

CONNECTION

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

Protest veterans
Judith Gilbert, Judy
Sanford and Ginny
Oehler, of Springfield.



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PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME / THE CONNECTION

Rally for
'Entertainment
Zone,' Casino

PAGE 8

Resistance
Builds
Community
Muscle

PAGE 3

NEWS

Glory Days 30th Anniversary April 16 in Burke

Glory Days Grill will mark its 30th anniversary on April 16 with a special anniversary menu, food and drink specials and a celebratory event at the restaurant's original location in Burke, Va. Founded in 1996 by Richard Danker, Robert Garner and Jeff Newman, the family-friendly sports grill has grown from a single neighborhood restaurant into a beloved regional brand known for its welcoming atmosphere, classic American fare and commitment to community.

From March 30 through the end of May, restaurant guests can celebrate 30 years alongside the brand with a special anniversary menu which includes a \$30 bucket of 30 wings, French onion dip, mushroom truffle burger, Korean BBQ wings, 10 oz. pork chop, crispy chicken sandwich, molten lava cake and drinks specials. On April 16, guests can enjoy \$0.96 bone-in wings and \$3 signature Homerun Ritas. Loyalty members who dine in on that day will also receive 30 free loyalty



Glory Days original location in Burke.

points.

In true Glory Days fashion, the restaurant will host its anniversary event on April 16 at its flagship location in Burke, bringing together community members, longtime guests and company leaders for a

celebration featuring day-of specials and '90s music.

"Celebrating 30 years is a proud moment for us," said Richard Danker, original co-founder of Glory Days Grill. "When we started Glory

SEE GLORY DAYS, PAGE 14

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No Kings Protest Participation Grows

Third event draws bigger crowds, focus on broader issues.

BY SUSAN LAUME
THE CONNECTION

“The abuses have not stopped. Neither will we.” That’s how No Kings organizers explained their plans for the latest nation-wide No Kings 3 protest held March 28.

Protestors say the administration has “increasingly authoritarian tactics aimed at disrupting government services, infringement of personal freedoms, and unconstitutional use of military and law enforcement agencies against citizens and non-citizens.” Organizers declare the March rally was a bigger nonviolent protest and mass mobilization than those previously held making it the largest protest rally in history, with over eight million people participating nationally.

Along with the camaraderie, social interaction and sense of community created in past local rallies, this latest event had a different tone. The messages on the signs and the comments of the participants in earlier No Kings rallies, in June and October 2025, largely focused on criticizing immigration enforcement and ICE tactics. At this rally, the discontent broadened to encompass a wide range of departments. Protestors often spoke of their concerns for the “shredding of the Constitution,” or “failure to follow Constitutional processes,” or “lack of due process rights.” Many signs were derogatory toward the President; calling for his removal from office and portraying him negatively.

Across Northern Virginia, crowds of people held signs, donned costumes and waved American flags along intersections and highway overpasses. There were more than a dozen local events. Typically reporting from 200 to 750 participants per site, organizers noted increases in attendance. From a lone man standing on an I-95 overpass early in the morning, to crowds two-deep lining both sides of South Van Dorn Street in Franconia, from Kingstowne Village Parkway to King Centre Drive in late afternoon, many were out to show dissatisfaction with the current government.

The local events held here add-



Protest on Braddock overpass draws large crowd of all ages.



At Ravensworth, protesters lined the intersection before interstate entry.

ed to over 3,000 events in all fifty states, major U.S. cities and locations around the world, held on the same day, including many in western Europe.

The national event’s center was at St. Paul, Minnesota, attracting thousands, including Gov. Tim Walz, U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders, musicians Bruce Springsteen and Joan Baez, and actress Jane Fonda.

While local events did not attract such big name celebrities, they did draw a host of costumes, magical creatures and dogs wearing signs of support.

Several participants spoke of the attack on rights of various groups. At a Braddock rally, Moira O’Shea, age 13 of Fairfax, came “to support the rights of LGBTQ people and people in general.”

At Franconia, Chrystal Simpson and her mother Linda, came from District Heights, Md., with a particular concern for the erosion of women’s rights. Chrystal said, “We [women] are being silenced, in the military, in health care, ... it is our right to choose.”

Jeanette Doucette, of Franconia, said, “I want to protect the Constitution.”

Norm Hollowell, of Alexandria, a Vietnam veteran, and his friend Joe Pettoni of Springfield, set up their chairs to sit along S. Van Dorn, as Pettoni said, “To give a message.”

At a Springfield rally, Martin and Patrice Petty were “making the rounds” hitting several rally events, traveling to Northern Virginia from Ox Hill, Md. Martin shared, “[Trump] is operating like a king. We are a democracy with a Constitution that’s being eroded



In Franconia, participants lined S. Van Dorn Street for blocks.

every day. If we drum up enough support, then the 25th Amendment.”

Early on in the No King protests, some critics characterized protestors as mostly “angry, old, white people.” That characterization has proven to be wrong, with attendance from all races, ethnicities and ages, from the very young to seniors.

Three women at a Springfield rally held near an assisted living community happily embrace the characterization. Judith Gilbert, Judy Sanford, and Ginny Oehler, are members of the senior community. Gilbert and Oehler attended the rally in wheelchairs. They are proud protest veterans, having been part of the Vietnam War protests and the Women’s March in earlier years. Oehler said, “Saving

our country from this administration is important for everyone. It’s falling apart. I can’t march anymore but I can do this. We all need to do something.”

The No Kings protest movement opposes rule by presidential decree and stresses the power of the nation’s people, harkening to the days of the nation’s founding with a message of “no thrones, no crowns, no kings.” With a core commitment to nonviolent action, several groups organizing under a loose coalition invited participants to voice support for free speech, presumed innocence and right to trial, security in one’s home, and freedom from cruel and unusual punishment; rights which they believe many now find under assault. Many Northern Virginians responded to that call for protest action.



PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME
THE CONNECTION

Retired from ABC News, Gail Ruf of Annadale expressed concern for actions against a free press.

Fairfax High Student Charged with Assault

Multiple female students at the school say he fondled them.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Allegations of a male Fairfax High student groping female students in the hallways have rocked both the school and City of Fairfax residents. Initially, some 12 girls reported the alleged incidents and, as a result, on March 7, Fairfax County police arrested an 18-year-old junior at the school.

He is charged with multiple counts of assault and battery – which are misdemeanors. After the first group of girls made their complaints, police charged him with nine counts. But as word spread, additional female students came forward. And on March 25, the student was charged with four more counts of assault and battery – for a total of 13.

If convicted, he could receive as much as a year in jail and/or a \$2,500 fine for each charge, although all the sentences could potentially be served concurrently, instead of consecutively. For now, he's being held without bond in Fairfax County's Adult Detention Center, pending his preliminary hearing later this month.

Although Feb. 25 is officially listed in court records as the offense date, Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Jenna Sands said the alleged fondling had actually happened several times during the school year. She was speaking during a March 13 bond hearing for the suspect in the county's Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court.

The teen was seeking to be released from jail on bond until his trial, later this month. However, after listening to details of the charges against him, Judge Dipti Pidikiti-Smith ordered the student to remain behind bars. He's scheduled for an April 9 criminal trial in Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, since the girls are minors. Sands is the prosecutor and, at this time, a public defender is expected to represent the accused.

In addition, Fairfax County Public Schools Superintendent Michelle Reid said the school system will hire an outside law firm to conduct its own investigation into this situation. She made her intentions known in a March 23 let-



Fairfax High School off Blenheim Boulevard.

ter addressed to the Fairfax High School community.

Meanwhile, some two weeks after the girls told authorities that he had assaulted them, Fairfax Principal Georgina Aye told parents about his arrest in a March 12 email. And while some parents wondered why there was an apparent delay between when she received the students' improper-touching complaints and when they were reported to the police, there are reasons.

The main reason for the delay was because, when asked if they knew the person responsible for the alleged offenses, or even his name, the girls were unable to provide this information.

Part of it was that a principal's communications to a school's parents can't just be written and sent out immediately when they involve subjects of such a serious nature. In these cases, they must first be reviewed through particular channels in the school system – such as higher-ranking personnel and the head of communications – and officially vetted and approved by them before being sent.

It was only after the high school launched a more extensive investigation – including carefully looking at surveillance tapes of students walking in the various hallways, which took some time – that the male student in question could be identified. On March 5, school officials reported the matter to Fairfax City police; and on March 7, the male suspect turned himself in. He's remained in custody ever since.

In Aye's email, she wrote, "We are writing to share the news of



PHOTOS BY BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

The spirit rock outside the school.

the recent arrest of a student who was charged with inappropriately touching other students at school. These incidents involved the student touching students' buttocks while they were transitioning in the hallways."

As for the school system, on March 16, the City of Fairfax School Board posted the following statement on Facebook:

"The City of Fairfax School Board takes the recent situation at Fairfax High School very seriously. Our thoughts are with the students affected, their families, and the entire school community.

"We support the students who have been directly affected and encourage members of the Fairfax

High School community to support one another during this difficult time. Inappropriate conduct has no place in our schools, and we understand the concern and distress this incident has caused for students and families.

"If students or families have additional information related to this matter, we encourage them to contact the City of Fairfax Police Department.

"We also want to express our support for Principal Dr. Georgina Aye, a student-centered leader who has devoted her career to serving and supporting students. We have confidence in her leadership.

"The City of Fairfax School

Board is here for our community. We remain committed to supporting Fairfax High School students and to ensuring that every student learns in a safe and supportive environment."

As for Reid's letter to the parents, she wrote, "I know that recent reports involving serious allegations of physical assault affecting multiple students at Fairfax High School have caused significant concern for our students, parents, staff and our Fairfax community. We share that concern. Such behavior is unacceptable in Fairfax County Public Schools.

"While law enforcement has confirmed that a student has been arrested and charged in connection with these allegations, we understand the desire for more information. [On March 18], I requested that we retain an independent outside law firm to conduct a comprehensive review of this matter.

"The goal is to establish a clear understanding of what occurred, when it occurred and confirm that all policies, procedures and regulations were properly followed. The firm of McGuireWoods will conduct this thorough, objective and independent review.

"We are continuing to work closely with our law-enforcement partners as their investigation moves forward. To maintain the integrity of the ongoing investigation, we cannot share additional details at this point. We want to be open about what we can disclose and the actions underway, while respecting student privacy laws.

"All FCPS staff are mandatory reporters and are required to complete annual training on recognizing and reporting concerns related to student safety. We expect all established procedures to be followed.

"If you or your student[s] have concerns or information to share, we encourage you to report it. The FCPS Office of Safety and Security provides an anonymous tip line accessible online, by text or by phone. You may also contact Fairfax City police at 703-385-7924.

"Our focus on the safety and wellbeing of every student and staff member remains firm. Nothing is more important. Thank you for your partnership and your continued commitment to this community."

Editor's note: The Connection is not identifying the suspect because he has been arrested, not convicted at this time; because he is a teenager and is charged with misdemeanors.

SENIOR OLYMPICS

Plans in High Gear for 2026 NVSO

Michael Coleman of Falls Church and newly elected Chair of the Northern Virginia Senior Olympics has predicted another record year for participation. "For the past few years NVSO has been growing both in participation and recognition," said Coleman.

The dates for 2026 are Sept. 9 – Oct. 4 with several events taking place prior to the official opening, Saturday, Sept. 19 at the Thomas Jefferson Community Center in Arlington.

Coleman said that the registration fee remains the same at \$20 which covers an unlimited number of events. Registration is online only at www.nvso.us.

"A new event this year is the popular game of Darts plus other events and venues are being considered," he said. Eligibility to participate include a person must be 50 years of age by Dec. 31, 2026 and live in one

of the sponsoring jurisdictions. Sponsoring jurisdictions are the counties of Arlington, Fairfax, Fauquier, Loudoun and Prince William plus the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax and Falls Church.

Most events are held in 5, 10 and 20 year age groups and some by gender. Events are held indoors and outdoors, plus all events which take place in venues throughout Northern Virginia are open to the public.

Additional support comes from Gold, Silver and Bronze Patrons which to date include The Beacon Newspapers, CareFirst Blue Cross Blue Shield, The Mather Tysons, United Healthcare, Koons Arlington Toyota, Seniors Helping Seniors and Woodlands Retirement Community.

Photos and results from previous years, rules for each event and information about becoming a volunteer are on the website at www.nvso.us.

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CAP Cadets Take 3rd in CyberPatriot Finals



The Cyber Monkeys of the Burke Composite Squadron Civil Air Patrol compete in the Cisco Networking Challenge at CyberPatriot 18 National Finals March 23 in Bethesda. From left, Cadet A1C Illia Shestiuk, Cadet MSgt Holden Donohue, and Cadet 1st Lt Taiyo Lloyd.

Local high schools represented in national competition.

BY MAJ. SARA DEMYANOVICH
SPECIAL TO THE CONNECTION

Civil Air Patrol cadets from Burke Composite Squadron, located in Springfield, competed in the CyberPatriot's National Youth Cyber Education Program. The team, nicknamed Cyber Monkeys, was one of the 11 All Service teams to compete in the CyberPatriot 18 National Finals held from March 21-23 in Bethesda.

The team finished third overall in the All Service Division. In the Cisco Networking Challenge, the team finished second in the All Service Division. This was the third consecutive year the team competed in the National Finals. Of the 4,787 teams that started the competition season, only 25 made the cut to attend the National Finals.

The CyberPatriot teams competed in increasingly difficult challenges that required them to learn more about computer systems and network infrastructure. These included systems such as Linux, Windows, Windows Server and Cisco networking.

The Cyber Monkeys competed in two qualifying rounds. In the State Platinum Tier Round, the team finished in first place. In the Semifinals Platinum Tier Round the team finished in second place among all Civil Air Patrol teams, qualifying them to compete in the National Finals. At the start of the competition, there were 1,342 All Service teams in the competition. The All Service Division includes

High School JROTC, Civil Air Patrol, and United States Naval Sea Cadet Corps teams.

CyberPatriot is a program of the Air & Space Force Association (AFA). It is designed to attract students to careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) - including cybersecurity-specific fields.

The Team Captain for the Cyber Monkeys is Cadet Lieutenant Colonel Ronald Zhang, a senior at Lake Braddock Secondary School. The other team members are Cadet First Lieutenant Taiyo Lloyd, a senior at West Springfield High School; Cadet Captain Clara Zhang, a freshman at Lake Braddock Secondary School; Cadet Master Sergeant Holden Donohue, a freshman at C.G. Woodson High School; and Cadet Airman First Class Illia Shestiuk, a junior at C.G. Woodson High School. The Team Coach is Second Lieutenant Caroline Ren and Team Mentor is Technical Sergeant Jonathan Groff.

Reflecting on Cyber Patriot, Team Captain, Cadet Lieutenant Colonel Zhang stated, "As much as CyberPatriot is about learning technical skills — finding malware, removing backdoors, and fixing vulnerabilities — the soft skills learned from the process are more valuable. It is more about being able to see the problem through to the end, to motivate and support each other through tough times, and to continuously challenge and improve skills and knowledge. Good teams turn into great teams through collaboration, passion, and perseverance."

Team Coach, 2d Lt Caroline Ren stated, "These cadets have learned how to take on complex challenges with perseverance and teamwork, even with limited resources. Through that process, and with the support of their mentors, they've grown into leaders who are ready to serve their communities."



PHOTOS BY JUD MCCREHIN, AIR & SPACE FORCES ASSOCIATION

The Burke Composite Squadron Team was awarded second place in the CyberPatriot All Service Division and third in the Cisco Networking Challenge All Service Division March 23 in Bethesda. From left, 2d Lt Caroline Ren, Cadet A1C Illia Shestiuk, Cadet Capt Zhang, Cadet Lt Col Zhang, Cadet 1st Lt Taiyo Lloyd, Cadet MSgt Holden Donohue, and TSgt Jonathan Groff.



The Cyber Monkeys of the Burke Composite Squadron Civil Air Patrol compete in the Network Security Master Challenge at CyberPatriot National Finals March 23 in Bethesda. Pictured are: Cadet 1st Lt Taiyo Lloyd (back left), Cadet MSgt Holden Donohue (front left), Cadet Lt Col Ronald Zhang (center), Cadet Capt Clara Zhang (front right) and (back right) Cadet A1C Illia Shestiuk.



Burke Composite Squadron Civil Air Patrol Cadet Lt Col Ronald Zhang, Cadet Capt. Clara Zhang, Cadet MSgt Holden Donohue, Cadet A1C Illia Shestiuk, and Cadet 1st Lt Taiyo Lloyd at the CyberPatriot 18 National Finals Competition March 23 in Bethesda.

OPINION

Neighborhood Renaissance Program: A Win-Win for Fairfax City

To the Editor:

Fairfax City is a special place to live and prides itself on a long history of neighbors helping neighbors. A great example of this is the Neighborhood Renaissance Program administered by the Fairfax Renaissance Housing Corporation (FRHC). This creative program adds incredible value to residents, neighborhoods and Fairfax City. It is essential that this unique home improvement and neighborhood revitalization program be funded by the City Council.

The nonprofit FRHC and Fairfax City-based MainStreet Bank have partnered to offer a unique home-improvement program exclusively for residents of Fairfax City. The FRHC

is committed to providing Fairfax City homeowners an attractive opportunity to upgrade their homes and to improve the quality of residential neighborhoods in Fairfax City. The brainchild of former FRHC President Dale Lestina, the FRHC has assisted homeowners in completing 290 home projects since 2002.

Those 290 renovated houses translate into 290 happy households, with these homeowners loyal to and invested in Fairfax City. Many of these homeowners are involved with City events, boards, commissions and service organizations, giving back to the City in many ways. The City also wins as these 290 properties are assessed with an increased local tax evaluation, thereby providing a higher tax return to the City.

Many homeowners who have completed projects through this

program likely would have moved out of the City to another local jurisdiction. Yet they have chosen to stay and remain an integral part of our special and connected City, in no small part due to this Neighborhood Renaissance Program.

Fairfax City homeowners Terry and Susan Olenchuk are great examples of homeowners who have taken advantage of this program and have remained City residents. They loved their house, but it no longer fit their lifestyle. "We didn't want to leave Fairfax City," said Susan. "We love it here. We have wonderful neighbors. The city services are awesome." The Olenchuks used a FRHC loan to transform both the exterior and interior of their home, modernizing and upgrading it to fit their lifestyle and helping to revitalize their neighborhood.

In a nutshell, the program is easy, creative and a benefit to all parties.

The City Council grants money to the FRHC at the beginning of each fiscal year, FRHC and MainStreet Bank approve qualified projects and borrowers, respectively, and the FRHC pays the required monthly interest payments when due for the two-year loan for the approved homeowner.

The principal is due at the end of the two-year period, after which the homeowner may either pay off the loan or apply to refinance into a conventional home equity loan or line of credit with MainStreet Bank or another financial institution. During its 24 years of existence, the FRHC program has not lost a single penny due to a bad

loan.

The loans are not income-sensitive and are available for owner-occupied homes (detached, townhouses, duplexes or condos). In most cases, homeowners have been dreaming of making home improvements for a while and this program allows them to make those dreams a reality. In return, upgrades are made to neighborhoods and housing stock, the City realizes additional tax revenue due to the increased assessed tax evaluation of the properties and the City proudly shares in the homeowner's joy of a finished project.

An added bonus is that housing stock is revitalized without being torn down and replaced with homes that do not fit with the character of our neighborhoods. There are no losers, only winners, with this program. It's unique, not only in its benefits for homeowners and neighborhoods, but it's the only program that provides an actual monetary return on the City's investment over time.

As beneficial and forward-thinking as this program is, City Council elected not to provide the FRHC a grant for funding it for the current Fiscal Year 2026. Although several projects funded in prior fiscal years are under construction, without continued funding, this program is in danger of ceasing to exist. This would be a huge loss for the City and its residents.

We are hopeful the Council will fund the Neighborhood Renaissance Program for FY 2027 and ensure that this unique and successful neighborhood revitalization program continues into the future.

To express support for funding this program, I urge City residents to please email Mayor and City Council at: MayorandCouncil@fairfava.gov. For more details about this program, go to www.fairfaxva.gov, search word Renaissance.

Paul Cunningham, president,
Fairfax Renaissance
Housing Corporation
Board of Directors

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Fairfax City's Population Is Growing

According to July 2025 data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Fairfax City's population has grown to 26,772 people for an increase of 2.82 percent. This jump was the largest one in the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan area and could possibly be attributable to Fairfax City's recent focus on adding more multifamily homes – especially apartments and condos – to its housing stock.

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The Power of a Referendum

'We are Fairfax,' chanted union members at a rally for the Tysons Entertainment District.



Fairfax County workers from 15 organized labor unions under the umbrella of the We Are Fairfax Coalition rallied Wednesday, March 25 at the site of the proposed Tysons entertainment district. The coalition, which also includes non-union community partners, represents tens of thousands of members regionally. Gathering at the proposed site, currently a vacant lot at 8546 Leesburg Pike, workers voiced support for Senate Bill 756, calling the project "one of the most significant economic development and affordability opportunities before working families in a generation."

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Fairfax County is in the middle of a "do more with less" budget cycle for 2027. The county entered the budget process facing a projected \$131.5 million budget gap, cutting 107 county positions. Despite holding the tax rate steady, rising home values mean the owner of the average county home will pay more in property taxes in 2027. The county is struggling to close this gap, which represents the amount needed to maintain operations and fund its public schools.

"The Board of Supervisors is quick to point out the issues with revenue streams ... without offering an alternative," Emily VanDerhoff, president of the Fairfax County Federation of Teachers, said at a rally at the site of the proposed Tysons Entertainment District on March 25. "Now, labor is presenting an alternative to raise revenues and support Fairfax's working families and schools."

The We Are Fairfax Coalition organized the rally at a vacant lot adjacent to the Spring Hill Metro station. Approximately 60 union workers gathered at 8546 Leesburg Pike, the site of a former auto dealership, to urge Gov. Abigail Spanberger to sign Senate Bill 756 by the April 13 deadline.

On March 14, Senate Bill 756, introduced by Sen. Scott Surovell, passed both the Virginia Senate and House of Delegates. SB 756 is "enabling legislation" that aims to give Fairfax County the legal authority to hold a referendum previously prohibited by state law. If signed by the governor, the project still faces hurdles. Nov. 3, 2026, the General Election, is the earliest possible date for a referendum vote. For the question to appear on the 2026 ballot, the County Board of Supervisors would likely need to petition the Fairfax County Circuit Court by mid-August 2026.

Against a backdrop of the Silver Line Metro trains passing overhead on the rails, rally speakers said the entertainment district project is essential to creating the high-wage, unionized jobs residents need to afford to live in the county. Supporters at the rally said the proposed Tysons district would be "transformative," creating roughly 2,000 union construction jobs and 3,000 permanent hospitality and service jobs.

"Being a union member means having top pay, best-in-class training, employer-paid benefits, retirement and safe working conditions, things every worker should have the right to," said Maria Zoraya Silva, a union electrician and Burke resident.

Hanan Ahmed, a resident of



The Metro Silver Line tracks soar above the street near the Spring Hill station in Tysons on March 25. Hanan Ahmed of UNITE HERE Local 25 says a proposed entertainment district at the site could provide the stable, unionized jobs and comprehensive benefits that local residents need to live in Fairfax County. The union represents thousands of hospitality and service workers across the Washington metropolitan area.



Emily VanDerhoff, president of the Fairfax County Federation of Teachers, speaks on March 25 in support of the proposed Tysons entertainment district. VanDerhoff said the project would support "quality union jobs for our private sector siblings" and generate tax revenue to help the county "fully fund our excellent schools and public services while providing needed tax relief to homeowners." She urged Gov. Abigail Spanberger to sign Senate Bill 756, which would allow a local voter referendum on the project. She expressed hope that Governor Spanberger will sign the bill and give the people of Fairfax County a chance to decide if this project is right for the community.



Nelson Aguilar, a 25-year Fairfax County resident and union carpenter, speaks on March 25 at the site of a proposed Tysons entertainment district. Aguilar, representing the Eastern Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters, said the project offers a "unique opportunity to train the next generation of carpenters and show them the path to the middle class." He joined a coalition of 15 labor unions at the vacant lot at 8546 Leesburg Pike to advocate for the passage of Senate Bill 756.

Fairfax County and union worker, said she wants SB 756 signed by the governor and a referendum authorized. To Ahmed, SB 756 is not the "Fairfax Casino bill"; it is "We Are Fairfax — Let Us Vote." Ahmed supports the entertainment development as a way to create more jobs in the community, sharing her experience working in both non-union and union hotels.

"Fairfax County [is an] incredibly

expensive place to live. My people commute more than one hour into D.C. because the wages in Fairfax don't match the living," Ahmed said. Before working at the Marriott Marquis, Ahmed worked at a non-union hotel where she said management cut hours. "They work me like a horse. I quit after 10 days because it was [a] terrible working environment."

Ahmed and all other speakers



The "We Are Fairfax" Coalition Union members hold a "We Are Fairfax" banner at a rally on March 25, at the site of a proposed Tysons entertainment district. The coalition, an umbrella organization comprising 15 labor unions and non-union community partners, was formed to advocate for the redevelopment of the vacant lot at 8546 Leesburg Pike. Supporters say the project will create thousands of unionized jobs and provide a new tax revenue stream for Fairfax County public services.

never said the word "casino" in their remarks, but instead referenced the bill's number or that the construction would be "an entertainment district."

While SB 756 does not explicitly name the Tysons site, its specific language effectively limits the location of a casino to the Spring Hill Metro property now controlled by Comstock Holding Companies,

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The Power of a Referendum

FROM PAGE 8

and possibly one other site. This would be part of a “coordinated mixed-use” development of at least 1.5 million square feet located within a quarter-mile of a Silver Line station outside the Beltway. A pivot shifted from a pre-pandemic plan (2019), for “The View,” a 3-million-square-foot development originally proposed by Clemente Development that featured the iconic tower, planned at 600 feet, an office-heavy space, luxury condos, and a “Rockefeller Center of Tysons” civic plaza.

Christopher Clemente, CEO of Comstock, is the son of C. Daniel Clemente, who founded Clemente Development; the two firms have shifted the focus from the father’s skyscraper vision to the son’s entertainment district, anchored by a casino with a 6,000-seat concert venue. Supporters say this shift is necessary to diversify the tax base following changes in the commercial office market after COVID.

As homeowners face an average 3.99% property tax increase due to rising assessments, some lawmakers, county voters and members of organizations believe Senate Bill 756 offers a potential fiscal solution. An independent market analysis commissioned by JLARC projects annual gaming revenue between \$418 and \$618 million. Proponents say the revenue would support county schools and county services through a 30-70% state-heavy split of tax revenue. The county’s portion would be earmarked for Fairfax County Public Schools, while a portion of the state’s share is earmarked for the Virginia School Construction Fund to help fix aging school buildings across the state.

The cost of living in Fairfax County is roughly 42% higher than the national average and 36% higher than the Virginia average. Blue-collar hospitality and service workers at non-union jobs in Fairfax County often work two or three jobs without access to health insurance.

Nelson Aguilar, a 25-year Fairfax County resident, said, “The union gives us a voice on the job and protects our rights ... We have a unique opportunity to train the next generation of carpenters and show them the path to the middle class.”

VanDerhoff noted that each year the union advocates for full funding for schools, yet the Board of Supervisors continues to underfund the school budget. She said the FCFT Executive Board voted to support the entertainment district to help fully fund schools and

ease the tax burden on homeowners. “We’re hopeful that Governor Spanberger will sign this bill into law and give the people of Fairfax County a chance to decide if this project is right for our community,” VanDerhoff said.

Ella Whitaker, a campaign researcher for UNITE HERE Local 25 and a spokesperson for the We Are Fairfax Coalition, concluded the rally.

“It is so moving to hear from these powerful union leaders from across the coalition. As a resident of Fairfax, I am inspired by the opportunity the county has to approve this project that would transform Fairfax for thousands of families,” Whitaker said.

Unions backing the proposal include: The Amalgamated Transit Union; Elevator Contractors Local 10; LiUNA; IBEW Local 26; Painters District Council 51; the Fairfax County Federation of Teachers; the Mid-Atlantic Pipe Trades Association; Operating Engineers Locals 77 and 99; the building and construction trades; IATSE; SMART Local 100; the Carpenters union; 32BJ SEIU; and the United Food and Commercial Workers.

Supporters say this new money, roughly 90% of it, would come from repatriated dollars currently being spent at casinos in Maryland and West Virginia. As the county faces a “structural deficit,” proponents frame the entertainment district as a way to generate non-residential revenue to take the pressure off homeowners’ property tax bills.

What Might Voters’ Ballots Say?

While the March 25 rally signs focused on an “entertainment district” and the “right to vote,” Virginia law requires specific language on the ballot itself. Following the 2022 Richmond Circuit Court order that finalized the wording for that city’s referendum, any Fairfax County ballot must mirror that directness.

As part of the passage of SB 756, the Virginia General Assembly amended Virginia Code § 58.1-4123 to include counties.

However, the mandatory phrasing remains unchanged. Under Subsection D, the question must be printed as follows:

“Shall casino gaming be permitted at a casino gaming establishment in Fairfax County at 8546 Leesburg Pike as may be approved by the Virginia Lottery Board?”

Yes

No



SCREENSHOT GOOGLE MAPS

The former Exclusive Automotive Group dealership lot at 8546 Leesburg Pike sits vacant near the Spring Hill Metro station on March 25. The 8-acre site is currently the focus of a legislative push for a new entertainment district and casino. Labor groups say the redevelopment would transform the idle property into a significant regional economic driver.



COMSTOCK COS.

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors in 2019 approved “The View at Tysons,” a 3 million-square-foot development by Clemente Development Co. The six-building complex was slated to feature the region’s tallest building — a 600-foot tower — alongside 1.4 million square feet of office space and 1.14 million square feet of residential space. The plan later became financially unfeasible due to the post-pandemic collapse of the office market.



COMSTOCK COS.

A 2026 rendering of the proposed Tysons entertainment complex by Comstock Holding Companies shows a reimagined district anchored by a luxury hotel and casino tower. The site plan, designed to meet a new state-mandated minimum of 1.5 million square feet of mixed-use space, includes a domed performing arts venue, a central outdoor plaza, and direct integration with the Spring Hill Metro station. The project’s future now rests with Gov. Abigail Spanberger, who has until early April to sign, veto, or amend the enabling legislation.

Reduced Plea Accepted for Fairfax House Fire

Local man is released after mental-health treatment.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Emanuel Morales Galvan got a lucky break in court last week, after spending most of the past year in a mental hospital and the rest in jail. Although initially charged with arson after admitting to setting a fire outside a house in Fairfax City, he was able to plead guilty to a misdemeanor – after one judge sent his case to another judge – and was released from custody.

The incident occurred March 11, 2025, in the 3900 block of Fairview Drive. A mother and her young child were inside the one-story, detached home at the time but were able to evacuate safely. The Fairfax City Fire Department was called around 9:45 p.m. and firefighters arrived 3 minutes later, followed quickly by City police.

First-arriving fire units discovered a car ablaze in the driveway of an enclosed carport/garage, which was also in flames. No one was injured and the fire was quickly extinguished.

Meanwhile, police received a tip that the fire might be arson, and after Morales Galvan, then 32, was found near the home, police considered him a “person of interest” and detained him. The City’s fire and police departments later stated, “Investigation revealed that Morales Galvan intentionally set the home on fire.” The City resident was then charged with malicious burning (arson) and held in jail without bond.

His court case was then continued several times until it was finally resolved last Wednesday, March 25, in Fairfax County General District Court. But it was tough and go and involved two different judges. The first was Judge John Kassabian, who listened as Assistant Commonwealth’s Attorney Christopher Worthington presented the facts of the case.

“The home’s [adult] occupant heard a man yelling outside, banging on the back door and entering the house,” said Worthington. “She saw a bright-orange flash or light and saw smoke out her window. All occupants exited the building and firefighters put out the flames.”

Worthington said City Fire Capt. John Bullock spoke with Morales



Firefighters saw these flames when they reached the home.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FAIRFAX CITY FIRE DEPT.

Galvan, who “admitted he’d set the fire. The defendant was suffering from a mental-health episode at the time and believed the occupants were part of a dangerous gang – and he was going to deal with them.”

Public defender Natalie Villalon said that, since March 2025, Morales Galvan “has spent most of his time receiving mental-health treatment at Western State Hospital” and had now been restored to sanity. And Worthington said the victims were “fine with” him pleading guilty to a lesser charge.

But, said Kassabian, “Since this concerns a mental-health issue, I’ll reject the plea outright and send this to another judge [to decide].” Those in his courtroom who came for Morales Galvan’s case then walked down the hall to Judge Gary Moliken’s courtroom.

Moliken noted that the attorneys had reached an agreement whereby the defendant would plead guilty to a lesser offense so he could be released from jail, provided he follows certain conditions. Addressing Morales Galvan directly, Moliken asked him, “Do

you realize that, if you don’t do these things and you violate the terms of the agreement, I could then find you guilty of the underlying offense and you won’t have the right to appeal?”

Morales Galvan replied yes, and Worthington again presented the details of the offense. “He’s now competent and the family supports this arrangement,” said Worthington. “The state sentencing guidelines for the original charge of malicious burning come out to probation because he has no prior criminal record, and none of the occupants had any physical injuries.”

He said amending the charge to the burning of personal property less than \$1,000 would reduce Morales Galvan’s offense from a Class 4 felony to a Class 1 misdemeanor. “There’d be two years’ supervised probation on top of the one year incarceration he’s already served,” said Worthington. “It would ensure he’s monitored, and his treatment is continued throughout his probation; plus a protective order would keep him away from the home’s occupants.”

Worthington said that resolu-

tion “keeps both the community and the family safe.” But Moliken said he wanted to hear from one of the occupants, so the adult female – whom The Connection is not naming because she’s a victim – testified. She said her husband and father weren’t home at the time of the fire; she was alone in the house in her bedroom and had just gotten her young daughter to sleep.

“I heard knocking on the back door and a man calling out for someone,” she said. “I heard him open the door and step inside. When no one answered, he went back outside, and then I saw smoke and flames coming out of the [carport’s] roof. We got outside, and the carport and the car next to it were completely in flames.”

She said a family member had spent a long time and much money restoring that car, and “it was destroyed in an instant. So it was very traumatic for everyone that night.”

Judge Moliken then said, “I’m troubled that this was an occupied dwelling, and I’m struggling to accept this [plea agreement].”

“[Morales Galvan] was restored

to competency over the course of several months,” replied Villalon. “They got his medicine correct, and he’s in a totally different place mentally now, than he was then. And he has a contract at Western State to help him transition back to society.”

Worthington said he could be released from jail immediately and assigned to a probation officer. Ultimately accepting the plea agreement, Moliken said, “This offers the community a sense of protection, and he’s spent a significant amount of time in jail. There are safeguards in place, and he’ll be on two years’ active probation. And the protective order will state he’s to have absolutely no contact with any of those family members.”

Moliken then continued Morales Galvan’s case for one year, requiring him to come to court in person so the judge could see if he was abiding by the terms of his probation. He also said he’d follow it with a second one-year continuance for the same purpose. In addition, said Moliken, “He’s to follow any treatment recommended to him by mental-health professionals.”

High-Energy Dramedy with Hilarity and Romance

City of Fairfax Theatre Company presents Jane Austen's 'Sense and Sensibility.'

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Aromantic, family drama filled with comedy and spice – that's Jane Austen's classic, "Sense and Sensibility." And it's City of Fairfax Theatre Company's (CFTC) upcoming play. Set in 1799 England, it follows two sisters in their 20s after the death of their father.

"They're flung into the society of the time – and its expectations – on their own," said Director Elizabeth Suzanne. "One sister is the 'sense' of this story; she has strong feelings but keeps them contained and close to her chest. The other is the 'sensibility' – very heart-on-her-sleeve and emotional. She feels her feelings deeply. The story's about the balance between those two ways of living and the benefits and pitfalls of being either emotionally vulnerable or emotionally transparent."

It'll be presented April 17-May 3. Friday shows are at 8 p.m.; Saturdays, 2 and 8 p.m.; and Sundays, 2 p.m. Tickets are \$30, adults; \$15, age 12 and under. Tickets may be available at the door, but online purchases are recommended due to limited seating. (Some shows are already sold out.) Performances will be in CFTC's black-box theater in a business park at 11216 Waples Mill Road, No. 103, in Fairfax. The ticket link is <https://www.fairfaxcitytheatre.org/current-season/sense-and-sensibility>.

Calling this play a dramedy, Suzanne said, "One of my favorite things about Austen's writing is that she's very funny and has clear ideas and opinions about the society in which she lived. So while it's a dramatic story, it's also romantic, family oriented and comedic. And we'll have all types of music, including modern pop and Regency-style [elegant, light instrumentals] classical pieces during scene transitions. Some of it we've specifically sourced for this show; for example, arranging a modern song into a classical style."

But that's not all. During these transitions, Suzanne's adding visual storytelling – such as carriage rides, walks in the country and extra moments between characters – to emphasize "the show vs. the tell aspect of the theater."

"This story has been told for some 200 years, and the reason we still love it is because it's adaptable and easily understood and something people continue gravitating to," she said. "This adaptation by playwright Kate Hamill is very popular because it's a high-energy and ensemble-strong piece of theater."

Suzanne said all the actors are working really hard and everyone's constantly onstage in some capacity. Besides the two women playing the sisters, the eight other cast members portray a total of 15-20 characters among them.

"Each actor plays at least three different parts, becoming set pieces – acting as trees, dogs, horses, carriage riders, etc. – and adding to the ambience," explained Suzanne. "There's even one character played by three



From left, Actresses Yasmin Abuwi, Ruth Pascoe, Anna Marquardt and Ali Lightfield sit for a Dashwood family portrait.

people who make sure her portrayal is consistent. It's wild and so much fun."

"At its center, this show's about how we find our individuality in the world in which we live, both socially and personally, and how we strike that balance between the two," she continued. "If we can do so, we can find a meaningful and successful path forward in life. If we only rely on either sense or sensibility, we're limiting ourselves in how we experience life and relate to other people."

The theme of striking a balance is also incorporated in the play's design elements. "While the shape and silhouette of the set, costumes and props are of the Regency era, the colors, textures and patterns will be brightly colored with modern flare," said Suzanne. "It's really cool. Scenes take place in cottages, country estates and manors, London apartments, gardens, outdoor walking areas and rolling hillsides."

This show will also have choreographed partner dancing, plus stylized movement for special effects. "For instance, there'll be actor lifts and people walking on planks suspended by actors," said Suzanne. "Our choreography team of Victoria Jungck and Stacey Clayton has done an incredible job."

"In addition, the cast is absolutely wonderful, talented and so ready and willing to play. We've asked a lot of the people who've volunteered their time and talents and risen to the top in so many ways. There's a mix of new actors, seasoned veterans and others returning to the stage after a long hiatus."

Portraying the sisters are Ruth Pascoe as Elinor and Ali Lightfield as Marianne, and Suzanne said they've "created an amazing dynamic and chemistry between them. It's a delight to experience. While this story is celebrated as a classical romance, it's really about them."

"Audiences will find we've respected a



From left, Brad Newberg, as Mrs. Jennings, shares a gossip-fueled moment with Sally Ann Flores as Sir John.

story they know and love very much, while breathing new life into it. Fans of the book will find little moments to excite them. And those who've never read it will discover Jane Austen isn't as stodgy as they thought she was. We also have terrific special effects, such as dancing mannequins serving as both part of the environment and, occasionally, the odd character. Jane Austen's funny, and this is a rock and roll of a show. Audiences will have a really good time."

Lightfield described Marianne as "leading with her heart. She has lots of big feelings and is a passionate person. So she doesn't always make the right decisions but, somehow, always lands on her feet. She's outgoing, loving and protective of the people she loves. She's also fixed in her opinions. She doesn't believe she can change as a person, and others can't improve in her eyes. Once someone's lost her good will, they've lost it forever."

Enjoying her role, Lightfield said, "I've loved getting to analyze her and understand her feelings. It's easy for people to leave the play thinking Marianne's the less reasonable of the two sisters. But she's decisive, charming and smart. She just happens to be a very emotional person, and I don't think that's a flaw. And since she's such a spirited character, I always have something to do when I'm onstage."

Lightfield said audiences will see how much fun the cast is having and "will have a good time along with us. It's an energetic and loving show, and we're all committed to our roles. People will love the acting and creativity of the production. We're doing things that wouldn't be anyone's first thought when putting on a Jane Austen show. All the jokes are taken to a 10, and all the emotional moments rise to their heights, as well. Nothing is half done; I'm excited for people to see it."

Pascoe described Elinor as "very connected, centered and grounded in her inner compass. And as aware of society's structure that she is, she isn't that swayed by other people's perceptions of her. She's so aligned with her values, she stays true to herself. She comes across as reserved and maybe even unexpressive; and to her sister, she's sometimes perceived as heartless."

"There's a strong connection between them, even though their differences are pretty stark – and that's uncommon. And although Elinor doesn't necessarily express her emotions, she's actually in tune with them. She just doesn't let them dictate a lot of her actions. But still, she's aware of every moment when her heart breaks and a little piece shatters off."

Pascoe admires that "Elinor's sure of what it can cost her personally to do the right thing – and does it anyway. And she'd do it even if no one's looking, which is impressive. I feel so lucky to play someone of such good character. She has her flaws, too, and I'm honored to portray someone so layered. She's the subject of books and movies and is a character beloved by many."

"It feels special to bring her to life in my way and add my humanity to her. I'm returning to theater after almost 10 years, and finding a character I feel privileged to play is something I'll never forget."

Pascoe said audiences will like that this show is so "movement-forward. Lots of the scenes almost read as dances, and it's an interesting way to tell the story. It's very visual, with lots of symbolism for people to find. They'll also enjoy the nuanced, sisterly relationship, and it's rare to have two female leads. This play teaches people that their word matters and you can stay connected to others even in the midst of differences. You can fight for someone even if you're fighting them."

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/>

FIVE-PART BETTER ARGUMENTS WORKSHOP SERIES

The Better Arguments Project, developed by the Aspen Institute & 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 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.



Easter Egg Hunts Galore and More will be held Saturday, April 4, 2026 at Fairfax County Parks.



A FoodeesFest is coming to Springfield Town Center April 17-19, 2026.

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

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.

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.

EGG HUNTS GALORE AND MORE

Spring is in the air and events to welcome the season are blooming all around Fairfax County. Find something for everyone in the family — from egg hunts to wildflower walks — and celebrate spring with Fairfax County Park Authority.

Baskets and Bunnies: Saturday, April 4, 10 a.m. and 5 p.m., Burke Lake Park (7315 Ox Road, Fairfax Station)

Baskets and Bunnies Egg Hunt with Sensory Friendly Times: Saturday, April 4, with times between 11:15 a.m. and 2 p.m., Burke Lake Park

Bubbles & Bunnies: Saturday, April 4, with times between 9 a.m. and 1:15 p.m., Cub Run Rec Center (4630 Stonecroft Blvd., Chantilly)

Sensory Friendly Bubbles & Bunnies: Saturday, April 4, 1:30-2:45 p.m., Cub Run Rec Center

Easter Egg Hunt: Saturday, April 4, with times between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m., Colvin Run Mill (10017 Colvin Run Road, Great Falls)

Bluebells at the Bend: Saturday, April 11, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Riverbend Park (8700 Potomac Hills Street, Great Falls)

Eggsperiments: Saturday, April 11, 1:30-2:30 p.m., Hidden Oaks Nature Center (7701 Royce Street, Annandale)

SATURDAY/APRIL 4

Easter at Capital One Center. 9 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Guests can enjoy the ultimate Easter Egg Hunt with 3,000 eggs on the Great Lawn at The Perch, a sky park 11 stories in the sky. Festive activities at The Perch will include a Goat Yoga class, an 18-hole miniature golf experience, food trucks, and a Paint and Sip

ENTERTAINMENT

session with mimosas at Perch Putt, Starr Hill's craft brews, a meet and greet with the Easter Bunny, and adoptable puppies from Wolf Trap Animal Rescue. On street level, Capital One Center will host the return of its popular "Color Fun Run" to kick off festivities, as well as a local farm petting zoo at Metro Park, a new plaza adjacent to the McLean Metro. Special experiences from Capital One Center partners will be offered throughout the event, including free express manicures from Nothing in Between, a pop-up of Flore Cafe serving festive hot chocolate, coffee and artisan gelato, and more.

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.

APRIL 10-11

Bethesda Film Fest. The 14th annual Bethesda Film Fest will feature five short documentaries made by local filmmakers at two screenings scheduled for Friday, April 10th at 7 p.m. and Saturday, April 11th at 7 p.m. at Landmark Bethesda Row Cinema, 7235 Woodmont Avenue, in downtown Bethesda. The Bethesda Film Fest is organized and managed by the Bethesda Arts & Entertainment District.

The films selected for the screening include: A Score in Absence, film by Max Rykov of Potosi, MD

Bay to Baltimore, film by Camila De Ilhéus & Samantha Mitchell of Baltimore, MD

Jacob Kainen: The Last Expression, film by Jon Gann of Washington, D.C.

Kil & the Kids, film by Ethan Baker of Washington, D.C.

The Danger of Disclosure, film by Carolyn McCulley of Brambleton, VA

SATURDAY/APRIL 11

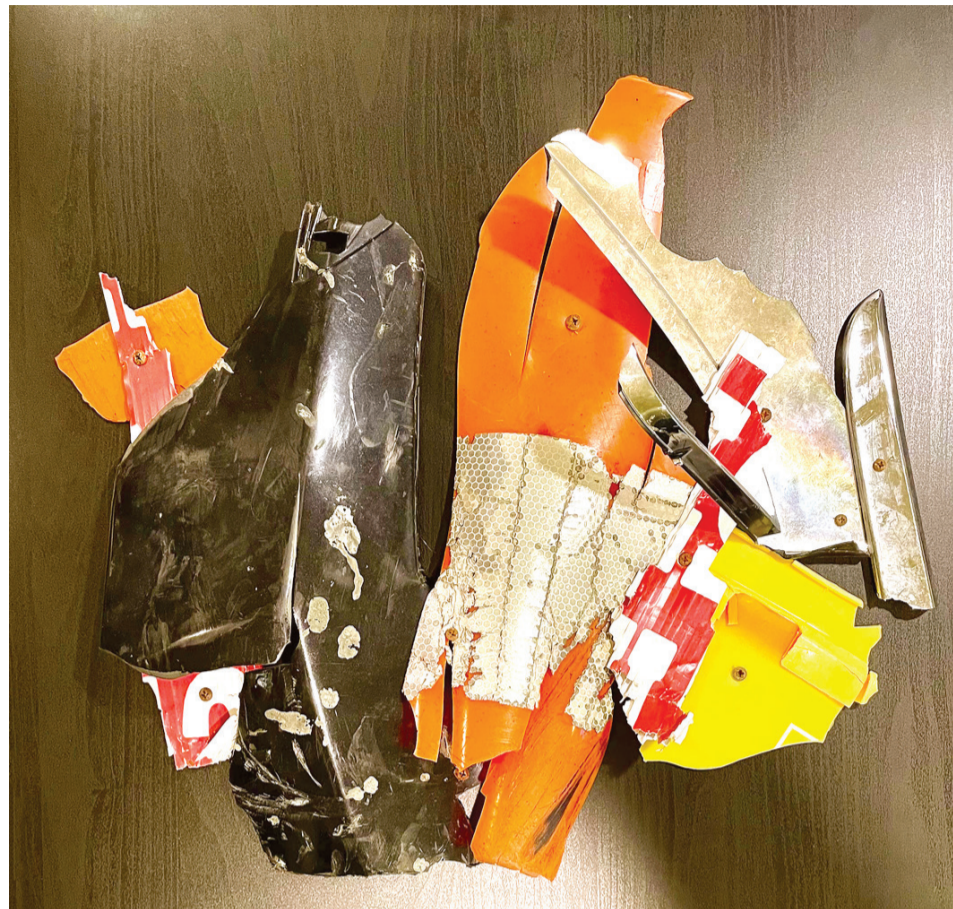
Fairfax Callery Pear Exchange. 9 - 11 a.m. At 12000 Government Center Pkwy., Fairfax. The Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF) is partnering with the Fairfax County Urban and Community Forestry Division to help Virginians replace invasive Callery pear trees. Building on the success of similar events 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

Peppa Pig – My First Concert. 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. Peppa Pig, along with Mummy Pig, Daddy Pig, and George, visit the Center for the Arts for Peppa Pig – My First Concert, a fun, interactive introduction to a live orchestra. Peppa and George learn all about the different sounds that instruments make together and enjoy some of their favorite music from the show played by Southbank Sinfonia, as well as discovering some other exciting orchestral pieces perfect for children. Little piggies can join in with Peppa and her family and make music of their own!

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



A Really Trashy Art Show – Found Object Sculptures by RustDoug can be seen April 1-29, 2026 at Reston Art Gallery and Studios (RAGS).



Peppa Pig – My First Concert can be seen on Saturday, April 11, 2026 at GMU Center for the Arts in Fairfax.

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.

SATURDAY/APRIL 11

Recovery Games. 10 a.m. At Lake Fairfax Park, Reston. National Capital Treatment & Recovery will be hosting the Recovery Game. The event brings together local treatment centers, alumni in recovery, and members of the community for a series of friendly games and activities designed to highlight the positive impact of recovery and show that long-term recovery is possible. Participants include individuals who have overcome substance use challenges and are now giving back by supporting others on the same journey. The event

will provide strong visual opportunities and personal stories demonstrating how recovery is transforming lives in our community.

SUNDAY/APRIL 12

Circa: Humans 2.0. At 7 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, Fairfax. This Australian company Circa presents "jaw-dropping, seat-clawing" (ArtsHub) next level circus. In a symphony of acrobatics, sound, and light, Circa's internationally acclaimed Humans 2.0 is a tightly woven choreography of bodies, pulsing with music by composer Ori Lichtik and revealed in Paul Jackson's dramatic lighting. Created by circus visionary Yaron Lifschitz, Humans 2.0 is intimate, primal, and deeply engaged with the challenge of being human.

SUNDAY/APRIL 12

Yom HaShoah Commemoration. 1:30 to 3 p.m. Fairfax. The JCRC of Greater Washington considers it their most sacred obligation to host the annual community-wide Yom Ha'Shoah Commemoration in memory of the six million Jews killed during the Holocaust and in honor of the survivors and their family members among us. Please join us for this poignant and meaningful tribute that brings together

the community to reflect and strengthen our resolve at a difficult time of unprecedented antisemitism around the globe. Holocaust survivor Irene Fogel Weiss, a Northern Virginia resident, will be the keynote speaker. The exact location will be provided to registrants closer to the event date. Visit <https://jcouncil.org/events/yom-hashoah-commemoration>

APRIL 12-19

McLean Restaurant Week. At 20 restaurants in McLean. This spring, McLean's restaurant offerings will be on full display at the inaugural McLean Restaurant Week, to be held April 12-19 and presented by the McLean Revitalization Corp. (MRC), an all-volunteer nonprofit organization dedicated to improving Downtown McLean. As Restaurant Week approaches, residents and visitors can visit McLeanToday.org/RestaurantWeek to see this diverse mix of offerings. Each participating restaurant will showcase a Restaurant Week special menu or promotion, which may include special prix fixe dinner offerings, discounts across their menu, free desserts and appetizers, and more.

APRIL 17-19

FoodeesFest. At Springfield Town Center, 6500 Springfield Mall, Springfield. Friday: 1:00 PM – 9:00 PM; Saturday: 11:00 AM – 9:00 PM; Sunday: 11:00 AM – 7:00 PM. The traveling food and artisan festival will transform the area into a vibrant gathering place filled with incredible food, local artisans, and a welcoming community atmosphere. Best of all, ticket registration is completely free, making it the perfect outing for families, friends, and food lovers alike. FoodeesFest is known for bringing together a wide variety of flavors and handmade goods, creating a festival experience that highlights both culinary creativity and local craftsmanship. Visitors can expect 40+ gourmet food trucks and food vendors serving everything from bold barbecue and street tacos to decadent desserts and refreshing drinks.

SATURDAY/APRIL 18

County History Commission Conference. 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. At Fairfax County Government Center, Fairfax. The theme is Revolutionary Ideas: Fairfax County's American Revolution. Besides presentations that appeal to scholars as well as anyone who likes history, the afternoon will have some all-ages activities. There will be a trivia competition, some hands-on crafts and activities for even young children, an AI presentation, interactive Find Your Roots, student projects (middle and high school), and more. The conference has partners: the Fairfax County Park Authority, which has been a previous partner, and new this year: the Fairfax 250 Commission, George Mason University's Center for Mason Legacies, and the Historical Society of Fairfax County.

SATURDAY/APRIL 18

Liberty Middle School Environmental Fair. 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. At Liberty Middle School, 6801 Union Mill Rd., Clifton. The Lord of Life Connections Team is partnering with Liberty Middle School to sponsor a community Environmental Fair on Saturday April 18, 2026 from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. It promises to be a fun-filled event that raises awareness and appreciation for our natural environment!

SATURDAY/APRIL 18

Both Sides Tour XXXIV – The Battle of Monocacy Battlefield Tour and a Visit to Fort Stevens. The Battle of Monocacy is one of the Civil War's most significant, yet little-known battles! The fighting that day in the corn and wheatfields near Frederick, Maryland, was a full-scale engagement between 12,000 battle-hardened Confederate infantrymen led by Lieutenant General Jubal Early, against 5,800 relatively untested Union soldiers under the command of the future author of Ben Hur, the celebrated Major General Lew Wallace. On June 12, 1864, two days before

SEE CALENDAR, PAGE 15

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WHAT THEY CLAIMED

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Obituary

Jeffrey Philip Strano, 57, of Springfield, Virginia, passed away on February 11, 2026, surrounded by the love of his family.

Jeff was born on October 26, 1968, in New York to John Strano and Marilyn (Slasky) Strano, who preceded him in death. He grew up with strong family values that he carried with him throughout his life.

Jeff was a proud graduate of Bishop Ireton High School and later earned his degree from George Mason University. He built a successful career in the Information Technology field, where he was known for his dedication, intelligence, and quiet professionalism.

Outside of work, Jeff enjoyed biking, had a passion for trains, and was a licensed pilot who loved flying airplanes. He also loved going to the beach, never turned down a good bowl of ice cream, and treasured spending time with his family above all else. He also shared his home with the family cats, Mr. Pants and Stick, though Stick may have been more fond of Jeff than Jeff was of him.

Those who knew Jeff will remember him as kind, caring, quiet, and loving. He also liked to say that he was "cool," something his family will always smile about when they think of him.

Jeff is survived by his loving wife, Melissa Strano; his daughters, Madison Strano and Aubrey Strano; his sister, Pauline Dahlin; his brother-in-law, Troy Dahlin; his nephew, Mitchell Dahlin; his nieces, Angelina, Meghan & Jenna Dahlin; and many cousins and extended family members who will cherish his memory.

Those who wish to honor Jeff's memory may consider making a donation toward research to find a cure for Progressive Supranuclear Palsy (PSP). Donations can be made through the CurePSP Foundation at: https://secure2.convio.net/cpsp/site/Donation2.jsessionid=00000000.app20003a?df_id=4320&4320.donation=form1&mfc_pref=T&NONCE_TOKEN=5FF70A12EBE0774E2B7179DD5ACDA16B

Service information will be announced at a later date.

Jeff will be deeply missed by all who knew and loved him. His kindness, quiet strength, and love for his family will never be forgotten. To his wife and daughters, who he lovingly called "his girls," his love will remain forever in their hearts.

Until we meet again. You will forever live in our hearts. May the ocean breeze and open skies carry our love to you.

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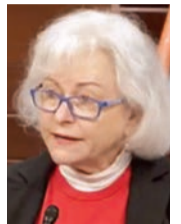
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OPINION

Not Asking for a 'Better' Casino Bill; NO Casino Bill

BY LYNNE MULSTON



Lynne Mulston

A casino doesn't belong in Fairfax County — and the only right answer now that SB 756 is on the Governor's desk is a full veto of the casino bill.

Pro-casino advocates claim it will bring tax revenue, jobs, and tourism, but the facts tell a different story.

They say:

❖ "It will bring in tax revenue for schools and public services."

Casino revenue is routinely overstated. After accounting for the costs of added law enforcement, addiction treatment, traffic management, and the loss of tax revenue from nearby businesses, the fiscal "benefit" collapses. Moreover, the Federal Reserve Bank of St Louis found that states that earmark gaming revenues for education experienced no overall increase in education expenditures. There's no version of this deal that makes financial sense for Fairfax taxpayers.

❖ "It will create jobs for local residents."

Most casino jobs are lower-wage, high-turnover, and shift-based. The local restaurants, retailers, and service providers that

SEE NOT ASKING, PAGE 15

Glory Days

FROM PAGE 2

Days, we set out to build more than just a restaurant. ... It's incredibly rewarding to look back and see how far we've come." Now, with 36 locations, the brand maintains a focus on the welcoming, family-friendly atmosphere that defined its earliest days.

"This milestone is a testament to the relationships we've built over the years, from our loyal guests to our dedicated team members," said Bob Basham, Principal Owner of Glory Days Grill.

The anniversary menu will run through the end of May while day-of specials will be available on April 16 only at all participating locations. To learn more about Glory Days Grill, visit <https://www.glorydaysgrill.com/>.

FROM PAGE 13

Union Major General David Hunter set out for Lynchburg, Confederate Commander-in-Chief General Robert E. Lee, sitting and pondering General Grant's next move, made a bold decision of his own. It was a move so risky that if it failed, it would have left Lee extremely vulnerable in Richmond and easily could have given Grant an opening to make a successful final aggressive move against Petersburg and the Confederate capital. However, if Lee's audacity succeeded, it could tip the other direction and force the Union to seek a peaceful resolution to the four-year conflict. The cost of this tour will be \$125. Tour leaves Franconia at 8:15 a.m. sharp. Park at the Olivet Church lot at the corner of Beulah Street and Franconia Road. The bus will leave from Olivet. Contact Don Hakenson at 703-971-4984 or dhakenson@verizon.net

SATURDAY/APRIL 18

Grow a Greener Fairfax...for Free! 8 a.m. to noon. At Burke Farmer's Market (at the Burke VRE/Amtrak station), 5671 Robert's Parkway, Burke. If you're looking to beautify your yard with more trees, you may find just what you need at an upcoming seedling giveaway. The Fairfax County Tree Commission is conducting the event this spring. Join your neighbors Saturday, April 18, at the opening of the Burke Farmer's Market and pick up a free tree. The bare-root seedlings are small, easy to plant and will be available while supplies last. A variety will be available: Black Gum, Red Oak, Willow Oak, Sweetbay Magnolia, Eastern Redbud.

SATURDAY/APRIL 18

Historic House Tours. 10:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. At Sunrise at Silas Burke House, 9619 Burke Lake Road, Burke. The Burke Historical Society next tour day of the historic house at Sunrise at Silas Burke House will be April 18. 10:30 a.m.-12:15 p.m. Free. No registration required. Tours begin on the side of the house facing the Sunrise building.

SUNDAY/APRIL 19

The Magic of Rob Lake: Live from Broadway. 4 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, Fairfax. Be amazed by the youngest winner of The Merlin Award, also known as the "holy grail of the magic world," and America's Got Talent quarter finalist Rob Lake! In addition to touring across the U.S. and 45 more countries, he also serves as magic and illusion consultant, illusion designer, and creative consultant for incredible productions including Disney's Aladdin on Broadway, The Harry Potter Film Concert Series, Adele's Las Vegas residency at Caesars Palace, and more.

TUESDAY/APRIL 21

2026 Historic Garden Week in Fairfax Tour. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The Garden Club of Fairfax will be hosting the Centennial Historic Garden Week Tour. This milestone will be marked by an exclusive, self-driving tour

of three distinctive properties in Fairfax County. Attendees will journey through time, beginning with a visit to an 1865 Victorian gem in Fairfax. This historic home offers a blend of classic elegance and contemporary comfort, nestled on nearly an acre adorned with spectacular gardens and over 70 American boxwoods that have flourished for more than a century. The tour continues with two remarkable residences in the Oak Hill area. One property enchants visitors with a tranquil Zen Garden, featuring graceful waterfalls and serene pools, while the other delights with vibrant color and a lush hillside woodland garden. Guests may enjoy the properties in any order at their own pace. Tour co-chairs Andrea Hickman Meleski and Susan Malcolm look forward to welcoming visitors to this memorable event. For more information, contact fairfax@vagardenweek.org.

APRIL 23-26

Annandale Book Sale. 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. At George Mason Regional Library, 7001 Little River Turnpike, Annandale. Browse thousands of high-quality used books, CDs and DVDs at the George Mason Friends Book Sale. Come early for the best selection and Sunday for half-priced bargains.

SATURDAY/APRIL 25

Annual Spring Faire. 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. At Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, 8304 Old Keene Mill Road, Springfield. Annual Spring Faire, Craft and Vendor Show. Sponsored by the Women's Club of Springfield. Proceeds benefit the Bethany House. Visit <https://womansclubofspringfield.org/event/april-25-2026-annual-spring-faire-supporting-bethany-house/>

SATURDAY/APRIL 25

RA's Community Yard Sale. 8:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. At 12010 Sunrise Valley Dr. (near Reston Wegmans), Reston. Join us for one of Reston's biggest community yard sales. With 85 families selling a wide variety of items, this is a fantastic opportunity to find bargains on children's clothes, toys, home essentials, college dorm necessities, and more. Sign up to have a booth or stop by to browse for great bargains. \$45/RA members, booth space. \$55/Non-members, booth space.

SATURDAY/APRIL 25

ChalkFest at eARTh Day. 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. At Reston Town Square Park, Reston. Celebrate creativity, community, and the planet at ChalkFest at eARTh Day 2026, a joyful outdoor art event hosted by Public Art Reston. The event is presented as part of the annual eARTh Day celebration organized by the Reston Town Center Association. ChalkFest welcomes artists of all ages and skill levels—from professional artists to enthusiastic amateurs, families and kids. Registered participants will create their own chalk masterpieces in designated squares, with prizes awarded in categories such as Professional

Artists, Amateur Artists, Families & Kids, and People's Choice. Chalking begins at 11:00 a.m., judging starts at 4:00 p.m., and winners will be announced at 5:00 p.m.

SATURDAY/APRIL 25

Doug Varone and Dancers. At 8 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, Fairfax. Doug Varone and Dancers brings the power, beauty, and humanity of dance to audiences worldwide. Touring nationally and internationally, the Company has built a rich legacy reaching audiences of all ages in urban and rural communities alike. It has been presented on major stages from Lincoln Center to London's Queen Elizabeth Hall, Moscow's Stanislavsky Theatre, Buenos Aires' Teatro San Martin, and the Venice Biennale.

SATURDAY/APRIL 25

Academy Day. 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. At the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg. Senator Mark R. Warner will host his annual Academy Day. The event is for high school and middle school students, their parents or guardians, and school counselors. It includes a seated program that will provide a comprehensive overview of the United States service academies and their admission processes. Information will also be shared regarding application procedures for congressional nominations and other military-related options that exist at higher education institutions in Virginia. Following the program, attendees will be able to meet with officials from all five academies as well as representatives from Navy Talent Acquisition Group (NTAG) Richmond, ROTC programs at the University of Virginia, the United States Marine Corps, the Virginia Military Institute, the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets, the Virginia Women's Institute for Leadership at Mary Baldwin University, and the University of Mary Washington at their resource tables. Staff from Virginia congressional offices will also be available to answer questions. As the event concludes, the University of Mary Washington will be offering campus tours. To participate, please meet at their resource table at 1:30 p.m. Information on the nomination process for the service academies is available on the Senator's website. You may email academy_noms@warner.senate.gov with any questions about the event.

SATURDAY/MAY 2

Fifth Civil War & Miliaria Show and Sale. At Arlington-Fairfax Elks Lodge, 8421 Arlington Blvd., Fairfax. Don Hakenson and Bud Mayo will be sponsoring a Fifth Civil War & Miliaria Show and Sale on Saturday, May 2, 2026 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Books, Relics and Memorabilia will be sold from all wars! Admission is \$5 per person. Tables for vendors are \$75 each. Contact Don Hakenson at dhakenson@verizon.net or call at 703-971-4984 or contact Bud Mayo at mayo5304@cox.net or call at 703-389-1505. All vendors are welcome!

Impractically Speaking



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Due to the closure of my local Truist Bank branch - and its equally accessible ATM, I have been living a non-cash existence. Though I have a supermarket nearby which enables me to get cash back when using my debit card (and by overpaying the supermarket's tab), the damage you might say, has already been done - in my head anyway. To even get to the cash, I have to use a debit card so I'm not exactly avoiding the problem as much as I'm contributing to it. And though I couldn't pay with the debit card unless I had a sufficient balance to the tethered account, nonetheless I feel as if I'm taking from one account to pay for another. It feels almost like churning. Except in this instance, I'm spending my own money, but it's not money that's actually in hand. Rather it's plastic in the wallet. And though it ultimately serves the same purpose/master, it feels - to me, as if I'm taking from Peter to pay Paul - and I'm neither Peter nor Paul. In short, I feel constrained and careless in the same transaction, if that makes any sense?

Underlying the previous paragraph's sentiment; having cash in actual hand/wallet represents - to me anyway, a kind of affordability/success that I don't feel when paying with plastic. Paying with plastic seems like bad planning. Moreover, not having enough cash represents a kind of failure to communicate (not between Paul Newman's character Luke Jackson and Strother Martin, his overseer on a prison farm, from the classic "Cool Hand Luke") but between you and your bank. As if you don't know how to manage - or you don't have enough, money. Either way, you're not going to influence people or make any friends (an ode to Dale Carnegie). Pulling out a credit card to pay your way doesn't carry the same weight/affect as fanning out however many \$100 bills are necessary to pay what's due. Cash seems more impressive/responsible somehow.

I understand that the evolution (or is that a revolution) of our economy from brick and mortar to online and not in person generally prevents the use of cash. These days, cash is no longer king. It's maybe a prince. And if one is not going to become a pauper when always using credit cards, it requires strict adherence to a recurring reconciliation of what's going where and who pays what, when. And that may require a "particular set of skills" or Liam Neeson to manage the incoming and this ongoing outgoing. Or the money will simply be taken with minimal understanding.

I am aware, and it's certainly a choice - but hardly a consideration, that I can debit from non-Truist automatic teller machines. However, I hate the fees associated with those withdrawals almost as much as I hate drivers who back into parking spaces - but that's a whole 'nother column which was published in this space months ago, so I won't bore you on the topic any more than I already have. But I don't see my debit card as a primary payor of stuff as I figure the money in the checking is there for other bill-related reasons. Its use is not supposed to abuse the privilege, so to speak, of having money not yet budgeted. I want to go forward with my money, not backwards and debiting often feels "bassackwards."

I imagine much of this rambling doesn't make any sense - or cents either, and that's exactly my point. Money doesn't grow on plastic any more than it grows on trees. I have to think about how I'm spending if I want to grow rich (sort of Napoleon Hill).

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

Not Asking for a 'Better' Casino Bill; NO Casino Bill

FROM PAGE 14

would lose business employ far more Fairfax residents today — in stronger, community-based positions.

❖ "We can negotiate better community benefit agreements."

No agreement can erase the harms to our roads, families and local economy. And the longer the threat of a casino looms, the damage to future mixed use development increases, as property owners shelve projects that would be negatively impacted by a nearby gaming operation. Negotiations cannot delay the damage and legitimize the

idea. The right move is a quick clean veto — not another rewrite.

❖ "There's clearly a demand for this."

Demand for gambling isn't the same as public benefit. Fairfax residents didn't elect their leaders to chase every revenue stream; they expect decisions that preserve a community built for families and businesses.

❖ "It will boost tourism and put Fairfax on the map."

While casinos may work in some locations, they don't in others. We need to build on Fairfax County's strengths and not copy

the playbooks of other jurisdictions. Fairfax County is already recognized as one of the most prosperous and dynamic counties in the nation.

Given other nearby attractions, Fairfax County will never be a tourist gaming destination. Casino-driven tourism doesn't build sustainable growth or enhance our reputation — it undermines both.

The bottom line:

We are not asking for a "better" casino bill. We are asking for no casino bill. There is no version of this proposal that serves Fairfax County's long-term interests.

Bringing Magic to the Message

'Make America Magic Again'

By SUSAN LAUME
THE CONNECTION

Standing out among the protest signs and waving flags, some rally participants loomed large among their fellow protestors, literally. Using spectacle with a dose of humor, they found a different way to draw attention to their complaints against the federal administration through costume dress; much of it larger than life.

Since costumes first appeared worn by the Portland Frog Brigade in protests outside the Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility in Oregon, use of "tactical frivolity" has become a staple of No Kings protest rallies. Experts say that costumes not only attract notice and people to the protest message, but also signal this is not a place for violence. Whimsy and humor, with a large dose of silly, do much to defuse tension, whether it is caused by facing armed and masked enforcement agents, or just thinking about the many reasons one has to come out to participate in resistance demonstrations.

No Kings events in Northern Virginia drew a selection of super heroes, ducks, unicorns, and the odd T-Rex and Flamingo. There were a few knitted frog hats for added measure.



Moving through a crowded overpass rally, one might be surprised to encounter a T-Rex.

Miranda Thomas, 8, and her mother Claire, of Annandale, used a duck to emphasize their message and added, "We want everyone to follow the rules [the Constitution], and protect our neighbors."



In Braddock, Captain America and Lady Deadpool, characters from American comic books, voiced concern that "no due process is not right; one issue out of how many."



PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION



Unicorns added to the magic in Kingstowne, drawing crowd applause.



Always smiling, two Axolotls carried signs with serious messages.



Mike Mirtan, of North Springfield, being purposely silly, rode a Flamingo, saying "Florida became intolerable."