

Mount Vernon Gazette

MOUNT VERNON'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER • A CONNECTION NEWSPAPER

FEBRUARY 5, 2026



Mini snow mountains at the Belle View Shopping Center.



PHOTOS BY GLENDA BOOTH

Snowplows piled up the snow in parking lots, here in the Hollin Hall Shopping Center.

Local Businesses Serve the Public Despite the Cold

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

As Northern Virginians dug out of the icy “snow-crete,” battled cabin fever and coped with below-freezing temperatures in a white-glazed landscape, local businesses tried to be there for their customers.

Snow fell overnight on Sunday, Jan. 25, continued into Monday, and then topped by sleet and days of freezing temperatures. Meetings

were canceled, mail delivery vanished, people teleworked and commutes became hazardous.

Shelves Emptied

“Wegman’s looked like an apocalypse,” said Holly Dougherty, President of the Mount Vernon-Springfield Chamber of Commerce. “The meat counter, produce aisles and bottled water were all gone. The shelves were empty,” she lamented.

Most businesses had to close on Monday and wait for snowplows

to clear streets and parking lots, making multiple rounds throughout the week.

Michael Bentley, manager of the Mount Vernon-area Hollin Hall Variety Store, ventured out on Monday to check on the popular store. “The Hollin Hall Shopping Center looked like a ghost town,” he said.

Once the snow and sleet stopped, shovels, sleds and ice melt leaped off the shelves at the Village Hardware and at the Variety Store. “I sold six to seven tons of ice melt in five days. All of my 50 metal

garden shovels were gone in three hours,” said hardware manager Andrew Knepp. To whack at the ice, “People were buying sledge hammers and pick axes,” he reported. Customers cleaned out the hardware’s sand, flashlights and batteries.

Knepp posted a sign on the door, announcing, “We are out of ice melt, shovels and sleds,” but another said, “We have propane.” The hardware’s supply chain was disrupted so he ordered ice melt from Colorado, instead of his usual

Fredericksburg, Virginia, supplier. He does not expect it to arrive until Feb. 4.

Bentley re-opened the Variety Store on Tuesday. “The shopping center’s landlord did an excellent job of clearing the parking lot,” he said, so customers started to dribble in. What popped off the shelves? “Puzzles, nerf guns and toys to entertain kids indoors. It was almost like Christmas again,” he cheered.

SEE LOCAL BUSINESSES, PAGE 10



Snowplows piled up the snow in parking lots.



Village Hardware promoted outdoor faucet covers.

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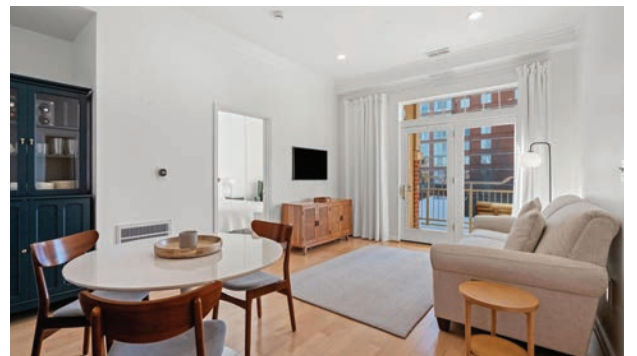
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ACM ATLANTIC COAST
MORTGAGE

Third Place Work Environment Continues To Gain Popularity Around Mount Vernon

By Mike Salmon
Mount Vernon Gazette

In early 2024 a placemaking study was conducted in Mount Vernon, and part of it found that with new developments, officials prioritized small-scale, programmed spaces that offer shade, seating and lighting to create pedestrian-friendly environments. This also includes integrated art and cultural elements to enhance the corridor's identity and attract visitors, like murals. In essence, this added to the "third place" notion that is already gaining on a nationwide scale.

Around the Mount Vernon area, there are several places where people work remotely, saving gas by eliminating the commute, saving time and meeting others. This includes McAlister's Deli where they have free tea refills, Stupid Good BBQ, Hollin Hall Pastry Shop, Panera, El Fogon Taqueria and Dave & Busters. Then there's always Starbucks that's been considered the third place at a few locations along Richmond Highway.

Also in Mount Vernon, the newly rebuilt recreation center acts as a third place for many. There are tables, plugs for laptops and Wi-Fi so many work from there in the wide open lobby space where others access the pool and skating rink.

Third Place Beginnings

The "Third Place" it goes back to a late 80s book written by Ray Oldenburg called "The Great Good Place," which defines third places as an informal public gathering spots like cafes, bars and bookstores that are crucial for community life, democracy, and social vitality. The third places exist outside the "first place" (home) and the "second place" (work).

Oldenburg had a degree in English and Social Studies from Minnesota's Mankato State University,

and a master's and PhD in Sociology from the University of Minnesota, and then Oldenburg became a professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of West Florida in Pensacola.

The third place can't just be the street corner or a park though. Oldenburg listed criteria of the third place. It is on neutral ground, promotes social equity by leveling the status of guests, conversation is the main activity, the mood is playful, strangers are welcome but there are regulars who feel rooted in the place for one reason or another.

Does it need coffee or some sort of magnetic food or drink to draw to inspire the gathering or fuel discussion? Although Oldenburg doesn't mention that up front, it does play a big part in many of today's "third place," settings. Starbucks mentions the third place on their website and at the many Starbucks locations in Mount Vernon, the tables are filled with coffee drinkers on laptops.

Survey in Arlington

In Arlington, city planners are looking at the 2025 Perception Survey to reinforce the sense of community that's been in place for years in this urban environment, strengthened by the frequency of the "third space," notion throughout the county.

From the survey, there are statistics about feeling safe and walkability, but also the sense of belonging which is partly where the third place locations fit in. While 65% recommend living in the neighborhood, they ranked "restaurants, bars, and dining" as the most important amenity in Rosslyn during the workday to support work-life balance," according to the survey.

The 2025 Perception Survey insights will guide the Rosslyn BID's FY26 Strategic Priorities to best serve its population of over



CONTRIBUTED

In Rosslyn, a 'perception survey,' and the third place was a response.



PHOTO BY MIKE SALMON/GAZETTE

The notion of the 'third place' is alive and well around Mount Vernon.

16,000 residents and more than 25,000 employees. These results will shape Rosslyn's urban char-

acter, activate the neighborhood with high-quality events and public spaces, enhance perception

through marketing and communication, and deepen engagement with stakeholders, the survey said. When asked what would most improve daily life, 60% said more parks and gathering spaces, and the third place can be that gathering spot.

Comedy?

They've captured the third place concept in a 2013 movie called "Coffee Town," starring Glenn Howerton who plays "Will" a website manager who considers the coffee shop his office. Conflict arises when the coffee shop manager isn't happy with the situation and looks at changing it.

When Will finds out it's going to be converted into a bistro and ruin his third place, he hatches a plan to rob it and make the neighborhood seem unsafe so they won't convert it.

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 email to calendar@connectionnewspapers.com

VOLUNTEERS WANTED

Assistance League of Northern Virginia is an all-volunteer non-profit organization

that feeds, clothes and provides reading assistance and books to children in need. Assistance League's programs touch the lives of hundreds of children in Fairfax and Prince William Counties and the City of Alexandria. There are many volunteer opportunities for community members to contribute to helping those in need. To learn more, email info@alnv.org, or visit www.alnv.org.

STEM Professionals Needed. Help assist K-12 STEM teachers as part of the American Association for the Advancement of Science's STEM Volunteer Program, stemvolunteers.org, during the 2018-19 school year. In the 2017-18 school year, there are 85 volunteers in 6 Northern Virginia school districts. Contact Don Rea at 571-551- 2488, or donaldrea@aol.com. Volunteer Drivers Needed. Drivers

needed by the American Cancer Society to take cancer patients to treatment in Northern Virginia. To volunteer, call 1-800-227-2345 or go to cancer.org/drive. RSVP a volunteer network for seniors seeking service opportunities in and around Fairfax County, Arlington County and the City of Alexandria, offers a wide array of opportunities for volunteers 55 and older. RSVP volunteers enjoy flex-

ible schedules, free accident and liability insurance while serving, optional mileage and meal reimbursement and are invited to volunteer group projects and social gatherings. To sign up for an upcoming orientation, email Carly Hubicki at chubicki@volunteerfairfax.org or call RSVP at 703-403- 5360. To learn more about RSVP, visit www.rsvpnova.org.

Fairfax County's Streams Are Still Struggling

Why isn't stream health improving?

By GLENDA C. BOOTH
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

Fairfax County's streams are in trouble and little has changed in 23 years. "In 2024, 75 percent of Fairfax County's streams were considered in 'fair' to 'very poor' condition; that is, they are impaired and lack biological diversity," concludes the Fairfax County Environmental Quality Council's (EQAC) recent report.

In 2001, 75 percent of the county's streams were in very poor, poor or fair condition biologically. Why haven't streams improved over the last 23 years?

Fairfax County has 1.2 million people, 400 square miles of land, 30 major watersheds and 750 miles of perennial streams.

"A healthy stream supports diverse aquatic life and natural functions, has a stable form, appropriate temperatures and balanced nutrients," said Shannon Curtis, Assistant Director of the Stormwater Planning Division. "It has good biological diversity with sensitive organisms present, minimal pollution and intact natural habitat that sustains fish, aquatic insects and plants."

Why Are Streams Degraded?

EQAC pinpoints impervious surfaces from development and redevelopment, pointing out that "Most watersheds in Fairfax County now are considered 'urban,' with greater than 10 percent impervious area." These hard surfaces block water from naturally infiltrating into the ground and increase runoff into streams. Stormwater carries pollutants like excessive nutrients, sediment, de-icing salts, pathogens, dog and other animal waste and litter, all of which can impair streams. Stormwater runoff is the fastest growing source of pollution to the Potomac River, reported the Potomac Conservancy in 2025.

The EQAC report also asserts, "This suggests that three quarters of the county's total stream miles would likely be assessed as impaired by DEQ [Virginia Department of Environmental Quality] and potentially require TMDLs." TMDL stands for "total maximum daily loads," the maximum amount of a pollutant that a water body can receive and still meet water



COURTESY FAIRFAX COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

This stream restoration on Hunting Creek helped stabilize the stream banks where mature trees were in danger of tipping.



COURTESY FAIRFAX COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Looking at fish and insects that live in the stream helps to determine the stream health.

quality standards. The county has several TMDL action plans.

The report also warns that "recreational direct contact with surface waters is discouraged" because of bacteria. One perhaps semi-bright spot cited is that benthic macroinvertebrates, a measure of a healthy stream, have improved slightly since 2004.

The report commends the county's stream restoration efforts, 273 stormwater projects that have treated about 66,299 acres and restored 29 miles of degrad-

ed streams and outfall channels since 2009. These projects represent three percent of the county's stream-miles. Stream restoration attempts to restore natural channel design, slow flow and spread the flow out into the floodplain. Kenneth Lanfear, a retired hydrologist and EQAC's Hunter Mill representative, argues that stream restoration costs \$9 million per mile and that that's "much cheaper than retention ponds and bioswales." Lanfear co-authored the report's

SEE FAIRFAX COUNTY, PAGE 14



PHOTOS BY GLENDA BOOTH

Every spring, volunteers with the Friends of Dyke Marsh collect samples in an unnamed stream in Mount Vernon to help the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District assess water quality.



In the past, Fairfax County channelized some streams, building concrete "troughs" that interfere with a stream's natural behavior and functions. This stream is behind the Hollin Hall Safeway on county property in Mount Vernon.



Stormwater cannot naturally infiltrate into the soil because of widespread impervious surfaces like this parking lot at the Belle Haven Shopping Center.

School Board Approves Results of Boundary Review

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

BY MERCIA HOBSON
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

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
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

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 6

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

FROM PAGE 5

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).

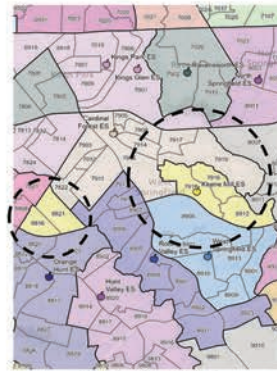
Flagged Sites for the Next Five-Year Review Cycle

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

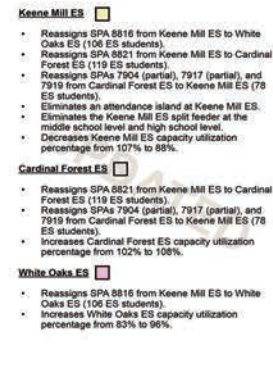
of or during the next boundary review in five years, include but are not limited to the following:

- ❖ 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



Existing Boundaries



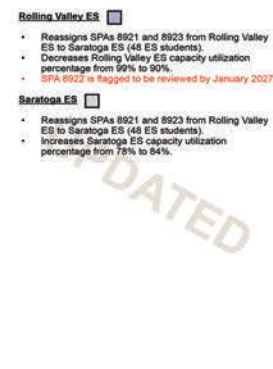
Superintendent Recommendation

Changes to the January 8, 2026 presentation are in red.

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



Existing Boundaries



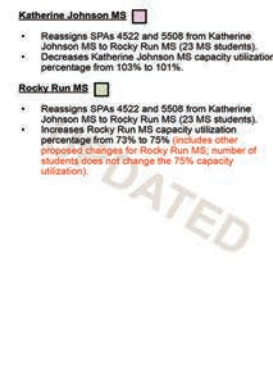
Superintendent Recommendation

Changes to the January 8, 2026 presentation are in red.

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



Existing Boundaries



Superintendent Recommendation

Changes to the January 8, 2026 presentation are in red.

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.

Project for the Fight Against Federal Overreach

Four of nine F.A.F.O. founders are Virginians, creating a local oversight from the D.C. suburbs to Hampton Roads.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

Two Northern Virginia prosecutors, Fairfax Commonwealth's Attorney Steve Descano and Parisa Dehghani-Tafti, Commonwealth's Attorney for Arlington County and the City of Falls Church, joined a national coalition

Jan. 28 vowing to oversight of federal agents who violate state laws. Called the Project for the Fight Against Federal Overreach (F.A.F.O.), launched following two fatal shootings by federal immigration agents in Minnesota. At stake, among other things, is whether the federal government can take over a neighborhood and investigate its own shootings, or if local author-

ities have a "concurrent jurisdiction" that the federal government must respect

The coalition aims to hold federal officials accountable when they exceed their lawful authority, particularly in jurisdictions experiencing "surges" of federal immigration and law enforcement activity. Founding members include nine prosecutors from Virginia, Texas,

Pennsylvania, Arizona, and Minnesota, all locally elected. They contend that their duty to state constitutions overrides federal claims of "absolute immunity" when state crimes, such as assault or homicide, are committed.

Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner, a founding member and the coalition's primary national spokesperson, dismissed recent

claims of federal immunity as "absolute nonsense" during the virtual launch.[2] "Despite the misinformation you have heard from the mouth of the vice president, we do have the ability to bring state criminal charges against federal officers and to prosecute those cases to conclusion," Krasner said. "This SEE PROJECT FOR, PAGE 9

OPINION

An Icy Week in Richmond

BY ADAM P. EBBIN
MEMBER, SENATE
OF VIRGINIA



Adam Ebbin

The last week in January was an icy time in Richmond, punctuated by bills passing and special events.

As the snow started falling, I was honored to receive a lifetime achievement award from the Virginia Chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML). It's been my pleasure to work with NORML for many years. I passed a bill to stop the suspension of driver's licenses for all marijuana offenders in 2017. After a multi-year effort, in 2020, I decriminalized possession of less than one ounce of cannabis with Delegate Charniele Herring (D-Alexandria) – meaning we removed criminal penalties. Then in 2021, I legalized the possession of up to an ounce of marijuana, and allowed Virginians to grow up to four plants at home with Delegate Herring and Senator Louise Lucas (D-Portsmouth). However, some key Senate colleagues were not yet ready to adopt our plan to provide licenses to sell cannabis in a controlled 21+ adult-only marketplace. In 2024 and 2025, Governor Glenn Youngkin vetoed follow up bills (from me and others) to issue tightly limited licenses to curtail the illicit market. When we finally move marijuana sales off the street corner to behind an age-verified counter, I look forward to Virginia becoming a national model for a safe and prosperous cannabis market.

Wednesday night, I enjoyed attending the Outdoor Caucus reception with Adam Spanberger, the first "First Gentleman" of the Commonwealth, in his first initial appearance since Governor Spanberger's inauguration.

Last Thursday night, I was flattered and grateful to receive a handmade quilt made by Mothers of Light, an Alexandria nonprofit, presented by Mayor Alyia Gaskins in recognition of my 22 years of representing the city. It was a special opportunity to welcome the members of City Council to Richmond.

Legislative Updates

We have been hard at work reviewing and voting on a wide range of legislation in this 60-day "long session," and I want to share a few highlights with you.

One important bill that I advanced from committee was SB 130, which ensures greater transparency and community input when data centers and new

high-energy facilities are proposed. It will require developers to study and share how these facilities could impact nearby homes, schools, and the surrounding environment before local approval is granted, while still protecting existing local

zoning authority.

Protecting renters is another top priority. I introduced SB 313, which prevents landlords from charging tenants for routine maintenance or repairs unless the damage was caused by the tenant. The bill also bans extra fees just for paying rent except for actual costs incurred to process a credit card or other electronic payment. SB 313 received a unanimous vote in the General Laws and Technology Committee and is expected to pass the Senate today.

Accountability and transparency in government are essential to a healthy democracy. In that same spirit, I introduced SB 699, which requires public bodies to post meeting agendas online ahead of meetings and limits last-minute additions from being voted on unless they are truly time-sensitive. The bill also received a unanimous committee vote and should also pass the full Senate later today.

Protecting our Communities

This year I've introduced two gun safety bills, SB 312 and SB 323, to curb unnecessary tragedies. The rate of gun related deaths has increased by 19% from 2015 to 2024, with one Virginian now killed by a gun every eight hours. We can change these statistics with meaningful legislation to protect public safety and save lives.

My SB 312 would prohibit the public carrying of semi-automatic long guns, whether loaded or not. In 2019 gun-rights advocates carried military rifles through the Old Town Farmers' Market, causing fear and alarm.

My bill to ban "Ghost Guns," SB 323, passed out of the Courts of Justice Committee on a party-line vote. Ghost guns are untraceable weapons without serial numbers, and are typically bought in kits or in multiple pieces. These weapons are found at many crime scenes and are an increasing problem for law enforcement. Firearms are now the leading cause of death of children. Sadly, ghost guns are specifically marketed to people who could not legally pass a background check, including children, domestic abusers, and previously convicted criminals.

SEE AN ICY WEEK, PAGE 9

Mount Vernon Gazette

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Bald Eagle Activity Hints that Spring Is Coming

By GLENDA C. BOOTH
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

Last week, cooped-up, iced-in, Washington-area residents coped with the snow, ice and a glaze on top of that, and a significant cold snap including the longest stretch of sub-freezing temperatures in over 35 years. Temperatures on many days were well below freezing and nights dipped into the single digits.

While these frigid conditions did not stir thoughts of spring, a spring ritual is underway along the area's rivers.

Since mid-November, keen observers have seen bald eagles carrying sticks and refurbishing last year's nests. These birds begin their courtship rituals in early December and in January and February are laying and incubating eggs for five to six weeks. The eggs hatch in early March and parenting begins in earnest, with adults bringing fish to their hungry young. In late May, the young eaglets will fledge.

Bald eagles build nests in trees near water, in places like Dyke Marsh, Little Hunting Creek, River Farm, Fort Belvoir and Mason Neck. It is too early this year to conduct a definitive survey of active bald eagle nests. By "active," bird experts mean that pairs are seen tending to a nest and/or their eaglets. On the Mason Neck peninsula, there are at least 23 bald eagle nests, up from five in 1980, according to Randy Streufert, citing a map of nests in Virginia.

In 2023, a nest in Dyke Marsh collapsed after two young fledged. Friends of Dyke Marsh bird surveyors believe the pair relocated to a residential backyard just west of the George Washington Memorial Parkway, built a nest and raised young there the next two years.

THE COMEBACK

Since 1782, the bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) has been America's national bird. In 2024, then-President Joseph Biden signed a bill into law making it official.

Bald eagles are one of America's great conservation success stories. The United States had around 100,000 nesting bald eagles in the lower 48 states in the 1700s. By 1963, the number plummeted to 417 known nesting pairs. In 1967, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) listed the bald eagle as endangered.

In the early 1970s, scientists determined that the eggshells of eagles and other birds broke during incubation and young birds failed



Bald Eagle in flight with nest material — branches — taking them to the nest.



A pair of Bald Eagles on their nest.



A Bald Eagle on its nest with a chick, facing away.



A Bald Eagle on its nest, feeding an unseen chick with a second chick waiting to be fed.

to hatch. Experts linked the eggshell thinning to DDT and other compounds used as pesticides that moved up the food chain. In 1972, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency banned DDT. As eagle numbers climbed, in 2007, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service removed the bald eagle from the endangered species list. It is still protected under other laws.

Big, Imposing Birds

Adult bald eagles have a white head and tail, a chocolate brown body, a yellow hooked bill and yellow talons. Eagles under five years old are mottled brown. Adults weigh between 10 and 14 pounds and have an eight-foot wingspan.

Bald eagles perch, swoop down and grasp prey in their talons, mostly fish, but they also eat small animals, like rodents, snakes and waterfowl. They also snatch fish from other birds like ospreys, a



A Bald Eagle carrying its catch - a large Catfish.



Two Bald Eagles about to mate.



A pair of Bald Eagles looking over their snow-covered nest.

SEE BALD EAGLE, PAGE 9

Project for the Fight Against Federal Overreach

FROM PAGE 6

is a gathering of people who take democracy seriously and are willing to do what their oath requires to uphold the Constitution and the laws of the United States and also their moral oath."

Fairfax Commonwealth's Attorney Steve Descano said that federal agents are not shielded from local authority.

"The chaos you're seeing on the streets — the beatings, the abductions, the killings of everyday Americans just like you and me — these are the natural consequences of a federal government that thinks they're above the law and the rest of us are below it," Descano said. "If you're not on their team, [they believe] you have no rights and your life does not matter."

On Jan. 8, 2026, following the fatal shooting of Renee Good by an ICE agent in Minneapolis, Vance said in a White House press briefing, "The precedent here is very simple; you have a federal law enforcement official engaging in federal law enforcement action. That's a federal issue. That guy's protected by absolute immunity."

Referencing the coalition's acronym, FAFO, Descano added: "Unfortunately for those guys, we're in the 'find out' business around here."

In addition to Descano in Northern Virginia is Parisa Dehghani-Tafti, the Commonwealth's Attorney for Arlington County and the City of Falls Church. "It doesn't matter whether you're local police, county sheriff, state patrol, FBI, ATF," Dehghani-Tafti said. "You serve the public, you respect constitutional rights, and you follow the law. And when you don't, we will hold you accountable."

The coalition also includes two other Virginia Commonwealth's Attorneys, Stephanie Morales of Portsmouth and Ramin Fatehi of Norfolk.

Fatehi noted that this geographic spread creates a pincer effect, ensuring that federal agents face local oversight whether they are in the D.C. suburbs or the coastal south.

"Between Steve and Parisa in the North, and Stephanie and me in the South, there is nowhere federal agents can go in this Commonwealth to escape the reach of the law," Fatehi said. "We have effectively ensured that from the D.C. line to the Atlantic Ocean, the Constitution is not a suggestion, it is the mandate. If you are operating in the Commonwealth, you are in our backyard, and someone is watching."

The independence of these offices is anchored in the law. In Virginia, the four prosecutors are protected as constitutional officers under Article VII, Section 4 of the state constitution. This status ensures their independence.

Similar constitutional protections exist for other members of the coalition, including Texas District Attorneys Jose Garza of Travis County and John Creuzot of Dallas County, and Pima County Attorney Laura Conover of Arizona. Hennepin County Attorney Mary Moriarty of Minnesota, while holding a statutory office, maintains similar autonomous prosecutorial discretion under state law.

Krasner, of Philadelphia, described this combination of shared ideology, constitutional independence, and direct accountability to local voters. "We find ourselves in a moment when one of the most potent tools ... to try to preserve democracy in the United States is state prosecutors," he said.

Participants plan to convene next in February to coordinate accountability efforts across their respective jurisdictions, according to the Official Press Release issued by the Office of the District Attorney, City of Philadelphia on Jan. 28.[9]

Legislative and Executive Backup in Virginia

Cov. Abigail Spanberger used her executive power to sign Executive Order 10 on Jan. 17, 2026, her first day in office, fulfilling a cam. This order officially rescinded former Gov. Glenn Youngkin's Executive Order 47 (2025). Spanberger fulfilled a campaign promise to remove the mandate requiring state and local law enforcement to assist in federal civil immigration enforcement.

Providing legislative backup, state Sen. Saddam Azlan Salim of Fairfax is guiding three bills through the Senate Committee for Courts of Justice.

As of Jan. 29: SB 351: Prohibits civil arrests at courthouses and requires a judicial warrant for federal agents to enter. SB 352: Prohibits federal and state agents from wearing face coverings or masks during enforcement to ensure they can be identified for accountability. SB 783: Restricts which state officers can perform the functions of a federal immigration officer.

Salim said his bills are designed to keep "the chaos, lawlessness, and violence that we have seen perpetrated against Minnesotans from coming to Vir-

ginia."

He added: "The formation of this coalition sends a clear message: Virginia is not a 'no-man's land' where federal agents can ignore the law."

Salim's three bills (SB 351, SB 352, SB 783) are currently referred to the Senate Committee for Courts of Justice.

Salim has until Tuesday, Feb. 17, "Crossover" deadline, to get these through the full Senate.

Del. Alfonso Lopez (D-Arlington) is the chief patron of HB 1440, which would make it a Class 1 misdemeanor for federal agents to conduct "civil immigration arrests" in protected areas like schools, hospitals and courthouses. Agents could enter these areas only with a judicial warrant, a subpoena, or in exigent circumstances.

HB 1440 is moving through the House. The bill was assigned to House Public Safety Subcommittee #3 on Jan. 28. If it passes the subcommittee, it must then clear the full House Public Safety Committee before moving to the House floor. Like the Senate bills, this must pass the full House of Delegates by crossover, Tuesday, Feb. 17

Bald Eagle Activity Hints That Spring Is Coming

FROM PAGE 8

behavior that led Benjamin Franklin to disparage them as "a Bird of bad moral Character. He does not get his Living honestly ..."

Bald eagles mate for life and have what biologists call "nest site fidelity," meaning that they typically return to the same site each year.

Their nests of sticks, moss and other materials are typically five to six feet in diameter, some of the largest nests in the world. Females lay two to three eggs.

Still Some Threats

Threats to bald eagles include lead poisoning from ammunition and fishing tackle, unattended fishing line, mercury, fire retardants, collisions and habitat loss from shoreline development.

Learn More

Bald Eagle Basics, <http://www.allaboutbirds.org>

www.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM



Mature Bald Eagle.

PHOTO BY RANDY STREUFERT

An Icy Week in Richmond

FROM PAGE 7

Mark Your Calendar

Tuesday, Feb. 10
6am-7pm, at your regular polling place

❖ Special Election for the 39th Senate District. Delegate Elizabeth Bennett-Parker is the Democratic nominee.

❖ Special Election for the 5th House of Delegates District. Councilman Kirk McPike is the Democratic nominee.

Early Voting Times and Locations:

❖ Alexandria <https://www.alexandriava.gov/elections/key-early-voting-dates-deadlines>

❖ Arlington <https://vote.arlingtonva.gov/Elections>

❖ Fairfax <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/elections/early-voting>

New General Assembly Website

The Virginia General As-

sembly has a new website designed with constituents in mind. The updated platform makes it easier than ever to stay informed, allowing you to quickly find information about your legislators, watch live committee and floor sessions, and track legislation as it moves through the Assembly.

In Conclusion

Like everyone else, we have been dealing with the aftermath of the winter storm. The General Assembly rarely stops, so we've been in the office and continued to work. While crews work to clear our roads and sidewalks from snow and ice please remain cautious and stay warm.

If you have an issue that our office can help with please email us at senatorebbin@senate.virginia.gov or call us at (804) 698-7539.

Local Businesses Serve the Public Despite the Cold

PHOTOS BY GLENDA BOOTH

FROM PAGE 1

Burke and Herbert Bank's Sherwood Hall Branch closed on Monday and re-opened on Tuesday at 11 a.m., but half the employees could not get to work. "It was hard to clear the ice," said manager Arben Zeko, noting that ice patches still lingered on Jan. 30. "Our sidewalks are clean," he said. "We salt them two to three times a day." One irony of the "snowmagedden" is that the bank's automated teller machines, accessible outside to customers, work better in cold weather, he said.

Storms that force closures can be "really hard on restaurants," Dougherty said. "They cannot make up their loss because people will eat at home." She contrasted going out to eat with buying shoes from a retail store, explaining that people will wait and buy the shoes later so the store still gets the money.

Caroline Ross, River Bend Bistro owner and chef, had a different story. The Hollin Hall Shopping Center owner did a "really fine job," clearing the parking lot, she said, and she re-opened on Monday, Jan. 26, at 4 p.m. "Monday we were full," she reported, and the restaurant had a steady flow of diners. On Friday night, Jan. 30, "I was turning people away." She thinks "people wanted to get out of the house. The storm has not affected us adversely," she happily said.

As life crawled back to normal, another bright spot popped up. Cedar Knoll Restaurant on Jan. 28 announced, "We are open!" and not just open but on Jan. 29 the restaurant featured Ricardo and Jose, playing flamenco guitar music, "transporting you to the lively streets of Spain." This was just the tonic many needed, assuming they could get to their car and down their streets.

Buy Local

On Jan. 30, Bentley said that Variety Store customer traffic was "picking up," adding, "I'm grateful for the community that helped keep our doors open. The Hollin Hall Shopping Center is our town center. Our 'mom and pops' need to keep our doors open."

Knepp agrees, saying, "We try to be open for our neighbors."

"Local businesses are the backbone of our community," says Dougherty. "They support the community, they provide jobs for teenagers, they have all the services and products that people need. Local businesses are the ones that care about the community."

And during January's storm, Mount Vernon's businesses proved that point.

At the Belle View Shopping Center, the empty shopping carts could not reach their destination.



Toe warmers were popular purchases at Village Hardware.



Gray squirrels had to dig deep to find food.

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The Landfill's Becoming 'Birdy'

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

PHOTOS BY GLENDA BOOTH

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

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."

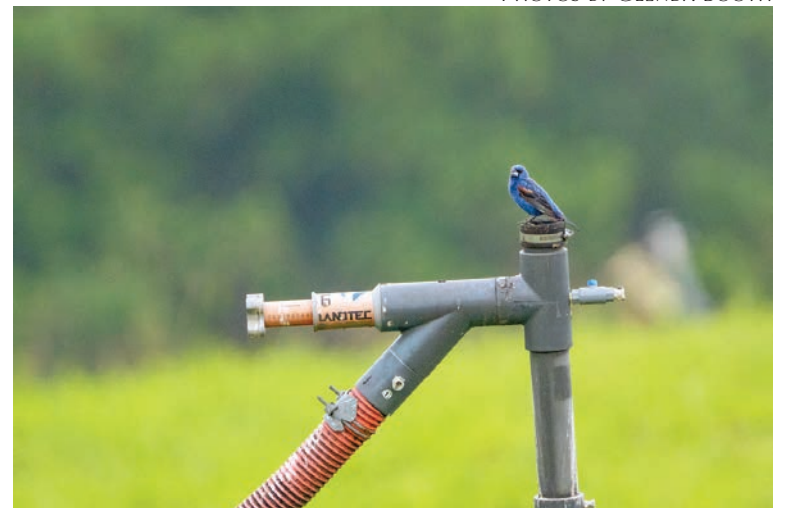
Grassland Birds

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



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."



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
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

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>

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ENTERTAINMENT

YEAR ROUND ON SATURDAYS

The City of Alexandria's historic Old Town Farmers' Market will temporarily move to the 100 block of North Royal Street and the courtyard at Tavern Square starting on Jan. 10, 2026. The new location is just across the street from Market Square. This move allows the market to keep operating during the upcoming renovations to City Hall and Market Square. The Farmers' Market has operated uninterrupted at Market Square since 1753. Because City Hall and Market Square will undergo major renovations starting in early 2026, the Farmers' Market must move to keep operating during the renovation. The Market Square Garage will also be closed during construction, and the new location provides easier access to nearby parking options. The Market Square Garage will be closed by Jan. 17. After this time, Farmers Market visitors are encouraged to use the Tavern Square garage (418 Cameron St.), which will offer FREE parking on Saturdays from 6:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. There is also parking at nearby Courthouse Square (111 S. Pitt St.). For a full list of parking locations, visit the Parking in Alexandria page. Shoppers can expect the same variety of local produce, baked goods, flowers, meats, dairy, and specialty items from over 70 vendors, now in a more spacious setting. The Market continues to run every Saturday morning from 7 a.m. to noon, year-round, rain or shine.

MEETS EVERY SUNDAY

Bird Walks. 8 a.m. At 6401 George Washington Memorial Parkway, Alexandria. Friends of Dyke Marsh organizers lead bird walks every Sunday morning. Meet at 8 a.m. in the south parking lot of the Belle Haven picnic area. Walks are led by experienced birders and everyone is welcome to join us.

MEETS EVERY MONDAY

Monday Morning Bird Walk. 7 a.m. Meets at 3701 Lockheed Boulevard Alexandria. The Monday Morning Bird Walk is sponsored by the Friends of Huntley Meadows Park and takes place every Monday at 7 a.m. April-September and 8 a.m. October-March. Following the walk, members of the group gather at the nearby Denny's for breakfast and to compile the morning's bird list. Call (703) 768-2525.

WEDNESDAY NIGHTS

Wednesday Night Bingo. 7 p.m. At Atlas Brew Works, 2429 Mandeville Lane, Alexandria. The Capital City Showcase, the company that brings you some of the DC area's best events, is hosting an amazing night of everyone's favorite game at Atlas Brew Works Alexandria. Win prizes on every round, and the winner of the final round gets a \$50 Atlas Brew Works gift card for your next visit! There's also \$6 select Atlas drafts! Plus pizza served from the world famous Andy's Pizza! Email at capitalcityshowcase@gmail.com

MGNV PLANT CLINICS ARE OPEN

The Alexandria Old Town Farmer's Market Plant Clinic at 301 King St., Alexandria operates on Saturdays from 7 - 9:30 a.m. Del Ray Farmers Market Plant Clinic at Oxford & Mt. Vernon Avenues, Alexandria operates on Saturdays from 8:30 - 11 a.m. The Arlington Farmers' Market at N. 14th and N. Courthouse Roads, Arlington operates on Saturdays from 8 - 11 a.m. The Fairlington Farmers' Market Plant Clinic at 3308 S. Stafford St., Arlington, operates on Sundays from 9 - 11 a.m.

YEAR ROUND ON SUNDAYS

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

ONGOING

Revolutionary War Exhibit. At the National
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The Last Days of RFK Stadium will be on display at Multiple Exposures Gallery at the Torpedo Factory in Alexandria.



Celebrate America's 250th Birthday starting now through the summer 2026 in Alexandria.

Museum of the U.S. Army, Alexandria. The National Museum of the United States Army has opened a special exhibition, Call To Arms: The Soldier and the Revolutionary War. The two-year exhibition commemorates this year's 250th Birthday of the U.S. Army and next year's 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. This 5,000 square-foot exhibition features a rare collection, specially curated by the Museum, that includes Revolutionary War artifacts from the original colonies, England, France and Canada. Among the exhibit's highlights are a pair of General George Washington's pistols, the original flag

of the 1st Rhode Island Regiment carried by the Army's first African American Soldiers, and a complete Loyalist uniform—one of the rarest items in the collection. The sword of British General Charles Lord Cornwallis, presented to Washington at the surrender at Yorktown, Virginia, will also be displayed for a limited time.

AMERICA'S 250TH BIRTHDAY

Starting now through summer 2026, Alexandria will host major events and experiences commemorating America's 250th birthday. Located on the Potomac River just

minutes from Washington, D.C. and George Washington's Mount Vernon, Alexandria, Virginia invites families, friends and history-lovers to stay in, explore and commemorate America's 250th birthday in a city older than the United States itself with a dynamic lineup of events and immersive experiences. Learn more and find additional details on these and other events at VisitAlexandria.com/250.

250th Events Itinerary:

❖ February 14: The oldest and largest George Washington Birthday Parade in the country
SEE CALENDAR, PAGE 15

NEW LOCATION 900 TABLES! BUY! SELL! TRADE! VPN

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Brown v. Board of Education SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE

Accepting Applications through April 12, 2026

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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News

Streams or Fairfax Streams

FROM PAGE 4

water chapter with Clyde Wilber.

Joni Calmbacher, Director of the Stormwater Planning Division, also highlights over 25 miles of stream restoration projects, the county's "enhanced stormwater management practices" at many public sites and public education programs.

Curtis attributed the lack of progress to "ongoing urbanization, stormwater runoff, erosion and other human impacts." He added, "Our efforts seem to be aiding 'holding the line' and helping these systems from enduring further degradation due to these ongoing impacts in their watersheds."

More Funds

County property owners pay a stormwater service district tax or \$0.0325 cents per \$100 of assessed real estate value to fund stormwater infrastructure. EQAC calls for increases in funding.

The Potomac River Is Stuck Too

The Potomac Conservancy's 2025 report card concluded, "The Potomac's overall health has stopped improving," as we reported earlier. The Conservancy reports that the river is not safe for swimming or fishing, that polluted stormwater runoff is increasing. This is the only source of pollution on the rise. Pollution is exacerbated by continuing forest loss and extreme weather and "driven by policies that tolerate industrial agriculture, unchecked development and reckless deforestation," the report contends.

The Potomac River is the drinking water source for five million people.

What Can People Do?

Curtis urges people to reduce fertilizer use, minimize winter salt use, pick up pet waste, plant native vegetation, maintain stream-side vegetation, reduce impervious surfaces, report dumping and join watershed groups and stream cleanups.

Lanfear advises, "Let the Board of Supervisors know that streams are important. We have 300 miles of streams amenable to restoration, which could take 60 years. Go visit a park. Most parks have streams. If you walk up to a stream, faced with a drop of four to eight feet, that's a degraded stream. If it looks like a drainage ditch, I hope you're not happy."

More information:

County stormwater management, www.fairfaxcounty.gov/publicworks/stormwater

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ENTERTAINMENT

FROM PAGE 13

- will run through George Washington's adopted hometown on the streets of Old Town Alexandria. The theme for the 2026 parade is "Virginia's Son ~ America's Founding Father."
- ❖ March: A new, major exhibit will open at Mount Vernon. Called George Washington: A Revolutionary Life, the exhibit will immerse visitors in Washington's world through recreated spaces, interactive role-playing, lifelike figures and artifacts.
 - ❖ March: A new exhibit will open at Gadsby's Tavern Museum highlighting Hannah Griffith, who ran a coffeehouse there from 1794-1800. The exhibit will explore her resilience during the Revolutionary War, its impact on families and her ties to Alexandria's modern entrepreneurs.
 - ❖ May-November: A temporary public art installation from artist Sandy Williams IV will commemorate the signing of the Declaration of Independence as part of the City of Alexandria's Time & Place public art series.
 - ❖ June 12-14: Alexandria's major signature 250th event, Sails on the Potomac, will host iconic tall ships as a Sail Virginia 2026 Affiliate Harbor and will feature a weekend packed with activities including Alexandria Jazz Fest performances.
 - ❖ June: A new exhibit will open at the Alexandria History Museum at The Lyceum. Called Stories of U.S. Collections Capture our History, the exhibit will bring out objects from the collection that are seldom seen.
 - ❖ July 3-4: Enjoy evening Fourth of July fireworks shows at George Washington's Mount Vernon on July 3 and 4, and a daytime fireworks show on July 4.
 - ❖ July 11: Take part in the City of Alexandria's 277th/USA 250th Birthday Celebration complete with fireworks, music and more at Oronoco Bay Park along Alexandria's waterfront.

JAN. 27 TO MARCH 8

The Last Days of RFK Stadium. At Multiple Exposures Gallery, Studio 312, Torpedo Factory Art Center, Alexandria. In this exhibition, Eric Johnson documents the ongoing demolition of RFK Stadium, a Washington, D.C. landmark for more than 60 years. His black-and-white photography captures the transformation of the stadium site as it progresses through its stages of demolition. It is both a record of the demolition and a farewell to a neighborhood fixture, marking a moment of transition as the city and team owners prepare for a new stadium and development on the site.

JAN. 29 TO MARCH 8

Continuum: An Athenaeum Sculpture Invitational. At The Athenaeum, Alexandria. Artists' Talk: Sunday, March 8 at 2 p.m. Continuum is a full gallery sculpture show, featuring floor and wall-mounted art as well as site-specific installations that take advantage of the gallery's high ceiling and unique light-filled space. Seven artists were invited to explore the concept of Continuum. Their works explore the connections that persist through continuity and gradual transformation, and the stories that evolve.

FEB. 6-28

"Lunar New Year: Year of the Horse" Art Exhibit. Del Ray Artisans presents "Lunar New Year: Year of the Horse" art exhibit celebrating traditions, mythology, and the dynamic symbolism of the horse in the zodiac through diverse interpretations inspired by movements, heritage, and storytelling with an emphasis on cultural respect and authenticity. View at Del Ray Artisans, 2704 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria. Gallery hours: Thursdays 12-6 p.m., Fridays 12-9 p.m., Saturdays & Sundays 12-6 p.m. Details at DelRayArtisans.org/exhibits

FRIDAY/FEB. 6

The Thirteen Concert. 7:30 p.m. At Virginia Theological Seminary/Immanuel Chapel, 3737 Seminary Road, Alexandria. The Thirteen explores the vocal music of Sergei

Rachmaninoff. "Beautiful and grandly mystical... exud[ing] a spiritual force that is deeply moving and restorative" (New York Times), Rachmaninoff's Liturgy exalts the power, beauty, and emotive range of the human voice. This concerto for choir in a symphonic palette has moved audiences for over 100 years with soaring melodies, rich harmonies, and vocal pyrotechnics.

SATURDAY/FEB. 7

39th Annual Mount Vernon District Town Meeting. 8:30 a.m. At Mount Vernon High School, Alexandria. Enjoy an informative exhibit hall featuring many County agencies and local service providers, as well as a special 250th Experience, created by the 250th Commission, highlighting our country's rich history. The official program will begin at 10 a.m., which will have a new version of our annual virtual tour, updates from local leaders and an opportunity to have your questions answered.

FEB. 7-8

Alexandria Warehouse Sale. Throughout Old Town Alexandria. Get ready for Alexandria's Warehouse Sale, the longest-running winter shopping tradition, returning February 7 & 8, 2026. Sponsored by Kristen Jones Real Estate, this highly anticipated event features 60-80% off at more than 40 independent businesses from Alexandria and the surrounding region in a walkable format. Shoppers can find a downloadable sale map and on-site QR codes to help explore storefronts, pop-up tents, open retail spaces, along King Street and more to score the best deals. For more information, visit <https://oldtownboutiquecommunity.com>.

SUNDAY/FEB. 8

Winter Lecture - Imperiled and Emboldened Insects. 1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. At Green Spring Gardens, 4603 Green Spring Road – Alexandria. (16-Adult) Our landscapes and gardens house a rich diversity of insects, some native, some non-native, some nice and some nasty. Explore with Mike Raupp, Professor Emeritus of Entomology at the University of Maryland, how many of our charismatic insects like butterflies, bees and fireflies are faring in our rapidly changing world and learn why the ongoing stream of dastardly pests like emerald ash borers and spotted lanternflies is unlikely to be stemmed. Not to be without hope, actions to help our imperiled friends and actions to mitigate the noxious pests will be discussed. \$15 per person. Register online at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/parktakes> or call Green Spring Gardens at 703-642-5173. Code N59.TII5

SATURDAY/FEB. 14

Art of the Heart. 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. At Green Spring Gardens, 4603 Green Spring Road – Alexandria. (Adults) Love has been a subject for artists throughout history. In honor of St. Valentine's Day, enjoy representations of the emotion on canvas. Discover art that shows love of many kinds – romantic, maternal, brotherly and patriotic. Be inspired, amused, moved, and elevated as we delve into the heart of art. \$18 (lecture only). Register online at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/parktakes> or call Green Spring Gardens at 703-642-5173

SUNDAY/FEB. 15

Winter Lecture - Colonial Seed Exchange. 1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. At Green Spring Gardens, 4603 Green Spring Road – Alexandria. (16-Adult) Discover how 18th-century neighbors built community through the exchange of seeds, cuttings and garden knowledge. Join Holly Gruntner, Mount Vernon's landscape historian for a look at how early Americans shared plants, ideas and innovations—shaping both their gardens and relationships. Explore the social and botanical networks that helped gardens thrive in George Washington's time. \$15 per person. Register online at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/>

parktakes or call Green Spring Gardens at 703-642-5173. Code KBC.XVYN

WEDNESDAY/FEB. 18

School of Rock. 8 p.m. At Little theatre of Alexandria, 600 Wolfe Street, Alexandria. The Board of Lady Managers of Inova Alexandria Hospital invites you to a benefit performance of School of Rock. A music teacher with illusions of rock stardom remakes a classroom of student misfits into a band of rockers -- no one said it was going to be easy -- and the rest is history! Get your groove on for an admission of \$50, \$70 (Patron), or \$130 (Benefactor.) Proceeds benefit the Board's support of continuing advances in the hospital's medical technology. For tickets and info, call 703-548-9485 or go to <http://www.boardodladymanagers.org>.

THURSDAY/FEB. 19

"What's New in 2026". 8:30 to 11 a.m. At George Washington Masonic National Memorial, Alexandria. During this event, Visit Alexandria will talk about travel trends and research shaping our destination; how it's promoting Alexandria as part of America's 250th; and they'll debut the brand-new destination marketing campaign. The event will begin with networking from 8:30 to 9 a.m. followed by the program from 9 a.m. to approximately 10:30 a.m. Immediately following the program, informational tables will be available for a deeper dive into some of the event content.

MARCH 6-28

The "Assembly: Together We Grow" art exhibit explores the power of gathering and how it helps us grow, care for one another, and cultivate belonging. From shared meals and family traditions to festivals, and protests, gathering shapes our lives. View the member showcase at Del Ray Artisans, 2704 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria VA. Opening Reception: Friday, March 6, 7-9 p.m. Gallery hours: Thursdays 12-6 p.m., Fridays 12-9 p.m., Saturdays & Sundays 12-6 p.m. Details at DelRayArtisans.org/exhibits

SUNDAY/MARCH 8

Learn about Vultures. 3 p.m. At Mount Vernon Government Center, 2511 Parkers Lane, Alexandria. Wildlife rehabilitator Heather Shank-Givens will make an in-person presentation on Virginia's fascinating vultures and bring wildlife ambassador black vulture, Dusty. Vultures are a critical component of the ecosystem, but they are frequently misunderstood and maligned. Ms. Shank-Givens will explore the natural history of vultures in Virginia, their unique biology and ecology, global conservation concerns and human-vulture conflicts and mitigation strategies.

THE BIRCHMERE

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

FEBRUARY

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Sat. 21: The Ocean Blue w/ Brian Tighe of The Hang Ups \$39.50 SOLD OUT!
Sun. 22: Daryl Davis Presents: Thanks For The Memories 2025! \$39.50
Mon. 23: Billy F. Gibbons and the BFG Band \$89.50
Fri. 27: Masters of Hawaiian Music: George Kahumoku Jr, Led Kaapana, Sonny Lim \$39.50
Sat. 28: BILAL \$49.50

"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.



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