

THE CONNECTION

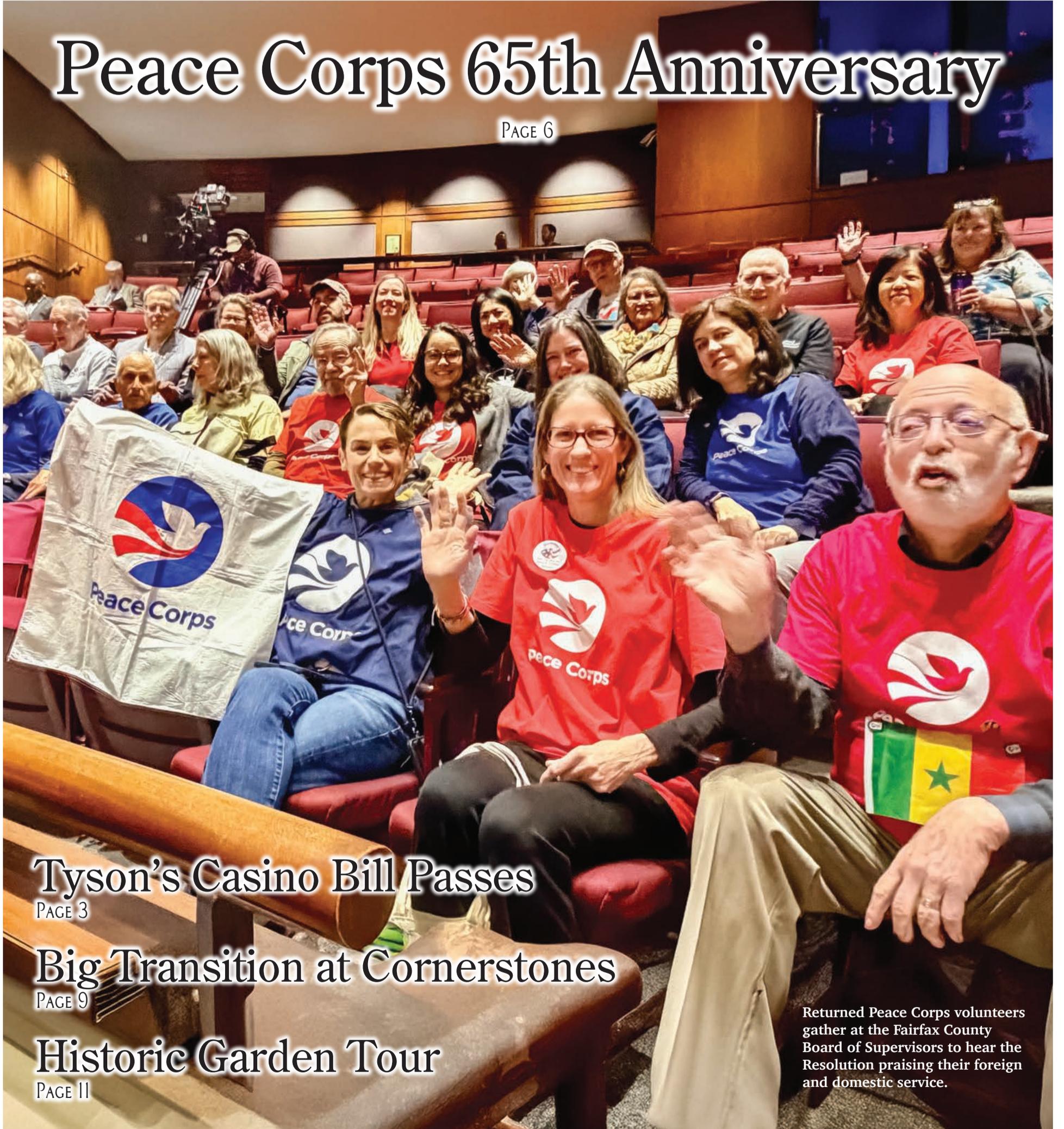
CENTRE VIEW ❖ Chantilly ❖ Great Falls ❖ Herndon ❖ McLean ❖ Oak Hill ❖ Oakton ❖ Reston ❖ Vienna

Peace Corps 65th Anniversary

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SENIOR LIVING, PAGE 8 ❖ ENTERTAINMENT, PAGE 12 ❖ CLASSIFIED, PAGE 14

PHOTO BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION



Tyson's Casino Bill Passes

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Big Transition at Cornerstones

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Historic Garden Tour

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Returned Peace Corps volunteers gather at the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors to hear the Resolution praising their foreign and domestic service.



Sarah Malaby, marketing director for Chesterbrook Residences, mans the chocolate dipping fountain with rice krispie treats, strawberries and marshmallows at McLean Chocolate Festival. Malaby says, "The rice krispie treats are the most popular for dipping. You know kids love all the sugar they can get."



Luca smells the chocolate beans at the American Heritage colonial America chocolate making demonstration.



The Munch & Match table features a grapefruit sparkling water for six tickets along with a fluffy buddy for for \$5.



Katherine Emerick has taken her time surveying the candy case and finally chosen the mango chocolates from Tysons Creamery.

Chocolate Choices for Everyone At McLean Chocolate Festival



Representatives of American Heritage, a Mars incorporated brand, tell the story of chocolate from the beans through the shelling and melting process and how it became part of our culture. "In early colonial days, people drank the chocolate before the Industrial Revolution where they learned how to make chocolate into bars."



This customer is enjoying her chocolate dipped strawberry while deciding which of the specialty chocolates to choose at Artisan Confections.



14th annual McLean Chocolate Festival on Sunday, March 15 at the McLean Community Center. The festival featured 14 chocolate vendors plus entertainment by the Sunshine Gang Band and Pocket Threes Band.



Ten-year-old Christopher Larson and his six-year-old sister Nicole, have chosen white and dark chocolate bars from Scrummy Gorgeous.

Fairfax Casino Bill Clears Assembly at Last-Minute

Surovell compromise wins over House after 'by-right' language drops.



FACEBOOK/CHAIRMAN JEFF MCKAY
Chairman Jeff McKay



SCOTTUROVELL.ORG
Sen. Scott Surovell



SENATE OF VIRGINIA
Sen. Jennifer Boysko



SENATE OF VIRGINIA
Sen. Stella Pekarsky



SENATE OF VIRGINIA
Sen. Barbara Favola

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

The Fairfax County casino bill is heading to the governor's desk after a final-hour compromise that limits the project to Tysons and strips a controversial "temporary casino" provision. SB 756 mandates that any proposed site be part of a coordinated mixed-use project of at least 1.5 million square feet located within one-quarter mile of a Silver Line station and outside the Beltway.

The bill also removed "temporary casino" language that the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors had characterized as a "power grab." Under the final version, a casino cannot move forward without a county referendum.

The path to passage took unexpected twists as the Virginia General Assembly neared its final hours Saturday. Shortly before adjourning March 14, the House of Delegates agreed to a last-minute "second conference report" substitute, 26110084D, in a 55-41 vote. That followed the rejection of an earlier conference report, (26109721D), that morning.

The Senate followed with a 25-13 vote, passing SB 756. The approved compromise emerged after a deadlock between the two chambers over an earlier version, Conference Report Substitute 26109721D. Chief patron Sen. Scott A. Surovell, D-Fairfax, introduced the legislation.

**Path to Compromise:
March 4-14**

On the morning of March 14, Fairfax County Supervisor Walter Alcorn issued a statement opposing that legislation, which he said

bypassed local authority. In his statement, Alcorn urged the House of Delegates to reject SB 756. "A bad casino bill just got much worse," Alcorn said.

The last-minute "second conference report" substitute, 26110084D, restored local zoning authority.

"The by-right provision has been removed," confirmed a spokesperson for the office of Chairman Jeff McKay in an email Monday, March 16. The spokesperson added, "But the original language limiting where it can be located remains."

Additionally, the spokesperson said that the revenue "split has reverted to the original allocation, rather than a 50/50 split." Meaning the once-offered "bonus" money for Fairfax schools is gone, replaced with the 70-state share/30-Fairfax share.

**Fairfax Delegation
Vote Breakdown: House**

The Fairfax House delegation voted overwhelmingly to reject the final conference report.

The following Northern Virginia delegates voted against the measure: David Bulova, D-11; Dan Helmer, D-10; Charniele Herring, D-4; Holly Seibold, D-12; Irene Shin, D-8; Marcus Simon, D-13; Rip Sullivan, D-6; Kathy Tran, D-18; Vivian Watts, D-15; Paul Krizek, D-16.

Del. Laura Jane Cohen, D-7, was the only Fairfax-based delegate to vote in favor. Del. Karrie Delaney, D-1, was recorded as not voting.

**Fairfax Delegation
Vote Breakdown: Senate**

In the Senate, Fairfax members were divided on the final 25-13 vote. Supporting the measure were Senators Scott Surovell, D-34; Dave Marsden, D-35; Stel-

la Pekarsky, D-36; and Jennifer Carroll Foy, D-33. Fairfax-area senators voting "nay" included Jennifer Boysko, D-38; Saddam Azlan Salim, D-37; Elizabeth Bennett-Parker, D-39; and Barbara Favola, D-40.

Jeff McKay, Walter Alcorn React
Upon learning that SB 756 passed, Board of Supervisors Chairman Jeff McKay called the initial language a "power grab" led by Senate Majority Leader Surovell.

"To be clear, this language was written by pro-casino advocates in the General Assembly — led by Fairfax's own Senator Surovell. This was done out of the public's view and would have imposed a casino on Fairfax County and its residents," McKay said. While he acknowledged the final bill "retains some local authority," McKay said proponents were trying to "jam a casino in Tysons."

On March 16, Supervisor Walter Alcorn called on Gov. Abigail Spanberger to veto the bill in an online statement. "Explicit Fairfax County opposition to casino legislation continues to be Fairfax County policy, and I call on Governor Spanberger to veto SB 756. We did not

ask for it, and we don't want it," Alcorn wrote.

Vienna Mayor Linda Colbert and the Vienna Town Council have lobbied legislators to defeat a bill to authorize a casino in Tysons. Now they're also pressing Governor Abigail Spanberger to veto the measure. "The Vienna Town Council has always strongly opposed any legislation that would pave the way for a casino in Tysons or anywhere in Fairfax County," said Mayor Linda Colbert.

**Infrastructure
and Regional Impact**

To address concerns about Tysons' infrastructure, the legislation addresses "spillover" effects through two distinct mechanisms. A Regional Improvement Commission will share revenue with neighboring jurisdictions to mitigate impacts on regional transportation and safety. Additionally, public safety proffers require the operator to fund increased demand for police and fire services.

The Floor Debate

The Senate floor debate on Saturday highlighted a rift among Fairfax Democrats. While considering the first conference report

earlier in the day, Sen. Jennifer Boysko, D-38, framed the bill as a dangerous precedent: "My county supervisors have their hair on fire because this casino was on the agenda ... and they are here to say, 'No, the county doesn't want it.'"

The morning vote narrowly cleared the Senate 21-19, but the bill hit a wall in the House of Delegates, where it was rejected 40-58.

This forced a second conference committee to draft the final substitute (26110084D). Before the final Senate vote that afternoon, Boysko remained steadfast: "I'm going to just make it clear that Fairfax County continues to oppose this, and so do I."

The second substitute's inclusion of a referendum helped shift momentum. Sen. Stella Pekarsky, D-36, asked for confirmation on the requirement. Surovell replied, "It does."

"So what we are basically now voting on ... is to allow the voters of Fairfax County to vote on whether or not they want this casino," Pekarsky said.

The Governor's Desk

Gov. Abigail Spanberger has three options: sign the bill, veto it, or send it back with amendments for the April reconvened session.

BULLETIN BOARD

Submit civic/community announcements at ConnectionNewspapers.com/Calendar. Photos and artwork welcome. Deadline is Thursday at noon, at least two weeks before the event. Or via email calendar@connectionnewspapers.com.

**ASSISTANCE LEAGUE'S
MARCH WISH LIST**

It has been a cold and snowy start to the year and people are looking forward to trading bulky clothes for shorts and tee shirts. Young kids grow quickly

and need new clothes as the seasons change, but for low-income families struggling with high costs for food and housing that's a luxury they can't afford. Assistance League's March Wish List offers the public a way to provide kids from these families the fun of having new clothes for warmer weather. The March Wish List features many kinds of short-sleeve shirts for spring and summer. Use this link <https://tiny.alnv.org/wish-short-sleeves> to make your selection or scan the QR code on the fly-

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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



SCREENSHOT VIA WIKIPEDIA
Dorothy McAuliffe (D)



SCREENSHOT VIA DANHELMER.COM
Dan Helmer (D)

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>

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 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.

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.

BULLETIN BOARD

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er. Please select Assistance League of Northern Virginia as the shipping address to ensure prompt delivery. If you would prefer not to order through Amazon, you can pay by personal check for these items. Please send your check, made out to ALNV, to P.O. Box 209, Herndon, VA

20172 and include "Wish List/month" in the memo line (e.g., if you order in March, please write Wish List/March.) Visit the website www.alnv.org.

FAIRFAX COUNTY OFFERS FREE TREES

Community-based organizations in Fairfax County can apply to receive free trees for planting

on private properties, through a program by Fairfax County's Urban and Community Forestry Division (UCFD) of the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services.

The program, offered in partnership with Casey Trees, is designed to help community organizations in Fairfax County — such as volunteer groups, civic associations and faith-based

organizations — obtain high-quality, professionally grown trees suitable for planting. Purchasing top-quality trees can be a challenge for these organizations. This opportunity focuses on increasing tree cover in economically disadvantaged

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FROM PAGE 4

communities, which typically do not benefit from moderate to high tree cover.

How to Apply: Fairfax County Tree Distribution to Community Organizations | Public Works and Environmental Services

UCFD will prioritize applications for tree-planting sites within or adjacent to Fairfax County-designated highly vulnerable communities, as defined by the county's One Fairfax policy and its associated Vulnerability Index. While planting in highly vulnerable communities will be prioritized, all community organizations are encouraged to apply for tree delivery, regardless of where tree planting is proposed.

The costs of the trees and delivery are covered by the county's Tree Preservation and Planting Fund and will be offered at no cost to participating organizations.

VOLUNTEER DRIVERS NEEDED

Have some extra time to drive a neighbor to a doctor's appointment? You pick the days, times, and places that are convenient for you. There is no minimum driving requirement. Not only do you help older adults in need, you also get to meet wonderful folks, often with very interesting backgrounds and stories to tell. The Shepherd's Center of McLean-Arlington-Falls Church (SCMAFC), is an all-volunteer, non-sectarian, non-profit organization. Its mission is providing free transportation to seniors for medical and dental appointments or run errands to grocery stores and pharmacies. Visit the website at <https://scmafc.org/volunteer>, or email contact@scmafc.org.

VOLUNTEER YOUR TIME

Would you like to help a neighbor feel less lonely? Will you help someone get much-needed groceries? Form new connections and make a meaningful difference. Older adults in the Annandale, Falls Church, and Alexandria regions are waiting for volunteer social visitors and grocery shoppers. If you can give the gift of your time, consider providing invaluable support to someone in your community. Learn more about Volunteer Solutions at bit.ly/FXVSVOL or email VolunteerSolutions@FairfaxCounty.gov or call 703-324-5406.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Parent Support Partners, a service of the Healthy Minds Fairfax initiative, are all parents who have received training and are qualified to offer education, support and assistance at no cost to families or caregivers. They provide reliable information that families can use in decision-making and are familiar with services and resources that can help families in distress. Visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/healthy-mindsfairfax or www.nami-northernvirginia.org/parent-peer-support.html.

The Shepherd's Center of Northern Virginia Caregivers' Support Group takes place the first and third Tuesdays of each month, 10-11:30 a.m. via Zoom. This group is for caregivers of family members with dementia. Meetings are gently facilitated. For more information and to get the Zoom link, contact Jack Tarr at jtarr5@verizon.net or 703-821-6838.

Haven of Northern Virginia Support Group. 703-941-7000, www.havenofnova.org or havenofnova@verizon.net.

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

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

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

Volunteer Adult Mentors Needed. Help assist the Department of Family Services' BeFriendA-Child mentoring program. The mentors provide opportunities for companionship, guidance and support to children who have been abused and neglected, or who are at risk of abuse and neglect. Contact Ibrahim Khalil at Ibrahim.khalil@fairfaxcounty.gov or 703-324-4547.

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

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.

Shepherd's Center of McLean-Arlington-Falls Church, 1205 Dolley Madison Blvd., McLean continues to have an urgent need for new volunteers to help area senior citizens get to and from their medical and therapy appointments. To find out more about the Shepherd's Center and how you can volunteer to provide transportation and other services, call the Center at 703-506-2199 or e-mail the Center at info@scmafc.org. The Center's website is www.scmafc.org.

Master Gardener Training. The Fairfax County Master Gardener Association offers plant clinics, home turf training or speakers for homeowner's meetings. Fees vary. Visit fairfaxgardening.org or call MG Help Desk at 703-324-8556 for more.

Volunteers Needed. PRS is looking for empathetic and caring volunteers to make phone calls to older adults who may be feeling socially isolated. The commitment is one 3-hour shift per week for one year. Located in Arlington. Ages 21 & up. Intensive training provided. Learn more and apply: prsinc.org/caring-volunteering/. Questions? Email lpadgett@prsinc.org.

The Northern Virginia Long Term Care Ombudsman Program needs volunteer advocates for residents in nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Contact Lisa Callahan at 703-324-5861, TTY 711 or email Lisa.Callahan@fairfaxcounty.gov. Also visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dfs/olderadultservices/ltombudsman/.

Great Falls Hike or Bike Volunteers. Bike or Hike Patrol volunteers assist park rangers by riding on accessible trails in Great Falls Park. To assist park staff in providing info and services to park visitors, maintain good public relations as a representative of the National Park Service, and monitor park resources, visitor usage, and emergency needs. Skills and Experience Desired: Excellent communication skills. Ability to work with culturally, socially, and economically diversified people. Knowledge of the park and local resources, or the desire to learn. Knowledge of basic bike maintenance or willingness to learn. Willingness to provide basic first aid. Ability to demonstrate skill in basic operation of a bicycle. Call Volunteer Coordinator 703-285-2965 ext. 225

Fairfax County needs volunteers to drive older adults to medical appointments and wellness programs. For these and other volunteer opportunities, call 703-324-5406, TTY 711 or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/olderadults and click on Volunteer Solutions.

Respite Care volunteers give family caregivers of a frail older adult a well-deserved break so they can go shopping, attend a doctor's appointment or just have coffee with a friend. Volunteers visit and oversee the safety of the older adult for a few hours each month. Support and training are provided. Contact 703-324-7577, TTY 711, or Kristin.Martin@

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Returned Peace Corps Volunteers Recognized

Proclamations fete 65th Anniversary.

BY SUSAN LAUME
THE CONNECTION

Ever dream of seeing a foreign country intimately close, immersing yourself in the culture, and living as its people do; while performing service for humanity? For more than 240,000 people who have volunteered for the Peace Corps since its creation on March 1, 1961, that dream has come true. This year marks the 65th anniversary of the Peace Corps.

Congress recognized the anniversary in the Federal Register, and the Virginia General Assembly and Fairfax County Board of Supervisors also recently recognized the contributions of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, both abroad and at home. In remarks honoring the anniversary and the volunteers, Chairman Jeff McKay and Supervisors Dalia Palchik and Walter Alcorn commended their dedication to volunteerism, community leadership and public service. More than two dozen Returned Volunteers, representing each decade of the Peace Corps, were on hand to be recognized with the County's resolution on March 3rd.

Speaking for the group, Sara Holtz acknowledged the honor. "Today we see domestic dividends here in Fairfax County. Service moved home and service is the backbone of our community," she said. She also invited the supervisors to consider joining the corps, pledging the group's assistance with the application to any who felt the call.

Assisting in just six countries at its inception, the program expanded its reach to 144 countries over the decades. The first traveled to Ghana. Today about 3,000 volunteers serve in over 60 countries. Virginia had 178 citizens volunteer in 2025. For many it means escaping the daily intrusions of the internet, social media, and even cell phones, in far less technologically advanced countries than the U.S. More than 300 have died in service, or following close of service as a result of service-related causes.

Volunteers still work to help fulfill the goal originally outlined by the corps' creator, President John F. Kennedy, in his inauguration ad-



PHOTO BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION

Returned Peace Corps volunteers gather at the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors to hear the Resolution praising their foreign and domestic service



PHOTO COURTESY S. HOLTZ

Sara Holtz, cooking and eating with her host family in Togo



PHOTO BY MICHAEL PARCHER

Jean Wintemute washing clothes in a stream in Costa Rica, says she will never complain about washing machines after this living experience

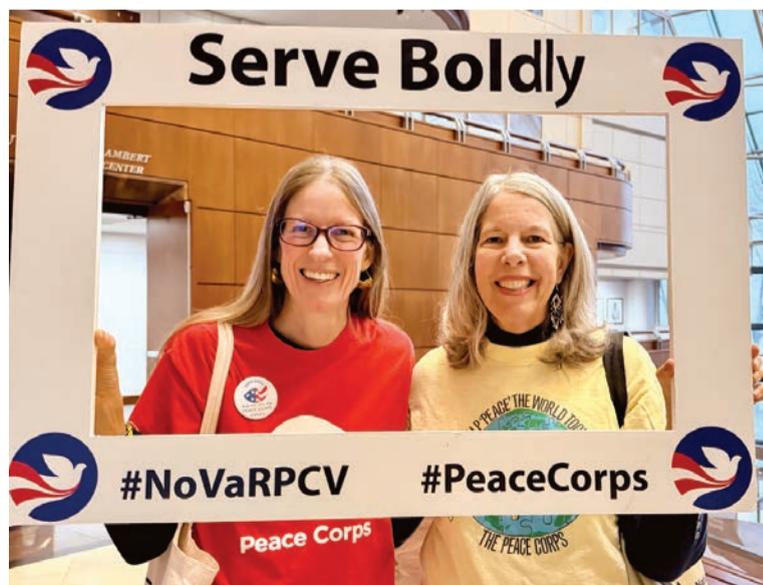


PHOTO BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION

Sara Holtz and Jean Wintemute today



PHOTO BY MICHAEL PARCHER

Costa Rican woman weaving with help from her toddler

3 Dead in Reston Crash 2 injured, one critically

Detectives from FCPD Crash Reconstruction Unit continue to investigate a fatal single-vehicle crash in Reston that left three people dead.

March 14 at 3:18 a.m., officers responded to Fox Mill Road and Folkstone Drive in Reston for a single-vehicle crash.

Preliminarily, detectives determined that the driver of a 2021 Rav4, Kevin Josue Rodriguez-Lopez, 25, of Herndon, was traveling southbound on Fox Mill Road when his vehicle left the roadway and struck a tree. The vehicle then became engulfed in flames. Rodriguez-Lopez was pronounced deceased at the scene. Two passengers, Aylin Gil Deleon, 21, of Fairfax

and a 16-year-old juvenile were pronounced deceased at the scene. An additional passenger, an adult female, was flown to a local hospital in life-threatening condition. Another passenger, an adult female, was transported to a local hospital in non-life-threatening condition.

Preliminarily, detectives believe alcohol and speed were factors in the crash.

Detectives would like to speak to anyone who may have information about this case. Those with information are asked to please call FCPD Crash Reconstruction Unit at 703-280-0543. Tips can also be submitted anonymously through Crime Solvers by phone – 1-866-411-TIPS (866-411-8477).



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 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 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.

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*Offer is only available for "NEW" Home Equity Line accounts when automatic payments are set up and maintained from a Bank of Clarke deposit account. The credit line established will be based on the amount of lendable equity in your home. Some restrictions may apply. Refinance of an existing Bank of Clarke Home Equity Line is NOT eligible for this offer. Subject to credit approval, ask for more details.

1313 Dolley Madison Blvd Ste #100 McLean, VA



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."

Kerrie Wilson To Retire as CEO of Cornerstones

Looking back and ahead as she prepares to pass the torch.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION



SCREENSHOT/THE CONNECTION

Kerrie Wilson, CEO of Cornerstones, participates in a Zoom interview March 5. Wilson is reflecting on 25 years leading the nonprofit's shift toward Housing First as she prepares to retire and pass the CEO role to successor Shannon Steene

Kerrie Wilson is leaving behind a legacy grounded in community compassion and systemic change as she retires as CEO of Cornerstones. Over a 25-year career, Wilson transitioned the nonprofit's framework to prioritize Housing First initiatives and racial equity systems.

Following her quarter-century tenure, Wilson sat down for an interview with The Connection via Zoom March 5 to discuss the importance of partnerships and the organization's upcoming leadership transition.

While her professional focus has been on systemic change, Wilson said she is personally looking forward to a change in her daily rhythm. For years, her schedule began with a 3 a.m. wake-up call — a habit she is eager

to retire along with her title.

Wilson noted that Cornerstones is in its 56th year of service. She downplayed her individual importance and instead emphasized the strength of the organization and its partners.

"It's not about me," Wilson said. "I have been so fortunate to be part of Cornerstones' story."

Wilson described how strategic expansion moved the organization beyond its roots as Reston Interfaith to serving broader regions, including Herndon and Loudoun County.

"Today we are serving Loudoun County, Fairfax County, not just Reston [and] Herndon, but we have a huge new project in Fairfax ... programs in Sterling," she said.

Wilson took pride in helping lead the county's 2008 10-year plan to end homelessness, built around the Housing First model. She explained how that plan shifted the entire system.

"In that first 10-year plan ... we were implementing Housing First," Wilson said. "[The philosophy] doesn't let people live and raise their families in homeless shelters. It really says the answer is getting people out [to] the dignity of a home where they can then address any other issues."

With a focus on equity and racial disparities, Wilson named the systemic challenges facing the region.

"Why are Black individuals overrepresented disproportionately in shelters and [the] judicial system and everything else? And it's because of the systems," Wilson said.

She noted that the continuum of care in Fairfax has worked to recognize those facts and combat bias. To address this, Wilson

embedded an "equity lens" into the nonprofit's housing work to challenge systemic bias and align with principles like One Fairfax.

During the interview, Wilson repeatedly returned to the theme of partnerships and staying focused on the basics during crises like the housing crash (2007-2012), the North American derecho, (June 2012), and the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2023).

"It's all about the partnerships that we have enjoyed in our service area for years," she said. "What I've learned is the strength in partnerships, you know, sticking to what you know best. In our work at Cornerstones ... we always kept our eye on: How do we stabilize housing? How do we make sure there's food on the table? And how do we ensure stable children and families? That has really served Cornerstones well over the years."

The Herndon Town Council will recognize Wilson March 24, highlighting the impact of Cornerstones' work within the town.

Cornerstones' transition will be formally celebrated April 9 during the "Cornerstones of Our Community" gala at the Hyatt Regency Reston, serving to honor Wilson before Shannon Steene, former executive director of Alexandria's Carpenter's Shelter, officially assumes the role of CEO April 13.

A Journey of 'Heart Work' Ahead at Cornerstones

Shannon Steene, named CEO, officially assumes the role on April 13.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

In a smooth transition for one of Northern Virginia's most established safety-net nonprofits, known for its housing and human services role, Shannon Steene will officially assume the role of CEO of Cornerstones on April 13. Succeeding long-time CEO Kerrie Wilson, Steene told The Connection that he intends to lead through two distinct roles: administrator and boots-on-the-ground advocate. To truly understand regional priorities, he says, a leader must be among the community rather than just behind a desk.

Steene, who has led Carpenter's Shelter in Alexandria since 2015, drew a direct parallel between the two organizations during a one-on-one interview with The Connection on March 5. Both organizations, he noted, are blue-chip brands — trusted, well-known pillars of their respective communities. He



SCREENSHOT

Incoming Cornerstones CEO Shannon Steene discusses his strategy for public engagement during a one-on-one interview with The Connection on Thursday, March 5. Steene assumes leadership of the Reston-based nonprofit on April 13.

emphasized that effective human services require a blend of "hard work" and "heart work," balanced with the business rigor necessary to support vulnerable neighbors.

The transition follows Wilson's notable 25-year tenure.

"I know that Kerrie leaves very big shoes," Steene said, acknowledging her deep history and local credibility. However he remains focused on the future. Steene notes that what was required when he joined Carpenter's in 2015 is not necessarily what the organization needs now — and similarly, Cornerstones today may require a different vision than it did when Wilson first began.

When asked for his "bumper sticker" message to his new staff, Steene offered a simple invitation: "Let's go on a journey."

Steene intends this to be a shared journey, relying on the expertise of the existing team while his own reach grows. His strategy for public engagement is equally inclusive; he plans to meet not only elected officials but also the people with informal power and influence across Reston, Herndon, Fairfax County, and Loudoun.

On a personal level, Steene considers it a privilege to join such an engaged community. He is candid about the emotional weight of the mission, recognizing that human services can "break your heart in an instant." Conversely, he finds immense hope in the success stories.

"When you see someone grab an honest opportunity and start to put pieces together and they stabilize and they thrive, there is nothing cooler," Steene said.

While he looks forward to these rebuilding journeys, he is also clear-eyed about modern obstacles, noting that the government is no longer just a safety net.

"We've often thought that the government is there as a backstop," Steene observed. "And what feels the most different in this moment is that the instigator for some of the challenges and changes that we're seeing now is actually springing from the government."

BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 5

fairfaxcounty.gov.
The Lewinsville Senior Center in McLean needs a Certified Arthritis Exercise Instructor. For these and other volunteer opportunities, call 703-324-5406, TTY 711 or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/olderadults and click on Volunteer Solutions.

Volunteers for Change. A program for adults which offers more than 50 weekend and evening volunteer opportunities per month. www.volunteerfairfax.org.

Potomac Paddlers Volunteer Corps. The Potomac Paddlers Corps is a volunteer group with the National Park Service under shared management between Great Falls Park and

the C&O Canal National Historical Park. The primary mission of the Corps is to have trained, uniformed park volunteers on the Potomac River to assist the park in identifying and reporting incidents, watch out for risky park visitor behavior, and to deliver safety messages to the public about the dangers of the Potomac River in the Potomac Gorge. Contact: Volunteer Coord-

inator 703-285-2965 ext. 225 or visit www.nps.gov

ONGOING

1 Million Cups. Wednesdays, 8:30 a.m. networking; 9-10 a.m. program at Make Offices at Tysons, 1751 Pinnacle Drive, Suite 600, McLean. Each week a different business owner gives a brief six-minute presentation about where they are in

their business. They then offer up a challenge question about a new idea, product, expansion or something they are facing in their business. The group then masterminds solutions. Free and open to the public. Visit www.1millioncups.com/. Great Falls Friends and Neigh-

SEE BULLETIN, PAGE 10

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 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 ar-

en'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>



Found object sculpture by Doug Fuller

Really Trashy Art Show Found Object Sculptures by RustDoug

Featured Exhibition at Reston Art Gallery and Studios
April 1–29, 2026

The Reston Art Gallery and Studios (RAGS) presents A Really Trashy Art Show, a featured exhibition of found-object sculptures by local artist Doug Fuller, known as RustDoug. The exhibition will be on view April 1 through April 29, 2026, at RAGS, located at Lake Anne Plaza in Reston, Virginia.

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.

The public is warmly invited to attend a reception to meet the artist on Sunday, April 12, from 2 to 4 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.

Over the past year, Fuller has expanded his materials in response to a friend's challenge. Alongside rusted metal, he now incorporates scraps of plastic, crushed cans, and

other discarded materials, creating works that blend industrial relics with contemporary refuse. This evolving approach has opened new creative possibilities and added a playful, experimental dimension to his practice.

Fuller began his studies in architecture at Syracuse University, later transitioning to graphic design. He has worked as a designer in Northern Virginia for many years and has exhibited his sculpture at galleries throughout the DMV region. Fuller is currently an adjunct member at Reston Art Gallery and Studios, where he continues to develop his distinctive sculptural work.

Exhibition Details

A Really Trashy Art Show: Found Object Sculptures by RustDoug

April 1–29, 2026

Reston Art Gallery and Studios (RAGS)
Lake Anne Plaza, Reston, VA

Exhibit Hours:

Saturdays: 10 a.m.–5 p.m.
Sundays: 12–5 p.m.
Tuesdays & Thursdays: 12–5 p.m.

Artist Reception:

Sunday, April 12, 2–4 p.m.
The exhibition is free and open to the public.

BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 9

bors (GFFN) invites women living in the Langley High School District or The Estates of Lowes Island to learn more about the group. The purpose of GFFN is to establish and foster an atmosphere in which new and current residents can develop new friendships and community contacts through social, educational and cultural activities. In addition, the club provides service, support and donations to philanthropic and civic organizations in and around the Great Falls community. Email info@gffnva.org or visit www.gffnva.org.

Vienna Toastmasters. 2nd and 4th Wednesdays from 7:30-9 p.m., at the Vienna Community Center on the 2nd floor room opposite the elevator, 120 Cherry St., S.E., Vienna. A friendly place to get comfortable with public speaking and impromptu speaking for new and experienced speakers.

Open to the public.

Run With the Doctor. Every other Saturday at 7 a.m. 8230 Boone Blvd., Tysons Corner. The Center for Orthopedics and Sports Medicine offers its services in a convenient format to runners at this running event. Free. facebook.com/run-withthedoctor.

Virginia Sheriffs' Institute Scholarship Program. Those enrolled in a Virginia college or university who are pursuing a degree in the field of criminal justice are eligible for the Virginia Sheriffs Institute Scholarship Program; recommendation letter needed. 703-246-3251, shpio@fairfaxcounty.gov or vasheriffsinstitute.org/scholarship/.

Brinker Toastmasters. 2nd and 4th Saturday, 9:30 a.m. at Vienna Presbyterian Church, 124 Park St. N.E., Vienna. brinker.wordpress.com.
Pauline Shirley Toastmasters Club Meeting. 2nd and 4th Tuesday, 7 p.m. McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Develop better speaking and presentation skills, learn to think quickly

and clearly on your feet.

703-893-5506 or paulineshirley.freetoasthost.info.
Northern Virginia Charter Chapter of the American Business Women's Association Holds Business Meetings. The Chapter meets the third Thursday each month from 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. Tickets via Eventbrite are \$25 in advance and \$30 cash at the door. Seating is limited. Open to businesspersons working or living in and around Fairfax and Prince William counties. Guests and prospective members welcome. The Northern Virginia Charter Chapter of the American Business Women's Association embraces positive, energetic and supportive women willing to help themselves and other women succeed both professionally and personally. To register, use www.eventbrite.com/e/abwanvcc-welcomes-sherron-washington-from-the-p3-solution-tickets-25778817136.

Century in Bloom: Historic Garden Week in Fairfax County

If You Go:

Historic Garden Week Fairfax County Tour

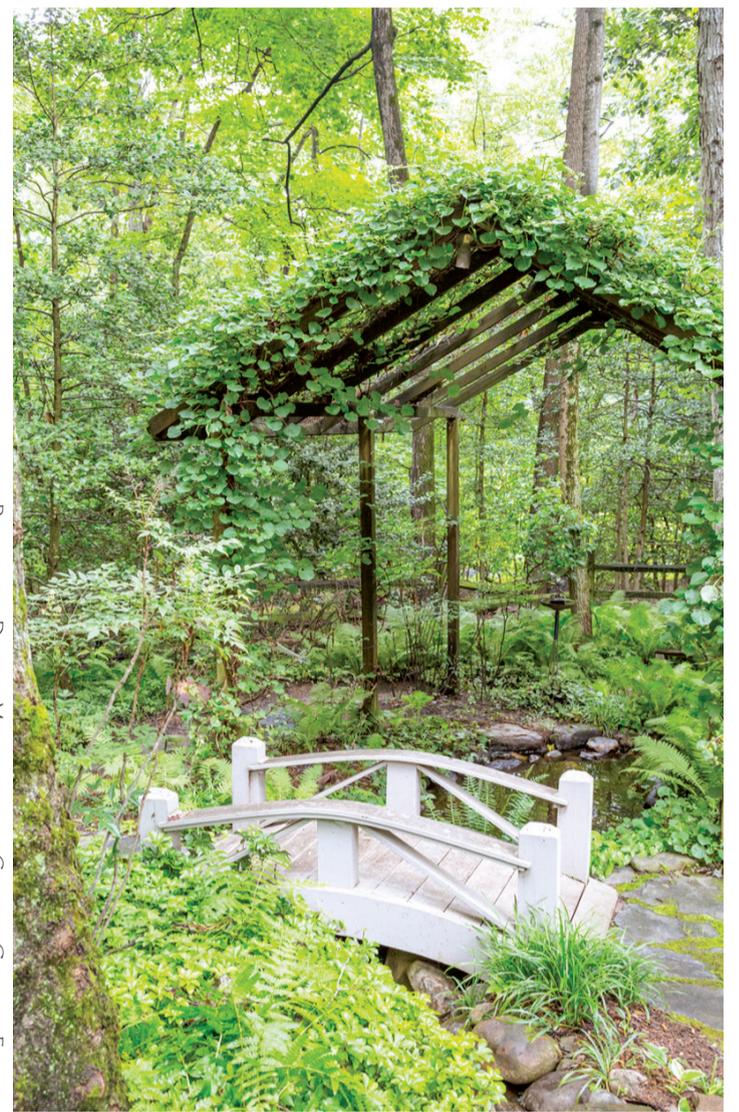
**Tuesday, April 21, 2026,
10 a.m. to 4 p.m.**
Tour Headquarters,
Historic Vale Church
(c. 1896), 11528 Vale Road, Oakton
❖ Complimentary refreshments
❖ Restrooms available
❖ Centennial “Decades” displays
❖ Arborists, native plant experts &
free tree saplings (while supplies last)

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

On 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
WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

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

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

betersaidthandone.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://betersaidthandone.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.

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-
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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

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:
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Giveaways and pop-up surprises
This event is free and open to all ages. For more information, visit: 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

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 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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Palo Alto Networks is accepting resumes for the following positions in RESTON, VA: Associate Consultant (CRM) REF9769217: Act as a key member of our team, learning to lead audits, risk assessments, and other engagement-related duties in accordance with industry regulations, standards, and company policies and procedures for assurance and continuous improvement of controls. Telecommuting may be permitted. When not telecommuting, must report to worksite. Position may require up to 20% domestic and/or international travel. Wage range: \$122,990 – \$125,500 per year. Associate Consultant (CRM) REF9769340: Act as a key member of our team, learning to lead audits, risk assessments, and other engagement-related duties in accordance with industry regulations, standards, and company policies and procedures for assurance and continuous improvement of controls. Telecommuting may be permitted. When not telecommuting, must report to worksite. Position may require up to 20% domestic and/or international travel. Wage range: \$122,990 – \$125,500 per year. Send resume to usmailresumes@paloaltonetworks.com. EOE. Must include REF code.

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PHOTO BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION

Returned Peace Corps volunteers with Board of Supervisors

Returned Peace Corps Volunteers Recognized

FROM PAGE 6

dress, of “advancing peace and friendship by promoting the understanding of different people and cultures on the part of Americans.”

Returned Volunteers Share Their Experiences

Jean Wintemute, of Reston, served about two and a half years in Costa Rica from 1980 to 1983. She became intrigued with the Peace corps when she met volunteers during a trip to Venezuela in high school. “So that was my goal in life - get my bachelor’s degree and then apply to the Peace corps,” she said. She served with her husband working on community development and health education on a Bribri Indian reservation.

The Bribri are the largest of eight indigenous groups in Costa Rica. They live in isolated mountain and coastal areas in the southern part of the country with no electricity or roads.

Wintemute shares, “My main projects were school gardens and women’s groups focusing on nutrition, basic health practices, and crafts. For nutrition, I focused on different ways to prepare food with local ingredients, such as baking banana bread, brownies, and homemade breads; and preserving fruits during harvest time. Women would make and sell banana bread for extra cash.” A plan to teach making jam out of local apples did not go well due to inadequate apple supplies. Wintemute later discovered a local superstition: if you cook the apples taken from the trees, the trees will die. No one was willing to offer the fruit for the lesson.

“For my craft project, I brought in a small loom and started weaving in my spare time. The women were so intrigued as they remembered their ancestors weaving, so we devised an easy loom to build and started weaving classes.” She shares that although originally intended to be a spare time hobby, the village women were able to sell their bags, creating an income source. During a visit to the site in 2025, she saw a young

man still using one of the bags the women had woven; still in great shape. While serving, Wintemute says she missed amenities such as refrigeration, electricity, and the variety of foods we enjoy in our supermarkets. Now she misses all the fresh tropical fruit, which she judges to be far superior to that on offer here.

Responding to President Kennedy’s call in the early years of the Peace corps was Stephen Cristofer, of Reston, who served for two years from 1962 to 1964 in Eritrea/Ethiopia. The two countries now are neighbors in east Africa; the former located on the Red Sea, the later land-locked, sharing borders with Somalia and Kenya. At the time of his service, they were one country. Working as a federal examiner at the time he joined, Cristofer felt called by the spirit of adventure. He would teach English and geography at primary, middle and high school levels as his service project in Africa. Absorbing the customs of daily life in a new country, Cristofer recalls, with humor, being admonished by the headmaster at his first teaching assignment. “I was taught not to put toilet paper in the toilet, both because it jammed up the system, and the wastewater flowed out to nurture the garden, in which the outhouse was located.” Cristofer relates that while there he most missed family and friends, and the comforts of home. He can keep memories and the foods of Africa fresh in memory here given Northern Virginia’s large Eritrean/Ethiopian community. He eats out frequently at Ethiopian restaurants.

Eritrea, although having extensive agriculture and mineral resources remains one of Africa’s poorest nations. Ethiopia is the tenth largest and second most populated country in Africa. It is recognized as having among the oldest remains of a human ancestor yet discovered.

Sara Holtz, of Oakton, served for three years in Togo, from 1995-1998. She promoted community health with a focus on safe motherhood, child survival and reproductive health. Holtz shared, “I missed family

and friends, but my two Togolese counterparts Henou and Adjoua welcomed me into their own families. For 23 years, Henou and I maintained our friendship through the slow, irregular pace of handwritten letters in French. In 2021 I received a WhatsApp voice memo from an unknown number and heard his voice for the first time since I left in 1998.

I still find myself craving fufu with peanut-sesame sauce and tchouk — the home brew prepared by Kabye women and served, still fermenting, in a calabash.”

Togo is in West Africa, sandwiched between Ghana and Nigeria. It’s known for its palm tree lined beaches and hilltop villages. One of the poorest nations in West Africa, Holtz says they still need much: “better roads, protection from Jihadist incursions, poverty alleviation, reversal of deforestation, more diversified economy, political stability, and gender equality.”

“Serving as a Peace corps Volunteer was the privilege of a lifetime, instilling in me a lifelong commitment to service,” Holtz says. “Having gained far more than I gave, I try to pay it forward by volunteering in my community — most recently through habitat restoration, youth development, and refugee resettlement initiatives in Fairfax County.”

The Peace corps volunteers receive no salary, but are paid a monthly allowance for living expenses in United States dollars that is sufficient to live at a level comparable with host country counterparts. According to the Peace corps, “It can be challenging to eat a well-balanced meal during some seasons and the variety of foods may be limited. Western style foods will be rare additions to a Volunteer’s diet.”

Holtz sums up missing the ethnic foods this way. “Truthfully, I miss the sense of family and community found in a communal bowl more than the food itself. Today I try to recreate that feeling by inviting friends to gather and eat together, honoring the lesson that the meal’s best ingredients are the connection and time we share.”

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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