

# CONNECTION

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

## Lifting Up With Reading

PAGE 6

Eight-year-old Ella Michaelson of Springfield, reading at the event, said the "Pizza and Taco" series are her favorite books.

## Driving a Golden Saxon For Equal Rights

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## Fairfax County Historic Garden Tour

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OPINION, PAGE 5 ♦ SENIOR LIVING, PAGE 10 ♦ ENTERTAINMENT, PAGE 12

PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION





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NEWS

Attend Film Festival for Free

NOVA International Film Festival & Music Festival in April.

BY SHIRLEY RUHE  
CONNECTION NEWSPAPERS



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

**Fernando Mico, NOVA International Film & Music Festival Director**

Drama, documentaries, comedy and even a little horror — they've got it all at the Twelfth Annual Northern Virginia International Film & Music Festival Thursday, April 9 and Friday, April 10. It is being held at the LOOK Dine-in Cinemas at the Boro, Tysons. The film screenings will run from approximately 5 p.m.-11 p.m. both nights.

"We look for films that have quality and that magic—you know that 'ah ha' moment," says Fernando Mico, NOVA Festival Director. "Our brand is glamour, elegance and excellence."

Mico says no year is the same. "In the first year for some reason we had a lot of horror film submissions. This year we have the first short film submission from France, and documentaries are up."

There is also a local connection with "909," a music video, which was filmed in part in Arlington, and "The Floaters," a comedy by an Arlingtonian about a struggling musician who takes a last resort job

supervising misfits at her childhood Jewish summer camp.

And Fairfax County resident and retired federal government employee Michael J. Volpe has won multiple screenwriting awards for a romantic drama he recently completed.

Mico adds, "Although we have films from across the United States and across Europe, we quickly found

that many of the filmmakers have some kind of attachment to the DMV area. A big number identify with the area because they have a connection; they know somebody or have a relative, and it is a destination area."

Mico is from Alexandria where he has lived all of his life "except for a short stint in LA where I took a grown up job for a few months as a colorist for Marvel Comics, all the big titles you still recognize like Spiderman." He moved back to Alexandria 3 years later and went back to school. "After a few bumps and bruises I learned how films work."

His work in school won "action film of the SEE ATTEND FILM FESTIVAL, PAGE 14



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# The Learning Experience Offers Kindergarten Readiness



Cutting the ribbon are (from left) FCED's Monika Blakely, Catherine Read, TLE's Grace Huxtable-Mount, Trinace Grant, Kaitlin Kellison and Ebony Malave, Jennifer Rose and FCED's Tara Borwey and Andrew Wilson.

## A place for education, childcare and fun in Fairfax City.

BY BONNIE HOBBS  
THE CONNECTION

Ribbon cuttings aren't always done when a new business first opens its doors. But doing them even a year later doesn't make them any less heartfelt. And that was the case when the City of Fairfax recently gave an official welcome to The Learning Experience Academy of Early Education (TLE).

Located at 10698 Fairgrounds Drive, next to the Boulevard VI residential community along Fairfax Boulevard, it doesn't just offer childcare, but an innovative approach to early childhood education. Serving children from 6 weeks through preschool, TLE provides a cheerful, nurturing environment. And by teaching lessons and values via a cast of characters led by Bubbles the Elephant, it also makes learning fun.

TLE has 460 locations nationwide, including 20 in Virginia. The one in Fairfax is open Monday-Friday, 6:30 a.m.-6:30 p.m., and has several rooms divided by age, plus a colorful, imagination room where children play and learn in a pretend town. There's also a fenced-in, outdoor play area in the

back. For more information, go to <https://thelearningexperience.com/>.

Grace Huxtable-Mount, who owns this center, first heard about Fairfax City from one of her best college friends who lives in the area. "She's been telling me for years to open a school in Fairfax," said Huxtable-Mount. "She said, 'No one here does what you do.' And with all these new, young families moving in, there's a need for high-quality childcare and education for their children. They want them to have a solid, research-based foundation to make sure they're ready for kindergarten."

At the outset of the ribbon cutting, Tara Borwey with Fairfax City Economic Development (FCED) said she started working as a preschool teacher, "so these businesses are super near and dear to my heart. I know how much work they take, how much care you have to have for your job. I also know how lucky parents are to have people they can trust with their kids, because that's such a huge step to take. And I'm so glad you chose the City for this business."

Calling it a very important addition to Fairfax, Mayor Catherine Read said, "Dr. Grace Huxtable-Mount could have chosen any other location, but she chose our City. And she's establishing a business that's so much needed in our community. I had three children in five years. And for all of us who are parents who work hard and have small children, we understand trying to find somebody

who will lovingly and safely care for your children.

"You worry about costs – especially if you have more than one – and you think about the fact that this isn't just someone taking care of your child, it's early childhood education. So the learning [happening inside] The Learning Experience is very key here. Your child's first learning experiences – from language to walking to learning to play in a group and stand in a line – all of that is under the caring direction of the staff at The Learning Experience."

"This is what parents truly care about – what is my child going to learn while they're in the care of someone else?" continued Read. "Dr. Huxtable-Mount has centered her business around early childhood education, and I think that's a distinguishing factor for people looking for where their child will spend their time from infancy through early toddlerhood and into their school-age years. And with whom will they spend it?"

"Here, they'll learn from a caring staff of people who will treat them like their own – and that is literally priceless. And I say this knowing that it's about the cost of a mortgage payment [to go here] for many families who have to have childcare. I also acknowledge that our City – which is expensive to live in – often has dual-income parents, and childcare is a must."

Read noted, as well, that TLE began with 10 students here and now has 65, and many of its students' families come from far away because they work here, while



BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

Flanking Grace Huxtable-Mount while she speaks are (from left) Catherine Read and Trinace Grant.



From left, Catherine Read and Kaitlin Kellison chat inside the imagination room.



From left, teachers Andrea Meija and Alajah Davis working with children, ages 2-1/2-3.

others live close by. "Working families with long commutes have to choose on which end [of their drive] their children will be," she said. "So The Learning Experience offers our local businesses an asset for their employees' children."

Jennifer Rose, executive director of the Central Fairfax Chamber of

Commerce, said she, too, was excited to have TLE in Fairfax City. She agreed with Read that "having great, safe, affordable childcare in a community is a very important concern for employers."

Rose also stressed the significance of providing a good, edu-

SEE THE LEARNING, PAGE 9



Alex Kim



Jake Kang



Bomin Lyoo enjoys some lunch while working.



Jennifer Rose



Tina Disch



De'Ayre Talley chills with an iced latte while studying.

# A Spot for Coffee, Food, Conversing and Studying

## Common Culture Coffee is a big hit in Fairfax City.

BY BONNIE HOBBS  
THE CONNECTION

Ask the customers, and they'll tell you honestly what they think of a local business. And in the case of Common Culture Coffee in Fairfax City, they're giving rave reviews.

Recently picking up lunch there was prominent Fairfax attorney Peter Greenspun, who works upstairs and comes there a couple times a week. "I've had everything from sandwiches to coffee, and it's all been really good," he said. "I'd absolutely recommend it to others."

"I think [the owner] Alex Kim has the right formula for success here and is going to do great," he continued. "It has an open, fresh, clean, pleasant ambience and is an easy place to get what you need."

Indeed, on a random weekday afternoon at 2:30 p.m., Common Culture was packed with people in their 20s and 30s eating, sipping coffee and other beverages, chatting with friends and working on their laptops. And the vibe was laid back and chill.

It's also in a convenient location because – at 3955 Chain Bridge Road – it's the first thing people see when exiting the parking-garage elevators onto Old Town Plaza. Hours are Monday-Friday, 7 a.m.-9 p.m. (kitchen closes at 6:30 p.m.); Saturday, 8 a.m.-9 p.m.; and Sunday, 8 a.m.-4 p.m. (kitchen closes at 3:30 p.m.). To see the menu or order online, go to [commonculturecoffee.com/menu](http://commonculturecoffee.com/menu).

Bomin Lyoo, who lives and works in Fairfax City, is another happy customer. She enjoyed her chicken/spicy mayo sandwich with onions, tomato, lettuce and a side of fries while doing accounting work on her computer.

"I love it – I'd give it a 5 out of 5," she said. "The spicy mayo sauce is really tasty, and everything is very fresh. This is also a great place for working because it's very spacious and light. And it's not too loud, so it's good for studying."

Although the previous business there also offered coffee, Kim said it was really more of a deli. So, he said, "I wanted to make it more of a coffee and gathering spot. And after I changed the hours and the theme, more people came in to eat and study. I also added outside seating with a [black, wrought iron]



About to cut the ribbon are (from left) Tara Borwey, Catherine Read, Jake Kang, Alex Kim and FCED's Monika Blakely.

rail around it. And inside, I moved the chairs and tables a little closer together so people could talk."

He also added self-service filtered water, so people coming in could feel "cozy and welcome," said Kim. "I added real, instead of fake, plants plus an air purifier. And I installed background music indoors and outdoors." Then to initially attract customers to the newly revamped site, he made an Instagram post, welcomed the former customers and also gave people samples of the new menu items.

"I wanted to make it comfortable for everyone so they could enjoy their drinks and study," he explained. "And every single day, I'm really thankful for our customers finding us and coming in, again and again."

One of them is City resident and GMU senior De'Ayre Talley. He was there studying recently and had just finished a refreshing iced latte made with oat milk and hazelnut. "I can still taste the coffee," he said. "It has a good flavor."

He also had the spicy turkey sandwich with a side salad. "I liked it, and the bread was crunchy on the outside and soft on the inside," said Talley. "They definitely used the correct amount of mayo, and the sandwich tasted really good. I'd recommend Common Culture to other people because it's a great place to come and eat and study."

The coffees include everything from double espressos to cold brews, cappuccinos and lattes flavored with vanilla, caramel, matcha, cardamon, white and chocolate mocha, lavender, and hazelnut. There are also non-coffee drinks such as chai and other types of teas, lemonade, refresher beverages and hot chocolate.

"We get our coffee from Grace Street Coffee Roasters in Georgetown," said Kim. "Our beans are a specialty grade for a fuller, flo-

ral, fruity flavor and aroma. So our coffee isn't bitter, but juicy and like a nice, black tea."

Regarding the food, he said the spicy turkey/avocado sandwich is especially popular for lunch, but several others – such as a BLT, tuna melt, grilled chicken with bacon and mozzarella, steak and cheese, and caprese – are offered, too. There are also salads and wraps, as well as burgers and chicken tenders, plus veggie, steak or chicken quesadillas. Customers may also enjoy French and bistro fries, tater tots and soup.

Breakfast choices are bagels, croissants, English muffins and toast with various toppings; a breakfast sandwich or burrito; and a pancake platter that comes with eggs and a protein. But that's not all. Diners may select from six different types of omelets, as well: Steak (sliced ribeye with cheddar, green pepper, onions and mushrooms); hearty (chicken, spinach, mushrooms, onions, green pepper and cheddar); Western; Spanish; egg white; and mushroom (with spinach and Swiss cheese). Breakfast is served weekdays until 11:30 a.m., and weekends until 1:30 p.m.

Several months after Common Culture opened, City officials formally welcomed the new business with a ribbon cutting. Tara Borwey, programs manager with Fairfax City Economic Development, said Kim invested in this venture and "worked really hard to add his own touches to it."

"He's also brought one of my favorite things – pour-over coffee – and I'm super excited to have that here in Old Town." She then told him how happy they all were to celebrate his business, along with Mayor Catherine Read, other members of Fairfax City Economic Development, Jennifer Rose from the Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce (CFCC) and Tina Disch from the Old

Town Fairfax Business Assn. (OTFBA).

"Thank you, Alex, for choosing this location for this coffee shop and gathering place – which is really important," said Read. "It's interesting that you named it Common Culture; because one of the things we take pride in is how diverse our City and George Mason University are. And our diversity is our strength."

"But coffee, gathering, eating and conversation are common to everyone. And you've created a space where the Common Culture is connection and coffee. You're welcoming people to your lovely, outdoor space – where people can sit outside, as well as indoors – and you're here in the plaza, right in the heart of the Old Town District."

We're all looking forward to coming here and enjoying your coffee," continued Read. "And I hope we can live up to our own goals of being good partners with our local businesses."

Jake Kang, the store's operations manager, acknowledged everyone who came to celebrate with them, adding, "A small business like ours doesn't happen in isolation. It truly takes a whole community's support, and we thank you for that."

"We also thank our team members for their passion and hard work," said Kang. "This isn't just a ribbon cutting for us, but a sign that we're opening the doors – not just to serve coffee – but an environment for getting together as a community."

Now a 9-year City resident, Kim said, "I love this area, so I wanted to open this place here and I finally did."

"We're so happy when our residents become business owners," replied Borwey. "They help enrich this place, investing in their own neighborhoods and communities."

OTFBA Executive Director Tina Disch said, "I park in the nearby parking garage and come in Alex's shop many times a week. I love that he connected the dots. This site was a coffee shop before, but he's taken it to a whole other level."

"He moved things around intuitively inside and even invested in equipment to make the best coffee. It's an all-around homerun, and the testament is that it's full of customers. It's like that every day now, and it wasn't before, and I'm really proud of what he's done."

Lastly, CFTC Executive Director Jennifer Rose told him, "We love coming here and hanging out with our good friends at the OTFBA." Then, pointing to herself, she said, "Coffee is the oil of this engine, and your coffee is amazing. We're thrilled with what you've done inside, too – it's beautiful and inviting. So welcome."

PHOTOS BY BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

# OPINION



Jennifer Miller



Latishma Walters



Linda Brown



Yolonda Earl-Thompson



Leah Fraley



Elsa Galvan Delgado



Tammy Mannarino



Maria Marengo

## Women Leading and Serving in Our Community

BY DAN STORCK  
MOUNT VERNON DISTRICT SUPERVISOR

Across the Mount Vernon District, many remarkable women are leading efforts that strengthen our community and support our residents every day.

Within Fairfax County government, we are fortunate to have remarkable women helping lead the vital services that keep our community strong. Jennifer Miller was appointed Deputy County Executive in July and oversees key public agencies responsible for public works, transportation, land development, environmental initiatives, and economic development. Through her leadership she

is helping shape the initiatives that will define Fairfax County's future. Latishma Walters, Assistant Division Director for Neighborhood and Community Services, has been an incredible partner in supporting many of our community initiatives and events, including our annual Back to School Community Day and upcoming opening of The Commons Mount Vernon.

Many women also lead through their commitment to community service. Linda Brown of the New Gum Springs Civic Association has spent decades advocating for the betterment of Gum Springs and preserving the strength and history of this important community. Yolonda Earl-Thompson, Executive Director of LAZERA Ministries,

continues the legacy of service started by her father. Through programs like the annual "Stock the Block" event, Yolonda helps provide thousands of household supplies to families while serving as a community healer and champion for civic engagement.

Others are leading organizations that provide essential services to our residents every day. Leah Fraley, CEO of United Community, works tirelessly to ensure families have access to food, resources, and programs that help build stability and opportunity. At the Lorton Community Action Center (LCAC), Client Service Administrator Elsa Galvan Delgado helps connect residents with critical support and assistance when they need it most

and is known by local families and children as their go-to person when someone is in need.

Our community also benefits from women who help preserve and celebrate our shared history. Tammy Mannarino, Vice-Chair of the Fairfax County History Commission and a member of the Fairfax 250th Commission, has been instrumental in many efforts such as the street renaming process of Fort Belvoir and planning for America's Semiquincentennial events. Her passion for history is infectious!

And behind many of our community gatherings are dedicated individuals whose work often happens quietly but makes all the difference. Each year, our annual Town Meeting would not be possible without

the incredible support from the team at Mount Vernon High School. Maria Marengo, Building Supervisor, who will retire later this year, and Akua Boamah, Assistant Building Supervisor, have gone above and beyond for many years to ensure our events run smoothly and our community feels welcome.

There are many more women across the District whose leadership, compassion, and dedication make our community stronger every day—from nonprofit leaders and civic advocates to public servants, educators, and volunteers. Some lead boldly in the spotlight, while others work quietly behind the scenes, but each plays an important role in helping our community thrive.

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Virginia Department of Transportation

### 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
GILES	8513	770	STEELE ACRES ROAD770	SINKING CREEK	2/24/2026
LOUDOUN	11332	722	LINCOLN ROAD	TRIBUTARY OF CROOKED RUN	2/13/2026
LOUDOUN	11379	831	YELLOW SCHOOLHOUSE	BRANCH OF BEAVERDAM CK	2/13/2026
BUCHANAN	29736	2207	RHONDA LESTER BRANCH ROAD	KNOX CREEK	2/11/2026
BUCHANAN	29785	3310	MOTT BRANCH ROAD	TRACE FORK	2/11/2026
AMHERST	1520	674	ROSE'S MILL ROAD	PINEY RIVER	2/5/2026

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](http://vdot.virginia.gov) and navigate to Travel and traffic/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](mailto: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](mailto:corina.herrera@vdot.virginia.gov).*

# Reading Opens the World

PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION



Volunteers from AFT open boxes and stack books



Volunteers spend hours to create piles of stacked books in Lorton Community Center's gym to prepare for the next day's book giveaway event, generating wall of empty boxes

**Kids, families, teachers turn the pages at Lorton book event.**

BY SUSAN LAUME  
THE CONNECTION

Thousands of books were on offer for the taking in Lorton as the Federation of Teachers distributed reading materials to kids, families and educators during its "Reading Opens the World" national literacy campaign. The national teachers' union, in partnership with the nonprofit organization First Book, is spreading the joy of reading by providing millions of free books across the nation to students and

families for home libraries, and to educators and school staff for classroom collections.

The latest event, held at Lorton Community Center on March 14, is the third annual event held at the Center. It included an opportunity to meander through the center's gym stacked with books of a wide variety of genres and reading levels. The book acquisition experience was heightened with complementary snack food, music, arts and crafts, and a limited number of LEGO brick box sets.

Representatives of the Fairfax chapter of the League of Women's Voters also had a table to provide information and answer voting questions, including about the March 6 to April 21 vote on the proposed Virginia Constitutional amendment on redistricting.

National Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten trav-

SEE READING OPENS, PAGE 7



Families and teachers crowd the event with bags, boxes, and carts searching for books



FCPS Superintendent Michelle Reid with student Avery Baines, 10 of Annandale, Katie Argueta and Marissa Fortunato, of Neighborhood and Community Services, and teacher, Gretchen Maxwell of Falls Church, enjoying the event



Ryan Bouazz, and Biesma and Basit Asif, all of Lorton, prove there's nothing more fun than Oobleck for making a big mess that can be cleaned up with water, as mom Saba Asif remains clean



Several readers can't wait to begin their reads



Diversity and inclusion director at Edutainment, Adonis Dorsey searched out books to give to youth at his arts oriented organization



Kirpa, 5, and Arzoi, 4, Kaur, of Lorton, possibly at an early stage of publishing careers following in the footsteps of their dad, formerly involved with The Connection newspaper delivery

# Reading Opens the World

FROM PAGE 6

eled from New York to join local Fairfax County AFT president, Emily VanDerhoff, and county supervisors and school board members, at the Lorton event to speak of the

importance of reading skills.

Mount Vernon school board member Mateo Dunne spoke to thank the union “for all you are doing to lift up the community with reading.”

Founded in 1992, First Book is a nonprofit which recognizes that education transforms lives. Their mission is to “build a world where all children have access to a quality education.”



Laura Stone and Sherelle Carper staffed a table for the League of Women Voters



Mount Vernon School Board member Mateo Dunne thanks the union for “lifting up the community with reading”



Eight-year-old Ella Michaelson of Springfield, reading at the event, said the “Pizza and Taco” series are her favorite books.

## PUBLIC NOTICE

### Proposed Limited Access Control Change Franconia-Springfield Parkway at INOVA Franconia-Springfield Hospital Fairfax County Willingness for Public Comment

The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) invites you to review information about a proposed change in limited access control to Franconia-Springfield Parkway (Route 289) at the new INOVA Franconia-Springfield Hospital between Walker Lane (Route 10026) and Beulah Street (Route 613).

Improvements are proposed in the area, requiring the existing Franconia-Springfield Parkway limited access lines to be adjusted to accommodate them. The proposed improvements include two left-turn lanes on eastbound Franconia-Springfield Parkway to Walker Lane, a right-turn lane on westbound Franconia-Springfield Parkway, and two pedestrian connections from the existing shared-use path along the north side of Franconia-Springfield Parkway to the new hospital. This project will involve changes in limited access control.

Materials are available for review online at <https://www.vdot.virginia.gov/INOVA> or by contacting the VDOT Project Manager, Mr. Joseph Webb, at 703-259-2382 or TTY/TDD 711.

The Commonwealth Transportation Board will consider the proposed limited access change at a future meeting.

If your concerns cannot be satisfied, VDOT is willing to hold a public hearing. You may request that a public hearing be held by sending a written request to Mr. Joseph Webb, Virginia Department of Transportation, 4975 Alliance Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030 on or prior to **March 24, 2026**. If upon receiving public comments it is deemed necessary to hold a public hearing, notice of date, time and place of the hearing will be posted.

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

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# Is ERA the Law of the Land?

Women's group drives question to Congress.

BY SUSAN LAUME  
THE CONNECTION

More than hundred years ago in 1916, suffragists Alice Snitjer Burke and Nell Richardson set out in a bright yellow 1914 Saxon auto, christened "The Golden Flyer." They would complete a cross county tour to promote passing the 19th Amendment; to give women the right to vote. Their 26-week, 10,700-mile trek across 29 states from New York to the West Coast and back, brought attention to the cause, as they gave speeches and collected petition signatures in towns along the way. It would take four more years after they ended their trek, and several more suffragist journeys, before the 19th Amendment passed in August 1920.

Now another group of women is reviving that historic journey. This time the focus is on recognizing passage of the 28th Amendment; the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Their journey, begun in March, traces the route of the Golden Flyer. They are using the same Saxon automobile model used by Burke and Richardson in 1916. They seek acknowledgement from Congress that the 28th Amendment is "valid to all intents and purposes as part of the Constitution, having been ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several States."

## Background

Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment on March 22, 1972 and sent it to the states for ratification. Ratification required a three-fourths positive vote, the approval of 38 of the 50 state legislatures. Historically, in January 2020, Virginia became the 38th state to add its approval, following a concerted push by women's rights advocacy groups to move passage through the General Assembly. However, Congress had set a ten-year ratification deadline of 1982. By the time Virginia's ratification vote that deadline was long past. Additionally, five states had acted to rescind their prior approvals. Virginia's vote spurred several legal and policy debates that remain unresolved.

In January 2025, in the last days of his presidency, President Josph Biden declared he considered ERA "the law of the land."



Women's rights advocates and vintage car enthusiasts Jeryl Schriever and Susan Nourse reenact suffragists 1916 19th Amendment drive in vintage Saxon at Lorton's Turning Point Suffragist Memorial

Many agreed with Biden, holding the position that the Amendment had been ratified; although the Constitution Article V gives no direct role to the Executive Branch in Constitutional amendment. Article V sets out congressional and state requirements. Traditionally, the chief archivist of the National Archives certifies and publishes the amendment once ratified. In 2025, the archivist cited opinions from the Justice Department's Office of Legal Council, issued in 2020 and 2022, that stated that "the ratification deadline established by Congress for the ERA is valid and enforceable," and that the ERA had expired and was therefore no longer pending before the states.

## Sign4ERA Petition Effort

Sign4ERA is a national petition drive to urge Congress to recognize the amendment sponsored by ERA NOW. Their "Driving the Vote for Equality" tour will cross 25 states with Golden Flyer II, retracing the historic Golden Flyer route. The restored Saxon automobile will be trailered on the trek, making appearances.

Mary Ann Gorman, with ERA NOW and a coordinator for the trip, says they want to "raise awareness that the amendment is ratified but not recognized." At trip stops they are asking for petition signatures to let congressional members know about "the many people who favor the amendment, and that women count."

ERA NOW was founded by former Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney who served from 1993 to 2023. The organization's driving tour, scheduled to end in ear-

ly June; and its petition drive, planned to peak by the November 2026 general election, are set to prepare for action by 2027's new Congress.

At a tour stop at the Turning Point Suffragists Memorial at Ocoquan Regional Park on March 7, group members urged the crowd to "spread the word" and share the #Sign4ERA on social media to make others aware of the petition. The tour which began in Manhattan will travel through Virginia and North Carolina; then on to Arizona and California after a brief break. The suffragists that inspired them wrote daily accounts published in The Boston Daily Globe and New York Tribune. The "Driving the Vote for Equality Tour" will follow that example by doing daily diary updates at [www.drivingthevote.org](http://www.drivingthevote.org) where viewers are invited to "Watch history happen."

## The Car - The Cat

In 1916, Suffragists Burke and Richardson drove a 1914 model Saxon automobile. The car was donated for the trip by the Saxon Motor Car Co of Detroit Michigan. At the time, few women were drivers. According to writer Jeryl Schriever, the company was trying to promote the model as "inexpensive, economical and "easy enough for a woman to drive." The company encouraged local car dealers along the way to clean and maintain the car during the suffragists' trek. The roads of the day were poor and rutted, creating a need for frequent maintenance.

The car making today's trip is the same model, not the actu-



Behind the wheel, Jane Barker and Donna Foss with symbolic Saxon on the cat with ERA supporters



HISTORIC ARCHIVES PHOTO  
Suffragist Alice Burke and Nell Richardson in 1916 with Saxon

al car, used by the suffragists in 1916. This Saxon was found by Jeryl Schriever, and her husband, of Newport Maine, in a barn in New Hampshire. It was in need of repair and mechanical work; they restored it. The couple, has an interest in vintage cars and own four Saxons. When Schriever became aware of the model's history, she was inspired to write a book chronicling the suffrage drive "Driving the Vote for Women: An American Journey for Suffrage" (Applewood Books, 2024).

Saxon, the cat named for the automobile, was given to the women as a kitten early in their tour, at a stop in Alabama. The women usually accepted donations, though usually coins, not cats. Saxon soon gained notoriety as people followed his growth through the weeks of the trip in newspaper stories. Some who opposed women being given the right to vote attempted to link the cat and cause to passivity and the philosophy that women should stay at home, like



Vintage car enthusiast Susan Nourse in traditional early 1900's driving garb with the Saxon

cats. Instead of a negative, Saxon became an unofficial mascot and a symbol of resilience. In 2020, the National Park Service used Saxon's image as part of its 19th Amendment 100 year anniversary celebration. Mesquite Nevada holds an annual Saxon the Suffrage Cat Contest inviting young artists to decorate his silhouette.

## The 28th Amendment

Early suffragists hoped people's attention would be drawn to their cause by the Saxons, car and cat. Modern day women's rights advocates too hope the car's visibility, and a replica Saxon, will capture attention of supporters.

Language of the 28th amendment: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex."

# The Learning Experience Offers Kindergarten Readiness

FROM PAGE 3

ational foundation for children because “those first five years are critical. If they’re ready for kindergarten, they’ll be ready to learn and will know how to stand in line, sit on their square, say their ABCs and know their colors. They’re leaps and bounds ahead of everyone else.”

Huxtable-Mount then thanked everyone for their “kind and wise” words. “I’m an educator down to my core,” she said. “I have four degrees, all in education –including] in elementary education and educational leadership – and took additional courses in early childhood education. I’m also a mom whose kids are now 12 and 15, and they’re doing amazingly well because of the foundation they received when they were at The Learning Experience.

“What we do here is like nothing else. It’s a magical place where kids are introduced by their favorite characters. Bubbles the Elephant is everyone’s best friend, and they look forward to seeing him. Our characters teach a variety of lessons from philanthropy to kindness to technology, science and art. It’s all woven in; children feel happy and are learning through play. That’s what I’ve experienced as a parent, educator, owner and

then a franchisee with The Learning Experience for 16 years.”

Huxtable-Mount said she’s totally dedicated to the children’s success, as are her teachers and leadership team at the Fairfax City site. “My director, Kaitlin Kellison, knows every family here, what their needs are, where they work, what their commute is, and what they’re looking for,” she said. “And she and our entire staff are committed to meeting their needs because, ultimately, our goal is kindergarten readiness.”

Saying how happy she is to have TLE in Fairfax, Huxtable-Mount said, “This is a City that’s growing and booming. We’re in a beautiful neighborhood and there’s just so much to look forward to – so much potential.” She then thanked Read for coming to welcome TLE. “It means a lot to me that you’re here,” she said. “It shows that you care about every aspect of the City, including the babies.”

Kellison then addressed the attendees and invited them inside to tour the building and see the children doing that afternoon’s activities. “It’s been wonderful to watch this location open, from the ground up,” she said. “I watched the decals get put on the walls and the classrooms get set up. So I appreciate you all coming and welcoming us.”

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# Creativity in Bloom

At The Jefferson, residents find freedom, focus and joy through art and gardening.



Bryna Freyer, a retired art historian, paints a delicate blue rim on a clay vessel during a studio session at The Jefferson.



Wendy Kotler with her painting inspired by nature.



Lynn Barton coordinates seasonal plantings in The Jefferson's community garden.

PHOTOS BY MARILYN CAMPBELL

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL  
THE CONNECTION

Carefully and almost meditatively, Bryna Freyer steadies a small clay vessel in one hand and lifts a brush with the other, guiding a thin line of pale blue paint around the rim.

The retired art historian and current resident at The Jefferson, a senior living community, pauses occasionally to study the curve before adding another careful stroke. Nearby, jars of gray, teal, and cream pigments sit open on the table.

"Working with clay in particular is very relaxing," she says. Then she smiles. "With ceramics, I don't obsess about whether mine is good enough anymore. I'm just enjoying it."

Freyer spent much of her career studying museum collections and teaching art history. For years she analyzed great works created by other artists.

Now she is making something of her own.

Around her, residents at The Jefferson gather for a studio session, some sketching still lifes, others mixing watercolor pigments or

shaping clay. The walls display landscapes, flowers and abstract bursts of color, each piece created by someone who lives in the community.

For many residents, creativity here is more than a pastime. It's a way to slow down, concentrate, and lose themselves in the process of making something.

### The Quiet Power of Creativity

Wendy Kotler understands that feeling well.

A retired art educator, she worked for public school systems as both a teacher and developer of art curriculum. Kotler still approaches art with the careful eye of someone who spent a career helping students learn to notice the small details all around them, the curve of a leaf, the shift of light across a surface, the subtle changes of color in the sky.

When she paints, she often leans close to the canvas, studying the way light settles on a petal or the subtle shift between shades of purple.

For Kotler, painting often begins with something that others might

overlook. One of her recent paintings was inspired by orange lilies in a bouquet on a table in the home of her sister-in-law.

"When I'm drawing," she explains, "I'm intensely focused on the connection between my eye

**"When I'm drawing, I'm focused on the connection between my eye and the subject. Everything else drops away."**

— Wendy Kotler

and the subject. Everything else drops away."

In that moment, the outside world recedes, and worries fade.

"If you're anxious or agitated," she says, "once you move into that creative space, it goes away."

Researchers agree. Studies supported by the National Endowment for the Arts suggest that artistic engagement can support cognitive health while reducing depression and anxiety, particularly among older adults.

Kotler traces her own artistic path back to kindergarten.

"We were supposed to draw a person," she recalls. "My teacher leaned over and said, 'Your person has a hand with five fingers. You're really good at this.'"

Encouragement like that, she believes, can shape a life.

"If you talk to people in creative fields," she says, "somewhere along the line someone noticed something and reinforced it."

### Creativity Beyond the Studio

At The Jefferson, creativity extends well beyond the art room.

Lynn Barton, chair of the community's garden club, first discovered her love of gardening as a child helping her grandmother in the yard.

Her favorite job was pulling weeds.

"I liked getting rid of the bad things so the good things could grow," Barton says.

Today she helps coordinate plantings around the Jefferson grounds, where residents gather to dig, water, and plan new additions

each season.

"A neighbor once told me the garden is always a work in progress," Barton says. "And that's true."

At The Jefferson, creativity is also woven into daily programming.

Dawn Hamed, activities coordinator for assisted living and memory care, says the key is understanding what residents care about.

"It all starts with building relationships," Hamed says. "We learn what people loved doing before they came here and build activities around those interests."

Sometimes the impact is immediate. Hamed remembers one resident who initially refused to leave his room or attend any activities.

Now he rarely misses one. "He may not follow the instructor exactly," she says. "But he's there doing his own thing. And just being there means he's engaged."

The power of creativity to affect one's mental and emotional wellbeing at any age, appears on studio walls, in garden beds and in the satisfaction of making something by hand.

As Kotler puts it simply: "It's never too late."

# Century in Bloom: Historic Garden Week in Fairfax County

## If You Go:

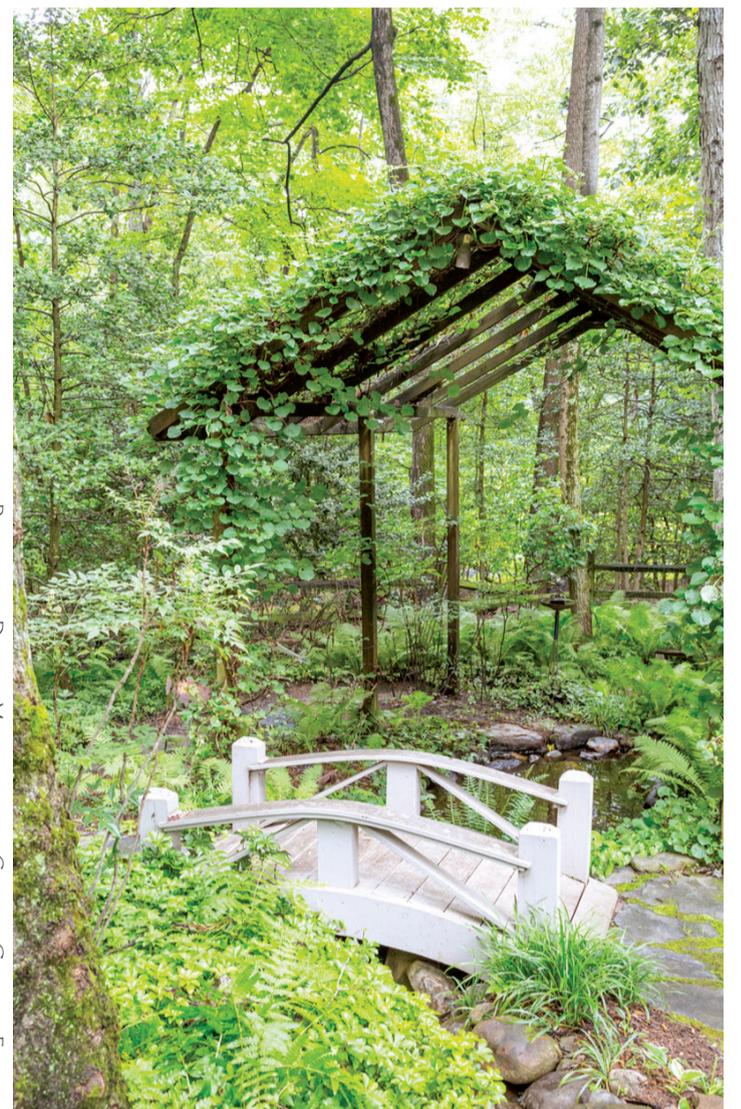
### Historic Garden Week Fairfax County Tour

**Tuesday, April 21, 2026,  
10 a.m. to 4 p.m.**  
Tour Headquarters,  
Historic Vale Church  
(c. 1896), 11528 Vale Road, Oakton  
❖ Complimentary refreshments  
❖ Restrooms available  
❖ Centennial “Decades” displays  
❖ Arborists, native plant experts &  
free tree saplings (while supplies last)

**Tickets**  
❖ \$50 advance online  
❖ \$60 day-of (online or at  
headquarters; cash/check/Venmo)  
❖ \$15 children ages 5–17  
(online only)  
❖ Under 5 free; no strollers  
inside homes  
**Lunch**  
❖ \$23 gourmet box lunch  
(preorder by April 13)  
❖ Served 11:30 a.m.–2 p.m.  
at headquarters café  
❖ Limited extras available on-site  
**Parking**  
❖ Along neighborhood streets  
near each home  
❖ At headquarters lot; follow signage  
Instagram  
@HistoricGardenWeekFairfax  
Contact  
fairfax@vagardenweek.org



Lush hydrangea blooms create a vibrant focal point in the garden, accented by a playful frog sculpture.



A simple wooden bridge adds charm and structure to the lush, woodland-inspired landscape.

## The Garden Club of Fairfax marks its 100th year with a tour steeped in heritage, artistry and spring color.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL  
THE CONNECTION

**O**n April 21, the Garden Club of Fairfax will mark its centennial year with a tour that feels both celebratory and deeply rooted.

As part of Virginia’s Historic Garden Week, the club will host a self-driving exploration of three distinctive Fairfax County properties from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., a day that blends history, horticulture and the quiet pleasure of stepping into places shaped with care.

“We hope visitors will enjoy both our historic and newer properties on the tour,” says co-chair Andrea Hickman Meleski. “Each property will have stunning floral displays, gorgeous interior design, and interesting architecture.” For Andrea, the tour is more than a showcase; it’s a reflection of the club’s century-long commitment to beauty and stewardship.

### A Farmhouse with Deep Local Roots

The tour begins at 3500 Chain Bridge  
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Road, an 1865 farmhouse that once stood at the center of a 100-acre orchard and dairy farm. For more than a century, it belonged to the Cobb family, early Fairfax landowners who cultivated orchards, raised dairy cattle, and shaped the agricultural landscape of the region. When the surrounding land was eventually developed, the original farmhouse and its mature walnut and beech trees remained intact.

Later owners, the Williams family, continued the tradition of care. Carol Williams, a longtime Garden Club of Fairfax member and president from 1995 to 1997, expanded the gardens with native plants and country-style borders. A former WWII aircraft spotter’s building, once perched on stilts in Vienna, now serves as the garden shed, a quirky reminder of the property’s layered past.

In 2024, the home changed hands again. The new owners have filled it with European and American antiques mixed with modern pieces, honoring the home’s character while making it their own. “Each home is unique and interesting,” Andrea says. “Visitors always enjoy hearing the homeowners’ stories.”

### Oak Hill: A Study in Contrast

The tour continues in Oak Hill, where two homes offer dramatically different interpretations of garden living.

At 3214 Upper Wynnewood Place, a contemporary home built in 1993 sits on nearly

an acre of wooded land. The current owners purchased it in 1994 and spent decades shaping the landscape, clearing trees, building multi-level decks and creating Zen-style shade gardens with ponds, waterfalls and footbridges. Inside, soaring ceilings and a circular staircase frame an extensive collection of original art.

“One home that has a bunch of original art will also feature an artist actively painting in the garden,” Andrea says. “It’s something visitors really love.”

Just down the road, 3235 Navy Drive offers a burst of color and personality. The English Country style home, redesigned in the 2010s and decorated further during the pandemic, is lively and welcoming with wallpapered ceilings, a Chinese red lacquered Chippendale table and a chandelier shimmering with silver and gold medallions.

Outside, brightly colored potted plants spill across decks and stairways leading to a woodland garden. “So much to enjoy,” Andrea says. “We have a Zen garden, a woodland garden, and a cottage-style farmhouse garden. Visitors love the variety.”

### Floral Artistry & Garden Wisdom

Inside each home, floral displays - large, small, sculptural, and whimsical - are created entirely by Garden Club members. “Most people love seeing the over-the-top floral displays,” Andrea says. “They’ll be highlighted in all four locations.”

Docents will be stationed throughout the homes and gardens, ready to share stories about architecture, plant choices, and design. “Our docents are happy to answer any questions,” Andrea says. “The tour is not only a delight to the eyes, but it will inspire visitors for their own homes and gardens.”

### A Centennial Celebration at Vale Church

Tour headquarters at the historic Vale Church (c. 1896) will host special centennial activities throughout the day. “We’ve truly enjoyed looking back on our club’s history through the past 100 years,” Andrea says. “It makes each of us proud and energized to accomplish more for the community.”

Visitors can enjoy complimentary refreshments, meet arborists and native plant experts, and pick up free tree saplings while supplies last. Gourmet box lunches preordered by April 13 will be served from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.

### A Day to Wander

The tour is rain or shine, and Andrea encourages guests to come prepared. “Wear comfortable, flat shoes,” she says. “You’ll be walking on grass, rocky surfaces, up and down steps, and paved surfaces.” Parking is available along neighborhood streets and at headquarters.

“We’ve already had people confirm their attendance from across the country,” Andrea says. “It’s truly a great, don’t-miss-it event.”

# ENTERTAINMENT

## AARP FOUNDATION TAX-AIDE PROGRAM

The AARP Foundation Tax-Aide program is returning for the 2026 tax season, offering free federal (and many state) tax preparation and e-filing by IRS-certified volunteers. Services began the first week of February at multiple locations. Eleven centers across Northern Virginia also prepare Virginia returns, and some sites assist with Maryland and DC filings.

Who can participate? Tax-Aide serves taxpayers of all ages, with a focus on low- and middle-income residents and seniors. Counselors handle nearly all types of income and work to ensure clients claim all deductions and credits for which they qualify.

Taxpayers should bring:

- ❖ Photo ID
- ❖ Social Security cards for themselves and dependents
- ❖ Copy of last year's tax return
- ❖ All current-year tax documents (W-2s, 1099s, 1098-T, brokerage statements, pension/IRA statements, etc.)
- ❖ Records for itemized deductions, education credits, and residential energy credits
- ❖ Bank account and routing numbers for direct deposit or debit

For more information and to find a site near you, visit: AARP Foundation Tax-Aide Information <https://www.novataxaide.org/>

## FAIRFAX SYMPHONY

### ORCHESTRA SCHEDULE

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

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

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

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

## FIVE-PART BETTER ARGUMENTS WORKSHOP SERIES.

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

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

- ❖ Workshop 3: Pay Attention to Context; April 14, 2026; 6-8 pm; Reston, VA Acknowledge the many factors that may influence beliefs. Register here: <https://tinyurl.com/WMApril14>
- ❖ Workshop 4: Embrace Vulnerability; May 12, 2026; 6-8 pm; Reston, VA Consider the benefits of opening up. Register here: <https://tinyurl.com/BetterMay12>
- ❖ Workshop 5: Make Room to Transform; June 9, 2026; 6-8 pm; Reston, VA Be open to new and varied perspectives. Register here: <https://tinyurl.com/WMJune9>

## NOW THRU JUNE 6

Syrian Artist Abdulrahman Naanseh. At Tephra

Live, in-person  
in Fairfax City, VA  
& Streaming Online




# Women's Storytelling Festival

March 19 - 22, 2026

[bettersaidthandone.org/womens-festival](https://bettersaidthandone.org/womens-festival)

The 2026 Women's Storytelling Festival takes place March 19-22, 2026 in Fairfax.



The 2026 Mason School of Dance Gala Concert Performances will take place March 27-28 at GMU Center for the Arts in Fairfax.

Institute of Contemporary Art (Tephra ICA) in Reston. Tephra Institute of Contemporary Art (Tephra ICA) presents a solo-exhibition by Fairfax, VA-based artist Abdulrahman Naanseh, on view at the Tephra ICA at Signature gallery February 26-June 6, 2026, featuring recent work created during his 2026 residency at Tephra ICA. Naanseh's work reimagines Arabic calligraphy as a deeply personal and contemporary visual language.

## NOW THRU APRIL 4

Photos with the Easter Bunny. At Tysons Corner Center, McLean. Families are invited to meet the Easter Bunny in Fashion Court and create memorable holiday photos. Guests can reserve a timeslot online to reduce wait times and secure exclusive perks, including special

offers from participating partners. In addition to traditional photo sessions, the Bunny will host Pet Nights, bringing furry family members into the springtime fun and other themed experiences throughout the season. New this year to bunny photos are KIDZ BOP Bunny Dance Parties! Hop into the fun with KIDZ BOP Bunny Dance Parties! Every hour on the hour, families can join Bunny for a fun KIDZ BOP dance party made just for kids. With easy-to-follow moves and upbeat music, it's high-energy, totally kid-approved, and guaranteed to bring smiles all around!

## NOW THRU APRIL 12

"Murder on the Orient Express." At Workhouse Arts Center, Lorton. This is not just a play. It is an immersive journey into glamour, danger,

and the psychology of justice. With themes of morality, loyalty, revenge, and truth, Murder on the Orient Express feels strikingly contemporary — asking audiences: What is justice? And who gets to decide? Times: Fridays & Saturdays at 8 PM | Sundays at 2 PM. At Venue: Workhouse Arts Center, Theater in Building W3. Tickets: \$40 General Admission. Discounts available for Seniors, Military, and Students

## WEDNESDAY/MARCH 18

SIA and Shamrocks St. Patty's Party- hosted by Seniors in Action. 6-8 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Celebrate St. Patrick's Day with a little Irish flair at our St. Patty's Party, hosted by SIA! Join us on March 18 from 6-8 p.m. in Community Hall for music, festive fun, and a delicious mashed potato bar. Don't miss a lively Irish dance performance by Phoenix Irish Dance Academy at 6:30 p.m. Bring your friends and family - everyone's welcome for this shamrock-filled evening of community celebration!

## MARCH 19-22

2026 Women's Storytelling Festival. At Sherwood Community Center, 3740 Blenheim Blvd., Fairfax. The festival features 20 storytellers from around the country, across the ocean, and right in Northern Virginia sharing a range of stories - from personal to folk to fantastic - intended for a mature audience. Ticket holders can attend in-person, watch the livestream, or watch the videos for one month after the festival concludes. As well as stories of lived experience, folktales, and mythology, the WSF will include stories celebrating 250 years of American history. Storyteller Denise Page will share her solo show, "Legacy of a Wealthy Slave," a deep dive into the 2024 discovery by Yale University archivists of her ancestors and their places in history. Additionally, the showcase History through Women's Stories will be presented at 2 pm on March 21, 2026. In this special showcase, emceed by 1A host Jenn White, we will hear: Lona Bartlett telling the story of Zitkala-Ša (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin), an influential Native American activist integral to the fight for U.S. citizenship; Kristin Pedemonti performing as Marie Jenney Howe, suffragist and founder of Heterodoxy, an influential feminist debate society; and Megan Wells appearing as Elizabeth Hamilton.

Visit:

<https://bettersaidthandone.org/womens-festival/>

## FRIDAY/MARCH 20

Danú. 8 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, Fairfax. One of today's leading traditional Irish ensembles, Danú takes audiences on a musical journey to the group's native Ireland through stirring ancient music and vibrant new repertoire. For over two decades, Danú's virtuosic players on flute, tin whistle, fiddle, button accordion, bouzouki, and vocals have delighted audiences worldwide, including stops at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles and Symphony Space in New York City.

## SATURDAY/MARCH 21

Fiesta del Sol. 5-10 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Get ready because Fiesta del Sol is back! Savor sumptuous cuisine, listen to Latin American and Caribbean music with renowned live bands, see quality artisan exhibitors and enjoy alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. Learn how to dance a variety of Latin dance steps from professional dance instructors throughout the evening. Drink and food tickets are sold onsite and proceeds go to Friends of MCC. Patrons must be 21 years old or older to purchase or drink alcoholic beverages.

## SATURDAY/MARCH 21

10th Annual Teen Job and Opportunity Fair. 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. At West Springfield High School. Sponsored by Supervisor Pat Herry's office. These fairs focus on students and young job seekers looking for a variety of employment opportunities; full time, af-

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# ENTERTAINMENT

ter-school, seasonal positions, internship opportunities, and volunteer positions. Students of all ages are encouraged to attend, but most opportunities will be geared toward students ages 16-18.

## MARCH 21-22

**The Alden's Youth Production of "The Wizard of Oz". 2 p.m.** At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. When Dorothy drops into the Land of Oz, only one thing is certain: she's got to find a way back to Kansas. A funny and fast-paced journey down the yellow brick road ensues, as Dorothy and her new friends travel to the fabled Emerald City to meet the Great Oz. When Oz demands a steep price for sending her home, a perilous new adventure begins. This imaginative Alden Youth Production adaptation captures the heart of L. Frank Baum's classic tale.

## MARCH 21 TO APRIL 12

**Spring Tree Rescue Extravaganza.** Want to spend a fun morning in the fresh air while helping to save our local canopy? Join volunteers across Fairfax County from March 21 to April 12 to rescue our trees from "strangling" invasive vines! This community-wide effort, hosted by Fairfax Tree Rescuers PRISM, aims to protect our natural areas from invasive plants that smother them.

**When:** March 21 – April 12, 2026.

**Where:** Various locations across Fairfax County.

**Action:** Registration is required due to limited parking at some locations.

Details and registration at [fairfaxprism.org](http://fairfaxprism.org).

## SUNDAY/MARCH 22

**Fairfax Choral Society Presents An Afternoon with Mozart. 4 p.m.** At Providence Presbyterian Church, 9019 Little River Turnpike, Fairfax. As Mozart's final, unfinished work, the Requiem merges intense, dark, and intimate musical genius with a haunting, personal narrative. Featuring Patrick Vaughn, the Artistic Director of the Fairfax Choral Society. He will conduct FCS's Symphonic Chorus and guest artists in the Requiem.

## SUNDAY/MARCH 22

**Cold War Conversation Lecture.** The next Cold War Conversation Lecture "The most important, challenging, and interesting SR-71 mission Buz Carpenter flew for President Jimmy Carter," will take place on Sunday, March 22, 2026 - 7 p.m. (ZOOM only). Retired SR-71 pilot Buz Carpenter will talk about his time in the USAF, SR-71 program and his most important mission. It's March 1979 and Saudi Arabia and Yemen are at war with each other over an ill-defined border. Learn about the process from White House decision, through tasking, to deployment, and finally execution, of this incredibly successful precedent setting mission! Get insights into the Blackbird culture, capability generation, outreach capacities, Flight limits, and tanker bases. Finally, learn about all the individual pieces that had to be engaged to facilitate this mission.

## SUNDAY/MARCH 22

**Silkroad Ensemble with Rhiannon Giddens – Sanctuary: The Power of Resonance and Ritual. 7 p.m.** At GMU Center for the Arts, Fairfax. Joined by Artistic Director and Pulitzer Prize-winning multi-instrumentalist Rhiannon Giddens, the GRAMMY Award-winning Mason Artist-in-Residence Silkroad Ensemble returns to the Center for the Arts with its latest project, Sanctuary: The Power of Resonance and Ritual. The idea of trance—leading to a deep peace that is hard to find in modern society—is deeply tied to the communal making of music in many different cultures.

## SUNDAY/MARCH 22

**An Afternoon with Mozart. 4 p.m.** At Providence Presbyterian Church, 9019 Little River Turnpike, Fairfax. The Fairfax Choral Society presents An Afternoon with Mozart. Mozart: Requiem - The Symphonic Chorus and Orchestra, Patrick Vaughn, conductor

Mozart: Concerto for Piano and Orchestra (d-mi-

[www.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM](http://www.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM)



The Fiesta del Sol takes place on Saturday, March 21, 2026 at the McLean Community Center.

nor) K.466 - Mark Irchai, pianist.

## TUESDAY/MARCH 24

**Shape of the Region Conference.** At Valo Park Auditorium in McLean. The Community Foundation for Northern Virginia's Shape of the Region Conference is scheduled.

Hundreds of business, community, nonprofit, and government leaders will gather to discuss the overlying question: What does a thriving Northern Virginia look like - and how do we get there? Expert speakers include:

Keynote: Paul Misener, of Misener Innovation, former Amazon Global Vice President

Host & Moderator: Drew Wilder, NBC4

Lightning Talk: Andrew Hanson, Strada Education Foundation; Ethan Heard, Signature Theatre; Elizabeth Kersey, Transurban; Dr. Garima Sharma, Inova; and Dr. Lisa Sturtevant, Bright MLS

## WEDNESDAY/MARCH 25

**Senior Movie Day. 10 a.m.** At Movie Theater at Reston Town Center, Reston. Reston Association presents Senior Movie Day, sponsored by Friends of Reston. Join them on the fourth Wednesday of each month. Coffee, donuts and OJ are provided, and door prizes are distributed prior to the movie.

March 25: Downton Abbey: Grand Finale

April 22: Eleanor the Great

May 27: Blue Moon (Rated R)

## THURSDAY/MARCH 26

**Genevive. 1 p.m.** At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. In this musical romance, Genevive (a beautiful young Frenchwoman who works at a small-town boutique selling umbrellas) falls for dashing mechanic Guy. Their brief romance is interrupted when Guy is drafted to serve in the Algerian War. Though pregnant by Guy, Genevive marries an older businessman, Roland, and begins to move on with her life.

## MARCH 27-28

**2026 Mason School of Dance Gala Concert Performances. Friday at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. Saturday at 8 p.m.** At GMU Center for the Arts, 4373 Mason Pond Drive, Fairfax. George Mason University School of Dance presents the 2026 Mason School of Dance Gala Concert performances, which celebrate a rich array of diverse choreographic voices. This year's program showcases George Mason School of Dance majors in five dynamic works: Brannndi Lewis's Many Brims, Victor Quijada's Enter Woven, Medhi Walerski's Romeo + Juliet (Balcony Scene), an excerpt from Alejandro Cerrudo's It Starts Now, and Andrea Miller's Sama.

## MARCH 28-29

**SPRINGPEX Stamp Show. 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturday (March 28), and 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.**



The Burke Historical Society will meet on Sunday, March 29, 2026 at Pohick Regional Library in Burke.

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

## SATURDAY/MARCH 28

**McLean Symphony's Defining Moments. 7:30 p.m.** at Columbia Baptist Church, 103 W. Columbia Street, Falls Church. Featuring Northern Virginia Music Teachers Association Concerto Winners, Rossini, Barber of Seville Overture, Beethoven, Concerto No. 3: Allegro con brio, Mozart, Concerto No. 23: Allegro, Brahms, Concerto No. 1: Rondo.

## SUNDAY/MARCH 29

**Blossom Bash. 12-4 p.m.** At Tysons Corner Center, McLean. This spring, Tysons Corner Center transforms into Center in Bloom (March 20-April 17), a vibrant celebration of the season. The signature event, Blossom Bash, invites guests to experience an afternoon of creativity and community featuring: Interactive activations from 40+ retailers Live chalk art by 20 local artists Seasonal food and beverage specials Live music throughout the center Special appearances by festival parade talent Giveaways and pop-up surprises This event is free and open to all ages. For more information, visit: [tysonscornercenter.com](http://tysonscornercenter.com)

## SUNDAY/MARCH 29

**Burke Historical Society Meeting. 3-4:30 p.m.** At Pohick Regional Library, 6450 Sydenstricker Road, Burke. NOVA Parks Historian Paul McCray will speak on the Washington and Old Dominion Railroad, sharing some of the thousands of

photographs he's collected. Email: [burkehistoricalsociety@hotmail.com](mailto:burkehistoricalsociety@hotmail.com)

## SUNDAY/MARCH 29

**Solomon Eichner, Piano. 2-3:30 p.m.** At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Baltimore native Solomon Eichner is a product of some of the best conservatories in the country and winner of numerous international competitions. He debuted at Carnegie Hall in 2016 after winning the "Golden Key Debut" International Competition and has performed in England, Italy, Germany, Austria, Poland and throughout the U.S. His playing is praised for its virtuosity and his ability to make music sing and come alive.

## APRIL 1-29

**A Really Trashy Art Show – Found Object Sculptures by RustDoug.** At Reston Art Gallery and Studios (RAGS), Lake Anne Plaza, Reston. Featuring found-object sculptures by artist Doug Fuller. Meet the artist reception is Sunday, April 12 from 2-4 p.m. Gallery hours for the exhibition are Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sundays from 12 to 5 p.m., with additional open hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12 to 5 p.m. A longtime Reston resident, Fuller began collecting rusty objects more than two decades ago after noticing a discarded crankshaft beside a dumpster. Intrigued by the forms and textures of abandoned metal, he began assembling found pieces into sculptures that reveal unexpected shapes and meanings. Inspired by the tradition of Marcel Duchamp's readymades, Fuller's work invites viewers to bring their own interpretations to these transformed objects.

## SATURDAY/APRIL 4

**Clifton Easter Egg Hunt. 12 to 2 p.m.** At Clifton Presbyterian Church, 12748 Richards Lane, Clifton. Easter Bunny pictures, fun games, bake sale, ice cream, pizza, face painting and balloons.

## APRIL 9-26

**"Young Americans."** At 1st Stage, 1524 Spring Hill Road, Tysons. By Lauren Yee, directed by Nikki Mirza. Dates: Thursdays at 7:30 p.m., Fridays at 7:30 p.m., Saturdays at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., Sundays at 2 p.m. Tickets: Tickets: \$25-\$55 general admission, \$15 students, educators, and military. Purchase online at [www.1ststage.org](http://www.1ststage.org) or call 703-854-1856.

## SATURDAY/APRIL 11

**Fairfax Callery Pear Exchange. 9 - 11 a.m.** At 12000 Government Center Pkwy., Fairfax. The Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF) is partnering with the Fairfax County Urban and Community Forestry Division to help Virginians replace invasive Callery pear trees. Building on the success of similar events in Charlottesville, Blacksburg, Harrisonburg and Richmond, a one-day tree exchange event will be held in Fairfax on Saturday, April 11. To incentivize the removal of Callery pear trees from your property, DOF will give participants a free native replacement tree for every Callery pear removed, up to three per household.

## SATURDAY/APRIL 11

**Aurora Dance Fest. 7:30 p.m.** At Capital One Hall, 7750 Capital One Tower Rd., Tysons. Witness a vibrant evening of dance performances hosted by Gin Dance Company and featuring works by 10 companies and 16 talented choreographers. This event promises to be a delightful mix of contemporary ballet, modern dance, and the fiery passion of Flamenco from Southern Spain. Adding to the excitement is the exceptionally talented guest artist, Luke Spring who was featured on Broadway in "A Christmas Story" with additional credits that include Disney's "Newsies", Maurice Hines Is Tappin' Thru Life, Kennedy Center Honors (Tom Hanks Tribute), Tony Awards, Fred and Adele Astaire Awards, and TV appearances on The Ellen DeGeneres Show and SYTYCD just to name a few. Join us for an unforgettable night filled with artistry, creativity, and mesmerizing performances.

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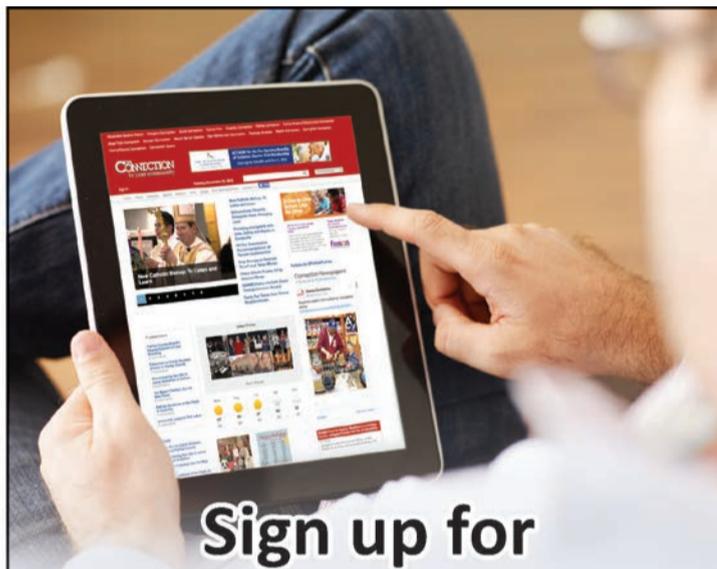
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**NEWS**

**Attend  
Film  
Festival  
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FROM PAGE 2

year” which he says “was kind of a big deal, it came out of nowhere.” But he said the action films that work in film festivals aren’t necessarily the ones that make it in streaming. As a result he has become a mentor to others; outside of the grind it is called “show” business for a reason.

The Festival schedule is online, and films are free but registration is required. The schedule ranges from “No Other Gods,” a music video filmed in Athens; to “The Donut Dollies,” a documentary about 627 young women in their blue dresses and smiles who entertained the troops along the front lines in Vietnam; to “Free Syria” which follows a country at a rare moment of possibility with the new freedom juxtaposed against the hardship.

The Black Tie Festival Awards and Red Carpet Show takes place on Saturday, April 11 starting at 5:30 pm at the Boro where the awards will be presented to the winners in each category. “We’ve changed the format this year from the Oscar style where you show up and have no idea whether you’ve won.” Now, he says, the winners are notified ahead of time so they have more time to think about their remarks and can invite their friends and families to celebrate with them.

To register for the screenings: <https://www.novafilmfest.com/>

<https://www.novafilmfest.com/2026-screening-schedule>

**CALENDAR**

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# Do These Districts Have a Future?

## Two locals battle for a possible new Democratic seat in Congress.

BY MERCIA HOBSON  
THE CONNECTION

A political thriller is unfolding across Northern Virginia's power corridor, stretching from Arlington through the south-central and eastern parts of Fairfax County, and into the sprawling commuter hubs of the I-95 corridor. It involves a high-stakes constitutional showdown with national implications and congressional districts that might not exist in a month.

Former first lady Dorothy McAuliffe and Del. Dan Helmer, both of Fairfax County, will vie (along with others) for the 7th district Congressional nomination if voters approve the out-of-turn redistricting. Early voting for the April 21 ballot is already underway.

While currently, Fairfax County, Arlington County and the City of Alexandria, rich in Democrats and population, are represented by (parts of) three of Virginia's 11 Congressional Districts, 8, 10 and 11, proposed redistricting would add parts of two more districts, Districts 1 and 7. Spreading out rather than concentrating those votes could change the party balance in the U.S. House of Representatives.

The battleground is the proposed 7th Congressional District; the western part of the district reaches into the deeply red rural Shenandoah Valley and Southside Virginia, the eastern part the Democratic suburbs of Arlington and Fairfax, which hold most of the voting-age population.

In recent elections, many of the Shenandoah Valley and Southside Virginia counties voted for Republican candidates by margins as high as 70% to 80%.

### The Gubernatorial Split

The advent of the McAuliffe-Helmer contest has created an unusual rift between former Gov. Ralph Northam and former first lady Pamela Northam. Ralph Northam is featured prominently on Helmer's campaign website under Endorsements. Pamela Northam is said to be backing McAuliffe.

Still, this version of the 7th District exists only if voters approve a constitutional amendment referendum on April 21, 2026. If the referendum fails, these maps vanish — and with them, the current campaigns.

### The Candidates

McAuliffe, a McLean resident and former State Department official, is the wife of former Gov. Terry McAuliffe. She launched her campaign last week with a focus on regional connectivity. "I look forward to traveling this district — from Arlington to Augusta — and sharing a vision for this community," McAuliffe said in her announcement.

Helmer, who lives in Clifton, is an Army veteran and small business leader who currently serves as the vice chair of the House Democratic Caucus. He is leaning into a coalition of local delegates and veterans.

### Battle of the Backers

The primary has become a contest of institutional influence versus local legislative

### Explanation for PROPOSED Constitutional Amendment to Be Voted On at the April 21, 2026 Special Election

#### BALLOT QUESTION:

Should the Constitution of Virginia be amended to allow the General Assembly to temporarily adopt new congressional districts to restore fairness in the upcoming elections, while ensuring Virginia's standard redistricting process resumes for all future redistricting after the 2030 census?

<https://www.elections.virginia.gov/media/electionadministration/election-law/4-21-2026-Special-Election-Explanation--Text.pdf>

ties.

Dorothy McAuliffe boasts the endorsement of Nancy Pelosi, who said, "Dorothy has never backed down from the fights that matter." Other key supporters include State Sen. L. Louise Lucas, former House Speaker Eileen Filler-Corn, and Anne Holton, the wife of Sen. Tim Kaine.

For Dan Helmer, supporters emphasize his effectiveness in Richmond. Del. Vivian Watts noted that Helmer "works on the hard details that matter."

Former GOP Rep. Denver Riggleman, who now considers himself an independent, called Helmer "exactly the leader Virginia needs in this fight."

Also backing Helmer is Del. Garrett McGuire, who said, "I'm proud to have worked alongside him this session on gun violence prevention measures that will make Virginia safer for everyone."

### Yes or No?

On Jan. 16, 2026, the General Assembly passed a proposed constitutional amendment (HJ 4) which would allow the legislature to redraw congressional districts, temporarily, mid-decade, if approved by voters. The amendment stipulated that the off-cycle redistricting could only be adopted if any other state adopted a redistricting outside of the 10 year cycle. It further stipulated that use of the out-of-cycle partisan method would be temporary. The method used would again return to the non-partisan commission led effort following the 2030 census.

The redistricting amendment, sponsored by Del. Rodney Willett (D-58), was moved forward through the General Assembly by its Democratic majority, with voting along party lines, and was signed by Gov. Abigail Spanberger (D).

The special session and redrawing proposal was in response to the White House calling for heavily Republican states to engage in redistricting to increase the number of GOP seats in the U.S. House of Representatives.



SCREENSHOT VIA WIKIPEDIA

Dorothy McAuliffe (D)



SCREENSHOT VIA DANHELMER.COM

Dan Helmer (D)

### Voter's Timeline

Early in-person voting for the April 21 referendum is already underway and continues through Saturday, April 18. Voters must go to an early voting site in the locality where they are registered.

### Fairfax County Locations:

❖ Fairfax County Government Center: Open now (Mon–Fri, 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.) [Source: Fairfax County Government].

❖ Satellite Locations (Opening April 11): Burke Centre Library, Mason Governmental Center (Annandale), West Springfield Governmental Center, McLean Governmental Center, and Tysons-Pimmit Regional Library (Falls Church).

❖ Hours for Satellites: Mon–Fri, 1 p.m. – 7 p.m.; Saturdays, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

### Arlington County Locations:

❖ Courthouse Plaza (2100 Clarendon Blvd): Open now (Mon–Fri, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.)

❖ Satellite Locations (Opening April 11): Madison Community Center (N. Stafford St.) and Walter Reed Community Center (16th St. S.).

❖ Extended Hours: These sites will stay open until 7 p.m. on Tuesday, April 14, and Thursday, April 16

### Key Dates to Remember

#### Referendum

❖ April 10: Last day to request a mail-in ballot (5 p.m.).

❖ April 18: Final day for early in-person voting.

❖ April 21: Referendum Day – Polls open 6 a.m. to 7 p.m., voters go to assigned precinct. [Source: Virginia Dept. of Elections].

#### Congress

District Boundaries will depend on whether Yes or No won the referendum.

❖ May 26: Candidate filing deadline for Congressional Districts.

❖ June 18: Early in-person voting begins for the primary.

❖ August 4: Primary Election Day.

## Penny for Your Thoughts



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Not anymore. As of Nov. 12, 2025, the U.S. Mint has stopped printing/making pennies. From that date onward to the present - and future, the American exact-changer cash payer will be on his/her own. No longer will the penny reserve of the rolls of pennies so regularly broken across cash-register draws be in play. According to the Mint, they're just too expensive. The penny costs more to produce than it does to pay. And so, as a direct consequence, I've already seen signs at miscellaneous businesses - who still collect cash, requesting "Exact change" from their in-store customers. In other cash exchanges, I've received a rounded-up nickel to compensate for the pennies printing demise. In summary, pennies don't make sense anymore. Who would have thought?

It's taken over 250 years for Benjamin Franklin's advisory: "A penny saved is a penny earned" to lose its relevance in history. In fact, for those of you who have saved your pennies in a receptacle at home, it may be time to do your patriotic duty and help your fellow consumer as well as your local brick and mortar store by cashing in your pennies. It's not exactly a rainy day. However, for cash customers and commercial establishments, there will not be pennies from heaven anymore - and certainly none from the U.S. Mint. Perhaps that's a non-buying opportunity. Since pennies might be a disappearing commodity, holding on to your pennies now might actually be penny wise and but pound foolish - for once. Their numismatic value might go up once their availability goes down.

Or perhaps pennies will end up in "the trash bin of history" along with the one-dollar coin and the two-dollar bill (the \$500, \$1,000 and \$10,000 denominations are not in circulation for another reason). Gone but not forgotten, they shall be," to invoke Yoda from "Star Wars." Good riddance, others might say, as our economy grows more online than in person, the penny becomes, especially given its upside-down cost to produce relative to its street value, an unnecessary appendage, so to speak.

Speaking of street value/formerly everyday/common uses of the penny, there's no more obvious example of the penny's outdatedness than "Penny candy." Given what you pay for the "Penny candy," these days, its name should be changed to "Quarter candy." It will be particularly difficult to continue calling it "penny candy" when there are no more pennies. It's more a figure of speech now anyway. Moreover, the fewer pennies there are in circulation/customer pockets, the less appealing these "penny" enticements will be. Otherwise, this is the use of a penny that will be dreadful. Misleading customers generally doesn't result to long-term success.

If there is going to be a present/future without pennies, what might the impact be to those who are named "Penny" (one of my neighbors in fact), will she be asked the origin of such a unique/unfamiliar given name? Will she have to change her name to "Nickel" to keep up with the times - and inflation? When an increase is characterized as "Pennies on the dollar," will an explanation be required (as in "What's a penny?")

Will the expression "For two cents I'd punch you right in the nose" disappear from our jargon (mine anyway)?

I certainly don't know the answers to any of these questions; nevertheless, I thought I'd write you my two-cents worth.

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

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