

# Mount Vernon Gazette

MOUNT VERNON'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER • A CONNECTION NEWSPAPER

FEBRUARY 1, 2024

## Mount Vernon District Town Meeting Feb. 10

BY SUPERVISOR DAN STORCK

Come learn more about why the Mount Vernon District is “The One” at our 37th Annual Town Meeting! This year’s event on Super Bowl Saturday will be filled with important District information, delicious food and engaging activities for the whole family, proving that the excitement of the weekend extends beyond just football.

Established by my predecessor, Gerry Hyland in 1988, the Town Meeting has become a cherished community tradition that I am fortunate to host year after year.

Join us Saturday, Feb. 10 from 7:45 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. at Mount Vernon High School, 8515 Old Mount Vernon Rd., to see your neighbors and engage and learn about the County budget, public safety and other is-



issues important to you. Our popular Exhibit Hall runs from 7:45 – 9:30 a.m. featuring many County agencies and local service providers. Take a moment to check out the KidBiz Young Entrepreneurs Expo which features many “small” business owners. The Fairfax County

Health Department will have flu vaccines available and Public Health Nurses will be onsite to answer your questions about childhood and adult vaccines. Don’t forget to grab some coffee and treats from the MVHS Athletic Boosters Club while listening to the MVHS Chamber String Quartet.

The program runs from 9:30 a.m. – noon featuring a “virtual tour” of the District with updates on recently completed, current and future projects, followed by Q&A panels with local leaders and special recognitions.

You will hear from Congressman Gerry

Connolly, Chairman Jeffrey C. McKay, County Executive Bryan Hill, Mount Vernon School Board Representative Mateo Dunne and other local elected leaders who will be speaking and answering questions from residents. Special this year, we will hear about the state of education funding in the Commonwealth.

After the program from 12:15 – 1:30 p.m., please join us for a Taste of Mount Vernon! Sample dishes from local restaurants such as Dishes of India, Della J’s Delectables, Grandma’s Famous Kitchen, 2 Jefes Tex-Mex, Domino’s, Ruby’s Jamaican Kitchen and many more. This addition has become a beloved portion of the Town Meeting and we hope you will stay to find your new favorite local restaurant.

Join us in-person or stream from your home on Facebook @SupervisorDanStorck and Channel 16 <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/cableconsumer/channel-16/stream>. We

are excited to show you all that is happening in the District.

By this point you should have received your annual Advisor mailer in your home mailbox, highlighting major accomplishments and projects from the past year, as well as our focus for 2024.

Looking forward, our goals for the coming year include: advocacy to increase state funding for schools, reducing large truck parking on our roadways, increasing housing options for all, beginning exterior construction on Original Mount Vernon High School, launching a new Mount Vernon business forum, completing the Lorton Visioning process and opening Bunnyman Brewery at the Workhouse Arts Center. Be sure to check it out and if you have any questions, comments or want to connect with Team MVD, be sure to join us for the 37th Annual Mount Vernon District Town Meeting.

## Local Author’s Internet Marketing Book Hits Bestseller List

It’s not all about ‘likes’ and ‘views’ out there.

BY MIKE SALMON  
THE GAZETTE

There seems to be a common misconception with marketing on the internet that if you have 100,000 views, you are rolling in the bucks.

It isn’t true. “They think likes and views equal dollars and that’s not the case,” said author and internet marketing whiz Colleen Nichols.

That’s just one of the things Nichols addressed in her book “Don’t Make it Weird, The Entrepreneurs Guide to Being Human on the Internet,” that has recently climbed onto the bestseller list online and possibly for the print version that came out on Jan. 23.

“It’s about how to make a human connection with people,” Nichols said. For internet marketing, “if the product is good, it can be an organic thing,” she added. On Tik Tok and Instagram, everyone is trying to catch the “going viral” wave and it doesn’t always happen.

Nichols has family roots in Hayfield Farm and grew up in Fairfax County, graduating from Edison High School, Longwood University and then a master’s degree in mental health counseling at George Mason University. That’s where she started focusing on human behavior and has since started a company called “Digital Sales Growth Community,” in 2020. She’s been teaching women in sales for over 10 years.

At home she has three boys under the age of 10, so that keeps her pretty busy but she juggles all of it successfully. “I have an office in my house,” she said.

She just finished her first book this month which is available on Amazon, Kindle and Audible. In November she launched it on the pre-order market and got over 1,000 sales. “There’s very little overhead,” with her company, so few expenses are taken out.

Marketing is all about the person though, she says, and it’s comparable to buying a car. The loud, pushy guy on the lot may not last long. “They buy YOU



Colleen Nichols with her book, “Don’t Make it Weird, The Entrepreneurs Guide to Being Human on the Internet.” Nichols graduated from Edison High School.

first,” she said. “The days of in-person marketing events are over.”

“In ‘Don’t Make it Weird,’ Colleen teaches you how to bring your whole personality — the messy, awkward, and mundane — to your online presence to create true connection and community. And, of course, to sell to people without making it weird. Whatever it is you want to do — you can. Just ‘Don’t Make it Weird,’” read the description on Amazon.

She’s gotten a bunch of five-star reviews too. One mentioned having Nichols in as a guest speaker at their company got him to buy the book.

“I could not put this book DOWN! It has changed the way I am going to show up on social media by helping me truly figure out who I am authentically,” one review said.

“She is able to give real life examples and scenarios, because she’s been there, done that, but without sounding like a know-it-all snob,” said another.

## Alternatives to Revenue Model for County Park Authority

In 2022, the Fairfax County Park Authority began a review of its fee-based revenue model with the objective of identifying a new path forward toward increasing equity of access to county park and recreation programming. After an 18-month effort with consultant HR&A, an initial report of the findings and proposed recommendations is available for initial comments and feedback.

Reliance on fees means that some of FCPA’s public recreation programs charge more than other local jurisdictions, and more than many county residents can afford, according to the report.

As a result, FCPA’s recreation participation skews wealthier and whiter than both the population of Fairfax County and participation in General Fund programs like RecPac.

“The Park Authority is firmly committed towards enhancing equity in all aspects of our park system,” said Fairfax County Park Authority Executive Director Jai Cole. The Park Authority seeks to ensure access is accessible and affordable to all residents.

The Park Authority is seeking public comment and reaction to the 2024 Equity Study. The feedback will play a valuable role in developing next steps toward greater equity in the Fairfax County park system.

Initial comments may be submitted online or via U.S. mail now through Friday, March 1. Instructions for participating are available at <https://engage.fairfaxcounty.gov/park-equity-study>

The Park Authority will use the results of the initial comment period to plan robust community outreach likely to run through summer. The program will include public meetings and a survey to obtain additional understanding regarding how residents perceive park programs and serve to identify barriers to participation.

**FCPA’s recreation participation skews wealthier and whiter than the population of Fairfax County.**

# People Over Platform

A SAMPLING OF TESTIMONIALS FROM MY 2023 BUYERS & SELLERS



## “Tracy was wonderful throughout the whole process...”

She made the selling of my house very painless. My house went on the market Sunday and by Tuesday I had a signed offer.”

- Colleen T.



## “Tracy always made time for us...”

which allowed the opportunity to place offers on homes as soon as possible in a very competitive market. She also had a list of workers to help us make updates that we wanted done to our home. Very happy and would recommend Tracy to a friend.”

- Wes R.



## “Tracy’s *\*impressive\** knowledge...”

of the Northern VA real estate market, combined with her contagiously positive energy and extensive network of contacts is what sold our home - before it was even listed **\*\*and\*\*** above asking price. Every ounce of her advice was spot on and every resource she recommended to get our home ready for sale paid off enormously. We are beyond grateful for her expertise and commitment to selling our home as flawlessly, easily, and quickly(!) as she did. We **\*\*HIGHLY\*\*** recommend Tracy Dunn for the sale of your home. Look no further - she’s a treasure.”

- Patty B.



## “Tracy was wonderful to work with!”

Her knowledge of the Alexandria area was amazing, and she offered advice, insight, and helped us explore different areas before deciding on the best location for us. She took the time to get to know us, and helped us find a house that perfectly meets our family’s needs before it hit the market. We truly enjoyed working with her, and would highly recommend her to anyone looking to buy in the Alexandria area.”

- Lisa S.



## “Tracy is a consummate professional...”

who knows her market inside and out. From the very start of our relationship, she took the time to listen to our needs and really understand what we were looking for in a new home. She had great suggestions and guided us thoughtfully to neighborhoods and properties to give us a sense of where we wanted to be. Tracy knows all the other agents, loan professionals, movers, and repair and improvement contractors and this helps to make the experience easy. She makes herself available when you need her and we have come to value her as a friend as well. You will not regret listing or buying with her!”

- Diane C.

## Wishing Everyone a Happy and Healthy New Year!

My deepest gratitude and sincere appreciation to all my clients for trusting me to serve you in a job I love and helping me reach over \$22 million in sales in 2023. If you are considering a move this year, call me to discuss your options.



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# County Jackpot in Tysons Casino?

Or ‘a concept derived in a vacuum.’

BY MERCIA HOBSON  
THE GAZETTE

Slots, table games, poker, and more — casinos could generate ongoing revenue for state and local governments, provide short-and long-term employment, and drive economic growth. On the other hand, casino gambling can lead to addiction and social costs, including family problems and bankruptcy, crime, and the displacement of small businesses.

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors discussed the possibility of a casino development in Tysons and the processes toward it during the public-packed Legislative Committee Meeting on Friday, January 26. The proposed Class III casino gaming opportunity for Fairfax County stems from Virginia Senate Bill 675, introduced by David Marsden (D-Fairfax). It was heading toward the state’s Economic Development subcommittees.

Chairman Jeff McKay emphasized that the justification for the casino from the start was that Fairfax County needs money. Yet, 70 percent of the revenue goes to the state, with the county keeping 30 percent. “So under this model, the state actually needs money,” McKay said.

“We get hosed. We are the state’s ATM. The financial model here at a minimum would have to improve dramatically at least before I would consider any referendum or any other thing as a result of this [bill].” McKay said.

“Our starting point is these properties that are on this map are supported by the Silver Line that largely the public paid for,” McKay said. “These are extraordinarily valuable pieces of property that are assets of Fairfax County. Fairfax County ... has not substantively been involved in the development of the casino concept envisioned by stakeholders and the patron of this legislation.”

Claudia Arko, the county’s legislative representative, gave a historical overview of the processes and best practices for municipalities to open a Virginia gambling facility and the economic impact on tax revenue and job creation as a stimulus. After the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) studied casino gambling in 2019, the Virginia General Assembly passed legislation to authorize casinos in five localities if the projects secured local voter approval through required referenda for each location. She described them as locations as “looking for economic development” and wanting “to revitalize their economies.”

The locations were Bristol, Danville, Norfolk, Portsmouth, and Richmond.

But one reason the commonwealth might press forward with a Tysons location for a casino was cited in the JLARC report, although not discussed by supervisors. Authorizing a casino in the Northern Virginia market would dramatically increase state revenue and economic benefits, according to the JLARC report on Gaming in the Commonwealth.

“A casino in Northern Virginia would in-



Jeffrey C. McKay, chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors.



Virginia Senator David Marsden introduced SB 675.



Claudia Arko, Fairfax County’s legislative representative



Map of possible casino sites held up during meeting

crease statewide gaming tax revenue by an estimated additional \$155 million (59 percent) and employ an additional 3,200 workers,” according to JLARC. “A Northern Virginia casino is projected to attract substantial revenue from out-of-state customers and retain in-state about \$100 million that Virginia residents are currently spending at casinos in other states.”

In Marsden’s presentation, which Arko said she reviewed, Adam P. Ebbin, (D-39), who chairs the full committee, asked what if Fairfax County wanted a casino in a different location? Arko relayed that Marsden clarified, “That wouldn’t be available to them because the location is part of this [SB 675] legislation.”

As for revenue, Arko said the host locality receives 6 percent of the first \$200 million in gross receipts, 7 percent of \$200 million to \$400 million, and 8 percent of \$400 million. Arko “That’s the formula for everyone,” Arko said.

Arko said SB 675 will advance to the Senate Finance Committee and the Senate if it passes the Subcommittee on Economic Development. No companion House bill exists. If the locality gains authority, it can work with a developer to choose a casino operator. The operator needs Virginia Lottery Board approval; otherwise, the state is little

involved. Finally, the board could propose a referendum on casino gaming. Then, Fairfax County residents would decide by referendum if a casino would come to Tysons.

According to McKay, a stated rationale for the legislation was that Fairfax County needed “to revitalize Tysons.” He rebuked the statement, saying that while the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent shift to remote hybrid work had impacted Fairfax County’s commercial office market, “Tysons, and especially the Class A office space in close proximity to Tysons for Silver Line Metro stations, continues to thrive, is poised for continued success, and will be the economic engine of the Commonwealth for decades to come.”

“Our focus needs to be on at this point in time, reminding folks that we didn’t ask for this. This concept was derived in a vacuum. I saw the bill only after the General Assembly had begun their session, and that we need to protect ourselves in the event that this bill could be approved by making sure that we put out there what our concerns are with this,” McKay said.

McKay added the easiest thing to do would be to oppose the bill instead of monitoring it. “We can change our position on this at any time,” McKay said.

Supervisor Daniel G. Storck, Mount Vernon, voiced that the bill’s process is flawed,

and the county should be engaged, be part of the conversation, and see where it goes. “Sometimes you start back at the beginning and say, Okay, what’s the concept here? What’s the objective here? I’m not clear exactly what the bill’s authors are trying to do. I understand the general objective, which is maybe to provide more tax revenue to the state and to Fairfax County, but the formula itself is deeply flawed and not one that I think any of us would really accept as an appropriate way to do it,” Storck said.

Supervisor Jimmy Bierman, Dranesville, said he listened to some of Marsden’s comments and had a personal conversation with him. “This bill is actually not, not about bringing more money to Fairfax County. Senator Marsden was very clear that he’s concerned that the LCI number [labor cost index] has been going down in Fairfax County.”

Supervisor Walter Alcorn Hunter Mill questioned the next steps leading to a referendum: “Frankly, I’m not sure any of us who are district supervisors would want this in our districts. So, I mean, if that’s the case, I’m not sure why we don’t just oppose it. I oppose the bill.”

Supervisor Dalia Palchik, Providence, opined that since Friday’s board meeting was the first committee meeting on the matter, “there’s still a lot of time in the process. ... And my understanding is [it] is only a Senate bill at this moment. There is no House bill... I think continuing to monitor this is the right call right now.”

McKay said Storck’s and Bierman’s messages must be shared. “As others have said, it’s a continuation of a mindset in Richmond that when the state needs money, they can just come to Fairfax and get it, and we’re at the breaking point.”

McKay noted that communities that have sought new casinos, such as Bristol and Danville, “are literally bankrupt ... [with] no taxable value.”

Fairfax County’s starting point is that the Silver Line supported properties, and the public primarily paid for them. “They are extraordinarily valuable pieces of property, assets of Fairfax County with public infrastructure,” said McKay, referencing a colored map.

“So the audacity to think that the one-size-fits-all model for those other parts of Virginia is a fair starting point of conversation when it comes to Fairfax County is not fair ... I have repeatedly said to the media, to the public, and to everyone [that] the starting point of that revenue breakout is not only unfair, it’s insulting to Fairfax County.”

McKay noted that SB 675 requires Fairfax County to consider a casino gaming establishment within a quarter-mile of a Metro Silver Line station, one-quarter of a mile of a coordinated mixed-use project development, two miles of a regional enclosed mall with a minimum gross building area of 15 million square feet, and outside the 495 Beltway. Tysons is the only place that fits.

The newly introduced bill, with its specific parameters for a location, could lead to a county referendum on casino gambling in Tysons. He added that the county needs to ensure it is part of the state’s conversation and doing everything possible to protect its constituents.

# Commonwealth Is Failing Students

BY JEFF MCKAY AND  
KARL FRISCH

As leaders of the largest school district and locality in the Commonwealth of Virginia, we are frustrated and disappointed by the hard truth exposed in a recent study: the Commonwealth is failing students in every part of Virginia by chronically underfunding local K-12 public schools. We trail the 50-state average, the regional average, and three border states – West Virginia, Maryland, and Kentucky – in per-pupil funding.

Education funding is the foundation of a strong community and economy. If we want the Commonwealth to be an economic leader, we must lead by investing in our young people – our future workforce. We call on Gov. Youngkin and the General Assembly to make K-12 funding their top priority.

The Virginia General Assembly's nonpartisan research arm, the Joint Legislative and Audit Review Commission (JLARC), recently completed a full review of state education funding. JLARC found that Virginia's funding is woefully inadequate compared to the rest of the country. School divisions in other states on average receive 14% more per student than school divisions in Virginia, which equates to \$1,900 more per student.

Virginia's funding of local schools is based on an outdated formula that results in chronic underfunding by the state. On average, Virginia local governments allocate

52% of their budgets to meet educational needs. In Fairfax County, that means our local government provides 69% of the school system's budget. We do this because our residents expect and demand the best schools. But we are at a breaking point, where local tax increases to compensate for state underfunding of schools are making Northern Virginia, and other parts of Virginia, less affordable. The number one challenge for any employer is finding high-quality talent. Unfortunately, many of the people who would fill those roles in our area simply can't afford to.

The state's formula under calculates the true cost of education by \$6.6 billion; that's \$1.2 billion for Fairfax County Public Schools alone. This is an embarrassment and must be addressed by the Youngkin administration and the General Assembly.

But it's not just an embarrassment. It hampers the ability of localities to fully address other community priorities. From mental health to climate change to affordable housing, there are so many opportunities for local government to solve problems if we are not asked to make up for a massive school funding shortfall from the state every year.

And it's also not just about the



McKay



Frisch

pressing challenges local municipalities cannot afford to address. It's about investing in what should be a community's greatest asset and a source of civic pride – its public school system. Decades of research confirms that funding plays a critical role in the quality of K-12 education, and the likelihood of having exemplary teachers increases with sufficient funding. There is not a school district in the Commonwealth that would not welcome more funding to increase teacher pay. To be clear, the teacher shortage is a state and national crisis; it cannot be adequately addressed if local governments are forced to shoulder the burden largely alone. More funding may not solve every problem, but without it, we are missing opportunities to help our kids succeed.

We know very well in Fairfax County what great schools can lead to in terms of economic growth and competitiveness, and that is why the County funds them at such a high level. While Governor Youngkin says improving Virginia's economic competitiveness is his priority, this cannot be accomplished without providing substantial new resources for public education rather than relying on the "smoke and mirrors" of moving scarce state dollars from one edu-

cation priority to another. It is time to end his war on public education and provide relief to local governments and school systems.

State underfunding of our schools is nothing new, but this time it is very different. The JLARC report provides a new opportunity. This is not a report from a national partisan think tank with a footnote about Virginia – this is the General Assembly's own nonpartisan commission showing us that the state is failing our students. This is a time for action and a time for the state to fulfill its constitutional duty to set a high standard for our local schools and then fund them appropriately.

For General Assembly leaders, this session you have an opportunity to use your own report and work with your colleagues around the state to begin fixing this problem.

For Governor Youngkin, to build a 21st century economy we must start with building and funding a world class K-12 public education system across the Commonwealth.

For everyone, the time is now to begin righting a historic wrong and help the Commonwealth's students achieve greatness in their local schools. No more patches or short-term fixes. Let's get to the root of the issue and build a better Commonwealth for future generations.

*Jeffrey McKay is Chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors  
Karl Frisch is Chair of the Fairfax County School Board*

## Virginia's Great Outdoors Act

BY DELEGATE PAUL KRIZEK

As we hurdle towards crossover day in just two short weeks here in Richmond, I'd like to bring you along on the journey of one of my bills this session.

As I have mentioned in previous columns, one bill I introduced this session is the Virginia's Great Outdoors Act, HB 1297. This bill began its life as a good idea back in the fall. I worked diligently over several months with our stakeholders to craft language that would accomplish the legislative intent of that good idea and then awaited a draft from our Division of Legislative Services to introduce by the first day of session on

Jan. 10. The bill had its first hearing in the Natural Resources subcommittee (on which I now sit) at 7:30 a.m. on Jan. 24 and reported bipartisanly (and unanimously) 10-0. Just this morning, this bill passed unanimously out of the full Agriculture committee by a vote of 22-0 and will now head on its way to be considered in Appropriations. HB 1297 still has a long way ahead of it to the House Floor and then to the Senate for consideration, before hopefully arriving at the Governor's desk for his signature.

HB 1297 seeks to provide \$200 million in dedicated funding from recordation tax revenue to invest



Krizek

in trails, state parks and other public lands, and support grant programs that help interested landowners protect their land, conserve natural resources, and increase access to the outdoors for all Virginians. This funding can help ensure current residents, future generations and visitors can count on enjoyment of the places that make Virginia special.

While Virginia's trails, state parks and other public lands are in high demand from Virginians and out-of-state visitors, they are currently underfunded and unable to provide the staff, programs, and infrastructure needed. In addition, historic sites like battlefields and

those important to marginalized communities are unprotected from development. Farms and forest lands are also at risk of being converted to other uses and there aren't sufficient funds to work with landowners who want to conserve their land.

Some of the many critical programs that will be funded through this legislation include the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation, the Get Outdoors Fund, the Virginia BIPOC Historic Preservation Fund, the Virginia Battlefield Preservation Fund, and the Virginia Farmland Preservation Fund.

Please visit the Legislative Information System website as we continue through session to track HB 1297's progress.

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# VA Legislators Aim for Assault Weapon Bans

Will new seats mean new votes?

BY SUSAN LAUME  
THE GAZETTE

Virginia came close to banning sales of assault weapons in 2020 when the House passed a bill banning them by a narrow 51-yes to 48-no vote. In the Senate Judiciary committee that year however, three Democrats: Senators Creigh Deeds, Chap Petersen, and Scott Surovell, surprised many by voting with Republican committee members to fail to move the bill forward in the Senate. Now, four years later, neither that assault bill's patron, former Del. Mark Levine, nor nay voter, Petersen, returned to the General Assembly. Deeds (D-11) is sponsoring his own assault weapon ban this session; and Surovell (D-34) now chairs the committee, titled Courts of Justice, which hears the assault weapon bills, and others related to firearms. Surovell also now leads the Democratic Caucus. The Deeds' bill, SB 2, would prohibit the purchase, possession or sale of assault weapons. The bill by Sen. Adam Ebbin (D-39), SB-99 would prohibit carrying assault weapons in public. And a bill from Sen. Saddam Salim (D-37), SB 327 would expand the definition of "assault firearm" and prohibit sales or purchase to anyone under the age of 21.

On the House side, Del. Dan Helmer (D-10), who voted for the assault weapons ban in 2020, this session is the sponsor of an assault weapon ban companion bill, HB 2. That bill reported from the Public Safety committee on Jan. 19 and was referred to the Appropriations Committee. Del. Mark Sickles' (D-17), bill HB1174, places an age restriction of 21 on purchase of assault weapons. Del. Marcus Simon (D-13), bill HB175, is the companion bill that would prohibit carrying assault weapons in public. Speakers at the bills' Public Safety Committee hearing included faith and public safety and gun control groups, including Giffords Law, Brady Center, and Chesapeake League of Voters, in favor of the bills. Several members of the Virginia Citizens Defense League, a representative of the NRA, and shooting sports group members spoke in opposition.

As the assault weapon restriction bills suc-



PHOTO BY SUSAN LAUME

Senator Scott Surovell, Chair, Courts of Justice Committee



PHOTO WIKIMEDIA

Assault style weapons' sale, carry, and age for possession remain the subject of debate in Virginia's General Assembly

cessfully work their way through various committees on partisan votes, Surovell at his recent Town Hall, explained what is different about assault weapon restriction chances this session from 2020.

Surovell explained that he has always favored restriction of assault weapons, but that the wording of the 2020 bill needed much more work than could be given to it that year. He and other Senators voted to continue it for study until the following year. But House GOP opponents who controlled the House the next year refused to docket the bill in 2021. Surovell asserts that the 2020 session did pass five major firearm bills that year, among an unusually high volume of work, before they simply ran out of time.

Gun rights versus gun control issues continue to roil political activism in the Commonwealth and across the country. Assault weapons are used in a large percentage of mass shootings. A federal assault weapons law, which placed restrictions on the sale and manufacture of some semiautomatic assault weapons expired in 2004. Gun safety advocates opposed allowing the law to expire and called for reinstatement of the restrictions. In December 2012, a 20-year-old gunman killed 20 children, ages six to seven years old, and six adult staff members, at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecti-

cut. Enacting gun safety measures in the wake of the massacre of small children seemed inevitable, but it didn't happen.

A new national advocacy group, Moms Demand Action, formed after Sandy Hook with chapters in every state to call for gun reform and increased gun safety measures.

In 2022, a federal bill to renew and strengthen assault weapons law passed the House of Representatives but did not pass in the Senate. Today there is no federal law restricting the weapons. Ten states (California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Washington), and the District of Columbia, have enacted laws that ban the sale, manufacture, and transfer of assault weapons. Virginia (Va. Code Ann. §§ 18.2-287.4, 18.2-308.2:01, 18.2-308.2:2, 18.2-308.7, 18.2-308.8) enacted laws that place some additional safety requirements and regulations on assault weapons, but fall short laws enacted in the ten listed states.

Now, about three weeks into Virginia's 2024 legislative session, a significant number of firearms-related bills, as well as the assault weapon bills, have an additional week for hearing in their originating body before the process of crossover begins for successful bills to be heard by the opposite body.

## Biden, Harris Visit Northern Virginia

Second stop of Vice President Kamala Harris's Reproductive Freedom Tour.

BY SUSAN LAUME  
THE CONNECTION

President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris visited Manassas on Jan. 23, with their spouses, First Lady Jill Biden and Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff. They were there to mark the

51st anniversary of the landmark abortion rights case, Roe v. Wade. The event is part of Harris's announced Reproductive Freedom Tour, a series of events across the country to "bring together people to address the freedom of every American to make decisions about their own body."

SEE BIDEN, HARRIS, PAGE 6



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES  
President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris spoke in Manassas on the VP's second stop of her Reproductive Freedom Tour on Jan 23.

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THE CONNECTION  
NEWSPAPERS

# Country Feeling Captured in a Painting at Nalls Produce

Former Franconia art teacher honors the owner and a pet pig in a painting.

BY MIKE SALMON  
THE GAZETTE

Over at Nalls Produce in the Franconia area, Penny the Pig is the in-house celebrity, and whenever children come to shop with their parents, Penny's pen is a first stop. After all, it's not common to have a celebrity pig on the staff, and then a loose pig in the neighborhood became the second pig at Nalls. The pigs have become a familiar sight around the place so one of the customers captured it in a painting which she recently gave to owner Cary Nalls.

The artist is Mary Andrews, a loyal Nalls customer and former art teacher at Franconia Elementary, including teaching Valerie Nalls. She's been a Nalls customer for over 30 years. The painting is now in Cary's house. In the painting, it's a warm summer day and Cary is walking the pig. It's a slice of life at Nalls.

"I enjoy painting animals so their pig was an intriguing subject," Andrews said. She regularly attends painting classes at the Workhouse Arts Center in Lorton.

Nalls' history with pigs started with Penny the Pig who has been there for years. Penny is a miniature pig and has her own pen over on the side near the vegetable plants at Nalls. Penny is nearly 10 years old and they celebrate her birthday in August.

Arnold is the other pig at Nalls and he came along by accident. In August 2022, there were reports of a loose pig running around the Beulah Street area and everyone thought it was the pig at Nalls so they reached out to them. This pig was a different variety than Penny but Cary and Valerie Nalls enlisted the help of a few other people and they cornered it in a spot nearby. Cary threw an old coat over the pig, wrapped him up and took him back to Nalls. They made a pen for him, threw in some food and he's been there ever since. He eats a lot too, they said.

Along with their two in-house pigs, there



Nalls owner Cary Nalls, holding the painting, wearing the same hat he has on in the painting.



Mary Andrews, artist and loyal Nalls customer, is a former teacher at nearby Franconia Elementary School.



are several chickens and roosters running around the place and this adds to the country atmosphere at Nalls.

## Nalls Produce

7310 Beulah Street, Franconia  
703-971-4068

Nalls is open daily

Monday – Saturday: 9 am – 7 pm

Sunday: 9 am – 6 pm

PHOTOS BY NALLS

Mary Andrews' painting of Cary Nalls walking one of the pigs.

## Biden, Harris Visit Northern Virginia

FROM PAGE 5

Described as a campaign event for the Biden-Harris ticket, the timing of the Manassas gathering on Tuesday provided a counterpoint to the first GOP primary in New Hampshire on the same day, where former President Donald Trump led in polling among Republican voters at the time. Trump received a higher percentage of the vote than challenger Nikki Haley.

Reproductive rights and related women's health issues are expected to be major issues in the Biden/Harris re-election campaign. Harris' first tour event was on Jan. 22 in Wisconsin, with at least three additional locations planned in the next two months. The President joined Harris in Manassas to highlight steps the administration is taking to expand access to abortion medication and contraception, to counter state abortion

bans that have sprung up in many states. Biden spoke about expanded coverage for no-cost contraception through the Affordable Care Act. He indicated the Departments of the Treasury, Labor, and Health and Human Services are issuing new guidance to clarify standards and support expanded coverage of a broader range of FDA-approved contraceptives, at no cost, under the Affordable Care Act among other actions.

This session, Democrats in the Virginia legislature in both houses have introduced constitutional amendments to guarantee the fundamental right to reproductive freedom in the Commonwealth. Hearings on those amendments are being deferred until 2025 to match the State's administrative rules for addressing constitutional amendments which when passed, are on the general election ballot, then must be followed by passing a sec-

ond time in the General Assembly. Voters in Ohio, Kentucky, Michigan, Kansas, and California already have rejected abortion bans in new legislation.

On June 24, 2022, The Supreme Court, Justices appointed by Trump, held that the Constitution does not confer a right to abortion, taking away the right to reproductive choice outlined in Roe versus Wade that had stood for 50 years.

## CLIMATE CHANGE

# Faith-Based Actions for Local Climate Change Solutions

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH  
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

**C**urbing the greenhouse gas emissions that are warming the planet and disrupting many traditional weather patterns is a governmental, economic, scientific and environmental challenge. It is also a moral challenge, contends Christopher Topoleski, the new executive director of Northern Virginia's Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions (FACS).

"It's a moral imperative for us, where we live and where we worship," he said in a recent interview, adding that addressing climate change transcends any one religion. "It is negatively affecting our children and future generations. Whatever you believe, we are all on the same planet and have a shared responsibility," he offered.

Climate change is a term generally meaning changes in temperatures and climate patterns attributed largely to burning fossil fuels like carbon dioxide and methane. These fuels produce gases that trap heat and warm the planet.

The Alliance was founded in 2013 "when a small group of passionate people of faith gathered in a church basement in Oakton to reflect on a faithful response to the climate crisis," explains Christine Connelly Montagnese, FACS



**Christopher Topoleski.**

Community Organizer. It is a region-wide, nonprofit organization composed of many different faiths and people who do not practice any religion. Topoleski seeks to build a strong, diverse network of people and over 190 places of worship, including people from Protestant, Muslim, Jewish, Catholic, Unitarian Universalist, Hindu and Peace traditions.

While addressing climate change is debated in the halls of Congress, state legislatures, parliaments and the United Nations, Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions is focused on local solutions, from supporting solar energy to reducing vehicular emissions.

### Vulnerable Populations

Topoleski, a Reston resident, comes to the position with years of advocacy experience. As the legislative director for the National Indian Education Association (NIEA), he gained a deeper understanding of how Indigenous people view our natural resources. "They were the first people here," he said, "stewards of the land. It all comes down to one Earth, one planet."

He is especially focused on how energy and environmental policies impact vulnerable populations and sees heading FACS as a "perfect opportunity" to highlight solutions. "Some lower and no income people and people of color suffer the most from greenhouse gas emissions," he maintains. For example, some low-income areas have some of the worst traffic congestion and vehicular pollution. In Fairfax County, for example, transportation emissions are 42 percent of all carbon emissions. "It's a social justice issue," he believes.

Working with congregations and individuals, he's building an advocacy army to persuade elected officials to do more. He brings the tools he promoted at the NIEA, tools that are applicable at all levels of government. He's also been a volunteer government liaison with Reston Strong and member of the Social Justice Committee

of Reston's Unitarian Universalist Church.

"Current policy is not sustainable," he argues and believes that advocates should not just focus on law or policy changes, but their long-term implementation which too often gets short shrift.

Scott Peterson, FACS Board Chair, lauds Topoleski's talents, saying, "Chris's experience will enable him to communicate with a wide range of stakeholders as we move forward. His expertise in fundraising, development of alliances, commitment to diversity and inclusion and his leadership roles will serve us well."

### FACS's Projects

In 2022, FACS received a U.S. Department of Energy grant to help convert buildings to clean energy sources and energy efficiency measures. Climate activists see clean energy as energy that does not produce carbon dioxide and other pollution from fossil fuels. FACS is developing a pilot program and hopes to eventually scale up to help many home and building owners install solar panels and more efficient hot water heaters, for example.

The FACS Tree of Life campaign helps congregations "green" their outdoor campus by restoring natural habitats, improving soil quality and planting native plants and trees.

Why is my sanctuary so cold? That was the title of a Jan. 16 FACS program on financing heating-cooling systems and energy efficiency and renewable energy products. The organization's solar sanctuaries program leverages the power of faith communities to strengthen energy efficiency and install solar power and battery backup systems. Not only will this reduce greenhouse gas emissions, these places of refuge can provide emergency shelter for the most vulnerable and save lives during power outages.

FACS has local subgroups called "hubs" in jurisdictions like Fairfax and Arlington that work on hyper-local projects.

As a volunteer, Topoleski manages the Reston Strong free market every Sunday at the Reston YMCA, providing free food, donated by Costco, no questions asked, to up to 150 families. "All anyone has to do is bring a bag," he says.

The father of two adult children, Topoleski calls himself an "avid home chef" and prepares meals from his summer home garden. With vegetables out the backdoor, he's at least not creating greenhouse gas emissions by buying produce hauled across the country. Local change can have global impacts, he believes.

Information: <https://faithforclimate.org/>

### BULLETIN BOARD

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

#### FOSTER PARENTS NEEDED

Interested in becoming a foster parent? There is always a need for caring foster parents looking to open their homes to foster youth. Get in touch to learn more. Visit [fcsvanow@gmail.com](mailto:fcsvanow@gmail.com) or [www.FCSVA.org](http://www.FCSVA.org). Or call 703-817-9890.

#### VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

**STEM VOLUNTEERS.** The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) needs scientists, engineers, mathematicians, and physicians to assist K-12 STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) teachers in the Northern Virginia Area, during the 2016-17 school year. In the 2015-16 school year, the numbers of STEM volunteers in Northern Virginia were: Fairfax County - 40, Arlington - 20, and Alexandria - one. Details of the collaboration are worked out between the teacher and the volunteer, and may involve giving demonstrations, assisting in lab experiments, lecturing on special topics, assisting

SEE BULLETIN, PAGE 8

## Ribbon Cutting for Soma Yoga Healing Center

**S**oma Yoga is a center dedicated to helping clients improve their quality of life in a safe and nurturing environment. Their mission is to provide a space where individuals be a part of a community that promotes healing and personal growth. Soma Yoga specializes in Ayurveda Yoga, an approach that recognizes the unique needs of each individual and tailors the practice accordingly. Whether you are a seasoned yogi or just starting, Soma Yoga believes that yoga is for everyone and welcomes you to join their community. 2560 Huntington Ave, Suite 404, Alexandria, Virginia 22303. <https://soma-yogahealing.com/>



**Ribbon Cutting for Soma Yoga Healing Center.** From left, Joe Haggerty, CEO, Alexandria Chamber of Commerce; Tracie Brace, also known as Padma, owns Rasa Yoga in Houston, Texas; Sarah Deblock, owner Soma Yoga Healing Center, Sarah's husband Ryan Deblock. Brace is Sarah Deblock's mentor and came from Texas to celebrate.



**Tony Curry-Fisher, Director of Membership for the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce; Tracie Brace; Sarah Deblock, and Joe Haggerty, CEO, Alexandria Chamber of Commerce; and.**

# NEWS

## 2024 Spring Garden Market at River Farm

The American Horticultural Society's annual Spring Garden Market at River Farm will be April 12-13. This much-anticipated outdoor event, one of River Farm's largest and most popular fundraisers, brings together plant, seed and garden accessory retailers, nature-focused artists and authors,

gardening experts, food vendors, and fun for the whole family.

The 2024 Spring Garden Market will take place April 12-13, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. at River Farm.

Proceeds from the Spring Garden Market directly contribute to the maintenance, beautification and preservation of River Farm, headquarters of the AHS since



2024 American Horticultural Society's annual Spring Garden Market at River Farm will be April 12-13. Here, a scene from a previous year.

1973. Once part of George Washington's farmland, the 25-acre site overlooking the Potomac River is enhanced by a blend of formal and naturalistic gardens, including an award-winning children's garden, woodlands, and many breathtaking views. Offering free access to the community six days a week, River Farm is truly a local and national horticultural and historical treasure.

With an expected attendance of over 2,000 local gardeners, plant lovers and nature enthusiasts, the Spring Garden Market is a wonderful opportunity for companies and organizations to showcase their products and brand. The AHS is currently registering vendors, sponsors and volunteers to participate in this annual event. Early bird registration for vendors is available through Feb. 18 with final registration deadline on March 15. Registration forms and details [www.ahsgardening.org/spring-gardenmarket2024](http://www.ahsgardening.org/spring-gardenmarket2024) or email [plant-sale@ahsgardening.org](mailto:plant-sale@ahsgardening.org)

person for walk-up or \$20 per car including all passengers. There is no entry fee or parking fee for AHS members including car passengers. Children six years of age and under are free. Additional restrictions and exceptions are available on the Spring Garden Market webpage.

River Farm is located at 7931 E. Boulevard Dr., Alexandria, Va. 22308. For more information, call (703) 768-5700 ext. 114 or visit [www.ahsgardening.org](http://www.ahsgardening.org).

### About the American Horticultural Society

The American Horticultural Society (AHS) has been fostering innovation and passion for gardening and horticultural excellence since 1922. The Society's membership includes over 22,000 individuals, including aspiring, new, and experienced gardeners, plant enthusiasts, and horticultural professionals, as well as numerous partner organizations. Through our educational programs, awards, and publications, the AHS connects people to gardening, raises awareness of earth-friendly gardening practices, introduce children to plants, and showcases the art and practice of horticulture.

### Attendees

Entrance to the Spring Garden Market may be purchased online beginning in March at [www.ahsgardening.org/springgardenmarket2024](http://www.ahsgardening.org/springgardenmarket2024). Entry fee is \$5 per

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### BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 7

with homework, etc. The hours are flexible, and volunteers attend a one-day training in September before being assigned to schools. To see how volunteers are assisting their teachers, view the video clips at [www.seniorscientist.org](http://www.seniorscientist.org). To volunteer, contact [donaldrea@aol.com](mailto:donaldrea@aol.com).

Assistance League of Northern Virginia is an all-volunteer non-profit organization that feeds, clothes and provides reading assistance and books to children in need. Assistance League's programs touch the lives of hundreds of children in Fairfax and Prince

William Counties and the City of Alexandria. There are many volunteer opportunities for community members to contribute to helping those in need. To learn more, email [info@alnv.org](mailto:info@alnv.org), or visit [www.alnv.org](http://www.alnv.org).

Volunteer Adult Mentors Needed. Help assist the Department of Family Services' BeFriend-A-Child mentoring program. The mentors provide opportunities for companionship, guidance and support to children who have been abused and neglected, or who are at risk of abuse and neglect. Contact Ibrahim Khalil (Ibrahim.khalil@fairfaxcounty.gov) at 703-324-4547.



# 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/>

## JAN. 11 TO FEB. 18

**A Delicate Balance Sculpture.** At the Athenaeum, Alexandria. Curated by Jackie Hoysted and produced by Veronica Szalus, A Delicate Balance is an all-sculpture show that explores the idea of achieving equilibrium. Perhaps more than ever, today we have a greater awareness of how everything operates in such a delicate balance - be it ecosystems, politics, relationships or personal well-being. We must navigate life without tipping too much in one direction so that we can strive for harmony, but at times something radical is required to achieve it.

## FEB. 2-24

**The "Visible Touch: A Look at Texture" exhibit features art that explores texture through physical form or visual illusion.** Visitors will be allowed to touch some of the art (pieces are marked). Enjoy the visual and the tactile experience! View at Del Ray Artisans Gallery, 2704 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria VA. Opening Reception: Friday, February 2, 7-9 p.m. Open Thursdays 12-6 p.m., Fridays 12-9 p.m., Saturdays & Sundays 12-6 p.m. (Closed February 25). [DelRayArtisans.org/exhibits](http://DelRayArtisans.org/exhibits)

## SATURDAY/FEB. 3

**Sherlock Holmes and the Case of the Missing Maestro.** 3 p.m. At George Washington Masonic Memorial, 101 Callahan Drive, Alexandria. When the orchestra is ready to begin their concert and suddenly discover the Maestro is nowhere to be found they begin to panic. Thankfully the world's greatest detective is available and agrees to take the case. All the musicians are suspects and thus Sherlock Holmes must investigate each of the instrument families to deduce who is behind the mystery. With Enrico Lopez-Yanez, Guest Conductor.

## SATURDAY/FEB. 3

**Book Launch.** 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. At Alexandria History Museum at The Lyceum, 201 S. Washington Street, Alexandria. Hear from editor Audrey Davis and the authors of African American Emancipation in an Occupied City, which tells the story of formerly enslaved and self-emancipated people in a newly occupied city during the Civil War. They sought refuge in Alexandria, coming with only hopes and dreams for life as free people. They came seeking freedom, but many did not live long in it. Those who survived used their labor for the cause of freedom. A book signing will follow after the authors' presentations. The event is free, but online registration is encouraged.

## FEB. 3-4

**20th Annual Alexandria Boutique Warehouse Sale.** At various boutique stores in Old Town Alexandria. The longest-running winter warehouse sale returns for its 20th year in a walkable format throughout Old Town Alexandria. With sales up to 80% off, shoppers are expected to score the best deals of the winter season with nearly 50 independent boutiques to choose from. Steals and deals from Alexandria and regional boutiques will



The 20th Annual Alexandria Boutique Warehouse Sale will be held Feb. 3-4, 2024 in Old Town Alexandria.

take place in stores, pop-up tents, select side streets, and open retail spaces for shoppers to explore and enjoy the best retailers ranging from indie brands, clothing, shoes, jewelry, to home furnishings, and more.

## THURSDAY/FEB. 8

**African American Film Series: "Banker."** 2-4 p.m. At Ellen Coolidge Burke Branch Library, 4701 Seminary Road, Suite 104, Alexandria. Free admission. In honor of Black History Month, the library will be showing a series of films throughout the month.

## FRIDAY/FEB. 9

**The Thirteen Presents "Path of Miracles."** 7:30 p.m. At St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 8009 Ft. Hunt Road, Alexandria. In Path of Miracles, British composer Joby Talbot takes the listener on a musical journey on the mystical Camino de Santiago de Compostela. The contemplative progression of the Camino is built into the structure of the work, with the four movements of the work titled after the four main posts along the Camino. Talbot incorporates various medieval texts in many languages and musical styles as diverse as those of Taiwanese Bunun people and medieval chant. Paired with projected images of the cosmos by renowned Italian virtual designer Camilla Tassi, The Thirteen's performances of Path of Miracles promise to be replete with beauty and wonder.

## SATURDAY/FEB. 10

**African American Waterfront Heritage Trail Signs Ribbon Cutting.** 11 a.m. At the New Fishtown sign on the river side of Founders

Park, 351 N. Union Street, Alexandria. The African American Heritage Trail Committee invites the public to join in a ribbon cutting ceremony to celebrate the installation of new interpretive signs along Alexandria's historic waterfront. The 11 signs and two orientation panels illuminate the history of the African American community in Alexandria over the span of several centuries. A reception following the ribbon cutting will be held in the Overlook Room (#325) on the third floor of the Torpedo Factory, 105 N. Union Street.

## SATURDAY/FEB. 10

**Manumission Tour Company Black History Bus Tour.** 10 to 11:30 a.m. and 12 to 1:30 p.m. Tour meets at the Alexandria Black History Museum, 902 Wythe Street, Alexandria. Ride with Manumission Tour Company on a 90-minute guided bus tour to visit various African American historic sites in Alexandria. You will hear stories of both enslaved and free African Americans prior to the Civil War as well as understand the stories behind some of Alexandria's most well-known African American historic sites. Sites will include the Alexandria National Cemetery, Alfred Street Baptist Church, Shiloh Baptist Church, Church Alley, the African American Heritage Park, the Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery, Barrett Library and more. Visit [manumissiontours.com](http://manumissiontours.com).

## SATURDAY/FEB. 10

**37th Annual Mount Vernon Town Meeting.** At Mount Vernon High School, 8515 Old Mount Vernon Road. Times: 7:45 a.m. to 9:25 a.m. - Exhibit Hall Open; 9:30 a.m. to

noon - Program: Speakers, Audience Q&A and Virtual Tour; Noon to 1:30 p.m. - Taste of Mount Vernon.

## FEB. 10-11

### Alexandria Symphony Announces ASO at 80 Project

Saturday, February 10, 2024 at 7:30 p.m. at Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center;

Sunday, February 11, 2024 at 3:00 p.m. at George Washington Masonic Memorial.

Four original pieces, commissioned in honor of the 80th anniversary of the Alexandria Symphony Orchestra (ASO), will be presented as part of the ASO at 80 Project. Led by Music Director James Ross, the commissions will premiere throughout the 2023-2024 season as introductions to four of the five performances.

On February 10 and 11, 2024, the program entitled "Do Not Go Gentle" opens with Milad Yousufi's Aurora, drawn from his experience as an Afghan refugee and inspired by a poem dedicated to his mother. His works express both his pride in his country of birth and his longing to return. Visit [www.alexsym.org](http://www.alexsym.org).

## FRIDAY/MARCH 8

**Women's Leadership Forum.** 7:45-10:30 a.m. At The Westin Alexandria Old Town, 400 Courthouse Square, Alexandria. The forum will bring together women (and men) at all stages of their careers for an interactive, "straight talk" panel discussion filled with inspiration and insight. Cost is \$80 for Members | \$105 for Prospective Members.

## MARCH 12-18

**Spring Book Sale** - At Beatley Central Library, 5005 Duke Street, Alexandria. The Friends of Beatley Central Library will hold their Spring Book Sale from Tuesday, March 12 through Monday, March 18. Members' Preview on Tuesday, March 12, 3:00 -7:30 p.m. (\$15 memberships available at the door); Wednesday, March 13, 10:00 a.m.-7:30 p.m.; Thursday, March 14, 10:00 a.m.-7:30 p.m.; Friday, March 15, 10:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m.; Saturday, March 16, 10:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m.; Sunday, March 17, Half Price Day, 1:00-4:30 p.m.; Monday, March 18, \$10 Bag Sale, 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. \$4 or less, unless specifically marked: hardbacks, paperbacks, children's books, and media. All genres. Visit [www.beatleyfriends.org](http://www.beatleyfriends.org).

## THE BIRCHMERE

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

## FEBRUARY

Fri. 2: Will Downing \$79.50  
Sat. 3: Will Downing \$79.50 SOLD OUT!  
Tue. 6: Rosanne Cash: ReInventing The Wheel 1993-2023 with John Leventhal and Band \$79.50  
Wed. 7: Rosanne Cash: ReInventing The Wheel 1993-2023 with John Leventhal and Band \$79.50  
Thu. 8: Aaron Watson w/ Jenna Paulette \$29.50  
Fri. 9: Dave Hollister \$55.00 SOLD OUT!  
Wed. 14: Kevin Ross \$65.00  
Thu. 15: The Amy Winehouse Celebration: back to BACK TO BLACK \$29.50  
Fri. 16: NRBQ \$45.00  
Sat. 17: The Dramatics featuring L.J. Reynolds \$59.50  
Sun. 18: Neil Diamond Tribute starring DAVID CARLIN KING and The Gold Diamond Band \$45.00  
Thu. 22: Corey Smith Band w/ Jeb Gipson - All Standing in the Flex Stage! Doors 6pm \$35.00  
Fri. 23: TWEET \$45.00  
Sat. 24: Tarsha Fitzgerald Presents DEVOTION: An Earth Wind & Fire Experience \$39.50  
Sun. 25: Daryl Davis Presents: Thanks For The Memories 2023! \$39.50  
Wed. 28: Sara Evans \$69.50 2nd Night Added!  
Thu. 29: Sara Evans \$69.50 SOLD OUT!

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## Beyer Supports 401Kids Savings Act

U.S. Sen. Bob Casey (D-PA) and U.S. Rep. Don Beyer (D-VA) led a bicameral delegation with Senate Finance Committee Chairman Ron Wyden (D-OR), Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), and Representatives Joyce Beatty (D-OH) and Suzan DelBene (D-WA) in introducing the 401Kids Savings Act. The new bill would create children's savings accounts (CSAs) for every single child in America, building lifelong wealth and economic self-sufficiency for kids from families with limited resources. Funds from the accounts could be used for post-secondary education, starting a business, buying a house, or retirement security.

"Wealth inequality is one of the most intractable challenges facing our nation; it perpetuates injustice, slows economic growth, and fosters political dysfunction. Our bill would help reverse this worsening trend by ensuring that all children entering adulthood have the means to invest in their future," said Rep. Beyer. "The positive effects of 401Kids accounts would go far beyond the children and their families who get accounts, because we know that when young adults can pursue education, start businesses, and buy homes, it creates economy-wide benefits. I thank Senator Casey and our other colleagues and partners for their leadership on this crucial legislation."

Along with introducing the bill, Casey also released a new report called "401Kids: Building Wealth for the Next Generation," which delves into the proposal and examples of how such savings accounts are already working for kids in several states.

Based on local models around the nation, the 401Kids Savings Act would create children's savings accounts that would be built on state 529 college savings platforms and managed by state Treasurers. Once the accounts are established for all newborns and kids under age 18, families, non-profits, employers, foundations, and others could contribute to a 401Kids Account which, starting at age 18, could be used for post-secondary education and training, a small business, a first home or retirement security. While all families could contribute up to \$2,500 per year to the accounts, only lower- and moderate-income families would receive direct federal support.

According to analysis by the Constellation Fund, for every dollar invested in 401Kids, society would receive at least \$2.61 in benefits associated with increased income, improved health, additional tax revenues, and savings to other government sectors.

# Police Continue Search For Hit & Run Driver

**Victim Mary Wong dies more than a month after she was left injured on road.**

**T**he victim of the hit-and-run crash on Huntsman Boulevard has succumbed to injuries inflicted on Dec. 23 (see Connection, January 18-24, page 2).

Around 7:53 p.m. on Dec. 23, officers responded to the intersection of Huntsman Boulevard and BridleWood Boulevard for a pedestrian who was struck by a vehicle that fled the scene before police arrival. Preliminarily, detectives from the Crash Reconstruction Unit determined Mary (Fu-Tzu) Wong, 63, was crossing Huntsman Boulevard from west to east within the crosswalk when she was hit by an unidentified vehicle. Wong was transported to the hospital with life-threatening injuries.

On Jan. 29, detectives were notified that Wong had died from injuries she sustained in the crash. The investigation into the crash



PHOTO COURTESY WONG FAMILY  
Mary Wong, Oct. 8, 1960 - Jan. 29, 2024

continues as detectives seek to locate both the vehicle and the driver involved.

Detectives would like to speak to anyone who may have information about this case. Those with information are asked to please call the Crash Reconstruction Unit at 703-280-0543. Tips can also be submitted anonymously through Crime Solvers by phone at (703)-246-4676, or online at <https://fcpd-news.wordpress.com/>

Speaking on Jan. 30, Mary Wong's son David repeated his plea for the community's help in bringing the hit and run driver to justice. He said, "Progress so far is affected because there aren't many traffic cameras around here, except for major highways. It takes time and effort to find nearby ring cameras or somebody who may have seen something. Also calling body shops and contacting neighbors along the possible travel route." Community members are reaching out to assist by making calls and talking about the need for information to support the police efforts.

## Much Ado About Something



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

That 'something' being the off-hand reference (use of the "R" word/"remission") from my oncologist explaining why we need to focus on my kidney health at the expense of restarting my cancer treatment (a pill a day). It came in an email response to my question about my cancer status/treatment timetable based on recent lab work especially ordered for this reason. It's the first time I've heard that r-word in a decade. Moreover, it wasn't a word I heard a month or so ago when I had my first in-person, post-PET scan appointment with my oncologist in over two years. Seems like that would have been an appropriate time. But no. Let's be realistic: using the "R" word to a cancer patient is akin to waving a red cape in front of a bull. We may not exactly charge but you'll certainly get our attention.

If the reason not to restart my cancer treatment is the potential damage (irreparable) to my kidneys (as indicated in the kidney function/creatinine level in my recent "chem 7" lab work), I can certainly understand and appreciate that. If you're going to mention that my thyroid cancer is in remission as a reason to stop treatment and avoid further (irreparable) harm to my kidney – potentially leading to dialysis, I'm happily on board and grateful for this preemptive strike. However, you can't bury the lead: "REMISSION." Since when, and why am I hearing about now in an email no less? This is the kind of news/characterization that cancer patients dream about. And if it's at all applicable to me – or any cancer patient for that matter, given the stress and pre-occupation with our disease and life expectancy that dominates our daily lives, tell me more. If you have an ounce of above-average-sounding news, please, as I said when I was about to receive bad news (initial Team Lourie meeting in Feb.'09 when I was first diagnosed and "prognosed"), give it to me straight. I can take it. And if I can take that, I can certainly take this: "Remission." Elaborate. Don't just drop that word in the middle of a paragraph and offer no additional context or suggestion that perhaps we should talk because of this relative bombshell of amazing but unexpected – and so far, not really corroborated news of my health.

For 14 and half years, I've lived with that original "13 month to two years" prognosis hanging over my head – like the sword of Damocles, permeating my brain and affecting every decision I make. You must know that the use of this word is not going to fall on deaf ears – or blind eyes. It's the word all of us cancer patients have been straining to see on any correspondence that we receive from our oncologists. To use it in this context, without any further explanation concerning its legitimacy/relevance to my life as an excuse no less for what we're now not doing (continuing my cancer medicine/treatment: chemotherapy/targeted therapy, pills and of course infusions galore, going on almost 15 years), deserves more than just a passing glance. Granted, I LOVE the sound/look of it but without further ado/additional information/clarification, I am no closer to a good night's sleep. It's not exactly a chicken-little situation, but for a cancer patient whose sky fell years ago, we're very susceptible and inclined to exaggerate good news. We've been waiting our whole lives (it only seems that way) since our original diagnosis for it. News or a reference of this significance/substance must be treated very carefully. Giving us/our health an inch will lead to a mile of unfounded and unrealistic, and possibly inaccurate information. And if us cancer patients need anything, it's precise and exact information so we can live what's left of our lives with clarity of purpose and dignity. Maybe even hope if there's some substance to his use of this word.

Because ambiguity is unhelpful. Considering that many cancer patients are enduring treatment with no guarantee of survival, the lines of communication – in person, and especially in print must be unequivocal with no basis for misunderstanding. And the misuse of a word, or in this case, the context in which the word "remission" is used, a word all of us cancer patients have dreamed of hearing/seeing, is unfair and dare I say insensitive.

We're all clinging to life here, emotionally certainly, and physically it varies. Make no mistake: being diagnosed with cancer or surviving cancer leaves a mark. My late mother used to quote Bette Davis: "No one gets out of this life alive." For cancer patients, life is not a given. Due to the cancer, it's more a taken.. All your decisions/considerations will be made with this underlying, overriding harsh bit of reality. And in that reality, we're all looking for morsels/cornels of positive sounding anything to give us hope. Don't presume that we can take it all in stride. In fact, I wonder if the longer I survive, the shorter distance I'll have to travel.

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

# New President, New Ideas Coming to FABB

**Bicycling group continues to grow with biking efforts in Fairfax County.**

By MIKE SALMON  
THE GAZETTE

**O**ver at the Fairfax Alliance for Better Bicycling, 2024 will start out with a new president, as former president Bruce Wright steps down and newly elected Joy Faunce takes over. She is a long time cyclist and will be behind all the cycling efforts of FABB through her tenure as president.

Wright founded FABB in 2005 and has been the president since 2021. He's seen several positive things for bicycling in the area, including the growth in the wide-spread system of trails and the formation of the county Bicycle Master Plan that is now in place. "Without that plan, I don't think we would have the bike facilities that we have now," said Wright.

Back when Wright started with FABB, they were working with then-Chairman Gerald Connolly, and then-Supervisor Jeff McKay who is now chairman who still advocates for an improved bicycling network in the county. The creation of



**Bruce Wright**  
Outgoing FABB President & Founder



**Joy Faunce**  
Incoming FABB President

**At Fairfax Alliance for Better Bicycling, former president Bruce Wright steps down and newly elected president Joy Faunce steps in.**

the county's first bike map was started with Connolly and remains one of the highpoints of Wright's tenure.

Wright will still work with FABB and will remain on the board of the non-profit as past president, but "I think we need some new ideas," he said. He is working with Faunce on the transition.

### County Biking Outlook

Other items that impact the local biking community are a look at the future George

Snyder Trail proposal that will link the Rt. 123 Trail with the Cross County Trail in Fairfax, the 2024 Bike Summit on March 19-20 and an update on the seven construction projects along Route 50 between Blake Lane and Prosperity Avenue.

Over at the Virginia Department of Transportation, they are updating the "Regional Bike and Trail Network Study," which started in 2004 and was last updated in 2015.



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