

Mount Vernon Gazette

MOUNT VERNON'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER • A CONNECTION NEWSPAPER

DECEMBER 7, 2023



Col. Paris Davis received the Medal of Honor in March of 2023. The Virginia Veterans Care Center in Roanoke will be renamed in honor of Davis and Capt. Eugene "Red" McDaniel.



Capt. Eugene "Red" McDaniel, a Living Legend of Alexandria, was brutally tortured as a POW during the Vietnam War. The Virginia Veterans Care Center in Roanoke will be renamed in honor of McDaniel and Col. Paris Davis.



Col. Paris Davis, Capt. Eugene "Red" McDaniel and Navy veteran Mike McDaniel at a reception honoring Davis in June 2023. The Virginia Veterans Care Center in Roanoke will be renamed in honor of Davis and McDaniel.

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED

Youngkin to Honor Local Heroes

Virginia Veterans Care Center to be renamed for Davis and McDaniel.

BY JEANNE THEISMANN
GAZETTE PACKET

Two of Alexandria's most decorated Vietnam veterans will be honored by the Virginia Department of Veterans Services as Gov. Glenn Youngkin renames the Virginia Veterans Care Center in Roanoke

in honor of Army Col. Paris Davis and Navy Capt. Eugene "Red" McDaniel.

A special renaming ceremony will be held at the Virginia Veterans Care Center Dec. 12 at 11 a.m.

"Governor Youngkin made a surprise call to my dad letting him know," said McDaniel's son Michael. "I knew about the call and

my job was to make sure my dad was at home and near the phone. When it rang my dad said, 'it's probably another robo call' but I made sure he answered it. Thankfully, my dad recognized Youngkin's voice. The Governor was very gracious and they had a nice talk. My son and grandson were there as well. It was very special."

McDaniel, 92, spent six years in captivity at the infamous Hoa Lo Prison, otherwise known as the Hanoi Hilton. Time Magazine once declared him as one of the most

brutally tortured prisoners of the Vietnam war.

Named a Living Legend of Alexandria in 2019, McDaniel was on his 81st combat mission over North Vietnam when his A-6 Intruder aircraft was shot down on May 19, 1967. For three years, McDaniel was listed as Missing in Action before the Hanoi government finally acknowledged in 1970 that he was alive and being held prisoner. He was released on March 4, 1973, returning to active duty and retiring from the Navy following

nearly 30 years of service.

Davis, 84, is one of the nation's most recent recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor. President Joe Biden presented Davis with the Medal of Honor in a White House ceremony March 3. Davis was also inducted into the Pentagon Hall of Heroes.

In June of 1965, a wounded and bloodied Davis, then a Special Forces captain, twice refused orders to quit the battlefield of Bong Son until he had saved multiple

SEE YOUNGKIN, PAGE 6

Trail Summit Highlights Connectivity

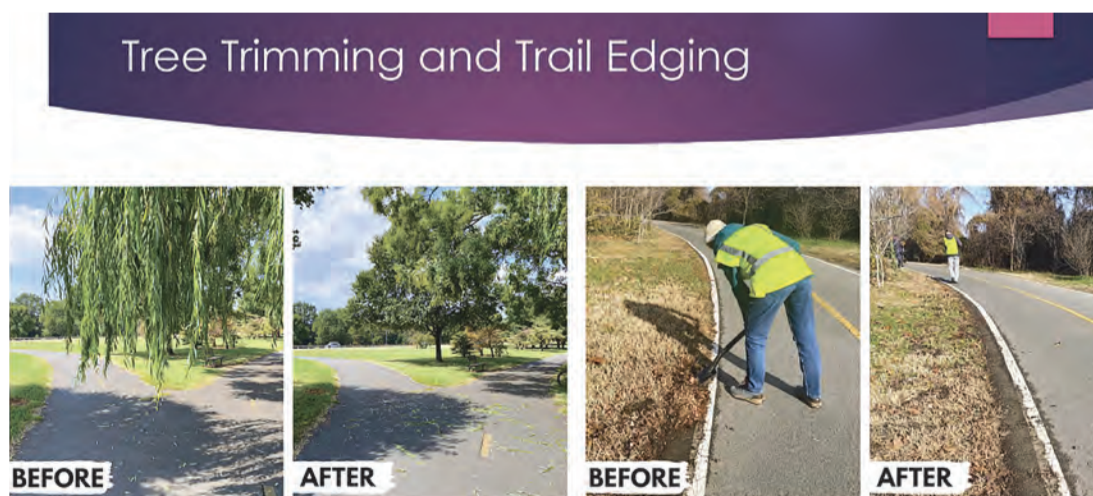
Discussion included the hard work done on the Mount Vernon Trail this summer.

BY MIKE SALMON
THE GAZETTE

In the end of October, area transportation officials got together for the second annual Northern Virginia Recreational Trails Summit to look at the recreational trails picture for the Northern Virginia area with a goal of improving the trail network. This included a look at the George Washington Memorial Parkway trail and the Mount Vernon Trail.

At the Oct. 24 summit, hosted by the Northern Virginia Regional Commission, there were over 60 representatives from all sides of the trail efforts whose goal was addressing the regional need for greater engagement around trail accessibility and connectivity. This was the second annual summit of this type with a unified goal for everybody in Northern Virginia to live within a 15-minute walk or 5-minute bike ride of a regionally significant trail.

Trail advocates focused on linking fragmented maps and plans, supporting communities so they collaborated to increase accessibility and comfort for all communities



One of the slides showing the before and after effects of the improvements done by the Friends of the Mount Vernon Trail.

using the parks and trails.

Dr. Torsha Bhattacharya, VDOT program manager with the State Trails Office, kicked it off with a presentation on the office's goals and development of the Statewide Trails Plan, including public engagement opportunities to learn about and discuss the plan.

The trail discussion focused on multimodal aspects, safety, accessibility which included the preferred surface and grade, and being regionally connected.

Mount Vernon Trail Love

When it came time to discuss the Mount

Vernon Trail, Judd Isbell, the president of the Friends of the Mount Vernon Trail group launched into the discussion with page two of his presentation entitled "What I love on the Mount Vernon Trail." The total number of volunteers is the highest its ever been,

SEE TRAIL SUMMIT, PAGE 11



The trail reconstruction in the southern portion of the bike trail has paid off for cyclists.

PHOTOS BY MIKE SALMON/CONNECTION

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www.KristenJones.com



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Gordon Wood 703.447.6138
www.GordonWoodRealtor.com



OPEN SAT 12/9 & SUN 12/10, 2-4PM

Stratford | \$879,000

Three level colonial with hardwood floors on main & upper levels, extra large kitchen and family room with French doors to the deck. Primary suite with enlarged bath & walk-in closet, 3 additional bedrooms on upper level. Partially finished lower level. 8604 Riverside Rd
Phyllis Sintay 703.472.3563
www.psintay.com



OPEN SAT 12/9, 12-2PM

Burke | \$550,000

This 3 level, 3 bedroom, 2 full & 2 half bath townhome has recently received a flurry of updates including a brand new deck, fully renovated baths on the upper level, brand new carpet on the upper level, fresh paint throughout & fresh landscaping. 9944 Whitewater Dr
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Belle View Condo | \$335,000

Charming 2-bedroom, 2-bath condo with abundant natural light & updated features. A modern kitchen boasts granite countertops & stylish accents, while ample living & dining spaces offer comfort. Prime location just a 5-minute drive to Old Town. 6626 Potomac Ave #A1
Jen Walker 703.675.1566
www.JenWalker.com



OPEN SAT 12/9, 2-4PM

The Plaza | \$305,000

This spacious 2-bedroom, 2-bath condo has 1,028 SF of living space with a cozy dining area, light-filled living room, and new sliding doors opening to the private balcony. Washer/dryer in unit. One assigned garage parking space & storage. 803 N Howard St #258
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NEWS

Supervisors Approve Good Faith Funding for Police & Firefighters

Fiscal Year One Impacts: \$33 million for police and \$24.7 million for firefighters and paramedics.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE GAZETTE

Talk about fortitude; it took Fairfax County Police and Fairfax County Fire and Rescue twenty-eight years under seven consecutive four-year terms of men and women serving as members of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, but it happened.

On Dec. 5, 2023, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors made history when it approved two separate resolutions specifying good faith commitments to funding agreements with the Southern States Police Benevolent Association and the International Association of Fire Fighters Local 2068.

In her 28 years as chair of the personnel committee, Penny Gross, vice chair of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, said that they put in place retirement plans and delayed retirement option plans. However, she said that the heaviest lift the board had ever done was the collective bargaining agreement.

"It took us seven terms to get us there and a change in the General Assembly's makeup. But I'm very pleased that we are here, where we are," she said at the Dec. 5 regular meeting of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. Gross is retiring from the board, and said: "This is a nice note to go out on."

The first resolution was ACTION-9, concerning the Fairfax County Police Department and the Tentative Agreement with the Southern States Police Benevolent Association. The second was ACTION-10 concerning Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Under the Tentative Agreement with the International Association of Fire Fighters Local 2068.

Gross advised, "If you have time, you can read every word of both of these resolutions and the agreements. I had to look up some of the terminology because I did not know what those things were."

Supervisor Dalia Palchik (D-Providence) designated the day as a historic moment, a first. The board was approving two collective bargaining agreements. She emphasized Article 54 of both agreements, the critical nature of



Penny Gross



Dalia Palchik



Pat Herrity
(R-Springfield)



James Walkinshaw

mental health and wellness services, as they had heard from staff, and the impact on their families. She added that it is critical not only to invest in salaries but also in mental and physical health. "I very much appreciate it that this addresses the impact to our public safety employees," Palchik said.

Supervisor Pat Herrity (R-Springfield) said that he had previously expressed his apprehensions regarding collective bargaining. His primary concern, however, was that although the agreement contained some positive aspects, "there were also bad things as well."

Herrity explained that the agreement was devoid of any influence from the board. "We've had no briefings on what objectives were accomplished. What things our employees wanted that we weren't able to give them in this agreement. At least I haven't," he said.

"I don't know that that's a good way to manage to turn it over to staff and let them hammer it out with our public safety officials without board input or report back to the board on what's in here and what's not," Herrity said. "It's very difficult for me to sit here other than reading, and oh, by the way, we've been told we can't talk to him. So on this agreement, for those reasons and many others, I'm not going to be supporting this," Herrity said.

Supervisor James Walkinshaw (D-Braddock) countered, recalling Herrity saying that this board is not ten county executives running around making every decision. One of Walkinshaw's key priorities was to provide a real voice to employees, in this instance, those in public safety, and to do so because

"they have some of the best ideas on how to improve things that Supervisor Herrity just talked about."

Among the aspects of the agreement that Walkinshaw appreciated, he said, was the stipend for foreign languages. Participating in ride-a-longs with police officers in certain areas of the West Springfield District has revealed that their inability to speak Spanish makes their jobs more difficult.

The officers told Walkinshaw it was difficult to take extra time to go to the classes and get certification to get foreign language skills, and a stipend would help. He presumed the officers had a chance to sit down at the table and say that and make that argument. "Straight out of their mouths, not mine or the chief's or the county executive's, and that's the real value of this process."

Walkinshaw observed that in the absence of collective bargaining, the board would have proceeded with its customary approach to evaluating compensation increases.

"So when it says that the year one impact is \$33 million, I don't want anyone to go out and say collective bargaining is costing us \$33 million. Because if we didn't have collective bargaining, we would have done what we did last year, the year before, and the year before. Look at our pay plan, the MRA pay studies, and all of the other elements of it. Maybe it would have come out the same or slightly different, but it's not collective bargaining that's costing us \$33 million."

Chairman Jeff McKay said that many of the commitments in the police agreement that they were expecting the county executive

to include in his budget proposal to the board are things we likely would have had to do anyway, in this particular market, especially in line with recruitment and retention.

McKay opined that Supervisor Herrity "missed the point of collective bargaining" to get the public safety people at the table to hear from them. "He added that it happens most of the time on supervisors' dias, and it is not right. "So to hear from them, the employee groups, and to be able to work together with them on an agreement that respects the very specialized work that we do and makes them feel like they have a voice, is the point of collective bargaining."

McKay closed, saying that not only was the board hoping that they could fund and support this in the budget, but they also hoped that that spirit of collaboration would continue as they move forward. "Because we have seen where that hasn't worked, and the outcome of those conversations in most cases doesn't benefit anyone, at least in the short term."

Before calling the vote, McKay said, "I think this is a remarkable, remarkable testament to the hard work of a lot of people who are in this auditorium and some people who aren't in this auditorium and to all the public safety workers who are working right now to benefit them and their families," McKay said.

He added, "Just to be clear, this is a collective bargaining agreement in this particular case; we're talking about police officers, but collectively, we have another item and a motion for fire and rescue. Collectively, we're talking about the firefighters, police officers, and

public safety communicators who serve this county every single day. And so with that, all those in favor of Action Item number nine, please say aye." The motion carried nine to one.

Moments later, the board approved, in a vote of 9-1, Action Item 10, a resolution specifying the Board of Supervisors good faith commitment to appropriate necessary funding for the county to meet its obligations under the tentative agreement with the International Association of Firefighters Local 2068 as set forth in the Department of Management and Budgets final impact study.

Collective Bargaining Timeline

On April 22, 2020, the Virginia General Assembly approved House Bill 582, giving localities the option to implement collective bargaining, effective May 1, 2021.

On Oct. 19, 2021, the Board of Supervisors approved the Collective Bargaining Ordinance. Under the ordinance, the police employees' bargaining unit consists of all sworn uniformed employees of the police department, including uniformed officers of the Animal Control Unit. The Fire and Emergency Medical Services: The fire and emergency medical services employees' bargaining unit consists of uniformed fire employees, including fire marshals.

The collective bargaining agreements reached with employee groups are subject to appropriation, like the current compensation agreements. Virginia Code Section § 40.1-57.2. Collective bargaining (B) provides: "No ordinance or resolution adopted pursuant to subsection A [enabling collective bargaining by localities] shall include provisions that restrict the governing body's authority to establish the budget or appropriate funds."

Visit <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/boardofsupervisors/sites/boardofsupervisors/files/assets/meeting-materials/2023/board/december5-board-package-revised.pdf> to access documents including the resolutions, fiscal impact studies, tentative collective bargaining agreements and contract summaries related to Action Items 9 and 10.

Closing Rental Housing Gaps for County's Most Vulnerable Adults

Dedicated housing vouchers announced for an additional 50 individuals in Reston and Herndon.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE GAZETTE

Part of an ongoing series.

The Connection speaks with Sylisa Lambert-Woodward, CEO of Pathway Homes, discussing the nonprofit organization's Housing First Model program, vouchers and what is on the horizon for residents in North Fairfax County.

Housing is a human right. So states the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Sylisa Lambert-Woodward is CEO of Pathway Homes, Fairfax-based nonprofit organization that reaches out to some of the county's most vulnerable adult residents. The organization serves adults experiencing homelessness or who are unhoused and with severe mental illness and/or co-occurring disorders, such as substance abuse, developmental disabilities, and physical disorders. "The mental health conditions manifest in a way that impacts their ability to function," Lambert-Woodward said.

These county residents confront financial inequalities. Pathway serves people whose income level is 30 percent to 0 percent of the area average median income. An AMI of less than 30 percent is considered extremely low-income. Racial inequities are documented in the Fairfax County 2022 Point-in-Time Count, which found 1,191 people experiencing homelessness on a single night in January.

Fifty percent of those experiencing homelessness identified as Black or African American, even though only 10 percent of Fairfax County's general population identifies as Black or African American. The Point-in-Time count of people experiencing homelessness is required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development at least every other year for any Continuum of Care (CoC) program, like that of Pathway, designed to promote a community-wide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness.

On Nov. 22, Lambert-Woodward said that homelessness is dis-



A tent city on Saturday, Dec. 4, 2023 sees dozens of additional tents erected on the hill to shelter residents who are experiencing homelessness in North Fairfax County.

trressing in and of itself. There are trust difficulties to address. One of Pathways' most significant markers of success is ensuring that the individual's choice of where they reside and what community they call home is emphasized. The ability of their clients to succeed and remain independent and active in the community is dependent on it, and it improves significantly when the individual is empowered.

Attempting to navigate Fairfax County's array of rental assistance services programs can be challenging for many people, but more so if the person is living with persistent severe mental illness and co-occurring disorders as well as health conditions. A prevalent characteristic among the individuals served by Pathway is that their mental health condition significantly impairs their functional capacity, necessitating supplementary levels of support or assistance, such as with medication management, to be independent. Support services are critical to Pathway's services.

In the absence of an informed advocate or case manager, such as those at Pathway who collaborate with the willing person, the journey to housing can be mentally exhausting and anxiety-provoking. Even more so if the burden of eviction proceedings is underway in their current rental or if the person is unhoused or unsheltered.

Lambert-Woodward reports that the majority of Pathway's clients are either unemployed or rely on a minimum fixed income of 15 to 10 percent AMI, or \$700 to \$800 per month in disability benefits.

"Unfortunately, in Fairfax County, there is a mismatch between the price and availability of modest rental housing and the wages of residents with extremely low income, at or below 30 percent of the area median income (AMI), Lambert-Woodward said. "So these individuals are just simply not going to be able to afford the cost of any type of housing unit in the county without subsidy or a form of voucher."

"Pathway Homes is the largest recipient of HUD Continuum of Care dollars in the region and provides subsidies to individuals so that they can live in the community," Lambert-Woodward said. Pathway has over 508 subsidies that specifically subsidize income so that individuals pay only 30 percent of their fixed income, or if they are not earning anything, they pay 0 percent, and the subsidy pays 100 percent.

Pathway Homes, Inc. provides its clientele with supportive services and individual units of stable, affordable housing located throughout the county. Pathway had expanded to a network of 427 owned, leased, or managed prop-



Sylisa Lambert-Woodward, CEO of Pathway Homes.

erties by the end of FY2022. Pathway Homes reports that it owns or leases over 500 homes in Northern Virginia as of 2023.

According to Lambert-Woodward, Pathway has observed that rents in Fairfax County have increased by \$300 or more per month since lease renewals a few months ago. This has prompted Lambert-Woodward to express concern to keep serving their clients. In order to defray the expenses, Pathways either conducts fundraising or relocates individuals who are unable to renew their leases, thereby forcing them to uproot and transition to another location.

"The rent increases are phasing individuals out of their category and out of certain leasing markets even with the leasing subsidies because the subsidies are not keeping up with the increasing FMR, fair market rates," Lambert-Woodward said.

For Pathway, it is a significant concern that 'affordable' rental housing remains affordable and does not soar in cost, making it no longer available by being inconsistent with the subsidies the organization receives.

On a positive note, though, Pathways is expanding its boundary. According to Lambert-Woodward, Pathway received a contract to not only provide Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) services but they are also going to be providing supportive housing through dedicated vouchers for an additional 50 individuals in North Fairfax County, meaning Reston and Herndon. Lambert-Woodward is talking about 1-bedroom rental units, which are the preferred housing option for individuals who come to Pathway from a homeless situation

or an unhoused state with serious mental illness.

Pathway is committed to its Housing First Program, meaning there are no conditions that have to be met before the person moves in, according to Lambert-Woodward. Using this model, Pathway maintains a housing retention rate of at least 89 percent with clients who have traditionally been viewed as treatment-resistant and "not ready for housing."

Housing services at Pathway Homes spans a continuum of care from highly intensive to highly independent. Most housing options have subsidies available to make housing affordable to anyone within the community. The organization also provides supportive services to others, allowing them to retain their own housing.

This Sunday, Dec. 10, celebrates the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris in 1948. The Declaration set out, for the first time, a set of fundamental human rights, among them housing, to be universally protected.

Article 25 of the Declaration provides, "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including ... housing."

Stable, supportive housing is merely the first step towards re-integrating into their community, rebuilding family relationships, reconnecting with their faith fellowships, and experiencing an improvement in overall physical health and psychological well-being.

After receiving housing first, every client is matched with a support team (Assertive Community Treatment Team, Veterans Housing First Team and/or Permanent Supportive Housing Team) comprised of psychiatrists, nurses, social workers, certified addictions counselors, employment specialists, and peer health specialists. The team works together to provide comprehensive community-based treatment and support services around the clock, with a focus on integrating both health and social well-being into the recovery plan.

These vital interventions are designed to empower client choice and support successful independent living.

PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE GAZETTE

Good Shepherd Housing Moves for an Affordable Office Space

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED

Lorton location won't slow down the effort.

BY MIKE SALMON
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

No one knows the impact of the high real estate prices in Fairfax County better than Good Shepherd Housing and it finally became an issue for this nonprofit so they picked up and moved into a new location in Lorton as a result of their high rent in Hybla Valley.

Their lease was up and the move was “the most cost-effective,” said Candice Bennett, the Interim Executive Director at Good Shepherd. “Most of our work is case management, done over the phone or by email so it doesn’t change how we’re interacting with our residents,” she said.

Their new location is in a semi-industrial area of Newington near the Newington Post Office, Frito-Lay distribution center and the intersection of Backlick and Cinderbed roads. It’s not exactly on a beaten path in the Mount Vernon District, but the office is bigger and it has parking. “It’s the very best deal I could find,” Bennett said, “as a nonprofit, that is key.”

Since the pandemic a few years ago, the real estate industry was humming about how much vacant office

space was available since everyone was working at home, but that’s not exactly what Bennett found when she started looking. It’s possible that those trends are centered around the traditional business districts elsewhere in the county like Tysons or Ballston but for a small nonprofit, it took some leg work to find the right match. “We were limited in options,” Bennett said.

It all worked out though and they got settled in the new space that is better for their growing staff.

The mission of Good Shepherd Housing is to reduce homelessness, increase community support, and promote self-sufficiency. Moving to an office four miles away will not impact any objectives.

Good Shepherd helps low-income families and individuals by providing affordable, stable housing and individualized case management that will help them address structural barriers to long-term housing like poor credit histories, itinerant rental histories, little or no savings, and low incomes. GSH’s apartment rentals are located along Richmond Highway in the Alexandria section of Fairfax County.

Good Shepherd Housing raises funds to support 500 families and individuals each year. Donate at <https://goodhousing.harnessgiving.org/donate/>

If you have any questions or need assistance, they can be contacted at goodhousing.org/contact-us or 8253 Backlick Rd, Suite L 703-768-9404. New mailing address is PO Box 1266 Newington, VA 22122-9998



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Be Warmer, Healthier and Save Money this Winter

BY SUPERVISOR DAN STORCK
MOUNT VERNON DISTRICT



It's that time of year again – the weather outside is frightful – well maybe not frightful yet, but it's colder! It can be a struggle to keep your home warm, whether from drafty windows, high heating costs and/or lack of money to pay bills. The good news is that there are several programs available to help anyone in need, as well as those who just want to know more about how to keep their homes warm and save money.

Need help with your heating costs? You may be eligible to receive help through two energy assistance programs that are currently accepting applications.

Dominion EnergyShare helps pay energy bills for any type of heating and cooling source (wood, oil, natural gas, propane, kerosene, electric) for those who qualify. En-

ergyShare is not income based so any customer in crisis is eligible to apply. <https://www.dominionenergy.com/virginia/billing/billing-options/energyshare>

Fairfax County and Virginia Energy Assistance Programs are designed to help households offset heating costs and overcome energy emergencies that cannot be met by other resources. Energy emergency help can include heating equipment repair/purchase/maintenance and a one-time-only heat security deposit. <https://www.dss.virginia.gov/benefit/ea/>

Drafty windows and doors? Cold in your own home? Want to save money on your energy bills? If you answered yes to any of these questions, there are several programs available to assist with home weatherization. Improvements can include: LED lighting, low-flow shower heads, insulation, heat pump or A/C tune-up, air and duct sealing, ENERGY

STAR refrigerator replacement and more. Get your free home energy audit today to save money and be more comfortable and healthier in your home.

Fairfax HomeWise Program educates, empowers and enables residents to make changes that reduce energy use, water use and associated costs in their homes. Volunteers also assist low- and moderate-income residents with physical improvements to their homes and provide support for behavior changes that are proven to conserve resources and money. <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/environment-energy-coordination/homewise>

Dominion EnergyShare Weatherization Program - <https://www.dominionenergy.com/virginia/billing/billing-options/energyshare>

Virginia Weatherization Assistance Program - <https://www.dhcd.virginia.gov/wx>

As always, my office is here to assist you, so please contact us at 703-780-7518 or mtvernon@fairfaxcounty.gov should you need help.

Be Part of 2022 Children's and Teens' Gazette

One week of December for many years, this newspaper has devoted its pages to the creativity of local students, teens and children. The results are always remarkable. It is a keepsake edition for many families. Even readers without children of that age spend time admiring and chuckling over the issue. The annual Children's Gazette, the Children's Connection and Children's Almanac, comprise a long-time tradition.

You can see last year's editions by visiting <http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/PDFs/> and scrolling down to Children's Edition.

We welcome contributions from public and private schools, art classes, individuals and homeschoolers. We publish artwork, poetry, essays, creative writing, opinion pieces, short stories, photography, photos of sculpture, gardens and any other creative efforts.

We ask that all submissions be digital so

they can be sent through email. Writing should be submitted in text format: docx or google docs, or pasted in the body of an email. Artwork should be photographed or scanned and provided in jpeg format. These can be submitted via google drive as well. Please share all google drive files with kimm.mary@gmail.com

Some suggestions, but different ideas are welcome:

Drawings or paintings or photographs of your family, friends, pets or some favorite activity. These should be photographed or scanned and submitted in jpeg format. Photos of sculpture or larger art projects are also welcome.

Short answers: What is one thing that you would change about school? What do you want to be when you grow up? What is your favorite animal? What is your favorite possession? What makes a good friend? What is the best gift you've ever received?

Your opinion (100 words) about movies, food, music, sports, restaurants, video games, toys, trends, politics, etc.

Poetry, short story or other creative writing. News stories or photos from school newspapers.

We must be able to print the full first and last name of the student artist/writer with the submission, along with student's age, grade and school or town name.

Identify each piece of writing or art, including the student's full name, age, grade and town of residence, plus the name of the school, name of teacher and town of school location. Home schoolers' contributions are welcomed.

Please send all submissions by Thursday, Dec. 8, 2022. The Children's Gazette will publish the middle of December, the edition with publication date Dec. 14, 2022.

Email submissions for the Children's Gazette to kimm.mary@gmail.com

NEWS BRIEFS

Don't Drink and Drive

Fairfax County Police Department's DUI Enforcement Squad ramps up at the end of every year to focus on Safe December. During this campaign, running from Dec. 4 to Dec. 29, the squad will increase staffing and focus on roadway safety this holiday season. These initiatives are aimed at promoting sober driving, pinpointing impaired drivers, and increasing officer presence on the roads.

In 2016, FCPD established a specialized DUI Enforcement Squad with the primary goal of identifying impaired drivers and removing them from the streets. The goal is that these efforts will serve as an educational reminder to all drivers, ultimately contributing to safer roads and preventing tragedies. The DUI Enforcement Squad has made 177 arrests this year so far.

Youngkin to Honor Local Heroes

FROM PAGE 1

wounded teammates in a brutal 19-hour hand-to-hand battle with a Viet Cong battalion. Due to his heroics, Davis's entire team survived the battle.

A reception honoring Davis was held in June at the Rocky Versace Plaza and Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Del Ray with McDaniel as a guest speaker.

Members of the public are invited to attend the Roanoke ceremony,

which will feature remarks by local, state and federal officials along with the formal renaming of the VVCC to the Davis & McDaniel Veterans Care Center. A reception and tour of the care center will follow the approximately one-hour ceremony.

The VVCC is located at 4550 Shenandoah Ave. N.W., Roanoke, Va. 24017, adjacent to the Salem VA Medical Center. Attendees are encouraged to arrive by 10:30 a.m. www.dvs.virginia.gov

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A Connection Newspaper



ALADDIN THE CAMEL

PHOTOS BY GLENDA BOOTH



Youngsters and their parents from Hawaii delighted in seeing Aladdin on Nov. 30.



Aladdin sniffs his keeper.

Aladdin the Camel Brings Christmas Cheer

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

Youngsters may be getting giddy visualizing reindeer streaking Santa across the sky, but how about a Christmas camel for some excitement? A dromedary camel named Aladdin is a little-known holiday delight at Mount Vernon Estate until Jan. 7.

Aladdin is a 16-year-old camel that measures about seven feet from his hoofs to the top of his hump, a long-legged ungulate or hoofed animal native to the other side of the globe. He seems quite at home loping around his pen and eyeing visitors in a field at the west end of Mount Vernon's bowling green.

Mount Vernon's managers have hosted Aladdin during the winter holidays since 2008 because in 1787, George Washington brought a camel to his plantation. He recorded in his ledger, "By the man who brot. A Camel from Alexa. For a show." Washington paid 18 shillings which today would be \$170.

In the 18th century, itinerant entertainers traveled the eastern part of the country with rare or specially trained animals and Washington had a great interest in animals. He recorded seeing a tiger, a "Lyonesse" in 1766 for 10 shillings, a "Cugar" and "Sea Leopard" in Philadelphia while President. In Washington's day, these animals had to be rare sights.

The online Britannica encyclopedia says that a camel is "any of three species of large ruminating hoofed mammals of arid Africa and Asia known for their ability to go for long periods without drinking. The Arabian camel, or dromedary (*Camelus dromedarius*), has one back hump, while the domesticated Bactrian camel (*C. bactrianus*) and the wild Bactrian camel (*C. ferus*) have two." Dromedary camels have an average lifespan of 40 years.

Aladdin has golf-ball-size dark brown eyes, two- to three-inch eyelashes and sandy brown fur that thickens up in the winter. He first came to Mount Vernon in 2008 at age 11 months. He eats hay and four to five pounds of grain and drinks five to ten gallons of water daily.

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Aladdin looks almost regal when he raises his head high.



Aladdin has a distinctive face, nostrils, mouth, eyes and eyelashes.



Aladdin has his own pen and shed.



Youngsters love Aladdin.

He is domesticated and generally appears to be very docile. Because he was bottle raised, "He can get mouthy," commented Lisa Pregent, senior livestock manager, adding, "He's very loved."

Aladdin lives in Fairfax Station the rest of the year and travels to Mount Vernon in a horse trailer. "We are camel-sitting," jokes Pregent. She observes that when he was younger, he was "very animated," but now has "mellowed out." She thinks he is "goofy," when he "flips his lip." He's been known to chomp off a visitor's hat if the person gets

too close.

Pregent has been caring for Aladdin for his 15 years there, along with the estate's cows, horses, pigs, sheep and chickens. Taking care of a camel is "a learning process every year," she commented on Nov. 30.

Thousands of visitors check out Aladdin every year, many en route to their mansion tour, says Julie Coleman Almacy, Director of Public Affairs. On Nov. 30, a family of five from Honolulu were captivated. "He's so cute," said Abigail Beahler, age six.

As Pregent fed him grain from a purple

bucket, Abigail's sister, Suzanne, age 10, said, "He's like me. He has a bottomless stomach."

Here's an interesting historical twist: George Washington's farm managers were probably not familiar with camels, but some of the plantation's enslaved people might have been, having encountered them in trading caravans in Africa before their enslavement in North America.

Information:

<https://www.mountvernon.org/plan-your-visit/things-to-do/animals/aladdin/>

Plaid Tidings

Scottish Walk celebrates 52 years.

By JEANNE THEISMANN
GAZETTE PACKET

**"In my heart
I am Scottish."**

— Alexandria resident
Anandashankar Mazumdar

The sound of bagpipes filled the streets of Old Town as the annual Scottish Walk Parade celebrated its 52nd anniversary Dec. 2.

The parade and related Scottish Walk Weekend events benefit the Campagna Center, which has been serving children and families in the city for 77 years.

said Alexandria resident Anandashankar Mazumdar, who has been attending the parade since 2012. "This year I get to wear my new kilt and enjoy seeing people dressed up and having fun."

SEE SCOTTISH, PAGE 12



The 52nd annual Scottish Walk Parade takes to the streets of Old Town Dec. 2.



A nutcracker attraction in the Scottish Walk parade.



At Home In Alexandria



Alexandria City High School Army JROTC.

PHOTOS BY
JANET BARNETT
GAZETTE PACKET



Mrs. Virginia American 2023 Andrea Schindler.



Campagna Center CEO Tammy Mann



The Little Theatre of Alexandria.



The Kiltie Band of York.



Parade attendee Anandashankar Mazumdar.



Scottish walk Parade participants.



Best in Show was Magical Knots sporting the “I Want a Hippopotamus for Christmas” theme in the Holiday Boat Parade of Lights Dec. 2.

Best Powerboat went to It’s Always Somethin’ with “Tribute to Jimmy Buffett ‘Thanks for the Memories’” in the Dec. 2 Holiday Boat Parade of Lights.

Pier Pressure

Holiday boat parade lights up the waterfront.

BY JEANNE THEISMANN
GAZETTE PACKET

The pressure was on as more than 60 boats vied for prizes in 10 categories at the 23rd Annual Holiday Boat Parade of Lights held Dec. 2 along the Alexandria waterfront.

Sponsored by Amazon, thousands turned out for the mile-long parade that was led by Alexandria’s Fireboat 201, Fireboat 2 from Washington D.C.’s Fire Department and City Cruises’ Miss Mallory.

Best in Show was awarded to Magical Knots, who presented “I Want a Hippopotamus for Christmas,” complete with a costumed crew. Best Powerboat went to It’s Always Somethin’ for “Tribute to Jimmy Buffett: Thanks for the Memories,” immortalizing the late musician with his signature songs and a tropical theme topped off with a glowing shark fin.



Boats line up for the 23rd annual Holiday Boat Parade of Lights Dec. 2 along the Alexandria waterfront.

Best Movie/TV Theme was Trust and Pixie Dust—Dreams Really Can Come True,” celebrating Peter Pan’s 70th anniversary with an aerialist dressed as Peter Pan performing acrobatics high in the air.

The 2023 winners include: Best in Show - Magical Knots, “I Want a Hippopotamus for Christmas”; Best Powerboat - It’s Always Somethin’, “Tribute to Jimmy Buffett ‘Thanks for the Memories’”; Best Sailboat - Lions Paw 2, “Jelly Pandas”; Thinking Outside the Christmas Box - 4Ever Freedom, “Christmas in America”; Most Holiday Cheer, “The Nauti List”; Best Movie/TV Theme - Tuesday, “Faith, Trust and Pixie Dust – Dreams Really Can Come True”; Most Spirited Crew - Big Sky, “Rocking ‘Round the Christmas Tree”; Best Theme - Hold My Pier, “Mojo Dojo Casa Houseboat”; Hardest Soul - Titan Rowing Team, 4 Crew Racing Shells, “Holiday”; Best Try - Happiest Hanukkah, “Brightest Boat Ever.”

The parade was produced by Visit Alexandria in collaboration with the City of Alexandria, City Cruises – Alexandria and the Old Dominion Boat Club.



The Hardest Soul award went to the Titan Rowing Team of 4 Crew Racing Shells in the Dec. 2 Holiday Boat Parade of Lights.



Best Try was Happiest Hanukkah with “Brightest Boat Ever” in the Dec. 2 Holiday Boat Parade of Lights.

NEWS

PHOTO BY MIKE SALMON/CONNECTION



The Friends of the Mount Vernon Trail patched many holes like this one.

Mount Vernon Trail Summit Highlights Connectivity

FROM PAGE 1

and they've made 647 trail improvements in 2023 including 236 bumps removed. Other categories of improvements included vegetation, graffiti, painting, drainage, trash and more. There were a few before and after shots that showed the progress these volunteers produced.

For the Mount Vernon Trail, the changes outlined in the recent Environmental Assessment for the trail and improvements on southern part of the George Washington Parkway are likely to be the roadmap for making it easier to get to the Mount Vernon Trail by making

crossing the Parkway safer for people on foot or bike. Recently some changes were made at some of the intersections including the crossing at Belle Haven Rd. where there are now fewer lanes to cross and a larger refuge. In the southern area of the trail, they are looking for funds to rebuild the southern portion of the trail and implement more intersection improvements as well as creation of paths between the trail and intersections.

The new trail segment on Mount Vernon Memorial Highway is a safety feature they opened this year to fill a trail gap to the side-path along Richmond Highway.

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GAYLORD NATIONAL

Scottish Walk Celebrates 52 Years



Alexandria Sheriff Sean Casey.



Girl Scouts of Alexandria City.

FROM PAGE 8

Pipes and drums from the East coast joined Scottish clans, re-enactment groups, Scottie dogs and classic cars. Congressman Don Beyer and Director of the Office of Art in Embassies at the U.S. Department of State Megan Beyer served as Grand Marshals.

Serving as the unofficial start of the holiday season, the Scottish Walk Weekend celebrates the Scottish heritage of Old Town Alexandria while benefiting Campagna Center programs that serve more than 2,000 children and families daily across the city.

www.campagnacenter.org

PHOTOS BY
JANET BARNETT
GAZETTE PACKET



Bagpipers perform during the Scottish Walk parade.



Grand Marshals Congressman Don Beyer and Director of the Office of Art in Embassies at the U.S. Department of State Megan Beyer.



A four-legged parade participant.



City of Alexandria Honor Guard.



City of Alexandria Pipes and Drums drum major Josh Cease.



One of several signs along the parade route protesting the proposed development of 301 N. Fairfax St.

ENTERTAINMENT

WEDNESDAYS THROUGH SATURDAYS

Tours Aboard Tall Ship Providence and Sen. John Warner Maritime Heritage Center. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. At Alexandria's Waterfront Park, 1A Prince Street, Alexandria. Guests of all ages are recruited into the Continental Navy aboard Tall Ship Providence with legendary Captain John Paul Jones. Recruits are assigned jobs on the ship, learn where they will work and live, how to load a cannon, etc... Tours conclude in the Naval History Theatre with a film about the ship. The Heritage center is a floating museum on the Alexandria waterfront. Visit <https://tallshipprovidence.org/>

NOW THRU JAN. 7

National Treasures | Leanne Fink. At The Athenaeum, 201 Prince Street, Alexandria. National Treasures is a collection of oil and cold wax paintings by Leanne Fink that pays homage to the grandeur of America's National Parks. Inspired by the beauty of the natural world, Leanne is known for her visually dynamic landscapes. The Athenaeum Gallery is open Thursday to Sunday from 12 p.m. to 4 p.m.

DEC. 8-10, DEC. 15-17

Del Ray Artisans 28th Annual Holiday Market. At 2704 Mount Vernon Ave., Alexandria. Offers unique handmade fine arts and crafts from local artists. Choose from wall art, pottery, photography, jewelry, glass, and much more! Free admission. First three weekends in December (Dec. 1-3, Dec. 8-10, Dec. 15-17), plus bonus market days Dec. 22 & 23. Different artists each weekend! Open Fridays 6-9 p.m., Saturdays & Sundays 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Hours for Friday, December 22 are 3-9 p.m. Details: delrayartisans.org/holiday-market

BREAKFAST WITH SANTA

"Breakfast with Santa" will take place every weekend in December, from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. in three locations in Alexandria:

Joe Theismann's Restaurant

Mia's Italian Kitchen

Ada's on the River

Tickets range from \$0-\$65 and include a hearty and festive breakfast feast that will delight your taste buds. Children will receive take-home treats to continue the holiday spirit at home, while adults can indulge in some celebratory Prosecco.

Tickets can be purchased here: <https://www.eventbrite.com/cc/breakfast-with-santa-in-old-town-alexandria-by-arp-1039279>

DEC. 8-9

Holiday Pops Concert. Friday and Saturday from 7:30-9:30 p.m.; Sunday at 2 p.m. At Washington Street United Methodist Church, 109 S. Washington Street, Alexandria. Share your spirit for the season. In lieu of a physical gift drive, online donations can be added at ticketing checkout for Alexandria's Carpenter's Shelter. Visit www.Alexandriasingers.com.

DEC. 16-17

"Holiday with a Twist." Featuring the Alexandria Symphony Orchestra. Saturday, Dec. 16 at 7:30 p.m. at the Rachel M. Schlesinger Center, Alexandria; Sunday, Dec. 17 at 3 p.m. at George Washington Masonic Memorial, Alexandria. Celebrate



First Night Alexandria will be held Sunday, Dec. 31, 2023 in Old Town Alexandria.

the Season "Holiday with a Twist" featuring Joshua Banbury, Baritone and Chris Ullman, whistler. Adults: \$20-89; Students \$15; Youth \$5.

SUNDAY/DEC. 17

Sunday Funday. 3 p.m. At Ainslie Arts Center at Episcopal High School, Black Box Theatre, 3900 West Braddock Road, Alexandria. Sunday Funday will feature a cast of local musical theater talent and singing drag queens, a three-piece band music directed by Marika Countouris, as well as bottomless drinks. Sunday Funday will be hosted by local drag queen and frequent Monumental collaborator Tiara Missou, also known as David Singleton. Individual tickets are \$30. Artist under 35 tickets are available for \$15 (patrons must show I.D. at the door). A table for four guests can be purchased for \$140. Table tickets include preferred seating and either a bottle of wine or champagne. Patrons may pay \$20 for bottomless specialty drinks or \$25 at the door. Tickets are available online at <https://www.monumentaltheatre.org/>.

SUNDAY/DEC. 31

First Night Alexandria. In locations around Old Town Alexandria. First Night Alexandria, known as the largest family-friendly and affordable New Year's Eve festival of music and more event in the region, returns with its day into night of celebration showcasing performing arts throughout Old Town. The annual event (in its 29th year) will feature a variety of activities, activations, dance parties, live music and more. The festivities kick off at 2:00 p.m. and conclude at midnight as thousands welcome in the New Year.

A tradition that started in 1994, First Night Alexandria has become a staple in the region to bring in the New Year as an affordable event filled with a lineup of entertainment and activities. Proceeds from the event supports Alexandria's middle and high school students' activities with a musical background in choir, orchestra, and band.

New this Year:
Twilight Fireworks - This year's



Leanne Fink's National Treasures exhibit can be seen now through Jan. 7, 2024 at The Athenaeum in Alexandria.

celebration will feature a twilight fireworks display at 6 p.m. on Alexandria's waterfront geared to families who want to enjoy the show with their kids and loved

ones. First Night Alexandria will also still host an abbreviated encore display of the New Year's fireworks at midnight on the waterfront.

Fun Hunt - Add adventure, exploration, and education to the last day of the year! After 5 years, the Fun Hunt returns with new ways to enjoy an afternoon in Old Town Alexandria. Ticketed guests have the opportunity to turn a day of Fun and entertainment into potential prize winnings. The adventure concludes at the Block Party at Market Square just prior to the Twilight Fireworks.

Daytime Block Party - Join us at Market Square from 4 - 6 p.m. for a time of music, a "Cool Happy New Year" demonstration and special fun just prior to the new Twilight fireworks display.

For more information visit www.first-nightalexandria.org

JAN. 5-27

"Visions of Resilience: Art for Climate Justice" exhibit. At Del Ray Artisans, 2704 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria, in partnership with the Changing Planet Justice Foundation, raises awareness about climate change and its impact on marginalized communities. By conveying issues through the universal language of image, we encourage action towards a just, climate-friendly future. Reception: Friday, January 5, 7-9 p.m. Open Thursdays 12-6 p.m., Fridays 12-9 p.m., Saturdays and Sundays 12-6 p.m. (closed January 28). DelRay-Artisans.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. Contact The Birchmere at 703-549-7500 or www.Birchmere.com.

DECEMBER

Wed. 6: Squirrel Nut Zippers Holiday Caravan Tour 2023 \$45.00

Thu. 7: An Acoustic Christmas with Over The Rhine \$45.00

Fri. 8: Chris Botti \$110.00

Sat. 9: Chris Botti \$110.00 SOLD OUT!

Sun. 10: Allison Russell 'The Returner Tour' \$35.00 SOLD OUT!

Mon. 11: Girl Named Tom: One More Christmas Tour \$55.00

Tue. 12: Karla Bonoff & Livingston Taylor "Home For The Holidays" \$45.00

Wed. 13: Jon McLaughlin w/ Bobbie Lee Stamper & Leo Sawikin - 2023 Holiday Tour \$29.50

Thu. 14: Carbon Leaf \$45.00

Fri. 15: Carbon Leaf \$45.00 SOLD OUT!

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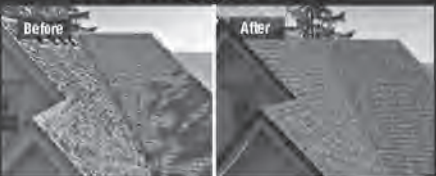
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NEWS

United Community Holiday Gift Card Drive

United Community's Board of Directors presents a \$50,000 Challenge Match. Until Dec. 31, your impact will be doubled, extending your generosity to even more children and families in our local community. Make a gift with TWICE the power to fight poverty. Make your donation online <https://interland3.donorperfect.net/weblink/WebLink.aspx?name=E3464&id=151>

Thank you to everyone who has already contributed to help reach the goal to ensure we provide the families of 900 local children with gift cards this holiday season. There is still time to make the holidays special for children in our local community.

- ❖ Make a donation online.
- ❖ Shop gift cards from our Amazon Wish List. <https://www.amazon.com/registries/gl/guest-view/DCXZ-KRATR2GU>
- ❖ Purchase \$25 Target, Walmart, or Visa gift cards locally and drop them at our office at 7511 Fordson Road, Alexandria.

Donate \$25 Target, Walmart, or Visa gift cards to help parents buy gifts. Drop off or mail in gift cards. <https://interland3.donorperfect.net/weblink/WebLink.aspx?name=E3464&id=151>
Gift cards can also be purchased from our Amazon Wish List.

United Community, 7511 Fordson Road, Alexandria, VA 22306, (571) 255-8979, <https://www.unitedcommunity.org/>

CALENDAR

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF FAIRFAX SYMPHONY & FAIRFAX BALLET

Fairfax Symphony and Fairfax Ballet present Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* Dec. 16 & 17 at 4 p.m. at GMU Center for the Arts.

See The Nutcracker with Live Orchestra

Two Fairfax County arts institutions — the Fairfax Symphony Orchestra and The Fairfax Ballet Company — collaborate to present their seventh production of the holiday masterpiece, Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*. This Fairfax production is a cherished, annual tradition, with two performances on Dec. 16 & 17 at 4 p.m. at George Mason University Center for the Arts.

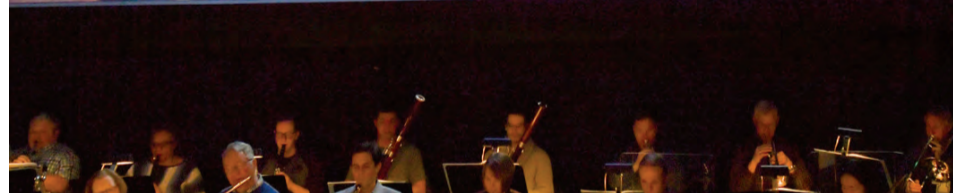
The FSO production is unique in the region to feature live musical accompaniment by a full orchestra, together with dancers on stage. The Fairfax Ballet's magical dance performance soars with original choreography and guest soloists from New York City Ballet. The Fairfax Symphony, under the direction Christopher Zimmerman, performs Tchaikovsky's captivating score live.

"Audiences delight in the incredible dancers on stage, while Tchaikovsky's unforgettable music is performed live by our orchestra musicians," said Jonathan Kerr, Executive Director, Fairfax Symphony Orchestra. "The dance, live music, plus the stunning, digital scenery creates a winter wonderland in a magical production that's perfect for the entire family."

The Fairfax Symphony Orchestra and The Fairfax Ballet Company showcase renowned guest soloists from New York City Ballet dancing the lead roles this year. The Fairfax Ballet was established in 1971 to develop in each student a love of dance, a strong technical foundation, and an artistic education. Karla Petry serves as Executive Director of The Fairfax Ballet and owner of The Russell School of Ballet.

"Audiences love this special treat as we welcome our professional guest soloists from premier dance companies together with our local stars," said Petry.

Andrea Cook is Artistic Director for The Fairfax Ballet Company, and she leads the choreography in one of the most complex theatrical ballets in the Company's repertory. She is a Fairfax County native and Chantilly HS alum. Her leadership has helped the



Company maintain its long-held reputation for high-quality training and service, while building on its performances with new cho-

reography. More than fifty dancers and students ranging from ages 7-18 will take the stage.

"Daze" Gone By



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

As of the first week in Dec. 2023, I will have been "churning out the dribble," as my late brother, Richard, teasingly characterized my columns me a few years back, for 26 years. Almost without fail, except for one week in Aug., 15 when I was hospitalized for a week due to fluid build-up in my lungs (almost four liters worth). The fluid problem was a side effect of my cancer medication. (Imagine that, a side effect from cancer medication that nearly kills the patient. Who would have thought?) I was told by the attending physician that this side effect caused my lungs to collapse — with no guarantee that they would reinflate. Fortunately, a few days after my surgery to drain the fluid from my lungs, they miraculously re-inflated (later than the doctors had hoped/anticipated, but everybody was happy nonetheless, especially me). But then I was on my way to recuperating and the following week I was home eating solid food again and semi back to normal ('normal' being a relative term, as I was a lung cancer patient after all).

I have been writing a column in "The Connection" for almost exactly 26 years. Multiply the years times the 52 weeks per year the paper published means that I've been at this pursuit of my happiness (writing/publishing columns) without fail — except that one week I spent in SICU for my lungs (actually I did write a column that week while in hospital bed. However, I typed it on a device which due to operator error, never sent my column to the paper for publication), a grand total of 1,352 weeks/columns, if anyone is counting. And I certainly am if you're not. Remembering that my initial (inauspicious) appearance in *The Connection* was hardly met with any fanfare (I was told I was filler, and a one-column inch filler at that), I summarize that beginning simply and with a nod to Bob Dylan: I was so much younger then, I'm older than that now. Thank God! And still, undergoing cancer treatment. And moreover, "still churning out the dribble."

And I'm especially still thanking God, always a prudent precaution to take, because when I started writing this column, I was cancer-free and years away from becoming the "victim of soy-cumstance" you read about regularly. That unfortunate circumstance/diagnosis of stage IV non-small cell lung cancer (a terminator if there ever was one, not named Arnold Schwarzenegger) became my official reality late Feb. 2009, 12-plus years after I started publishing my slice-of-life-type column ("Daze of My Life") in the first place. To say this diagnosis was a shock is to minimize any and all things that shock. But I persevered and though I didn't sing it, I did invoke Diana Ross a time or two ("I will survive"). And lo and behold, here I am in 2023, slowly creeping up on my 15th "cancer-versary." (You bet I'm going to "creep," I don't want to bring any unnecessary attention to the fact that I'm still alive, especially around Christmas where lists are often checked twice.)

Considering that a "13 month to two-years" prognosis — at age 54 and a half (out of the blue, a lifelong non-smoker, and minimal exposure to second-hand smoke), came along with the diagnosis, I figured I had to roll punches somehow and buck up and find a way to be positive about this horrifying negative. As a dear friend who exhibited this attitude would often say when prompted: "My attitude is just like my blood type: B+." I don't know what my blood type is exactly, but I do know what my attitude is. However, during those first few months of learning this diagnosis and then starting every-three-week chemotherapy, lab work, diagnostic scans, and face-to-face, in-person appointments, your dominant feeling/reaction to your predicament (mine anyway) is disbelief. Though I certainly was curious how this could have happened to me (given what I thought I knew about lung cancer and its cause, very little after all) I never wallowed in "woeing." I saw no future in dwelling on the past.

And for the past 13 years, ever since I shared my diagnosis with you in my June 2010 column entitled "Dying to Tell You, Sort Of", published approximately four months after I began treatment, I have written extensively, if not almost entirely about cancer. And oddly enough, writing about it, whether it's good, bad, or indifferent news still gives me a lift somehow. Since I don't woe is me, neither do I drone on about my challenges. Oh sure, I'll update you readers about any major, potentially life-altering cancer-related news. When I do so however, it's not important that it's me that's being written about (it's never about me, really). It's important because it's about the cancer. As I used to say when asked about my column's subject matter before I was diagnosed: "I'm just the driver. I'm writing about the car."

And even though the car, metaphorically speaking, has some major problems, it's still able to get me where I want to go. Of course the ride can get a bit bumpy at times, but I'm still driving, if you know what I mean?

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



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