment protests and quell violent uprisings. We responded to the Capitol on Jan. 6."

Gehr said the members have a "high level of training" and are "trained more than street officers are to deal with these types of situations. Our training levels are Basic, Grenadier, Medic and Level 1. Grenadiers will use chemical munitions and pepper balls. Level 1 officers are in full riot gear; we use armadillo shields that won't break if an ax is thrown at them. When you have 10,000 people and only 50 of you, officers need to be trained to deal with them.

"A couple medics — usually from our Helicopter Division — are embedded with us. They help us out because, in a [Civil Disturbance Unit] deployment, we're often far from a hospital and they can offer prolonged treatment and provide advanced life support. They can also do ultrasounds and concussion screening, and they can administer DuoDote — a prescription medicine used to treat chemical attacks. In addition, we're now the first police department in the country carrying whole blood in the cruiser. It comes from Inova, and we can administer it to victims on the street."

PFC Kevin Gehr

FCPD CIVIL DISTURBANCE UNIT

At a Glance

- ❖ 131 Officers
- ❖ High level of training
- ❖ Responded to the Capitol on Jan. 6
- ❖ Deployed more than 80 times since May 2022
- ❖ Last fall, 90 percent of the deployments were for protests outside homes of the three Supreme Court justices who live in Fairfax County.

He said some 38 Civil Disturbance Unit officers are Level 1 and the rest are Basic level. The CDU conducts several rounds of training per year. And, said Gehr, "Every new member coming out of the Police Academy will be CDU-trained, at least at Basic level. It's not an option, anymore."

The CDU also instructs surrounding jurisdictions — including Stafford and Spotsylvania counties, Fairfax and Alexandria cities, and the U.S. Capital and CIA police — in both basic and advanced tactics. "It's a National Capital Area requirement for a 40-hour class," said Gehr. "And all the other jurisdictions come and take our class in Fairfax County."

Since May 2022, Fairfax County's Civil Disturbance Unit has been deployed more than 80 times. "Crowd sizes for these protests have ranged from 5-100 people," said Gehr. "They all ended peacefully and

SEE UNIT, PAGE 12



FILE PHOTO

Fairfax County took part in rail emergency exercises last summer.

Railway Safety and Emergency Planning

BY SUPERVISOR DAN STORCK
MOUNT VERNON DISTRICT

Recent railway incidents have brought railway safety into sharp focus. While the railroad industry is regulated at multiple levels, from the railway company to all levels of government, the health and safety of my constituents and our community is my highest concern. I want to take this opportunity to share with you how we are working to improve rail in our area, as well as outline how the County's Department of Emergency Management & Security (DEMS) is prepared for the unlikely event there is an incident in our area. DEMS is responsible for the mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery planning for both natural and man-made disasters.

First, it is important to point out that rail is a relatively safe mode of transit, especially when compared with trucks. We currently have two rail lines, carrying passenger, auto and freight trains through our area, with a third line and several bridge improvements planned in future years. These infrastructure investments will expand our through capacity, reducing the number of potential conflict points by reducing the need for trains to mediate track changes with one another as they travel through our area.

DEMS has created a multi-discipline, all-hazards plan that establishes a single, comprehensive framework for the management of major emergencies and disasters. The Fairfax County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) establishes the overall roles and responsibilities for emergency operations. The plan details a specific Emergency Support Function (ESF 10) that deals specifically with Oil and Hazardous Material Response, for which the Fairfax County Fire



PHOTO BY MIKE SALMON/GAZETTE

March, 2023

and Rescue Department (FCFRD) is the coordinating agency.

To further improve safety, the FCFRD's Hazardous Materials Response Team (HMRT) consistently conducts training specific to railway incidents. In coordination with our railway partners and the Northern Virginia Regional Intelligence Community, the team gathers information about the hazardous materials transported through our communities to develop effective and realistic emergency response plans. HMRT also plans and trains with regional partners for freight, passenger and rapid transit rail incidents. Additionally, the Regional Fire Chiefs Committee, working in cooperation with the rail carriers, created the Railroad

SEE RAILWAY SAFETY, PAGE 11

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Host Rev. Dr. Vernon C. Walton leads prayer during a Call to Action on the 60th anniversary of "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" at Vienna Baptist Church.



Willie King shakes hands with Del. Holly Seibold (D-35). Willie King (not related) helped transcribe Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" written on newspaper edges, paper napkins, toilet paper, and whatever scraps Dr. King could find in jail.

Calling Leaders to Action in Wake of Police Shooting

Ecumenical Service links 60th anniversary of MLK's "Letter From Birmingham Jail" with call to action about police use of force.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE GAZETTE

Influenced by the Feb. 22 shooting and killing of shoplifting suspect Timothy Johnson, 37, at Tysons Corner Center by Fairfax County Police officers and the increase in police use of force cases in the county, Faith Leaders United of Northern Virginia held "Call to Action: An Ecumenical and Interfaith Service" on April 16. It coincided with the 60th anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."

Multi-racial, multi-faith clergy teams invited legislators and candidates from all levels, community activists, and others to the First Baptist Church of Vienna program at 450 Orchard Street NW. Rev. Dr. Vernon C. Walton was the host pastor. The 17 speakers tied the anniversary commemoration of King's letter to their current ongoing fight for justice for Johnson and others shot and killed by Fairfax County Police.

Rev. Stephen Smith Cobbs, Trinity Presbyterian Church pastor in Herndon, and other faith leaders urged action. Cobbs said



Harold Sims (D), candidate for Fairfax County School Board in the Mount Vernon District, and Erika Yalowitz (D) candidate for Virginia State Senate, 37th District



Karen Campblin, immediate past president of Fairfax County NAACP

everyone should follow Reverend Dr. King's example and act. "Write our own letters to public officials (to) encourage them to take action to restore trust and accountability," he said.

The program suggested mailing a letter to the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, the Commonwealth's

Attorney, and local business owners and leaders. Reference <http://www.nvhcreston.org/664393-2/>.

Pastor Paul Sheppard of the First Baptist Church of Merrifield said waiting for justice through the legal system or the goodwill of white moderates would "only perpetuate the vicious cycle of oppression and inequality. ... [King's] letter is still relevant," Sheppard said.

Grand Jury Fails to Indict for Johnson's Death

Former FCPD Sgt. Wesley Shifflett won't face criminal charges, at least now.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE GAZETTE

A grand jury decided on Monday, April 17, not to indict a former Fairfax County Police Department officer. He fatally shot Timothy McCree Johnson, a 37-year-old unarmed Black man from Washington D.C., during an alleged shoplifting incident at Nordstrom Tysons Corner Center in McLean on the evening of Feb. 22. The merchandise: two pairs of sunglasses.

In a released statement Monday afternoon, April 17, Fairfax County Commonwealth's Attorney Steve Descano said, "Earlier this morning, I sat with Timothy Johnson's family and told them I expected an indictment to come today in the killing of their son, so I can only imagine their pain and shock when they received the news that the officer — who shot and killed their unarmed son — was not indicted." Descano did not proceed with his previously announced 12 p.m. press conference to provide an update on the investigation into Johnson's death, during which he would read a statement and take questions. It was delayed until shortly before 2 p.m., then cancelled.

According to VA Courts.gov, the grand jury's function is to determine whether there is probable cause to require the accused to stand trial. It is not to determine guilt or in-

nocence. Proceedings are kept in strict confidence.

"Since, by law, no prosecutors were permitted to be present in the room when the investigating officers made their presentations to the grand jury, I can't say for sure what information was conveyed to the grand jurors. In light of this outcome, I am evaluating all options on the path forward and continue to grieve Timothy's loss," Descano said.

During a press conference on March 23, FCPD Police Chief Kevin Davis said no firearm or other weapon was recovered from the scene. Davis said the officer had been served notice that day, "administratively separating" him from the Fairfax County Police Department. Davis clarified that is the equivalent of firing, and he did so because of the officer's "failure to live up to the expectations of our agency, in particular use of force policies." The fired officer was later identified as Sgt. Wesley Shifflett.

Shifflett, a white officer in the FCPD Tysons Urban Team, fatally shot Johnson during a nighttime foot pursuit in a wooded area near the mall, according to Shifflett's body-worn camera video released by FCPD. The chase ends with Shifflett saying, "Stop reaching. Stop Reaching. Don't move." It is followed by three pops heard "consistent with gunfire."

Johnson was shot in the chest. Johnson



SCREENSHOT VIA INSTAGRAM

Fairfax County and City of Fairfax Commonwealth's Attorney Steve Descano

says: "I'm not reaching for nothing. I have nothing. ... I'm shot, man. Hurry." Johnson was taken to a nearby hospital, where he was pronounced deceased.

THE ATTORNEY for the Johnson Family spoke harshly about the failure to indict.

"It is unprecedented that when a Commonwealth's Attorney requests an indictment and the Grand Jury doesn't return a True Bill. Two detectives from the Fairfax County Police Department gave testimony for the Commonwealth to return these indictments," said Carl Crews, the Johnson Family attorney. "They tanked the case and turned the Grand Jury away from returning an indictment. This is nothing more than a 'Blue Wall of Silence.' The Blue protecting

Statement from Michelle Leete, president, Fairfax County NAACP

"The failure of the grand jury to issue an indictment compounds the tragic loss of Timothy Johnson with grave injustice. This case appears to be another horrible example of how the criminal justice system fails to ensure police accountability, particularly for the needless and unjustifiable killing of unarmed civilians at the hands of police.

"Fairfax County NAACP continues to call for Commonwealth's Attorney Steve Descano to do everything within his power to make sure that justice is done — up to and including holding officers Shifflett and Sadler criminally responsible for Timothy's death. The Branch continues to call on Fairfax County Police Chief Kevin Davis to terminate Officer Sadler's employment. We also call on the police department to institute a foot pursuit policy and other reforms governing officer actions and misconduct."

the blue. No one should be above the law, even former police officers."

Chief Davis did not immediately respond to a request for comment before the Connection's deadline. Neither did Jeffrey McKay, chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors; nor Caleb Kerscher, attorney for Wesley Shifflett.

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.

MT. VERNON FARMERS MARKET TO RESUME APRIL 19

A mix of new and familiar vendors will be selling local, farm-fresh produce — including strawberries and asparagus — and more at the McCutcheon/Mt. Vernon Farmers Market when it opens on Wednesday, April 19. From 8 a.m. to noon every Wednes-

day (through December 20), 21 farmers and local food producers will sell fresh vegetables and fruits; meats; Chesapeake Bay seafood; breads and pastries; honey, jams and jellies; milk, cheese and eggs; herbs and plants; and more. The market is located at the Sherwood Hall Regional Library, 2501 Sherwood Hall Lane.

This year's vendors are:

- Arnest Seafood — crab cakes, scallops, shrimp, rockfish, oysters and more
- The Big Brine — Fermented foods, pickles and pickled vegetables
- The Fermented Pig- charcuterie and gourmet bacons

- Grace's Pastries - cakes, pastries and breads, with a Caribbean touch
- Great Harvest Bread - breads and pastries
- Honeycomb Heroes — Honey and beeswax-based products
- House of Empanadas — variety of empanadas
- King Mushrooms — variety of locally grown mushrooms
- Layla's Lebanese Restaurant — Lebanese hummus, eggplant dip, garlic sauce and more
- Linda Vista Farm - fruits and vegetables, specializing in Asian and Latin produce
- Misty Meadow Farm Creamery - milk, ice cream, cheese and eggs
- Ochoa Produce - vegetables, herbs and flowers

- Pasta Ilgatto — Fresh, handcrafted pasta and sauces
- PorkStork — Forest-raised heritage pork products, including bacon and sausages
- Salsa Las Glorias - fresh salsas, guacamole and chips
- Sharkawi Farm - herbs, spices, teas, plants and flowers
- Three Way Farms — vegetables, melons and herbs
- Traveling Shepherd Coffee Co. — variety of freshly roasted coffee
- Twin Springs Orchard - fruits, vegetables,

SEE BULLETIN, PAGE 15

STATIONARY ENGINEER APPRENTICESHIP



Applications for the IUOE Local 99 Apprenticeship Program will be accepted during the period of May 1—5, 2023, inclusive. Applications must be completed in person by the applicant at Engineer Center 9315 Largo Drive West, Upper Marlboro, MD 20774 from 9:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. \$35 application fee includes drug screen.

For additional information scan the QR Code.



Equal Opportunity M/F



On Friday, cars started streaming in at the 10 a.m. opening.



Radical Roots had a big supply of vegetable plants.



Radical Roots sold Camarosa strawberry plants.



Shoppers had many choices of plants and garden-related items.

Plants, Mushrooms, Art and Alpacas

The American Horticultural Society's Spring Garden Market.

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

Last Friday, April 14, cars were lined up waiting for the 10 a.m. gate to open at the spring garden market at River Farm, headquarters of the American Horticultural Society in Mount Vernon. With their passion for plants and their wallets at the ready, 3,000 shoppers exuded their garden love and for some, even “garden lust,” the title of a book by Christopher Woods at the AHS welcome tent.

The two-day event featured 37 vendors from as far away as Pawpaw, West Virginia and Keezletown, Virginia, who brought plants, seeds, seedlings, art, crafts, books and gardening accessories. From bluebells to basil, from peppers to poppies, from shiitakes to strawberries, the “plantophiles” meandered, browsed and searched for both common and rare finds from the plant world.

In the animal world, two male suri alpacas delighted all. David Headley brought Elliott and Milo from Tappahannock, Virginia, along with some alpaca products from Peru. Headley raises four alpacas and sells their fiber. These ungulates are generally docile, he patiently explained, but “a pregnant female can get fussy.” He added, “Alpacas have two sounds. Their alert call sounds like a goose screeching.”

Plants Galore

Radical Roots Community Farm's tables were bulging with organic herbs like basil and cilantro and heirloom tomato, strawberry and vegetable plants. These farmers come to the market every year from Virginia's Harrisonburg area.

Janet Davis, owner of Hill House Farm and Nursery, from Castleton, Virginia, had a brisk business selling native plants like oxeye sunflowers, mountain mint and Virginia bluebells. “It's how I make my living,” she said. She sells only native plants to help restore natural ecosystems. Her sign: “Native plants for native bees.” Jack and Diana Weil, who

Fungi Too

Even fungi had a prominent presence. First timers Sharon Biggs and Anthony Mur-



Anthony Murray explained how to grow shiitake mushrooms.



The lane was lined with 27 vendors.

live in Tauxemont, go to the market every spring especially in search of native plants that will support native insects, which are declining, studies show.

Nature by Design, another native plant vendor, has sold at the market for many years. Though managers had to close their Alexandria shop, they offer free delivery inside the Beltway in Virginia and in Alexandria zip codes, said Jared Berquist.

Denise Freeland, who lives in Wessynton, is grateful. She went to the AHS market “because the native plant vendors are awesome,” she said. She has transformed her Wessynton property from a yard smothered by invasive English ivy to native plants.

Acer Acres offered Virginia-grown Japanese maples. Bartlett Tree Experts, a sponsor, gave away free 24-inch, pin oak and sycamore seedlings. This was their first year. Sponsor McEneaney Realty representatives had a raffle and spinning wheel for prizes and offered heirloom seeds.

Fungi Too

Even fungi had a prominent presence. First timers Sharon Biggs and Anthony Mur-

ray came from Peasant's Parcel, their solar-powered, Pawpaw, West Virginia, farm and gave a tutorial on how to grow shiitake mushrooms. They had a waist-high stack of logs arranged box-style in front of their tent and Murray explained that they inject mycelium into holes drilled into the logs. This process propagates mushrooms in six months and can produce a “crop” in the spring and fall. If the weather is dry, minders may have to water the mushrooms, but generally, their growing technique is “sit and forget,” said Murray.

Garden-related arts, crafts and literature drew many shoppers. Bruce Ciske displayed several styles of his vases made in his Mount Vernon-area home studio, many for Ikebana, Japanese flower arranging.

First-timer Brianna Berkowitz from Virginia Beach dries and presses flowers into art pieces, like coasters, flower tiles and bouquets. She teaches her techniques at Alexandria's Made in Virginia shop.

Alexandria's Hooray for Books, staffed by Kathryn Howell-Dalton, sold adult and children's gardening books and puzzles for their first time at the market.

Marylander George Frazier spread out colorful, hand-woven, fair trade baskets from Ghana. Some of the proceeds from his sales go to the basket weavers, to pay for books and health care, he commented.

Advice and Support

The Fairfax County Master Gardeners fielded questions like, “Can we plant tomatoes now?” At summer events, they typically get questions about weeds and insects, said Molly Gray. They discourage pesticide use. “You should know what the enemy is before dousing it with a chemical,” advised Gray.

Greg Meyer and Amelia Wilt staffed Northern Virginia Conservation Trust's table. “We helped save River Farm,” said Wilt. In late 2020, the property was listed for sale, but an outpouring of opposition ultimately kept it as the AHS headquarters.

Contented Customers

Dorothy Keogh, Hollin Hall resident, comes every year because River Farm is “a beautiful place,” she remarked as she befriended the alpacas. She likes to buy pineapple sage, specialty tomato plants, lavender

PHOTOS BY GLENDA BOOTH



Brianna Berkowitz sold her dried flower art.



Kathryn Howell-Dalton from Hooray for Books offered plant and gardening books for all ages.



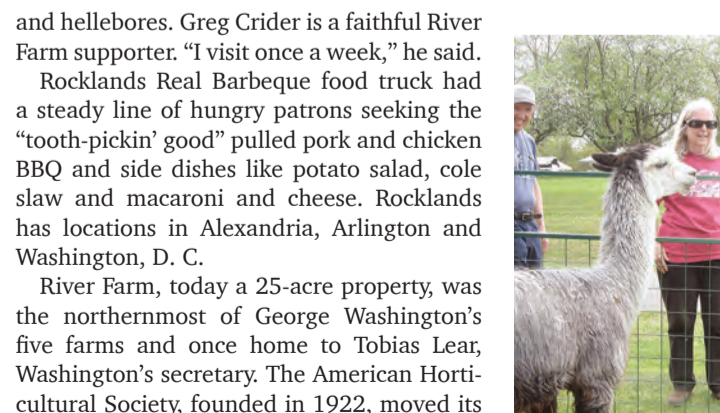
Rocklands BBQ had a lively business.



Many of River Farm's 16,000 tulips brightened the landscape.



Acer Acres sold Virginia-grown Japanese maple trees.



Two alpacas were popular with all, Elliott (gray) and Milo (black).



Bruce Ciske, a Mount Vernon potter, sold his vases.

OPINION

Should FCPS Get So Much Money?

Everyone is reeling from the increase in property tax assessments. What many don't realize is that 52% of the Fairfax County budget goes to schools. I am a product of Maryland public schools and my kids attended FCPS all grades. I have always been a staunch supporter of public schools but that doesn't mean taxpayers shouldn't be asking how the money is being spent. Consider,

❖ FCPS has a \$3.4 billion budget. Twenty years ago, the FCPS budget was \$1.55 billion. The bud-

get has increased on average \$1 million per year or 6% year over year.

❖ The FCPS budget has increased 3x the rate of enrollment since 2000 despite recent declines in enrollment.

❖ FCPS asked for a 7% increase this year taking the budget to \$3.5 billion despite an enrollment drop of 11,000 students, the largest drop of any county in Virginia.

❖ Despite increases in spending, the pass rate of FCPS SOL scores have dropped 16% since 2018.

❖ SOL pass rates for minority students have decreased over 20% between 2008 and 2018 exacerbating the achievement gap.

❖ Between 2018 and 2022, the average FCPS SAT score dropped 27 points, while Virginia SAT scores increased 14 points. Compared to our neighbors, Prince William scores fell only 7 points, Loudoun dropped by 6 points, and Montgomery County, Md. scores increased 58 points. FCPS average SAT scores are at their lowest level since 1989-1993.

The taxpayers in Fairfax County should question the impact of FCPS spending on student outcomes. Clearly increased spending in our schools has not resulted in better outcomes and higher student achievement.

This increased spending in our school system cannot go unchecked at the expense of its citizens being taxed out of the area and unaffordable for future generations.

Kim Putens
Alexandria 22308

Speaking Out Against zMod's Data Centers By Right

To the Editor:

The Virginia Supreme Court ruled on March 23 that the new Fairfax County Zoning Ordinance (zMOD) was illegal. But rather than allow the public time to digest and comment on the 691-page document, the Planning Commission will hold a public hearing on it, May 3 at 7:30 p.m., and the Board of Supervisors, May 9 at 4:30 p.m. This rush for reapproval leaves residents little time to prepare their responses and objections, or even to realize that zMOD will allow construction of data centers, by right, close to residential neighborhoods.

Of the nearly 400 emails received during the pandemic regarding zMOD, many complained of the dizzying number of changes to consider, the minimal time for discussions and that it was being rushed through during a pandemic. But the do-over is being rushed, too.

Questionable zMOD issues include: Allowing 12 square feet of signage in residential front yards advertising Home-Based Businesses (HBBs – effectively changing a residential district to a commercial district); eliminating the public hearing process that allows neighbors to weigh in on the building of Accessory Living Units, Accessory Structures, HBBs; and more.

However, the most problematic is zMOD's by-right construction of data centers, which the public has never been separately made aware of. Prior to zMOD, data centers were only allowed in the "planned" (P) districts, which are large tracts of land developed for a specialized purpose. It is a gross

misinterpretation by the Supervisors to state that data centers were allowed anywhere a telecommunication facility was referenced.

zMOD permits data centers in the C-3, C-4, I-2 through I-6, PRC, PDC, and PTC Districts (more than Loudoun). Check how close these districts are to your home via <https://fairfaxcountygis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=e64b68aa834d-46b0ad0e6cd4d831f843>.

I-3 and I-5 districts are adjacent to, or within several hundred yards of parkland and residential neighborhoods. For example, an enormous 100-foot tall, 402,000-square-foot data center (ref: RZ 2022-SU-00019, SE 2022-SU-00038) is being considered adjacent to the Cub Run Stream Valley Park and neighboring Pleasant Valley community.

In zMOD, the I-3 district's purpose is "to provide areas for scientific research, development and training, offices, manufacture and assembly of products, and related supply activities. This district is designed to accommodate a broad spectrum of clean industries operating under high performance standards." A clean industry uses eco-friendly practices to minimize negative environmental impacts while conserving energy and natural resources.

Data centers have an enormous energy usage: the DEQ even considered a variance to allow data-center generators to exceed EPA air-pollution levels in Loudoun County because they cannot get enough supply from the electrical grid. Data centers also consume an

enormous amount of water. Excessive water and electrical usage and the ability to pollute the air, do not constitute a "clean industry" and therefore should not be permitted by-right in I-3.

zMOD states uses allowed in the I-5 district "must minimize noise, smoke, glare, and other environmental pollutants on the uses within the district and on neighboring areas." Data centers are noisy, contradicting I-5's purpose "to minimize the impact of noise."

The 24/7 hum from roof-top HVACs is having detrimental effects on many communities. Residents near an 8-story CyrusOne data center in Chicago sued because of the incessant noise; Northern Virginia residents have been protesting the effects of data-center noise; and a Business Insider article states, "Physiological effects of industrial noise pollution are well-documented to include hearing loss, elevated stress hormones like cortisol, hypertension, and insomnia."

Article 4, section 6A for data centers states "In all districts except I-4, I-5, and I-6, all equipment necessary for cooling, ventilating, or otherwise operating the facility must be contained within an enclosed building where the use is located. This includes emergency power generators and other emer-

gency power supply equipment," implying that data centers can have outdoor generators for I-5 districts – again contradicting "to minimize the impact of noise."

Data centers are largely self-regulating; no federal agency governs the siting and operation of these facilities. It's up to us to understand the issues and know where NOT to allow data centers that will be detrimental to the surrounding communities.

The Virginia Supreme Court has given us an opportunity to get zMOD right. We know more about data centers than we did three years ago, so it's important to remove the by-right construction of data centers from zMOD and handle data centers as a separate issue.

Show the county that you care. Email your concerns to the Planning Commission Plancom@fairfaxcounty.gov by May 1, subject "zMOD - No to by-right data centers," and to clerktothebos@fairfaxcounty.gov requesting it be submitted to all the supervisors by May 7. Sign up to speak, or attend one of the hearings at the Fairfax County Government Center auditorium, 12000 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax.

Cynthia Shang
Chantilly

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NEWS DEPARTMENT:
gazette@connectionnewspapers.com

Mary Kimm
Editor and Publisher
mkimm@connectionnewspapers.com

Jeanne Theismann
jtheismann@connectionnewspapers.com
[@TheismannMedia](https://www.instagram.com/TheismannMedia)

Mercia Hobson
Staff Reporter
mhobson@connectionnewspapers.com

Mike Salmon
Contributing Writer
msalmon@connectionnewspapers.com

Ken Moore, Glenda Booth
Contributing Writers

ADVERTISING:
For advertising information
sales@connectionnewspapers.com
703-778-9431

Debbie Funk
Display Advertising/National Sales
703-778-9444
debfunk@connectionnewspapers.com

Helen Walutes
Display Advertising, 703-778-9410
hwalutes@connectionnewspapers.com

David Griffin
Marketing Assistant
703-778-9431
dgriffin@connectionnewspapers.com

Classified & Employment
Advertising
703-778-9431

Publisher
Jerry Vernon
703-549-0004
jvernon@connectionnewspapers.com

Editor & Publisher
Mary Kimm
mkimm@connectionnewspapers.com
[@MaryKimm](https://www.instagram.com/MaryKimm)

Art/Design:
Laurence Foong
Production Manager:
Geovani Flores

CIRCULATION
Circulation Manager:
Ann Oliver
circulation@connectionnewspapers.com

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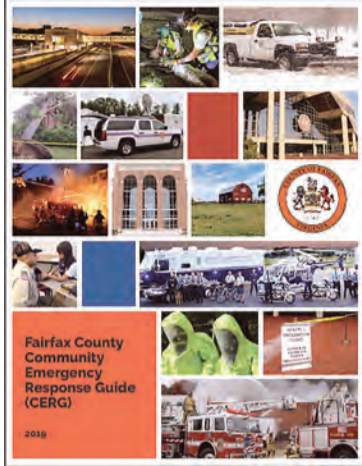
Railway Safety

FROM PAGE 5

Emergency Response Manual. This manual ensures all fire and rescue departments, as well as private corporations, train and respond to incidents the same way.

DEMS also has a tool for residents to use. The Fairfax County Community Emergency Response Guide adapts the EOP for use by residents and provides the tools you need to become more prepared. It can help you create a family emergency plan, a business preparedness plan, a neighborhood preparedness plan and an emergency supply kit. It also includes a wealth of information on hazards and resources to help you be more prepared.

In Fairfax County, we are committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of our residents. I hope this information and these materials guide you and your family in your emergency preparedness and provides comfort that the County has plans in place for all emergencies. As always, I thank you for the



opportunity to serve you.

The full Emergency Operations Plan can be found here: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/emergencymanagement/sites/emergencymanagement/files/Assets/documents/EOP%202019%20Final.pdf>.

The full Community Emergency Response Guide can be found here: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/emergencymanagement/sites/emergencymanagement/files/assets/cerg%20final%20jan%2030%20final.pdf>.

The hazardous materials page can be found here: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/emergency/sites/emergency/files/assets/documents/cerghazardannexpages/hazmat%20pd>.

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Calling Leaders to Action in Wake of Police Shooting

FROM PAGE 6

As a teen, Rev. Scott Ramsey, pastor at Lewinsville Presbyterian Church in McLean, had read King's letter. He learned that "the Negroes great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is ... the white moderate ... (who) is more devoted to order than to justice."

Ramsey said the timetable for another man's freedom cannot be set "until a more convenient season." Ramsey said King wrote that waiting for change is no longer an option. "We do not want our community to elevate consumer goods over human lives. So, we are here together to think together as a community about loss prevention policies in our businesses. We are here to call for proper accountability and training for our police officers. We're here to call for equipping our police officers, whom we value and honor, to be ready to de-escalate situations. We are here to think together about improving public safety so that lives serve the common good of all of us. Those of us who aren't white, we need to be involved in this now."

Karen Campblin, third vice president and immediate past president of the Fairfax County NAACP, attended for Michelle Lee, president. Campblin said she realized the community would still feel King's sentiment and awareness even if his letter were dated today. Disparities persist despite gains. Campblin said they want more than words from the Board of Supervisors, Commonwealth's Attorney, and police chief, "action-

able solutions and definitive reassurances that this will never happen again."

"Moving forward," Campblin said, they are asking for an end to "excessive use of force policies that will hold our police officers accountable, instituting comprehensive policies and procedures... establishing a foot pursuit policy ... and of course, community-based alternatives that aid in mental health and substance abuse crisis responses."

Assembled faith leaders seek to raise awareness about the shooting death of Timothy Johnson by the Fairfax County Police Department and broader concerns about police use of force in Fairfax County.

According to Campblin, these changes would fail if Black lives were undervalued. Leaders should enforce these new rules. They must also change the culture, enforce fairness and equality, and admonish efforts to demonize Black, brown, indigenous, and low-income communities. "The urgency now," Campblin said.

Rev. Aaron Fulp-Eickstaedt, a pastor at Immanuel Presbyterian Church in McLean, said he received a call that no pastor ever wants to hear. One of his church members, a young trans man name Aaron Lynch "had been killed by Fairfax County Police." The killing took

place after three officers went to his home for the second time that evening, a mental health call. According to Fulp-Eickstaedt, Lynch "was experiencing a psychotic break, and came towards officers brandishing a tribal mask and a wine bottle, and Aaron, who may be weighed 140 pounds soaking wet, was first tased twice and then shot three times."

"Spending time with his grieving mom and dad and then conducting his memorial

service was heart-wrenching. With Aaron's death, even more painful for all of us at Immanuel Presbyterian Church was that it didn't have to happen. None of these shootings have to happen," Fulp-Eickstaedt said.

Fulp-Eickstaedt told of a different incident wherein they sent a letter to the Fairfax County chief of police about a successful crisis intervention by a rookie officer who helped during a mental health call during their hypothermia shelter week. "She helped de-escalate a charged situation like an expert, and she was only a rookie," he said. "We learned that it was in large part because she had re-

ceived Crisis Intervention Training (CIT)." According to Fulp-Eickstaedt, part of that letter to the county's chief of police "advocated for him to deploy additional funding and the FCPD budget to make sure that every officer on the force was trained in CIT so that they felt better equipped in such situations... But the letter our board received back from the chief was that there were 1000 officers on the force who had received crisis intervention training, and they didn't need any more of them to be trained," Fulp-Eickstaedt said. "One untrained officer is one too many."

Rev. Dr. Vernon C. Walton, the pastor of First Baptist Church of Vienna, closed the program asking for Fairfax County's elected officials to stand. "I want to acknowledge Karen Keys-Gamarra (at-large member of the Fairfax County School Board) I did see as we were coming into the sanctuary," Walton said. Keys-Gamarra and Del. Holly Seibold were the only elected officials who attended, although several candidates for office did as well.

"I thought it important for you to see who is present because seeing and acknowledging those that are present, you're also able to see those that are not present," Walton said.

According to Walton, every Fairfax County Supervisor received an invitation. Officials who people elect hold positions to represent their constituents. "You cannot represent us if you don't hear from us," Walton said. "This is not the end; this is just the beginning."

Inside Look at FCPD Civil Disturbance Unit

FROM PAGE 4

without incident. We don't want to make arrests; we want to encourage people to protest peacefully."

He noted that, last fall, 90 percent of the deployments were for protests outside the homes of the three Supreme Court justices who live in this county. "We went there every Thursday, Friday and Saturday, after the Roe vs. Wade decision came out," he explained.

However, the violent Jan. 6 insurrection was another matter, entirely. "Our folks were in gas masks for five hours that day, as well as helmets, masks, body armor and shields," said Gehr. "The Fairfax County CDU pushed people back after the curfew, but the Capitol Police and Metro Police Dept. did most of the heavy lifting. Then came the state and local police, including FCPD."

Normally, he said, 30-50 CDU members are deployed at a time for a large-scale event in, for example, Washington, D.C., or Baltimore, Md. But to a Supreme Court justice's house, just 10-12 officers are needed. The Civil Disturbance Unit's many deployments have also included responding to protests outside the NRA building, as well as to the District for presidential inaugurations and State of the Union addresses.

After hearing Gehr's presentation, residents attending were able to ask questions. One wanted to know how the CDU learns about an incident in advance. "We



PHOTO COURTESY OF FCPD

Civil Disturbance Unit officers doing live training to subdue a "violent protester."

have full-time detectives and analysts working on intelligence, and this information is relayed to the CDU commander," replied Capt. Rachel Levy, commander of the Sully District Station.

Another man asked, if a civil disturbance broke out in Centreville, who'd respond and who'd be in charge of quelling it. "Should there be an unlawful assembly in the county, we'd be called to go there with our gear," said Gehr.

"The local police officers would respond, as would the CDU," added Levy. "When the CDU experts came in, we'd still be there, but they'd be the ones leading the charge."

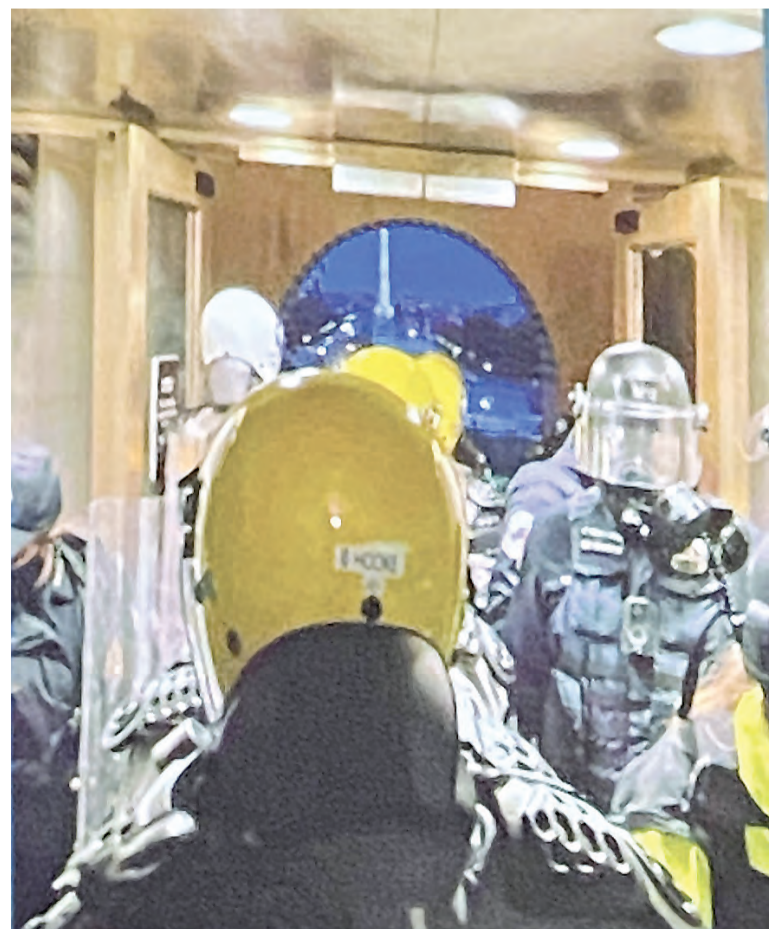


PHOTO COURTESY OF FCPD

FCPD's Civil Disturbance Unit officers (in face shields) inside the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

CALENDAR

ALEXANDRIA EARTH DAY

April 2023, various events, Virtual and In-Person. Help commemorate the 53rd anniversary of Earth Day with a month full of environmentally focused events, activities, and online initiatives that center on the Eco-City Vision in which Alexandria's residents, businesses, and City government participate in a vibrant community that is always mindful of the needs and lifestyle of the generations to come. We all need to do our part and what better way than through fun, educational, and engaging opportunities. For more information go to: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/EarthDay>

NOW THRU APRIL 30

Matthew McLaughlin Art Exhibit. At the Athenaeum, Alexandria. Reception: Sunday, March 26, 4 - 6 p.m.; Artist Talk: Sunday, April 30, 2 - 3. Matthew McLaughlin's work explores how people define space in relationship to themselves on multiple levels, through personal and public forums, by bringing together those themes via mixed-media works from multiple series. The exhibition covers three distinct series, Proxemic Boundaries, Plotting Truths, and Reflective Cartography.

NOW THRU APRIL 29

"A Tale of Two Studios." Del Ray Artisans partners with Art Enables Gallery & Studio in an open-themed showcase of the inspiring art of these two community organizations to convey an essential story about creative expression and art-making. At Del Ray Artisans, 2704 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria VA. Opening Reception: Friday, April 7 from 7-9 p.m. Open Thursdays 12-6 p.m., Fridays 12-9 p.m., Saturdays 12-6 p.m., and Sundays 12-6 p.m. (closed April 30). DelRayArtisans.org/exhibits

GARDENING TIPS AT GREEN SPRING GARDENS

Garden Talk - Small-Space Veggie Gardening, At 4603 Green Spring Road in Alexandria.

Saturday, April 22, from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Don't have a large yard? With a little creativity, even the smallest patio, deck or townhouse yard can be turned into a successful vegetable garden! Let Extension Master Gardener docents show you how to grow vegetables in a small space. Whatever your space constraints, you too can grow delicious and nutritious fruits and vegetables! Enrollment is \$12 per person.

Green Spring Gardens is located at 4603 Green Spring Road in Alexandria. For more information on these and other gardening program offerings, call 703-642-5173.

FRIDAY/APRIL 21

"Pitch Me" Challenge Event. The Drew Wynne Foundation presents its Pitch Me Challenge event scheduled to take place at Building Momentum in Alexandria. The event is designed to support entrepreneurs and provide them with the opportunity to showcase their innovative ideas and win funding for their ventures. The Pitch Me Challenge is a competition-style event that invites entrepreneurs to pitch their business ideas to a panel of experienced judges. Participants will have the chance to present their ideas in a three-minute pitch, followed by a five-minute Q&A session with the judges. The Pitch Me Challenge event is free to attend, but registration is required. To register, visit <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/drew-wynne-pitch-me-challenge-tickets-568227663237>

ute Q&A session with the judges. The Pitch Me Challenge event is free to attend, but registration is required. To register, visit <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/drew-wynne-pitch-me-challenge-tickets-568227663237>

FRIDAY/APRIL 21

Book Release: Reclamation by C. Alexandria-Bernard Thomas. At the Athenaeum, Alexandria. Join in the book release of Reclamation. by C. Alexandria-Bernard Thomas, a Black Non-Binary, award-winning poet, teaching artist, an advocate for Child Abuse Prevention, the LGBTQIA community, and Mental Health Awareness. Their forthcoming collection of poems, titled Reclamation., is a poetic journey through C. Alexandria-Bernard Thomas' process of re-emergence and re-acceptance of self. It is their rebirth and ownership of all that has sought to destroy them.

SATURDAY/APRIL 22

Garden Talk - Small-Space Veggie Gardening. 10:30-11:30 a.m. At Green Spring Gardens, Alexandria. (Adults) Don't have a large yard? With a little creativity, even the smallest patio, deck or townhouse yard can be turned into a successful vegetable garden! Let Extension Master Gardeners show you how to grow vegetables in a small space. Whatever your space constraints, you too can grow delicious and nutritious fruits and vegetables! \$12 per person. Register online at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/parktakes> or call Green Spring Gardens at 703-642-5173. Code 11B.N6ER.

Farmers Markets Opening Around the County

The Fairfax County Park Authority hosts 10 markets at locations throughout Fairfax County, where residents can find a variety of fresh and locally grown produce, delicious baked goods, prepared foods and family-friendly market activities, including live musical performances.

The 2023 season begins April 19 with the McCutcheon/Mount Vernon market. Check out our full market schedule for the latest times and locations.

WEDNESDAYS

McCutcheon/Mount Vernon
<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/farmersmarkets/mccutcheon-mount-vernion>
April 19 to Dec. 20, from 8 a.m. to noon
Sherwood Library, 2501 Sherwood Hall Lane

Oak Marr

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/farmersmarkets/oak-marr>
May 3 to Nov. 8, from 8 a.m. to noon
Oak Marr Recreation Center, 3200 Jermantown Road

Wakefield

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/farmersmarkets/wakefield>
May 3 to Oct. 25, from 2 to 6 p.m.
Wakefield Park, 8100 Braddock Road

THURSDAYS

Annandale
<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/farmersmarkets/annandale>
May 4 to Nov. 2, from 8 a.m. to noon
Mason District Park, 6621 Columbia Pike

Herndon

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/farmersmarkets/herndon>
May 4 to Nov. 9, from 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
Old Town Herndon, 700 Block of Lynn St., by the Red Caboose

FRIDAYS

McLean
<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/farmersmarkets/mclean>
May 5 to Nov. 17, from 8 a.m. to noon
Lewinsville Park, 1659 Chain Bridge Road

Kingstowne

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/farmersmarkets/kingstowne>
May 5 to Oct. 27, from 3 to 7 p.m.
In the Giant parking lot, 5870 Kingstowne Towne Center

SATURDAYS

Burke
<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/farmersmarkets/burke>
April 22 to Dec. 16, from 8 a.m. to noon
VRE parking Lot, 5671 Roberts Parkway

Reston

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/farmersmarkets/reston>
April 30 to Dec. 3, from 8 a.m. to noon
Lake Anne Village Center, 1609-A Washington Plaza

SUNDAYS

Lorton
<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/farmersmarkets/lorton>
May 7 to Nov. 19, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
VRE parking lot, 8990 Lorton Station Blvd.

For a complete list of market times and locations, visit <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/farmersmarkets>. For questions, contact the Community Horticulture Office at 702-642-0128.



The 39th Annual PNC Parkway Classic takes place Sunday, April 23, 2023 in Alexandria.

SATURDAY/APRIL 22

5th Annual Environment Expo. 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. At Fort Hunt Park, 8999 Fort Hunt Rd. Come out for live music, demonstrations, workshops, nature walks, giveaways and more!

SUNDAY/APRIL 23

39th Annual PNC Parkway Classic. Mount Vernon Estate through Old Town Alexandria. Alexan-

dria's hometown destination race returns this Spring when the 39th PNC Parkway Classic hits the pavement on Sunday, April 23, 2023. The race, organized by local running retailer Pacers Running, attracts thousands of runners and spectators who want to experience the George Washington Memorial Parkway from a unique perspective. The race features both a 5K, and a 10-mile race offering

starting at 8:00 a.m. as well as a 600-meter Kids Dash race for the little runners kicking off at 10:30 a.m. The Classic 5k Course will start and finish at Oronoco Bay Park. The 10-mile race will start at Mt. Vernon Estate with the course taking runners up the George Washington Memorial Parkway and ending at Oronoco Bay Park. Visit the website: www.parkway-classic.com.

SUNDAY/APRIL 23

Del Ray Garden Fest. Noon to 4 p.m. At Bean Creative Field, 2207 Mt Vernon Ave, Alexandria. VCE Master Gardeners will be on hand to provide all the information you need to have a healthy garden this year—how to test your soil, what to plant, and how to improve your vegetable harvest. Fun, food and activities for all! For more information go to <https://www.visitdelray.com/>

WEDNESDAY/APRIL 26

Chamber XCHANGE. 6-8 p.m. At Founders Hall, 106 N. Lee Street, Alexandria. Powered by The Chamber ALX. April presenters: Julie Chapman, Founder and Chair ALX Dog Walk; Cheyanne Dwyer, Chief Strategy Officer of Building Momentum; and Brad Halsey, CEO and Co-Founder of Building Momentum. For more information on the program, reach out to us at Lpatish@thechamberalx.com

THURSDAY/APRIL 27

Poem in Your Pocket. 6:30 p.m. At the Athenaeum, Alexandria. City of Alexandria Poet Laureate, Zeina Azzam, will lead the Poem in Your Pocket Celebration at the Athenaeum. The formal program begins at 7 p.m. She will be joined by winning poets of the 2023 DASHing Words in Motion program, who will have their poems displayed inside the DASH buses and trolleys in April and May. Limited seating will be available, so reservations are required. To make a reservation email arts@alexandriava.gov.

SEE CALENDAR, PAGE 14

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CALENDAR

FROM PAGE 13

SATURDAY/APRIL 29

Alexandria African American Family Reunion. The Alexandria Public Library is having their very first "Alexandria African American Family Reunion" on April 29, 2023. The library wants you to share your family photos. They will have their scanning machines ready to make copies of your pictures. If you would like your pictures scanned prior to the event, visit the blog at - <http://www.theotheralexandria.com> and while there, read the article on "The Importance of Photos." For additional information on the Reunion, click on this link - <https://mailchi.mp/alexlibraryva/newsletter-1108914?e=117c38e-cbf>

SATURDAY/APRIL 29

Healthy Kids Day. 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. At YMCA Alexandria, 420 East Monroe Ave., Alexandria. This free, annual event features all sorts of family-friendly activities to encourage healthy kids, healthy families, and a healthy start to the summer season. Meet firefighters and check out a fire truck, get your face painted, and create something new in our STEAM Maker Space. Enjoy Family Zumba, Family Swim (1-3 p.m.), and a Doggie Parade (12:30-1:00 p.m.). Grab a piece of fresh fruit, courtesy of the American Heart Association, and get up-to-date on important vaccines provided by Giant Pharmacy. Register here: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/healthy-kids-day-at-ymca-alexandria-tickets-609846716947>

SATURDAY/APRIL 29

Native Plant Sale. 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. At 1701 N. Quaker Lane parking lot, Alexandria. Largest native plant sale in DC Metro Area hosts 10 vendors from VA, MD, PA, and DC selling native perennials, shrubs, and trees for sun or shade. This event is free. Call 571-232-0375 or www.NorthernAlexandriaNative-PlantSale.org.

APRIL 29-30

"Cinderella Spring Ballet." At George Washington Masonic National Memorial, Alexandria. Presented by the Metropolitan School of the Arts. More than 40 Metropolitan School of the Arts students will perform Cinderella, including: Justin Roach, who performs as Prince Charming. Roach, grade 12, was accepted into the Syracuse University Musical Theater Dance program in New York with a full tuition scholarship; and Sara Yoon, grade 12, has been at MSA since age 3. Yoon completed her Royal Academy of Dance examinations through the highest level, receiving a high distinction. Dates: On Sat., April 29 at 12 PM and 5 PM, and Sun., April 30 at 12 PM and 5 PM. Tickets are ranging from \$22 to \$25 per person. Go to www.metropolitanarts.org for more information and tickets, or click go to Cinderella tickets.

MAY 5-27

The "Prints in May@DRA: Exploring the Possibilities" exhibit. At Del Ray Artisans gallery features traditional printmaking techniques such as reliefs, intaglios, mono-prints and handmade prints with mixed media, along with artworks

SEE CALENDAR, PAGE 15

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Screenshots taken from two videos of the men who police say parked Brenda Ochoa Guerrero's vehicle.

Woman Likely Died from Gunshot

An autopsy has determined a woman found deceased in her car earlier this week suffered from an apparent gunshot wound to her upper body.

At 10:45 am on April 13, community member saw an unconscious woman in a vehicle in the parking lot of Mount Vernon Hospital located at 8033 Holland Road. Officers and fire and rescue personnel found Brenda Ochoa Guerrero, 33, of Alexandria in the passenger seat of her vehicle. She was declared deceased at the scene. Ochoa Guerrero had apparent trauma to the upper body, but no immediate cause of death could be discerned.

Ochoa Guerrero was taken to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner to conduct an autopsy to determine exact cause and manner of death. Preliminarily, the Medical Examiner discovered that the deceased had suffered an apparent gunshot wound to the upper body.

Through detectives' investigation and review of surveillance footage, they saw two men park Ochoa's vehicle at 1:11 a.m. then leave the area. The men were then picked up by another SUV and left the area.

If you have any information about this incident or Ochoa Guerrero, please call 703-246-7800, option 2.

CALENDAR

FROM PAGE 14

created using computer graphics programs and other objects enhanced with block prints or imprints. View at Del Ray Artisans Gallery, 2704 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria. Open Thursdays 12-6 p.m., Fridays 12-9 p.m., Saturdays and Sundays 12-6 p.m. (Closed May 28). Details: DelRayArtisans.org/exhibits

THE BIRCHMERE

At 3701 Mount Vernon Ave., Alexandria. All shows are at 7:30 p.m., unless otherwise noted. Tickets available at Ticketmaster.com.

BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 7

cheese and more
Valentine's Bakery & Meats - meats and baked goods
WeGrow - Microgreens.
All of the items sold at the market are grown or produced by the vendors and come from within a radius of 125 miles. The McCutcheon/Mt. Vernon market is one of 10 farmers markets run by the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA); for more information, visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/farmersmarkets.

FAMILIES SOUGHT TO HOST INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Families and individuals from the Washington, D.C.-metro region are being sought to become hosts for international students for 12 weeks, a semester, or an academic year. Exchange students represent nearly 80 countries and cultures, including Kenya, Ukraine, Egypt, Turkey, Italy, Germany, Chile, Thailand and more.

AFS-USA, a leader in international high school student exchange for 75 years, is focused on providing opportunities for intercultural

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APRIL

Wed. 19: Graham Nash – Sixty Years of Songs & Stories \$99.50
Thu. 20: Langhorne Slim & John Craigie \$39.50
Mon. 24: Steve Morse Band \$65.00
Wed. 26: Suzanne Vega – An Intimate Evening of Songs and Stories \$55.00
Fri. 28: Ohio Players \$69.50
Sat. 29: Eaglemania – The World's Greatest Tribute to the Eagles \$45.00
Sun. 30: Herman's Hermits starring Peter Noone \$55.00

exchange that can help lead to a more just and peaceful world.
Those interested in hosting an AFS Exchange Student are encouraged to contact 1-800-AFS-INFO or visit www.afsusa.org for more information. You can also get involved as an AFS-USA Volunteer. Visit www.afsusa.org/volunteer to get started or learn more about opportunities to make a difference.

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.

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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.

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 of 2020. Some beloved advertisers have stayed the course supporting us 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.

Please, help save these historical papers. 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 or community news includes the Alexandria Gazette Packet, Mount Vernon Gazette and all Connection Newspapers in the metropolitan region.

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.

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The Dog's Honest Truth



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Since we'll be out of town for a few days – and can't take our new puppy Burton with us, arrangements for his away-from-home accommodations have been made. For the first time in over five months, dog and owner will be separated. I am not looking forward to it. Burton will be spending the next two days and one night staying with fellow dog owners, Jen and Murph. Rather than subject Burton to the stress of being caged at his veterinarian's kennel, he'll be overnighing instead in Huntington, Maryland in a big single-family house. He'll have run of that house and when he needs to go outside, he'll have a large fenced-in yard to explore and even better, he'll have another dog, Cooper, to occupy him. Besides, he's not quite old enough, and/or vaccinated completely yet to risk exposing him to a kennel environment where a miscellaneous disease or a virus might exist. I know Burton will be in excellent, loving hands, but that's not my problem. My problem is me and the logistics of the drop-off. Because of schedules and availability, we'll still be at home without Burton for nearly a day before we leave.

As I write this in real time, I'm still at home – without Burton, and I miss him terribly. A dog is such a full-time responsibility that not having him around is extremely noticeable. I feel like I'm not doing something I should be doing with him: walking, playing, petting, wrestling, ball-throwing, stick-fetching, feeding, treating, et cetera. Moreover, until we leave later today, for the time that I'm being dogless, I am lonely and bored, even though there are still four cats and one wife in the house. In addition, not having any dog-centric responsibilities for the next few days is triggering some other feelings that subconsciously I've buried (having been so preoccupied with Burton): my brother, Richard's surprising (but not shocking) death on Dec. 3rd.

On Dec. 3rd, Burton was four months old and not yet housebroken. As such, me and my wife, Dina have been taking him out constantly, especially since he's a puppy, throughout the day and overnight as well, trying to reinforce certain dos and don'ts. Also, it seemed like every week, one of us was taking him to the vet for one puppy shot or another: distemper, DHPP, rabies, para influenza. It's not overwhelming or anything as we're familiar with the drill (requirements). Nonetheless, it's easy to get preoccupied. Then (not suddenly), we have no dog anything for two-plus days, one day of which was half at home, now.

Left to my own devices, with no distractions (not that Burton is a distraction, but you know what I mean, right?), I began to feel my brother's death more substantially again. Not that I hadn't learned to live with it, but I had found a place for it, I thought. It wasn't top of mind. It was middle of mind. And it seemed to be in a good place. After I dropped Burton off and came home – with no dog responsibilities, Richard's death became top-of-mind, sort of unexpectedly. Here I thought I was coping and assimilating his loss into a new routine. The only routine I was assimilating was life with a puppy. With Burton away for the weekend, I've had no distraction. And it has become painfully obvious that my brother's death is still weighing on me. Once again, the loss felt palpable. Almost as if I was experiencing it for a second time. I hadn't assimilated anything after all. I was too busy with the dog to realize it. Now, I realize it. My brother is dead. And I'm extremely sad.

At least my brother got to meet Burton once (his nephew as he called him) on his birthday in late October. Richard was doing so well. I never imagined (anticipated is probably a better description) that that would be the last birthday and the second to last time I would see my brother alive. And the fact that Burton was involved with Richard, even for a little bit, gives me some comfort. It created a connection of sorts between them that helps me to smile about an otherwise horrible situation. I can recall how happy Richard was that night when we brought Burton, kennel, and all, into the house. We positioned Burton's kennel on the floor in the dining room right next to Richard so they could be physically close. Dogs have a wonderful capacity to spread joy wherever they go. And this evening was no exception. As minimal as their interaction was, nonetheless, it was a happy memory I have and will continue to have of my brother. And I need as many of them as possible. And thanks to Burton, I have an extra-special one. One for which I am forever grateful.

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



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