

Mount Vernon Gazette

MOUNT VERNON'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER • A CONNECTION NEWSPAPER

AUGUST 7, 2025

50 Years Later FCPD Identifies Victim

Detectives from FCPD Major Crimes Bureau Cold Case Squad have solved the mystery of a child found deceased in 1972 in Massey Creek, under the Old Colchester Bridge in Lorton. The child has been identified as Carl Matthew Bryant. The identification was made possible through advanced DNA testing and forensic-grade genome sequencing provided by Astrea Forensics.

Astrea Forensics developed a DNA profile suitable for genetic genealogy, which Innovative Forensic Investigations used to identify a possible relative of John Doe. After extensive research and calls, detectives traced John Doe's family to Philadelphia. With help from the Philadelphia Police Department, they contacted a relative who led them to John Doe's mother, Vera Bryant. Bryant died in 1980, and a family member said she had two sons, Carl and James, and planned to travel from Philadelphia to Virginia in 1972. Vera's body was exhumed, and DNA submitted to Astrea Forensics confirmed a match.

Discovery and Initial Investigation

On June 13, 1972, the body of a young boy was found in Massey Creek under the Old Colchester Road Bridge in Lorton. An autopsy revealed that the cause of death was blunt force trauma, ruling the death a homicide. With no immediate leads, a local church group gave the unidentified child the name "Charles Lee Charlet" and arranged for his burial at Coleman Cemetery in Al-



In 2003, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) created a computer-generated sketch. Several tips came in but yielded no viable leads.

exandria, VA. The case remained unsolved for over 50 years.

In 2003, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) created a computer-generated sketch. Several tips came in but yielded no viable leads.

In 2004: Hair evidence was discovered in the case file and sent to the FBI. Mitochondrial DNA was extracted and entered into the national database, but no matches were found.

In 2016: Two potential leads of missing children, Solomon Rose and George Barksdale, were ruled out

via DNA.

Genealogy Efforts Begin: Due to the limitations of mitochondrial DNA, detectives needed nuclear DNA. Detectives sought legal authorization to exhume the body, but poor cemetery records and a storm had erased burial markers of John Doe.

DNA Extraction from Hair: After locating hair samples, Astrea was able to extract a DNA profile from just a few millimeters of hair — far less than typically required.

Genetic Genealogy Leads to a Family

❖ **Genetic Genealogy Match:** Detectives traveled to Philadelphia to speak with family, and it was confirmed that Vera Bryant had a 4-year-old son, Carl Matthew Bryant, who disappeared after leaving for Virginia in 1972.

❖ **Philadelphia Investigation:** DNA from relatives and Carl's suspected father was collected, along with birth certificates and



On June 13, 1972, the body of a young boy was found in Massey Creek under the Old Colchester Road Bridge in Lorton.

historical records. Detectives then exhumed Vera Bryant's body to confirm the maternal link. George Mason University provided support in preparing the evidence for submission to Astrea Forensics.

* **Final DNA Confirmation:** After multiple failed attempts (due to preservation issues), DNA was successfully extracted from a portion of Vera's remains by Astrea. On July 1, John Doe was confirmed to be Carl Matthew Bryant, born May 26, 1968.

Homicide Investigation Continues

Detectives believe that Vera Bryant and her boyfriend James Hedgepeth, both now deceased, were involved in the murder of Carl. Detectives also suspect that Carl's

infant brother, James Bryant, was killed around the same time. The events are believed to have occurred somewhere between Philadelphia, and Middlesex County, VA.

James Hedgepeth was previously convicted of murder and had a violent criminal history.

Detectives are asking for the public's help. If you remember this family, or if any law enforcement agency has recovered or documented unidentified infant remains from the 1970s, especially in Virginia or the Philadelphia area, please call our Major Crimes Bureau at 703-246-7800, option 2. Tips can also be submitted anonymously through Crime Solvers by phone – 1-866-411-TIPS (866-411-8477).

Facility Improvements at Franconia Rec Center Starting Aug. 18

The Fairfax County Park Authority will soon begin facility renovations at Franconia Rec Center, located at 6601 Telegraph Road in Alexandria, aimed at enhancing air quality and comfort for patrons. The renovations, scheduled to begin Monday, Aug. 18, 2025, will focus on upgrading key heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems serving the fitness center, racquetball courts and pool.

To safely complete the work, the facility will undergo temporary closures:

Fitness Center and Racquetball Courts: Closed from Aug. 18 to Sept. 16

Pool, Family Change Room and upper level: Closed from Aug. 18 to Sept. 5

Full Building and Parking Lot Closures:

❖ Wednesday, Aug. 20 (backup day Thursday, Aug. 21)

SEE FACILITY, PAGE 14



Fairfax Police Investigate Inmate Death

Detectives from the FCPD Major Crimes Bureau are conducting a death investigation of an inmate at the Fairfax County Adult Detention Center.

On the evening of July 30, Omar Maknassi, 32, of Alexandria, was arrested and transported to the Fairfax County Adult Detention Center. In the early morning hours on July 31, Maknassi was found unresponsive in a single cell at the detention center. Deputies and EMS immediately began rendering aid. Maknassi was declared deceased at the detention center. Detectives continue to investigate Maknassi's death and preliminarily, foul play is not suspected.

By policy, the FCPD investigates all Fairfax County Sheriff's Office in-custody deaths.

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Please welcome, Evan Lacopo to Corcoran McEneaney

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We are pleased to announce that Evan Lacopo has been appointed Managing Broker of the Corcoran McEneaney Alexandria office! Evan brings a wealth of luxury real estate leadership to the role, with an impressive background that includes leadership positions at TTR Sotheby's International Realty and Douglas Elliman Metro DC. His unique blend of high-level sales experience and agent-centric leadership positions him to offer strategic guidance and mentorship through the lens of a seasoned Managing Broker.

Before entering real estate, Evan Lacopo co-founded Trusted Advisors Mortgage, a top lender for high-net-worth clients, later acquired by Access National Bank. He

then earned his real estate and Associate Broker's licenses. A native Washingtonian licensed in VA, DC, and MD, Evan brings deep regional expertise and a sharp understanding of market trends. He is known for his empathy, vision, and leadership—qualities that earned him a seat on the NVAR Board in 2025 and roles with several local nonprofits.

Visit us at **corcoranmce.com** to learn more about Evan Lacopo and Corcoran McEneaney.



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Korean War Armistice Remembered

Veterans, scouts commemorate the 72nd anniversary of the armistice.

BY JEANNE THEISMANN
GAZETTE PACKET

Military veterans from several nations were joined by local Scout-ing troops to commemorate the 72nd anniversary of the signing of the Korean War Armistice July 27 at Alexandria National Cemetery.

"Today marks the anniversary of the Korean War Armistice," said Col. Se-geun Chang, military attaché from the Republic of Korea. "On that day the fighting stopped although peace was not declared. This place, where so many heroes rest, reminds us of the fathers, sons, brothers and friends who answered the call of duty."

The Korean War Armistice was an agreement signed on July 27, 1953, that ended active combat in the Korean War, though it did not officially end the war.

The Korean War began on June 25, 1950, when North Korea (backed by the Soviet Union and China) invaded South Korea (supported by the United Nations, primarily the U.S.).

After three years of intense fighting, neither had achieved a decisive victory. The Armistice halted all open hostilities between North and South Korea. It established the Demilitarized Zone along the 38th parallel, roughly where the front lines were at the time. A military demarcation line runs through the center of the DMZ and marks the actual boundary between the two

countries.

The armistice was signed by the United Nations Command, led by the United States, the North Korean People's Army, and the Chinese People's Volunteer Army. South Korea did not sign the armistice. Then-president Syngman Rhee opposed it, wanting to continue the war to unify Korea under the South.

"Soldiers from many nations united and fought for three years," said Lt. Col. Nicholas Stasinakis, Assistant Defense Attaché from the Hellenic Republic of Greece. "As members of the military family we understand the deeper sense of brotherhood and the long-lasting connection between brothers in arms regardless of country, color or religion."

The commemoration event was hosted by VFW Post 609 and Outpost 5845 International Society of the 3rd Infantry Division, whose president C. Monika Stoy spoke at the event.

"It is not over between North and South Korea," said Stoy, whose mother was one of the 5.8 million refugees who fled from North Korea to the South. "Hundreds have died since the signing of the armistice. We remember the millions of Koreans both North and South who suffered horrors of the war and remain hopeful that someday Korea will once again be one country and that such a reunification will be achieved peacefully."

Boy Scout Troop 301 and Cub Scout Pack 301 participated in the

ceremony which included a wreath laying at the cemetery.

"Today, because of the sacrifice of these brave men and women, South Korea stands as a free and democratic, thriving nation," Chang said. "The Korean people have never forgotten what these American heroes did. We are grateful. We are here because of them and the 22 nations who sent troops. The solidarity in the face of tyranny will never be forgotten."

The armistice was a military agreement, not a peace treaty. Technically, North and South Korea are still at war. While multiple attempts at peace talks have been made, no formal peace treaty has ever been signed.

PHOTOS BY JANET BARNETT/GAZETTE PACKET



Veterans and Scouts stand with the wreath honoring those who perished in the Korean War during the commemoration of the 72nd signing of the Korean War Armistice July 27 at Alexandria National Cemetery.



Col. Se-geun Chang, Military Attaché from the Republic of Korea, gives remarks at the commemoration of the 72nd anniversary of the signing of the Korean War Armistice July 27 at Alexandria National Cemetery.



A cub scout from Pack 301 salutes the empty table representing those who did not return from battles overseas during the commemoration of the Korean War Armistice July 27 at Alexandria National Cemetery.



Lt. Col. Timothy R. Stoy (ret) salutes his fellow veterans at the commemoration of the Korean War Armistice July 27 at Alexandria National Cemetery.



Veterans, scouts and attendees pose for photos at the commemoration of the Korean War Armistice July 27 at Alexandria National Cemetery.

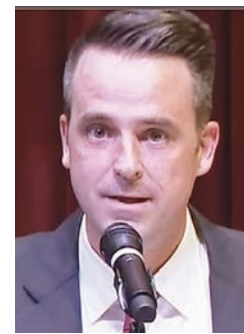


SCREENSHOT YouTube

Voters attend the Virginia 11th Congressional District Forum by Reston Citizens Association to hear directly from nominees who answered their questions posed by the moderator.



James Walkinshaw (D)



Stewart Whitson (R)



Lynn Mulston, president of the Reston Citizens Association

SCREENSHOTS

VOTE: Important Dates

Aug. 29, 2025: Last day to apply for an absentee ballot to be mailed to you for the CD 11 special election
Sept. 2, 2025: Deadline to register to vote in CD 11 special election (otherwise, must cast a provisional ballot)
Sept. 6, 2025: Last day of in-person early voting for CD 11 special election
Sept. 9, 2025: Special Election - CD 11

Virginia 11th Congressional District Forum

Walkinshaw, Whitson discuss district, national and global concerns and proposed actions.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

The nominees for Virginia's 11th Congressional District, James Walkinshaw (D) and Stewart Whitson (R) offered sharply contrasting visions for the district, country, and the world at the Reston Citizens Association's candidate forum on July 28. They disclosed notable differences in their personal and professional ideologies. Walkinshaw and Whitson are the two candidates on the ballot for the Sept. 9 special election to fill the vacant seat of U.S. Rep. Gerry Connolly, who died in office in May.

Lynn Mulston, forum moderator and president of the Reston Citizens Association outlined the 60-minute program, which included three-minute opening statements, a Q&A session, and closing remarks. View the program on YouTube or read its attached transcript at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUcbdfVHfGw>.

Opening Statements:

Walkinshaw introduced himself as a lifelong Northern Virginian, member of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, and former chief of staff to Congressman Gerry Connolly. Walkinshaw emphasized his record on affordable housing, clean air and water, funding for schools and combating Trump's federal job cuts. He criticized Whitson for his support of Trump's policies. And Whitson "wants to make

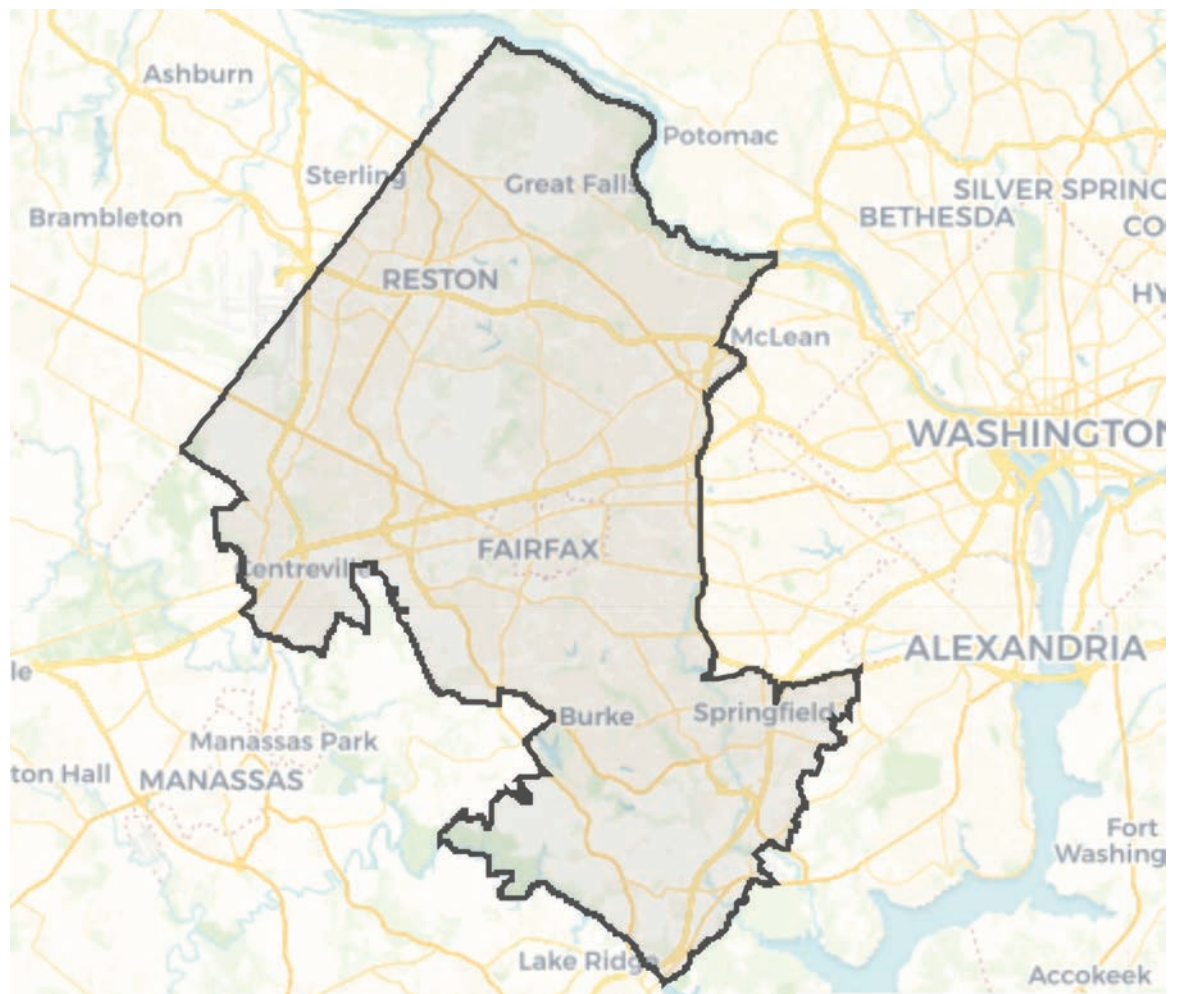
DOGE permanent. ... I'm running for Congress because our community is under attack by the Trump administration," Walkinshaw said.

Whitson highlighted his experiences in Army combat and with the FBI. He advocated for lower taxes, safer streets, and empowering parents. He emphasized his law enforcement background and criticized Walkinshaw's record on taxes and law enforcement. "I'm a fighter, and so I want to fight for our country, and with the support of my wife and the support of our kids, I'm stepping up to serve our community, because guess what — we can do better."

The Q&A session, which focused on 17 questions solicited from audience members and read by Mulston, provided a platform for candidates to address concerns. The following highlights the nominees' responses to some of those questions.

Supporting lawful ICE actions in removing people who are here illegally:

Walkinshaw emphasizes the importance of community policing and focusing on violent criminals. "It should not be focused on rounding up law-abiding members of our community who are here, who are part of our community and are working hard. The Trump administration has taken their eye off the ball. We just learned last week that 60 percent of those de-



VPAP.ORG

tained by ICE in our region have not been arrested or charged with any crime," Walkinshaw said.

Whitson advocated for a firmer stance on immigration enforcement and used his professional background to underscore the

dangers posed by a "wide open border." Whitson described his experience in national security, as a former FBI Special Agent, his work on Iranian threats, the first ISIS-claimed attack on the US homeland and serving as a SWAT team operator along the southern bor-

der in Arizona. "I have seen firsthand the violence these guys have. MS-13 ... are almost no different than ISIS in how violent they can be to their enemies." He reported that 17 million people had illegally crossed the southern border, ac-

SEE VIRGINIA 11TH, PAGE 13
WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Dominion Hospital announced the opening of its Mental Health Assessment Center in Fairfax with a ribbon-cutting. Located at 10721 Main Street, Suite 1300, Fairfax, and open Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., services are available for voluntary, non-emergent patients aged five and older seeking professional mental health evaluations.

Dominion Hospital Opens Mental Health Assessment Center in Fairfax

"The assessment center provides free initial evaluations and personalized referrals to mental health professionals and treatment programs — whether inpatient, outpatient, or community-based," said Gary Litovitz, MD, chief medical officer. Free assessments

are available to walk-in patients, and same-day appointments can be booked online or by calling 703-621-1900. All major health insurance plans are accepted.

— MERCIA HOBSON

BULLETIN BOARD

VOLUNTEERS WANTED

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

Submit civic/community announcements at ConnectionNewspapers.com/Calendar. Photos and artwork welcome. Deadline is Thursday at noon, at least two weeks before the event. Or email to calendar@connectionnewspapers.com

Fairfax and Prince William Counties and the City of Alexandria. There are many volunteer opportunities for community members to contribute to helping those in need. To learn more, email info@alnv.org, or visit www.alnv.org.

STEM Professionals Needed. Help assist K-12 STEM teachers as part of

the American Association for the Advancement of Science's STEM Volunteer Program, stemvolunteers.org, during the 2018-19 school year. In the 2017-18 school year, there are 85 volunteers in 6 Northern Virginia school districts. Contact Don Rea at 571-551-2488, or donaledge@aol.com.

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VA250 Summer Edition

BY DELEGATE PAUL KRIZEK

The year of our nation's Semiquincentennial, that is, the 250th anniversary of the United States, has officially begun! As a lover of history and the current holder of our first President George Washington's historic General Assembly seat, you may recall my 2020 legislation, which founded the Virginia American Revolution 250 Commission (VA250). This commission was tasked with celebrating the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution and U.S. independence within the Commonwealth. Our Commonwealth and historical Virginians had a unique and important role in our nation's founding, and that is reflected by the VA250 motto, "America. Made In Virginia". Furthermore, VA250's core mission is to educate Virginians (especially our

young students) about our nation's founding ideals and government, engage each of our Commonwealth's diverse communities in inclusive events, and inspire a recommitment to citizenship values as we work toward a more perfect union. By centering our founding narrative on lesser-known voices – enslaved people, tribal nations, women, and everyday citizens – we can embrace a richer, more honest story of how America was formed and how its principles endure.

While last year VA250 celebrated July 4th in Richmond's Capitol Square, 24,000 gathered for this year's celebration at Fort Monroe in Hampton, which included a Naturalization Ceremony where new Americans became citizens, an all-day family-friendly festival, and a



Krizek

large fireworks display. There are ample opportunities coming our way to get involved in this exciting commemoration! This summer, the VA250 Mobile Museum Experience titled "Out of Many, One" is traveling to schools, museums, local events, and fairs across the Commonwealth. I encourage you and your family to visit this hands-on, interactive, and immersive "museum on wheels" at its upcoming stop at George Mason's Gunston Hall during Labor Day weekend.

To learn what life was like for soldiers during the American Revolution, you can visit George Washington's Mount Vernon daily through the end of the year to experience an authentic Continental Army encampment with soldiers' tents and an officer's tent, followed

by an American Revolution film in the museum auditorium.

If you find yourself in Richmond, make sure to stop by the Virginia Museum of History & Culture to check out the "Give Me Liberty" exhibit, which highlights Virginia's leading role in the American Revolution. It explores the continental and global forces as well as the actions of both iconic and ordinary people that brought about a model of democratic government that changed the world.

I invite you to visit www.va250.org to learn more about the VA250 mission and take advantage of the many community events around the Commonwealth! The VA250 commemoration is much more than just a historical celebration. VA250 emphasizes that our founding ideals of liberty, civic duty, and inclusive participation are living values that we are responsible for upholding and shaping today.

Parks Try to Can Litter

Volunteers suggest more effort to curb unsightly park trash.

BY SUSAN LAUME
THE GAZETTE

Laurel Hill Park recently highlighted some common "good" bugs ... and one big bad one. No, it's not the Spotted Lantern Fly recently seen in numbers in the park. This bad bug is arguably an even greater danger to human health and the ecosystem — the "litter bug".

Lorton's park, and parks throughout Fairfax County's extensive park system, have struggled to keep littering and excessive trash discarded by park users under control. Some users bring food and drink to consume in the parks, and leave behind paper wrappers, bottles and cans, plastic bottle caps, and food scraps on the grounds; not properly disposed. Beyond being unsightly, litter creates a fire hazard, and indirect health hazards, from the bacteria, rats, roaches, and mosquitoes it attracts. Litter which includes food scraps, also attracts birds and other small mammals to picnic areas, increasing possible unwelcome hu-



PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME/THE GAZETTE

Insect photographer Judy Gallagher (right), stands with longtime insect surveyor Jim Waggener, and FCPA intern Amanda Dawson.

man-animal interaction.

Area park maintenance crews struggle to keep rentable picnic shelters trash-free. Area four maintenance operations, covering the Lorton area, added a commercial size trash dumpster in a unseen spot near the park. This change came after an employee suggested reducing the frequent long runs of trash bag filled trucks to the office collection site multiple times per day and week. Even though Fairfax County owns a landfill, the Park Authority pays for landfill use, as other users. Not just a Fairfax County parks problem, Clean Fair-

fax says, "Virginia spends about five million tax dollars annually for litter cleanup."

In 2022, Fairfax County began levying a five cent tax on using throw-away plastic bags in an effort to deter littering and pollution county-wide, as well as to encourage reduced use of plastic. The use tax has been deemed highly successful: significantly reducing plastic bags found as litter, reducing use by about four million bags, and adding \$ 6 million dollars to the environment fund it created. Under a grant awarded from the Plastic Bag Use Tax fund, new Lau-

rel Hill Park anti-littering signs go after other items of litter, providing another reminder that littering is not a socially acceptable practice.

Laurel Hill Park's signs were a collaboration between the Park's volunteer team and the Park Authority. The draft design created by the volunteer team was inspired by the 1960s "Keep America Beautiful" campaign, which included famous ads, such as "Don't Be a Litter Bug," the "Crying Indian," and "Susan Spotless." The signs were designed to include an educational element about the park's common "good" insects. Well known local area macro insect photographer, Judy Gallagher, suggested colorful native insects to include, as a contrast to the "ugly" litter bug. FCPA Interns Amanda Dawson and Timothy Klopfer, and other Park Authority staff, tweaked the volunteer's design, contracted a sign maker, and assisted with the installation.

The signs are posted at each of Laurel Hill Park's rentable picnic shelters. Time will tell if they are effective, along with other FCPA measures to curtail littering. On a positive note, signs posted outlining kite flying rules proved effective in nearly eliminating what had become a substantial amount of unsightly and dangerous kite string littering in the park. Until better trash disposal takes hold, volunteers and ploggers are expected to maintain their trash vigil (see Connection, Nov 23-29, pg 8)

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NEWS

Jail Time for Lamborghini Driver Street Racing a Cybertruck in Tysons

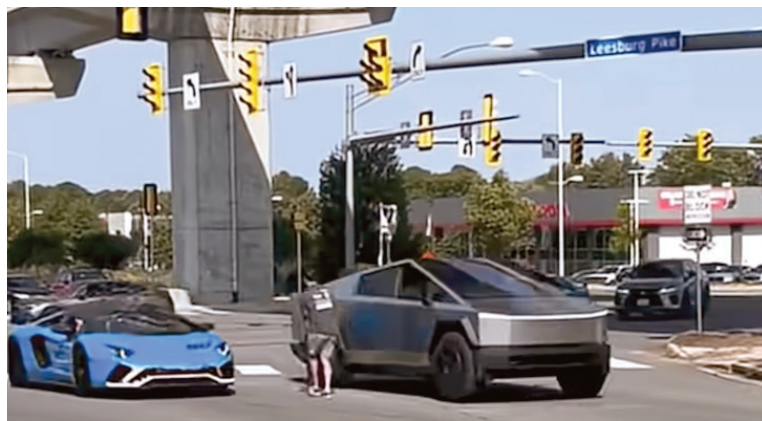
'Needlessly puts the lives of others at risk,' says CA Descano.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE GAZETTE

Commonwealth's Attorney Steve Descano posted to Instagram on July 29 that Carlos Montero, 38, of Sterling, was sentenced to 90 days in jail for racing a Lamborghini alongside a Tesla Cybertruck on Route 7, Leesburg Pike, Tysons, on Oct. 13, 2024.

The judge suspended 85 days of the 90-day sentence and imposed a \$1,000 fine for reckless driving, with \$250 of that amount suspended and an additional \$200 for the highway violation.

"This reckless behavior attracted a lot of online attention — I hope the consequences do as well," said Descano. "Street racing is dangerous; it needlessly puts others' lives at risk, and it has no place on the



SCREENSHOT FCPDNEWS VIDEO, POSTED NOV. 2, 2024

The drivers of a Lamborghini and a Tesla Cybertruck illegally street racing on Oct. 13, 2024, near Leesburg Pike and Westwood Center Drive in Tysons. "Street racing has no place on the highways and roads that you and your family frequent," posted Fairfax, CA, Steve Descano to Facebook on July 31, following sentencing for the driver of the Lamborghini.

roads you and your family use."

Christian Camaco, 48, of Vienna, was the driver of the Cybertruck. On March 24, both Montero and Camaco were convicted of misdemeanor reckless driving. Camaco's sentencing is Aug. 28.

A video from FCPD news shows the Lamborghini and the Tesla Cybertruck racing down Leesburg

Pike during daylight hours.

The Code of Virginia, § 46.2-865, states that street racing incidents are considered reckless driving.

In the case of conviction, "The driver's license of such person shall be suspended by the court for a period of not less than six months nor more than two years."

Reston House Fire Caused by Solar Panels

On Sunday, Aug. 3, around 6 p.m., the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department responded to the 2300 block of Colts Brook Drive in Reston for a house fire. Units arrived to find fire showing from the home's rooftop solar panels. Crews were able to contain the fire to the roof. There were no firefighter or civilian injuries.

Occupants reported hearing a loud noise inside the home. Upon investigation, they saw smoke coming from the roof and safely evacuated. Smoke alarms were present throughout the home but did not activate as the fire was isolated to the solar panels on the exterior of the roof. All occupants were able to reoccupy the home following extinguishment of the fire.

Preliminary investigation determined the fire was caused by an electrical event involving the solar panels. Damages are estimated at \$60,527.

Preliminary investigation determined this Reston house fire was caused by an electrical event involving the solar panels. Damages are estimated at \$60,527.



Ugh, Another Invasive Insect Pest

Box tree moth has its eyes on Fairfax County.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE GAZETTE

The box tree moth, *Cydalima perspectalis*, an invasive insect pest, may be moving into Fairfax County. The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services said on July 25 that agency inspectors had discovered the box tree moth at four sites in Loudoun and Clarke counties.

The moths are white with a brown border, with a minority of specimens entirely brown except for the white commas on the forewings. They can decimate boxwood plants if unchecked.

Box tree moths lay their eggs on the underside of the leaves, and the young caterpillars feed there. It gives the leaves a "peeled" appearance from the top. Older caterpillars chop on



Flicker USDA.GOV

Box tree moth caterpillars

and consume the entire leaf, eventually eating all of it except for the midrib.

The caterpillars are green and yellow with white, yellow, and black stripes and black spots and feed exclusively on boxwoods.

PennState Extension provides control resources. To learn more, visit <https://extension.psu.edu/box-tree-moth>.

Boxwoods, widely used in landscaping, are not native to North America; they are native to western and southern Europe, western Asia, and northern Africa.

FCPD Water Safety Tips

As more people head out to enjoy the water this summer, the Fairfax County Police Department's Marine Patrol Unit is working around the clock to keep everyone safe. From patrolling busy waterways to responding to emergencies, our team is ready so you can enjoy the water responsibly.

FCPD's Marine Patrol Unit is the only full-time local marine patrol in Northern Virginia. Officers are trained and equipped to handle any situation on the water, covering areas like the Occoquan/Belmont Bay, Pohick Bay, Little Hunting Creek, Burke Lake, and more.

Here are some essential water safety tips:

For Boaters:

- ❖ Wear a life jacket: Virginia law requires all children under 13 to wear a life jacket while on a moving vessel, but everyone should have one on board and wear it.

- ❖ Don't boat under the influence: Operating a boat while under the influence of alcohol or drugs is dangerous and illegal.

- ❖ Check the weather: Conditions on the water can change quickly. Always check forecasts before heading out and monitor for storms.

- ❖ Know the rules of the water: Learn navigational markers, right-of-way rules, and no-wake zones. Unsafe speed and reckless operation are leading causes of boating accidents.

- ❖ Carry safety gear: Fire extinguishers, distress signals, lights, a whistle or horn, and a first aid kit should be on every vessel.

For Swimmers:

- ❖ Swim in designated areas: Stay in marked swimming zones and never swim near a boat launch or docked vessels.

- ❖ Keep an eye on children: Always supervise children closely, even if they're wearing flotation devices.

- ❖ Avoid alcohol near water: Alcohol impairs judgment and reaction time, increasing the risk of drowning.

- ❖ Know your limits: Even experienced swimmers can get tired or caught in a current. Don't push your limits.

For Anyone Near the Water:

- ❖ File a float plan: Let someone know where you're going and when you plan to return.

- ❖ Respect wildlife and the environment: Avoid disturbing animals or damaging natural habitats.

- ❖ In an emergency, call 911: Marine Patrol officers coordinate with air support and dive teams to respond quickly when time matters most.

For more about FCPD Marine Patrol Unit and other specialty teams at www.joinfcpd.org

More Severe Rainstorms Are ‘New Normal’

Rain barrels can help.

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
THE GAZETTE

This has been the “summer of flooding,” CNN headlined on July 20, reporting, “Large parts of the U.S. have seen an unusually humid summer with record amounts of moisture in the air. When cold fronts and other weather systems come along, that moisture can get wrung out, squeezed like a water-laden sponge, yielding heavy and often highly localized downpours.”

While the Washington region has been baking in sauna-like conditions this summer, the area’s been soaked too off and on, with showers, downpours and humidity.

Rene Bourassa with the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin reports that in mid-July rainfall is 3.8 inches above average for this time of the year.

Fairfax County’s resiliency plan says, “Fairfax County is already feeling the effects of climate change, including more severe storms, increased flooding and amplified extreme heat. Climate change is a threat multiplier, increasing the frequency and intensity of climate hazards and conditions.”

Dr. Edward Maibach recently told the Richmond Times-Dispatch, “Unfortunately, more intense rainstorms are the new normal in Virginia. Hotter temperatures lead to more evaporation, which means more moisture in the atmosphere, which increases the likelihood of more intense rainstorms.” Mai-



A rain barrel installed at a shed at an elementary school. Photo credit NVSWCD.

bach is George Mason University’s Director of Climate Change Communication.

Capturing and Using the Rain

Some homeowners capture some of the rain by installing rain barrels under their home’s downspouts. While no one claims that residential rain barrels are the solution to the type of flooding seen recently, they have some merits.

Most rain barrels are made of plastic and range in size from 30 to 100 gallons, with the standard being around 55 gallons. They typically have a spigot for attaching a hose and an overflow hose to direct water away from a house’s foundation if the barrel fills up and the rain continues. One inch of rain on a 1,000-square-foot roof can yield 300 gallons of water, according to Gardeners Supply.

Why Have Rain Barrels?

If you capture water, you can use it. If you pay for your water according to how much you use,

you can save money by using less water from the tap or faucet.

Water is a finite resource. Some estimate that as much as 40 percent of water use is for outdoor activities, like watering lawns. Capturing water can reduce stress on the county’s water supply for activities like watering plants, washing your car, cleaning household windows or other outdoor uses, especially during dry spells.

“Unlike treated water, which is ‘softened’ with dissolved minerals, rainwater is naturally soft. The water stored in your rain barrel is better than municipal water for washing your car and watering indoor or outdoor plants,” says the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District.

Rain flowing off roofs, streets and other impervious surfaces carries pollutants so retaining water can help keep some pollutants out of streams. Fairfax County’s assessments show that in 2024, 76 percent of the county’s streams were in fair to very poor condition. “This



Participants at a Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District Build-Your-Own-Rain Barrel Workshop glue the rain barrel’s spigot in place.

indicates that many of our streams are impaired and lack biological diversity,” county studies show.

Surges of water rushing into streams can gouge out streambanks and their vegetation and send sediments into waterways. Rain barrels can help keep some water on-site and slow water rushing into streams.

Rain barrels have some limits. The water supply depends on rain and a rain barrel can only provide as much water as it can hold so water may not be available at all times. You can only safely use rainwater for outdoor use, without treating it. If heavy rain is predicted, you might want to remember to empty your rain barrel because it could overflow. And in prolonged cold, the water can freeze.

But remember, rainwater is free water and capturing it can help the environment.

Build-Your-Own Rain Barrel Workshop

Aug. 30; 2 to 4 p.m. at Green

Acres Community Center, 4401 Sideburn Road, Fairfax. Registration required.

You can assemble your own rain barrel to take home and learn tips for care and maintenance. Registration is \$55 per barrel and includes all materials and supplies needed. Register at <https://nvswcdevents.myrec.com/info/products/default.aspx?CategoryID=100>

Sponsors are Fairfax City/Environmental and Sustainability Division and the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District.

Only two rain barrels will fit in most vehicles. The rain barrels hold approximately 50 gallons. They are roughly 23 inches wide. They range from 41.25 inches to 43.75 inches tall.

More Tips on Stormwater Management

<https://www.onlyrain.org/stormwater-management-resources>

https://19january2021snapshot.epa.gov/soakuptherain/soak-rain-rain-barrels_.html

Good News You Can Use Instead of throwing things Out in NOVA.

BY EDEN BROWN
THE CONNECTION

Ever had a six year old’s brand new Minion Bank break within two days of arriving from China? Ever had a Microwave mysteriously die and not want to risk blowing up the kitchen to find out what went wrong? Repair Cafe is the answer to both problems.

If you hate to throw out your broken appliances, coffee machines, toys, bikes, dog equipment, and clothes because you don’t know how to fix them, there is good news. Fairfax County’s Repair Cafe is now up and running.

The Repair Cafe concept was started in the Netherlands in 2009, by a journalist and advocate for sustainability,

Martine Postma, who saw practically new toys and equipment going into landfill-bound trash. Repair Cafe became a global movement, with over 3,000 local Repair Cafés in over 40 countries.

The free events are designed to empower communities to repair broken items together.

The Fairfax Repair Cafe is not the first in the region, but it is the closest to Arlington. Since it has only recently started, and people only learn about it by word of mouth, there has been some lag time in getting it going, said Ari Nicholas, who is the main force behind the Fairfax Repair Cafe.

As you enter the Fairfax library, a greeter asks you about your item and directs you to the right person to help. Standing behind tables are people with some knowledge of how things work, ready to try to diagnose the issue.

They work, free of charge, for two hours, offering advice, figuring things out and calling on each other’s “expertise.” (No one pretends to be an expert, just a problem-solver.) They pull out tools, deploy a sewing machine or a knife sharpener, and solve (most) problems. Even if an item is not fixable, the volunteers will tell you what the problem is and whether it can be fixed, for instance, in the case of the microwave, was it just a fuse, easy to replace, or the magnetron?

Repair Café is not just about fixing things; it’s about building a sustainable future, having snacks and making conversation, creating community and learning new skills.

The next Repair Café will be held on Aug. 16th at the Oakton Library. For more details, see: <https://dmvcommunity/@RepairCafeFFX>



Construction taking place in the Springfield Town Center parking lot.



Bridge to a parking garage outside JC Penney.

Construction Continues at Springfield Town Center

The new structure will be an apartment building and hotel.

BY MIKE SALMON
THE GAZETTE

The urbanization around the Franconia-Springfield Metro Station is taking a step forward with the hotel-apartment construction progress on the southern end of the Springfield Town Center parking lot. The town center has a greater concentration on non-retail attractions and a shift towards placemaking, consistent with a national trend for shopping.

The site will contain 400 residential units and a five-story hotel in the parking lot area between JC Penney and a separate retail hub away from the center. Hanover R.S. Limited owns the apartments and Intermountain Management owns the hotel section, which is slated to open in 2028. PREIT owns the town center and has owned it for several years.

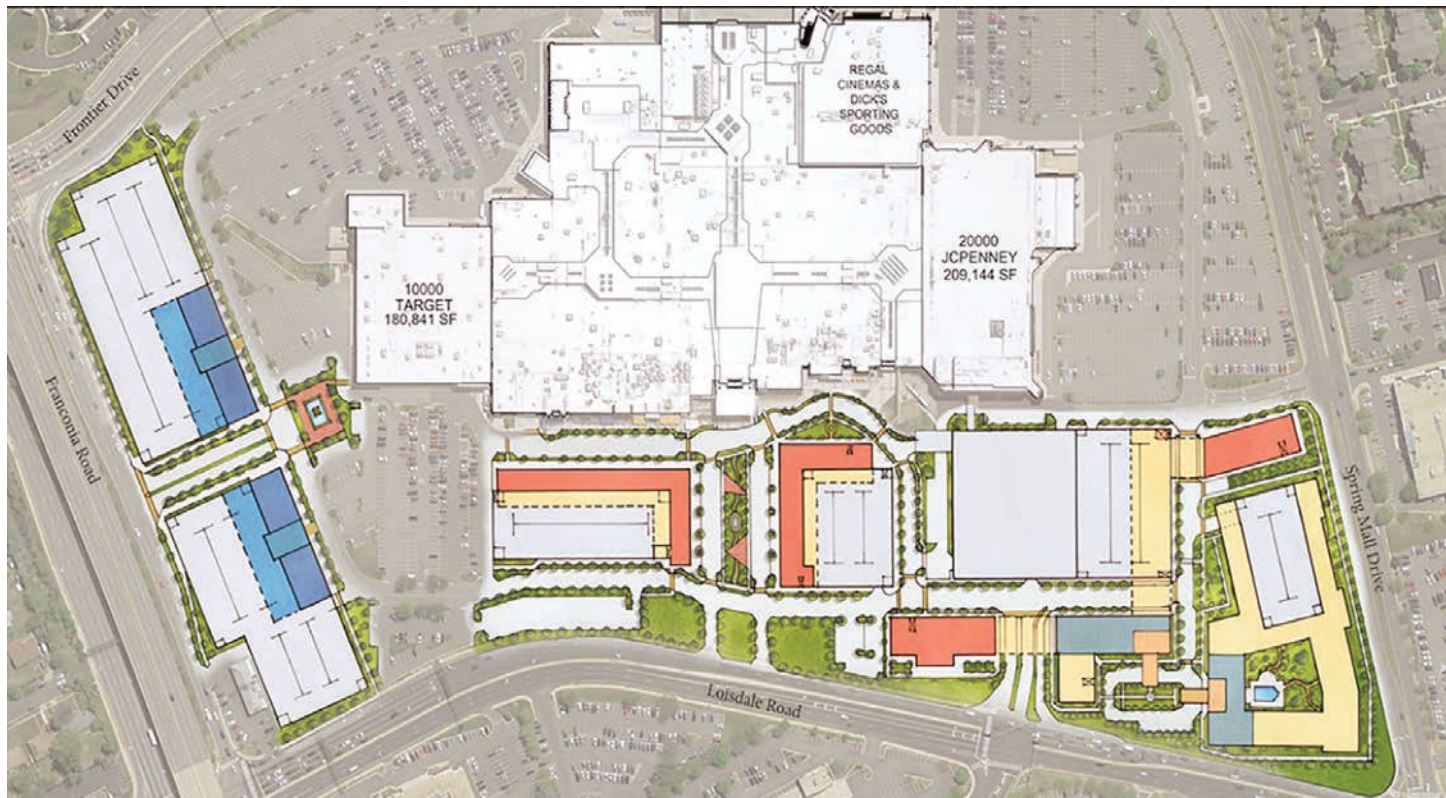
The Lego Discovery Center was an early arrival outside the retail genre, and it has events and an in-house Lego expert to assist with the big projects. They claim there are over two million bricks at the center and there is a team of Master Model Builders to help with the tough projects. Over on the dining side, big names include Yard House, Dave and Busters, Maggie McFly's, Maggiano's, Chipotle, Starbucks, and others.

Malls across the country are experiencing the same type of remake, said Andrew Brezina, principal at CRTKL, a global architecture, planning and design firm that works with both retailers and malls in designing

spaces. Instead of being packed with retail shops and walk-up pizza places like Springfield used to be, they must be neighborhood gathering places where people can shop and dine and have access to services like health-care, gyms, co-working and living spaces, said Brezina in an article in Forbes Magazine. The apartment-hotel project at Springfield Town Center follows that formula.

PHOTOS BY
MIKE SALMON
THE GAZETTE

The hotel and apartments will be close to Metro.



There are plans for this part of the town center that are currently parking lots.

Make Raptors Welcome in Your Backyard

Simple tips from to help and protect our avian treasures.

BY SUSAN LAUME
THE GAZETTE

Raptor rehabilitator and educator, Liz Dennison, with her Secret Garden Birds and Bees non-profit volunteers, recently presented some how-to tips to attract raptors to area backyards as she introduced several of her birds at Burke Centre Library. They come with the side benefit of controlling animal and insect pests.

“It is definitely desirable to attract raptors to your backyard and community,” Dennison says. As top predators they are essential contributors to a healthy ecosystem. Most hunt and eat mice, rats, rabbits and other small mammals; and/or frogs, lizards and snakes; as well as other birds; some eat insects. Great Horned Owls even catch and eat skunks; a practice that often leaves them with a tell-tale odor of their meal. An odor which they themselves cannot detect with their very poor sense of smell; relying on their hearing and vision senses to hunt.

Eagles and Osprey catch and eat fish. Overall, raptors have a varied diet and help keep populations of animals and insects in control.

Dennison shares that attracting raptors to your backyard “involves creating as natural an environment as possible. Raptors need food, shelter, and a safe place to raise their young.

Native plants are a good place

to start because they attract the insects that many birds, even raptors, feed to their young. It helps to have a wild area where you let the grass or weeds grow tall; or even have a little brush pile, as a home for the small rodents, and a shelter for songbirds. And all wildlife appreciates a water source in all seasons. A few big trees suitable for a hawk’s stick nest, and some old trees - even dead ones - with cavities for nesting. [Putting up] nest boxes are also a possibility. Keeping the night dark and quiet helps too. I know this is a lot and not always possible on one property or because of HOA rules. But every little bit makes a difference, even a small balcony garden or window box [for native plants].”

Raptors could use our help. Many succumb to rodenticide poisoning from eating rodents who have ingested the poison, or from lead poisoning from eating animals, such as deer carcasses shot with lead ammunition, or from ingesting lead fishing weights when feeding on fish. So, Denison says, a raptor-friendly environment should absolutely not include rodenticides, nor insecticides. Sadly raptor death or injury from collision with vehicles is also a global problem. The birds are drawn to roadway areas in search of prey. Most of Secret Garden Birds and Bees’ raptor residents were injured in vehicle collisions, which they survived, but with eye impairments that affected their ability to hunt and live in the wild. Many bird populations are losing population numbers due to reduction of habitat and toxins.

Another population loss story is the current dramatic failure of Osprey nests around the Chesapeake Bay. The area has had the world’s largest concentration of Osprey



Young wild Osprey exercising her wings in preparation for her first flight from her nest in Lorton

breeding pairs; estimated at 10,000 to 12,000. Ospreys had shown a highly successful comeback from DDT poisoning after its ban in the early 1960s. In the past few years, Osprey’s failure to successfully reproduce in their traditional nesting spots around the Bay has caused growing alarm. Although the cause is not yet fully recognized, scientists have pointed to food scarcity during the breeding and rearing periods due to Menhaden fishery purse netting activity, impacting these birds which depend almost totally on fish for their food. Climate change and competition from the growing population of eagles could also be factors. Neither the marine commissions tasked with managing Mid-Atlantic and Virginia marine environments, nor the

Virginia General Assembly have acted to seek out and mitigate the Osprey population decline.

As examples, observers at Jug Bay nesting area indicate that out of 70 nests observed, only eight successfully raised chicks this year. Along Virginia’s portion of the Eastern Shore, William and Mary ornithologists report a drop in breeding pairs from 83 in 1987 to just nine pairs in 2024. For more on the Osprey’s reproduction troubles, see Mount Vernon Gazette, July 17, page 11. <https://connection-archives.com/PDF/2025/071625/Mt%20Vernon.pdf>

For more on Secret Garden Birds and Bees, their birds, and their work in avian education, see

<https://www.secretgardenbird-sandbees.org>



Raptor rehabber, Liz Dennison with her Red-tailed Hawk, Big Red, who lost his vision in one eye after a car collision making it impossible for him to hunt effectively in the wild



Osprey’s notoriously “decorate” their nests with materials, like these Dennison pulled from just two nests during chick banding, which could cause them harm by entanglement or poisoning, adding to environmental perils the birds face.



American Kestrel, Kipper, joined Dennison’s rescue after imprinting on humans soon after hatching



Hodor a Great Horned Owl, represents the largest owl species in our area



Scarlett, a Barred Owl, another car injury victim, has a distinctive hooting call



Screech Owl, Kvosir, is an example of the smallest owl species in our area, whose bark-like camouflage helps them hide from larger birds as they blend with trees



There were no injuries but this townhouse fire spread quickly to neighboring townhouses.



Fire started in the garage at this house in Crosspointe.

PHOTOS COURTESY FAIRFAX COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE DEPARTMENT

House Fires in Fairfax County Displace Many

Luckily no fatalities; total price tag is up near \$1.5 million in damages.

BY MIKE SALMON
THE GAZETTE

Improperly discarded rags possibly led to spontaneous combustion in a recent fire in Kingstowne causing an estimated \$1,115,563 in damage and leaving the homeowner without a residence.

It was one of several fires in Fairfax County recently that hammers out no-no's for things that are flammable

In Kingstowne, the action started in the early morning hours Wednesday, July 23, around 4:45 a.m., when Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department responded for reports of a townhouse fire in the 5000 block of Dunstable Lane in the Kingstowne area. Crews arrived to find a large volume of smoke and fire showing from the rear of multiple townhomes. A second alarm was requested. Firefighters quickly went to work to extinguish the fire and search the affected townhouses. There were no firefighter or civilian injuries.

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SAFETY REMINDERS ON SMOKING MATERIALS

Never dispose of cigarette butts in potted planting soil. The soil, when it gets too dry, can become highly flammable.

Ensure designated outside smoking areas have an appropriate fire-proof container, ashtray or bucket.

Completely douse butts and ashes with water before throwing them away, as they can smolder and cause a fire.

SAFETY REMINDER WITH TOXIC SUBSTANCES

Rags wet with oil-based paints, stains, or varnishes can ignite on their own. The oils release heat as they dry. If the heat is not released into the air, it builds up. In a pile of oily rags, as the rags dry the heat becomes trapped. The heat builds up and can cause a fire.

- ❖ Never leave cleaning rags in a pile.
- ❖ Hang the rags outside or spread them on the ground. Weigh them down so they do not blow away.
- ❖ Put dried rags in a metal container with a lid. Fill the container with a water and detergent solution that will break down the oils.
- ❖ Keep containers of oily rags in a cool place. Keep them out of direct sunlight and away from other heat sources.

The townhouse where the fire originated was unoccupied at the time of the fire. A passerby observed fire coming from the back of the structure and called 911. Smoke alarms activated in the neighboring townhouse and alerted the occupants prior to fire department arrival. Red Cross assistance was offered and declined.

The investigation revealed the fire was accidental and originated on the rear patio. The cause of the fire was spontaneous combustion of oil-soaked rags and sawdust.

Three townhouses were affected with damages estimated at

\$1,115,563.

Household oil was to blame for another fire earlier this spring in April when a resident in Lorton left a pan on the stove with food and cooking oil which ignited while unattended. Residents noticed smoke and discovered a fire in the kitchen. All occupants self-evacuated and called 911. There were no working smoke detectors in the home at the time of the fire, the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department said.

Two adults and three children were displaced as a result of the fire. Red Cross services were of-

fered and accepted. Damages are estimated at \$100,000.

A week before, improperly disposed smoking materials were the cause of a fire in a house in Springfield. On Sunday, March 30, at approximately 3:30 pm, Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department, along with Prince William County Fire and Rescue and the City of Alexandria Fire Department, responded to a house fire in the 7900 block of Hill Stream Court in Springfield.

Units arrived on scene of a two-story single-family home with heavy fire and smoke showing with fire rapidly spreading. Firefighters immediately began an attack to bring the fire under control while ensuring all occupants were safely out. A second alarm was called. Crews worked extensively to extinguish the fire.

Two occupants were home at the time of the fire. The fire was discovered when a neighbor notified the occupants that the house was on fire. The occupants evacuated and called 911. Smoke alarms were present and activated.

One civilian was transported with non life-threatening injuries. There were no firefighter injuries. Red Cross assistance was offered and accepted.

Fire investigators determined the fire was accidental and started on the exterior of the home. The preliminary cause was determined to be improper disposal of smoking

materials. Damages are estimated at \$90,611.

On Friday, March 7, at approximately 2 p.m., Fairfax County Fire and Rescue responded to reports of a house fire in the 8300 block of Ivy Green Road in the Crosspointe area. Initial calls reported a fire in the garage attached to the home.

Upon arrival, units encountered heavy fire conditions with fire rapidly spreading. Firefighters immediately began an attack to bring the fire under control while ensuring all occupants were safely out. A second alarm was called. Crews worked extensively to extinguish the fire. Four occupants were home at the time of the fire. The fire was discovered when one occupant heard a loud explosion-like noise coming from the attached garage. Upon investigation, he found a fire in the garage. All four occupants evacuated and called 911.

The home had working smoke alarms. However, due to their location they did not activate until after the fire was discovered.

Five residents were transported with non-life-threatening injuries. Two firefighters were transported with non-life-threatening injuries. Red Cross assistance was offered and accepted.

Fire investigators determined the fire originated in the attached garage. The preliminary cause was determined to be a vehicle fire within the garage. Damages are estimated at \$206,199.

ENTERTAINMENT

MGNV PLANT CLINICS ARE OPEN

The Alexandria Old Town Farmer's Market
Plant Clinic at 301 King St., Alexandria operates on Saturdays from 7:00 - 9:30 a.m. Del Ray Farmers Market Plant Clinic at Oxford & Mt. Vernon Avenues, Alexandria operates on Saturdays from 8:30 - 11:00 a.m. The Arlington Farmers' Market at N. 14th and N. Courthouse Roads, Arlington operates on Saturdays from 8:00 - 11:00 a.m. The Fairlington Farmers' Market Plant Clinic at 3308 S. Stafford St., Arlington, operates on Sundays from 9:00 - 11:00 a.m. The Arlington Central Library Plant Clinic at 1015 N. Quincy St. will be open on August 6th and 20th and operates on Wednesdays from 6:15 - 7:45 p.m.

YEAR ROUND ON SUNDAYS

Farmer's Market. 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. At Casa Chirilagua Community Center, 4109 Mt. Vernon Ave., Alexandria. Experience fresh foods, native plants, artisan crafts, music and community at Four Mile Run Farmers & Artisans Market in the heart of Arlandria outside the Casa Chirilagua Community Center, every Sunday 9-1 p.m.

NOW THRU SEPT. 14

REVISITED Exhibit. At Multiple Exposures Gallery, Studio 312, Torpedo Factory Art Center, Alexandria. REVISITED is a solo fine art photography exhibition by Stacy Smith Evans. In her series of color images, Evans explores a deep connection to nature, the land, and memory, revisiting the places she turns to for solitude and renewal, and when joined by family and friends, for celebration and tradition. Through the exhibition, Evans invites viewers to join her as she traverses the rivers, mountains, and forests that shape the Eastern landscape.

ONGOING

Revolutionary War Exhibit. At the National Museum of the U.S. Army, Alexandria. The National Museum of the United States Army has opened a special exhibition, Call To Arms: The Soldier and the Revolutionary War. The two-year exhibition commemorates this year's 250th Birthday of the U.S. Army and next year's 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. This 5,000 square-foot exhibition features a rare collection, specially curated by the Museum, that includes Revolutionary War artifacts from the original colonies, England, France and Canada. Among the exhibit's highlights are a pair of General George Washington's pistols, the original flag of the 1st Rhode Island Regiment carried by the Army's first African American Soldiers, and a complete Loyalist uniform—one of the rarest items in the collection. The sword of British General Charles Lord Cornwallis, presented to Washington at the surrender at Yorktown, Virginia, will also be displayed for a limited time.

NOW THRU AUG. 31

Creative Summer Programs is a series of workshops exploring the arts. Learn techniques in collage, drawing, mixed media, photography, bead embroidery, and more from local artists. Delve into creative exploration solo or with friends. For children and/or adults, free and paid programs are offered. Sign up for what inspires you! Held at Del Ray Artisans (2704 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria VA) unless noted. Details: DelRay-Artisans.org/creative-summer

NOW THRU AUG. 17

Potomac Valley Watercolorists "The Painted Garden" 2025 Art Exhibition and Sale. At Green Spring Gardens Horticultural Center, 4603 Green Spring Road, Alexandria. This annual fine art show spotlights many of our region's most highly-skilled and well-known water media artists, and features more than 100 original framed works on display and available for purchase. Special Event: Artists Reception – Sunday, July 13 from 1-3 p.m.

AUG. 1-30

"Lovely As a Tree" Art Exhibit. At Del Ray Art-



The Wright at Twilight event will be held Friday, Aug. 8, 2025 at Woodlawn & Pope-Leighey House in Alexandria.



The Potomac Valley Watercolorists "The Painted Garden" Art Exhibition and Sale will be held now through Aug. 17, 2025 at Green Spring Garden Center.

sans Gallery, 2704 Mount Vernon Ave., Alexandria. Del Ray Artisans members explore all the ways in which trees impact our lives and the earth and bring aspects of this natural phenomenon to artistic life. Join them for the Opening Reception on Friday, August 1, 7-9pm. Gallery hours are Thursdays 12-6pm, Fridays 12-9pm, Saturdays & Sundays 12-

6pm. Details at DelRayArtisans.org/exhibits

AUG. 7 TO SEPT. 29

Masterpiece Mini Golf. Thursday: 11 a.m. – 6 p.m.; Friday and Saturday: 11 a.m. – 8:30 p.m.; Sunday: 12 – 5 p.m. At Workhouse Arts Center, 9518 Workhouse Way, Lorton. Masterpiece Mini-Golf isn't just a game—it's an

interactive journey through the world of art like you've never seen before! Imagine 18 artist-designed holes bursting with bold colors, iconic imagery, and mind-bending creativity. From Monet's water lilies to Banksy's graffiti walls, every twist and turn brings you face-to-face with art history's greatest paintings—reimagined in wild, surreal, and playable form. It's part gallery, part game, and 100% fun for all ages. Visit the website: <https://www.workhousearts.org/masterpiece-mini-golf>

FRIDAY/AUG. 8

Wright at Twilight. 6:30 to 9 p.m. At Woodlawn & Pope-Leighey House, 9000 Richmond Hwy., Alexandria. Enjoy the iconic Pope-Leighey House, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. Sit back with complimentary snacks and a glass of wine, and watch the changing light bring out the architectural details. Visit the website: <https://www.woodlawnpopeleighey.org/upcomingevents>

SATURDAY/AUG. 9

16th Annual Alexandria Sidewalk Sale. This lively event features more than 30 independent boutiques across Old Town, Del Ray and beyond stepping out of their storefronts and offering deeply discounted merchandise, showcasing Alexandria as the D.C. region's premier "Shop Small" destination.

What to Expect:

First-time Sidewalk Sale participants like Eliana Curated, a new jewelry boutique, romance-only Friends to Lovers bookstore and Fantastical Glass artist studio joining beloved shops like Red Barn Mercantile and Old Town Books along with the recently opened Old Town Books Junior.

Local flavor at Del Ray's "Second Saturday" with four markets offering a variety of goods from art and crafts, vintage finds and more.

SUNDAY/AUG. 10

Gluten-Free Tea and Tattle. 1-3 p.m. At Green Spring Gardens, 4603 Green Spring Road – Alexandria. (Adult) Rumor, hearsay, scuttlebutt, scandal. Gossip is widely condemned yet sometimes considered a positive force in society. Hear all about the origins and changing definitions of gossip, how people have "dished" hilariously through the ages, and why gossiping was once considered synonymous with tea-drinking! Please note: All tea food for this afternoon tea will be made with no gluten-containing ingredients but cross-contamination is possible. \$50 (lecture + tea); \$18 (lecture only)

SATURDAY/AUG. 16

Backyard Composting – Principles and Best Practices. 10:30 a.m. - noon. At Green Spring Gardens, 4603 Green Spring Road – Alexandria. (16- Adult) Stop feeling guilty about leftover food scraps - learn how to transform your scraps, yard debris and other organic materials into nutrient-rich soil amendments for your garden. GSG staff will provide all the information you need to manage an active compost system. We'll discuss the basic principles behind the science of composting, why compost benefits the soil and the different compost bins and tools needed for successful composting. Class will begin indoors before moving out to Green Spring's Compost Station to illustrate examples of composting practices. \$19 per person. Register online at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/parktakes> or call Green Spring Gardens at 703-642-5173. Code AER.EDWG

THURSDAY/AUG. 21

Tom Teasley & John Wubbenhorst. 7 p.m. At The Athenaeum, Alexandria. Master percussionist Tom Teasley teams up with acclaimed Indian bansuri flutist John Wubbenhorst for the final concert in the 2025 Art of the Duo series.

FRIDAY/AUG. 22

Wright at Twilight. 6:30 to 9 p.m. At Woodlawn & Pope-Leighey House, 9000 Richmond Hwy., Alexandria. Enjoy the iconic Pope-Leighey House, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. Sit back with

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ENTERTAINMENT

complimentary snacks and a glass of wine, and watch the changing light bring out the architectural details. Visit the website: <https://www.woodlawnpopeleighy.org/upcomingevents>

AUG. 22-31

Alexandria Restaurant Week. At restaurants throughout Alexandria. For 10 days and two weekends, dozens of restaurants in Alexandria will offer multi-course prix fixe dinner menus at \$30, \$40 or \$50 per person. Find additional special offers at select fast casual restaurants throughout Alexandria, making it easy to sample a wide range of cuisines at every budget. Alexandria Restaurant Week showcases the creativity of local chefs and showcases the global cuisine available in neighborhoods throughout the city, including Old Town, Old Town North, Del Ray, Carlyle and Eisenhower, Arlandria-Chirilagua and the West End. In August, a digital flipbook of menus at participating restaurants will be available at AlexandriaRestaurantWeek.com.

SEPT. 5-27

The “Second Time Around” exhibit at Del Ray

Artisans gallery features artwork made out of recycled materials. This exhibit focuses on the thought-change concept of sustainable creativity and enhancing artistic environmental ethos, from the art to the earth-conscious workshops and events. View at Del Ray Artisans, 2704 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria. Opening Reception: Friday, September 5, 7-9 p.m.. Gallery hours: Thursdays 12-6 p.m., Fridays 12-9 p.m., Saturdays & Sundays 12-6 p.m. Details at DelRayArtisans.org/exhibits.

SATURDAY/SEPT. 6

First Saturday Used Book Sale: 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. at Sherwood Regional Library, 2501 Sherwood Hall Lane. Selection of over 20,000 gently used children’s books, fiction, history, biography, home and garden, cooking, crafts, sports, religion, travel, CDs, DVDs, and more. Unless specially priced, \$1 for hard backs and large paperbacks, and 25 cents for mass market paperbacks. Visit <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library/branches/friends-of-sherwood-regional> for information on other days and times for the

library’s ongoing book sale.

SATURDAY/SEPT. 6

Writers in Residence Reading. 12 to 1 p.m. At Woodlawn & Pope-Leighey House, Alexandria. Each summer, Woodlawn and Pope-Leighey House collaborates with The Inner Loop to invite writers to the historical site to explore place, ownership, and history to bring awareness to critical social and environmental issues we face today. These writers will be sharing their experiences with an on-site reading on Saturday, September 6th.

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.

AUGUST

Fri. 8: Who’s Bad – The Ultimate Michael Jackson Experience \$39.50
Sat. 9: 1964: The Tribute \$45.00
Sun. 10: SWITCH \$49.50
Fri. 15: JAZZ FUNK SOUL featuring Everette

Harp, Jeff Lorber, Paul Jackson, Jr. \$49.50
Sat. 16: TOAST – The Ultimate BREAD Experience! \$59.50
Sun. 17: MAYSA’s 59th Birthday Concert Party! \$79.50
Tue. 19: Robert Earl Keen w/ Henry Conlon \$65.00
Wed. 20: Robert Earl Keen w/ Henry Conlon \$65.00
Thu. 21: Robert Earl Keen w/ Henry Conlon \$65.00
Fri. 22: Magical Mystery Doors – Beatles, Zeppelin, Doors Tribute \$35.00
Sat. 23: Eric Roberson \$69.50
Sun. 24: Eric Roberson \$69.50
Thu. 28: SHALAMAR featuring Howard Hewett, Jeffrey Daniel, Carolyn Griffey \$75.00
Fri. 29: DANNY GATTON Birthday Celebration featuring Bill Kirchen, The Mighty Redd Volkaert, John Previti, Dave Elliot, David Chappell, Tommy Lepson, Anthony Pirog, Big Joe Maher, & more! \$39.50
Sat. 30: Raheem DeVaughn (band) w/ Wes Felton (trio) \$85.00
Sun. 31: Raheem DeVaughn (band) w/ Wes Felton (trio) \$85.00

Northern Virginia Regional Elected Leaders Summit

Arlington Chamber of Commerce

Tuesday, Aug. 19, 2025; 8-10 a.m. 8 - 8:30 a.m.: Registration & Open Networking; 8:30 - 10 a.m.: Program
George Mason University, Mason Square Auditorium - 3351 Fairfax Drive, Arlington, VA 22201

The Northern Virginia Elected Leaders Summit offers the opportunity to hear from local elected leaders about the economic climate in the region, initiatives they have completed or are undertaking to foster economic growth, and their thoughts on how jurisdictions can work together to improve the regional economy.

The Arlington Chamber of Commerce is hosting this summit with NVC, and co-hosts, Alexandria Chamber of Commerce, Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce, the Northern Virginia Regional Commission, and the Regional Elected Leaders Initiative.

Panelists

Alyia Gaskins, Mayor, Alexandria City
DeShundra Jefferson, Chair, Prince Williams Board of County Supervisors
Takis Karantonis, Chair, Arlington County Board
Jeff C. McKay, Chairman, Fairfax County Board of Su-

pervisors
Phyllis Randall, Chair, Loudoun County Board of Supervisors
Moderator, Joseph Olmo, NBC

Registration

Registration closes Monday, Aug. 18 at noon. For registration questions, please contact Operations Manager, DJ Batchelor at chamber@arlingtonchamber.org.
Registrations are non-refundable. While you are unable to apply registrations to future events, you may transfer your registration to another individual.

Virginia 11th Congressional District Forum

FROM PAGE 4

cording to numbers from the Biden administration. “My opponent promoted a sanctuary policy forbidding the federal employees to stop that, and so he has dropped that front to our neighborhood, and we have to stop it,” Whitson said.

Federal government’s role in education: Whitson pressed for giving funding directly to parents to choose schools. He said a school should fit children and shared that out of his five children, two attend public school and three attend private school. “I think every family in America should have that choice to find the right space for their children to learn,” Whitson said.

Walkinshaw defended the Department of Education’s role in funding and research, criticizing voucher schemes for not ensuring accountability and accessibility for all children. Private schools should not receive public funds unless they are accountable to taxpayers and agree to accept every child, including those with special needs or from high-poverty households, Walkinshaw said. “They often do not accept children, all children that come from high poverty households, and we cannot give taxpayer dollars without accountability.”

US policy in the Middle East, particular-

ly the conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza:

Walkinshaw called for a ceasefire and humanitarian aid in Gaza, criticizing Trump’s broken promises on foreign policy.

Whitson stated that it all could have been avoided with a stronger commander-in-chief.

“I will say this, any people that aren’t getting food, or any people that aren’t getting medical supplies inside Gaza, they are not getting that because of Hamas. It is not Israel. It’s not the US. It’s Hamas stealing that food and stealing those supplies and taking them away from the people. And if you don’t think that’s true, then you’re wrong,” Whitson said.

How to support federal workers and maintain a professional civil service:

Whitson answered that, as a former federal employee himself, he understands the importance of the work federal workers do and the impact of job loss on families. He said that layoffs are “horrible and sad.” He emphasized his desire to help federal workers who have lost their jobs.

Walkinshaw criticized Whitson, saying, “Well, Stewart, if you want to help the federal employees who have lost their jobs, or those thousands who are about to lose their jobs, you could stop advocating to make DOGE permanent. You can denounce DOGE,

and you could commit to co-sponsoring legislation like the Delete DOGE Act as I have, to put an end to this chaos.”

The first piece of legislation they would introduce:

Walkinshaw responded that he would introduce legislation to defund DOGE and to restore civil service protections for federal workers.

Whitson said his first piece of legislation would be the Regulations from the Executive in Need of Scrutiny (REINS) Act, which would require congressional pre-approval before the executive branch could implement any new rule or regulation costing \$100 million or more.

What steps they would support in Congress to ensure AI development benefits workers and safeguards democratic values:

Whitson said when he was in the FBI leading the technology team people worried about enhanced search bases taking their jobs. “My point is, I think [in] AI there’s some of those concerns with the population where it’s going to interfere with employment and job opportunities. I think in Congress, we can help make it clear that it’s not.”

Walkinshaw said Fairfax County is working to become a leader in AI workforce skills, “because there will be no such thing

as an AI company in the future. Every company is an AI company, and if we have the workforce that knows how to utilize it, every company will want to be here in Fairfax.” ... Nationally, he emphasized the need to stay ahead of China in AI development for security reasons, while also implementing strong safeguards to protect privacy and prevent misuse “in the United States or globally.”

Closing comments:

Walkinshaw positioned himself as an experienced and results-oriented public servant, a champion for ordinary people — committed to stability, respect and opportunity for all, especially those who serve the community as federal employees. Walkinshaw contrasted himself with his opponent, stating that his priority is to serve the people of the 11th district, rather than being an ally of Donald Trump. “I’m running for Congress to fight for every single family in the 11th district so your life can be more affordable, where, if you or your spouse or your neighbor is a federal worker, you no longer have to live with the threat of having your job cut any given day, or have your service denigrated,” Walkinshaw said.

Whitson closed by asking the audience to examine what was happening in the district. He contrasted himself with his opponent by

SEE VIRGINIA 11TH, PAGE 15

Know The Facts

EVERY business must annually report unclaimed property to the Virginia Department of the Treasury by the deadline.

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- All businesses, legal entities, non-profits, & corporations must report.
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News

Facility

FROM PAGE 1

❖ Wednesday, Sept. 3 (backup day Thursday, Sept. 4)

The fitness equipment will be moved into the gymnasium to allow patrons to continue their workouts during the upgrades. The main entrance and patron check-in will move to the gymnasium door by the parking lot.

The upcoming improvements at Franconia Rec Center will enhance both the fitness and aquatics areas. In the fitness center and racquetball courts, the air handling system will be replaced and upgraded to provide better temperature control and improved energy efficiency.

In the aquatics area, a second pool HVAC unit will be installed to improve overall air quality, along with a new low deck exhaust system to more effectively ventilate humid air and enhance the swimmer experience. Additionally, ceiling-mounted de-stratification fans will be added to promote better air circulation throughout the natatorium.

"These upgrades are designed to significantly improve the overall experience for our members by ensuring better air quality and comfort, especially during peak seasons," said Sara Baldwin, Deputy Director and Chief Operating Officer of the Fairfax County Park Authority. "We appreciate the community's patience as we complete these much-needed improvements."

This project follows earlier upgrades completed during the spring break 2025 window, including replacement of a rooftop pool air handling unit over the childcare area to support summer operations.

STILL OPEN: Our Special Harbor, Chessie's Big Back Yard, the Amphitheater, volleyball, tennis and pickleball courts will not be impacted by the construction activity, even when the Rec Center is closed.

Rec Center members are invited to use any of Fairfax County Park Authority's other Rec Centers including the nearby Mount Vernon Rec Center (2017 Belle View Blvd. in Alexandria). Franconia Rec Center members who want to pause their memberships can make this request by visiting the front desk before closure begins or by submitting a request to pause membership online.

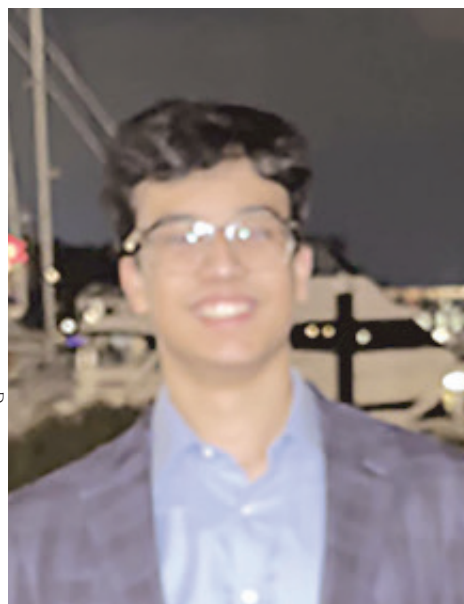
For questions or more information, contact the Public Information Office at parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov.



Sam Stankiewicz of Springfield, co-founder and chief executive officer of Normal Debate



Petr Kisselev of Burke, co-founder and chief technology officer of Normal Debate



Abhiraj Tiwari of Herndon, founding engineer of Normal Debate

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED

New Platform for Normal Debate?

Civil discussions with real impact.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE GAZETTE

Interview conducted
July 21, 2025

Tired of online social media debates turning into visceral attacks and misinformation? Normal Debate is a new online platform created by its executive team, Sam Stankiewicz, Petr Kisselev, and Abhiraj Tiwari. They developed Normal Debate to foster thoughtful, fact-based discussions and promote meaningful dialogue.

Kisselev, co-founder and chief technology officer, said that part of their mission is to ensure that it is a “normal debate.”

“That’s why we call it that — it’s reasonable. People want to talk about their issues instead of yelling at each other or being incomprehensible.”

Normal Debate provides a space where users can publish articles they have authored on a wide range of topics, and others can respond to them. The design encourages a range of opinions and is designed to foster a more profound understanding, without relying on any one person as the final authority, thereby avoiding confrontation.

The platform incorporates features such as adding sources and fact-checking, which help ground discussions in empirical evidence and reduce misinformation, according to Stankiewicz, co-founder and chief executive officer.

Stankiewicz said that the current platform is not the final product. Early beta testing is underway to ensure the product functions properly and identifies any potential issues that may arise.

“It’s a way to get early feedback on the product without having a huge audience relying on the platform,” Stankiewicz said. The platform may contain unfinished features or parts that the team will refine in

the future. However, it provides a realistic preview of what users can expect from the official release.

Kisselev said the team worked day and night during their 2024-2025 academic year at Thomas Jefferson High School, balancing their rigorous class schedule and study requirements while developing Normal Debate. Together, they wrote over 15,000 lines of code.

“It was a labor of love for the three of us,” Stankiewicz said.

Tiwari, founding engineer, highlighted the platform’s distinct role: “There’s no real online tool right now where people can post articles and their opinions on a wide set of issues. I think that our platform helps solve that.”

The chain can go on forever, and the platform has a strict rule against attacking writers. They say Normal Debate offers an alternative to general publishing sites like Medium or Substack.

According to Stankiewicz, in just a few weeks since going live, Normal Debate has attracted over 5,000 users and received enthusiastic feedback.

“People are really good at enjoying it,” Stankiewicz said, citing an email from someone who used it to engage with their school clubs. “It’s gratifying to see just such a positive reception of this kind of idea. They care about coming together.”

The executives of Normal Debate are rising seniors at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology (TJ) in Alexan-

dria.

They will return to classes on Aug. 21.

Kisselev confirmed the team’s commitment to the platform’s future. “I think I can speak for Sam (Stankiewicz) and Abhiraj (Tiwari) as well, and we’re committed to keeping this platform going,” Kisselev.

TJ is a Virginia magnet school operated by Fairfax County Public Schools division and functions as one of Virginia’s Governor’s Schools, a statewide program for gifted students with a selective admissions policy. The Normal Debate team received no assistance from school staff in developing the resource, but leaned on their acquired knowledge.

Visit Normal Debate at <https://normaldebate.com/> to discover articles over 300 words in length covering American politics, AI, justice, economics, tech, and more, along with responses from users. A “sound bite” is not an article.

Among current trending headlines with view counts are: Capitalism is State-Endorsed Genocide, by Drew Sitckley, 1.0K views; Free Will in the Age of AI: Evaluating Human Agency, by Karen Park, 3.1K views; and Mental Health Apps Cannot Replace Professional Treatment, by Abhiraj Tiwari, 2.2K views.

Visit the following links for more information on Normal Debate: legal (<https://normaldebate.com/legal>), use (<https://normaldebate.com/use>), Team <https://normaldebate.com/team>, and contact, including how to write an opinion and sign up at contact@normaldebate.com.

Virginia 11th Congressional District Forum

FROM PAGE 13

saying he wants to lower taxes, protect girls’ sports and spaces [from transgender concerns], empower parents, and restore common sense. Whitson emphasized his record of service as a combat veteran and federal law enforcement officer. Whitson said, “I’m not here to play politics. I’m here to serve. I’m asking for

your vote tonight so that I can fight for you, so I can fight for our families, so I can fight for your safety, so I can fight for your freedom.”

Connolly won his 2024 election with 66.7 percent of the vote. Kamala Harris garnered 65.4 percent of the vote to Donald Trump with 31 percent in the 2024 presidential election in the district.

“Hey Gals”



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

For the second time in as many weeks, our new across-the-street neighbor Dani has made me laugh. Burton (my golden retriever) and I were walking alongside the road in front of Dani’s property, just passed her driveway, semi blocked by some bush-type shrubbery. Nevertheless, after Dani parked her car on her driveway and gathered up her groceries and her nearly three-year-old daughter, Isabelle, she still saw us and yelled out: “Hi guys.” I laughed and yelled back a “Hello” to her. (We were a bit too far and hard to see to carry on any kind of conversation.) Her greeting stuck in my head though, filed away for a future column: this one.

Burton is my male golden retriever, so I guess in a very broad application of gender-specific greetings, he’s a guy. Burton and I share that gender distinction. As such, I suppose a courtesy-type “Hello” while carrying an armful of groceries in one arm and a nearly three-year-old daughter in the other, as we were walking in the opposite direction of her front door, was reasonable and quite neighborly as she was otherwise engaged. She was juggling duties so to speak but had seen us and it would have been discourteous almost not to say anything; mind you, she didn’t exactly have a free hand for a wave. Had she not said anything, it wouldn’t have been any kind of a deal breaker, she was busy and preoccupied with her task and responsibilities at hand. Yet, she still managed a sincere “Hello” and in doing so found her way into a Kenny column.

I can’t say for certain that in my over 40-ish years of dog ownership, never together, always one at a time, that my dogs and I were ever greeted in such a gender-respecting way. Nor can I suppose that words matter to others as they do to me. It’s kind of my thing. I’m endlessly fascinated and focused on words, phrases, meanings, double-endendres, et cetera. And recalling all those years and all those walks with Gus (my first dog, not a golden but a shepherd lab mix of sorts), Brandy (a female golden), Bailey (a male golden) and now Burton (our third golden, another male) in any and all locations (even college classes with Gus) anyone ever greeting us in the same gender-respecting way in which Dani did a few weeks back.

And the reason I’m droning on about this exchange, other than it’s what I do is, to highlight the importance of my neighbors to me. Living on a dead-end street with only 13 single family homes, we are all semi involved with one another. Which for a cancer patient like me, with an indeterminant life expectancy and an occasionally uncertain future (us patients live from scan to scan with the radiologists’ report clarifying that uncertainty), without local family around (and no children unfortunately), it may very well fall to one of my neighbors to watch our house, care for our animals, remove snow from our driveway, as but a few examples. As such, I need dependable neighbors/relationships. If something happens to me - or Dina, although more likely me, I need to worry less about as much as possible so that I can focus on my recovery/treatment and so forth. And as a non-parent, I certainly worry about my dog. Integrating him into the neighborhood is crucial.

As much as I want to live a life not impacted by cancer, I have to be realistic. Though not at all preoccupied with the enormity of my diagnosis, I have to factor it in. It’s hardly a paper cut. Fortunately, my personality has enabled me to never be consumed by my status: cancer patient. And after receiving a “13 month to two years” prognosis - back in late Feb. 2009, I have managed somehow to survive. But as a survivor, I know I’m one scan or one blood test away from needing medical attention and possibly neighborly assistance. If me walking the dog gets my neighbors involved in my life, so be it. I’m going to need their help, eventually.

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

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