

CONNECTION

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

Go Easy on the Salt, Page 7 ♦ Entertainment, Page 12 ♦ Classified, Page 14

Photo by Susan Laume/The Connection

Snowcrete!

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Kids in Springfield experienced fast sledding on icy slopes with little steering control.

Boundary Decisions Leave Much Undone

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Springfield Figure Skater Eyes 2030 Olympics

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Sunset on snow boulders in Fair Oaks.



Snow and ice in the Fairfax Towne Center shopping area.

Scenes of Fairfax in Snow, Ice and Bitter Cold

Some 6 inches of snow – topped by 4 inches of sleet – fell in the Fairfax area, Jan. 24-25, leaving behind lots of cold, white flakes that quickly froze into cement-like ice in the bitter-cold weather that plummeted into the single digits at night.



Shoppers venture out onto the ice-covered parking lot of the Wegmans in Fairfax on Friday, Jan. 30 – nearly a week after the snow/sleet storm here. Temperatures were too cold to melt the ice.



PHOTOS BY BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

This stop sign surrounded by an ice mountain in a Fair Oaks neighborhood expresses the sentiments of many residents who've had enough of the icy, winter precipitation.

Bank of America Names Goodwill of Greater Washington and Pathway Homes Its Greater Washington, DC 2025 Neighborhood Builders

Program provides \$400k in grants & leadership training to expand critical services locally.

Bank of America has named Goodwill of Greater Washington and Pathway Homes as its 2025 Neighborhood Builders for their work providing employment opportunities and creating pathways to stable and permanent housing for people and families across the region. Bank of America's Neighborhood Builders program continues to be one of the nation's largest philanthropic investments into nonprofit leadership development, while providing multi-year flexible funding annually to high-impact nonprofits in communities nationwide. Specifically, both Greater

Washington, DC nonprofits are each awarded a \$200,000 grant over two years, comprehensive leadership training for the organization's executive director and an emerging leader, and access to a national network of nonprofit peers. Since the program's inception, 44 nonprofits have been selected as Neighborhood Builders in the capital region, with the bank investing more than \$8 million in philanthropic capital into these nonprofits. "Goodwill of Greater Washington and Pathway Homes are addressing critical needs for so many in the DMV, and they are ideal recipients of Neighborhood Builder recognition," said Larry Di Rita,

president, Bank of America Greater Washington, DC.

Goodwill of Greater Washington

Goodwill of Greater Washington provides free job training, education, and employment services to people with disabilities and other barriers to employment. This new grant funding will be invested in the redevelopment of Goodwill's flagship store in Arlington, Va., which will create 128 units of affordable family housing above a larger retail experience, and double the number of jobs created.

Pathway Homes

Pathway Homes provides housing and support services to over 2,000

adults who are living with mental illnesses and other co-occurring disabilities in Northern Virginia and Washington, DC. The bank's funding will enable Pathway Homes to expand its outreach efforts via an innovative low-barrier mobile drop-in center offering unhoused individuals access to showers, case management support, and other direct outreach services. Designed to meet people where they are, the Mobile Outreach Unit (MOU) will be a gateway to long-term support, including housing, food security, mental and physical healthcare, education, and workforce readiness.

"In addition to supporting our MOU, these funds will help us complete our Fairfax City headquar-

ters, which will not only serve as a community resource hub, but also include ten one-bedroom apartments for our most vulnerable unhoused neighbors," said Dr. Sylisa Lambert-Woodard, President and CEO of Pathway Homes.

Neighborhood Builders is part of the bank's longstanding efforts to build thriving communities by addressing issues fundamental to economic opportunity. Since 2004, Bank of America's Neighborhood Builders program has invested more than \$346 million in communities across the U.S. and trained more than 4,000 leaders at nearly 2,000 U.S. nonprofits.

School Board Approves Results of Boundary Review

Critics say incremental change at extraordinary cost leaves core problems unsolved.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

The Fairfax County School Board approved its first comprehensive boundary review in nearly 40 years during its Jan. 22 regular meeting. This was the first time the board had done a district-wide reassessment since the mid-1980s. The school board had, during those 40 years, made geographically isolated changes, such as when the “West County High School,” later officially called Westfield High School, opened in 2000. The board shifted the boundaries of the schools immediately adjacent to Westfield to relieve massive overcrowding at nearby Chantilly and Centreville high schools.

The 2026 Fairfax County School Board aimed to address changing demographics in Fairfax County and facility use across Virginia’s largest school system through the comprehensive boundary review. Superintendent Michelle Reid called it a “great beginning” toward long-term progress, acknowledging the process is not perfect but essential for improvement.

The school board voted 8-3 on Jan. 22. Board members who voted in favor praised the “progressive cycle” as a hard-won victory for equity, while those who opposed it criticized the move as a costly, incremental change that does not address the district’s most pressing capacity issues. The final approved plan affects less than 1% of the district’s students.

Reid noted that several sites remain flagged for review in the next calendar year, with new recommendations expected by Jan. 2027.

The Vote Tally

Only 11 of the 12 school board members voted in the 8-3 decision, with the Braddock District seat vacant until after the March 3 special election. Supporting the plan: Karl Frisch (Providence), Kyle McDaniel (At-Large), Melanie K. Meren (Hunter Mill), Marcia St. John-Cunning (Franconia), Robyn Lady (Dranesville), Seema Dixit (Sully), Ricardy Anderson (Mason), and Board Chair Sandy Anderson (Springfield). Opposing the measure: Ryan McElveen (At-Large), Mateo Dunne (Mount Vernon), and Ilryong Moon (At-Large). Supporters cited necessary first steps and community engagement,

while opponents criticized procedural confusion, lack of clarity, and equity concerns.

Internal Dissent and Data Criticism

Dunne said he could not support the final motion because he did not clearly know what he was voting on, citing last-minute changes that also created confusion for the public. Dunne pointed to unclear transportation logistics — specifically, who receives busing and at what cost — as key uncertainties.

Using data, Dunne argued the results are modest. The division began the process with 22 attendance islands and ended with 22; it started with 42 split feeders and ended with 35. Furthermore, the district still relies on roughly 800 temporary trailers and modular classrooms, a number reduced by only one or two. He criticized the two-year process as mentally exhausting and said it often felt like “flying by the seat of your pants.”

McElveen called the outcome an “incremental change at extraordinary cost.” He contended that targeted studies could have achieved similar results. McElveen warned that future boards would be preoccupied with ongoing boundary reviews and criticized delays in start-time changes for failing students during the mental health crisis. He called the board’s approach an “unmitigated failure.”

Moon also opposed the delay of start times but stressed the lack of a finalized transportation plan for students “grandfathered” into their old schools. Moon and McElveen argued that this creates an equity gap. Dunn said that the board was asking parents to take a leap of faith “that they could manage the logistics of the transition.”

Support for a Progressive Path Forward

Despite friction, most board members approved the vote, calling it essential groundwork. Lady, who supported the plan, described it as the result of listening to community needs and bringing students to schools with enrollment needs. She expressed pride and excitement in voting for the plan.

McDaniel linked the changes to fairness and efficiency, describing them as steps to align boundaries, balance enrollment, improve access, and run the large district effectively.

Meren, who ultimately voted in favor, still

noted procedural confusion, stating some recommendations had not been made public until just before the vote. She emphasized that complete transparency is crucial for making informed decisions.

The Board officially updated Policy 8130 in 2024 before touching any maps. Policy 8130 requires the superintendent to conduct a division-wide boundary review ev-

ery five years. The board’s commitment to a five-year review cycle ensures regular redistricting in Fairfax County. From October 2024 through November 2025, the board held multiple work sessions and community meetings to untangle so-called “attendance islands” and “split feeders,” where students from the same elementary school are sent to different high schools.

Case Study: Boundary Debt and Renovation Queues

Connecting the dots between the 2006 Westfield High School addition and the 2026 Western High School opening (the former Saudi Academy)

Before Westfield High School opened in 2000 with a design capacity of 2,500 students, the school board shifted the boundaries of adjacent schools to relieve overcrowding at nearby Chantilly and Centreville high schools. No comprehensive boundary change was conducted at the time.

By 2003, Westfield reached its limit. In November, voters approved a bond that included \$8.7 million for a permanent 24-room addition; construction began in 2004. Bricks, not boundary changes, were again used by the board to address overcrowding. Although the addition opened in time for the 2006-07 school year, overcrowding persisted.

“Opening-day enrollment was 3,230 students,” said the new principal, Tim Thomas. “Pretty soon, we’ll have our own ZIP code,” The Connection reported Sept. 20, 2006. For much of the 2010s, approximately 13 trailers were stationed around the school.

As of January 2026, Westfield has 13 trailers on site, according to January 2026 school facility reports. The new Western High School project, the former Saudi Academy which the school board purchased for \$150 million, is underway. It is scheduled to open, with limited, phased enrollment, in August 2026 for the 2026-27 school year.

The school board, through its Jan.

22, 2026, approval of the comprehensive boundary review and updated Policy 8130, is now addressing where students go to school via maps rather than bricks. By rebalancing enrollment across existing buildings, Fairfax County Public Schools aims to prevent the renovation queue from becoming a capacity queue. This shift requires the superintendent to conduct a division-wide boundary review every five years.

Where Is My School in the Renovation Queue?

FCPS staff are currently developing a new renovation queue to follow the 2008 list. The main Capital Improvement Program (CIP) page can be found at fcps.edu/capital-improvement-program. This page contains the full PDF of the FY 2027–2031 CIP (as of January 2026), which includes the specific status of every school in the queue.

For School Bond Information, see fcps.edu/about-fcps/facilities-planning-and-future-schools/school-bond-information. This link tracks which renovation projects have been approved by voters but are still awaiting funding.

The direct link to the most recent published status table is in the FY 2026 – FY 2030 Adopted CIP Summary. This document shows the line-item list for schools like Centreville High (slated for 2028), Franklin Middle, and various elementary schools, including Poplar Tree, Cub Run, and Union Mill, that are currently ahead of any new potential queue for schools like Westfield.

What’s the Status of Redistricting for My FCPS Student?

Board’s approved plan punts the problem down the road; Boundary Explorer tool will be ‘updated by the end of January.’

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Leading up to the Fairfax County School Board’s Jan. 22 vote on the division’s comprehensive boundary plan, Superintendent Michelle Reid and her staff scrambled to revise school boundary plans, leaving it looking more like a patchwork quilt, amid fierce community pushback in the days just ahead of the vote. Eleventh-hour reversal adjustments, going from impacting 2,210 students to 1,697 in just two weeks (Jan. 8 to Jan. 22), ended a chaotic two-week period that left parents chasing outdated maps to determine their children’s future.

Ultimately, the board’s 8-3 vote spared several neighborhoods, 513 students, but delayed addressing overcrowding issues. It forces officials back to the table long before the five-year mark designated by board policy. They wanted a five-year cycle of stability.

According to a bulletin from School Board member Robyn Lady (Dranesville) that Fairfax County Public Schools sent Jan. 21, the public should “view the school board’s amended presentation with revised recommendations.”

SEE WHAT’S THE STATUS, PAGE 10

Meet Fairfax City's New Superintendent of Schools

Dustin Wright hopes to make a positive impact on students.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

A love of music and a desire to teach fueled Dustin Wright's career in education. And on Dec. 1, 2025, he officially became Fairfax City's new superintendent of schools.

As a youth, he played tuba and trombone. So in high school, he wanted to someday become a music teacher and a performer. And after graduating from college, said Wright, "I performed with professional orchestras, jazz bands and everything in between."

Still, the pull of teaching was strong. "My degree was in music education – and I'd had lots of amazing, inspiring teachers growing up, so I had a passion for teaching," he said. "Linda Gammon, my band director at Robinson Middle School, was one of the main reasons I got into teaching."

Later on, he taught music with her for six years at Carson Middle School in his one and only teaching job. However, Wright had aspirations beyond the classroom and, along the way, he obtained a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership from George Mason University. In 2012, he became assistant principal at Fairfax Villa Elementary; and two years later, he assumed the same position at Daniels Run Elementary.

"At Carson, we had over 300 students in the band, and it was so fulfilling," he said. "I learned what a difference I could make." He chose administration, though, "to make as large an impact on as many students, teachers, parents and staff members as possible."

Turns out, he loved it. "It was challenging, exciting and never the same every day," said Wright. "I worked really hard to support our students, teachers and families, and that was a great way to spend my day. I loved interacting with the students, being in the classrooms, and going to nighttime events and field trips." And he still got to perform music.

"As assistant principal, I played trumpet with the band and bass with the orchestra in concerts," he said. "But the best part was seeing a student have a success – a lightbulb moment, meeting a goal and making a good choice."

In 2016, Wright became principal of Olde Creek Elementary, near Woodson High. "With just 400 students, it had an amazing community feel and allowed me to develop the best relationships," he said. "And our teachers were wonderful. I learned a lot. When you become a principal, you're ultimately responsible for everything that happens there and for everything that school's name is attached to – and I took it very seriously."

Then in January 2020, he took over as principal of Franklin Middle School in Chantilly. But with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, students there and elsewhere spent nearly a whole year doing remote learning. In spring 2021, they returned to school two days a week.

"Being a principal through COVID, I adapted by working with students, teachers



PHOTOS BY BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

Superintendent Dustin Wright on the front lawn of Fairfax City's School Board office.

and families I didn't have the opportunity to know, so it taught me how important communication is," said Wright. He was at Franklin until 2023, when he moved to the FCPS central office for a year as executive director for strategy and planning.

There, he helped Fairfax County's school system implement its new, strategic plan for student success. "It was wonderful," he said. "I missed being in school with the students every day, but I loved getting the opportunity to impact schools throughout the county."

Next, in July 2024, Wright shifted to Falls Church City Public Schools. Its superintendent, Peter Noonan – who previously held that post in Fairfax City's school system – hired him as chief of schools, comparable to the position of assistant superintendent of schools.

"I supervised all the principals and supported the five schools' day-to-day operations," said Wright. "I enjoyed supervising

the principals; I watched them become better and stronger leaders, and it was really satisfying playing a role in that. I also loved being part of a small community and forming some strong relationships there. And similar to the City of Fairfax, those relationships are strong because you get to see the same people a lot."

Then, continuing his upward trajectory, he applied to Fairfax City's School Board to become its superintendent, succeeding Jeff Platenberg, who retired in July 2025. Wright was hired that November and began his new job Dec. 1, 2025.

"I wanted to be able to grow my impact on students," he said. "This school system has a strong track record of excellence, and I wanted to be a part of it. For the last 17 years, I've been a proud City of Fairfax resident with my wife Monique – who teaches music at Colvin Run Elementary – and our three children."

"We have an eighth-grade son, and boy-and-girl twins in sixth grade," continued Wright. "And I think there's no greater way to show the community that you're committed, and all in, than by working in the same community where you reside."

He's visited all four City schools and said it's "exciting to see the great work that's happening in each building. It's very apparent how committed our community is to supporting our schools and educators – and that's the best type of place to be a superintendent."

Calling it "a privilege and an honor" to have this role, Wright said, "I wouldn't be in a position like this without all the support I've received along the way from family, friends, students, mentors. And I'm incredibly excited to be here. The City of Fairfax is such a strong community, and I'm looking forward to being a leader in it. It's the best of both worlds – a place with a small-town feel, deep relationships and a sense of community, with our nation's capital right next door."

Regarding his philosophy of leadership, he places a priority on "great communication and being visible and accessible." For example, the day he spoke with The Connection, he planned on attending a girls varsity basketball game at Fairfax High afterward and a band concert at Katherine Johnson Middle School the next day.

"I'll be at community events, such as festivals and parades, as well," said Wright. "And I'll be a tireless champion for our students and keep them at the center of everything we do."

He expects the toughest part of being a superintendent will be "trying to learn everything I need to know about this job and school system." But, he added, "I'm comfortable asking lots of questions." As for the best part, he said it'll be "spending time in our schools with the students and seeing whatever this school system can do to support their success."



Dustin Wright with vintage photos of Fairfax City schools above him.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CARRIE DORSEY

Dustin Wright with the Fairfax City School Board. From left, are Lauren Bartelme, Sarah Kelsey, Chair Carolyn Pitches, Dustin Wright, Vice Chair Kristina Cecere and Amit Hickman.



BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

This colorful mural is above Senberry Bowls and Marlowe Ink Tattoo at 10407 Main St. in Fairfax City.

Fairfax City Vies for Best Small Town Arts Scene

Fairfax City has been nominated for a national honor – Best Small Town Arts Scene – by a panel of independent editors from USA Today. It's one of 20 communities across America vying for this title in USA Today's Readers' Choice 10Best 2026 awards.

Voting is already underway and will continue through noon on Monday, Feb. 16. People may cast their votes once a day for Fairfax City at <https://10best.usatoday.com/awards/best-small-town-arts-scene/>. Winners will be announced Feb. 25.

According to USA Today, "Fairfax blends small-town

charm with a vibrant arts scene.

Local galleries, public art, and community-driven programs flourish thanks to strong cultural support from organizations like ArtsFairfax, which expands access to diverse performances and visual arts across the region.

"Engaging events such as ARTScreen film nights and family-friendly programs at Old Town Hall help foster a warm, community-centered arts atmosphere that welcomes both locals and visitors to experience Fairfax's creative spirit."

Fairfax City's Chocolate Lovers Festival Feb. 6-8

Fairfax City's Chocolate Lovers Festival is this weekend, Friday, Feb. 6, from 5-8 p.m.; Saturday, Feb. 7, from 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; and Sunday, Feb. 8, from noon-4 p.m. It offers fun for all ages, including all forms of chocolate treats – even a chocolate fountain and chocolate-flavored adult beverages.

The signature event is the Taste of Chocolate, where

attendees purchase samples of chocolate treats from local vendors. But this year's location has changed. Due to building renovations, it will NOT be held in Old Town Hall, as usual. Instead, it'll be in the Sherwood Community Center at 3740 Blenheim Blvd. For more festival information, plus a schedule of events, go to fairfaxva.gov/chocolatelovers.

Bulova, Salim Hold Town Hall Feb. 14

Del. Gretchen Bulova (D-11) and Sen. Saddam Salim (D-37) will hold a town hall meeting together on Saturday, Feb. 14, from 9-11 a.m. It'll be at Fairfax City Hall, 10455 Armstrong St. in Fairfax.

They'll present a legislative update from the current Virginia General Assembly session, discuss their bills and answer questions from the local community.

Black History Traveling Exhibit is at Fairfax Museum

In honor of Black History Month, a traveling exhibit, "Un/Bound: Free Black Virginians 1619-1865," is now on display until March 9 at the Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center. It's at 10209 Main St. in Fairfax and is free to view. This exhibit from the Virginia Museum of History and Culture explores the lives of free Black Virginians from the arrival of the first captive

Africans in 1619 to the abolition of slavery in 1865.

Discover how Virginia's people of color achieved their freedom and persevered within a legal system that recognized them as free but not equal. Museum hours are Wednesdays through Mondays, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. It's closed Tuesdays and on Feb. 16 for Presidents Day.

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California Fish Grill Opens in Fairfax City

Sustainable seafood and a community partner.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

When California Fish Grill opened recently in Fairfax City, it was a win not only for the community, but for a national charity. That's because No Kid Hungry received a donation from the restaurant chain after it welcomed residents and local dignitaries to its new location in the Kamp Washington Shopping Center.

"They do round-up fundraisers for us, year 'round," said Jessie Sherrer, senior manager, corporate partnerships, with No Kid Hungry. "And for every new store opening, they donate \$500."

She was among those attending the ribbon cutting for the restaurant at 11048 Main St. in Fairfax. And Bob Holden, owner, founder and CEO of all the California Fish Grills, said, "We partnership in many fundraisers. We also love to support the local fire and police departments and schools and give back to our community."

This is the chain's 63rd restaurant and its first on the East Coast. Hours at the Fairfax restaurant are Sunday-Wednesday, 11 a.m.-9 p.m.; and Thursday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-9:30 p.m.

"As we looked at different locations on this coast, we found this area was filled with lovers of seafood – and, specifically, 100-percent sustainable," said Holden. "We use sustainable fishing methods because they protect the oceans for many generations to come. And all the fish we serve is on the Monterey [California] Aquarium's list of sustainable seafood."

He said he chose Fairfax City for this restaurant because "it seems to be a close-knit community that supports business growth. And we were excited to find a location in Kamp Washington [near residential neighborhoods and other commercial entities, and between Routes 50 and 29]. It's easily accessible, so it's ideal for our business model."

"The existing economic base here supports our businesses of catering and supplying portable and great-tasting seafood. We offer takeout, dine-in or delivery. And customers can download our app to order ahead. I want people to know what 100-percent sustainable seafood can mean, how great it tastes, and that we make it affordable. We also verify that it's actually sustainable, with clean factories and good labor practices."

California Fish Grill has been in business since 1998 and is known for its Atlantic salmon, wild rockfish, cod fish and chips, and Dynamite Shrimp Bowl – a spicy meal of rice, shrimp, mixed vegetables and a special sauce. "We get our fish from all over the world," said Holden. "For example, our salmon comes from Norway."

Louie Jocson, executive chef for the whole



Among those cutting the ribbon are (in the middle, in front, from left) Catherine Read (green jacket), Bob Holden and Louie Jocson.



California Fish Grill's opening team and Fairfax restaurant's employees with a large replica of the check that the business donated to No Kid Hungry.



From left, restaurant employees Dayana Fuentes and Dylan Molina pose with (clockwise from bottom left) breaded shrimp, a Cajun shrimp taco, ahi tuna poké, and a tilapia/Cajun shrimp skewer plate.



A salmon/swai platter with Cajun sauce, brown rice and fire-roasted street corn.

company, highlighted some of the restaurant's signature dishes. He said the Dynamite Shrimp is flash fried and tossed in a sauce that's "velvety-soft, smooth and craveable. It's salty/sweet with a little bit of heat

– a gateway seafood not overly spicy but still challenging."

"We also offer lobster rolls, and the fish for our fish and chips is wild-caught in Alaska," he continued. "And for first-time customers, we recommend the salmon/swai combo plate. Swai is a delectable, white-fleshed fish that's mild in flavor, firm but tender, and goes well with any sauce."

Diners can choose which sauces and side dishes they want. The sauce selections are garlic butter, Cajun style, seasoned olive oil and island teriyaki. Jocson's favorite side is the fire-roasted street corn, tossed off the cob in olive oil, chili flakes, spices and parmesan cheese.

Starters include ahi poké and New England clam chowder; salads offered are grilled-salmon salad and shrimp and avocado Caesar. There are also four kinds of fish tacos, plus bowl meals such as teriyaki chicken and salmon burrito. Desserts are chocolate brownies and brown-butter Rice Krispie treats.

Also pleased with the new location, Jocson said, "Fairfax has been so welcoming and incredibly nice. People here talk to you like you're their neighbor."

Regional Manager Miguel Rodriguez agreed. "We're super excited to be here," he said. "It's a huge opportunity for our company to be here on the East Coast. It's like a dream come true."

The customers were happy, too. Husband and wife, Wayne and Joanne Griffith, came from Washington, D.C., to have lunch at California Fish Grill on its opening day. "We'd gone to their location in Woodland Hills, Calif., when we were out there visiting," explained Joanne. "So we wanted to try this one. We both had the salmon/swai entrée."

"I had it with the roasted corn and brown rice, and it tasted very good," said Wayne. "The swai was delicious – very tasty and well-seasoned."

Joanne's side dishes were the brown rice and rosemary zucchini. "It tasted very fresh," she said. "I used seasoned olive oil on it." Both said they'd "absolutely" recommend this restaurant to others.

"It's a great place to come," said Wayne. "The staff is friendly, the restaurant is clean, there's free parking and the food is very good."

Added Joanne: "It's easily accessible, with a nice ambience and a relaxing atmosphere. And it has lots of good seafood options, reasonably priced."

Prior to the ribbon cutting, Fairfax Mayor Catherine Read told Holden how delighted the City is to have this restaurant in its midst. "It's in my own neighborhood, right across the street," she said. "There was a whole neighborhood of people waiting for you to open your doors. We're the first of three sites [you're opening] here in the DMV, but you came to Fairfax City first, and that's not a small thing."

"We appreciate you not only choosing our City, but this location, because the Small Area Plans we put together for the City are basically a blueprint for what we're trying to build here – something walkable, something

SEE CALIFORNIA GRILL, PAGE 9

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Salt: Winter Helper, Pollution Hazard

Experts say use sparingly to protect fresh drinking water resources.

BY SUSAN LAUME
THE CONNECTION

As the region prepared for the predicted heavy ice and snow event on the Jan. 24 weekend, VDOT trucks rolled out to pretreat area roadways. Brine solutions are designed prevent ice from adhering to road surfaces on interstates, major highways and thoroughways. Once an inch of snow accumulated on those roads, treatment switched to pure rock salt to lower the freezing point of water, melting snow and ice. On subdivision streets, plowing and sand were the preferred VDOT treatments; as property owners shoveled and considered using salt on sidewalks.

Use of brine, calcium chloride solutions, and rock salt for maintaining winter safety has come under increased scrutiny in recent years. Groups like the Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NVRC), the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Fairfax Water, the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin (ICPRB), and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, have pushed the need to balance using salt for safety with its negative impacts on water quality, pipes, bridges, and the environment. An annual awareness campaign in our area, Winter Salt Week, observed the last week in January, highlights salt pollution from de-icing and promotes “smart salt” use.

The key messages: You only need a little salt to tame ice; and too much salt pollutes water permanently.

It’s such an important message that Del. Kathy Tran (D-18) sponsored a Joint Resolution (HJ46) in the General Assembly this year, seeking to make the annual Winter Salt Week a state-wide observance. Tran is a legislative member of the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin (ICPRB), part of the Northern Virginia Winter Salt Workgroup. The Winter Salt Workgroup is a coalition of organizations working to reduce road salt



Del. Kathy Tran



Jamie Hedges

mac River and Occoquan Reservoir drinking water sources. In drinking water, higher salinity presents human health risks. Over 90% of American adults consume more than the recommended 2,300 milligrams of sodium per day, according to the AMA. Intake averages 3,400 mg daily, increasing risks for high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke. Salt cannot be removed through traditional drinking water and wastewater treatment processes at treatment facilities.

According to Fairfax Water, processes such as reverse osmosis and desalinization exist, but are extremely expensive to build, operate and maintain at a drinking water treatment facility; in part because of large energy consumption.

Salt is corrosive. It impacts community infrastructure including water and sewer pipes, roads, bridges, sidewalks, and parking lots, raising infrastructure maintenance costs. It also can impact household plumbing for which homeowners are responsible. It’s chloride component can corrode home metal plumbing, fixtures, and appliances with metal parts; such as dishwashers and laundry machines.

How Does Local Drinking Water Measure Up Now?

Fairfax Water services the water needs of over two million customers, producing an average of 170 million gallons of clean water daily; with a 345 million gallon production capacity. Their 2025 annual report on water quality, which analyzes 2024 collection data, reports 16 - 25, and 12.9 - 44.2 ppm (parts per million) of sodium in its “finished” water at the Potomac and Occoquan sources treatment facilities, respectively.

Fairfax Water shares, “The differences in sodium levels between the Occoquan Reservoir and the Potomac River are primarily due to variations in watershed size, land use and water management practices. The Potomac watershed contains a higher percentage of forested lands as compared with the Occoquan watershed. The Potomac River is a much larger body of water, so it naturally dilutes sodium more effectively. In contrast, the Occoquan Reservoir is smaller, which can concentrate sodium levels.”

With no allowable state or federal levels established for sodium content, when asked if sodium in our water is at acceptable levels,

pollution throughout the region.

“I’ve been aware of how excess road salt can pollute our waterways, so when the ICPRB staff raised the idea with me of Virginia designating Winter Salt Week, I agreed it is something we can do to increase knowledge of this issue,” Tran said. “Winter salt helps clear our roads for safe travel, but



Humans and wildlife depend on fresh water.

when it is overused, it doesn’t disappear when the snow melts — rather winter salt ends up in our rivers, reservoirs, and drinking water. I proposed designating the week of the fourth Monday in January beginning in 2027 as Winter Salt Week to help constituents, businesses, and local and state governments use the right amount of winter salt so we can protect our waterways for future generations.”

Why Is Salt Harmful?

As salt runoff from road/sidewalk/yard use eventually makes its way into storm drains, creeks and rivers, it increases salinity in groundwater and local waterways, harming freshwater fish and other aquatic life, and polluting drinking water sources. The Chesapeake Bay watershed is home to more than 18.5 million people and provides habitat to an estimated 3,500 species of plants and animals which depend on unpolluted water.

Run-off in Fairfax County eventually makes its way to the Poto-

mac River and Occoquan Reservoir drinking water sources. In drinking water, higher salinity presents human health risks. Over 90% of American adults consume more than the recommended 2,300 milligrams of sodium per day, according to the AMA. Intake averages 3,400 mg daily, increasing risks for high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke. Salt cannot be removed through traditional drinking water and wastewater treatment processes at treatment facilities.

How Much Salt for Winter Safety?

Just one teaspoon of salt pollutes five gallons of water, creating permanent freshwater salinization; a danger for the nation’s freshwater supply over time. While road salts, applied at a rate of about 20 billion tons in the U.S. each year, contribute heavily to the problem, there are several other contributors. They include weathering of concrete, input from sewage and animal wastes, lawn irrigation with

recycled water, application of lawn fertilizers, and water softeners, to name a few.

Fairfax Water shares a few tips for using less winter salt on its website: <https://www.fairfaxwater.org/winter-salt>.

Their suggestions include: use salt sparingly and only when needed; shovel before ice forms; use only one 12 oz mug to treat a 20 foot driveway, or about 10 sidewalk squares; scatter salt evenly, not in clumps; sweep up excess salt after ice melts for reuse; and salt is not effective below 15 degrees - so don’t use salt ineffectively. Also consider alternatives like sand, or calcium magnesium acetate, another de-icer, for traction instead of salt.

Fairfax Water’s general manager and CEO, Jamie Hedges, says, “Public involvement is essential. Salt used during the winter doesn’t disappear — it ends up in the drinking water supply. When individuals use salt wisely, they help protect our drinking water, aquatic life and infrastructure. Small changes can lead to big improvements for our watersheds.”

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Neighborhood snow scenes showed nature's beauty on Saturday night.

January Snow

Waiting for the storm - dealing with the aftermath.

By SUSAN LAUME
THE CONNECTION

As VDOT began making road preparations for January's ice and snow storm, forecasts were warning of the possibility of high totals. Virginia's new governor, Abigail Spanberger faced her first weather emergency, asking Virginians to prepare their homes and stay off the roads; declaring a state of emergency.

By early Saturday, many Northern Virginia area roads and interstates had been pre-treated with a brine solution. By Saturday afternoon, contract drivers, like Edgar Kombe, of Hyattsville, Md. were sitting in heavy vehicles positioned to salt or plow. Kombe's large truck, loaded with rock salt, one of two waiting just off Richmond Highway in Lorton, was ready to apply the salt to roadways once snow

SEE WAITING FOR, PAGE 9



Rock salt loaded heavy vehicles waited for the storm's arrival on Saturday afternoon.



Fairfax County's suggestion, not mandate, to shovel walkways had mixed takers.



Kids in Springfield experienced fast sledding on icy slope with little steering control.

Snow equipment driver Edgar Kombe, comfortable in his truck, prepared for a long wait



PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME
THE CONNECTION

WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM



School closures and high plowed snow piles provided the ingredients for tunnel construction for community kids in Springfield.



Many cars left on streets were buried in concrete-hard snow piles.

Waiting for the Storm - Dealing with the Aftermath

FROM PAGE 8

depth reached the one to two inch mark needed for effectiveness. The two contracted vehicles were part of a VDOT response fleet of 3,200 pieces of equipment, including heavy trucks and front-end loaders intended to move large masses of snow if needed. The equipment either belonged to, or was directed by, VDOT, which has the responsibility to face nature's onslaught, keeping Fairfax County roads safe for area motorists.

Kombe knew he would have a long wait until his truck would see action. Trucks are placed well in advance of the storm for certainty in reaching needed service areas. His truck would run through his entire wait time to assure no

engine re-start issues, with a side benefit of keeping him warm. His engine, designed to run for long periods with low fuel consumption, would assure he still had sufficient fuel when he received his call to begin operation. He would pass the extended time entertained by his smart phone and taking a nap, until receiving the text message to begin laying down his load.

Snow-response truck drivers were not the only ones with a wait. Fairfax County Public School teachers and students woke Sunday morning to falling snow and sleet, wondering how long it would take school administrators to announce a Monday school closing. Schools did close on Monday, and again on Tuesday and Wednesday. Matched

with planned off-days on Thursday and Friday, children found themselves safe from navigating treacherous routes and with a lot of time for snow play. Sledding and snow tunnel construction took preference over snowmen and snowball fights, as dictated by the snow's fine, icy quality. Sledding was fast and steering difficult on icy surfaces leading pediatricians and ERs to fear for broken bones and recommend use of helmets to prevent possible head traumas from tree or ground collisions.

After the storm, those who had no alternative to street parking often found cars well buried by accumulated and plowed snow. Several living in District 18 neighborhoods contacted Del. Kathy Tran com-

plaining of unplowed or minimally attended streets, prompting her letter of concern to VDOT. Springfield's Brookfield postal branch attempted parcel delivery early in the week; returning to attempts at wider delivery on Thursday, where carriers found plowed streets. Many homeowners followed the county's suggestion, not mandate, to shovel sidewalks in front of their houses and assisted neighbors, and volunteered to shovel at area schools. Other walkways were left unaddressed, leaving those on foot to navigate a maze, or walk in streets to make their way.

Sadly, for three local residents, the extreme weather was more than inconvenient or difficult to deal with. It was deadly. Police of-

ficers responding to a call to Kings Park West, found a man in his 70s who collapsed and died while clearing snow outside his home. In a second incident, a 50-year old man, living in a tent on a property on Backlick Road in Springfield, was found deceased by a friend checking on him. An elderly woman was found in the backyard of her home on School Lane in Falls Church and pronounced dead at the hospital. These tragedies are a reminder to all of how dangerous winter conditions can be.

For Fairfax County's suggestions on how to prepare for and remain safety during winter storms, see: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/health/winter-weather-emergency-preparedness>

California Fish Grill Opens in Fairfax City

FROM PAGE 6

of service. There's a brand-new apartment complex right behind you that just opened two years ago. So I know you did your market research."

"We welcome you, we have great expectations and we hope you'll find the City is a good partner for your business," continued Read. "We'll try to be a great partner. And I want to call out your support of No Kid Hungry. Our businesses are wonderful about supporting nonprofits and community-based organizations. Trying to do something about hunger in this country and in our community is very important, so we appreciate your participation."

Thanking her for such a warm

welcome, Holden said it was exciting to open this new restaurant, after "all the hard work and team effort. This all started with eight locations in California, and we couldn't wait to get to the East Coast and to Fairfax for all the reasons you just mentioned. We also thank No Kid Hungry for showing up today, and we're happy to be a partner with you. It means a lot to us to help the children out there."

Saying he couldn't do it all by himself, Holden then acknowledged and thanked several members of his staff in attendance, including Rodriguez, who moved his whole family here from the West Coast. All in all, he said, "We're thrilled to get the opportunity to come to Fairfax."



PHOTOS BY BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

Wayne and Joanne Griffith enjoying their meal at California Fish Grill.



(Clockwise from top left) are a shrimp and avocado Caesar salad, shrimp taco, a sea bass/branzino platter and a rockfish taco.

What's the Status of Redistricting for My FCPS Student?

FROM PAGE 3

mendations for changes to school boundaries. Changes are noted in red. The amended executive summary has also been updated to include additional sites to be reviewed by January 2027, as well as those to be reviewed during the next boundary review cycle. Find more information on Board docs.

However, according to Fairfax County Public Schools, while the district recommends using the official FCPS Boundary Review Scenario Explorer at <https://boundary.fcps.edu/boundary/>, as of Jan. 28, a caution headline fronts the boundary explorer tool: "Please note: The Boundary Explorer tool will be updated by the end of January."

Superintendent Reid confirmed on Jan. 26 that families specifically affected by the changes will receive direct mail or email notifications in the coming weeks.

Sites for Review in One Year, January 2027

- ❖ The neighborhoods within the boundaries of the Gunston, Halley, Laurel Hill, and Lorton Station elementary schools.
- ❖ The Bren Mar Park Elementary School middle and high school feeders.
- ❖ Greenway Downs, Jefferson Village, City Park Homes and Kingsley Commons neighborhoods.
- ❖ Rolling Valley Elementary School middle and high school feeders (SPA 8922).
- ❖ Glasgow Middle School changes related to the Beech Tree Elementary School and Belvedere Elementary School areas.
- ❖ Keene Mill Elementary School attendance island and the surrounding schools (e.g., Cardinal Forest Elementary School and White Oaks Elementary School).

Flagged Sites for the Next Five-Year Review Cycle

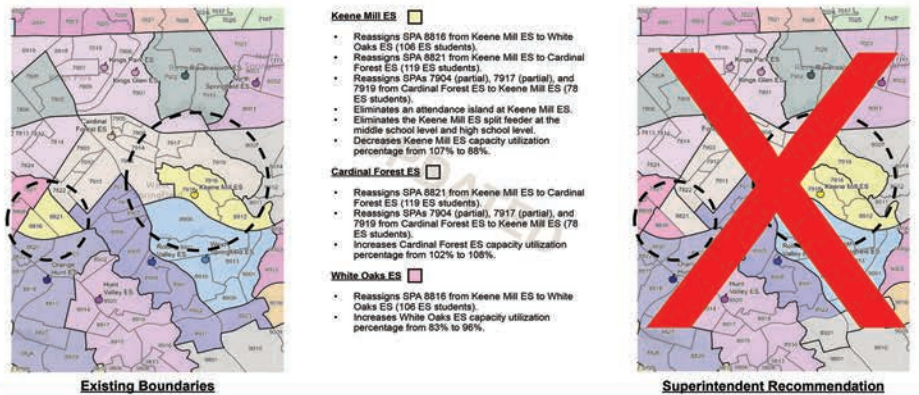
Flagged schools for the next review cycles, or areas for closer examination ahead

of or during the next boundary review in five years, include but are not limited to the following:

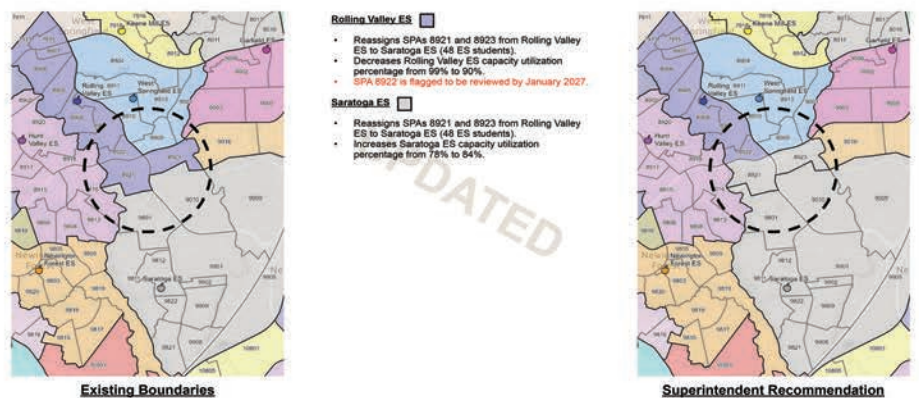
- ❖ The Briarwood Trace and Briarwood Farms communities: To be reviewed in approximately two years. This is to ensure that data is collected on the impact of the opening of the new Western High School on enrollment at Oakton High School.
- ❖ The Tysons Green community: To integrate a priority transfer space option during the gap year timeline, starting in fall 2026, for high school students only who wish to transfer to Madison High School and provide their own transportation. The middle school option for Thoreau is not possible at this time.
- ❖ The Bull Run Elementary School boundary is on hold for now and will be reviewed with the Western High School boundary study.
- ❖ Lewis High School: Review the boundary and other under-capacity schools.
- ❖ West Springfield High School: Review the boundary and other over-capacity schools (105% or more).
- ❖ Riverside Elementary School Full-time Advanced Academic Program Center: To be considered for relocation to Woodley Hills Elementary School before the next comprehensive boundary review, with a possible soft launch sooner.
- ❖ Non-residential areas: School boundary realignment for areas such as the Buckman Road and Richmond Highway intersection, and Greendale Golf Course and the surrounding area.
- ❖ Minor adjustments: Small school boundary adjustments (e.g., 2817 Douglas St. was addressed in the current comprehensive boundary review).

If the school board moves forward with establishing Advanced Academic Program (AAP) Centers in all middle schools, board members directed Reid last fall to present an implementation plan by this March.

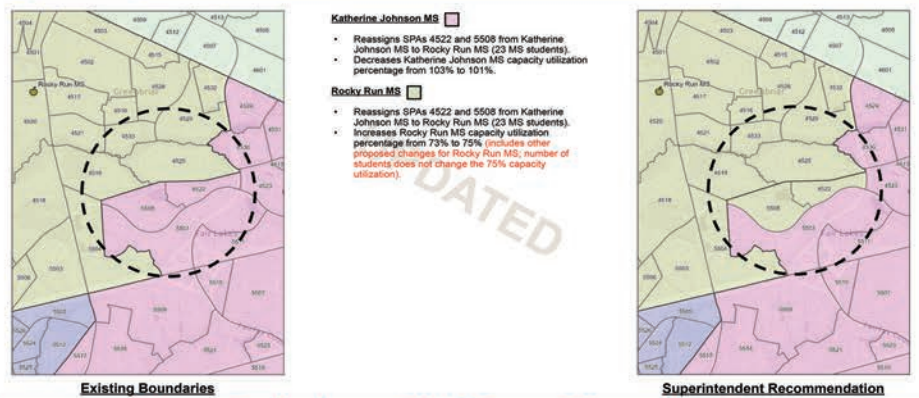
Region 4: Keene Mill ES, Cardinal Forest ES, and White Oaks ES - Updated - To Be Considered by January 2027



Region 4/6: Rolling Valley ES and Saratoga ES - Updated



Region 5: Katherine Johnson MS and Rocky Run MS - Updated



FCPS BOUNDARY REVIEW SCENARIO EXPLORER

FCPS Boundary Review Scenario Explorer cautions that the tool will be updated with boundary changes by the end of January.

BULLETIN BOARD

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 via email calendar@connectionnewspapers.com.

SCHOOL BOARD SEEKING COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Fairfax County Public Schools invites applications from Fairfax County community members interested in serving on the School Board Comprehensive Planning and Development Committee (CPDC). The Committee consists of five School Board Members and five Community Members. The committee's primary role is to support FCPS' capital planning and facility maintenance efforts.

Applicants must reside within the boundaries of Fairfax County. The deadline to submit an application has been extended to 11:59 p.m., on Sunday, February 8, 2026. Get more information and submit an application. **QUALIFICATIONS:** Cannot be a current FCPS employee. Be independent of day-to-day management of FCPS. Be knowledgeable about FCPS facilities policies and procedures. Be an expert in architecture, construction, engineering, facilities management and capital financing, permitting and procurement, land use planning and development, or related subjects. **APPLICATION:** Introductory cover letter. Submit a School Board CPDC Community Member Application. For an application, click here.

In the application, written responses are required for the Statement of Interest questions, including: Describe any professional or community experience that you believe qualifies you to serve on the Comprehensive Planning and Development Committee. You may attach a current resume. Describe any previous experience/involvement with FCPS and/or other public schools. State why you are interested in serving as a member of the Comprehensive Planning and Development Committee. Describe your understanding of the role of the Comprehensive Planning and Development Committee. The School Board will be appointing five community members to staggered terms all commencing on April 1, 2026, and ending in either June 2027, June 2028, and June 2029. **DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS**

Applications will be accepted until Sun, Feb 8 at 11:59 pm. Click here to get more information, and to submit an application.

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 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.



Springfield resident Sofia Bezkorovainaya has a lot to skate for.



At 15, Sofia practices daily while attending school virtually.



Somewhere over the rainbow.

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED

Local Ice Skating Marvel Honors Friend

The ice skating community and one teenage girl lost a lot from last year's helicopter-airliner collision.

By Mike Salmon
Connection Newspapers

The best part of performing is definitely the adrenaline," says Sofia Bezkorovainaya, 15 year old figure skater. "I love the excitement and the feeling of being on the ice in front of an audience."

When skating phenomenon Sofia Bezkorovainaya looks down at the ice, she remembers skating around the rink with her friend Everly Livingston, one of the 67 lives lost on Flight 5342 over the Potomac River last year when the airliner collided with a U.S. Army helicopter.

Sofia's friend Everly was aboard the commercial jet with her whole family, and Sofia is dedicating her routines to Everly. "In the opening and closing moments of the program, when I look up and hug myself, it feels like she's hugging me," said Sofia.

It's a lot for a 15-year-old, but



The ribbons and trophies may be on the Olympic level one day.

her flawless routine shows her level of professionalism and dedication. Her short program music is "Over the Rainbow." The emotion came through to the many who watched it on the Instagram post of Sofia skating. "I got chills, what an amazing tribute," said one. "I cry every time, it's a beautiful program for her dear friend," said another. "In some respects, this is hard to watch, but to see it, and to this song, you HAVE to, so we can remember all of the great skaters and their families whose lives were so senselessly cut short that eve-

ning. R.I.P. Everly. Your friend did a beautiful job in tribute to you," said another.

Sofia is a 15-year-old student at Virginia Virtual Academy from Springfield, born in Alexandria, Va., who recently earned a top-six finish at the U.S. Junior Figure Skating Championships, placing her among the best junior skaters in the country. She trains in Reston, and is widely considered a strong future Olympic contender, with her sights set on the 2030 Winter Games when she becomes age-eligible.



She manages traveling, home life and school.

"Absolutely, the 2030 Olympics are my long-term goal," Sofia said. Meanwhile she is excited to watch the Winter Olympics beginning Feb. 6. "These Olympics are so exciting to watch. ... I'm cheering for all of the Team USA skaters."

Training Home

"I started skating at the Mount Vernon Rec Center. After that, I trained at MedStar and Ashburn," Sofia said. "My current home rink is Reston SkateQuest."

Her virtual school schedule at the Academy allows her the flex-

ibility needed to travel, train and compete nationally while still getting an education. It's a model that has supported her growth for years, dating back to her 2022 Juvenile National Championship.

The XXV Winter Olympic Games, Milano Cortina 2026, is scheduled to take place this month, Feb. 6 - 22. Sofia won't be competing there yet, but she is hopeful for the future.

<https://www.instagram.com/sofiabezkorovainaya/>

<https://usfigureskating.org/sports/figure-skating/roster/sofia-bezkorovainaya/1244>

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

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.

NOW THRU 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

2026 CITIZEN OF THE YEAR

Rotary of Herndon-Reston seeks nominations for its 2026 Citizen of the Year, honoring individuals who exemplify Service Above Self. Submit Nominee and Nominator contact details with a heartfelt impact description by February 15, 2025, to HerndonRestonRotary@gmail.com

AARP FOUNDATION TAX-AIDE PROGRAM

The AARP Foundation Tax-Aide program is returning for the 2026 tax season, offering free federal (and many state) tax preparation and e-filing by IRS-certified volunteers. Services begin the first week of February at multiple locations, with Mason District Government Center and Columbia Pike Library opening slightly earlier on Jan. 30. Eleven centers across North-



The Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company will perform in the Year of the Red Fire House Lunar New Year Celebration on Wednesday, Feb. 18, 2026 at the McLean Community Center.

ern Virginia also prepare Virginia returns, and some sites assist with Maryland and DC filings. Who can participate? Tax-Aide serves taxpayers of all ages, with a focus on low- and middle-income residents and seniors. Counselors handle nearly all types of income and work to ensure clients claim all deductions and credits for which they qualify.

Taxpayers should bring:

- ❖ Photo ID
 - ❖ Social Security cards for themselves and dependents
 - ❖ Copy of last year's tax return
 - ❖ All current-year tax documents (W-2s, 1099s, 1098-T, brokerage statements, pension/IRA statements, etc.)
 - ❖ Records for itemized deductions, education credits, and residential energy credits
 - ❖ Bank account and routing numbers for direct deposit or debit
- For more information and to find a site near you, visit: AARP Foundation Tax-Aide Information <https://www.novataxaide.org/>

FAIRFAX SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA SCHEDULE

The Fairfax Symphony Orchestra (FSO) continues its 2025 - 2026 season with an exciting slate of performances still ahead. Featuring world-renowned guest artists, cinematic favorites performed live, and orchestral masterworks, the upcoming concerts offer something for every music lover.

February 7 - The Soul of Tango with Berta Rojas: Grammy-winning classical guitarist Berta Rojas brings the passion and fire of tango to the stage, featuring music inspired by Astor Piazzolla.

March 5 - Patti LuPone 25th Anniversary Tour of Matters of the Heart: Three-time Tony Award® winner Patti LuPone returns in her acclaimed theatrical concert celebrating love, heartbreak, and the power of song.

March 7 - Mozart, Leshnoff, Mendelssohn with Demarre McGill, flute: Featuring the World Premiere of Jonathan Leshnoff's Flute Concerto No. 2, alongside Mozart's Flute Concerto No. 2 and Mendelssohn's exuberant Italian Symphony.

March 14 - How to Train Your Dragon In Concert: The beloved DreamWorks film comes alive as the Fairfax Symphony Orchestra performs John Powell's score live to film at Capital One Hall.

March 29 - Rick Steves' Europe: A Symphonic Journey: Travel icon Rick Steves joins the FSO on stage for a musical tour across Europe, blending storytelling, stunning visuals, and orchestral favorites.

May 31 - Prokofiev with Claire Huangci, piano: The season concludes with a powerful program featuring pianist Claire Huangci, Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 3, and Symphony No. 5.



The Lion Dance! Honolulu Theatre for Youth will perform "The Great Race: The Story of the Chinese Zodiac" on Saturday, Feb. 28, 2026 at the McLean Community Center.

Performances take place at premier venues including the Harris Theatre and Center for the Arts at George Mason University, and Capital One Hall. More information and tickets available at FairfaxSymphony.org

BLACK HISTORY MONTH EVENTS

Honor Black history through meaningful programs that explore African American history, culture and lived experiences across Fairfax County. Throughout February and beyond, the Fairfax County Park Authority offers engaging events, exhibits and interpretive programs for all ages that highlight the essential role Black individuals and communities have played in shaping the county's past and present. From stories of resilience and labor to traditions, skills and community life, these programs invite visitors to learn, reflect and connect with history at park and historic sites across the county.

Programs and Events

Black History Month at the Meeting House
Frying Pan Farm Park, Feb. 7 or Feb. 21, noon–2 p.m. Free
Remembrance: Enslaved Lives at Sully Sully Historic Site, Feb. 8 or Feb. 21, 1–2 p.m. \$10
Enslaved Lives and the Legacy of Slavery
Historic Huntley, Feb. 19, 1–2:30 p.m. \$12
Grit and Grain: African American Millers

Colvin Run Mill, Feb. 28, 2–3 p.m. \$10

FIVE-PART BETTER ARGUMENTS WORKSHOP SERIES.

The Better Arguments Project, developed by the Aspen Institute, is part of William & Mary's broader Democracy Initiative, which advances civil discourse, civic engagement, and the skills needed to live and lead in a pluralistic society. William & Mary is a national leader in bringing this work into classrooms, campuses, and communities. The series is free and open to the public, and participants are welcome to attend any individual session - there is no expectation to attend all five.

This free series is hosted by Radhika Murari (W&M '95), a member of the William & Mary Washington Campus Advisory Board in the spirit of William & Mary's commitment to democratic engagement. Each workshop centers on one core Better Arguments tenet:

- ❖ Workshop 1: Take Winning Off the Table; Feb 10, 2026; 6-8 pm; Reston, VA Lead with a desire to understand and learn. Register here: <https://tinyurl.com/Better2026>
- ❖ Workshop 2: Prioritize Relationships and Listen Passionately; Mar 10, 2026; 6-8 pm; Reston, VA Focus on building honest connections. Register here: <https://tinyurl.com/WMMarch10>
- ❖ Workshop 3: Pay Attention to Context; Apr 14, 2026; 6-8 pm; Reston, VA Acknowledge the many factors that may influence beliefs.

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ENTERTAINMENT

Register here: <https://tinyurl.com/WMApril14>

- ❖ Workshop 4: Embrace Vulnerability; May 12, 2026; 6-8 pm; Reston, VA Consider the benefits of opening up. Register here: <https://tinyurl.com/BetterMay12>
- ❖ Workshop 5: Make Room to Transform; June 9, 2026; 6-8 pm; Reston, VA Be open to new and varied perspectives. Register here: <https://tinyurl.com/WMJune9>

REPAIR CAFE

Fairfax County Repair Cafe is a team of volunteer “fixers” with a variety of skills. They diagnose, repair and recommend. Bring your items or questions and join them.

Examples include sewing repairs, small appliance fixes, jewelry repair, computer help, knife sharpening, community fun. Upcoming dates:

- ❖ Sunday, February 8th, 2026, 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. @ Pohick Regional Library
6450 Sydenstricker Rd., Burke;
- ❖ Saturday, March 14th, 2026, 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. @ Thomas Jefferson Library
7415 Arlington Boulevard, Falls Church.

THROUGH FEB. 8

“**The Sunshine Boys**.” At Vienna Community Center, 120 Cherry St., SE, Vienna. Presented by Vienna Theatre Company. 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays: Jan. 23-24, Jan. 30-31, and Feb. 6-7. Matinee performances begin at 2 p.m. on Sundays, Feb. 1 and Feb. 8. It is the story of a theatrical agent as he tries to re-unite his elderly uncle with his long-time stage partner for a TV reunion. Tickets are \$16 each and may be purchased online at www.viennava.gov/webtrac or in person at Vienna Community Center, located at 120 Cherry St., SE, Vienna, Va. Visit www.viennava.gov/theatre.

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, Feb. 4.

FEB. 4-28

McLean Art Society and McLean Art Gallery “From the Heart” Exhibition. At Chesterbrook Shopping Center, 6224B Old Dominion Drive, McLean. This February, the McLean Art Gallery is pleased to feature “From the Heart,” a new exhibition from the local nonprofit McLean Art Society. Members of the public are invited to enjoy 170 new works from more than 40 local artists. Included are paintings in oil, acrylic, pastel, watercolor and mixed media; drawings; photography; sculpture; and works in wood, glass, ceramics and jewelry. “Put your heart into art” at our Opening Reception on Friday, February 6 from 5-7 p.m.

SATURDAY/FEB. 7

Mark Morris Dance Group and Music Ensemble Presents Dances to American Music. 8 p.m. At

www.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM



The Mark Morris Dance Group will perform Saturday, Feb. 7, 2026 at GMU Center for the Arts in Fairfax.

GMU Center for the Arts, Fairfax. The Mark Morris Dance Group and Music Ensemble returns to the Center for the Arts with Dances to American Music, a vibrant celebration of the rich tapestry of American music and dance. Featuring choreography by the legendary Mark Morris, “undeviating in his devotion to music” (New Yorker), this program highlights music by iconic American composers in a celebration of the nation’s 250th anniversary in 2026.

SATURDAY/FEB. 7

“**Astronaut vs. Aquanaut.**” 6 p.m.

At the Alden Theatre, McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Two acclaimed scientists face off—spacesuit to wet-suit—to decide who’s the ultimate explorer. Join Janet Ivey (“Janet’s Planet”) and Jennifer Swanson (Science Rocks) as they journey from deep oceans to outer space using cutting-edge discoveries, including images from the James Webb Space Telescope.

FEB. 7 TO MARCH 1

Reston Art Gallery Presents A Touch of Red. At 11400 Washington Plaza W # B, Reston. Reston Art Gallery is pleased to present A Touch of Red, an all-member show that incorporates red across a diverse collection of works. A Touch of Red invites viewers to explore the many meanings and moods associated with the color red. From subtle accents to bold focal points, red serves as a unifying element throughout the exhibition, often symbolizing energy, warmth, and vitality. As an all-member show, the exhibit highlights the breadth of talent within the Reston Art Gallery. Works span a variety of media, including painting, sculpture, mobiles, fabric art, and mixed media created by the gallery’s member artists—Pat Macintyre, Julia Tova Malakoff, Sandra Dovberg, Rosemarie Forsythe, Marthe McGrath, Jennifer Duncan, and Cindy Grisdel—as well as adjunct members Doug Fuller and Wayne Schiffelbein. An opening reception will be

held on Sunday, February 15, from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m., and the public is warmly invited to attend.

SUNDAY/FEB. 8

Craft Day at the Fairfax Station

Railroad Museum. 1-4 p.m. At 11200 Fairfax Station Road, Fairfax Station. Guests of all ages can craft unique train-themed Valentine’s Day cards. What to Expect:

- ❖ All Supplies Provided: We’ll supply everything you need, from cardstock and decorative materials to markers and stamps. Get inspired by train motifs and designs, and let your imagination run wild as you create heartfelt cards for your loved ones and friends.
- ❖ Guided Crafting Sessions: Our friendly staff will be on hand to offer guidance and tips on creating beautiful cards. Whether you’re crafting for family, friends, or that special someone, our team will help you make your cards extra special.
- ❖ Family-Friendly Fun: This event is perfect for families! Kids and adults alike can enjoy crafting together, making it an excellent opportunity to bond and create lasting memories.
- ❖ Exhibit Access: While you’re here, take some time to explore our fascinating exhibits on the history of railroads and model trains. Learn more about the significance of trains in our community and their impact on transportation.

WEDNESDAY/FEB. 11

The monthly luncheon of the Springfield Christian Women’s Connection will be held on Feb. 11 at the Springfield Country Club, Springfield, VA. The program includes a feature and speaker. If interested or for more information, email springwmconn@yahoo.com. Reservations required and should be made NLT February 6th.

WEDNESDAY/FEB. 11

“**An Evening with Friends**” Fund-raiser. At Red’s Table, 11150 South Lakes Dr, Reston. The Friends of Reston invites the

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Vienna Department of Parks and Recreation
and
Vienna Theatre Company

by
Neil Simon

The Sunshine Boys

Vienna Community Center 120 Cherry St. NE 22180
by email call 703.968.0740
www.viennatheatrecompany.org viennatheatresales@viennava.com

“The Sunshine Boys” will be featured Jan. 23 to Feb. 8, 2026 at the Vienna Community Center.

community to make Reston your Valentine at the “Evening with Friends” fundraiser, an uplifting celebration of local spirit and generosity taking place Wednesday, February 11, 2026 from 6 - 9 p.m. at Red’s Table, Reston’s favorite lakeside restaurant. With every dollar raised, this event supports the Reston Association’s camp scholarships for underserved youth, free monthly movies for senior citizens and awards scholarships to high school seniors.

Guests will enjoy a festive evening featuring a cocktail hour with heavy appetizers, followed by dinner and seasonal Valentine’s Day desserts. Two ticket options are available: \$75 for dinner including one beverage of choice or \$100 for dinner with three beverages of choice included. For tickets and information, contact friendsofreston@gmail.com or visit www.friendsofreston.org/events.

SEE CALENDAR, PAGE 15

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Brown v. Board of Education SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE

Accepting Applications
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The Brown v. Board of Education Scholarship Program was established by the General Assembly to provide educational opportunities for persons who were denied an education in Virginia between 1954 and 1964 due to the closing of the public schools during Massive Resistance. The scholarship is now available to those individuals and to their descendants. The program is open to eligible applicants for the 2026-2027 school year. For applications and information on eligibility, visit: **BROWNSCHOLARSHIP.VIRGINIA.GOV**

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CALENDAR

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**Let us know
about an
upcoming event**

connectionnewspapers.com/Calendar

Announcements

SYC (Springfield South County Youth Club)
Spring 2026 girls rec league softball

Recreation leagues at the 8U, 10U and 12U levels (ages 6-12); Registration open until mid-March. New players welcome! Pre-season clinics for new and experienced rec league players in February and March, included with registration. For additional info., including link to registration and FAQ, please visit www.sycva.com

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ENTERTAINMENT

FROM PAGE 13

THURSDAY/FEB. 12

“Hyenas” Film. 1 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave. McLean. Based on Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s play “The Visit”—which was also the basis of the Broadway musical, “Hyenas” follows a now-rich woman returning to her poor desert hometown to propose a deal to the populace: her fortune, in exchange for the death of the man who years earlier abandoned her and left her with his child. “Hyena’s” is suitable for 18 years and older, and admission is free.

FEB. 13-16

Middleburg’s 15th Annual Winter Weekend Sale. Join the town of Middleburg on February 13, 14, 15 and 16 for the 15th annual Winter Weekend Sale. During the Winter Weekend Sale, visitors will be able to hunt for wonderful gifts for themselves and others while experiencing the small-town charm of Middleburg. The sale, sponsored by the Town of Middleburg and the Middleburg Business & Professional Association, will be held Friday and Saturday from 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. and Sunday – Monday as posted by shops. Many of the unique shops in the village will have discounts on everything from shoes to children’s clothes to fall and winter fashions, as well as specials in some of the local restaurants. Bargain hunters can arrive early to get the best deals or stay over at one of the inns in town.

FEB. 14-15

Virginia Opera: Intelligence. Saturday, February 14 at 7:30 p.m.; Sunday, Feb. 15 at 2 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, Fairfax. Virginia Opera presents the state premiere of Intelligence, an operatic drama that tells a gripping true story of espionage, sacrifice, and the fight for freedom. Based in Richmond, Virginia, in the shadows of the Civil War, Mary Jane Bowser, an enslaved woman turned operative, joins a Union spy ring, unveiling secrets about the Confederacy and her own identity. Packed with riveting drama, powerful music, and dynamic dance, Intelligence will keep you on the edge of your seat. Sung in English with English surtitles.

SUNDAY/FEB. 15

Monthly Model Train Show. 1-4 p.m. At Fairfax Station Railroad Museum, 11200 Fairfax Station Road, Fairfax Station. Join the Fairfax Station Railroad Museum for the cherished Monthly Model Trains Showcase, a delightful gathering for model train enthusiasts and families alike! This month’s show is February 15, 2026, from 1-4 p.m. Shows are every 3rd Sunday, from February through November, they invite hobbyists and curious visitors to explore the fascinating world of model trains, featuring either N or T scale exhibits. Admission: Museum members and ages 4 and under, free; ages 5-12, \$4; ages 13 and older, \$6. Military/First Responders/Teachers (with ID) \$5.

WEDNESDAY/FEB. 18

“Year of the Red Fire House Lunar New Year Celebration” at 7 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Featuring the Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company. The show intertwines traditional and contemporary dance, and will also include a traditional Dragon.

THURSDAY/FEB. 19

“Spettacolo” Film. 1 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. “Spettacolo” is a portrait of the 50-year-old tradition of turning their lives into a play, where the town’s piazza becomes a stage and every villager from 6 to 90 plays a part...the role of themselves. The film is rated PG, and admission is free.

FEB. 19 TO MARCH 8

“Between Riverside and Crazy.” At 1st Stage, 1524 Spring Hill Road, Tysons. A play by Stephen Adly Guirgis, directed by José

Carrasquillo. When: Thursdays at 7:30 p.m., Fridays at 7:30 p.m., Saturdays at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., Sundays at 2 p.m. Tickets: Tickets: \$25-\$55 general admission, \$15 students, educators, and military. Purchase online at www.1ststage.org or call 703-854-1856.

FRIDAY/FEB. 20

Les Ballets Africains. 8 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, Fairfax. Les Ballets Africains brings Africa’s rich tradition of music and dance to the Center for the Arts. Founded in 1952 to serve as cultural ambassador for the Republic of Guinea, the company has toured the world and become known for “dazzling, high-speed footwork” (LA Times) as well as “sheer physical energy and beauty” (New York Times).

SATURDAY/FEB. 21

FocusMusic presents Andrew McKnight and Beyond Borders. 7 p.m. At The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Sterling, 22135 Davis Dr., Suite 104, Sterling. Advance tickets \$25 / day-of and door \$30 (member / congregation as-applicable \$25 at the door). Webcast tickets are \$15. Info and tickets at <https://focusmusic.org/sat-2-21-andrew-mck-night-sterling>

SUNDAY/FEB. 22

The Borisevich Duo. 2 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave. McLean. The husband-wife pair is an Alden favorite and attracts larger crowds each year with their sweetly old-world sound and brilliant commentary! Tickets are available at mclean-center.org.

WEDNESDAY/FEB. 25

Senior Movie Night: “Anniversary.” 10 a.m. Reston Association sponsors senior movies at the movie theater at Reston Town Center.

FEB. 27 TO MARCH 8

Vienna Restaurant Week. At participating restaurants in Vienna. The annual, 10-day celebration highlights Vienna’s diverse culinary scene with specially priced prix fixe menus, exclusive specials, and limited-time dining experiences at local favorites across town. The initial lineup showcases a wide range of cuisines and concepts, everything from cozy cafés and bakeries to global flavors and neighborhood taverns offering something for every palate.

Participating restaurants include: Amma Vegetarian Kitchen, Bear Branch Tavern, Ben & Jerry’s, Big Buns, Caboose Tavern, Cafe Renaissance, Caffe Amouri, Charlies Bowl, Chef Tan, Chick-fil-A Vienna, Cocoa Vienna, Crumb, Cuco’s Peruvian, Evelyn Rose, FRAME Coffee Roasters, Foster’s Grille, Ledo Pizza Vienna, Lily’s Chocolate and Coffee, Maple Ave Restaurant, Oh My Dak, Peking Express of Vienna, Plaka Grill, Pure Green Vienna, Qamaria Yemeni Coffee, Rita’s Italian Ice & Frozen Custard (Rita’s of Vienna), Roberto’s Ristorante Italiano, Royal Nepal Bistro, Seray, Shilla Bakery, Smoothie King, Social Burger, Sunflowers Vegetarian Restaurant, Sushi Koji, Sushi Yama, Tango Pastry Café, TeaDM, The Red Bird Hot Chicken & Fries, Viet Aroma, Vienna Thai and Bar, and Vivi Bubble Tea.

SATURDAY/FEB. 28

Metropolitan Jazz Orchestra with Vaughn Wiester Presents The Music of Stan Kenton. 8 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, Fairfax. Audience favorite Metropolitan Jazz Orchestra returns to celebrate the music of Grammy Award-winning jazz bandleader, composer, and pianist Stan Kenton. Known for his innovative and brassy approach to big band jazz, he developed what became known in the 1940s as “The Wall of Sound.”

SATURDAY/FEB. 28

Karate Kids Adventure Day. At Chantilly Family Martial Arts, Chantilly. A fun and active event to encourage physical activity, confidence, and positive social interaction in a safe, welcoming environment.

Event activities: Age-appropriate obstacle courses; Team-based karate games and challenges;

Creative coloring stations
Admission is \$10 per child, with parents attending free. New families also receive the opportunity to stay for a complimentary introductory karate class.
Registration link: <https://tinyurl.com/CFMAad-ventureday>

SATURDAY/FEB. 28

Lion Dance! Honolulu Theatre for Youth will perform “The Great Race: The Story of the Chinese Zodiac” at 6 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. It is a beloved tale about the origin story of how each animal earned a place in the Chinese Zodiac. Tickets are available at mcleancenter.org.

SATURDAY/FEB. 28

Reston Association Seasonal Job Fair. 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. At RA Headquarters, 12001 Sunrise Valley Drive, Reston. Ideal opportunity for teens, college students home for the summer, and anyone seeking flexible. With a wide range of temporary positions available in Aquatics, Camps, Maintenance, Tennis, and Member Services, the event is an ideal place to launch a rewarding seasonal job - or even a future career - with Reston Association.

RA’s seasonal roles offer a great fit for:

- ❖ Teens looking for their first job
- ❖ College students returning home for the summer
- ❖ Retirees or adults seeking flexible, part-time hours
- ❖ Anyone who wants to work in a supportive, community-focused environment

SUNDAY/MARCH 1

Community Cornhole Challenge. Sponsored by The Rotary Club of Herndon-Reston and YMCA. At the Teen Center at the Reston YMCA. Benefitting local youth and literacy programs.

THURSDAY/MARCH 5

Matters of the Heart. 7:30 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, Fairfax. The FSO presents Patti LuPone’s critically acclaimed theatrical concert Matters of the Heart. The show is based on the CD recording of the same name which was released in 1999 and named one of the best recordings of the year by both The Times of London and Time Out/NY. For tickets, visit FairfaxSymphony.org.

SATURDAY/MARCH 7

Comicworx. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. At Workhouse Arts Center, Lorton. Featuring celebrity guest John Swasey who is the voice actor for Attack on Titan to Fullmetal Alchemist, My Hero Academia, and One Piece. Secure your tickets and your chance to meet the one and only John Swasey at workhousearts.org/comicworx.

SATURDAY/MARCH 14

“How to Train Your Dragon.” 7 p.m. The Fairfax Symphony Orchestra will present DreamWorks’ How To Train Your Dragon – In Concert, a thrilling live-to-film experience for all ages, at Capital One Hall in Tysons. Audiences will experience the beloved animated adventure in HD, with composer John Powell’s Academy Award-nominated score performed live to the film by the Fairfax Symphony Orchestra. For tickets and further information, visit FairfaxSymphony.org.

MARCH 28-29

SPRINGPEX Stamp Show. 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturday (March 28), and 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sunday (March 29). At John R. Lewis High School cafeteria, 6540 Franconia Road, Springfield. Presented by Springfield Stamp Club. SPRINGPEX is the Washington D.C. area’s largest club-sponsored stamp show. It features interesting philatelic exhibits, 20+ dealers, U.S. Postal Service booth, 3rd annual Postcrossing meetup, and free materials for young, beginning, and returning collectors. Free admission and parking. For details, visit springfieldstampclub.org/springpex

“Every Knock’s a Boost”



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

If I heard those words of fatherly encouragement once, I heard them a hundred times; words of wisdom from my late (very late now; he died in Dec. 2006) father, Barry. Not only would he be positive about the positive (that was easy), but he would also try to find a way to be positive about any kind of negative as well. Ergo the title of this column. My father had the kind of personality and attitude that invokes a very desirable description of not-every professional athlete: “Good in the locker room.” Meaning, great/positive/helpful; he was good in the house, too, where my brother Richard and I not only grew up but were raised.

Born in 1918, my father was a child of The Depression. As a boy of no more than 10 years old, he was already working, selling miscellaneous stuff at Braves Field in Boston, home of the then National League Boston Braves (who eventually moved to Milwaukee and then on to Atlanta where they still play today). You might have heard of their crosstown rival: the Boston Red Sox? After the game ended and my father returned home, whatever coin (literally) he had earned, he would give over to his mother, Besse. She would greet him by spreading open her apron wide for him to donate (I use that term loosely) his days wages for the Lourie family budget. Living in the Jewish ghetto in Dorchester, Ma. with six brothers and sisters and my grandfather who rarely worked (I never received much of an explanation as to why, but my grandmother, Besse, was the breadwinner), all monies earned went to support the family.

My grandmother had a job outside the house, too. She worked for a caterer. In those days, chicken wings were not as popular as they are today, so the caterer had no interest in them. They were refuse, more trash than treat. Unclaimed and unwanted, my grandmother collected this ‘refuse’ and brought them home to feed her family. Otherwise, on the nights when my grandmother didn’t work, the family would have gone hungry. The effect this cycle had on my father? This Depression-era staple - for him, became a lifelong must-have. For the next 70 years or so, my father loved chicken wings. And it formed him as a man and a father. Forever grateful (there’s another story he would tell about wanting clean bedsheets since he always slept in the same bed as his siblings), my father never took anything for granted and as his life improved, so did his attitude. Never complaining about what he didn’t have, my father was always happy to get a hot meal and sleep in a bed with clean sheets.

My father, in his work ethic, his deeds and actions, showed Richard and I the way forward. And though it may not have been a way paved with gold, it was one brimming with good intentions and confidence-boosting words of encouragement. I learned at a pretty young age, that even though we might not have had a lot, (there’s a story I like to tell about the occasional breakfast my mother served/provided, and she did serve us, always: on a dinner-sized plate, she would fill it with the week’s leftover breads. There would be a bagel piece, half a bulky roll, a heel of rye bread, another end of pumpernickel, some challah, et cetera, with butter and cream cheese, and American cheese), but we didn’t go to school hungry or sleep in the same bed as one another. We might have been depressed but it was no Great Depression. Nor was it a big deal. It was just another day in our life.

A little perspective - and context, goes a long way. At least it did for us.

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

The Landfill's Becoming 'Birdy'

50-acre no-mow grassland provides sanctuary for some bird species of concern.

By GLENDA C. BOOTH
CONNECTION NEWSPAPERS

Few people find visiting a landfill enticing, but some of our avian friends do.

Grassland and other birds are using a closed portion of the I-95 landfill, according to a recently released Fairfax County report.

In 2024, at the urging of the Northern Virginia Bird Alliance and with the Board of Supervisors' support, landfill managers designated 50 closed acres of the 500-acre landfill as a "no-mow" zone. The managers agreed to avoid mowing during grassland birds' nesting season and to raise mower blades to an eight-inch height when they did mow.

County officials concluded, based on 2024 and 2025 surveys, "overall observations confirm that the no-mow zone continues to provide critical habitat during the peak breeding and nesting season." County staffer Kimberly Lewis wrote, "The Eastern meadowlark and grasshopper sparrow, among other species, are thriving on a 50-acre meadowland atop the landfill."

By modifying and reducing mowing, the area is in effect a grassland, albeit not a natural one. The project sought to determine which grassland birds are using the area and how.

In 2025, Blair Evancho, a county intern, staffers and volunteers conducted weekly bird surveys from May 1 to July 12, 2025 and recorded all bird species observed. They confirmed 40 bird species in this area in 2025, including four species of regional or continental concern: chimney swift, grasshopper sparrow, Eastern meadowlark and bobolink. "Notably, the grasshopper sparrow, a grassland nester experiencing regional population declines, was the most detected species," notes the county's report. In 2024, surveyors confirmed 29 bird species.

"The County's monitoring efforts show that the I-95 Landfill Complex continues to provide meaningful habitat for grassland birds, including several species of conservation interest," commented Duane Wright, Director, Solid Waste Management Program. "These findings reflect our commitment to thoughtful land management that supports both environmental stewardship and long-term site care."

"On survey days, at least one



COURTESY FAIRFAX COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC WORKS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

The no-mow zone continues to provide critical habitat during the peak breeding and nesting season, attracting birds like the Eastern Meadowlark above, and grasshopper sparrow.



Plants other than grass take hold and attract insects, like butterflies.

Northern Virginia Bird Alliance (NVBA) volunteer helped," NVBA President Libby Lyons said. "We commend the County for this approach and hope this project can serve as a role model for other landfills in taking such important conservation steps," she said.

According to the 2025 report, one glitch was "unanticipated mowing on three days in June during work on a new solar field next to the no-mow zone, which created "a noticeable decline in bird activity on those dates." The report indicates that this mowing "conflicted with the established protocol, which prohibits mowing in the no-mow zone during the April – September breeding season, except when required for access to monitoring wells."

Grassland Birds

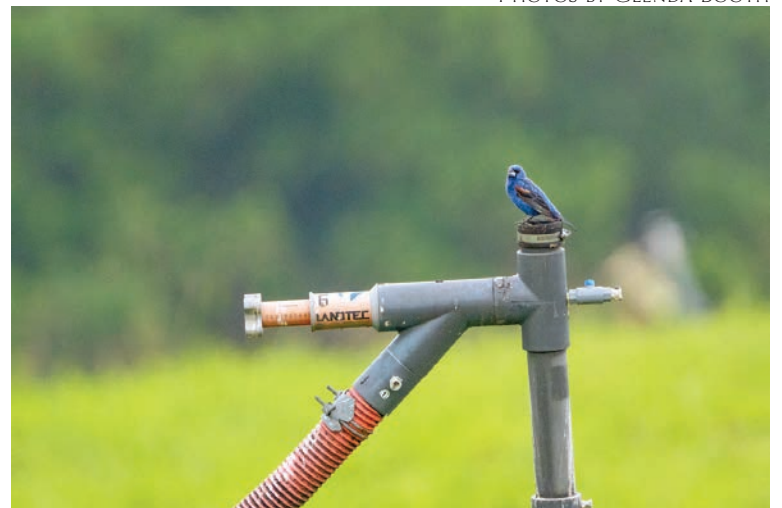
Grassland birds rely on grass-

land habitats for nesting and many species have seen marked drops in numbers. Since 1970, grassland birds have declined by 43 percent, concluded the 2025 State of the Birds report by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative. The main driver is habitat loss.

Most of the eastern United States' natural grasslands are gone. These birds typically do not use other habitats. In Virginia, since the European colonists' arrival in the 1600s, only a fraction of the state's grasslands remain. "It may be less than .0001 percent," according to biologist Justin Folks quoted on the Virginia Outdoors Foundation's website.

"The landfill has the largest patch of grassland in eastern Fairfax County," ornithologist Greg Butcher said in our 2024 Connection article. Landfill managers usually put a cover on closed landfills

PHOTOS BY GLENDA BOOTH



A Blue Grosbeak thriving in the environment enhanced by grasslands.



I-95 landfill managers have installed signs to guide the mowers.



Landfill managers typically plant grasses to stabilize a landfill's surface. The Lorton landfill has monitoring wells.

and plant grasses to stabilize the surface.

Wright concluded, "By maintaining a clearly defined seasonal no-mow period, the County is able to support important nesting and foraging activity while also ensur-

ing the landfill remains well maintained and protective of the environment. This balanced approach allows us to responsibly manage closed landfill areas while recognizing their value as part of the region's broader ecosystem."

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