

THE CONNECTION

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



Lara Bury at the No Kings protest in the Town of Herndon, Saturday, March 28. Bury says the protests are building community and helping people feel less alone.

Labor Rallies
for 'Entertainment
Zone,' Casino

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Resistance
Builds Community

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PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON / THE CONNECTION
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Seniors Join ‘No Kings’ Protest

Older age group protests expanded executive authority.

By MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

For Joe and hundreds of other seniors who took to the streets in the Town of Herndon and in Reston, the Herndon-Reston Indivisible No Kings 3 rally wasn't just a Saturday outing — it was a decades-long fight for democracy coming full circle.

Joe, who joined others filling the sidewalks of downtown Herndon on March 28, remembers a different kind of high stakes. He was draft number 50 during the Vietnam War. For a young man, “that was scary,” he said. “I protested against the Vietnam War. And here I am, in my 70s, doing it again.”

John Hoefnagels of Maine stood with his brother, George, at the corner of Elden Street and the W&OD Trail for the No Kings 3 rally. He echoed the same sentiment. “I think it is the same as the Vietnam protest, but it was younger people,” John said.

Protesters' signs voiced a wide range of opposition, from expanded national executive power, the 2026 Iran War to ICE raids, the deaths of Renée Good and Alex Pretti during federal immigration sweeps and more. In one voice, they declared, “No thrones; no crowns; no kings.”

Among the thousands locally in Reston and Herndon, Tom Geniesse from New York City stood post. He joined his sister from Reston in the Town of Herndon. Geniesse said, “I'm here to protest the awful policies of the Trump administration.”

Joanne Collins, host for Herndon-Reston Indivisible, said that No Kings 3 was a local event by Herndon-Reston Indivisible and its partners including the Community Action Team, Third Act Virginia and the Hunter Mill Democrats for Street Visibility. The groups peacefully demonstrated at seven intersections in Reston and Herndon.

According to Collins, 500 people attended their Herndon corner events while 2,200 gathered at the five corner events in Reston.

Lara Bury of Springfield, who attended previous rallies, noted that the “No Kings” events are increasingly about building community. For many, the rally represented a survival response in a year of political shifts and “people building community ... because of the ongoing protest energy and not feeling alone.” “There's more hope,” Bury said, as she looked over the crowd of protesters.



Lara Bury, of Springfield, attends the No Kings protest in the Town of Herndon, Saturday, March 28. Bury says the protests are building community and helping people feel less alone.



Tom Geniesse, of New York City, joins the No Kings protest in the Town of Herndon with his sister of Reston, Saturday, March 28.



John Hoefnagels, of Maine, stands beside his brother, George Hoefnagels, of Herndon, as they attend the No Kings 3 rally on Elden Street, Saturday, March 28. “The Vietnam protest was younger people,” John said.

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.

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.

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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] incred-

ibly 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,

Kanu Convicted of Manslaughter In Centreville Shooting

Crime happened two years ago in Route 29 shopping center.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

After a five-day trial in Fairfax County Circuit Court, the jurors deliberating the fate of a Centreville man accused of murder sent a note to the judge. They said they were deadlocked, 6-6, with neither side willing to change.

But since they had to come to a unanimous decision, they were tasked to keep working. And ultimately, they found Hassan Kanu, 20, guilty of the lesser – but still serious – charge of manslaughter. A Class 5 felony, it's punishable by 1-10 years in prison.

The crime occurred May 15, 2024, at 9:18 a.m., in the parking lot of the Centre Lee Business Park along Route 29 in Centreville. There, Kanu met Michael Alcantara, of Manassas, to buy marijuana from him. Both were 18 then and both brought guns with them. At some point, things went south, and the teens shot at each other outside Alcantara's car.

During Kanu's March 9-18 trial, defense attorney Farheena Siddiqui contended her client shot in self-defense, fearing for his life after Alcantara fired at him. But Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Kennedy Nyhoff said Kanu shot Alcantara in the back and, as he lay dying, Kanu fled to hide the murder weapon. He then returned to the scene, pretending to be an innocent bystander who'd gotten shot during the fray.

The jury saw video of the incident and Kanu fleeing, and witnesses testified about what they saw and did that day. Nyhoff began by calling Alcantara's mother, Diamond Bierlein, to the stand. She said her son and Kanu didn't know each other, but she knew



Kanu

Michael intended to sell Kanu marijuana that morning.

"When he didn't come home, I checked with his girlfriend for his location," said Bierlein. "And when I got there, he was dead."

She said he took a gun with him anytime he went to sell "weed," except to friends, because "he'd been robbed and beaten at gunpoint before."

Aimal Jahani was working that day at Virginia Tire & Auto, when he heard shots and saw "a body drop and another person run away. There was a guy on the ground bleeding, and he couldn't breathe. My manager kicked a firearm out of the way, and I was already phoning 911 to come and help resuscitate [the victim]. Then somebody else came up to us bleeding. He was a black male with a black hoodie. He kept screaming, 'I was shot,' and was acting like he didn't know what happened. My manager told him to step back. Then paramedics arrived and he went over to them."

The 911 call was then played for the court, and Jahani was heard saying, "Somebody just got shot. The gunman ran toward the back [of the business park], and the kid [Alcantara] that got shot had a gun. He was shot next to his heart." The dispatcher then said to keep applying pressure to the wound and that the ambulance was on its way. Jahani added, "A second victim, shot in the shoulder, just walked up to us," and a second ambulance was dispatched. In court, he also testified that he didn't see the shooting or who fired first.

Police Officer Stephen Thomas, with the Motor Squad, responded to the shooting and identified Kanu in court as the person who'd told him that day that he'd started running

in the parking lot after hearing shots and realized he was in pain.

"He said a black male in all-black clothing shot him and ran toward the back of the shopping center," testified Thomas. "There were also four police cars and paramedics there." He said Kanu had gunshot wounds to his chest, back, left shoulder and by his ear and "seemed in shock" to him.

The tire store's manager, Jason Rosario, said they heard loud noises outside and employee Jahani started running toward the Dunkin' Donuts there. Rosario said when he and three other co-workers also went outside, about 100 feet away from the doughnut shop, "We saw a man [Alcantara] on the ground with a handgun beside him." Rosario said Kanu then approached them and said, "I've been shot, as well," and they told him help was on the way.

Officers quickly attempted lifesaving measures, but Alcantara was declared dead at the scene. Kanu was hospitalized for treatment of his injuries and charged with second-degree murder and use of a firearm in the commission of a felony. In court, Police Officer Lisa Velasquez Fernandez said she was guarding Kanu in the hospital and – when a nurse asked him why he was shot – he replied, "I was buying weed off this guy. I saw him pop out of the car [we were in]."

Next, forensic pathologist Brittney Imblum, who works at the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in Manassas, testified about the autopsy she did on Alcantara. When she began showing photos of his injuries, his mother, crying, left the courtroom.

Imblum said the fatal bullet's path went from Alcantara's back to front, right to left and upward, injuring the thoracic vertebrae, left lung and left ribcage before exiting his left armpit area. She said the cause of death was "multiple gunshot wounds."

Police Det. Scott Bronowicz canvassed the area of the shooting that day, looking for the weapon that shot Alcantara. "I found it in a storm drain after I removed the manhole cover from the sidewalk to the right, facing

the Dunkin' Donuts," he testified. He then identified two photos of a black handgun, both inside and outside of the storm drain.

The lead crime-scene detective that day was Det. Susan Anderton. She said numerous patrol officers and homicide detectives responded, found evidence and maintained its chain of custody. Kanu had entered Alcantara's car to buy 3 ounces of marijuana, and Anderton said the vehicle was found with its motor running and doors open.

She testified that car keys and a cell phone were next to Alcantara's body on the ground. "A 9 mm handgun was a few feet from his left side," said Anderton. "It was a ghost gun without a serial number and two bullets in it. We also found numerous cartridge cases; and a shopping bag with marijuana inside was found on the driver's side of the car."

Anderton said she removed the other weapon from the storm drain and described it as a TulAmmo 9 mm Luger with one cartridge in the chamber. Although it can hold 18 bullets, she said it only had the one when recovered. She noted that the ghost gun found can hold nine bullets.

In charge of the whole investigation was homicide Det. Michael Hengemuhle, who testified that – according to Kanu's Cash App records – his attempt to pay Alcantara for the marijuana that morning via that digital wallet was declined due to lack of funds. The price was \$340, but Kanu only had \$5 in the bank account he'd linked to it.

Testifying in his own defense was Kanu, who claimed Alcantara fired at him first. "I felt something hit my chest or shoulder and felt pain," said Kanu. "I was scared of dying; I felt like he was going to kill me. I crouched and ducked, [then] raised my hand to shoot. I'm not sure how many times I fired; I had 17 bullets. When I didn't hear any more gunshots, I ran away."

Saying he was "confused and in a lot of pain," Kanu said he ran into the Dunkin' Donuts building, thinking he'd ask people there to help him. He said he hid his gun in the

SEE CRIME HAPPENED. PAGE 5

'He Had a Tough Life, but He Never Complained'

Mother of victim talks about her late son.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Yes, 18-year-old Michael Alcantara sold marijuana. But there was more to him than that. He was also a deeply loved son and brother who helped people in need and was the main source of income for his mom and younger siblings.



Michael Alcantara

Michael's mother,

Diamond Bierlein, still suffering his loss.

And when his life was cut short by another teen two years ago, after a failed drug deal, it left his family devastated. The perpetrator will be sentenced for manslaughter in August, but that's small comfort for Michael's mother,

"I normally wake up 16 times a night with nightmares," she said. "When you lose a kid, it consumes you. Your mind just goes a million miles a minute. Michael didn't do hard drugs. He'd smoked weed since he was 16, but it was only to get relief from the trauma of not having his own father in his life and growing up in poverty with a teenage mother who, at times, lived in her car while he stayed with his grandma."

Bierlein also has a daughter, 17, and a son, 11, who has both a learning disability and an eating disorder. Their father is a man she met when Michael was 1. "He helped raise Michael until he was 12," said Bierlein. "Then he left the family but stayed in touch

with them. Michael didn't have much contact with his own dad."

The past few years, she said, "Michael worked to support the whole family" while she was a stay-at-home mom, especially for her younger son, still in elementary school. Michael worked as a sous chef in the kitchen at Jiffy Lube Live, but it was only seasonal, part-time work. So his money from selling marijuana was sorely needed in the household.

"He had a very tough life, but he never complained," said Bierlein. "He'd been selling for a couple years, and he kept the electricity on in the house and the gas heat on

SEE MOTHER OF VICTIM. PAGE 5
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Mother of Victim Talks about Her Late Son

FROM PAGE 4

in the winter. He always had a big heart. We lived on food stamps, but he wanted to help the homeless and others in need. He'd save his work money and buy food and water to give to the homeless."

She said Michael was down-to-earth and funny, always laughing and joking. "He was outgoing and realistic about human nature and didn't judge other people," said his mom. "He gave good advice, and everybody who met Michael wanted to be around him and be like him because he was so nice, respectful and authentic."

And he loved his family. "Two weeks before he died, he was worried about his sister," said Bierlein. "He told me, 'She's such a good kid. I just want her to have a good life.' He knew the obstacles life can throw at you, and he didn't want anyone to hurt her. He had purpose and such a good soul."

Bierlein said he also saved her own life. "I had Michael when I was 16, so I was a baby raising another baby," she explained. "But I wanted him. My whole life, I had depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts. And I thought, if I had someone to love or someone to love me, it would give me a reason to be here because a kid would be relying on me. He did – and I never again tried to kill myself."

Growing up, Michael was rambunctious and athletic, playing basketball in elementary school and running track in middle school. "He was in special-ed classes in middle school because he couldn't focus and learn in large groups," said Bierlein. "But he returned to regular classes in high school because he'd learned how to ask for help from his teachers."

"And throughout high school, he used his extra periods to help out the special-needs kids. He helped them in gym; and during lunch, he'd help them get their food. He didn't believe in people being mean or bullying others. He was also loyal; he was with his girlfriend for five years."

Later on, said Bierlein, he began growing his own marijuana and took pride in it. "He

wanted to eventually go to college to learn to grow it professionally for legalized use, such as medicinal marijuana," she said.

Then came May 15, 2024, when Michael was shot in the back and left to die on the ground while his killer fled. His mother knew he'd gone to Centreville to sell marijuana but, as time passed, she grew uneasy.

"He'd been gone 20 minutes too long, so his girlfriend and I drove there," said Bierlein. "The whole ride there, I had a gut feeling something was wrong. I saw the crowd in the parking lot and ran toward it. But the police wouldn't let me go near Michael because it was a crime scene."

The tragedy and the trauma continued that afternoon, when 25 family members gathered at her home and she had to tell her other children about their brother's death. "When my youngest son came home from school, he walked in the house smiling," said Bierlein. "And I said, 'You've got to sit down. Mommy's got something to tell you.'" Crying as she relived that moment, she said, "His whole life broke – and now I can't put any of us back together."

"The grief never stops and it never goes away. The next month was a blur, just trying to get through the day in 10-minute increments." She's now coping with the support of her children, mother, boyfriend and sister-in-law. She's also going to a grief-share group at church, and her children are in therapy.

"I literally take it day by day," said Bierlein. "My whole world is completely upside down now. I've always helped others and I'll keep doing that. All through school, I worked with kids on the spectrum. And as an adult, I've taken in other children for months, when their families couldn't take care of them. I even took in whole families because they didn't have a place to live."

As for Michael, she said, "The world is going to miss out on a wonderful human being. You can label him a drug dealer, but he was a good person who cared about everyone and would never intentionally hurt someone. They say the good die young, and it's really true."

Crime Happened Two Years Ago in Route 29 Shopping Center

FROM PAGE 4

storm drain because "I thought police seeing me with a gun in my hand might make them think I was going to shoot them."

Under cross examination from Nyhoff, he admitted he didn't have enough money in his Cash App to purchase the marijuana. And he gave no indication of any argument before they both exited the car. He also said he didn't call 911 after Alcantara fell to the ground, nor did he tell the police that he'd shot Alcantara. In addition, Kanu said he went into the building, straight to the stairwell and outside to the storm drain, without seeing any other people.

Consciousness of guilt, a deliberate act

and malice are the elements of second-degree murder. In her closing argument, Nyhoff said, "When Michael was running away, Kanu shot him in the back. If a person flees to avoid detection for his crime, that's for a purpose. Kanu had three phones and never called 911 or asked anyone for help [for Alcantara]. He throws the murder weapon into the storm drain and tells people he has no idea what happened."

"All those actions together are indicative of his consciousness of guilt. 'I was just walking by and I got shot.' He was lying to the police. Who does that if they genuinely believe they shot someone in self-defense

SEE CRIME HAPPENED, PAGE 9

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Visit www.daytonva.us for more information about the Redbud Festival and other great Town events!

AAUW McLean Area Recognizes STEM Essay Contest Winners

The McLean Area Branch of AAUW (American Association of University Women) recognized five winners of its 2026 STEM Essay Contest at the Branch annual potluck dinner held at the McLean Community Center on March 24, 2026. The contest was open to 7th and 8th grade students (girls and boys) at six local public and private schools. The students were asked to discover and publicize women including women of color who made a difference in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields, but who received little or no recognition for their contributions while they were alive. Strong preference was given to essays about women who are not well known even today. Each essay described one woman's contribution and its impact, as well as why the student selected the woman.

The winners of the contest are:

- ❖ 1st Place: Aleksandra Bidenko, Longfellow Middle School (8th Grade)
- ❖ Honorable Mention: Ridheema Dusange, Luther Jackson Middle School (8th Grade)
- ❖ Honorable Mention: Mario Fernandez Granda, Longfellow Middle School (8th Grade)

❖ Honorable Mention: Zafyr Rahman, Longfellow Middle School (8th Grade)

❖ Honorable Mention: Bowen Wu, Longfellow Middle School (7th Grade)

As part of the awards ceremony, the 1st place winner, Aleksandra Bidenko, read her essay on Valentina Prokof'eva, a Russian astronomer who did innovative research leading to the discovery of double and multiple asteroids. Other women who were the subjects of the winning essays were Bibha Chowdhuri, Jane Hinton, Janaki Ammal, and Huang-Wu Lu.

Eleven volunteers from the branch served as judges: Pam Bacher, Lynn Gutter, Christina Hamilton, Myrtle Hendricks-Corralles, Sherry Joslin, Sue Kaleish, Mafalda Marrocco, Judy Page, Ruth Nowjack-Raymer, Diana Parsell, and Adarsh Trehan. The essay contest was managed by a steering committee, consisting of Myrtle Hendricks-Corralles and Ruth Nowjack-Raymer together with Judy Page, STEM Chair.

For more information on the McLean Area Branch, visit the branch website at <http://mclean-va.aauw.net>.



Shown at the annual AAUW McLean Area Branch potluck dinner recognizing the winners of the STEM Essay Contest are, left to right, Judy Page, STEM Chair; Bowen Wu; Aleksandra Bidenko, 1st Place Winner; Ridheema Dusange, Zafyr Rahman, Mario Fernandez Granda, and Myrtle Hendricks-Corralles, STEM Essay Contest Steering Committee member.

PFC Ritter Is Sully's Officer of the Quarter

Honored for her professionalism, leadership and resilience.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

PFC Lauren Ritter is the Sully District Police Station's Officer of the Quarter for October through December 2025. She was feted at the Feb. 11 meeting of the station's Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC).

Sgt. Donovan Royal, of the Midnights B Squad, wrote the letter nominating Ritter for the award. In it, he explained why she was worthy of receiving this honor. He said the squad was "proudly nominating Ritter in recognition of her exceptional professionalism, leadership and resilience under pressure."

During the fourth quarter of 2025, wrote Royal, "Ritter successfully completed her first phase as a primary Field Training Instructor, demonstrating a strong commitment to developing the next generation of officers. As a first-time primary FTI, she provided her officer-in-training with broad,



PHOTO COURTESY OF MPO SCOTT RICHARDS

From left are Major Jane Russell, station commander; CAC Chair Karen Bilak; PFC Lauren Ritter and Capt. Aaron Spooner, assistant station commander.

hands-on exposure to patrol operations, while maintaining high standards of safety, accountability and performance."

In addition to her training responsibilities, stated Royal, "Ritter was selected to supplement the Traffic Division and actively participated in SAFE December, a countywide traffic-safety initiative. Through her proac-

tive enforcement efforts, she recorded seven DUI arrests and 23 traffic-related charges – directly contributing to roadway safety and impaired-driving prevention."

Royal wrote that Ritter's "most notable performance occurred on the evening of Dec. 5, 2025, on Route 28. While conducting a traffic stop, a separate traffic accident

occurred directly behind her. As she was managing both the original stop and the newly occurring crash, a third incident unfolded when a passing vehicle struck her patrol vehicle at a high rate of speed.

"Despite the extreme stress and danger of the situation, Ritter remained calm and composed.

She clearly communicated the unfolding events, coordinated resources and effectively managed all three incidents – which spanned approximately 150 yards of Route 28 – until additional units arrived. Remarkably, she sustained no major injuries and returned to full duty, resuming both SAFE December enforcement and field-training responsibilities, just two days later."

All in all, wrote Royal, "Ritter is a knowledgeable and driven officer with a strong focus on DUI and traffic enforcement. She consistently demonstrates sound judgment, professionalism and composure in high-risk situations.

She is a trusted mentor to younger officers and a reliable asset to her supervisors, who know they can depend on her to make safe, well-reasoned decisions in any circumstance."

Therefore, he added, "PFC Lauren Ritter's dedication, leadership and performance reflect great credit upon herself and the Sully District Station, making her highly deserving of recognition as Officer of the Quarter."

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PHOTO VIA FAIRFAX COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE

Fairfax County Fire and Rescue units responded to a boathouse fire at the Fairfax Yacht Club on Old Colchester Road in Lorton shortly after 1 a.m. on March 30. Upon arrival, firefighters found the structure fully engulfed, with flames spreading to nearby brush. No injuries were reported. Fire investigators remained on the scene as of 6 a.m. to determine the cause of the blaze.



PHOTO VIA FACEBOOK HERNDON POLICE DEPT.

Officer Hank M. Ruffin of the Herndon Police Department assisted young participants at the Kids Trout Fishing Derby on Saturday, March 21. Held at the Sugarland Run Trail stream behind the police station, the event featured a heavily stocked stream to encourage local youth. Ruffin, a long-time staple at the annual derby, spends his time teaching children how to cast and spot trout. His goal, as he told *The Connection* in 2019, is to “spark a lifelong love affair with the sport” and recruit the next generation of anglers for the Town of Herndon.



PHOTO VIA FAIRFAX COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT [HTTPS://FCPDNEWS.WORDPRESS](https://fcpdnews.wordpress)

FCPD Shuts Down Large Drug Operation

Detectives from the Fairfax County Police Department’s Organized Crime and Intelligence Bureau, alongside local and federal partners, executed search warrants on March 18 at 13 “Tobacco King” locations, two storage units, a warehouse and three residences. The operation resulted in the seizure of more than \$2 million in narcotics, including 40 pounds of mushroom-infused gummies, unauthorized prescription medications, and hundreds of pounds of marijuana in various forms. Authorities also seized more than \$500,000 in cash and froze 30 bank accounts. The massive effort included support from the DEA, ATF, Virginia State Police, and several regional police departments.

PFC Henry Viar Is Sully Police Officer of Year

Recognized for his accomplishments, judgment and integrity.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

In both 2020 and 2022, PFC Henry Viar was recognized as one of the Sully District Police Station’s Officers of the Quarter. But during the Feb. 11 meeting of the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), he was honored as the station’s Officer of the Year.

Writing the letter nominating him for this award was 2nd Lt. Chad Cosgrove. Directing it to the station commander, Major Jane Russell, he said, “On behalf of Sully Days A Shift, I am proud to formally nominate PFC Henry Viar for Officer of the Year.”

“PFC Viar is consistently one of the most active and reliable members of this squad, maintaining performance metrics that rank in the top third of the team,” explained Cosgrove. “His dedication to public safety is clearly reflected in his year-to-date statis-



PHOTO COURTESY OF MPO SCOTT RICHARDS

From left are Major Jane Russell, station commander; CAC Chair Karen Bilak; PFC Henry Viar; and Capt. Aaron Spooner, assistant station commander.

tics.” Detailing them, Cosgrove stated that Viar handled 229 calls for service and dealt with 66 incidents. He also made 15 arrests. And as for traffic enforcement, his statistics

through July 2025 showed that he issued 162 citations and 16 warnings.

“During this year’s ‘Roadshark’ campaigns, Viar’s enforcement efforts were exemplary,” wrote Cosgrove. “He intercepted three, sep-

arate violators traveling at speeds exceeding 100 mph.

These high-profile stops garnered significant attention from the Public Affairs Bureau and were featured in public-awareness campaigns to demonstrate our department’s commitment to road safety.”

Beyond Viar’s individual achievements, Cosgrove stressed that he also serves as “a vital leader within the squad. As a Field Training Instructor, he successfully trained three rookies over the past year. His ability to mold the next generation of officers, while maintaining his own high activity level, is a testament to his work ethic.”

In addition, wrote Cosgrove, “Viar also demonstrated exceptional professionalism and sound judgment while handling a sensitive, high-profile case involving a commonwealth’s attorney who was found to be drinking. Viar’s ability to navigate such a public and high-pressure situation with total impartiality reflects the highest standards of our department.”

“PFC Henry Viar is a model of proactive policing, mentorship and integrity,” wrote Cosgrove.

“He is a credit to Sully Days A, and I highly recommend him for the honor of Officer of the Year.”

The Power of a Referendum

FROM PAGE 3

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.

Supervisors Approve 56-Unit, Beverly Road Redevelopment Project in McLean

Catalyst for the downtown area.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a distinct redevelopment project in McLean during its meeting on March 17. It is a modern seven-story residential building in the heart of the McLean Community Business Center that will serve as a catalyst for the downtown area.

The 1368 Beverly Road Redevelopment Project is located at the intersection of Beverly Road and Elm Street and will feature 56 residential units, at least seven workforce dwelling units and a street-activating public plaza.

Supervisor Jimmy N. Bierman (D-Dranesville) emphasized during the meeting the site's significance by noting its location on a map relative to local landmarks, including the McLean Project for the Arts and the Mars headquarters.

"This is the center of the central zone of the Community Business Center," Bierman said. "So we're very happy to see this come in."

What sets this project apart from a typical infill redevelopment is its catalytic effect. While first-floor retail was not part of the original plan, Bierman noted the developers were accommodating to ensure "street activation" so the community could benefit from the increased foot traffic.

As for the building's design, Bierman said, "In a twist for local redevelopment, the community push was for a more modern aesthetic rather than a traditional one. At the community meeting, some folks actually asked if the design was modern enough — they wanted it to be even more modern."

A distinctive feature of the project is its role as a new public gathering spot at the



PHOTO VIA FAIRFAX COUNTY VIDEO

The 1368 Beverly Road Redevelopment Project is located at the intersection of Beverly Road and Elm Street and will feature a modern, seven-story building with 56 residential units and a street-activating public plaza.

heart of McLean — combining the plaza and retail with 56 units on a highly visible corner. Parking is mostly underground, and the new public plaza/open space is at the Beverly/Elm corner.

The project aligns with the McLean Community Business Center's vision for a more

walkable, mixed-use core with active ground floors and improved streetscapes. Street trees will be planted along the property's Elm Street and Beverly Road frontages. The applicant has proffered to provide a six-foot wide landscaping zone, eight-foot sidewalk, and four-foot building zone, as called for in

the McLean Design Guidelines.

To address housing accessibility, the developer proffered at least seven workforce dwelling units (WDUs). These income-restricted homes are reserved for moderate-income workers who are often priced out of market-rate rents in McLean.

Crime Happened Two Years Ago in Route 29 Shopping Center

FROM PAGE 5

and aren't guilty? His testimony was self-serving and not the truth. He hid the gun because he knew he couldn't be caught with the weapon that killed somebody."

"Mr. Alcantara is dead — he can't tell his version of what happened," Nyhoff told the jury. "But you don't have to believe Kanu's story. All of a sudden, Michael jumps out of the car and pulls out a gun? Why? That makes no sense. Kanu said nothing happened before then.

And Kanu came there to buy drugs, having no money. The video shows he was facing Michael and shot him in the back as he ran away — which is malicious."

Siddiqui said it didn't matter that they were there about drugs and that Kanu had the right to defend himself after Alcantara shot at him. "Why would [Alcantara] leave his car running?" she asked. "Because he was going to make quick work of Hassan and jump back into the car and leave."

For manslaughter, she said, the killing must be intentional and

committed in mutual combat. "But Hassan said he was being shot at multiple times and was trying to get Alcantara's barrage of bullets to stop. He didn't plan to kill him; [Kanu] was scared and didn't know what had happened."

But in her rebuttal, Nyhoff said Kanu wasn't seen crouching in the video. "Kanu got out of the car before Michael fired any shots; Kanu prepared himself for combat. Stressing that experts identified 13 bullet fragments that came from Kanu's gun, she said, "You don't shoot 13 times by accident. You

have to intentionally pull the trigger each time.

He makes Michael stop shooting by killing him."

Nyhoff also said Alcantara left his running car because he was scared of Kanu, whose waistband gun he might have seen. "Who jumps out of their car and runs around to shoot someone sitting right next to them?" she asked. "Why not just do it in the car? In the video, never once does Kanu retreat. He [exits] the car and immediately starts shooting. Michael doesn't even take a step toward

Kanu's side of the car."

Calling Kanu's killing of Alcantara "malice and a cruel and deliberate act," Nyhoff said he was guilty of second-degree murder and use of a firearm in its commission "beyond a reasonable doubt." Ultimately, after 1-1/2 days of deliberation, the jury of seven men and five women found Kanu guilty of manslaughter.

The weapons charge only applies to murder. Judge Dontae Bugg then set his sentencing for Aug. 14.

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."

Indy Folk Band Experimented with Blindfold For a New Twist

The Golden Hours is at Jammin' Java on April 14.

BY MIKE SALMON
THE CONNECTION

One musical show of “The Golden Hours,” started with an experiment to blindfold some of the guests and have them listen to the band without any visuals, so it brought on some reactions that seem like they come from a lab report.

It was fun, adventurous and a new way to set themselves apart from other groups.

“It gets people to listen in a different way,” said musician David Wax, who plays guitar as well as a few other instruments. “You kind of don’t know what’s going to happen,” he added.

Kallao, one of the NPR radio hosts, tried it as well and described it as a feeling of an-



The Golden Hour band plays in Vienna.

icipation, surprise and joy. “It was like being reminded of why I fell in love with music in the first place,” he said.

People heard about it and wanted to try it with The Golden Hours. “All of a sudden, it became a thing, people loved it,” said

Wax.

It was a “Dark Dining Experience,” that Daniel Groans and Laura Groans organized that brought on the blindfold. Dark Dining is a nationwide activity where people are blindfolded at the dinner table and “enjoy delectable surprise dishes and feast on a curated 3-course meal without using your sight, thereby enhancing your other senses,” it said on the Dark Dining website.

It was just one angle the Charlottesville, Va. based indie-folk group brings to the stage. The band was formed by Suz Slezak and David Wax of the David Wax Museum and Lauren and Daniel Goans of Lowland Hum. The band’s debut album “Terra Nova,” is coming out this year, and they describe it as “simultaneously lush and distilled, emotionally probing, and conceptually expansive.” Huh? Maybe blindfolded is the way to hear it.

Their tour this year includes stops in Harrisonburg, Richmond, Pennsylvania and New York, as well as Jammin’ Java in Vienna on April 14. Jammin’ Java has traditionally been their go-to spot in Northern Virginia.

Stone Bridge Puppets Capture Attention

Arresting likenesses of Trump and cohorts, made of papier maché.

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
CONNECTION NEWSPAPERS

The big papier maché puppets looming over the bridge turned heads and generated a steady soundtrack of toots and honks as vehicles sped up and down the south George Washington Memorial Parkway in Mount Vernon on March 28, No Kings Day. The protestors waved homemade signs, swirled American flags and wore pointed stickers, hats and creative costumes under a bright afternoon sun. And even “America’s only king,” Elvis Presley, showed up.

Led by Mount Vernon organizer Lisa Finn, the 250 locals chanted, “No kings!” “No thrones!” “No monarchy!” “No war.” The event was one of over 3,000 across the country, the third nationwide protest dubbed “No Kings” decrying the Trump administration’s policies.

“Everyone needs to show up for

democracy,” said Arina van Breda. “We’re going to lose it if we don’t protest. Protesting and voting. It’s that or revolution.”

Ann Allman said, “It’s not a fight about right and left. It’s a fight about right and wrong.”

Her husband, Frank Zulino added, “It’s necessary to protect our democracy, which I never thought I’d have to say.”

Local Methodist minister Kerry Kincannon echoed these sentiments. “I don’t want to live in an autocracy,” he said. “I want to live in a democracy. Our faith calls us to be inclusive of all and to respect the integrity of every life.”

Earlier that day, a throng of thousands marched across the Memorial Bridge past the Lincoln Memorial and on to the Washington Monument, starting at the site of Trump’s proposed 250-foot triumphal arch, which would be larger than Paris, France’s 164-foot-tall Arc de Triomphe.

Saturday’s demonstrations in all 50 states exceeded June’s number of 2,100 events and October’s 2,700.

The protesters denounced the U.S. war in Iran, policies leading to rising gas prices, immigration crackdowns and authoritarian-like governance.

Gregory Henschel remarked, “It is my duty as a citizen to join with neighbors to express my deep dis-



PHOTO BY GLENDA BOOTH

The protestors posed with the puppet likenesses of Trump officials, here, Kash Patel, Steven Miller, Karoline Leavitt, J. D. Vance, Pete Hegseth and Pam Bondi.

appointment with the Trump administration.”

An “Art Build” for the Big Day

Mount Vernon-area resident Marcos Smyth, a retired goldsmith, created the unique papier maché heads, measuring about two feet in diameter, by squeezing together wads of newspaper, pa-

per bags and white glue and then sculpting and painting them into human likenesses. The group covered cardboard toilet paper rolls with duct tape layers to hold the poles that support the heads. The self-named Stone Bridge Resistance organizers held “art builds” in Finn’s driveway to paint caricatures of key Trump administra-

tion officials. The caricatures have gotten national attention in media outlets like USA Today.

Finn says that their weekly Thursday 5 p.m. protests on the bridge will continue indefinitely and that they welcome all.

Information: www.nokings.org; Stone Bridge Resistance on Facebook.

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

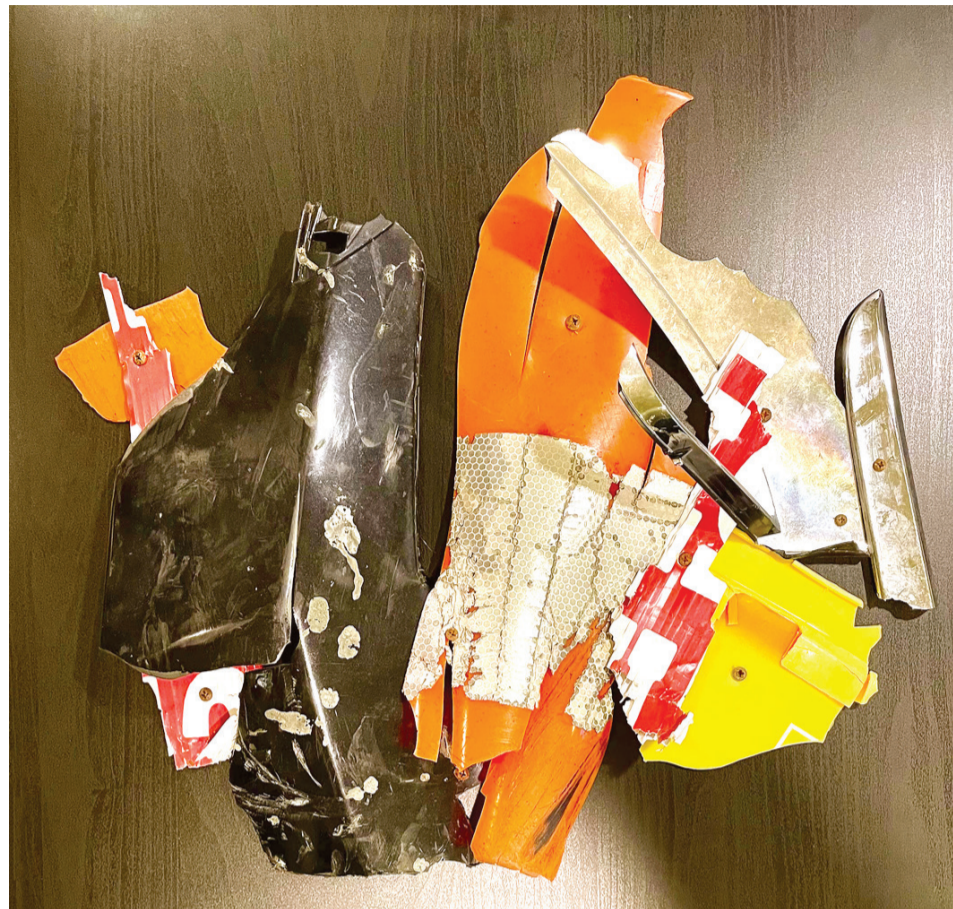
Fairfax Callery Pear Exchange. 9 - 11 a.m. At 12000 Government Center Pkwy., Fairfax. The Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF) is partnering with the Fairfax County Urban and Community Forestry Division to help Virginians replace invasive Callery pear trees. Building on the success of similar events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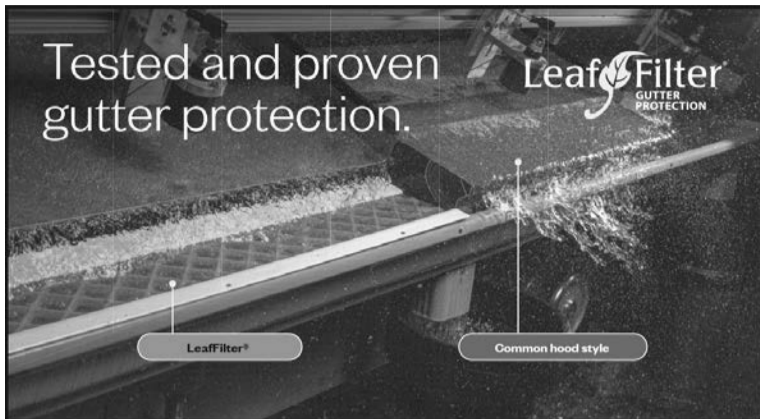


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FROM PAGE 13

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/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!

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

BY 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.



Lynne Mulston

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 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.

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.

Hilarious, Slapstick Comedy; Creative Tech Elements

Centreville High presents 'The Play that Goes Wrong.'

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Anything can happen in community theater, and that's never truer than in Centreville High's upcoming production of "The Play that Goes Wrong (high-school edition)." Actors forget their lines, props get mixed up and hilarity ensues in this rollicking, slapstick ensemble.

The story follows the fictional Cornley Drama Society trying valiantly to put on a murder mystery in London while, all around, whatever can go wrong does. Featuring a cast and crew of 25, it's Centreville's Cappies show.

"I think the audience will really enjoy the fast-paced comedy – which includes a swordfight gone wrong, missing props on stage, and the set slowly falling apart," said Director Patrick McGee. "But as in live theater, the show must go on."

The curtain rises Friday, April 17, at 7 p.m.; Saturday, April 18, at 2 and 7 p.m.; and Sunday, April 19, at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$15, adults; and \$10, students, senior citizens and military at the door or via www.theatrecentreville.com.

McGee chose this show because he wanted "the opportunity to celebrate and highlight our Theater Department's strong ability to perform comedy. The actors are bringing their talents and creativity into portraying these comedic characters."

"This play also offers our technical-theater students the opportunity to develop their artistry with many of the complicated, technical elements involved in this show," he continued. "They're using their design skills in developing the interior of the Haversham mansion and the unique props. And the costume team is outfitting guests at a 1920s party and working on color coordinating related characters."

Junior Makena Nelson plays Chris, head of the drama society and director of its play, "The Murder at Haversham Manor." She also takes advantage of her position by casting herself in one of the lead roles, Inspector Carter, investigating the death of the manor's owner, Charles Haversham.

"She's confident and really enjoys being in charge and telling

people what to do," said Nelson. "As the detective, she's serious and no-nonsense, but she struggles to maintain control. I like playing that level of confidence and experience: 'I know best; let me tell you what to do.'"

As the director, though, said Nelson, "Chris is frustrated by all the things that go wrong. She cares a lot about this show and knows it so well that it really bothers her that others don't. I also enjoy playing this character because I relate to her as a perfectionist, but nobody in the mystery's cast is really buying it that things are going OK because she says they are."

Nelson said audiences will love this show's high energy, comedy and funny bits. "There are even jokes that only the audience – not the characters – are in on," she said. "It's familiar British humor and a really lighthearted, fun and enjoyable show to watch."

Portraying an actress named Sandra is junior Kylie Henryhand. In the mystery, Sandra plays Florence, Charles's fiancé. "She's dramatic and over-the-top faints all the time," said Henryhand. "And it's gotten to the point where everyone thinks it's normal for her to throw a tantrum. I like playing Florence because it's a new experience doing her stage falls and the different ways I have to position my body to show all her antics."

Henryhand described Sandra as a "know-it-all, braggy, snobby character who likes to throw the fact that she has the role of Florence in everybody's face. She does extensive research on her character and is extremely committed to her role."

"I like speaking in a British accent, which is good experience for me as an actress. And as Sandra, there's a lot of physicality. But since the others don't expect all the things that go wrong, she has to maintain her composure and stay in character, while everything's just falling apart."

Henryhand said audiences will have fun watching the set, its elements and the characters "deconstructing before their eyes. And they'll enjoy seeing all the technical elements that make this happen, plus the little jokes and jabs between the characters while they act in the murder mystery."

Freshman Hannah Smith plays an actress named Annie who also plays Florence – and Annie thinks she does a better job of it than Sandra. "Annie was originally the play's stage manager," explained Smith. "But when things go wrong among the actors putting on the mystery, Sandra can't continue



PHOTOS BY BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

There's a phone call for the person on the far right, so the actors in the mystery "connect" it via themselves and a handkerchief. From left are Asher Galbis-Doucette, Hannah Smith (in background), Makena Nelson and Jules Couch (actress Rachel and Florence's sister).

playing Florence, and Annie's thrust into the spotlight.

"At first, Annie's timid and scared because she's never been in front of an audience before. But as things go on, she discovers her passion for acting and being onstage, after previously only working behind the scenes. She's so much fun to play. She's an awkward weirdo figuring things out – and then having to fight for her role when Sandra returns and wants to reclaim it. Since Annie has no experience acting, she's coming up on the spot with ways to play Florence, with hilarious results."

"Audiences should have a really good time at our show," said Smith. "There are so many goofy moments and impressive tech elements. People will learn there are better and more creative ways to work around their problems than the actors in the community theater's production do – by covering up things and pretending they're not going wrong."

Portraying actor Max is junior Asher Galbis-Doucette. Max plays Cecil Haversham, Charles's brother, but his main role in the mystery is as Arthur the Gardener. "Max believes he's God's gift to acting, so I play him as big as I can," said Galbis-Doucette. "I really play to the audience. Max is very full of himself, and it's funny because of all those moments when he gets to show off. And he also gets to have a duel with Florence's sister."

Galbis-Doucette described Arthur the Gardener as "straight-



As Sandra, still in her pajamas, not ready for her scene, Kylie Henryhand is angry because, as Max, Asher Galbis-Doucette won't look at her.

laced and loyal to the Haversham family because he's worked for them a long time. But the audience sees him as a comic character because, for example, he talks about his dog, but it's never seen. He just walks around carrying a leash."

Galbis-Doucette said audiences will like Centreville's actors "be-

cause we all portray such big characters and pour such passion into them that it heightens the show's emotion. And there's a lot going on in the set that our tech crew worked so hard on that people will really appreciate it. The set's the backbone for all the slapstick humor that happens."