

# CONNECTION

Burke ♦ Fairfax ♦ Springfield ♦ Fairfax Station ♦ Lorton ♦ Clifton

## Swans Among the Latest To Travel the Potomac

PAGE 6

## Groundbreaking GMU Report on Climate Dangers

PAGE 3

## Progress in New Laws

PAGE 8

Tundra swans in the Potomac River at Mason Neck State Park. See page 6 for directions to the best place to spot them.

COMMUNITY NEWS AT GLANCE, PAGE 2 ♦ ENTERTAINMENT, PAGE 9 ♦ CLASSIFIED, PAGE 10

PHOTO BY CATHY LEDEC

JANUARY 8-21, 2026

ONLINE AT [WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM](http://WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM)

## Rolling Road and Grigsby Drive Traffic Signal Fairfax County

*Willingness to Hold a Public Hearing*

**Find out** about plans to construct a traffic signal at the intersection of Rolling Road (Route 638) and Grigsby Drive (Route 4179)/the main West Springfield High School entrance to improve traffic operations and safety for students crossing at the intersection, especially during school arrival and dismissal periods. The signal will have flashing yellow arrows for drivers turning left from northbound and southbound Rolling Road. The project also includes installing Accessible Pedestrian Signals at the three existing crosswalks, adding a fourth crosswalk with Accessible Pedestrian signals, and upgrading the curb ramps to be Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant.

Pursuant with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and 23 CFR 771, a Programmatic Categorical Exclusion (PCE) is being prepared under agreement with the Federal Highway Administration. When completed, the PCE will be available on the project website listed below and upon request. In compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 and 36 CFR Part 800, information concerning the potential effects of the project on properties listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places will be included with the PCE.

**Review** project information at <https://www.vdot.virginia.gov/Grigsby> or at VDOT's Northern Virginia District Office, 4975 Alliance Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030. Please call ahead at 703-259-1778 or TTY/TDD 711 to make an appointment with appropriate personnel.

If your concerns cannot be satisfied, VDOT is willing to hold a public hearing. You may request that a public hearing be held by sending a written request to Mr. Ahmad Al Kawabeh, EIT, Virginia Department of Transportation, 4975 Alliance Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030 on or prior to **January 29, 2026**. If upon receiving public comments it is deemed necessary to hold a public hearing, notice of date, time and place of the hearing will be posted.

VDOT ensures nondiscrimination and equal employment in all programs and activities in accordance with Title VI and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended. If you need more information or special assistance for persons with disabilities or limited English proficiency, contact VDOT Civil Rights at 703-259-1775 or TTY/TDD 711.

State Project: 0638-029-696, C501, P101, R201  
UPC: 127005  
Federal: STP-5B01(767)

## COMMUNITY NEWS AT A GLANCE

### Capturing the people, places, and businesses of Fairfax County

**L**ife in Fairfax County can be viewed through a steady rhythm of diverse stories that define its residents, businesses, organizations and government. Compiled and written by Mercia Hobson, staff reporter for The Connection Newspapers

Submit items for consideration to [mhobson@connectionnewspapers.com](mailto:mhobson@connectionnewspapers.com) and include up to two photos with captions identifying people from left, their community, a description of the event, and credit lines as appropriate.

**A**ccording to police, Grant Faircloth, a 24-year-old resident of Aldie, was driving a 2010 Toyota Prius eastbound on Post Forest Drive when the vehicle left the roadway and struck a tree near the intersection with Government Center Parkway. Though his injuries were initially thought to be non-life-threatening, police reported that evening, officers were notified that Faircloth's status had changed to life-threatening. Faircloth was later pronounced deceased. Preliminarily, alcohol does not appear to be a factor in the crash, though the investigation into the cause continues.

PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/ THE CONNECTION

**New Year's Eve Crash Turns Fatal: The Fairfax County Police Department is investigating a single-vehicle crash that occurred on New Year's Eve around 8:25 p.m.**



### Special Election for VA House of Delegates, 11th District Underway:

#### Sample Ballot for the January 13, 2026, Special Election

11th District

Member, Virginia House of Delegates

Commonwealth of Virginia, **SAMPLE BALLOT**  
City of Fairfax  
Special Election  
Tuesday, January 13, 2026

**Making selections**

To vote for a candidate, fill in the oval to the left of the name.  
To write-in a candidate who is not already on the ballot, fill in the oval and write the name of the person on the line.  
If you want to change a vote or if you have made a mistake, ask an election officer for another ballot.  
If you make marks on the ballot besides filling in the oval, your vote(s) may not be counted.

Sample\_CityofFairfax\_B1\_in Yellow.pdf

**Member, House of Delegates  
Special Election  
11th District  
For unexpired term to end  
January 11, 2028**

Vote for only one

☐ Gretchen M. Bulova - D

☐ Adam J. Wise - R

☐ Write-in

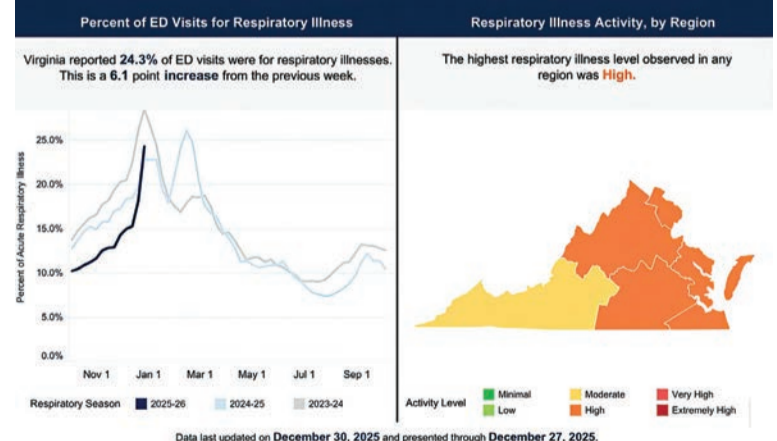
SCREENSHOT/CITY OF FAIRFAX WEBSITE

Early voting officially opened on Jan. 3 for the special election to fill the 11th District House of Delegates seat vacated by David Bulova, who joined Governor-elect Spanberger's cabinet. Drawing local political attention as the General Assembly session nears, the race features Democratic nominee Gretchen Bulova, director of Historic Alexandria, and Republican nominee Adam Wise, a local firearms instructor. In-person early voting locations are the Fairfax County Government Center at 12000 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax; Jim Scott Community Center at 3001 Vaden Drive, Oakton and Fairfax City Hall at 10455 Armstrong Street, Fairfax (primarily for City of Fairfax residents). The Voter Registration Deadline is Tuesday, Jan. 6, and the Special Election Day is Tuesday, Jan. 13.

### Respiratory Update:

The Fairfax Health District reports that respiratory illness activity has hit its high and warns residents of a new "subclade K" variant of H3N2 influenza strain spreading in the region. The current 2025-2026 flu vaccine is a trivalent vaccine that protects against two Influenza A strains (H1N1 and H3N2) and one Influenza B strain.

### Respiratory Illnesses are Rising in Virginia, Mostly Due to Increases in Flu



**Nearly 1 in 4 visits to the emergency department last week were for respiratory illnesses.**

[VDH.VIRGINIA.GOV/EPIDEMIOLOGY/RESPIRATORY-DISEASES](https://vdh.virginia.gov/epidemiology/respiratory-diseases)

[vdh.virginia.gov/flu](https://vdh.virginia.gov/flu)

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# Virginia Faces Climate Change Risks, GMU Warns

By GLENDA C. BOOTH  
CONNECTION NEWSPAPERS

**A**cross Virginia, temperatures are rising, the state is getting wetter, precipitation is more frequent and extreme, drought is a growing concern and sea level is rising. These are the key findings of a recent, first-of-its-kind assessment of how climate change is impacting Virginia.

The state has been warming since the 18th century, said Dr. Jim Kinter, Director of George Mason University's Center for Ocean-Land-Atmosphere Studies, in a Dec. 12 briefing. He drew this conclusion in part using Thomas Jefferson's meticulous 1776 to 1826 weather logs, records that "raised more questions than answers."

Other conclusions of Virginia Climate Assessment:

Of Virginia's 8.7 million people, more than three million live in "relatively high multi-hazard risk" counties and 1.4 million "socially vulnerable residents face the greatest cascading impacts." Impacts vary by region.

Extreme weather, like floods, heat waves and wildfires, is worsened by the events' longer duration, frequency and severity and bigger temperature swings.

The northern and western parts of the state are most affected by drought, with more flash droughts anticipated. Droughts especially affect water supply, data centers, forestry and agriculture. Data centers' water use rose 63 percent from 2019 to 2023. "In Northern Virginia, drought-induced disruptions to water availability in the Potomac River could reduce economic output by more than \$4.5 billion in just one month," according to the report.

In a follow-up email, Dr. Kinter stressed the urgent need to act because he expects the "negative impacts to become more intense and frequent if global carbon dioxide and methane emissions continue to grow as they have for the past several decades. ... Virginia needs to take bold action within this decade to sharply reduce emissions of these pollutants through programs of both conservation and transition to non-fossil energy sources," he argues. He commends Fairfax County's resiliency plan.

Compounding or over-lapping climate events will bring more power outages, communication disruptions and threaten air quality, infrastructure and emergency systems.

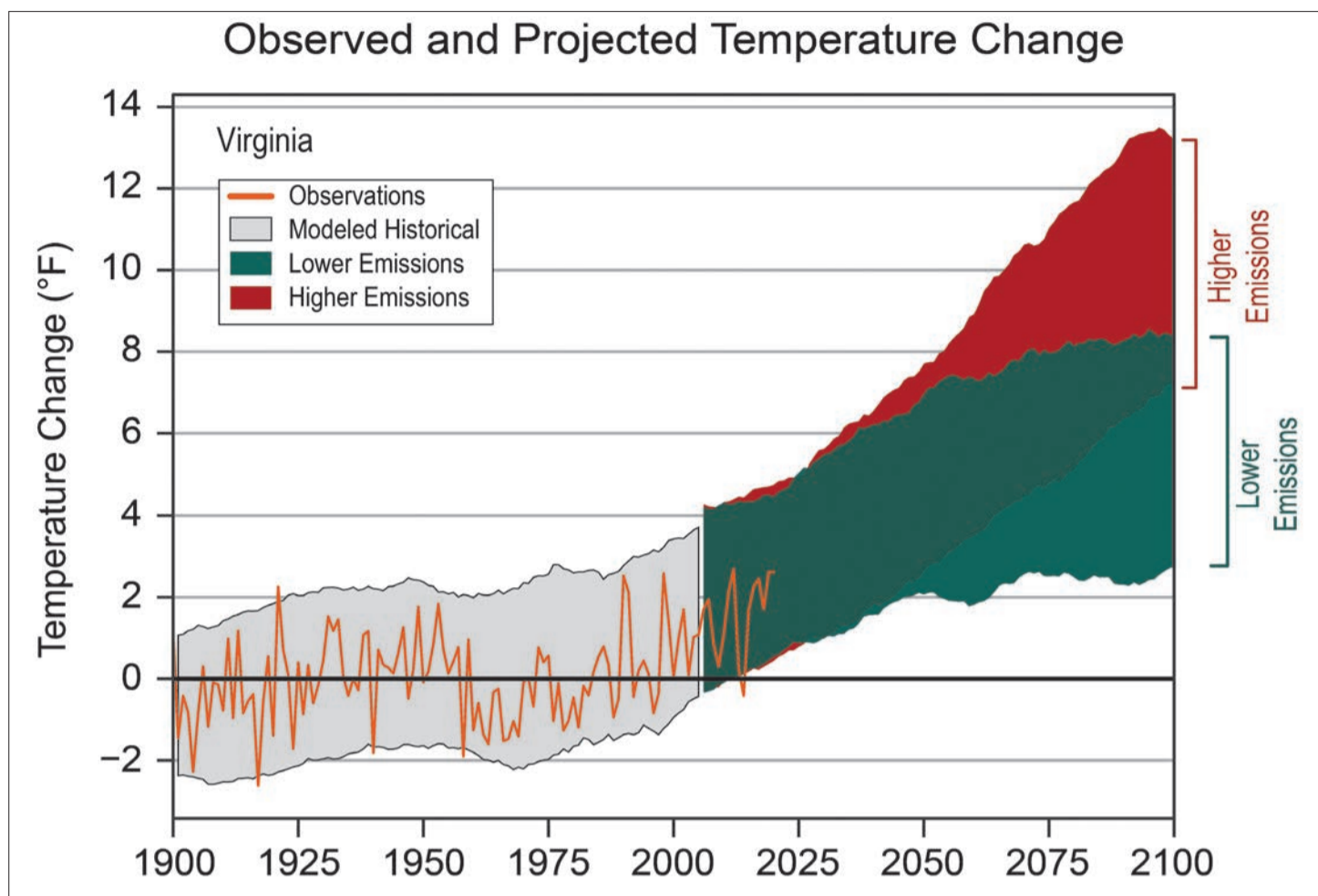
Heat risk is increasing, creating significant health impacts and healthcare costs. Heat risk is "inequitably distributed," with the elderly and outdoor workers, for example, at high risk.

All areas "are experiencing flash flooding and stream overflows," the study concludes. Spring and fall are getting wetter and the flood risk to housing is rising. Nine percent of Virginia's housing stock, 344,000 homes, is already at substantial risk. Flood insurance premiums could rise 45 percent, according to the report.

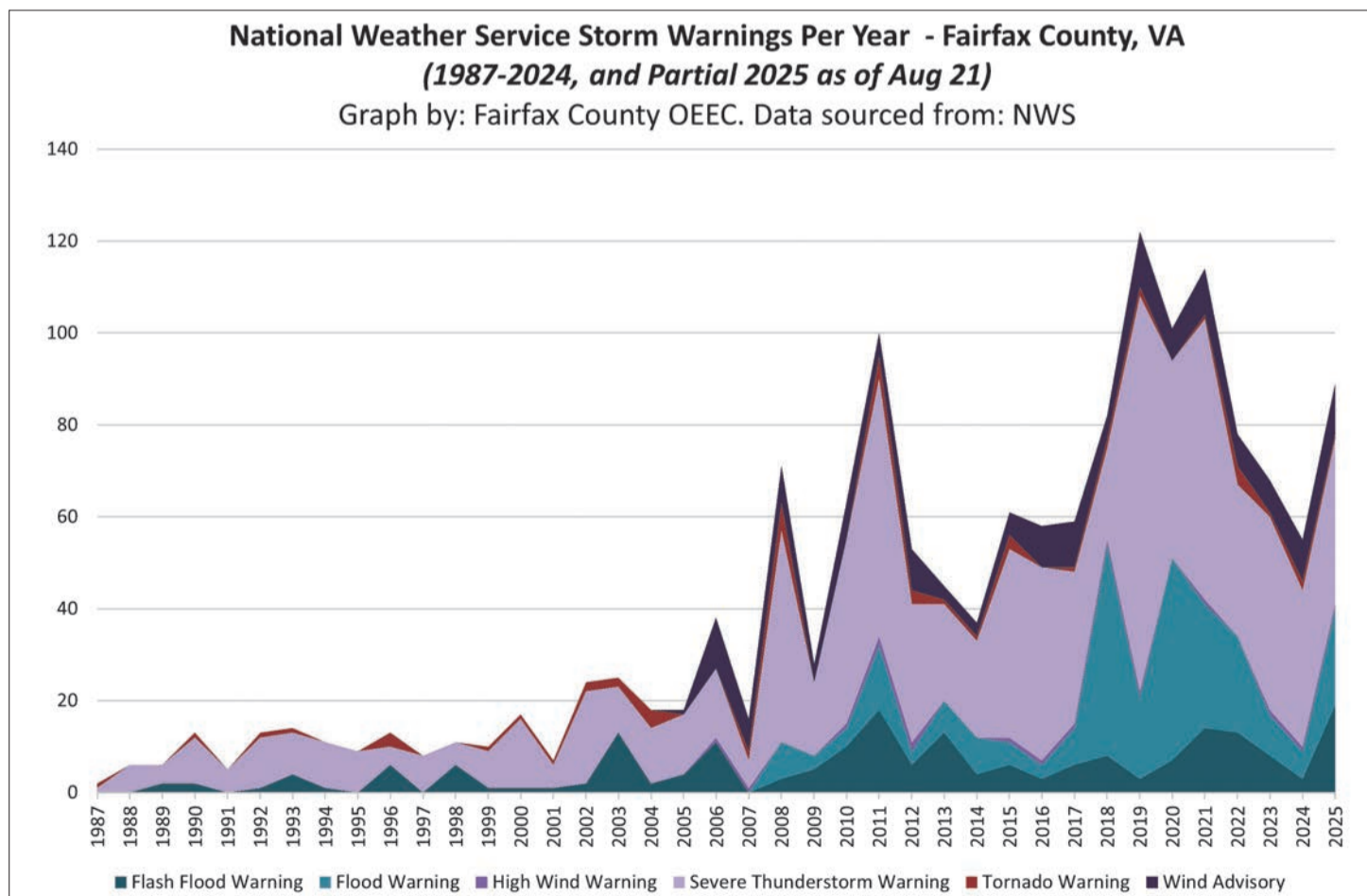
Warming and increased precipitation will

SEE VIRGINIA FACES, PAGE 7

WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM



NOAA TECHNICAL REPORT NESDIS149-VA. NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION. <https://statesummaries.ncics.org/chapter/va/>  
Observed and Projected Temperature Change (relative to 1901–1960 average) in observed statewide average mean annual air temperature for Virginia (1900–2020), and projected temperatures (2006–2100) under uncontrolled (higher) and optimistic (lower) global greenhouse gas emissions pathways. Shading reflects confidence around observed and projected temperatures.



PROVIDED BY ALLISON HOMER (FAIRFAX COUNTY OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND ENERGY COORDINATION)

Examples of flooding in Fairfax County, VA, showing A) a swift-water rescue, B) transportation infrastructure failure due to flooding, and C) the increasing trends of flash flooding, thunderstorms, tornadoes, and other related weather events over the past nearly four decades.

# Opera, Politics and Adolf Hitler Highlight Novel by Local Author

BY MIKE SALMON  
THE CONNECTION

**T**he beautiful sound of opera enthralls many, and Angelika Eder's sound enlightened many in Europe in the early 1930s, but sadly, that included Adolph Hitler who strongly suggested that Angelika sing for him. Was this what she wanted?

This is the conflict in Heather Walrath's historical novel "The Diva's Daughter," that hinges on the intersection of art and politics, an intersection that is revealed throughout time. "I wanted to shed light upon the dark realities of this time period in a way that is accessible to both regular readers of historical fiction and those who might not usually read this genre, or who may feel intimidated by dense works of non-fiction," said Walrath. She suggests the parallel between then and recent times with politics and entertainment at the Kennedy Center, or is it the Trump-Kennedy Center?

Walrath's novel is inspired by the true story of renowned opera singer Lotte Lehmann, who mentors fictional heroine Angelika in "The Diva's Daughter." During the Nazi era, party officials pressured Madame Lehmann and other performers to form alliances with them. Through the eyes of Angelika, Walrath explores the dangers and decisions these artists faced, including questions about what constitutes complicity or resistance.

Walrath, a Burke resident, raises questions of art, politics and censorship that are still relevant today, bringing up the notion of artists and patrons standing up for their beliefs. This is an underlying theme of her novel.

Walrath is a fan of opera, musical theater and the arts. Her husband, Stephen Walrath, has a grandfa-



Heather Walrath of Burke.

**"It is more important than ever to keep this era and its lessons alive through recorded history and stories."**

— Heather Walrath

ther who was in the Army Signal Corps during World War II and saw the horrors of Hitler during his involvement in the liberation of Dachau, a concentration camp

in Germany where over 40,000 prisoners died. As the number of WWII veterans decreases through the years, Walrath says, "it is more important than ever to keep this

era and its lessons alive through recorded history and stories."

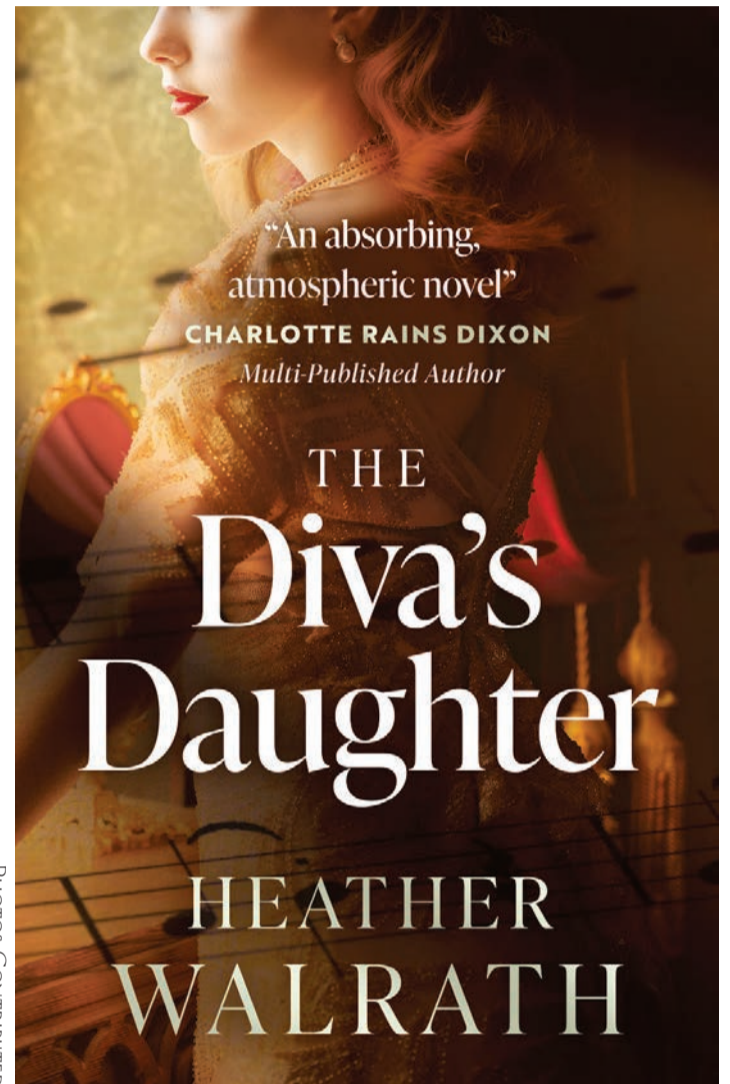
## The Hills are Alive

The noted musical "The Sound of Music," was inspirational to Walrath but she noticed the family's mother was "rarely mentioned," she said. Angelika's mother was an opera star, so Walrath looked on this as a subplot in her story.

Walrath grew up in the Los Angeles suburbs and got involved with history and writing after an inspirational high school teacher

provided some encouragement. She went on to get a bachelor's degree in journalism from California State University Northridge and, after moving to the DC area for a congressional internship program, earned her master's degree in publishing from George Washington University.

"The Diva's Daughter" is Walrath's debut novel, but she's currently pitching her second book, "The Banished Baker's Forgotten Recipe," which is set in Yonkers, New York, during Prohibition.



Historical novel is Walrath's first in circulation but not her last.

## 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 the event. Or via email [calendar@connectionnewspapers.com](mailto:calendar@connectionnewspapers.com).

**ALNV JANUARY WISH LIST**  
Assistance League of Northern Virginia (ALNV) is an all-vol-

unteer organization that partners with several Title 1 elementary schools across the region. These schools have a high percentage of low-income students whose families have a difficult time providing basic necessities. ALNV helps fulfill basic needs by providing food and clothing. A series of monthly wish lists helps ALNV expand the scope of what can be provided. The January Wish List focuses on

new underwear, a basic clothing item that is greatly needed and frequently requested by the schools the organization serves. As the New Year starts the community is invited to make a contribution from this month's New Year! New Undies! wish list. There is a variety of colorful multi-pair underwear packages for boys and girls in all sizes. Use this link: <https://tiny.alnv.org/undies> or scan the QR

code on the flyer to make your selection and help the schools replenish their supply of this important necessity that many children need. Please select Assistance League of Northern Virginia as the mailing address to assure timely delivery. If you would prefer not to order through Amazon, you can pay by personal check for these items. Please send your check, made out to ALNV, to P.O. Box 209, Herndon,

VA 20172 and include "Wish List/month" in the memo line. (E.g., if you order in January, write Wish List/January.

**VOLUNTEER DRIVERS NEEDED**  
Have some extra time to drive a neighbor to a doctor's appointment? You pick the days, times, and places that are

SEE BULLETIN, PAGE 5

# Next Repair Café

Sunday, Jan. 11

City of Fairfax Regional Library  
10360 North Street  
Fairfax, VA, 22030

**For transit:** This location is served by WMATA MetroBus F23 and F50, and the Fairfax City CUE Green and Gold lines.

**By car:** This location has a 2-level parking garage behind and under the library building, accessible from University Drive. Follow city signage from North Street for the library/parking.

Doors open at 10:30. We close to new knife sharpening at 12:00pm, and we close to all new repairs at

12:30pm. This helps us make sure we can clean up the library's room before we leave.

**Next up: February, March Cafés**

Sunday, Feb. 8, 2026, 10:30am-12:30pm,  
Pohick Regional Library  
6450 Sydenstricker Rd  
Burke VA 22015-4274

**Saturday, March 14, 2026, 10:30am-12:30pm**

Thomas Jefferson Library  
7415 Arlington Boulevard  
Falls Church, VA, 22042

## BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 4

convenient for you. There is no minimum driving requirement. Not only do you help older adults in need, you also get to meet wonderful folks, often with very interesting backgrounds and stories to tell. The Shepherd's Center of McLean-Arlington-Falls Church (SCMAFC), is an all-volunteer, non-sectarian, non-profit organization. Its mission is providing free transportation to seniors for medical and dental appointments or run errands to grocery stores and

pharmacies. Visit the website at <https://scmafc.org/volunteer>, or email [contact@scmafc.org](mailto:contact@scmafc.org).

### VOLUNTEER YOUR TIME

Would you like to help a neighbor feel less lonely? Will you help someone get much-needed groceries? Form new connections and make a meaningful difference. Older adults in the Annandale, Falls Church, and Alexandria regions are waiting for volunteer social visitors and grocery shoppers. If you can give the gift of your time, consider providing invaluable support to someone in your community.

Learn more about Volunteer Solutions at [bit.ly/FXVSVOL](http://bit.ly/FXVSVOL) or email [VolunteerSolutions@FairfaxCounty.gov](mailto:VolunteerSolutions@FairfaxCounty.gov) or call 703-324-5406.

### SUPPORT GROUPS

Parent Support Partners, a service of the Healthy Minds Fairfax initiative, are all parents who have received training and are qualified to offer education, support and assistance at no cost to families or caregivers. They provide reliable information that families can use in

SEE BULLETIN, PAGE 7

## Easing Your Transition from Hospital to Home.



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900 Virginia Ave, Alexandria, VA 22302

## Mental wellness plans for the WHOLE FAMILY



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Scan the QR code to schedule a no-cost assessment or call 703-621-1900.

We accept most major insurance plans, including Medicare.



**HCAVa**  
Mental Health & Wellness



PHOTO BY TOM BLACKBURN

Mason Neck State Park Assistant Manager Jamie Leeuwrik explored the river's history.



PHOTO BY CATHY LEDEC

Tundra swans at Mason Neck. Read on for the best place to spot them.

# The Potomac River, An Important Artery

River commerce history and more shared by Friends of Mason Neck State Park.

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH  
CONNECTION NEWSPAPERS

**T**he Potomac River is a vibrant 383-mile thoroughfare. Among the latest to travel along the river are tundra swans that arrived recently from the Arctic to spend the winter at Mason Neck until February. Randy Streufert counted 220 of these white, long-necked birds on Dec. 4. He recommended the best places to see the tundra swans: the end of the Great Marsh and Wood Marsh trails in the Mason Neck Wildlife Refuge at high tide.

The Potomac was an important commercial thoroughfare for centuries for goods and people in dug-out canoes, shallows, flat-bottomed boats, steamships, ferries, barges and other vessels.

Today, most of the river's traffic is recreational, anglers trying to snag a striped bass or leisure boaters just plying the waters.

On Dec. 7, 75 people gathered at Gunston Hall to learn about the river's historic role and connection to Mason Neck in a talk by Jamie Leeuwrik at a meeting dubbed "Swanfall" and sponsored by the Friends of Mason Neck State Park. Leeuwrik is Mason Neck State Park's assistant manager.

The Mason Neck peninsula in southeastern Fairfax County has been inhabited for over 13,000 years, she began. Artifacts and an oyster midden "show a heavy reliance on the river," for marsh creatures, fish and shellfish before European settlement, she said.

In 1608, English Captain John



First place, youth division winner Quinn Clark, won with a picture of a northern water snake.

Smith sailed up the Potomac and encountered the Algonquin-speaking Doeg people in that area. In the 17th and 18th centuries, when the Masons occupied much of Mason Neck, George Mason IV had several landings.

Tobacco farmers in the 1700s

and 1800s needed a way to transport 1,000-pound hogsheads of dry tobacco to inspection warehouses and then to boats for domestic sales and export. Hauling goods by water was easier than traveling on crude roads on foot, SEE THE POTOMAC RIVER, PAGE 7



Rachel Elrod photographed an eastern rat snake on a sycamore tree.



PHOTOS BY GLENDA BOOTH

The Friends of Mason Neck State Park honored past president Hilary Clawson.

# Virginia Faces Climate Change Risks, GMU Warns

FROM PAGE 3

continue through the middle to late 21st century.

All economic sectors and natural systems face more exposure because of climate change.

## Northern Virginia

“Compound flooding” is already affecting Northern Virginia, the report maintains, “caused by the interaction of precipitation, storm surge, tides and riverine overflow” in the Potomac River corridor.

One of Northern Virginia’s vulnerabilities is aging stormwater infrastructure, with some systems a century or more old. The study includes a photo of flooded Alexandria streets during concurrent high tides and rain.

The assessment singles out as a “credible and growing concern” Northern Virginia’s concentration of data centers as being at “emerging risk” and cites data centers in California and the United Kingdom overheating and shutting down from power failures during heat waves. “Northern Virginia, home to the world’s largest concentration of data centers, with 13 percent of global data center capacity, has seen outages and is increasingly exposed to flash floods, extreme heat and grid strain,” notes the report.

Federal agencies and contractors could face “disruption of mobility” and telecommunications. “Tidal flooding and storm surge at Naval

Station Norfolk, the world’s largest naval base, threatens military readiness,” the report warns.

“Northern Virginia’s economic output, based in government and data infrastructure, depends on continuous access to high-functioning transportation and facility operations,” the report contends. “Flash floods in 2019 and 2021 overwhelmed parts of Fairfax County, shutting down arterial roadways and temporarily closing government buildings, demonstrating an instance where a localized event threatened government functions.”

## Global Warming Emissions

Greenhouse gas emissions in Virginia peaked in 2005 and declined by about 26 percent in 2023, according to U.S. Energy Information Administration data. Dr. Kinter attributes the drop to converting some electricity generation from coal to natural gas since “natural gas combustion emits about half as much greenhouse gases as coal combustion.” The EIA data does not reflect Virginia’s 2020 Clean Economy Act effects.

## A State Climate Office?

Dr. Kinter advocated for a state climate office to collect and analyze data, conduct assessments and recommend solutions, noting that Virginia is one of only two states without one. George Mason is “willing to host it,” he said, and



PHOTO BY CELSO FERREIRA (GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY).

**Compound nuisance flooding overwhelming stormwater infrastructure in the City of Alexandria during high-tides and precipitation event.**

will again ask the state legislature to fund a state climate office.

## A Landmark Study

The science-based assessment is the first of its kind establishing a baseline for measuring future changes. Unlike national and glob-

al analyses which examine broad climate trends, this study focuses on regional impacts in Virginia.

The 90-page study reflects the work of 26 authors, eight institutions and over 300 articles, coordinated by GMU professors. GMU plans future reports with finer-scale

geographic details, sector impacts and “adaptation effectiveness.”

For more, see <https://www.gmu.edu/news/2025-11/george-masons-virginia-climate-center-releases-first-ever-statewide-climate-assessment>

# The Potomac River, An Important Artery

FROM PAGE 6

horse or wagon.

The Mason Neck town of Colchester, founded in 1753, had a ferry crossing on the Occoquan River to the port town of Occoquan, the location of two public wharves, a copper and a tobacco inspection warehouse. The river linked the Potomac to the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic, so goods reached larger markets and imports from Europe arrived.

In the late 1700s, steamboats came of age, used for commercial, recreational and military purposes. They transported vacationers as well as fish, farm products and

other goods.

Toward the end of the 18th century, canal building along the river began, intended to facilitate navigation where the natural topography and rapids made navigation difficult or impossible. The canals included the Potowmack Canal and the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal (C&O), intended to connect the Potomac River to the Ohio River for transporting coal, lumber and agricultural products. The C&O terminated in Cumberland, Maryland.

“The waterway’s dominance gradually declined, but remained important in the 19th century,” said

Leeuwrik. Railways and roads eventually moved travel off waterways.

“Waterways like the Potomac River have continually shaped the livelihoods and identities of all living creatures,” she said. “Without the river, which created the marshes, which attracted wildlife and people, we may not have had Mason Neck State Park or any of our public lands on the peninsula.”

## Photography Winners Recognized

The Friends group announced the winners of their photography contest. In the youth division, first

place went to Quinn Clark for her picture of a northern water snake. “The snake was outside the visitor center,” she said. “It was really cute.”

Also in the youth division, Shayan Achmed won first place for a photo of an eastern phoebe and Rachel Elrod for a photo of an eastern rat snake. Connor Marshall won the youth grand prize for his “headshot” of a five-lined skink.

In the adult category, the grand prize went to Lisa Mayo for her photo of a tan jumping spider and Mike Garth won first place for a photo of mushrooms.

“Some are National Geographic

quality,” said Streufert, the contest’s manager.

## Friends Accomplishments

President Steve Levenson honored past president Hillary Clawson with a bouquet.

He cited as among the Friends’ accomplishments getting state funds for all-terrain wheelchairs and making the park more accessible for people with disabilities. They built a sidewalk so visitors in wheelchairs can more easily see the water, provided more accessible picnic tables, financed a new water fountain and bought “magic glasses” for colorblind individuals.

## BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 5

decision-making and are familiar with services and resources that can help families in distress. Visit [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/healthymindsfairfax](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/healthymindsfairfax) or [www.nami-northernvirginia.org/parent-peer-support.html](http://www.nami-northernvirginia.org/parent-peer-support.html). The Shepherd’s Center of Northern Virgin-

ia Caregivers’ Support Group takes place the first and third Tuesdays of each month, 10-11:30 a.m. via Zoom. This group is for caregivers of family members with dementia. Meetings are gently facilitated. For more information and to get the Zoom link, contact Jack Tarr at [jtarr5@verizon.net](mailto:jtarr5@verizon.net) or 703-821-6838.

Haven of Northern Virginia Support Group. 703-941-7000, [www.havenofnova.org](http://www.havenofnova.org) or [havenofnova@verizon.net](mailto:havenofnova@verizon.net).

Virginia Chronic Pain Support Group Meets from 1:30-3 p.m. the 2nd Wednesday of each month at Kaplan Center for Integrative Medicine, 6829 Elm St., Suite 300, McLean. Group leader, Jodi Brayton, LCSW. 703-532-4892.

## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Operation Paws for Homes, a Virginia based 501(c)(3) organization seeks volunteers, especially to foster dogs. See [www.ophrescue.org](http://www.ophrescue.org) for information and all volunteer opportunities.

# Virginia's Hidden Wins: New Laws in Effect

From protecting primates to ending 'mystery' court bills to a bit of help for foster children.

BY MERCIA HOBSON  
THE CONNECTION

In 2025, the Virginia General Assembly and Gov. Glenn Youngkin passed and signed over 650 bills into law. While most legislation hits the books in July, several major laws went live on Jan. 1, 2026. From closing fatal diagnostic gaps in ERs and ensuring foster youth move with dignity, to providing a retirement pathway for primates previously euthanized after lab research, these hidden victories address the pocketbook and health issues that matter to Virginians. Here is a curated selection of the hidden victories as we move forward in 2026.

## Malcolm's Law: Blind Spot in Virginia Hospitals Corrected

Virginia hospitals with emergency departments must now include fentanyl in all routine urine drug screenings to prevent diagnostic errors in overdose cases. Named in memory of a 17-year-old Fairfax resident whose synthetic opioid overdose was missed by standard hospital tests, Malcolm's Law (HB 2742) closes a potentially fatal diagnostic gap. Just a tiny amount of fentanyl, the small amount that fits on the tip of a pencil, is a potentially deadly dose, according to the DEA. During legislative testimony, it was revealed that adding a fentanyl reagent to a standard test costs less than \$1 per patient for a life-saving measure. The bill, introduced by Del. Irene Shin (D-Herndon), passed with unanimous 99-0 and 40-0 votes before being signed into law by Gov. Glenn Youngkin on March 21, 2025.

## Failed Two Consecutive Years Before Passing: The Breast Cancer Screening Act

After clearing significant hurdles related to insurance mandates, the Breast Cancer Screening Act HB 1828 is eliminating the follow-up fee. State-regulated insurance plans are prohibited from charging copays for diagnostic breast exams and follow-up MRIs, ending a years-long push for cost-free detection. This legislation specifically targets the hidden costs that often hit patients after a suspicious finding on a standard mammogram. The bill, introduced by Del. Shelly Simonds (D-Newport News), passed with unanimous 99-0 and 40-0 votes before being signed into law by Gov. Youngkin on March 24, 2025.

## Prostate Screening Equity: Aligning with Modern Medicine

HB 2097, introduced by lead patron Del. Bobby Orrrock, (R-Caroline), forces insurers to cover prostate cancer screenings without cost-sharing for high-risk individuals, mirroring protections recently established for other major cancers. Previously stalled due to insurance lobby concerns about premium costs, this law ensures PSA tests are treated with the same preventive priority as mammograms. The bill passed with 97-0 and 40-0 votes before being signed into law by Gov. Youngkin on March 21, 2025.



SCREENSHOT FCPDNEWS

Fentanyl pills seized by the Fairfax County Police Department in August 2024. Malcolm's Law, House Bill 2742, is now in effect, requiring all Virginia emergency rooms to test for fentanyl. The law followed the 2023 overdose death of a Fairfax teenager whose condition was missed by standard hospital screenings.

## Medical Debt Protection Act: Capping Interest on Illness

HB 1725, introduced by Del. Karrie Delaney (D-Fairfax), passed with a 53-44 and 27-13 vote before being signed into law by Youngkin on May 2, 2025. New protections limit interest rates on medical debt to 3% annually and prohibit hospitals from taking aggressive collection actions, such as foreclosures. This bill faced several years of debate before a compromise was reached to shield patients from financial ruin due to healthcare costs.

## Primate Retirement Law

The Primate Retirement Law, SB 907, states that state-funded research facilities in Virginia are now required to offer retired primates to certified sanctuaries rather than resorting to euthanasia, which was previously the standard protocol. This compassionate mandate ensures that monkeys and other primates used in state-funded studies have a pathway to a natural life once their research term ends. In consultation with a facility's attending veterinarian, research centers must now prioritize retirement over euthanasia. The bill, introduced by Sen. Bill Stanley (R-Franklin), passed unanimously in the Senate (39-0) and passed the House (75-21) before being signed into law on March 24, 2025.

## The End of 'Mystery' Court Bills

HB 1665, introduced by lead patron Del. Michael Jones, (D-Richmond), ensures that Virginians convicted of traffic infractions or crimes can now request a transparent, line-item receipt for every fine, fee and court cost assessed. The bill ends the era of "mystery bills" by requiring court clerks to provide a detailed financial breakdown at the time of assessment or upon request. The bill passed



SCREENSHOT FRIENDS OF DYKE MARSH

Dyke Marsh, located in the Alexandria section of Fairfax County and managed by the National Park Service, is impacted by Virginia's HB 2034. The new law mandates a coalition of scientists, nonprofits, and state and federal agencies to move beyond mere preservation and begin building new wetland acreage to defend against rising sea levels.



SCREENSHOT VPAP.ORG

Del. Karrie Delaney (D-Fairfax), is the chief patron of HB 1725, the Medical Debt Protection Act: Capping Interest on Illness.

unanimously, with 99-0 and 40-0 votes, before being signed into law on March 24, 2025.

## Extra \$52 Unemployment Boost

The maximum weekly unemployment benefit in Virginia has increased by \$52 for all new claims filed as of Jan. 1, 2026. Introduced as HB 1766 by Del. Marty Martinez (D-Loudoun), the increase was enacted as part of the 2025 budget compromise to help benefits keep pace with the rising cost of living in the Commonwealth.

## Wetlands Protection Task Force: Fighting 'Marsh Loss'

Virginia has launched a Wetlands Policy Task Force to slow the rapid loss of state wetlands and develop a strategy for large-scale restoration. Wetlands act as nature's "kidneys," filtering pollutants from water before they reach the Chesapeake Bay and protecting Fairfax County neighborhoods from flash flooding. This new mandate (HB 2034) requires a state-federal coalition of scientists, nonprofits, and government agencies to move beyond merely preserving what remains. By coordinating with federal partners, the task force will expand wetland acreage to mitigate rising sea levels and ensure Virginia's restoration goals align with national environmental standards. Introduced by Del. Shelly Simonds (D-Newport News), the bill passed with bipartisan support (84-14 and 38-2) before being signed into law on March 21, 2025.



SCREENSHOT VPAP.ORG

Del. Irene Shin (D-Herndon), is the chief patron of Malcolm's Law (HB 2742), which effectively closes a potentially fatal emergency diagnostic gap.

## Step Toward Stability For Those Experiencing Homelessness

While this law officially went into effect mid-2025, its full funding and administrative rollout at DMV offices and the Department of Health — including those in Fairfax County — began in earnest on Jan. 1, 2026. HB 1617, the Homeless Identity Act, waives all state fees for birth certificates and government-issued identification cards for youth and adults experiencing homelessness. The new rule requires state agencies to provide these documents at no cost to individuals who can certify their homelessness through a shelter or social service agency. The bill, introduced by Del. Adele McClure (D-Arlington), passed 82-14 and 40-0 before being signed into law on March 21, 2025.

## The Foster Care Luggage Law:

HB 1631, introduced by lead patron Del. Candi Mundon King (D-Prince William), requires the Department of Social Services to maintain a supply of new luggage so that children in foster care no longer have to move their belongings in trash bags. For decades, the "black trash bag" has been a heartbreaking symbol of the foster care experience, often damaging a child's sense of self-worth during an already traumatic move. This law requires that each local department maintain a supply of suitcases or duffel bags for every child in the system. The bill passed unanimously, with 99-0 and 40-0 votes, and was signed into law on March 21, 2025.

# ENTERTAINMENT

## \$25,000 BUSINESS GRANTS

### APPLICATION OPENS

The City of Fairfax Business Marketing Grant is now live! The submission window is open until February 13. This program awards \$25,000 to at least five Fairfax City owned businesses, providing access to professional marketing services tailored to each business's needs. By pairing businesses with industry experts, the grant helps to boost visibility, competitiveness, and long-term growth. To view more details and how to apply, visit the link: [https://gofairfaxcity.com/business.../incentives-grants\(7\)](https://gofairfaxcity.com/business.../incentives-grants(7)) Facebook

## NOW THRU FEB. 24, 2026

**Bernie Boston, A Retrospective Photography Exhibition.** At Pleasant Grove Church and McLean Community Center. Presented by McLean Project for the Arts and The Friends of Pleasant Grove. Sponsored by The Friends of Historic Pleasant Grove, 8641 Lewinsville Road, McLean. Visit [www.historicpleasantgrove.org](http://www.historicpleasantgrove.org).

## THROUGH JAN. 25

**"Into the Woods."** Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m.; Sundays at 2 p.m. At Workhouse Arts Center, Lorton. This winter, the Workhouse Arts Center invites the region's media to step inside a theatrical world where fairy tales collide, destinies twist, and classic characters reveal their most unexpected truths. "Into the Woods" brings beloved storybook characters together on a shared quest for meaning, fulfillment, and the elusive "happily ever after." In this fresh Workhouse interpretation, the Creative Team reimagines the production through a dynamic tabletop-game lens—transforming each character into a questing adventurer with individual missions, intertwining fates, and surprising consequences.

## THROUGH FEB. 8

**Winter Ice Skating.** At National Building Museum 401 F Street, NW, Washington, D.C. This season, the National Building Museum is delighted to welcome back the Winter Skate Spectacular—returning for its second year in an even bigger, better, and brighter form. This one of a kind, indoor synthetic ice-skating experience transforms the Museum's Great Hall into a winter wonderland where visitors of all ages can skate beneath the soaring Corinthian columns. Events will include early hours for younger skaters, themed nights, festive snacks and drinks, and more.

### Early Hours

Thursdays – Toddler Time, 11–11:30 am (following Storytime)

Saturdays – Museum Members-Only Skate, 10:30–11:30 am

Sundays – Museum Members-Only Skate, 10:30–11:30 am

### Daytime Hours (45-minute skate)

Thursday through Monday, 12–5 pm, skate times are:

Noon–12:45 pm

1–1:45 pm

2–2:45 pm

3–3:45 pm

4–4:45 pm

After-Hours (2-hour skate)

Thursdays and Fridays, 6–8 pm

## THURSDAY/JAN. 8

**"Pelle the Conqueror" Movie.** 1 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. When his wife dies, Lasse (Max von Sydow) takes his 12-year-old son, Pelle, from their home in Sweden to Denmark in search of a better life in this epic 1987 film. PG-13.

## JAN. 9 THRU FEB. 1

**Passport Music Festival.** At Creative Cauldron 127 East Broad Street, Falls Church. DMV's Premier Global Music Series Returns with Folk, Jazz, Soul, and World Fusion Curated by Wammie Award Winners Ken Avis and Lynn Veronneau. This year's series features an eclectic lineup of folk, Latin, jazz, soul, blues, and world music. Sponsored by Ken Trotter, JD Realtor TTR Sotheby's International Re-



Enjoy table tennis at Play Away! Open Games at OFC on Saturday, Jan. 10, 2026.



Curious George: The Golden Meatball can be seen on Saturday, Jan. 31, 2026 at GMU Center for the Arts in Fairfax.

alty, the festival provides an intimate setting for audiences to experience legendary "guitar heroes," international touring acts, and rising stars from the DMV area and beyond.

Week 1: Guitar Heroes and Roots Legends

❖ Fri, Jan 09 (7:30 pm): Dave Chappell & Anthony Pirog – A tribute to the "Guitars of the Anacostia Delta" featuring the styles of Danny Gatton and Roy Buchanan.

❖ Sat, Jan 10 (7:30 pm): The Kennedys – The beloved folk-pop duo returns for their annual high-energy, harmony-filled performance.

❖ Sun, Jan 11 (2 pm): The Nighthawks – DC's legendary blues and roots masters, led by harpmaster Mark Wenner.

❖ Sun, Jan 11 (7:30 pm): The Rock-A-Sonics – A high-octane rock-a-billy celebration for Elvis Presley's birthday.

Week 2: Global Alchemy and Soulful Tributes

❖ Fri, Jan 16 (7:30 pm): VERONNEAU – Multilingual "alchemists of cool jazz" featuring vocalist Lynn Veronneau and music from their 2025 chart-topping album Blue Tapestry.

❖ Sat, Jan 17 (7:30 pm): Cecily – The Wammie-winning soul artist celebrates "The Queens of Disco" with a 70s-inspired dance party.

❖ Sun, Jan 18 (2 pm): Blues Alley Youth Orchestra – DC's premier youth jazz ensemble performs Big Band classics and small ensemble arrangements.

❖ Sun, Jan 18 (7:30 pm): Abbie Palmer – A mesmerizing exploration of the harp, spanning Celtic, African, New Age, and Hip-Hop styles.

Week 3: Blues Queens and Heritage Stories

❖ Fri, Jan 23 (7:30 pm): Carly Harvey – "DC's Queen of the Blues" and star of The Voice brings her award-winning stage presence to the Cauldron.

❖ Sat, Jan 24 (7:30 pm): Spyros Koliavasilis – A world music medley blending Greek traditional rebetiko with contemporary ethno-jazz.

❖ Sun, Jan 25 (2 pm): Generations of Vocal Jazz – A unique collaboration between Capital City Voices and the Ballou High School Vocal Ensemble, directed by Alison Crockett and Barry Moton.

❖ Sun, Jan 25 (7:30 pm): Grey Jacks – An exclusive album fan-release concert exploring Americana, roots, and intergenerational storytelling.

Week 4: The Quiet Storm and Mardi Gras Finale

❖ Sat, Jan 31 (7:30 pm): IO The Singer – A soulful tribute to the "Quiet Storm" era, featuring

hits by Sade, Anita Baker, and Marvin Gaye.

❖ Sun, Feb 1 (2 pm): Raymi – The haunting, traditional sounds of the Andes brought to life with Zampoñas and Quenas.

❖ Sun, Feb 1 (7:30 pm): Little Red and the Renegades – A high-energy Mardi Gras closing party featuring Zydeco, New Orleans R&B, and accordion-led grooves.

Tickets for the Passport Music Festival are on sale now at [www.creativecauldron.org](http://www.creativecauldron.org). Phone: 703-436-9948.

## SATURDAY/JAN. 10

### Public Hearing for 2026 General Assembly Session.

9 a.m. At Fairfax County Government Center, Board Auditorium, 12000 Government Center Pkwy, Fairfax. The Fairfax County Delegation to the General Assembly will hold a public hearing for the upcoming 2026 General Assembly session. Fairfax County is assisting with the logistics of the delegation's event. Fairfax County residents and those representing organizations serving Fairfax County residents will have the opportunity to address the Fairfax County Delegation to the General Assembly. Fairfax County residents who want to sign up in advance to speak at the hearing should register online (2026 Fairfax County General Assembly Delegation Pre-session Public Hearing Speaker Registration) or contact the Department of Clerk Services at 703-324-3151, TTY 711, by noon on Thursday, Jan. 8. Residents will also have the opportunity to sign-up on the day of the event.

### Saturday/Jan. 10

**Play Away! Open Games at OFC.** 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Every Wednesday at 6:30-9 p.m. At The Old Firehouse Center, McLean. Every Wednesday, come enjoy table tennis, arcade games, video games, pool, bridge, mah-jongg, a sensory lab and more at the Old Firehouse! Children under the age of 18 must be accompanied by an adult.

SEE CALENDAR, PAGE 11

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### CALENDAR

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### Legals

#### PUBLIC NOTICE

The Springfield Industrial Development Board and the Health and Educational Facilities Board of the City of Springfield will meet for their regular quarterly meetings on the following dates beginning at 9:00 am in the Board Room at the Springfield City Hall, 405 N. Main Street, Springfield TN 37172. The HEFB meetings will begin immediately following the conclusion of the SIDB meetings. The public is welcome.

- March 4, 2026;
- June 3, 2026;
- September 2, 2026;
- December 2, 2026.

Please direct any questions concerning meetings to Kathryn Stewart, Public Affairs Coordinator, at 615-382-2200.

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# ENTERTAINMENT

FROM PAGE 9

## SUNDAY/JAN. 11

**Happy Pop-Up.** At Workhouse Arts Center, Lorton. A joy-centered Sunday wellness experience designed for people who are tired of rushing, overcommitting, and ending the weekend more stressed than when it began. This isn't a retreat or a multi-week class. It's a 90-minute reset—intentional joy practices, gentle movement, and meaningful community connection—created for busy parents, couples, neighbors, and professionals who want something nourishing without pressure. The kickoff session is led by: Chianti Lomax, Chief Happiness Curator of The Happy Pop-Up® and author of *Evolving While Black*, and Michael Louis, Head Coach of The Everyday Athlete, brings accessible, grounding movement into the experience. For details, email: carlawelborn@workhousearts.org

## THURSDAY/JAN. 13

**No More Sugar-Coating: The Truth on Sugar.** 6-7 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Sugar is all around us. It is the ingredient of celebrations, milestones, love, heartbreak and everything in between. This seminar will provide you with the good, the bad and the truth about sugar to help you make the best decisions for your body.

## FRIDAY/JAN. 16

**Snowball Dance (5th & 6th graders).** 7-9 p.m. At The Old Firehouse Center, McLean. Old Firehouse 5th-6th grader parties are themed and decorated accordingly. Free catered food and beverages will be distributed to participants. Parties feature a DJ, open dance floor and a variety of activities.

## SATURDAY/JAN. 17

**Dementia Man, An Existential Journey.** 2-3:30 p.m. At Chantilly Regional Library, 4000 Stringfellow Road, Chantilly. Dementia Man, An Existential Journey is the fascinating and award-winning autobiographical story of a man who faces his diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease, written and performed by actor and playwright Samuel A. Simon. Register to receive a reminder and not required to attend. Seating is limited and is on a first come, first served basis. Call 703-502-3883 (option 4).

## SUNDAY/JAN. 18

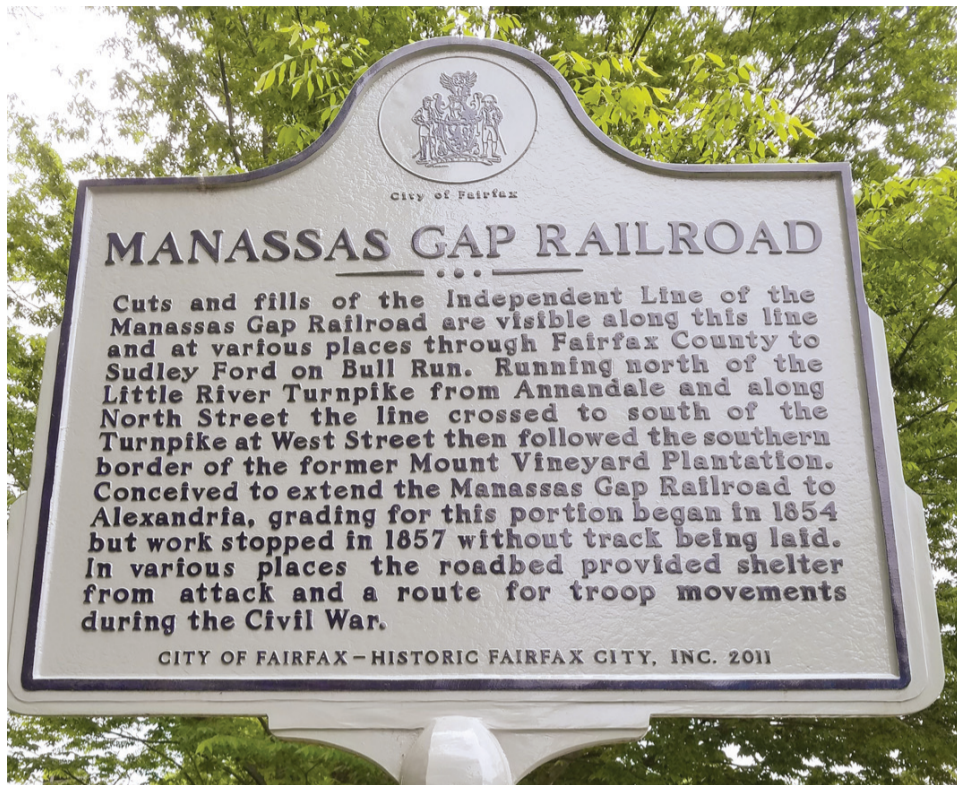
**Barron Ryan Trio: "There Arises Light into the Darkness"**—2026 Martin Luther King Jr. Day Celebration. 2 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Following his triumphant performance here last season, The Alden is proud to welcome back pianist and composer Barron Ryan for a special event featuring the expanded three-part movement of a work originally commissioned by Chamber Music Tulsa for the 100th anniversary of the Tulsa Race Massacre. Inspired by eyewitness accounts of the massacre, Ryan's gorgeous piano, violin and cello trio aim to bring hope to a dark time in history.

## MONDAY/JAN. 19

**MLK Day of Service – \*A Day On, Not a Day Off\*.** At Northern Virginia Community College, Ernst Community Gymnasium, 8333 Little River Turnpike, Annandale. Register for one of two volunteer shifts; doors open at 9:00 a.m. Volunteer Fairfax invites families, businesses, and especially youth to unite for an inspiring MLK Day of Service. This event is designed to engage young volunteers in meaningful, hands-on projects that support local nonprofits and neighbors across Northern Virginia. Each child receives a "service bingo" stamp as they complete projects, turning volunteering into an adventure and a lesson in community impact.

## WEDNESDAY/JAN. 21

**Financial Planning: Choosing Your Path to Retirement.** 6-7 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Presented by Clover Leaf Wealth Strategies, in partnership with McLean Community Center. This seminar provides a comprehensive guide to planning your ideal retirement. Whether



The Burke Historical Society will meet on Sunday, Jan. 25, 2026 at Pohick Regional Library in Burke.

you're just starting to save or nearing retirement, this session will help you understand key strategies for building and managing your retirement nest egg. Topics include determining your retirement goals, understanding investment options, maximizing employer-sponsored plans and IRAs, managing debt, and protecting your savings. You'll also learn how to evaluate risks, plan for healthcare costs, and create a sustainable income stream. Instructor: Clover Leaf Wealth Strategies.

## THURSDAY/JAN. 22

**Tech & Cyber Networking and Hiring Event.** 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. At Capital One Hall, Tysons Corner. Northern Virginia is one of the nation's most dynamic employment ecosystems. It is home to Fortune 500 companies, fast-growing startups, federal contractors, and research institutions working across a wide range of industries. This event brings together more than 40 employers with thousands of open roles across technical, professional, and mission-focused fields. You will have the opportunity to connect directly with recruiters from organizations such as Amentum, Fairfax County Public Schools, Peraton, Ofinno, Somatus, Systems Planning & Analysis (SPA), Xcelerate Solutions, and many others who value experience, adaptability, and a commitment to meaningful work. Cleared professionals are especially encouraged to attend, and all backgrounds are welcome.

## FRIDAY/JAN. 23

**Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.** 8 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, Fairfax. London's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO) returns for an exhilarating program of musical masterpieces with violinist and global phenomenon Ray Chen. Under the esteemed direction of Maestro Vasily Petrenko, RPO has cemented its place at the forefront of classical music performance with its unwavering dedication to excellence.

## SUNDAY/JAN. 25

**Burke Historical Society Meeting.** 3-4:30 p.m. At Pohick Regional Library, 6450 Sydenstricker Road, Burke. Michael McDonnell will discuss the Manassas Gap Railroad. Incorporated in 1850 but never completed, remnants of the MGRR can still be found around Fairfax County. Email: burkehistoricalsociety@hotmail.com

## SUNDAY/JAN. 25

**Keyboard Conversations with Jeffrey Siegel: Poetic Tone Pictures.** 7 p.m. At GMU Center

for the Arts, Fairfax. In Jeffrey Siegel's next program of Keyboard Conversations, Poetic Tone Pictures features deeply affecting music by Liszt, Rachmaninoff, Debussy, and Ravel, inspired by words and visions. The program will conclude with a short Q&A with the audience.

## THURSDAY/JAN. 29

**IBS Roadmap: Your Guide to a Better Digestion.** 6-7 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Presented by Medstar Gastroenterology, in partnership with McLean Community Center. Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a common gastrointestinal disorder that affects 10-15% of Americans. IBS can significantly impact a person's quality of life, but it is manageable through dietary adjustments, stress management, and sometimes medication. Raising awareness about IBS can help those affected seek appropriate care and support. The intention of this presentation is to provide a brief overview of the symptoms of IBS, how it is diagnosed, and what you can do to manage it.

## SATURDAY/JAN. 31

**Curious George: The Golden Meatball.** 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, Fairfax. Monkey around with the mischievous, lovable star of books, movies, and the award-winning PBS television show in this fun-filled musical adventure, Curious George: The Golden Meatball! All-You-Can-Eat Meatball Day comes just once a year and George has been waiting excitedly for the big event. When it arrives, George and his friend Chef Pisghetti are ready to cook for a hungry crowd, but their audience is nowhere to be found, lured away by a speedier Meatballs-o-Matic machine. Determined to help his despairing friend, George goes on a mission to enter Chef in the Golden Meatball Contest in Rome, learning along the way about the secret ingredient to cooking!

## SATURDAY/FEB. 7

**Ping Pong Tournament.** 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. At Wayne H. Nickum Clifton Town Hall, 12641 Chapel Road, Clifton. All ages and levels of playing experience are welcome at this family-friendly event hosted by the Clifton Betterment Association. Call: 703-968-0740. Visit the website: <https://C25K.redpodium.com/clifton-annual-ping-pong-tournament-2026>. Registration closes at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, February 4. To register online, please click on the link listed in the "Website" box.

## A Hannukah Miracle



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

No, this will not be a retelling of the legend of the menorah and the Maccabees who, with "one small purse of olive oil" kept their lamp lit for eight days, when they had only enough oil for one. This story will be updated "for your consideration," as Rod Serling used to say to begin the episodes of his "Twilight Zone" television show and whatever "dimensions" he was referring to. The miracle to which I now refer makes this legend hardly worth its holiday association and countless retellings.

It happened on Dec. 18, 2025. I ended up - per my intention, at the new Amazon Marketplace in Silver Spring, Md. It is, for all intents and purpose a supermarket, with a few Amazon touches which are hardly worth mentioning since they are not central to my miracle.

I had selected my items and placed them in my basket as I rolled it around the store until I ended up at the self-checkout area (cash not accepted) to pay for my goods. Naturally, I had to take out my wallet from my right rear pocket to select a credit card. The store was not crowded, and I wasn't the least bit flustered by this task. The register was a bit different than I had become accustomed to. Nonetheless, I figured it out, paid for and bagged up my groceries and then walked to my left to exit the store. Unfortunately, I didn't remember anything more about my wallet. I got to my car where I placed my one bag onto the back seat and then drove on home.

It wasn't until the next afternoon that I realized my wallet was missing. This 'missing' is not so unusual as I've experienced similar misplacements as I've aged into retirement and beyond. After exhausting all possible places in my house and car, I started thinking of places it couldn't or rather shouldn't be: outside the house and car. This exact 'missing' had happened a time or two before and in my retracing of my steps/drive there was a successful ending with wallet and contents remaining exactly where I had inadvertently left them.

As I now recalled that strategy, I had made multiple errand-type stops and realized that Amazon Marketplace was my last stop. In fact, I remembered taking my wallet out of my right rear pocket and laying it across the register's scanning window. A bit unusual, but nothing totally irregular. Moreover, I really can't say I remember placing my wallet back in my pocket. However, over the last 60 years, the number of times I've performed this movement has to be in the thousands. As such, it's become almost like a knee-jerk-type reaction. I have no conscious memory of doing anything with that wallet.

After sorting through my movements, I convinced myself that I had left my wallet at Amazon Marketplace and so I grabbed my car keys and off I drove. Finding the customer service counter, I asked about whether a wallet had been found/turned in since yesterday. The lady manning the window picked up a brown cardboard box and quickly she and I both saw my wallet. I said, "That's it." She grabbed the wallet and took out the driver's license and asked my name and home address. I answered correctly so she returned the wallet to me. Once in my hand I checked for cash and credit cards. All were present and accounted for.

Now that's what I call a miracle.

Kenny Lourie is an Advertising Representative for The Potomac Almanac & The Connection Newspapers. SEE CALENDAR PAGE 15

# St. Christopher's Episcopal Celebrates the Birth of Christ



PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION

AJ and Bethany Adams, portray Jesus and Mary in St Christopher's Episcopal Church living nativity.



Church members reenact the holy nativity with magi, the holy family, shepherds and Bar C Ranch animals.



Dinny Nguyễn, 3 of Springfield, offers Moses a leaf while posing with his mother Anh.

## Living nativity remains a popular community event.

BY SUSAN LAUME  
THE CONNECTION

In celebration of Christmas, the scene of the arrival of Jesus was recreated by St Christopher's Episcopal Church, in Springfield, complete with living actors and barnyard animals.

The living nativity has become a pre-holiday tradition for the church. This was their seventh year, strengthening their nickname "the camel church"; a nod to its most recognized and favorite animal actor in the tableau.

Presentation of the living nativity harks back to Saint Francis of Assisi; the first to reenact the birth of Jesus, with a manger and animals, back in the year 1223. Nativities, along with Advent calendars, wreaths, candles, carols, cards and trees, help us prepare for the holiday season and Christmas Day, and serve as a reminder of the original story.

Nativity scenes are popular in homes, malls, and churches throughout the Christmas season, although most use figurines of Mary, Joseph, newborn Jesus, the three wise men and animals. St Christopher's takes it a step farther, as church members take on roles of the principles, and animals from the Bar C Ranch of Berryville take on the parts of the stable animals, in the often retold Bible story. The stars of each year's event, invariably, are baby Jesus and the camel.

The role of Jesus this year went to AJ Adams, backed by his parents, Bethany and Adam, as Mary and Joseph. This was AJ's first year in the role, which often goes to one of the youngest church members. AJ perhaps would prefer casting as a bus driver, given his interests, but, of course, no such part was available. Other cast members included Norbert Hymels, Camilla Hicks, Mike Snyder, and Chris Lane, repeating their roles. As veteran magi, actor Hymels shares, "There were no auditions. The costume fits me." Moses, with his very friendly, smile-ready,



Bar C Ranch co-owner Jennifer Cantor shares a moment with young camel, Moses.



Rowe Ginsley, 4, of Springfield, attending with his parents interacts with Moses.

dromedary ways, and very soft fur, led the cast of stable animals this year.

Reverend Carey Conners of St Christopher's says of her congregation's dedication to the annual event, "They love the neighborhood spirit and sharing the beautiful story, that is just joyous. Children walking into the story, in the neighborhood event, makes us incredibly happy, and we love giving away food, the music and community."

The church members also support several other community efforts year-round. For example, volunteers knitted 93 scarves and 40 sock caps for nearby Crestwood Elementary School students; and provided meals for the school children during breaks and holidays. Their toy drive, conducted at the nativity event and through the wider holiday period supports ECHO and Second Story; both nearby help groups.

Four year old Rowe Grinsley, of Springfield, picks the camel as the best part of the event, even over hot dogs. Why? "It's big."

He also seems to have captured the mood of all the participants, saying, "It's a fun event."

Stephani Romas, 11 of Springfield, makes friends with donkey.



Twins Susannah and Vivian Hill, 9 yo, of Springfield, pose with Moses, who understands smiling for photos.



Petable Bar C Ranch animals: a camel, cow, donkey, goat, and sheep, joined the animal contingent, including this sheep with a 'boop' spot on her nose.



While hay and grass were continuously available, a hand-fed snack can be appealing.