

Mount Vernon Gazette

MOUNT VERNON'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER • A CONNECTION NEWSPAPER

FEBRUARY 19, 2026

Town Hall Meeting Featured George Washington Himself

Historic impersonator shared the stage with local officials on a cold morning.

BY MIKE SALMON
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

On Saturday, Feb. 7, Supervisor Dan Storck (D-Mount Vernon) opened the doors for the 39th Annual Mount Vernon District Town Meeting, giving residents a glimpse of things going on in Mount Vernon.

Guest speakers were Chairman Jeff McKay, U.S. Rep. Don Beyer and other officials, and then George Washington himself talking about the nation's 250th anniversary. These town meetings began in 1988 with the late Supervisor Gerry Hyland. "He began this great tradition," Storck said.

The morning started off with an exhibit hall consisting of county agencies and local service providers and then everyone shuffled

into the auditorium where Storck highlighted things that are going on in Mount Vernon. Other speakers included County Executive Bryan Hill and School Board member Mateo Dunne.

George Washington talked about crossing the Delaware River on Christmas night, while Beyer discussed these troubling times and the fact that his office addressed over 3400 resident cases last year.

During the question and answer portion, McKay got a question about being protected from ICE. "We will do everything we can to prevent ICE from terrorizing our residents," he said.

The meeting ended with a look at Storck's latest video which gave an overview of the district, featuring the bike facilities in the area, the new rec center and the Summer Palooza event that Storck had last summer.



PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED

The colors are presented to the audience at the Mount Vernon Town Hall Meeting.



U.S. Rep. Don Beyer (D-8)



George himself.



There was much discussion in the exhibit hall.

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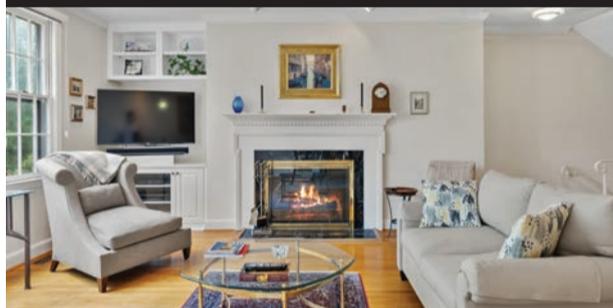
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ACM ATLANTIC COAST
MORTGAGE

Prolonged Cold, Snow Exacerbated Needs

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

January's and February's 20-plus-day stretch of subfreezing temperatures, hard packed snow and ice was one of the coldest periods in the Washington region since the 1970s. Few were unaffected by the harsh weather. The snow started to come down on Sunday night, Jan. 25, continued on Monday, followed by sleet and persistent freezing temperatures that solidified "snowcrete" in place for weeks.

Extreme, extended cold periods accentuate the existing gaps in our system for people who are experiencing homelessness, are homebound, need support or live paycheck to paycheck.

"What it means to be in a crisis of poverty is heightened," says Rev. Kameron Wilds, pastor of the Rising Hope Mission Church.

"Our clients become more underserved," said Leah Fraley, Chief Executive Officer of United Community. Rising Hope and United Community are local non-profits that help people, many at risk, build stable lives.

Transportation

Along the U.S. 1 corridor in southeastern Fairfax County where many residents rely on public transportation, snow piles on the highway's sides left by plows and icy sidewalks meant that riders could not access bus stops and had to walk in the streets. Some had to wave down the buses. Under normal circumstances, U.S. 1 is one of the county's most dangerous roads for pedestrians.

"No one could use public transportation safely," said Fraley. She saw someone on U.S. 1 trying to navigate in a wheelchair.

Some apartment dwellers welcomed their cleared parking lots, but managers created "mini-snow mountains" in parking spaces so car owners then had to dig out their cars, if they could penetrate the frozen piles.

People Who Are Unsheltered

Rising Hope typically provides overnight housing to around 40 people per night, from 5 p.m. to 6 a.m. "The system is not designed to care for people during the day," said Wilds. He noted that in more normal weather, some people go to public buildings and malls during the day, but during severe weather, public buildings can be closed. "Everyone scrambles. There is nowhere to go." He stresses, "There is insufficient shelter already," and the prolonged cold created "cha-

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Many sidewalks on U.S. 1 were covered with snow which meant people had to walk on the busy highway.



Snow piled up around U.S. 1 bus stops made them difficult to access.



United Community has a food pantry at 7511 Fordson Road that was able to stay open.



Rising Hope provides services to people experiencing homelessness. The church's philosophy is "Love unconditionally, include everyone and celebrate life."



PHOTOS BY GLENDA BOOTH

os."

With staff and volunteers unable to get to Rising Hope, some staffers had to stay at work for over 48 hours, from Saturday afternoon, Jan. 24, to Monday morning.

Wilds said that even in "normal times," countywide, there are an "insufficient number of beds" for people experiencing homelessness, so the faith community tries to fill in some gaps and house people overnight in churches. "That works ok in some cold weather, but during long stretches of cold and ice, the system is not designed to take care of people during the day," he said.

Food Stress

Rising Hope's food market had to close during the week of Jan. 26. Their trucks could not get out to pick up food from grocery stores and since volunteer partners were snowed in, they could not bring food donations or meals to the site.

United Community's food pantry on Fordson Road was able to reopen on Tuesday and distributed

food. Fraley applauded Wegman's supermarket which donated 3,000 pounds of meals ready to heat up. Wegman's regularly donates food to the agency, but "They gave more in the storm," Fraley said.

Rob Rutland-Brown said that the Lorton Community Action Center was closed the whole week, Jan. 26 through Jan. 30 so he could not distribute food. Normally over 300 families shop for food there three times a week, but the center's ramp was buried under snow and volunteers could not pick up food donations from grocery stores. The center could not deliver food to the 30 families they typically serve a week. With sidewalks and the ground blanketed in icy snow, the one-third of their clients who walk to the center could not get there.

Stuck at Home

Many people along the U.S. 1 corridor work in retail jobs, cannot miss a shift and cannot work remotely. "They have to be at work," said Fraley, adding, "The whole effort to get there was dangerous."



In 2024, artist Nico Cathcart painted this mural on the east side of Rising Hope's building. The lantern symbolizes the mission church's warmth and light.

Wilds lauded a hero, a man in the landscaping business with a four-wheel-drive vehicle who mobilized friends and offered some transportation.

Serious Challenges

What are the most serious challenges? Wilds has a ready response: "Current systems are not sufficient for the level of homelessness in our county and the system is designed

to only work when we leverage the help of neighbors. If they cannot get there, the system collapses." He adds that people should "not assume that the county is taking care of it. They don't. In good and bad weather, we rely on the community to rally together."

Fraley offered a sobering note. "We are all vulnerable, just one situation away from needing help," she said.



West facade and entry of Gunston Hall in the snow.



View of Gunston Hall mansion from the Riverside Garden.

PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER ECK

Christopher Eck Named Executive Director of Gunston Hall

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

Gunston Hall, “the Home of American Rights,” has a new leader, Dr. Christopher Eck, who started as executive director in January at this historic site on Mason Neck in southeastern Fairfax County.

“I believe that Virginia is blessed with a treasure of significant historic sites, such as Gunston Hall,” Eck said in a Feb. 12 interview. “They are especially relevant in this 250th anniversary year of both George Mason’s writing of the Virginia Declaration of Rights and the founding of the United States.

“People want to connect with the tangible places where history was made, where the figures of our past lived and where the ideas and ideals that shaped our nation began,” he continued. “Just like with great art, we all want to see the ‘original’ of something, because our historic sites are imbued with meaning from their physical witness to the people and events that made us who we are.”

Eck has worked in historic preservation, archaeology and public administration for over two decades in academia and federal and local government. Prior to this position, he was executive director of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission at the National Archives, where he managed grantmaking to preserve and digitize non-federal historic documents, like George Washington’s papers.

A registered professional archaeologist,



SUSANA RAAB/NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Christopher Eck.

Eck has also held preservation and cultural resources positions with the U.S. Departments of Defense and Commerce, the General Services Administration and metropolitan governments.

He grew up in Atlanta, Georgia, majored in history at Loyola University in New Orleans, Louisiana, received a master’s in historical archaeology from the University of Massachusetts and a law degree from the University of Miami. He has taught historic preservation law at the university level. He, his wife and two college-age children live near Warrenton, Virginia.

2026 Plans and Events

Gunston Hall will commemorate the 250th anniversary of the June 12, 1776, Virginia Declaration of Rights with special programming and public events.

Eck’s plans also include a March screening of a film about Phillis Wheatley, an 18th-century African-American writer, that was filmed at Gunston Hall and Mount Vernon Estate; a gala on May 16 and July 4th speakers. “Families in Focus” will offer programs on the Masons and enslaved families that lived there. Ongoing events include colonial food demonstrations, history talks, cocktails by candlelight, 18th century game nights, school and other tours and nature walks.

Eck works with the Descendants Advisory Board which is composed of people who trace their ancestry to people enslaved at Gunston Hall.

Mason’s Legacy

Gunston Hall was the plantation of the Mason family, starting with George IV’s great-grandfather, George I, who fled England in the 1650s after the defeat of the Royalists. George Mason IV helped author the Fairfax Resolves asserting the rights of the then-British colonists and the 1776 Virginia Declaration of Rights, 16 articles that historians say was the first founding document to call for individual liberties such as freedom of religion and freedom of the press. This landmark document had far-reaching impacts, including influencing the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution’s Bill of Rights.

Mason refused to sign the new U.S. Con-

stitution, mainly because it lacked a bill of rights, amendments added in 1791, a year before his death. One irony in Mason’s life is that he fervently believed in individual rights and supported a revolution to free the nation from the British monarchy, but he enslaved people, lived in a house built by enslaved people and never freed his slaves.

Mason lived his whole life on Mason Neck, Eck said. “Philadelphia [for the Constitutional convention] is the longest trip he ever took,” but like many of Mason’s contemporaries, he “wrote and read a lot,” writers such as Montesquieu, an 18th century French philosopher who is credited with the governmental theory of the separation of powers.

Gunston Hall is an accredited museum, a national historic landmark and a popular tourist destination. Today’s 554-acre property is one-tenth of the original plantation’s size and home to the Masons’ 3,200-square-foot mansion, several outbuildings, a restored 1780s garden and the remains of a barn’s foundation.

“We are thrilled to welcome Christopher Eck as our new executive director,” said Virginia Nicholson, first regent of Gunston Hall, in an announcement. “He brings with him a powerful combination of historic preservation knowledge, archaeological background, strategic leadership and deep passion for our mission.

Chris is the ideal leader to guide Gunston Hall into our next chapter of growth and impact.”

To help preserve the legacy of one of the nation’s founders is “phenomenal,” Eck said.



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My Farewell Column

BY SEN. ADAM P. EBBIN

My last day in the Virginia Senate is today, Feb. 17. Thanks to your support, I'm concluding a 22-year career in the General Assembly with great pride in all we have accomplished together. We leave a legacy of equality, fairness, and meaningful progress for Virginians. Later this month, I will join Governor Abigail Spanberger's administration as a Senior Advisor at the Virginia Cannabis Control Authority.

Serving in the General Assembly has been the greatest honor of my life. Representing Northern Virginia first in the House of Delegates and then in the Virginia Senate has been a responsibility I never took lightly. In the 39th Senate District, I was a voice for 216,000 Virginians who speak more than 127 native languages. I came to public service because I believed government could be a force for good. Not perfect, not always fast, and certainly not easy — but transformative. After all these years, I believe that more strongly than ever.

In 2004, as the first openly gay state lawmaker, I was aware that simply being here carried a responsibility larger than myself. Over the years, Virginia has changed. Today, there are LGBTQ Virginians serving openly, authentically, and unapologetically at every level of government. I see them every day around Capitol Square and call them colleagues, future leaders, even Mr. Secretary. That progress did not happen by accident, and I am deeply humbled to have played a role in helping move this Commonwealth closer to a place we can all be proud of.

We experienced many more firsts, including the first women of color to serve in leadership positions, first Muslim members, first transgender person elected, first female and Jewish House speaker, first Black House speaker, the first Black Attorney General and the first Muslim Lieutenant Governor in the country. The General Assembly is a truly much more representative citizen legislature than Thomas Jefferson could have ever envisioned. This alone has led to the ability to craft more compassionate, thoughtful, and inclusive policies.

As Mr. Jefferson said, "I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and Constitutions. But laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new

truths discovered and manners and opinions change, with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times." I am pleased to say we have.

With your help, we enacted major policies that protect and advance civil rights, strengthen education, expand access to healthcare, safeguard our environment, and stand up for working people. I am grateful to many colleagues whose hard work, tenacity, and moral courage helped us create a better Virginia.

I am particularly proud of our work on modernizing state law to protect LGBTQ people from discrimination in their daily lives, including in employment, housing, and public accommodations. The Virginia Values Act of 2020 established new protections for all Virginians. The law, the first of its kind in the South, passed with strong bipartisan support. Former Delegate Mark Sickles, now Secretary of Finance, partnered with me on the legislation. Former Senator Jill Vogel, a Republican from Fauquier County, provided key support. I shared many fun moments in the Senate with her, Janet Howell, and Jennifer Wexton.

This fall, Virginians will finally be able to vote on the Marriage Equality Amendment, which would cement protections for same-sex unions. It's time for the state Constitution to accurately reflect the law of the land and make sure loving Virginia couples are not mistreated or discriminated against, even if federal protections are stripped away. As a legislator, one of my great privileges has been the ability to officiate at weddings. While I no longer will do that, it gave me great joy to share a couple's special day.

When I first entered the General Assembly, I saw too many lives upended by a simple marijuana charge — jobs lost, futures delayed, families hurt. And for far too long, that harm was baked into our laws. That is no longer the case. The times have changed and so have our laws.

So many people pick up the torch on cannabis. In 2020, House Majority Leader Charniele Herring of Alexandria joined me to sponsor legislation decriminalizing marijuana. The next year, she and Senate President Pro Tempore Louise Lucas of Portsmouth worked closely with me to pass a new law legalizing possession of marijuana. I'm also indebted to Delegate Paul Krizek of Mount Vernon, a steadfast partner



Ebbin

on many bills; J.M. Pedini; and David May.

With your help, Medicaid expansion became a reality. Immigrant moms now have access to prenatal care. We were able to provide support to victims of human trafficking. I'm proud of our efforts to

ban firearms in state-owned buildings. I visited five prisons around the Commonwealth, including the supermax Red Onion Correctional Center, to improve conditions.

During my time as a legislator, there were some special moments. When I first joined the House, looking up at the beautiful ceiling of Mr. Jefferson's Capitol was a daily reminder of the rich history of the General Assembly. In 2007, I attended the 400th anniversary of the signing of the charter for the Virginia Company beneath the vaulted stone ceilings of the Honorable Society of the Middle Temple in London, where the legal profession was born. And on January 17, I witnessed Governor Spanberger make history and shatter the glass ceiling.

There are so many people to

thank. First, I must acknowledge my parents. If they hadn't campaigned for me in 2003, I never would have won by 43 votes in a five-way primary. They're my biggest supporters. I thank my family for their patience and understanding of a job that rarely respects evenings, weekends, or holidays.

I've been fortunate to know many great local officials who I've been able to turn to for advice and counsel, among them Alexandria Mayor Alyia Gaskins, former Mayor Justin Wilson, Delegate-elect Kirk McPike, and former Arlington Board Member Katie Cristol. Congressman Don Beyer is always accessible and has great ideas. Then-Governor and now Senator Mark Warner appointed me to be his Chief Deputy Commissioner of Labor and Industry. Senator Tim Kaine has been an inspiration as one of the most decent, genuine and honest public servants I've ever met. Delegate Patrick Hope of Arlington has been a great friend and ally, on our multi-year effort to stop the sale of vapes to children.

Senator Janet Howell used to say I was the best prepared senator. But SEE MY FAREWELL, PAGE 15



PHOTO BY JANET BARNETT/GAZETTE PACKET

Mount Vernon District Supervisor Dan Storck as Abraham Lincoln in the George Washington's Birthday parade in Alexandria on Saturday, Feb. 14. Masthead etc

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Chamber Celebrates Excellence At 2026 THE BEST in Business Awards

BY DAVID GRIFFIN
MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS,
MOUNT VERNON SPRINGFIELD
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Mount Vernon Springfield Chamber of Commerce 2026 THE BEST in Business Awards on Thursday, Feb. 12, brought together business leaders, nonprofit partners, and community members to recognize and celebrate excellence, innovation, and remarkable achievements in the local business community. The awards program was sponsored by Stout & Teague Co.

The BEST in Business Awards recognize not only individual success stories but also the broader impact strong businesses have on the region through job creation, local investment and support for the organizations and people who call this area home.

Chairman Mark Viani, Bean, Kinney & Korman PC, opened the luncheon by highlighting the endurance of local businesses and their role in shaping the community's identity despite changing economic conditions. The strength of the local business environment is built on relationships, trust, and joint effort.

Vice Chair Marissa Eyon, FAST-SIGNS Springfield, reinforced that message, noting that the awards are designed to honor more than just financial success. She said that the Chamber looks for businesses to honor that demonstrate integrity, community engagement, innovation, and that take the time to invest in the people and places around them.

Celebrating Business Excellence

The BEST Large Business of the Year award was presented to ServiceMaster National Capital Restoration. The company has provided restoration and specialty cleaning services throughout Northern Virginia for nearly 40 years. ServiceMaster was recognized for its dedication to quality customer care during some of the most challenging moments families and businesses face.

The BEST Mid-Sized Business of the Year was awarded to Springfield Town Center, a cornerstone of the regional retail landscape. The Town Center has become a community gathering place with many holiday activities and events. Its constant investment in the area shows a commitment to both commerce and connection.

Receiving the BEST Small Business of the Year honor was Unwined Alexandria. Since opening in 2004, Unwined has built a reputation for its wide (and carefully crafted) selection, personalized service, and a friendly atmosphere. They have grown while preserving the personal, neighborhood atmosphere that defines a true small business.

The BEST Nonprofit Organization of the Year award went to AUSA - Potomac Liberty Chapter. The organization plays an important role in supporting soldiers, veterans, and military families across the region through scholarships, leadership programs, and community outreach, strengthening ties between the military and civilian communities.

Next, The Cut Butchery was named as the BEST New Business of the Year. Since opening, The Cut has quickly established itself as a dependable source for high-quality meats and locally sourced products, focusing on craftsmanship, customer relationships, and community participation.

Honoring Individual Leadership In addition to organizational awards, the luncheon recognized individual contributions that have strengthened the Chamber community.

The Chamber Citizen of the Year award was presented to Dan LaMay of Dan's Van Lines. LaMay was honored for his consistent involvement in Chamber programs, his leadership within networking groups, and his willingness to mentor and assist fellow members. His involvement reflects the type of engaged participation that helps the Chamber's initiatives succeed year after year.

This year also featured a special Liberty Legacy Award, created exclusively for 2026 in recognition of the 250th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. This award was presented to George Washington's Mount Vernon for its role in preserving and sharing the legacy of the nation's founding. As both a historic landmark and a major regional attraction, George Washington's Mount Vernon contributes to education, tourism, and the local economy in a one-of-a-kind way.

More Than Awards

As Chairman Viani and Vice Chair Eyon moved between award presentations, a consistent theme appeared: local success is interconnected. Large employers rely



BEST Award Winners including ServiceMaster National Capital Restoration, Springfield Town Center, and Unwined Alexandria; with BEST Nonprofit AUSA - Potomac Liberty Chapter and Dan LaMay, Citizen of the Year.

on small vendors. Nonprofits collaborate with businesses. Retail centers support service providers. The Chamber helps foster those connections, and the atmosphere

in the room reflected that spirit.

The Chamber congratulates all award recipients and thanks the sponsors, attendees, and partners who helped make the event a

unique celebration of local achievement. Photos from the event, winners, and nominees can be seen on the Chamber's Facebook page at facebook.com/MtVSChamber.



Public Notice

Updated weight limits on Virginia bridges and culverts

In accord with state and federal law, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) has imposed new or changed existing weight restrictions and installed new signage indicating the updated weight restrictions on the following bridges and culverts (structures) in Virginia within the last 30 days.

Jurisdiction	Fed Struc Id	Route #	Route Name	Crossing	Posted Date
CRAIG	5556	692	ROUTE0692	CRAIG CREEK	1/21/2026
LEE	10967	743N	ROUTE743	CLEAR SPRING BRANCH	1/21/2026
PATRICK	13342	677	WILLIS GAP ROAD 677	EAST FORK JOHNSON CREEK	1/16/2026
FRANKLIN	8012	876	BYRD'S MILL ROAD 876	BRANCH PIGG RIVER	1/12/2026
ROCKBRIDGE	15619	691	RURAL VALLEY ROAD (ROUTE 691)	CEDAR CREEK	1/7/2026
ALLEGHANY	1041	159	DUNLAP CREEK ROAD (ROUTE 159)	TRIB DUNLAP CREEK	1/1/2026
WASHINGTON	18854	19N	PORTERFIELD HIGHWAY	HAYS BRANCH	1/1/2026
SCOTT	16553	23N	US HIGHWAY 23	BRANCH	1/1/2026

The list above is not a comprehensive list of all structures with weight restrictions in the Commonwealth but shows only structures that have new or changed weight restrictions within the last 30 days. The list contains only basic structure identification and location information and the date the new or changed weight restriction and signage became effective.

For a full listing of all bridge and culvert weight restrictions with detailed information about specific structures, including location data and actual weight limits, visit vdot.virginia.gov and navigate to Traffic and Travel/For freight operators/Truck restrictions. This page references a posted structures report and a GIS map tool that contain detailed information about restricted structures in Virginia. To receive email notifications regarding new or updated weight restrictions for structures statewide, complete the sign-up form on the web page.

Notices regarding bridges and culverts with new or updated weight restrictions are published monthly by VDOT. For additional information or questions, please contact haulingpermits@vdot.virginia.gov or the Load Rating Program Manager, Manjil Devkota at 804-786-4064.

The Virginia Department of Transportation is committed to ensuring that no person is excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any of its programs or activities on the basis of race, color, or national origin, as protected by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. If you need further information on VDOT's Title VI Program or special assistance for persons with disabilities or limited English proficiency, please contact the Virginia Department of Transportation's Title VI Program Specialist at 804-786-2730 or corina.herrera@vdot.virginia.gov.

Motor Squad Protects Walk for Peace

Fairfax County police provide safety for all.

By SUSAN LAUME
THE GAZETTE

As the Venerable Monks of the Walk of Peace chari-ka traveled across ten states in sunlight and darkness, in fair and poor weather, on country roads with almost no one to witness their passing, or along major thoroughfares lined with thousands of people, there was one constant presence. Sheriffs or their deputies, patrol officers or chiefs, wearing uniforms of small community rural offices or large city or county departments, escorted the monks. Although they wore many different uniforms they shared the same mission: safety for all.

In the early hours of darkness before sunrise on Feb. 8, ordinary looking vehicles began appearing one by one at a quiet parking area off US Route 1, just over the Fairfax County/Prince William County line. Lights were off, engines running, to combat the 11 degree temperature. After a dozen or more vehicles filled the lot, uniformed officers began to emerge and gather. They assembled to hear their final pre-operation instructions. The unit was the Motor Squad; their Commander, Lt. Tyler Lamper. Their operation: to escort the Walk for Peace through Fairfax County.

Lamper indicated no threats



Motor Squad officers gather before dawn for pre-operation instruction

were expected, but the helicopter and drone unit were alert as a precaution if needed. The Department's crowd control unit was expected to assist at stop points. The major responsibility for the assignment fell to the Motor Squad.

The specialized unit consists of 28 full-time officers, and draws on supplemental staff as needed. In their normal duties, they perform a variety of operations: community outreach programs, VIP and funeral escorts, and traffic enforcement. They are experts in controlling traffic flow to maintain thoroughfares and traffic safety. They are a motorcycle unit recognizable by their high uniform boots. In winter snow conditions, they often trade motorcycles for a variety of closed vehicles. The vehicles for the day's conditions were unmarked and equipped with inconspicuous

banks of police red and blue flasher lights, and a full regiment of radios and other police equipment inside.

While the monk's plan to travel through Northern Virginia was known for several weeks, details of their exact travel routes were available with only a few days' notice. That created a challenge in coordinating a large contingent of officers and the liaisons necessary with multiple jurisdictions. Even as the arrival time drew close, the details of the actual timing were in flux. As the weather worsened, it was not clear what impact it would have on the monks' walking pace and schedule. As is typical with escort operations, providing assistance required flexibility to match changing needs, timeframes, and routes, requiring the squad to adapt on short notice, with radi-



PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION

Walk for Peace monks approach Fairfax County line along US Rte 1

oed coordination between unit members and other county departments.

After confirming assignments and understanding by each unit member, another waiting period began. At about 6:30 a.m., with unit members on-station nearby, Lt. Lamper waited to hear from the Prince William Police Department when the monks began to move after their overnight rest.

The communication came about 7:14 a.m. The monks were leaving their overnight stop to begin their journey north on Route 1. The escort responsibility would transfer to Fairfax County after a few more miles.

When the monks reached that unmarked boundary line, just over the Occoquan River bridge, Lt.

SEE MOTOR SQUAD, PAGE 11



Crowds line US Rte 1 in Fairfax County



Capt. Harold Morris and Lt Tyler Lamper welcome monks to Fairfax County

A Conversation on Character

McChrystal to lead ASF Feb. 27 fireside chat.

BY JEANNE THEISMANN
GAZETTE PACKET

Few leaders embody the intersection of discipline, service and community impact as fully as General Stanley McChrystal, the retired four-star U.S. Army officer known for commanding Joint Special Operations Command and later U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

While his military career is widely documented, his ongoing commitment to civic leadership, particularly his support for organizations that strengthen communities, receives far less attention. One of the most meaningful examples of this commitment is his connection to the Alexandria Seaport Foundation.

“General McChrystal and his wife Annie have been supporters of the Seaport Foundation for some time now,” said ASF executive director Deb Roepke. “A board



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Retired Gen. Stanley McChrystal will be the featured guest at a fireside chat on building character Feb. 27 at Belle Haven Country Club. The event will benefit the Alexandria Seaport Foundation.

member brought Annie in for a tour of our workshop and she saw the way ASF is transforming the lives of young people at risk.”

McChrystal will be the featured speaker at a special event in support of the Alexandria Seaport Foundation. He will lead a fireside chat on building character Feb.



Matt Roberts, program director for the Alexandria Seaport Foundation, will be a speaker at the fireside chat on building character Feb. 27 at Belle Haven Country Club.

27 at Belle Haven Country Club. McChrystal will be joined by ASF program director Matt Roberts. Roberts holds a Doctor of Education degree from the University of Pittsburgh and will focus on learning in non-traditional settings.

“The fireside chat will focus on building character,” Roepke said.

“They will discuss leadership and building character, highlighting the vital work of the Seaport Apprentice Program. And they will explore insights from the General’s latest book, ‘On Character: Choices That Define a Life.’”

SEE A CONVERSATION, PAGE 14



ALEXANDRIA SEAPORT FOUNDATION PRESENTS

BUILDING CHARACTER: A CONVERSATION WITH GENERAL STANLEY McCHRISTAL

Join us for an intimate evening with Retired General McChrystal and Seaport’s Program Director, Dr. Matt Roberts. They will discuss leadership, building character, and the vital work of the Seaport Apprentice Program.

**FEBRUARY 27
6:00PM
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Walk for Peace Reaches Fairfax County

Mindfulness and inner peace message resonates with many.

PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION

BY SUSAN LAUME
THE CONNECTION

“**M**ay you and all beings be well, happy and at peace.” That was the recurring blessing shared by a group of Buddhist monks as they endured the vigors of a 110-day, 2,300-mile pilgrimage. They walked with their loyal dog from Fort Worth, Texas, to Washington, D.C. The journey culminated in their widely attended event of a Global Loving-Kindness Meditation and other gatherings in D.C. at the National Cathedral and Lincoln Memorial. All were welcomed “to make a significant affect on our world.” Their stated mission from the start — to promote peace, compassion, and nonviolence across America and the world.

The Monks in Fairfax County

The Walk of Peace reached Fairfax County on the morning of Feb. 8; their 106th day of walking. They crossed the Occoquan River Bridge on US Rte 1, stopping for a brief welcoming introduction by their new Fairfax County Police escort

They faced bone chilling temperatures, and hilly miles walking along U.S. Rte 1 that morning to reach their lunch stop and rest at Hoa Nghiem Pagoda on Backlick Road. After lunch they continued on to their overnight stop at Mount Vernon Presbyterian Church on Sherwood Hall Lane. There they entered Alexandria, concluding their trek through Fairfax County.

The group walked through the county in much the same way as they had walked since leaving Huong Dao Temple in Fort Worth Texas, on Oct. 26. They walked quietly in single file along the roadway. Forgoing their bare foot travel, they added closed shoes here; a concession to the bitter cold. They carried no backpacks, instead toting a few essentials on sling shoulder bags. They handed out bead strings to several they encountered on their way and at rest stop visitations, a Buddhist symbol of protection and blessings. Volunteers assisted with arrangements enroute, following with an RV and a couple of support vehicles. Support staff took videos and live-streamed the journey. One monk often took photographs documenting their encounters.

For centuries, monks traditionally have engaged in journeys of pilgrimage to foster person-

SEE WALK FOR PEACE, PAGE 12
10 ❖ MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE ❖



Children bring their message of peace to the monks



Recognizing the steps of the monks toward peace



Reflecting back the monk's message of striving for a peaceful day



Amy Orr, Gaithersburg



Vanessa Vizcarra, Burke



Sreeja & Gamesh Rajamani, Ashburn



Linh Dang, Woodbridge, and Thanh Kha, Springfield

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Motor Squad Protects Walk for Peace

FROM PAGE 8

Lamper, joined by Captain Harold Morris of the Traffic Division, greeted the monks with a welcoming introduction, a bouquet of flowers, and mementos of their entry into Fairfax County.

Law enforcement jurisdictions along the way have provided badges to add to the lead monk's robe. Commander of the Mount Vernon Police Station, Major Jeff Mauro, would later present a Fairfax County Police badge and shoulder patches at the monks' lunch stop, continuing the remembrance practice. At the county border, in a few minutes, the monks, already looking cold in the 11-degree temperature, walked on. The choreographed operation of traffic control and pedestrian protection began.

Experienced officers, obviously well accustomed to working together, held traffic, blocked intersections and lanes and managed traffic with surgical agility on the busy highway. As they progressed to on-ramps from I-95, State Police shut down exits to Route 1 temporarily. Where possible, and when the monks took a rest break along the way, the squad opened lanes and intersections to aid the flow of traffic.

As the monks walked, the north side of the highway was closed. Managing the overflow of hundreds of observers flowing into the roadway at points along the way was taken in stride, and with understanding of the enthusiasm of the many people who had come to see the monks and share the Walk of Peace experience.

Escort vehicles moved slowly, at a pace in sync with the walking monks. Those in escort vehicles following behind the quiet of the main contingent saw observers, many hugging, smile and wave to the support vehicles. Many shouted out, "Thank you for protecting the monks."

When the procession reached Backlick Road, the unit aided the lane crossing over south bound Rte 1, to the monks' planned lunch rest stop at the Vietnamese Buddhist Hoa Nghiem Pagoda.

There the monks ate and held a private visitation with government officials, addressing the crowd before continuing their walk north. The Motor Squad stood at ease until the monks returned to their journey. Then the synchronized process of lane and intersection closures, and slow progression, repeated itself as the procession continued north to the monk's night stop at Mount Vernon Presbyterian Church on Sherwood Hall Lane.

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WALK FOR PEACE

Storm and cold brought few observers on Buffalo Rd near Raleigh NC, one of the few spots without crowds along the monks' pilgrimage



Sgt. Steve Cicinato provides left lane sweep control and answers questions about the police operation

There the jurisdiction changed to Alexandria's police, ending a twelve-hour shift for the Motor Squad.

Members of the Motor Squad attain an elite level of driving skill. During their months at the police academy, officers participate in two weeks of police driving skills training, including skilled backing, braking, handling speed, and controlling skids. Officers in the Motor Squad regularly exhibit cone drills on motorcycles, and are adept at car handling. Perhaps at the skill level of race car drivers, however, one must note, race car drivers rarely must exhibit backing or parking skills on the track, as these officers do daily.



Mount Vernon Unitarian Church

1909 Windmill Lane • Alexandria VA 22307

WWW.MVUC.ORG

The Mount Vernon Unitarian Church recently wrote a Statement of Witness and Public Commitment regarding the shocking ICE events we see happening all over these United States of America. Our church works hard to alleviate the stress that has been caused to so many. Our Social Justice Ministry has

reached out to local churches and groups who are active in this area of expertise to enable us to help as much as we can. If you find yourself looking for some solace, we want you to know you are welcome to attend our services any Sunday at 10am to meet Rev. Dave Clements and many more friendly faces.

A Statement of Faithful Witness and Public Commitment

We, the members of this Unitarian Universalist congregation, raise our voices at this moment in history because **silence is not neutral**.

To remain quiet when human dignity is threatened is to abandon our deepest values. Grounded in our Unitarian faith, we affirm the **inherent worth and dignity of every person**. We stand for **human rights, for integrity, for community engagement, for democracy**.

Our Unitarian tradition has never been neutral in times of moral crisis. From abolition to civil rights, to marriage equality, our faith has taught us that **love demands resistance, and justice** requires courage.

Therefore, we commit ourselves to:

- Speaking out publicly and faithfully
- Engaging in nonviolent action for justice
- Educating ourselves and others
- Voting, organizing, and advocating
- Standing with those most at risk

We do this not out of fear, but out of love. Not out of anger alone, but out of hope. Not because it is easy—but because it is right.

This is who we are.
This is what our faith calls us to do.

Walk for Peace Reaches Fairfax County

FROM PAGE 10

al spiritual development. In contrast, this Walk for Peace effort employed modern day communication methods to embrace a huge audience through social media; attracting the attention and admiration of more than 4.5 million Facebook and TikTok followers online. Many hundred thousands more followed their progress in print and network media. Sharing their planned path each day, they attracted thousands to line their way, some traveling hours to see them, lining the roadways, offering quiet support, flowers, or food, and holding signs with words of encouragement. The public was often invited to join them for a visitation as they made daily lunch and overnight rest stops. At a time when many people felt anxiety over national and world events, the monks' message resonated.

Reaction

Although the crowds were large, they were mostly quiet. Some spoke a "thank you" to the monks, but there was little shouting or loud questions. The monks were permitted to pass quietly. Many who came held signs to convey their messages to the monks. The signs, some drawn by children, contained words: such as, peace, hope, kindness, thank you; the peace symbol; or messages repeated from the monk's talks heard on social media: "May you be well, happy, and peaceful." "Today will be my peaceful day." Many offered flowers. The offering of flowers in Buddhism is a traditional act of respect and devotion.

There were many, many flowers. Some strewn on the pathway, some handed to the monks singly or in bouquets. The monks often accepted flowers, and often gave a gift of flowers back to those along the path.

After the monks passed, there were many signs of emotional impact in the crowds, spontaneous hugging and tears. Many described their admiration for the monks, the need for their message, and a desire to support that message. Along their Lorton travel path, Sreeja Gamesh, of Ashburn, said she was there "To support peace. The world needs this message more than ever before."

Amy Orr of Gaithersburg wanted to witness the march first hand. "The message is needed across the country. It's inspiring."

Vanessa Vizcarra of Burke, whose family is originally from Chile and has lived in the U.S. for thirty years, began to tear as she said, "I really needed this. The state of everything in our country. It's hard to wake up and feel peace."

At the monk's pagoda lunch stop, a crowd gathered outside. Rande Wittkopf and Jody Rumelili of Fairfax, friends and teachers attended together. "It's a beautiful thing they are doing; especially now, to spread peace and kindness and I wanted to be a part," said Wittkopf. "It gives us hope. I have been incredibly sad about the atmosphere, the state of the country. The number of people coming out [for the monks] gives me hope."

T. John and Amy Mutzel of Springfield said "their message — people are hungry for it." T. John grew up in the Congo.



Rande Wittkopf and Jody Romelili, Fairfax



T. John and Amy Mutzel, Springfield



Kenny and Nhi Byrant, northeast Texas

Thai and Phvong Truong of Alexandria are members of a nearby buddhist temple. Thai was born in Vietnam and came to the U.S. 30 years ago. "The monks and walk are a good moment. It's up to all of us to promote peace and kindness, the same as the monk's path."

Kenny and Nhi Byrant journeyed here from northeast Texas. Nhi was born in Vietnam and has been in the U.S. since 2017. She described the Walk for Peace as "a historic moment. ... After watching on Facebook, I wanted to be in on seeing America



Thai and Phvong Truong, Alexandria



Crowd awaits the monks' appearance at their lunch stop at Noa Nghiem Pagoda

turn out. Not many know much about the walks, but how much of an understanding do you need to get their message?"

Mother and daughter Liah Dang of Woodbridge and Thanh Khan of Springfield bundled against the cold. "We are following the peace monks and came out to support and pray for them. It's inspirational, showing you can do anything."

The Mission

As noted by crowd members, Buddhism may be less well understood by Westerners than mainstream Western religions. Yet the monks' promotion of hope for peace, compassion, kindness and nonviolence is universally understood. The monks made clear that they were not advancing a religion or political position. There was no prominent solicitation for donations. They asked that people "look at the monks, not to see them, but to slow down, take a deep breath and find peace."

Respect for the monks and their journey on foot in adverse conditions with little protection was obvious in the numbers of those who turned out to share their journey in a small way by bearing witness and honoring

their passage with hands in prayer.

Reaching their 100th day milestone in Richmond, the monks were greeted at City Hall by Richmond city officials, legislators in the General Assembly, and Virginia Governor Abigail Spanberger. The Governor noted in her remarks that her proclamation in their honor was her first. She officially recognized Feb. 2, 2026 as Walk for Peace Day in Virginia.

The Walk of Peace "officially" ended on its 110th day with large gatherings in Washington DC for multiple events on Feb. 10 - 11. The monks invited Venerable Monks and Nuns, from all Buddhist traditions, to join them on Feb. 10 for a gathering of monastics; to walk with them, and come together in the spirit of unity, compassion and shared purpose.

All people were invited to join them for a gathering at the Lincoln Memorial for an evening meditation.

The meditation was live-streamed for world participation, and drew a huge crowd at the memorial and around the reflecting pool. The monks returned home to Texas by bus on Feb. 12 after a walk stop in Annapolis Md.

PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME/THE GAZETTE

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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> **Continuum: An Athenaeum Sculpture Invitational will be held now through March 8, 2026 at The Athenaeum 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:

❖ 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.

NOW THRU 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.

NOW THRU 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.

NOW THRU FEB. 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

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.boardofladymanagers.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.

SATURDAY/FEB. 21

Workshop - Hand-Bound Watercolor Journal. 9:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. At Green Spring Gardens, 4603 Green Spring Road - Alexandria. (16-Adult) Make a hand-bound journal by sewing signatures together filled with watercolor paper and various types of paper. Then create a unique cover and add other special touches to some inside pages. Your journal will be a unique treasure ready to be filled with drawings, paintings or writing. It will be special, but it is made to be used often. \$112 per person. Register online at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/parktakes> or call Green Spring Gardens at 703-642-5173. Code Y1S.BZWC

SEE CALENDAR, PAGE 15

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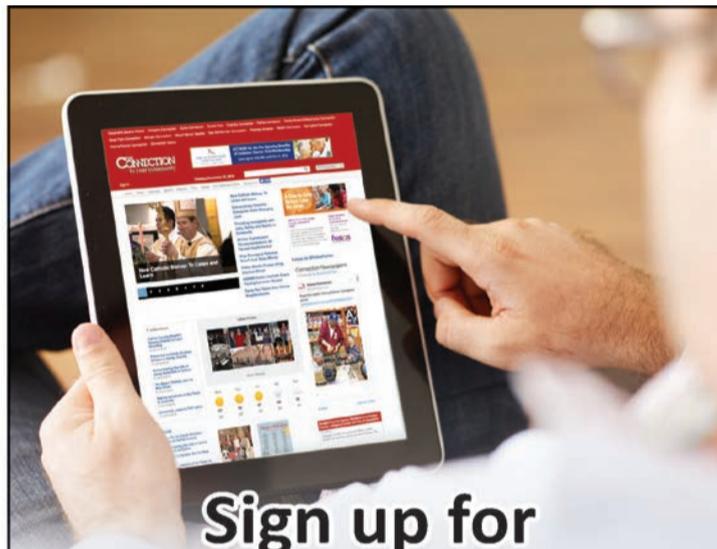
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NEWS

**A Conversation
on Character**

FROM PAGE 9

Located on the Potomac River waterfront in Old Town, the Alexandria Seaport Foundation is a nonprofit dedicated to helping young people build better futures. Its mission centers on workforce development, hands-on learning through boatbuilding, mentorship, and life-skills training, all designed to support youth who face academic, economic, or personal challenges.

The Seaport Foundation's Apprentice Program uses traditional boatbuilding as a vehicle for teaching math, craftsmanship, and teamwork to participants ages 18-23.

Said Roepke, "Participants don't just build boats. They build confidence, discipline and a sense of purpose."

The long-running Apprentice Program remains the organization's cornerstone initiative. Apprentices spend six to nine months immersed in woodworking and traditional boatbuilding, gaining job-readiness skills, life skills, and the support of experienced mentors. Recent updates highlight the program's continued success in helping participants pursue higher education, obtain driver's licenses, and transition into the workforce.

In addition to local programming, the Alexandria Seaport Foundation is elevating its national profile by participating in a year-long Boatbuilding Educator Fellowship through the Teaching With Small Boats Alliance. Roberts and volunteer Katherine Hamilton recently joined other educators in shaping a curriculum for a future national certification in wooden boatbuilding, an achievement that underscores ASF's leadership beyond Alexandria.

The fireside chat event will include a reception and buffet dinner and attendees will receive a signed copy of McChrystal's latest book "On Character." The evening will include a silent auction featuring a private dinner with General McChrystal and his wife.

After leaving military service, McChrystal shifted his focus to education, leadership consulting, and public service. He became a Senior Fellow at Yale University's Jackson Institute for Global Affairs and co-founded the McChrystal Group, a leadership advisory firm headquartered in Alexandria.

The evening is hosted by Rob Dugger and Joan Huffer and all proceeds will benefit the Alexandria Seaport Foundation. Visit www.alexandriaseaport.org for more information.

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FROM PAGE 13

SUNDAY/FEB. 22

Winter Lecture – Native Roots & Stories. 1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. At Green Spring Gardens, 4603 Green Spring Road – Alexandria. (16-Adult) Join Smithsonian Gardens horticulturist, Christine Price-Abelow for a fascinating lecture on the garden surrounding the National Museum of the American Indian. Learn about the carefully selected native plants, their cultural significance, and the stories they tell about the land and Indigenous traditions. Discover how the landscape honors the connection between plants and the American Indian community. \$15 per person. Register online at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/parktakes> or call Green Spring Gardens at 703-642-5173. Code T11.XP9E

SUNDAY/FEB. 22

Tea, Glorious Tea. 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. At Green Spring Gardens, 4603 Green Spring Road – Alexandria. (Adults) There's nothing quite like it for all kinds of things. Tea can be used in a multitude of different, and surprising, ways – from cleaning Persian rugs to feeding plants. We'll help you get the most out of your used tea bags or leftover brew with a variety of practical uses for tea. \$18 (lecture only). Register online at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/parktakes> or call Green Spring Gardens at 703-642-5173. *All tea food for this afternoon tea will be made with no gluten-containing ingredients but

cross-contamination is possible.

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.

THURSDAY/MARCH 19

2026 General Assembly Breakfast. 8:00-10:00 a.m. At Hilton Alexandria Old Town, 1767

King Street, Alexandria. Join in a timely and lively conversation as our delegation reflects on the 2026 session, breaks down the legislation that will most impact our community, and offers behind-the-scenes insights into the debates, negotiations, and defining moments that shaped the final outcomes. From budget priorities and education to transportation, public safety, and economic development, this is your opportunity to hear directly from the lawmakers who were in the room where it happened.

Legislators Confirmed:
Senator-Elect Elizabeth Bennett-Parker
Majority Leader Delegate Charmiele Herring
Delegate Alfonso Lopez
Delegate-Elect R. Kirk McPike

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

Thu. 19: Mohini Dey \$35.00
Fri. 20: esperanza spalding \$96.00
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

My Farewell Column

FROM PAGE 6

the truth is, I only looked good because of some great legislative aides, including Benjamin Jones, Parker Treichel, Chris Leyen, and Henry Watkins. The Senate staff, Clerk's office, and the Division of Legislative Services are extraordinary.

However, it's only with the support of my constituents that I have been able to be a force for progressive change. To the people

of Alexandria, Arlington, and Fairfax: Thank you for trusting me to be your voice. I will never forget the people who sent me to Richmond. Senate District 39 will be in excellent hands with Elizabeth Bennett-Parker. She will be a strong advocate.

As I reflect on the past 22 years, the words of a Jesus Jones song come to mind: "Right here, right now, there's no place I'd rather be ... watching the world wake up from the his-

tory." I've been witness to and part of history. Together, we've made a difference. The day I was sworn into the house, my late Aunt Janice gave me a note that I always kept behind my desk. It said, "Never forget the little guy." I hope I have lived up to her words. Thank you for the honor to serve.

Thank you,
Adam P. Ebbin
Member, Senate of Virginia

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.

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 flexible 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.
Farmer's Market Volunteers Needed. To volunteer for the Farmer's Markets, email Brian Morreale, brianmorreale@gmail.com

SUPPORT GROUPS

Postpartum Support Virginia sponsors a free, bi-monthly support group for women suffering depression and/or anxiety during pregnancy or in the first year following childbirth. Meets on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of each month at Inova Alexandria Hospital, Health Education Center, rooms 1-2, 4320 Seminary Road. Contact co-moderator Susan Doyle at suzjdoyle@gmail.com or 571-403-0673.

The Parkinson's Disease Support Group of Alexandria meets the 1st Wednesday of each month at 2 p.m. At the Hollin Hall Senior Center, Room 109, 1500 Shenandoah Road. All Parkinson's patients and caregivers are welcome.

FACE Center Support Groups provide parents with a space to share their daily parenting frustrations and triumphs while offering new strategies for helping parents to cope, build positive parent-child relationships and best support their children's learning.

❖ Support Group in English, every Monday, 6-7:30 p.m. at ARHA Main Building, 401 Wythe St.

❖ Support Group in Spanish, every Wednesday, 6-7:30 p.m. at Community Lodgings Brookside Center, 614 Four Mile Road.

Registration not necessary. A light dinner and childcare services provided free. Contact

Krishna Leyva at 703-619-8055 or krishna.leyva@acps.k12.va.us for more.

Divorce Workshop for Women. Second Saturday of each month, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. at Hilton Alexandria Old Town, 1767 King St. The workshops are designed to provide education on the legal, financial, family and personal issues of divorce in a logical, yet compassionate way. The workshop fee is \$25. Visit www.novasecondsaturday.com for more.

ONGOING

Backflow Preventer (BFP) Assistance Program. The City of Alexandria has reinstated its sewer Backflow Preventer (BFP) Assistance Program for homeowners in designated areas that historically experience basement back-ups or flooding. The program reimburses homeowners for up to 50 percent of the cost of installing a BFP device by a licensed plumbing contractor, up to a maximum of \$2,000. The current program period is through Dec. 31, 2019. Alexandria homeowners should call the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services at 703-746-4014 or visit www.alexandriava.gov/tes.

Robust Walking. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at 9 a.m. at Mount Vernon Recreation Center, 2701 Commonwealth Ave. Free 55+ robust walking 1-hour exercise class (with chair exercise option). No class on holidays. Contact jjkingconsulting@yahoo.com.

Heads Up Or Else



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

As a Bostonian, born, bred and buttered, when snow (or even Washington, DC's version: "wintry mix") is in the forecast or on the ground it doesn't cause my spine to get chilly. But once my car is warmed up and the heated steering wheel is warming up, driving locally becomes as much about awareness, expecting the unexpected, keeping your hands at 10 and 2 and minimizing the use of your cell phone, whether in-hand or hands-free. As for the radio/entertainment center, the radio seems less problematic now as many automobiles feature its controls on the steering wheel. As such, there's not the distraction/loss of focus as when the controls were located solely on the dashboard. Driving in Washington, DC under these wintry conditions then becomes more about survival than it does about getting where you're going. As many Virginia roadside signs used to advise: "Arrive Alive."

And between the municipalities, the car manufacturers, and AAA, among many other car-driving advisory groups, safety of driver, passengers and vehicle has become an ever-evolving business. However, while driving during our most recent storm (snow on the ground for three weeks and counting) I was unexpectedly impacted by a safety feature of my German-engineered car: the "Lane Departure Warning" system. Located/illuminated on the dashboard, under the steering wheel, it's warning words are clear to see. What's not as clear is what to do when the system seizes control of your steering wheel. When it happens, it seems like "The Outer Limits" television show (1963-'65) - and its introductory warning/voice over during the credits, is coming back to scare you. And what the "Lane Departure Warning" system does is take control of the steering wheel to gently-ish get the car you're driving back in its lane without really considering the other variables on the road. I wouldn't characterize it as a design flaw as much as it's a reality check. (By the way, this course correction occurs whether there's snow on the ground or not.) In effect, it's protecting you from yourself. Snow on the ground however complicates the system. The scenario to which I refer is the one which often occurs when snow falls/accumulates faster than the "snowplowers" are able to pile it safely away. As a result, roads sometimes go nowhere, and/or end prematurely - and for this there is no warning. You just have to pay attention.

For perfectly understandable reasons, the late January, "snowcrete," as we've come to title it, caused many familiar problems. Many neighborhoods were left to fend for themselves. However, the snow-related problems also included many "main/numbered roads as well which resulted in a nightmare scenario: snow accumulation being plowed into driving lanes leading to incomplete lane clearance which caused havoc with the lane-sensitive warning systems.

What I'm referring to/have experienced is when the road you're traveling on becomes no more and you have to swerve into the adjacent lane where the drivers already in that lane are not as aware of your car's predicament as you are. In the midst of this observational dilemma comes the problem I mentioned earlier: you have less control of your own car as the "Lane Departure Warning" system has taken hold of your steering wheel. And it's forcing your car back into your original the lane, the one from which you're trying to escape, like it or not. And even though you may not like it, you can't really stay right as you'll drive directly into a snowbank. If you move left, against the warning system's grain - so to speak, you'll potentially cause an accident which will likely take months/year's maybe to adjudicate. As my late father would say: You "have a confliction." Either you'll slam your car into the snowbank blocking your lane or you'll have to "lane" left without having proper time to look/prepare - each choice made with the warning system working against your predicament. Hardly what the manufacturers intended. Presumably, the system was designed/ to avoid accidents, not create them.

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



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19 homes SOLD in 2026 so far and 80 homes SOLD in 2025!



8711 Millbrook Pl | \$775,000



4008 Sulgrave Dr | \$960,000



6404 13th St | \$1,245,000



3903 Belle Rive Ter | \$3,995,000



3608 Center Dr | \$1,550,000



8047 Fairfax Rd | \$1,375,000



4302 Adrienne Dr | \$899,000



3713 Maryland St | \$780,000



4301 Laurel Rd | \$740,000



1600 Lafayette Dr | \$1,565,000



2410 Ryegate Ln | \$760,000



5304 Cedar Ct | \$599,950



4412 Tarpon Ln | \$900,000



3026 Battersea Ln | \$765,000



1804 Mason Hill Dr | \$995,000



9420 Ferry Landing Ct | \$1,550,000



4112 Ferry Landing Rd | \$1,250,000



4504 Neptune Dr | \$875,000

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