

CONNECTION

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'Sweeny Todd' at Woodson High.
Juliana Gurrola as Mrs. Lovett and
Silas Blocker as Sweeney Todd
share a gleeful moment.

High School Theater Shines

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PHOTO COURTESY OF OLIVER HUYNH

APRIL 16-29, 2026

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NEWS

FCPS Board Approves 2026-27 School Year Calendar

Forty days off during school year is a flashpoint for some parents; 33 approved for upcoming year.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

The Fairfax County School Board finalized the upcoming school year calendar by approving a motion from at-large member Kyle McDaniel with a vote of 8-4 at its April 9 meeting. Fairfax County Public Schools is an outlier in Northern Virginia with significantly more student holidays than neighboring districts.

The decision followed extensive debate regarding instructional time, federal holidays, early release schedules and Indigenous Peoples Day, incorporating three specific motions intended to improve instructional consistency and address calendar concerns.

According to McDaniel in his school board bulletin update the next day, the 2026-27 school year calendar will reduce the number of off days from a “a record-setting 40 days off ... to 33 next year”

and “adds three more full five-day weeks.”

The largest change for the next school year that the board approved is the return of Veterans Day as a full instructional day.

“I’ve had many conversations with parents and teachers in the community over the past few weeks, and it’s clear that this year has been uniquely difficult with a record-setting 40 days off,” McDaniel said. “We need to carefully review the school calendar to be responsive to the needs of our diverse communities around holidays and ensure we maximize instructional time, while still balancing the needs of our teachers for planning and professional development.”

According to current 2025-26 student holiday counts across the region, while Fairfax County has 40 days off, Arlington County has 33 days off; Prince William has 32 days off; Loudoun County has 30

days off and Alexandria City has 29 days off.

The board also committed to further calendar policy work in May and issued a directive for the superintendent to bring recommended calendars for 2027-2029 to the board in July. A follow-on motion was passed directing the superintendent to present recommended calendars for the 2027-2028 and 2028-2029 school years at the July 9, 2026, meeting.

During the public hearing portion of the meeting before the vote, Anthony Lampkin spoke to represent his two children at Wolf Trap Elementary. He expressed his concerns regarding the current school calendar, noting it as the “worst school calendar” and advocating for a “data-driven approach on how to solve the problem.” He said, “I believe we are at about 50 percent of the school calendar hav-

SEE 2026-27 SCHOOL, PAGE 5

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New Franconia Government Center Opens



PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION

The new Franconia District Governmental Center encompasses several services in its two-story facility with attached multistory parking.



Official ribbon cutting included, Police Chief Kevin Davis; Lloyd Tucker, Director, Neighborhood and Community Services; Franconia District Supervisor, Rodney Lusk; Board Chairman Jeff McKay; Eric Carzon, Director Fairfax County Public Library; Donald Hakenson, Vice President for History, Franconia Museum; and Chris Herrington, Director, Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (not pictured).

New heart of Kingstowne activities.

BY SUSAN LAUME
THE CONNECTION

In a ribbon-cutting on Saturday, Supervisor Rodney Lusk and other county government service leaders welcomed the community to the new Franconia District Governmental Center, now housing many county services. Event planners, apparently surprised by the turn-out, held the ceremony in a cordoned section of the ample building lobby, forcing many to remain outside the doors. After waiting for the ceremony to end, all were able to enter and tour the new building. After remarks by

Supervisor Lusk, Board Chairman Jeff McKay, and county department heads, the event celebrated the new service center with music; an art exhibit, contest, and raffle, and other events throughout the new multi-purpose building.

Fairfax County has employed the money saving and reduced environmental impact concept of housing multiple government services under one roof in other districts. Franconia takes the idea one step further by including the Franconia Museum. The center, constructed on a county-owned vacant site between Beulah Street and Silver Lake Blvd, houses the Franconia District Supervisor's office, Kingstowne Library, Active Adult Center, and the Franconia District Police Station, in addition to the museum. The fire station remains at its

SEE NEW FRANCONIA, PAGE 15



New mom Maggie Mondu holds 13 month old Rory under a library sign which seems meant for them, after Rory looks for his favorite: touch books.



Joy Ascher, attending the opening with partner Ira Wright, declares the library, "My favorite place to be," while receiving help from Librarian Tim Lee.



A significant portion of the large crowd was not able to find space inside the lobby for the opening ceremony.

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FAIRFAX COUNTY

Project drawing shows the relative space allowed to the several government services housed within the new 90,000-square-foot center.



Eric Parkhurst tells the significance of the items on the table in honor of POW/MIAs.



From left, VFW's Johnny Restivo and Jim Cordes shake hands as Cordes presents Restivo with a Vietnam veterans lapel pin.



From left, NSDAR's Janice Dixon and Ann Heinz watch as veteran Hank Roeder places a carnation into the wreath.

PHOTOS BY BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

'They Gave their Lives in Hope for a Better World'



From left, American Legion's Jeff White and Eric Parkhurst wait as Fairfax Resolves Forrest Crain heads to the wreath with a carnation.



The veterans posed for a photo at the ceremony's end.

Fairfax City ceremony honors Vietnam War veterans.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

National Vietnam War Veterans Day is March 29, and it was commemorated locally on March 28 with a remembrance ceremony at American Legion Post 177 in Fairfax City.

Besides the American Legion, participating were the Fairfax County Chapter, National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (NSDAR); Fairfax Resolves Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution (SAR); and VFW Post

8469.

"Our duty to honor Vietnam veterans and their families continues, and their service and sacrifice will not be forgotten," said Suzy Mulligan, NSDAR regent. "We'll also individually remember the 147 Fairfax County residents who gave their lives in Vietnam and whose names are inscribed on the plaque on the Veteran's Monument on the Historic Fairfax Courthouse lawn."

Giving the invocation was former Fairfax City Mayor David Meyer of the Fairfax Resolves. He dedicated it to his wife's cousin who died in Vietnam in 1969. "We gather today to remember those who sacrificed in the service of others," said Meyer. "They gave their lives in the hope for liberty, justice and a better world."

"We also remember the Vietnam veterans still among us who carry the unseen wounds of war,

who continue to struggle with PTSD, substance dependencies, aging bodies and strained family relationships. May we continue to advocate for them and partner with them and their loved ones so they may experience healing and wholeness."

Fairfax Resolves President Tom Heinz said the "profound sacrifices veterans made in the jungles and rice paddies of Vietnam were a testament to their unwavering courage, resilience and dedication to duty. They faced unimaginable horrors and hardships, yet they never wavered in their commitment to defend our freedoms and the ideals upon which our country was founded."

"Many of our Vietnam veterans

returned home to a nation divided and torn by the war. They faced prejudice and misunderstanding but carried on with dignity and honor. Their experiences forever shaped their lives, and they continue serving their communities and nation in countless ways.

"Today we stand in awe of their bravery and sacrifice. We're eternally grateful for their service, and we pledge to never forget the lessons learned from that tumultuous era in our history. Let us use this day to honor both those who returned home and those who made the ultimate sacrifice. Let us also reaffirm our commitment to supporting our veterans and their families and ensuring that they receive the care and respect they so

richly deserve."

Mac McCarl, commander of VFW Post 8469, said the U.S. Vietnam War Commemoration was authorized by Congress, established under the Secretary of Defense and launched by the president in 2012. "Its primary purpose was to thank and honor Vietnam veterans and their families for their service and sacrifice, he said. "Today, even though the official commemorative period has ended, we proudly continue that mission here in our own community."

"The Vietnam War Veterans Recognition Act of 2017 established the 29th of March, in perpetuity, as a national day to recognize the previously unsung patriotism. SEE 'THEY GAVE THEIR', PAGE 6
WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

NEWS

Fairfax High Teen Convicted of Assault

Israel Flores Ortiz, 18, was convicted last Thursday, April 9, in Fairfax County Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, of sexually assaulting nine Fairfax High female students in late February/early March. He's a junior there and had been charged by police with 13 counts of assault and battery – misdemeanors punishable by a year in jail for each charge.

But in court, Judge Melinda VanLowe dismissed one of those charges and found him not guilty of three others. She closed the courtroom to the public while each girl was testifying and also kept each one outside until it was their turn to take the stand. That way, they wouldn't be influenced by the other girls' testimonies. However, everyone was allowed to hear the attorneys' opening statements.

Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Jenna Sands said the girls accused Flores Ortiz of "grabbing their butts. When one girl shared with a friend what had happened, they eventually realized multiple girls had been victimized. He was spoken to and admitted committing the offenses. We have the school's surveillance videos and the defendant's own, written statement."

But public defender Jamie Hospers said, "Israel is not guilty of these charges. The videos show an appallingly fast mass of students navigating a very tight space in the hallways and bumping into each other."

Flores Ortiz has been in jail since his March 7 arrest and will remain there until his April 21 sentencing.

– BONNIE HOBBS

2026-27 School Year Calendar

FROM PAGE 2

ing a full five-day week."

Stephanie Lundquist provided video testimony. "Half of our school weeks are not five-day weeks like this one; a three-day school week for no apparent reason directly after spring break," Lundquist said. "Aside from the learning disruption for some low-income families, to pay for more childcare is regressive and inequitable. You claim to believe in

the concept of equity, but what about the children from low-income households?"

Kimberly Adams, an FCPS staff member and parent, urged the board to reestablish a calendar committee and prioritize student and staff well-being over five-day weeks. "I would encourage you to listen closely to the community and offer room for public discussion at least one full year in advance of any proposed changes," Adams said.

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'They Gave their Lives in Hope for a Better World'

FROM PAGE 4

of our Vietnam veterans. It's codified in law, [along with holidays including] Memorial Day, Independence Day and Veterans Day."

American Legion Post 177 Commander Eric Parkhurst explained why that date was chosen. "March 29, 1973, was the day U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam was disestablished," he said. "It was also the day the last U.S. combat troops departed Vietnam. Finally, it was the day Hanoi released the last of its acknowledged prisoners of war. So March 29 is a fitting choice for our National Vietnam Veterans Day."

"As we observe it, we honor the 9 million who served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces from Nov. 1, 1955, to May 15, 1975. No distinction is made between veterans who served in-country, in-theater or elsewhere during the Vietnam War period. All were called to serve – none could determine where they'd be stationed. Too often, they were judged by a nation that couldn't separate the war from the warrior. Each person who served [then] earned and richly deserves our profound thanks."

Speaking next was Honorary NSDAR Regent Janice Dixon. "As they say at Arlington National Cemetery when you lay a wreath for Wreaths Across America, 'When you say their names, they are never forgotten,'" she said. "So today, we'll individually remember the 147 Fairfax County residents by reading their names."

Although none of their families are with us this morning, we know many live in Fairfax County, and we thank them for the sacrifices they made that enabled their loved ones to serve. Sadly, as of today, 1,566 Americans who served in the Vietnam War remain unaccounted for, and their families continue to wait for answers. As a nation, we remain committed to the solemn work of fulfilling our promise to account for the missing and bring them home."

Then Parkhurst conducted a special POW/MIA ceremony with objects on a table in front of the podium. "Those who've served, and those currently serving in the U.S. uniformed services are ever mindful that the sweetness of enduring peace has always been tainted by the bitterness of personal sacrifice," he said. "We're compelled to never forget that, while we enjoy our daily pleasures, there are others who have endured and may still be enduring the agonies of pain, deprivation and imprisonment."

"To recognize them, we call your attention to this small table occu-



Standing by the full wreath are Fairfax Resolves (from left) Jim Cordes, David Cook, Tom Heinz and Carl Loveland.

pying a place of dignity and honor. It's set for one, symbolizing that members of our armed forces are missing from our ranks. They're referred to as POWs and MIAs. We call them comrades. They're unable to be with their loved ones and families, so we join to pay humble tribute to them, and to bear witness to their continued absence.

"The table is small, symbolizing the frailty of one prisoner, alone against his or her suppressors. The tablecloth is white, symbolic of the purity of their intentions to respond to their country's call to arms. The single rose in the vase signifies the blood they may have shed in sacrifice to ensure the freedom of our beloved United States of America. It also reminds us of our missing comrades' families and friends who keep faith while awaiting their return."

"The vase's red ribbon represents an unyielding determination for a proper accounting of our comrades who aren't among us. A slice of lemon on the plate reminds us of their bitter fate. The salt sprinkled on the plate reminds us of the countless fallen tears of families as they wait. The glass is inverted; they cannot toast with us at this time. The chair is empty – they're not here."

"The candle is reminiscent of the light of hope living in our hearts to illuminate their way home to the open arms of a grateful nation. The American flag reminds us that many of them may never return and have paid the supreme sacrifice to ensure our freedom. Never forget that; and pray they'll all soon be back within our ranks. May God forever watch over and protect them and their families."

Fairfax Resolves member Jim Cordes then read the names of the 45 Virginians still missing in action. As he did, ceremony participants placed yellow carnations

onto a memorial wreath to honor each one. Then attendees did likewise in remembrance of others who served during the Vietnam War period. The names of the 147 Fairfax County fallen Vietnam War veterans were read and honored the same way, with the American Legion's Hank Roeder playing "Taps" at the end.

Afterward, the Vietnam veterans present each received a special lapel pin. It features an eagle's head representing courage, honor and dedicated service; stripes for the American flag; and six stars for the allies who fought alongside each other. All are encircled by a blue ring signifying vigilance, perseverance and justice. The phrase, "A Grateful Nation Thanks and Honors You," is embossed on the reverse side.

Giving the closing benediction was Annetta Smith, NSDAR chaplain-elect, saying, "We lift up our hearts in gratitude for [our Vietnam veterans'] dedication to duty, endurance in hardship, and commitment to one another and to this nation. Bless those who served, Oh Lord. May they find peace knowing their sacrifices aren't forgotten. Heal the wounds of body, mind and spirit for those who still bear them. Grant them the honor and respect they so rightly deserve."

"For the families who endured separation, loss and the burdens of war, we ask Your comfort. May they find strength in the love of this grateful nation and assurance that their sacrifices, too, are recognized. And we entrust those who made the ultimate sacrifice to Your eternal care."

"May their names be etched not only in stone, but in our hearts forever. Let us be faithful stewards of their legacy, ensuring that their bravery is never forgotten and that peace is always pursued. As we leave this place, may we walk in unity – ever committed to justice, freedom and the dignity of all who serve."



PHOTOS BY BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

Jeff White (second from left) and others salute while "Taps" is played.



Veterans and their families saluting or with hands over hearts during "Taps."



Fairfax County chapter, DAR, members (from left) Ann Heinz, Janice Dixon, Cherie Fuchs, Suzy Mulligan, Annetta Smith and Rosemary Rhile.



Event organizers (from left) Tom Heinz, Suzy Mulligan, Mac McCarl and Eric Parkhurst.

Support the Willard-Sherwood Health & Community Center

To the Editor:

I'm writing to request the Fairfax City Council's support for the Willard-Sherwood Health & Community Center. My husband Pete and I have lived in the Daniels Run Woods (formerly Old Lee Hills) neighborhood for almost 26 years. During that time, we've had a number of mayors and council members. The desire for a community center has been part of the dialogue for the entire time we've lived here.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

During my six-year tenure on the Planning Commission (2014-20) – including serving as the Planning Commission representative to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board for three years (2015-17) – the need for a full-service community center was a key topic of many discussions and much planning. I support this project for the following reasons and respectfully request that City Council support it, as well:

1. This facility will provide services for all age groups, from infants and toddlers to seniors, and all ages in between, in one consolidated location.
2. This facility is not a luxury but, instead, will provide essential community infrastructure. It is a long-term investment that will serve residents for many decades to come. I can assure you that early intervention services for a developmentally delayed toddler provided by Infant and Toddler Connection of Fairfax-Falls Church are hardly a luxury. I have firsthand experience with the delivery of these services and know how essential they are to many in our community.
3. The location of this facility will be ben-

eficial to both City and County residents as it is centrally located and accessible via public transportation.

4. An investment now will offer a valuable return. Delaying the project only will increase costs.

5. The existing Green Acres Center is not equipped to support the Senior Center or other services for much longer. It has aging infrastructure, and repair and maintenance costs will continue to skyrocket. As a member of the Senior Center, I have seen firsthand the need for new facilities to help safeguard the health and welfare of our senior residents.

For example, it is not easy or safe for seniors to continue to use bathrooms that were built decades ago for schoolchildren. There are many other examples of things at the existing Green Acres Center that are in need of overhaul. The Willard-Sherwood project will provide for appropriate facilities and services that the existing Green Acres Center cannot.

6. This project will strengthen our relationship with Fairfax County, which is an invaluable one and not one to take lightly or put at risk. Not moving ahead with this project will signal to the County that we are not a reliable and trustworthy partner. Considering how many contracts we have with the County that are essential to providing much-needed services to our residents, it is ill-advised to put this relationship at risk.

For all these reasons, I respectfully request the Council approve this project and move it forward.

Janet Jaworski
Fairfax



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Virginia Department of Transportation

Public Notice

Updated weight limits on Virginia bridges and culverts

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

Jurisdiction	Highway	Route #	Structure Name	Crossing	Project Date
SCOTT	16861	696N	MCMURRY HOLLOW ROAD	BRANCH	3/31/2026
FRANKLIN	8031	1605	WHSPRNG CK ROAD 1605	MAGGODEE CREEK	3/19/2026
FRANKLIN	7914	703	AYERS ROAD 703	POPLAR CAMP CREEK	3/18/2026
TAZEWELL	18583	631E	INDIAN CREEK ROAD	INDIAN CREEK #2	3/5/2026
BLAND	2950	42N	WEST BLUEGRASS TRAIL	SPRING BRANCH	3/3/2026

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

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

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

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

A Celebration of Diversity at Fairfax High School

Fairfax High celebrated its diversity, March 26, with a night of ethnic food, cultural dances, music and a fashion show of traditional clothing from a variety of countries throughout the world.



Representing the Middle East are (from left) the Alsherif sisters, sophomore Henwa and junior Hana, plus sophomores Mayssa Zrelli and Malk Mahmoud. They're selling a bread dessert and sandwiches of grilled chicken and vegetables.



From left, sophomores Yasna Sahab and Arveey Akrami model clothing worn to important cultural events in Afghanistan.



Representing Afghanistan are seniors, (from left) Hilal Safi and Amir Nazari, respectively holding a dessert of milk, pistachios, almonds and cardamon, and a hot drink of black tea, milk, cream and spices.



Representing East Africa, mother and daughter (from left) Emu Getahun and Nohamie Tesfaye, a junior, demonstrate an Ethiopian coffee ceremony.



From left, juniors Camila Arce Quispe and Ashley Cano wear traditional dresses worn at carnivals and parades in Bolivia.



From left, senior Anton Recio and junior Kyle Im wear clothing of Mongolia and Korea, respectively.



Before the fashion show, junior Anushma Kc poses in a Vietnamese gown.



Ready for the fashion show is senior Kosi Asomugha, representing Nigeria.



Wearing South Korean fan dance outfits are (from left) senior Ashley Shin and junior Analise Lee.



Junior Asmaa Hamid models a thobe, worn in Sudan for special events.



From left, sophomore Tselmuun Batjargal and senior Sugar Munkh-Ochir wear Mongolian dresses for dancing.



Offering a plate of pandan (coco-nut-vanilla flavored) waffles is senior Nikki Hua, representing Vietnam.



Posing in an áo dài, worn on New Year's and holidays in Vietnam, is junior Minh Nguyen.

PHOTOS BY BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

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SCAN TO VIEW MORE

Laughter and Fun Galore in a Musical Comedy

'Something Rotten!' is Fairfax High's Cappies show.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Featuring a cast and crew of 80 plus a live orchestra, Fairfax High's upcoming stage production is the musical comedy, "Something Rotten!" It's also the school's Cappies entry for this season.

"The actors are hilarious and are making me laugh at rehearsals," said Director Chris Whitney. "It's a really, feel-good show. My students voted to do it because of its choreography possibilities. And our three student choreographers – Nate Smith, Libby Hansen and Naomi Bautista – have been amazing teaching the actors tap because there are multiple tap numbers."

Show times are Thursday-Friday, April 30-May 1, at 7 p.m.; Saturday, May 2, at 1 p.m.; Thursday-Friday, May 7-8, at 7 p.m.; and Saturday, May 9, at 1 and 7 p.m. Tickets are \$15, adults; \$10, students, at the door or via www.fxplayers.org.

The story takes place in 1590s London where brothers Nick and Nigel Bottom are struggling playwrights having to compete with William Shakespeare, who releases a new play every time they do. Frustrated, they consult reputed seer Nostradamus who tells them that, in the future, no one will watch plays – they'll all be watching musicals.

"So the older brother, Nick, asks Nostradamus to find out what Shakespeare's greatest masterpiece will be," said Whitney. "And instead of saying, 'Hamlet,' Nostradamus gets it wrong and says, 'Omelet.' So the brothers write a musical about omelets."

"The show's message is to be true to yourself," continued Whitney. "And it's especially important when we're living in a world with AI. We work a lot harder to create our own original ideas and works. This production is really a love letter to both Shakespeare's classical plays and the musicals of today. Audiences will love the choreography and big, dance numbers. The story is light and entertaining, and the dialogue is witty and funny."

Senior Olive Webster portrays Nick's wife, Bea. "She's very witty, outgoing and confident and has comebacks for everything her husband says," said Webster. "But she lives in a time when women aren't given much power, and she wants to get some for herself by having a job.



Rehearsing a scene are (from left) Addison Pierce (Nostradamus), Mauro Manganello (Minstrel) and Nate Smith (Nick Bottom).

She disguises herself as a man and tries out for various male jobs but can't keep them.

"She's fun to play because she's supportive of her husband but will do what she needs to support her household – which includes both brothers, who aren't making much money. And I see some of myself in her in the way she's not afraid to make fun of herself in front of others."

Webster's favorite number is "God, I Hate Shakespeare," sung by Nate Smith as Nick. "It's very funny and shows how Nick really feels about Shakespeare, while the song remains upbeat and hilarious," she said.

Webster said this show is different from most other high-school plays because "the humor is inappropriate in some parts. And it has song titles and lines you don't always hear from high schools. It's best for kids ages 10 and up. And there are lots of classic, big, musical numbers with bright, colorful costumes and lights that'll really appeal to the audience."

Playing Nick's brother, Nigel, is sophomore Lucas Schnotala. "He's awkward and unsure of himself but also passionate about being a playwright," said Schnotala. "His insecurity comes from him not believing in his artistic abilities, and part of his journey is just accepting who he is and finally believing in himself. He's also friendly and outgoing, but in an unsure, clumsy kind of way. He's well meaning, but that sometimes



Bottom row, from left are Olivia Ho (Portia) and Lucas Schnotala (Nigel Bottom). And (top row, from left) are Nate Smith (Nick Bottom) and Olive Webster (Bea Bottom). Nigel's poetry impresses Portia, while Bea tries to calm Nick, who lacks ideas for a new play.

gets in his way because it's to a fault. And he's overly trusting and even gets taken advantage of."

"I like finding the balance between his clumsy, comedic moments and his genuine passion," continued Schnotala. "And his journey is one of the most complex of all the characters. There's a variety in the people he interacts with and the emotions he feels throughout the show. There are peaks and valleys in his optimism and in his feelings about what's going on around him."

Schnotala especially likes the song, "To Thine Own Self Be True," which he sings. "The melody itself is beautiful, and it also seems to

sum up the show's core themes of being true to yourself and your art," he said. "Audiences will like how fun and over-the-top it is, at times. Even though there are moments of seriousness, it's overall a silly and joyful production. They'll also love the score because it's full of iconic theater songs, and they're all very catchy."

Sophomore Olivia Ho portrays Nigel's love interest, Portia. "She's naive, young and lovable and brings an extra comedic aspect to the show," said Ho. "She's also bright, bubbly, friendly and outgoing, although a little shy, at times. She's grown up in a religious household and was taught to follow the Bible.

"She loves poetry, but it was forbidden for her to read or even like it while growing up. But since Nigel loves it, too, they get to discuss it together, and it brings out the joy in both of them. I love playing Portia because she's just so fun. She's never sad and is always open-minded and encouraging to everyone around her. Every time I read a line of hers or sing one of her songs, it makes me happy."

Ho said audiences will particularly enjoy the play's choreography, sets, lighting and costuming. "Our set has moving parts, and people will see Bea's house, a park under London Bridge and exteriors of a village," she said. "Women wear long, colorful dresses, and the men wear shirts and pantaloons. The lighting colors will match the vibe of each scene, and this show will make everyone laugh."

Playing a minstrel named Minstrel is senior Mauro Manganello. "He's the epitome of the English Renaissance and represents art in the world in general," said Manganello. "I start off both acts with a song-and-dance number. Minstrel is fashionable, wearing high heels and Betty Boop curls. He's also flamboyant and has a larger-than-life personality. His songs and dances are over-the-top, and he's polished, cocky and a little sassy. He doesn't have speaking lines and sings everything he does."

Enjoying his role, Manganello said, "I love getting to explore dance. The choreographers let me create my own dances for Minstrel because I'm also a dancer and a gymnast. And since he's the first thing audiences see, he gives them a taste of the comedy that's in store."

He especially likes the song, "Make an Omelet, sung together by the brothers and an acting troupe. "It alludes to multiple, different, modern musicals [that didn't exist then], and they're incorporated into the song – while giving an actual recipe for an omelet," said Manganello.

He's also head of hair and makeup, which will be traditional, Renaissance style, except for Nostradamus. So most of the women will have big, bold hair and curls, with almost a Marie Antoinette vibe for the wealthy ones. The poorer women will wear updo styles or ponytails, explained Manganello, "because they were poor and couldn't wash their hair as much.

"As for an example of makeup, one rich woman will have heart-shaped lips, a pale face and lots of blush. Shakespeare will have a modern, rockstar vibe with black eyeliner and a grunge look."

But, added Manganello, "The undeniable best part of this show is the comedy – because it makes no sense what these brothers are trying to do. Their musical contains references to and characters from dozens of popular Broadway musicals, such as 'Phantom of the Opera,' 'Jesus Christ Superstar,' 'Cats,' 'Music Man,' 'Fiddler on the Roof' and 'Mary Poppins.' Everyone in the audience will laugh and have a really good time."

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHRIS WHITNEY

Gluttony and Revenge Onstage in a Dark Comedy

Woodson High presents famed musical, 'Sweeney Todd.'

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Woodson High's upcoming production of the musical, "Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street," has a total of 120 students in its cast, crew and pit orchestra. And Director Chris Rushing calls it the "most epic play we've done here, with the greatest amount of complex, difficult music. The orchestra started rehearsing it in December."

He said the technical aspects are also the most ambitious ones the school has ever attempted – including construction of huge, working gears, plus a large revolve (a circular, mechanized turntable) – to whisk the audience from one scene to another.

"And the only reason we're able to tackle all these things is because this group of students, especially the seniors, is particularly capable," said Rushing. "They've worked really hard for four years, and it's paying off with the most complicated show we've done."

The curtain rises Friday-Saturday, May 1-2 and May 8-9, at 7 p.m., with additional 1 p.m. performances on Saturday, May 2 and May 9. Tickets are pay-what-you-can, starting at \$10, at the door or via woodsondrama.org.

"This season, we've been examining vices and their impact on communities," said Rushing. Our Cappies play, 'Tartuffe,' dealt with corruption and people who prioritize greed over community, and our one-act, 'A Piece of My Heart,' was about the Vietnam War and wrath. 'Sweeney Todd' is very much about gluttony and revenge."

It's set mainly in London during the mid-19th century when, explained Rushing, "society was all about the excesses of the rich. Industrialization was dehumanizing people and grinding them up. For the first time, poor people were working with machinery, injuring themselves, breathing in coal dust, working long hours and physically destroying themselves. And all their hard work only benefited the rich, ruling class; so this play asks, 'how much is enough?'"

Basically, he said, "This is a show about terrible people doing terrible things to each other. And I hope au-

diences leave thinking that we should be kinder to and more forgiving of each other so the cycle of violence can stop. The concentric circles of the revolve, pies and gears in this play symbolize the horrors of unregulated industry grinding us down. So hopefully, people will be aware of their rights being eroded away."

"This show's melodramatic nature also provides the dark comedy," continued Rushing. "We're embracing its parable aspect and theatricality. There's even a 'Greek chorus' narrating the action and three 'fury' characters guiding Sweeney's hand."

Senior Silas Blocker portrays Sweeney Todd. "Audiences either think he's the hero or the villain of the story," said Blocker. "You could make a solid case for both; but I personally think he's a complicated, hurt, human being. This play explores how the actions of others can drive people to become the worst versions of themselves. Sweeney was a good man until he was sent to prison on a trumped-up charge, leaving behind a wife and 3-year-old daughter and a judge [Turpin] who'd do anything to take them for himself."

"And now, years later – out of a mad need for revenge – he's out to find those who hurt him and hurt them back. He's good at creating a mask for himself to hide behind. But the mask gets harder and harder to keep up as his rage and misery increase."

Although Blocker usually plays wild, funny and physical characters, he said being able to "live and breathe in the pain of a more reserved and twisted person is fulfilling and exciting. I've never done that before, so it's nice to show a different side of myself. I'm even growing out my beard to help show how Sweeney's quest for retribution is all-consuming, to the neglect of his appearance, and help me look more menacing and ominous."

Blocker's favorite song is "My Friends," in which Sweeney's singing to his straight razors. "It's a metaphor for the trials he's endured to get back to London," said Blocker. "And it helps me better understand his motivations. I also like 'Johanna Quartet,' a beautiful song with ominous undertones. It sounds light and airy while tragic things are happening."

He said audiences will be



Juliana Gurrola as Mrs. Lovett and Silas Blocker as Sweeney Todd share a gleeful moment.



Silas Blocker (Sweeney Todd) has Graham Bickford (Judge Turpin) in his barber chair.

wowed by this show's "spectacular tech. And I feel so lucky to work with such talented, fellow actors. The audience will see great stage chemistry among them, plus amazing acting."

Playing Sweeney's daughter, Johanna, 18, and Judge Turpin's ward, is senior Rosamy Perez-Caban. "She's curious and anxious to find out who she is outside of the walls – both literal and figurative – that she's been confined in, her whole life," said Perez-Caban. "Turpin took her as a baby, so she doesn't know Sweeney is her dad. She's friendly, outgoing, strong and determined and stands up for herself. She eventually falls in love with Anthony, a sailor who helps her escape from Turpin."

Enjoying her part, Perez-Caban said, "It's been a dream role of mine for a long time. I love her free spirit and inquisitiveness. And she's so different from me; she's bubbly, and I'm more grounded and realistic." Perez-Caban also likes singing Johanna's songs, especially 'Johanna Quartet,' which she performs with Blocker and two others. "The chord structure and overlapping vocals make this a captivating song to listen to," she said. "It's a ballad, with each character singing about their own goals."

Perez-Caban said this play will appeal to audiences because "the story is so impactful and can be relevant to today's society. It speaks to how we can somehow lose sight of ourselves when we're blindly trying to achieve something at

the expense of all else. Everyone's commitment to and passion for this show – both actors and techs – creates such a powerful piece, and that really comes across. In addition, the beautiful music is a joy to watch – and that, combined with the dark story – makes it a compelling show."

Senior Henry Green designed the set with sophomore Liora Freedy. "Our 8-foot-tall set represents brick buildings on a city street. Sweeney's apartment and business are on a top floor, with Mrs. Lovett's pie shop next door," said Green. "And her bakeshop next to it has a large, walk-in oven with a chimney and smoke coming from it. And a large, metal slide on the side of the bakeshop leads to the oven."

He said the wooden, revolving turntable on the stage will keep the action fluid and the pace of the scenes moving smoothly. "We'll also have three, 8-by-6-foot, spinning gears behind the revolve, suspended in the air," said Green. "And every time someone dies, the gears will rotate and the red ribbon inside them will symbolize that person's blood. The industrial age was beginning then, so they also illustrate how the working class often got killed by their harsh working conditions and machinery."

The set's overall atmosphere is dark and grimy, he said, "like London was at the time. We'll also have a factory's steam whistle." The hardest part, said Green, was "learning how to build the revolve

because it was a completely new thing for us to do. And it'll also be motorized. I'll be proudest when the set's all put together and we see that it fits and enhances the show's harsh aesthetic."

"People will enjoy the dark comedy and bad people doing bad things," he continued. "And we have a really talented cast, so all the hard work they put into it will be evident throughout the show."

Stage manager is senior Katie Meisenheimer. "There'll be lots of sound effects, like the steam whistle as a jump scare to the audience," she said. "And since it's a dramedy, we're leaning more into its comedy, which is vaudeville-style – where people had pale faces like clowns, so all the main characters will have pale faces done with makeup."

"We're showing it in the hair and costumes, too. For example, a guy named Toby tries to promote a miracle, hair-growth elixir. So he wears a really bad wig, pretending it's his real hair. Characters will wear dark colors in act one because many of them are poor. But in act two, as they get more money, their clothes are brighter and more colorful."

Meisenheimer said audiences will love many things about this show. "The music is written by Stephen Sondheim, one of our greatest composers," she said. "The storyline's enjoyable, and our set and lighting are really cool. We just got some new LED lights, so we can flood the stage with color."

ENTERTAINMENT

FIVE-PART BETTER ARGUMENTS WORKSHOP SERIES.

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

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

- ❖ Workshop 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.

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.

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



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

703-854-1856.

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.

WEDNESDAYS, APRIL 15, 22, 29

OFC Open Play! OFC Open Game Nights. 6:30-9 p.m. Drop in for open game time at The Old Firehouse Center to enjoy relaxed, friendly ping pong or Mah Jongg while connecting with others.

FRIDAY/APRIL 17

Vienna Community Center's 60th Anniversary. 4-7 p.m. At Vienna Community Center, 120 Cherry Street, SE, Vienna. The occasion will feature a 1960s-themed celebration complete with a ceremonial cake cutting at 4:30 p.m. Attendees can take a walk down memory lane with self-guided tours, a photo memory wall, giveaways, and a chance to share their own stories from the past 60 years. The vision for the Vienna Community Center began in 1946 when the Vienna Lions Club donated \$1,500 to a grassroots fundraising campaign. It took nearly 20 years to raise the \$125,000 needed to construct the original facility on the 2.6-acre property on Cherry Street. Visit www.viennava.gov/vcc60.

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 reg-

istration 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.

APRIL 17 TO MAY 2

"My Fair Lady." At Vienna Community Center, located at 120 Cherry St., SE, Vienna. In this classic Lerner and Lowe musical, Eliza Doolittle is a young flower seller with an unmistakable Cockney accent which keeps her in the lower rungs of Edwardian society. When Professor Henry Higgins tries to teach her how to speak like a proper lady, an unlikely friendship begins to flourish. The Vienna Theatre Company's performances of "My Fair Lady" are at 7 p.m. on the following Fridays and Saturdays: April 17-18; 24-25, and May 1-2. Matinee performances begin at 2 p.m. on Sundays, April 19, 26 and May 3. Tickets are \$18 each and may be purchased online or in person at Vienna Community Center. Tickets are non-refundable and ticket transfers are not allowed. To learn more about the Vienna Theatre Company and to purchase "My Fair Lady" tickets online, visit www.viennava.gov/theatre.

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.

THE LAKE BRADDOCK THEATRE PRESENTS

CABARET

BOOK BY JOE MASTEROFF, BASED ON THE PLAY BY JOHN VAN DRUTEN AND STORIES BY CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD, MUSIC BY JOHN KANDER, LYRICS BY FRED EBB

APRIL 30TH, MAY 1ST, & MAY 2ND

TICKETS AT LBTHEATRE.COM

Lake Braddock Secondary School presents "Cabaret" from April 30 to May 2, 2026.



The Vienna Community Center celebrates its 60th Anniversary on Friday, April 17, 2026.

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 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

ENTERTAINMENT

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 Haken-son at 703-971-4984 or dhaken-son@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.

SATURDAY/APRIL 18

Spring Cleaning! Spring Community Parking Lot Sale. 9 a.m.-1 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Got stuff? Need stuff? This parking lot sale has over 50 vendors! Residents selling gently used household-related items are welcome. At the event you can meet our MCC Governing Board candidates!

SATURDAY/APRIL 18

Nicholas Rodriguez "Sincerely Sondheim." 7-9:30 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Direct from the Tony Award-winning revival of "Company," Nicholas Rodriguez (Arena Stage's "Oklahoma!" and "Carousel") celebrates Stephen Sondheim with "Sincerely, Sondheim"—a nod to both the lyrical and musical genius of the late composer and his reputation for prolific letter writing.

SATURDAY/APRIL 18

Masterpiece Mini Golf Season Opener. 2-5:30 p.m. At Workhouse Arts Center, Lorton. Get ready for an unforgettable day of fun for all ages! The Mini Golf Seasoner Open Golf Tournament is the perfect way to enjoy a sunny Saturday with family, friends, and neighbors. Tickets are just \$15 each if you register online, and only \$20 on-site (if available).

What to Expect:

- Exciting Mini Golf Tournament: Compete for prizes in three age categories—Adults, Teens, and Kids!
- Live Leaderboards & Prizes: Winners announced at 5:15 PM!
- Swag Bags: Every participant receives a swag bag upon entry.
- Delicious Drinks & Vibes: Enjoy themed cocktails and refreshments from Bunnyman Brewery.



Nicholas Rodriguez "Sincerely Sondheim" will appear on Saturday, April 18, 2026 at McLean Community Center in McLean.

- Explore the Arts: After your round, dive into our art shows, classes, and exhibits throughout the Workhouse Arts Center.

SATURDAY/APRIL 18

Horse Expo Returns to Frying Pan Farm Park. 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. At Frying Pan Farm Park Equestrian Center, 2709 West Ox Road, Herndon. This year's Horse Expo features a special appearance by Freedom and Liberty, the Bureau of Land Management's 250th Wild Horse and Burro ambassador team. Freedom is an 8-year-old sorrel gelding from the Salt Wells Creek Herd Management Area near Rock Springs, Wyoming, and Liberty is a 17-year-old gray gelding from the Cibola-Trigo Herd Management Area near Yuma, Arizona. At the Horse Expo, visitors can watch Freedom and Liberty in the Parade of Breeds at 11:30 a.m. and see a training and handling demonstration at 1 p.m. in the Indoor Arena. Then, guests can take part in a Q&A session to learn more about the horses and BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program. Freedom and Liberty will also be stabled in barn one for a meet-and-greet and photo opportunities.

APRIL 18-19

Free Community Clinic. At Mubarak Mosque, 4555 Ahmadiyya Drive, Chantilly. Remote Area Medical (RAM), in partnership with Humanity First USA, Fairfax County stakeholders, and a coalition of non-profits will offer free medical, dental, and vision services to the public. The clinic is designed to help community members access care at no cost. Clinic opens Saturday and Sunday at 6 a.m.

SUNDAY/APRIL 19

Burke Historical Society Meeting. 3-4:30 p.m. At Pohick Regional Library, 6450 Sydenstricker Road, Burke. Kate Kelley will join in by Zoom to speak on the Photo Angel Project (identifying persons in old photos, including her recent success with a photo of Burke's Joseph William Dooley. Email: burkehistoricalsociety@hotmail.com

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.

WEDNESDAY/APRIL 22

Documents for Life: Estate Planning. 6-7 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Estate planning is essential for protecting your loved ones and



Magician Zak Mirz will appear on Friday, April 24, 2026 at McLean Community Center in McLean.

ensuring your wishes are honored. This seminar explores the purpose and importance of estate planning, offering clear guidance on the key documents you need to safeguard your future. Topics include wills, trusts, powers of attorney, health-care directives, and beneficiary designations. You'll learn how these documents work together to manage your assets, provide for dependents, and address health-care decisions in critical moments. Join us to demystify estate planning, gain peace of mind, and take the first step toward securing your legacy.

THURSDAY/APRIL 23

Town of Vienna Green Expo. 7-9 p.m. At Vienna Community Center, 120 Cherry St., SE, Vienna. More than 40 local exhibitors will offer resources and information on sustainable practices such as planting natives and eliminating invasives, raising chickens and keeping bees, composting, conserving water, and making homes more energy efficient. New this year is a visit from The Electric Vehicle Association of Greater Washington, which will provide information about EV ownership and give expo-goers a chance to see electric vehicles up close.

THURSDAY/APRIL 23

Shepherd's Center of Annandale Springfield Lunch N' Life. 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. At St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, 4801 Ravensworth Blvd., Annandale. Hear Christina DeVera, Physical Scientist, presenting "Geology & You: Discovering our shared history through the

rocks underneath our feet." Lunch of ham tetrazzini, salad, green beans, dessert, tea and coffee. Cost for lunch and lecture is \$20 per person. Call 703-941-1419 by Tuesday, April 21st by noon to register or send an email to shepherdscas@vacoxmail.com.

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.

FRIDAY/APRIL 24

Blink and You'll Miss It! Zak Mirz, Magician. 7 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Zak Mirz amazes audiences by weaving magic into stories from his experience as a first-generation American. From being a kid growing up in Texas to becoming a father of two, Zak's charismatic style easily connects with audiences and keeps them on their toes. This show will be unlike any you have seen before because you will be the one at the wheel deciding where the story goes next.

SATURDAY/APRIL 25

Sensory Exploration! Sensory Day. 1-4 p.m. At the Old Firehouse Center, McLean. Experience a free, sensory-rich event that invites everyone to explore taste, smell, sound, sight, and touch in support of Autism Awareness Month. This event is free and open to all!



PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION

The library's large and open space and modern look place it in stark contrast to the former rental library space serving Franconia.

New Franconia Government Center Opens

FROM PAGE 3

current location.

The new two-story facility is approximately 90,000 square feet and offers significantly more parking than was available for services at the buildings it replaces. Space includes the 28,000 square-foot police station; 4,200 square-foot supervisor's office; 7,200 square feet for the Active Adult Center; with a new Childcare Center offering care for infants to pre-kindergarten children with 10,000 square feet. The Kingstowne Library, sited on the second floor, upgrades from community to regional library status, with increased service offerings, occupying 30,000 square feet. The Franconia Museum is located off the lobby with about the same footprint, but upgraded and modernized displays.

The event also provided the opportunity to share long-term plans for district development with community members. Several proposed plans were on display in a separate meeting room with staff available to answer questions and take suggestions. Separately, Supervisor Lusk shared work being done in the near term to transform blighted buildings and create more job and housing opportunities. Lusk praised the work of the WISH Center (Workforce Innovation Skills Hub) in

preparing those in the community for future jobs, including those linked to the redevelopment work. The audience held its collective breath as Lusk, who has often spoken fondly of his grandmother, struggled to speak while relating her emphasis on education and what it had meant to his life. He credits her with instilling the importance he places on WISH and other education efforts today.

The library and the community meeting rooms are arguably the brightest jewels of the facility, with glass walls and windows adding to the feeling of ease and space. The library's upgrade to regional library status, means extension of service to a seven day operation, according to remarks made by county library director Eric Carzon. He noted the library's book inventory has expanded to 55,000 with the additional space. Supervisor Lusk noted the considerable meeting space which will be available for reservation.

Thought given to the outdoor area around the facility is evident in the walking and sitting areas; with bike storage, and a playground. Its outdoor space may be well utilized if the number of people who walked to the event from their neighborhoods is an indication.

New plantings of tall cedars and other plants add to the feeling of ease. Dedicated entrances to the police station for law enforcement and the public separate the police functions housed under the same roof.

Franconia Museum board of directors vice-president Donald Hakenson, may have best captured the spirit of the event while admitting "some people think I get fired up." In remarks before the ribbon cutting, he said, "As a local boy, [listing local schools he attended], I am extremely proud to be here today, I love this building!"

The project was authorized in the 2015 Public Safety Bond and the 2020 Library Bond referendums; and included in the FY 2024 - FY 2028 Adopted Capital Improvement Program (CIP); with funding at \$63.7 million. The final cost of the new center is \$73,486,513. The project construction replaces the leased space of the small and outdated Kingstowne Library and Active Adult Center, with its limited parking and maintenance issues; including grease leaking from the overhead barbecue restaurant. The Franconia District office and police station also were deemed undersized for their needs, with limited parking and outdated mechanical and structural systems.

You Really Want My Opinion?



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

I am so over it, under it and/or around it and any other unflattering way you can characterize it; 'it' being asked my opinion regarding the customer service I've just received. Spare me. Nowadays, one can't make an inquiry/purchase/service - via the phone or even in person without being asked for a verbal response or barcode scan (post office comes to mind) or touching tones on your phone, all relating to the exchange with the person/process you've just endured before you can be properly excused. That is if you're being polite.

The cost of doing business/making an inquiry is as much about getting feedback from the paying customer as it is about selling the customer a product or a service, et cetera. Occurring on the figurative backs of former customers who were "always right," now those customers have an opinion, good, bad or indifferent that payees want to know about - and their rightness is now being compared to other payors to determine who is actually right. And as you might imagine, the customer is much less right than he/she ever was. As Major Frank Burns sort of said on a long-ago M*A*S*H episode: You can't swing a dead rat without hitting a North Korean, so does it follow that you can't buy or inquire about anything without your opinion being solicited. Usually, you can politely back out of the exchange, but it doesn't totally minimize the occurrence. And at least for me, the request for my opinion leaves a mental mark - almost akin to when I see a driver backing into a parking space. Even if I say no, or look away, the damage is done. I can't unwring the bell as it were.

Moreover, I can't imagine my two-cents worth, even when added onto all the other opinions ever adds up to a dollar's worth of value. And though I understand that customer opinion/feedback is part of the engine that keeps the world turning; nevertheless, the current outreach is too much of a bad thing. I am asked my opinion of whatever the previous experience was so often, and in so many ways often beginning with: "How can I give you excellent customer service?" and ending with an "On a scale of 1 - 5, how would you rate your experience?" or a reasonable facsimile thereof, and on and on and on, I've pretty nearly exceeded my threshold. As my late mother read back to me, while living in Florida her favorite bumper sticker of full-time Floridians: "Welcome to Florida. Now go home." It's simply too much, even of a good thing. It's exactly how I feel about the octopus-type outreach of all these opinion solicitors. And yes, it's okay/I understand that this conversation will be recorded - for training purposes.

Quite frankly, that last bit about training is the only thing that helps me endure this never-ending need for my opinion. I can't help laughing and pitying the poor person who has to listen to all these customer-service phone calls. That has to be torture, a type of torture I would wish on my worst enemy. Listening to callers/reading customer surveys only to occasionally find a kernel of relevance mixed in with all that pabulum. How many hours must staff be subjected to the general public before management takes pity on them and rotates in another poor sap?

Unfortunately, opinions are the lifeblood of any entity that wants to remain in business. The general public must be considered, generally. Running a business, providing a service, et cetera, presumably has a specific purpose. And unless there's a match between customer server and customer servee, the only purpose served is losing money quickly. You want my opinion? No, you don't. I don't know anything relevant to your endeavor. I only know what I want and what I want can't possibly suite your inquiries. After all, I'm just one of millions not lost at sea but drowning, nonetheless. Stop asking me what I think. Ask me what I know. It will be a much shorter conversation. And that suits me just fine.

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



The center's Active Adult section includes space for exercising and hanging out with friends.



The Franconia Supervisors office is housed in the new center with office and meeting space.



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