

The Arlington Connection

A young observer searches for the hind legs emerging from the bullfrog tadpole which came from Long Branch Nature Center.

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PHOTO BY SHIRLEY RUHE/ARLINGTON CONNECTION

At 102, Still In For Adventure
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Hands on for Earth Day

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PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED



Nicole Kovar gives heart warming speech to her students, parents and teachers at the 10-year anniversary event April 17

Piano & More students performing with live band at 10-year celebration

Students Join Band for Ten-year Celebration

BY SHIRLEY RUHE
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

Nicole Kovar knew she wanted to celebrate the 10-year anniversary of her business, Piano & More, this year but she just didn't know how. "Maybe a small dinner for teachers?"

But then Randy Goode, one of her teachers in the program, suggested they could have a live performance by some of the students accompanied by his band Twin Brooks.

"I thought this would be a lot of work and it would be risky," Kovar says. "It would take three things that I wasn't sure we could do. You have to know how to play with a band, how to perform and how to accompany the player."

"When Randy first told me about his idea, I loved it but our players aren't advanced, and I didn't know if we could do it," Kovar said she really had to trust her teachers because there was no way they could rehearse ahead of time with a seven-piece band since the lessons are given in individual homes. So she had to rely on her teachers to prepare the students. "But Randy felt we could do it with no rehearsals."

"I was a nervous wreck. But it was amazing. I did ask the teachers to come and accompany the student on stage for support so in case the student froze, the teacher could jump in. And Randy worked with the band to signal the band when to slow down or speed up to stay with the performer." The performers included keyboard, drummer, singers and guitar.

"The parents loved it. They couldn't believe their little 8-year-old could be playing with these cool dudes."

The event was a ticketed program held at the Shirlington location of Busboys and Poets on April 17 and included a full three-course meal plus a raffle of donations by local businesses. "We had a surprise appearance by a Taylor Swift impersonator who ran the raffle."

Kovar started Piano and More in 2016 with two teachers and herself. "With the three of us combined we had about 90 students in the beginning. We were full up so I went out and hired more teachers, and we grew pretty fast to over 150 students." She says they discovered that students wanted something more than just drilling

students on technique. Kovar tries to make it fun, and discovered that happy students make happy performers. She believes that music has the power to provide lifetime benefits of strengthening the mind and offers an emotional outlet.

Then when Covid hit, the business took a dip in the beginning. People were cancelling until they discovered "stay at home" was here to stay. "Then we had a boom."

She says her biggest struggle was in year seven when she realized she had been doing it all — teaching, managing, hiring and all the paperwork, and she needed help. "I started looking for administrative help but everything was in my head. I had to put it all on paper, train a person. It was overwhelming."

Now she manages 13 teachers who give premium in-home lessons in the Arlington, McLean and Falls Church areas. "Since this is a part time gig after school, my biggest challenge is finding amazing teachers who are great teachers and musicians and know how to work with young children. They don't usually make it a career but we pay teachers competitive rates, and I would like to see them view it as a career and be able to offer health insurance and benefits."

Kovar says this 10-year celebration was one of the coolest things she has experienced since she started Piano & More. "We rocketed it out of the park."

It was so amazing. The parents were so thrilled and asking if we could do it again. We had so much fun; maybe we will."



Taylor Swift impersonator surprises crowd at the raffle.



Piano & More teachers attending the 10-year celebration April 17 at Busboys & Poets

Arlington Celebrates Earth Day



Joe Dilbert and his daughter Sophie are helping create a work of art out of yarn and bits of natural materials.



Four-year-old Grant Hines, successfully throws his green bag right into a bucket at the "Let It Flow" Arlington Art Truck Project.



Maddy Frick plants nasturtium seeds at the Truck Library on the Move.

PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUHE/THE CONNECTION

BY SHIRLEY RUHE
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

The plunk of bags bouncing into metal buckets welcomes visitors to the "Let It Flow" display at the corner of Cherry Hill Road where the Langston Earth Day event is taking place on Sunday, April 26. Four-year-old Grant Hines yells, "I got one" as his green bag flies through the air and disappears into a bucket. The game is an Arlington Art Truck project developed with the County Pollution Control Plant to educate users on the best way to dispose of waste.

The block is filled with displays of clothes, baskets, jewelry, cards, pottery and soap made with natural materials and with booths promoting recycling, environmental education, eliminating food waste, natural art and promoting the advantages of biking.

Joe Dilberto and his 8-year-old daughter Sophie have stopped to add yarn to a wire structure already decorated with bits of other colorful materials. Joe says, "I think this is to show us that we can create art out of anything."

Booths line the block down



A young observer searches for the hind legs emerging from the bullfrog tadpole which came from Long Branch Nature Center

the street including Karina Gaul's handmade fabric buttons, vinyl pouches and other small decorated bags. Apothecary Spices advertises, "Try our bacon salt." Paloma Vintage announces "Reclaim the Past, Wear the Future."

A crowd has gathered in the middle of the block attracted by the sounds of a mariachi band. Some are standing at the green-topped

tables with their pizza boxes and others seated in wooden chairs in front of the stage are clapping to the beat. As the Mariachi Estrellas Band begins playing a catchy tune about the girls in the highlands, a toddler runs out in front of the stage and starts bouncing to the music, much to the delight of his relatives in the front row.

At the other end of the block



A toddler dances to the mariachi band to the delight of his relatives watching from the front row.

Francisco Ban mans the King of Pops stand where popsicles are advertised at \$5 each. "Cookies and cream is the best seller today although my favorite would have to be the raspberry-lime for sure."

Nearby The Truck Library on the Move offers a chance to spin a wheel of numbers for a prize or fill a small pot with dirt and plant a seed. Maddy Frick, a seven-year

old elementary school student who attends Taylor Elementary, carefully scoops a small shovelful of dirt into a pot which could be transplanted pot and all, into a larger pot. She carefully places two nasturtium seeds into the pot, gives it a spray of mist and proudly carries it over to show her dad.

Liz Hutcheson, Arlington owner
SEE ARLINGTON CELEBRATES, PAGE 12

At 102, Still Writing Life's Next Adventure

From a western Maryland farm girl to wartime physical therapist to late-in-life author, Esther Lang proves that creativity, curiosity, and purpose have no age limit.



Lang's memoir, *Living Life as an Adventure*, draws from decades of journals, photographs, and global travels, chronicling what she describes as "one adventure after another."



Inspired by a lifelong love of storytelling, Lang's children's books, including *The Adventures of Scarlett Maple Leaf*, reflect the same creativity and optimism that have shaped her journey for more than a century.



PHOTOS COURTESY ESTHER LANG

At 102, Esther Lang continues to write with the same imagination that first emerged in childhood, transforming a lifetime of journals, travels, and adventures into books for both children and adults.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

At 102 years old, Esther Lang of Arlington has already lived enough stories for several lifetimes and she's still writing more.

From a small farm town in western Maryland to global travels, wartime service, and now authorship, Lang's life has been defined by curiosity, resilience, and an enduring imagination. Her first book, "Living Life as an Adventure," reflects exactly what its title promises: a life marked not by stillness, but by movement, discovery, and a remarkable willingness to embrace new chapters.

Born in 1924, Lang grew up in a rural community where creativity first began to take root.

"In high school, I used to like to write stories, imaginative stories," she said. "The English teacher thought I did well. I guess that was the background for my writing."

That early encouragement, paired with parents who were both educated and enjoyed writing themselves, quietly planted seeds that would bloom much later in

life.

Though writing would eventually become one of her defining pursuits, Lang's early career followed a very different path. She attended Bowling Green State University in Ohio, majoring in physical education. But after student teaching, she quickly realized the classroom was not where she belonged.

"When I did practice teaching, I knew I could never teach that," she

"My life was full of one adventure after another."

— Esther Lang

said with a laugh. "I wouldn't get along with the kids."

So she pivoted.

During World War II, the federal government offered women the opportunity to train as physical therapists and Lang seized it.

"The government ... would pay for it," she said. "So I jumped at the chance."

That decision launched a meaningful career in service during a momentous time in American history.

Yet perhaps one of Lang's most inspiring qualities is that her liter-

ary career did not truly begin until much later, proving that creativity has no expiration date.

It was during the isolation of COVID-19, when life slowed dramatically, that Lang finally turned decades of memories into published work.

"We were in our apartments, and we weren't allowed to go out," she said. "I was bored to death, and I needed something to do."

Her family had long encouraged her to record her memories, but the pandemic gave her the time and perhaps the nudge to begin in earnest.

"I've always journaled," she said. "On all my travels, I journaled."

Armed with years of journals, photographs, and travel albums, Lang began piecing together the remarkable experiences that had shaped her life.

"My life was full of one adventure after another," she said. "So I opened up the albums and searched for the journals and wrote the book."

"Living Life as an Adventure," now a three part series, is a reflection of the philosophy that has guided her remarkable life.

Lang's literary journey now extends to younger readers through children's titles including "The Blackbirds Tour the Parks," "A Wind Tour Guide Adventure," and "The Adventures of Scarlett Maple Leaf."

Her independently published books have reached her audience through a mix of local events, personal appearances, and online listings.

Her work reflects a life that has never stopped moving forward from imaginative schoolgirl, to

wartime physical therapist, to centenarian author.

In many ways, Lang's story is not simply about longevity. It is about possibility.

Her life stands as a reminder that reinvention can happen in every season, that stories worth telling are often gathered over decades, and that sometimes the dream waiting quietly in the background can become the brightest chapter of all.

For Esther Lang, the adventure is still unfolding, one page at a time.

NEWS

FOUA Plot Against Hunger Produce Donation Centers Open May 11 for 2026 Season

Community invited to share garden harvests and support local food access

Friends of Urban Agriculture and Plot Against Hunger officially open two 2026 Produce Donation Centers on May 11, 2026, inviting gardeners across Arlington to share their extra harvest and support neighbors experiencing food insecurity.

From a handful of tomatoes to a full basket of vegetables, all donations are welcome. The program makes it easy for home gardeners, community garden participants, and urban growers to ensure fresh, locally grown produce reaches those who need it most.

In 2025, Arlingtonians grew and donated 12,186 pounds of produce. Our goal for 2026 is 13,000 pounds.

“Even a small donation can make a meaningful difference,” said Lynda Ramirez-Blust, President. “Plot Against Hunger connects the abundance in our gardens with the needs in our community—turning surplus into sustenance.”

2026 Donation Locations & Schedule

Site 1: Rock Spring Church – Carpenter Hall, 5010 Little Falls Road, Arlington
Mondays (Tuesday, if Monday is a holiday) in May, June, and July: 12:30 pm – 2:30 pm
Mondays and Thursdays in August and September: 12:30 pm – 2:30 pm
Mondays in October: 12:30 pm – 2:30 pm

Site 2: Woman’s Club of Arlington, 700 S Buchanan Street, Arlington

Mondays (Tuesday if Monday is a holiday) May through October: 1 pm – 4 pm
Mondays and Thursdays in August and September: 1 pm - 4pm
Mondays in October: 1 pm - 4 pm

Gardeners who are unable to make these times can still participate. Plot Against Hunger encourages gardeners to locate a nearby food pantry and donate directly. Gardeners who donate directly are asked to record the number of pounds donated to help track the community’s collective impact throughout the season.

Plot Against Hunger is part of a broader effort to strengthen Arlington’s local food system by increasing access to fresh, nutrient-dense food while reducing food waste. It is the only program in Arlington County whose sole mission is to provide fresh produce to neighbors in need. Through partnerships with growers, volunteers, and food distribution organizations, the program channels hyper-local produce directly into the community.

For more information, including how to find a pantry near you and record your donation, visit: <https://arlingtonurbanag.org/donating-your-garden-produce/>

Learn more about FOUA and Plot Against Hunger at <https://arlingtonurbanag.org/plot-against-hunger/>

BULLETIN BOARD

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

VOLUNTEER DRIVERS NEEDED

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

DONATIONS NEEDED

Pet Food Bank. AWLA has established a Pet Food Bank to serve qualifying residents of Arlington County and the City of Falls Church. In consideration of the effect financial obstacles have on a pet owner’s ability to afford pet care, the AWLA Pet Food Bank program’s goal is to keep family pets out of shelters. If you are an

Arlington County or City of Falls Church resident and are in need of assistance in feeding your pet, follow this link and fill out a pre-registration form. Visit goo.gl/forms/s2FuFdaYWdZm4tPw2.

Donations Needed. Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Church, 2700 South 19th St., is seeking to replenish its food pantry. Particularly needed are rice (large bags appreciated, the pantry will rebag), dry beans, canned vegetables, soup, small jars of peanut butter, small jars of jelly, pasta and pasta sauce. Donations are collected during Mass each Sunday. Visit www.ourladyqueenofpeace.org for more.

ONGOING

Create a Wildlife Sanctuary. The Audubon at Home Wildlife Sanctuary certification program assists homeowners in restoring their home’s natural habitat by providing information on sustainable gardening practices. These practices include using native plants, removing invasive species, reducing use of pesticides and fertilizers, and creating space for native flora and fauna. Visit audubonva.org/audubon-at-home-1/ for more.

Naloxone (Narcan) can save the life of someone who is overdosing, if given in time. Anyone who assists a person in need is protected from liability by the Good Samaritan Law. Naloxone (Narcan) is avail-

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LOCAL HELP IS HERE.



Call or text 988
Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
to reach trained
counselors – right here
in your community.
Learn more about our
mental health services at
HopeLinkBH.org.

CALL OR TEXT 988.

988 | SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE

HOPELink
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

CALL TODAY FOR OUR NEW MOVE-IN OFFERS!

Offering Senior Living in Alexandria, Virginia

cogir | OLD TOWN ALEXANDRIA SENIOR LIVING

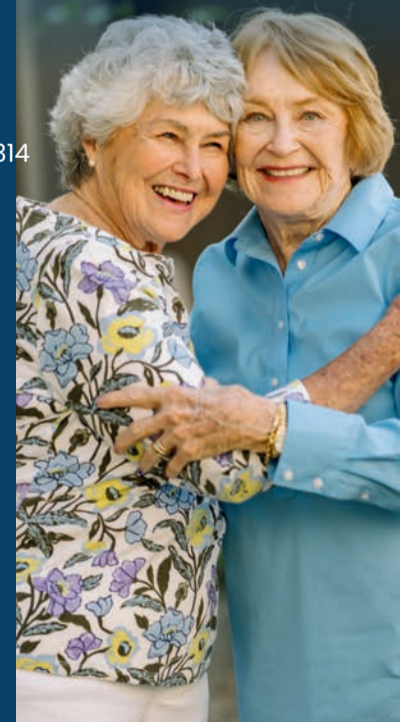
Cogir of Old Town Alexandria

Assisted Living & Memory Care
400 N Washington St, Alexandria, VA 22314
CogirofOldTown.com
(571) 506-7089

cogir | WEST END ALEXANDRIA SENIOR LIVING

Cogir of West End Alexandria

Assisted Living & Memory Care
5550 Cardinal Pl, Alexandria, VA 22304
CogirofWestEnd.com
(571) 506-7089



Localizing Mental Health

HopeLink answers the 988 calls.

BY JOSEPH GETCH
CEO, HOPELINK
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

May's Mental Health Awareness Month is another touchstone to help remind our community about the resources available to them and their loved ones here in our hometown. Chief among these is the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

Behind each call, text, and chat is a real person. I know this because I lead HopeLink, a regional mental health nonprofit that operates the 988 service for Northern Virginia. We have been connected to this community as a provider of behavioral health services since 1963. Our crisis workers are trained in active listening, safety assessment, crisis de-escalation, and to collaborate with callers, texters and chaters to reduce distress and, when appropriate, to connect individuals to appropriate local services.

These dedicated crisis workers answered nearly 400,000 calls, chats and texts last year from individuals that were facing a life crisis. HopeLink's workers are the empathetic voice that listens, providing help, hope and comfort.

As one of our workers explained, "I have spoken to hundreds of callers. While no two calls are exactly alike, I find callers asking the same question again and again: 'Will I be okay?' What I can tell them is yes, one day, they will be okay, and this call is one step closer to breathing a sigh of relief. Together, we sit in that uncertainty and that pain, until they are empowered to seek longer-term support and explore what life might look like around the corner. When a caller tells me that they see a way forward, that's when I know I've made a difference."

Nationally more than 59 million people experience mental illness and nearly 46% of Americans are expected to meet the criteria for a diagnosable mental health condition in their life, according to Mental Health America. That's why May's Mental Health Awareness Month is important.

While we shine a light on mental health this May; there are ways each of us can help. It's important to know the signs and ways that you can make a difference. This



A crisis worker at HopeLink.



Joe Getch

list provides ways to be part of the solution to change and even save lives:

Listen: Listen for signs of distress from loved ones or friends such as talking about wanting to die, ending their life, having no reason to live, being trapped, or being a burden to others.

Ask: Ask the tough question. When somebody you know is in emotional pain, ask them directly: "Are you thinking about killing yourself?"

Connect: Help connect people to resources. For an immediate crisis, encourage them to call or text the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988. Or visit HopeLineBH.org or your county's local community services board for more resources.

Donate: Support local and national mental health nonprofits that are working to save and

change lives. It matters and works.

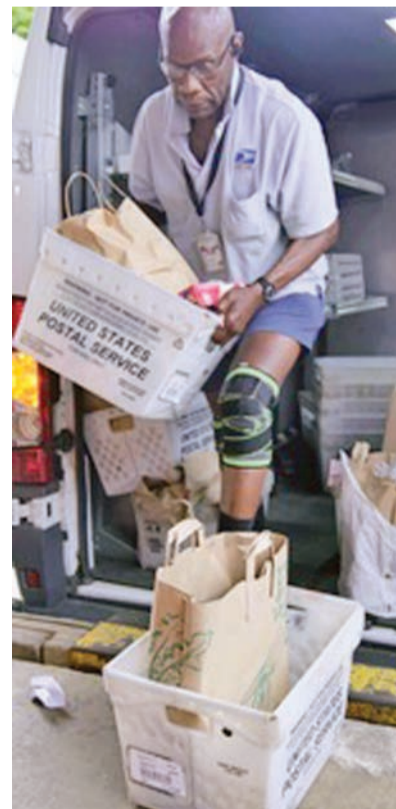
Advocate: Being a voice with local, state, and federal government ensures that mental health is front and center and that funding for mental health programs exists. Write letters/emails to officials in support of mental health funding and legislation.

Much progress has been made in

mental health services, but tough times can exacerbate the need. This May, I hope you will join us and Connection Newspapers to make mental health a priority for you, your loved ones, and the community. Tap into the local resources that are available. Learn more tips on our website at HopeLink-BH.org.

Stamp Out Hunger

Mark your calendars for the 33rd Arlington Stamp Out Hunger Drive on Saturday May 9. Place non-perishable items like canned goods, peanut butter and pasta on your porch before your postal delivery person arrives on Saturday. The items will be donated to Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC) which provides free weekly groceries to needy Arlington families at its central location on S. Nelson Street as well as 20 other locations around Arlington. The national Stamp Out Hunger Drive is sponsored by the National Association of Letter Carriers and is the largest one-day food drive in the nation.



— SHIRLEY RUHE

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Groceries or Diapers? A Tough Choice

BY SHIRLEY RUHE
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

Many Arlington families are forced to choose between groceries and diapers. Thrive is tackling this issue head on with the opening of its We Thrive Baby Pantry. Melanie Anderson, Executive Director of Thrive says, "I know there is a need because in the first month we have already served 30 families, and the supplies are beginning to run low. It's amazing to see."

Anderson says the Baby Pantry offers the basics like diapers and scent-free baby wipes, bottles and pacifiers as well as gently used clothes, toys and baby equipment.

"Over half of our Thrive clients earned less than \$30,000 a year," although she stressed the Baby Pantry is open to all families, not just Thrive clients.

Thrive uses the choice model for shopping so the family can select what they need instead of receiving a prepackaged set of essentials. "This offers them flexibility and dignity."

Anderson says the pantry is currently open for shopping on

Tuesday afternoon and Thursday morning "but we are playing around with the hours to find the most convenient time for the customers."

Anderson says in order to come and shop the family should contact Thrive to sign up for a shopping slot. She has noticed that the families go for the expensive essentials first. Diapers can cost \$100 a month. "A lot of things they need aren't covered by programs like WIC or SNAP"

Clothing, books and toys as well as baby equipment such as baby car mirrors or strollers are sometimes also available. "One father got really excited about a baby carrier that someone had donated. We've also seen needs that no one knew about like a little girl who was going to day care in her brother's underwear."

The Baby Pantry is supplied by donations from the community, faith-based organizations and businesses. Currently Thrive is asking for donations to be dropped off at their office by contacting info@arlingtonthrive.org to arrange a time.

"But we are working with the community to find drop off loca-



PHOTO BY SHIRLEY RUHE

Diapers are at the top of the priority list for families coming to Thrive's new We Thrive Baby Pantry.

tions around Arlington that are convenient for the public and hope to have them available soon."

In addition, she says Thrive is partnering with local groups on initiatives for diaper drives or other collection efforts. "The community connections are so important." Contact Sarah Slough to learn how your group can help keep pace with growing demand.

"There is a list on our website that includes everything from teething, unscented baby lotion and shampoo, diaper rash cream and gently used items such as clothing in sizes from newborn to 3T for such items as shirts, mittens, pajamas and shirts. We found it surprising that they were excited to find shoes." In addition, items may be purchased from their Amazon Wish List.

Thrive was originally established in 1975 as an organization to help the community. It was rebranded as Thrive in 2013 and now is the only non-profit group in Arlington that meets emergency needs such as rental assistance to avoid eviction, utility bills to avoid heat and water disconnection systems, essential medical needs and more.

BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 5

able without a prescription for a fee at all pharmacies. Obtain it for free by attending a REVIVE! training. Contact Emily Sigveland at 703-228-0913 or esigveland@arlingtonva.us or visit health.arlingtonva.us/opioid-awareness/ for available training sessions. The Chris Atwood Foundation also offers training to the public. Visit www.chrisatwoodfoundation.org/naloxone for details.

Monthly Memory Café. 1-3 p.m. at 7910 Andrus Road, Suite 6, Alexandria. The Memory Café, a social gathering for individuals living with memory loss and their families, virtually. Registration is free and highly recommended to reserve spots, which are open on a first come first served basis. To reserve a spot, please call 571-210-5551 or email bdesai@seniorhelpers.com. Visit www.dementiaconnections.com/memory-cafe or www.seniorhelpers.com/arlington-alexandria-va for more.

Aging Matters. 2-3 p.m. Tuesdays on WERA 96.7 LP FM on Arlington's community radio station. Each week host Cheryl Beversdorf interviews individuals with expertise about a broad array of aging related topics affecting the lives of older adults and their loved ones. Visit www.facebook.com/agingmatterswera to listen to programs. <https://www.mixcloud.com/AgingMatters/>

Volunteer Bike Repair Night. First Tuesday of the month, 6-9 p.m. at Phoenix Bikes, Barcroft Park, 4200 S. Four Mile Run Drive. Volunteers gather to refurbish bikes, sort parts or help with essential tasks. No experience necessary.

Public Financial Fraud, Waste and Abuse Hotline. Arlington County public hotline that offers a confidential and secure way to report suspected incidents of financial fraud, waste and abuse. Anyone can submit a complaint to the hotline at 1-866-565-9206 or at arlingtonva.ethicaladvocate.com. The hotline website is available in English and Spanish. Phone calls can be taken in many languages.

Created by the Arlington Initiative to Rethink Energy (AIRE) in partnership with the Arlington Public Library, the nation's First Energy Lending Library made its debut on Earth Day. Meant to resolve energy issues in the Arlington community, efficiency tools can be borrowed, such thermal imaging cameras, energy meters and books play a vital role in achieving a "greener" home. Open Sun-Sat 10 a.m.-9 p.m. 1015 N. Quincy St. Visit library.arlingtonva.us/locations/central-library or call 703-228-5990.

Arlington Rotary Club Lunches. Thursdays, 12 - 1:30 p.m. Club meetings are at 12:15 to 1:15 on the second and fourth Thursdays of

each month. On the 2nd Thursday we meet at a restaurant in Arlington (currently Texas Jacks BBQ). On the 4th Thursday we meet via Zoom (click [HERE](#) to join). Newcomers are welcome to join the Zoom meeting. Organization comes together for humanitarian services. Listen to guest speakers on various topics of interest. Visit <https://arlingtonrotaryclub.org/JobSeekingHelp>. 5-9 p.m. at Columbia Pike Branch Library, 816 S. Walter Reed Drive. Receive job-related help from the staff and volunteers with applications. Free, but requires registration. Visit www.arlingtonva.libcal.com.

Arlington PFLAG Community Group. 7:30-9 p.m. on the second Tuesday of each month, PFLAG promotes the equality and well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender people and their families. Meets at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington, 4444 Arlington Boulevard. Contact arl.pflag@gmail.com for more or go to www.pflagdc.org.

Helmsmen Toastmasters meet Thursdays, 7:30-8:45 a.m. at Pentagon Library and Conference Center. Toastmasters is an international organization that helps everyone speak, think, lead and listen better. Most clubs are meeting online at this time. Contact Carl Sabath carl.e.sabath.civ@mail.mil or 703-695-2804 or Elizabeth Femrite elizabeth.m.femrite.civ@mail.mil or 571-256-8674.

Soil Testing. Virginia Cooperative

Extension is offering soil testing services to analyze soil and determine what is needed to condition soil for plantings. The routine soil test is all one normally needs for a fertility evaluation. Pick up soil sampling box at the Virginia Cooperative Extension Arlington office, 3308 S. Stafford St., 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday. Send filled soil sample box with form and fee to the Virginia Tech Lab for analysis. Fees vary, visit www.soiltest.vt.edu/Files.

Alzheimer's Association Support Group has meetings. They are open to people with Alzheimer's, their caregivers, family members and friends. Free. Call the Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline at 703-359-4440 or 800-272-3900 before attending a group for the first time to verify meeting information, obtain directions or other information about the group. A complete list of all groups in the National Capital Area region can be found at https://www.alz.org/nca/helping_you/support_groups.

Pentagon Legacy Toastmasters meet Tuesdays 5:15-6:30 p.m. in the Pentagon Main Cafeteria/food court, left of Dunkin Donuts. Most clubs are meeting online at this time. Toastmasters is an international organization that helps people speak, think, lead and listen better. Call 703-695-2604 www.toastmasters.org.

The Friends of the Planetarium Visit www.friendsoftheplanetarium.org to find up-to-date show times,

a schedule of future events, information about Friends of the Planetarium membership, astronomy news and events, the history of the David M. Brown Planetarium, a link to the Friends' store, and more.

Lifeline Personal Alert System. Virginia Hospital Center Senior Health staff locally manage the personal emergency response system. Help is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Monthly cost starts at \$42. Call 703-558-6859 for more.

Musical Instruments Wanted. Instruments of any type or size — from a piano to a piccolo, in response to school's needs. Donations are tax exempt. Contact Miriam Miller, Opera NOVA for pick up. 703-536-7557; mcdm1@verizon.net; www.operaguildnova.org.

Online Salary Negotiation Workshop. AAUW (American Association of University Women) Work Smart is free online for anyone looking to learn how to negotiate a salary increase or promotion. Why is negotiation so important? AAUW's research on the gender pay gap shows that, one year out of college, women are already paid significantly less than men. Visit salary.aauw.org and <https://www.aauw.org/resources/career/boost-your-career/tackle-hurdles-to-salary-negotiation/>

ENTERTAINMENT

CENTERS FOR OPPORTUNITY ARLINGTON

The Centers for Opportunity Arlington is a safe, stigma-free place to spend time for those recovering from homelessness, substance use, and mental illness. It has a donation closet that needs adult clothing and shoes. Some participants at the Center are looking for jobs and need the proper attire. Located at 3219 Columbia Pike, Suite 101, Arlington. Contact Greg, Program Coordinator at 703-567-1346.

VOLUNTEER FOR ARLINGTON'S COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

Arlington Neighborhood Village, in partnership with Arlington County and Marymount University, has started the Community Ambassador Program (CAP). CAP is a volunteer fueled system that identifies "Ambassadors" connected with civic associations, faith communities, senior centers, apartment buildings, etc. These individuals will be trained to be a reliable source of information about the many opportunities available to older adults in Arlington.

Ambassadors will spread the word about programs and support services, opportunities for social and civic engagement, and educational and enrichment activities for older adults in their own neighborhoods. They are actively recruiting ambassadors to act as a bridge between their community and the Arlington safety net, providing information and soliciting feedback to improve offerings that help older adults remain safe, independent, engaged, and connected to their community. Contact cap@anvarlington.org if this is something you are interested in or want to learn more. Let's work together to create a supported and connected community for all ages!

Receive Support Services: Are you a senior in Arlington? Do you need support services but don't know where to look? Are you looking for fun and enriching activities in Arlington? Email or call 703-509-8057 and they will connect you with an Ambassador.

THE MARJORIE HUGHES FUND FOR CHILDREN

The Marjorie Hughes Fund for Children (MHF), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit serving Arlington Public Schools (APS) students, helps underinsured and uninsured students obtain medical and dental services and other necessary medical care. Established in 1992 to honor the work of public health physician Marjorie F. Hughes, who dedicated her career to public school students in Arlington, MHF is made up of Public Health School Nurses, School Health Aides, APS staff, and community stakeholders. In collaboration with pediatric office staff and dental providers, MHF pays for school entry and sports physical exams, dental treatments, assists with the purchase of medications or medical equipment, and provides transportation via UberHealth rides to doctor and dentist appointments. MHF services are supported entirely by generous donations and grants, and they have helped students throughout Arlington schools, from kindergarten to high school, to be happy, healthy, and ready to learn. To learn more about MHF, its mission, its work, and to make a contribution, visit <https://www.marjoriehughesfund.com/>.

YEAR ROUND ON SUNDAYS

Farmer's Market. 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. At Casa Chirilagua Community Center, 4109 Mt. Vernon Ave., Alexandria. Experience fresh foods, native plants, artisan crafts, music and community at Four Mile Run Farmers & Artisans Market in the heart of Arlandria outside the Casa Chirilagua Community Center, every Sunday 9-1 p.m.

FRESHFARM OPEN YEAR-ROUND

FRESHFARM Ballston Market will now operate year-round, providing residents and visitors with continued access to locally grown produce and goods even through the winter months. Located at Welburn Square (901 N Taylor St., Arlington) just steps from the



"The Secret Garden" is playing May 9-24, 2026 at Thomas Jefferson Community Theatre in Arlington.

Ballston Metro, the market operates Thursdays from 3-6 p.m. The market features a lineup of 20 regular and rotating farmers and producers, and shoppers can enjoy nearly everything needed for a complete grocery shop, from hearty winter squash and leafy greens to eggs, meats, pantry staples, and prepared foods, while supporting regional farmers and producers year-round. Visit freshfarm.org/markets/ballston.

THURSDAY/MAY 7 Leadership Summit and Reception. 1-6:30 p.m.

At Westin Arlington. Leaders in the greater Northern Virginia/Washington, D.C. area are invited to connect with one another and learn from some of the nation's guiding voices. This afternoon of leadership development is meant to inspire and empower individuals with reimagined perspectives and tools for enriching personal growth and influence. The Leadership Summit also serves as the culmination of the Leadership Center of Arlington's Lead and Ignite Classes of 2026, as well as Leadership Alexandria. Visit leadercenter.org/summit.

THURSDAY/MAY 7 Cinco de Mayo Trivia Night. 5:00 – 7:00 p.m.

At Los Chamacos, Arlington. Test your knowledge at our Cinco de Mayo-themed Pike Trivia Night with prizes. Free appetizers provided while supplies last.

MAY 7-28 Music by the Metro. 6 p.m.

At Clarendon Metro Park, Clarendon, Arlington. Music by the Metro is back for 2026 with four free outdoor concerts in Clarendon Metro Park, presented by Clarendon Alliance. Join on Thursdays in May at 6pm for live music, good vibes, and community connection—just steps from the Clarendon Metro. Bring a blanket or a chair, grab dinner or a drink from a nearby Clarendon business, and enjoy an evening of live performances under the spring sky. Check out this year's line-up below!

May 7: Crush Funk Brass
May 14: Son Cubano Subterraneo
May 21: The Fuss
May 28: The Sidleys

SATURDAY/MAY 9 Arlington HistoryFest 250. From 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

At Kenmore Middle School, 200 S Carlin Springs Road, Arlington. The Arlington VA250 Committee has announced plans for Arlington HistoryFest 250, a free, one-day outdoor festival commemorating the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution. Programming will feature live reenactments, musical performances, and historical storytelling, hands-on demonstrations, children's activities and crafts, and local food vendors. Thousands of attendees from across the Washington, D.C., area are expected, along with dozens of historical reenactors and over 40 exhibitors. For more information: <https://arlist.org/arlington-va250/>

SATURDAY/MAY 9 Comedy Karaoke Trivia Funtime Show. 7:30 p.m.

At Highline RxR, 2010 Crystal Drive, Arlington. Bring a team or fly solo and win prizes by dropping knowledge in a trivia competition, then duking it out in a karaoke battle. Hosted by Christian Hunt, this amazing experience features comedy from the DC area's finest comics. The headliner for May's show is the hilarious Danny Rouhier from 106.7 The Fan! Tickets: \$10/\$15 at capitalcityshowcase.com. Call 202-235-4311

SATURDAY/MAY 9 Arlington Chorale Live Performance. 5 p.m.

At Westover Baptist Church, 1125 Patrick Henry Drive, Arlington. Inspired by Leonard Bernstein's words, "This will be our reply to violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before," this moving concert explores how composers across history have responded to pain and uncertainty with beauty, courage, and hope. Featuring music by Palestrina, J.S. Bach, Brahms, Sarah Quartel, Reena Esmail, and Ysaye Barnwell, Reply offers an evening of powerful choral music that speaks to the resilience of the human spirit and the enduring power of art.

SATURDAY/MAY 9 Arlington Poetry Tent. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

At Kenmore Middle School, 200 South Carlin Springs Road, Arlington. As part of the

upcoming Arlington 250 celebration sponsored by the Arlington Historical Society, the Arlington Poetry Tent will offer a dynamic literary space featuring live poetry readings, small press publications, and a historical record of poetry in Arlington. The Poetry Tent will showcase many of Arlington's poets, including past and present poet laureates, poetry publishers, and teachers of poetry. Visitors can browse the historical materials, ask questions, hear hourly live poetry readings, join free writing workshops, contribute to a community poem, and more.

Schedule of Events:
10:15 Arlington Poet-Educators and Young Poets
11:15 Community Workshop with Arlington Poet Laureate Jennifer Kronovet
12:15 Write A Flash Poem: Workshop for Kids
1:15 In Memoriam Reading, Honoring the memory of such poets as Mary Bowman, Tim Dlugos, John Elsborg, Alexandra Hailey, Jim Morrison, Carol Heller Nation, Irene Rouse, Robert Sargent, Hillary Tham, Karenne Wood, and Zitkala-Ša
2:15 Veterans of the IOTA Poetry Series Reading
3:15 Poet-Publishers of Arlington
4:15 Potpourri Poetry Reading
Kid-friendly programming includes a poetry writing workshop at 12:15. Kids are also invited to contribute to the community poem. The Poet is IN, a program of the Arlington County Cultural Affairs Division, will take place at the Poetry Tent from 12 PM until 4 PM, when local poets will write poems for kids of all ages to take home.

MAY 9-23 "Ghost Limb." At Gunston Arts Center, Theatre Two, Long Branch Creek, Arlington.

Ghost Limb is a timely and haunting examination of authoritarianism set during Argentina's Dirty War that draws poetic inspiration from the Persephone and Demeter myth. When Consuelo's son is "disappeared" by the military, she discovers a psychic link between her injured arm and her tortured child - and races to find him before it's too late.

MAY 9-24 "The Secret Garden." At Thomas Jefferson Community Theatre, Arlington Heights, Arlington.

The Arlington Players presents a musical version of a timeless classic. A young girl unlocks a hidden world and brings new life to those around her in this timeless tale of healing and hope. With its rich score and emotional depth, it's a moving tribute to our capacity to find growth.

FRIDAY/MAY 15 Bike to Work Day – Penrose Square Pit Stop. 7 – 9 a.m.

At Penrose Square, Arlington. Stop by on your morning ride for free refreshments, giveaways, and community vibes in partnership with BikeArlington.

SATURDAY/MAY 16 Create a Flower Bouquet. 2 p.m.

At Ballston Local, 900 N. Glebe Road, Arlington. Join Arlington Thrive for a hands-on floral design experience where creativity blossoms and giving back takes center stage. Enjoy light refreshments at Ballston Local as you learn the art of flower arranging with expert guidance from Astraea Floral Arts, a local florist. This interactive flower arranging workshop is perfect for everyone! From complete beginners to seasoned flower lovers, you'll create your own stunning bouquet, learn the fundamentals of floral design, and support local businesses!

SATURDAY/MAY 23 Water Safety Day! At Long Bridge Aquatics & Fitness Center, Arlington.

Water Safety Day, a free event focused on helping all ages stay safe and confident in and around the water. Enjoy age-specific sessions that teach key swimming and water-safety skills, including Aqua Tots Together, Aqua Preschoolers Together, Hydro Heroes for kids, and Aqua Awareness for teens and adults. To maximize participation, each person may register for one session only.

SENIOR LIVING

In the Stillness, She Saw More

For nearly three decades, Charity Campong has built her nursing career on presence, patience, and the lessons she carried from her childhood in Ghana.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

On a late afternoon in Alexandria, the light slants through the windows of a resident's room, softening the edges of the day. Making her rounds at the Goodwin Living Alexandria campus, a nonprofit that operates senior-living communities and health-care services, Charity Campong stepped inside and did something that doesn't appear on any checklist. She stopped. She watched.

Nothing about the moment was urgent. No alarms. No hurried footsteps in the hall. Just a resident living with Parkinson's — quiet, mostly unresponsive — and a nurse willing to stay a little longer than her schedule allowed.

"I made a deliberate decision to

"The primary source of my motivation is the residents."

— Charity Campong,
Director of Nursing,
Goodwin Living

spend more time," she says. "More than I typically would."

In a profession where minutes are often rationed, that choice became a turning point. In the stillness, Campong noticed what others had missed: faint signs of awareness, small attempts at communication that had slipped past in the rhythm of routine care.

That moment reshaped the team's approach to the resident's treatment and later became a model presented at one of the organization's national health-care conferences.

Her instinct to pause didn't come from her professional training. It came from much earlier.

In Ghana, where Campong grew up, caring for elders wasn't a job, it was simply part of life. Families shared the responsibility. As a child, she helped tend to her great-grandmother after school. No manuals. No protocols. Just the steady practice of being present.

Those early lessons shaped more than her skills. They shaped her way of seeing.

WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM



From left: Sallay Kanu, charge nurse and wound-care nurse; center: Dr. Thomas Brughan, wound-care physician; right: Charity Campong, Director of Nursing, during a wound-care collaboration at Goodwin Living.

Years later, when she began working as a certified nursing assistant at Goodwin Living, she moved through even the most complex care situations with a calm that surprised others. Residents responded. Families noticed. Colleagues paid attention. What came naturally to her — patience, attentiveness, meeting people where they are — became the foundation of a career that has now spanned more than twenty-five years, carrying her from certified nursing assistant to her current role as Director of Nursing.

It was the residents, she says, who pushed her forward.

"They encouraged me to go back to school," she recalls. "They supported me through that decision."

Their encouragement led her to earn an associate degree, then a Bachelor of Science in Nursing, along with certifications in wound care and staff development. Each step expanded her ability to care for residents and to mentor the



Director of Nursing Charity Campong at Goodwin Living's Alexandria campus.

next generation of caregivers.

As one of the region's early wound-care nurses in senior living, she helped reduce hospital visits for Goodwin Living residents. She advocated for small, practical changes in how staff interacted with patients, adjustments that added up



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GOODWIN LIVING.

Charity Campong with Jackie Barbarito Scholar, health-care administrator, after receiving a service award.

to something larger: more comfort, more dignity, more time spent in familiar surroundings.

"Early in my career, I realized I could meet the needs of all residents even those others found challenging," she says.

Still, when asked what keeps her in the work after nearly twenty-six years, she doesn't mention credentials or accomplishments.

"It's the residents," she says. "Seeing the outcomes. The appreciation. The connection."

For Campong, the relationship between nurse and resident is reciprocal. What she gives returns in trust, in gratitude, in the quiet understanding that forms between caregiver and patient.

That sense of shared purpose extends beyond individual interactions. As Director of Nursing, she mentors other health-care professionals, emphasizing not just skill but perspective: that they are part of a team working toward a common goal.

"I've seen my team take greater ownership and pride in their work," she says. "They're not just showing up — they're contributing to something larger."

Even so, she worries about the future. Staffing shortages have grown more pronounced, with positions taking longer to fill and fewer applicants stepping forward. For an industry already stretched thin, the implications are serious.

"We're seeing longer recruitment timelines," she says. "Positions remain open for weeks before we receive applicants."

During National Nurses Week, May 6-12, Campong's work offers a quieter model of nursing — one rooted in patience, presence, and the belief that care begins in the smallest moments. The pause in a doorway. The decision to stay. The instinct to notice what others might miss.

It's the kind of nursing that doesn't call attention to itself, but changes everything just the same.

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SENIOR LIVING

Flourishing after 55

Office of 55+ Programs
Department of Parks and Recreation
300 N. Park Dr., Arlington, VA 22203
703-228-4721

55+ Programs are in person at 55+ Centers unless otherwise noted. A 55+ Pass is required to participate (starting at a \$30 annual fee). To join or register, go to registration. arlingtonva.us or call 703-228-4747.

Northern Virginia Senior Olympics (NVSO) looking for volunteers to assist event directors at a variety of events, Sept. 9 – Oct. 4 plus a person to write press releases and contact potential Patrons. Experienced volunteer Webmaster also needed. Email Judy Massabny for further details at jmassa@arlingtonva.us. The dates for 2026 are Sept. 9 – Oct. 4. The official opening is Saturday, Sept. 19 at the Thomas Jefferson Community Center in Arlington. The registration fee remains the same at \$20 which covers an unlimited number of events. Registration is online only at www.nvso.us.

55+ Ice Skating, Mondays at the Med-Star Capitals Iceplex in Ballston Quarter, parking (\$1) on roof level 8, Fee (\$1) includes skate rental, 8:40-9:50 a.m. Pre-registration required at <https://www.medstarcapitalsiceplex.com>, register for Senior Public Skate.

55+ (senior adults) weight room hours, Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at Langston-Brown Community Center, 11 a.m. – 2 p.m.; Tuesdays and Thursdays, 8 a.m. – 11 a.m., Madison Community Center. For more information, call 703-228-4771. A 55+ Gold Pass is required.

Line dance practice led by volunteers, open to intermediate level dancers, Mondays, 10 a.m. and Thursdays, 1 p.m., Arlington Mill 55+ Center. Drop-in.

Walk Fit, a free, weekly walking program hosted by VHC Health offers a 45-minute walk on the indoor track at Lubber Run 55+ Center plus a 15-minute guided stretch, Thursdays, 8:30 - 9:30 a.m. Open to all ages; no 55+ Pass required. Drop-in.

Calling all trivia buffs, join 55+ friends for a fun-filled trivia challenge, Thursday, May 7, 11 a.m., virtual. Registration # 913600-10.

Sunshine Gang band plays rock and popular selections in a low-key, music-loving atmosphere, Friday, May 8, Walter Reed 55+ Center. Drop-in.

Arlington Palooza, street fair, live music, something for everyone, all ages, Saturday, May 9, 1-5 p.m. at Lubber Run Community Center. For more information visit, <https://www.arlingtonva.us/arlingtonpalooza>.

Cornhole Toss, Monday, May 11, 1 p.m., Aurora Hills 55+ Center. No experience needed for this light, low-impact activity. Drop-in.

Friendly games FUNdraiser, enjoy a lighthearted day of games for all skill levels, Tuesday, May 12, 3 – 6 p.m., Walter Reed 55+ Center. Cost \$15, pay online at [\[falliance.org\]\(http://falliance.org\) or cash at the door. Please bring exact change. Registration # 913600-04.](http://friendso-</p>
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Social bridge games, highly regarded as a great way to keep the brain fin-tuned, Tuesday, May 12, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., Madison Community Center. Drop-in; Wednesday, May 13, 1:30 -3:30 p.m., Walter Reed 55+ Center. Drop-in.

Haiku, learn the basics of this meditative Japanese nature poetry form from award-winning writer Rick Black, Tuesday, May 12, 2 p.m., Lubber Run 55+ Center. Registration # 913300-12.

Supper Club, casual and fun dinner party, participants bring their own dinner, non-alcoholic beverages and dessert provided by Arlington Mill 55+ Center Advisory Committee and AASP Wednesday, May 13, 6 p.m. Registration # 913801-03.

Movie and munchies, "It Was Just an Accident" (2025) (PG-13), Foreign language with English sub-titles, Thursday, May 14, 2 p.m., Walter Reed 55+ Center. Registration # 913804-06.

Arlington's 250th Anniversary celebration plans, Thursday, May 14, 3 p.m., virtual. Hear Peter Vaselopulos, president, Arlington Historical Society, deliver an overview of Arlington's history during the Revolutionary War and how Arlington will celebrate July 4th. Registration # 913400-19.

Paper quilling, use a few basic tools to wind paper strips into coils and create beautiful raised images of flowers, butterflies and more, Thursday, May 14, 1:30 p.m., Lubber Run 55+ Center. Taught by volunteer Joni Leonardo. Cost \$20; supplies provided. Registration # 913310-06.

Nature journaling with Arlington Park Naturalist Nayeli Arellano, Friday, May 15, 11 a.m., Walter Reed 55+ Center. Learn to identify common plants and methods of recording observations. Bring a journal and preferred art supplies. Weather permitting, class will be held outdoors in the Sensory Garden. Registration # 913400-19.

55+ Travel group to attend a performance of "Don Quixote" by the Manassas Ballet Theatre at the Hylton Performing Arts Center, Sunday, May 17. Cost \$87, Arlington resident; \$100, non-resident. Registration # 902605-06.

Retire Well, Live Well, hear advice about tax and retirement planning and budgeting from Wealth Advisor Brian Fyock, Monday, May 18, 1 p.m., Aurora Hills 55+ Center. Registration # 913404-03.

Pickleball for all ages, Monday, May 18, 12:30-4 p.m., Tuesday, May 19 and Thursday, May 21, 12:30-3 p.m., all at Walter Reed 55+ Center. Drop-in. No 55+ Pass required.

Cole Porter – Too Darn Hot! Classic songs from the Great American Songbook performed by local musicians, pianist Ken Schellenberg and singers Judy Lewis, Jane Petkofsky and Cameron Fletcher, Monday, May

18, 11:30 a.m., Lubber Run 55+ Center, registration # 913301-12 and Wednesday, May 20, 1 p.m., Aurora Hills 55+ Center, registration # 913301-13.

Euchre, classic trick-taking card game, easy to learn, Tuesday, May 19, 5 p.m., Walter Reed 55+ Center. Taught by 55+ volunteer Ben Childers. Registration # 913600-16.

Arlington Mill 55+ Center book club will discuss "The Stories We Tell" by Patti Callahan Henry, Tuesday, May 19, 1 p.m. Drop-in.

Acoustic Café featuring performances by musicians Krista O'Connell and Sweet Mountain Laurel, Tuesday, May 19, 7 p.m., Walter Reed 55+ Center. Open to all ages; no 55+ Pass required. Registration # 913301-03.

Piano Lounge and Sing-Along, selected songs from Broadway with pianist Valerie Welsh, Tuesday, May 19, 2:30 p.m., Lubber Run 55+ Center. Lyrics provided. Registration # 913304-23.

Exploring book arts, learn how to make an accordion book with hard cover, Tuesday, May 19, 3 p.m., Arlington Mill 55+ Center. Taught by artist Sushmita Mazumdar. Cost \$20. Registration # 913310-09.

Open art studio accommodates artists who work at their own pace in a collaborative space, Wednesday, May 20, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. and Friday, May 22, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m., both at Arlington Mill 55+ Center. Artists must bring their own materials; no instruction provided. Drop-in.

Ticket to Ride, cross country train adventure board game. Thursday, May 21, 9:30 a.m. – 12 p.m., Walter Reed 55+ Center. Taught by 55+ Center Director Jennifer Weber. Registration # 913600-12.

Memory Café for people with dementia and their family caregivers, meaningful dementia-friendly activities, Thursday, May 21, 1:30 p.m., Walter Reed 55+ Center. For more information and to register, call Adult Services Librarian Zoe Mann at 703-228-5193 or email zmann@arlingtonva.us. Open to all ages; no 55+ Pass required.

Tea and a movie matinee, "The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society" (2018) (NR), Friday, May 22, 12:30 p.m., Aurora Hills 55+ Center. Registration # 913804-09.

Just say "no" to scams, join Aisha Salazar, Virginia Cooperative Extension, to learn about financial scams and how to protect yourself, Friday, May 22, 11 a.m., Aurora Hills 55+ Center. Registration # 913400-06.

Generative AI for healthy eating using it to plan balanced meals and support healthy habits, presented by 55+ Volunteer Barbara Fillip, Friday, May 22, 1 p.m., Arlington Mill 55+ Center. Learn how to use tools like ChatGPT to create recipes, grocery lists and menus. Registration # 913403-13.

Biology Student from Arlington Wins Scholarship at GMU

Scholarship for multidisciplinary interests in scientific research and the French language.

Ellen Valencia, a first-year biology student in George Mason University's Honors College, received the Harold J. Morowitz Scholarship at the Spring Research Exhibition and Awards Ceremony on May 1, 2026. Valencia graduated from Washington-Liberty High School in Arlington and continues to live in Arlington.

The Harold J. Morowitz Endowed Scholarship supports Honors College students engaged in research. The award is given in memory of Harold J. Morowitz (1927–2016), who served as the Robinson Professor of Biology and Natural Philosophy at George Mason.

Valencia's research began in Honors 110, where she studied the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the development of pediatric myopia. Her findings underscored that younger children experienced especially pronounced effects because eye plasticity is highest at those ages — even though older students typically log more screen time. She plans to extend the project beyond the pandemic period to look at how the broader shift toward digital learning, iPads, and laptops affects myopic development in young children today.

"Valencia embodies the multidisciplinary spirit of the Honors College. Here biomedical research interests sit alongside a French minor and a deep interest in the Francophone world," said the announcement. Valencia traces her affinity for French back to the Fancy Nancy children's books.

"It became more than just another language to learn," she said. "[It] serves as a bridge to meet with others, but it also serves as a way to be more empathetic and be more open-minded and curious about the world."

As first-generation college student from Arlington, Valencia came to George Mason with plans to head to medical school. She's still on that path, but the breadth of the Honors College widened her thinking to better appreciate the value of pursuing the questions you are interested in. For Valencia, this has been an affirming experience that has led her to rediscover the joy of biology after a period in late high school when STEM classes came to feel "more like an expectation rather than something that I liked doing." A science fiction course with Honors College faculty member Carlos Chism, in particular, "lifted this weight off my shoulder. ... I can relearn to love what I love," she said.



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Soap du Jour



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

As I'm sure you don't know - and even more sure that you don't care, I prefer using a bar of soap rather than liquid soap/body wash. This point may not be worth making, but as a cancer patient still under treatment, with monthly lab work and quarterly PET scans keeping me on the precipice, I react to things differently than one who was not given - as I was, a "13 month to two-years" prognosis, back in late Feb. 2009. Moreover, having been diagnosed (at the time, it has since changed) with stage IV, non-small cell lung cancer, a killer cancer if there ever was one - and there are many (though lung cancer kills more people than the next four cancers combined); my prospects were not encouraging. Yet, here I sit, pen in hand, 17+ years later alive and reasonably well - all things considered (and you bet I consider all things; it helps to keep my sane); still waiting for the other shoe to drop (expect it really) and viewing my life through a cancer-affected prism.

And through that prism I saw an eight-count package of soap the other day in my local supermarket advertising circular, and since it was my brand, I thought I should buy it, especially since it's not often advertised and rarely available, given the popularity/marketing of liquid soaps - apparently. Seeing this advertisement reminded me of a similar experience I had 17+ years ago during the early, hairless stage of my heavy-duty chemotherapy infusions. I went ahead and instinctively (bulk/value purchases appeal to my consuming nature - then and now) bought the eight-count then without factoring in my mortality (or rather lack thereof - at the time). However, soon-ish after I returned home and incorporated this eight-count of soap into my bathing routine, and realized how long a bar was lasting, I "stopped short" like Mr. Costanza did in his car - on a long ago "Seinfeld" episode, but in my house and I thought/wondered/worried if I had just wasted my money - considering my prognosis. A variation of the common-sense advisory to not buy green bananas if it's presumed that time is not on the buyer's side.

But survived I have - and eventually "soaped up" this eight count. Nevertheless, the purchase/experience made me gun shy and up until this recent advertisement, I hadn't noticed this item for sale anywhere and likewise hadn't purchased another eight count. Though I survived, I always thought that previous soap purchase was a bit of reach. Seeing the eight count of soap once again reminded me of my earlier what-I-subsequently-described as a mistake and as such was not keen to repeat my error/waste my money (I have plenty of other shorter-term needs/pleasures I'd rather purchase that carry no such financial implications - to me anyway).

All of which brings me - finally, to the meat of this column's bone - so to speak: a cancer's patient's presumptive/predicted/anticipated mortality and the effect it has on one's thinking/planning. A constant worry for me - then and now, has been and still is: whenever I buy anything, I consider/calculate - figuratively speaking, if I will live long enough to actually use this product/item. (I still remember cleaning out my uncle's condo in Florida and finding five bottles of mouthwash underneath the bathroom sink.) I'm constantly worrying about whether I might outlive my money. Money which is hardly unlimited. Moreover, it's very difficult to live/plan financially for a definite maybe. This angst is further complicated by the amazingly good fortune I've had to outlive by prognosis. It's been a blessing but when looking ahead, I can't help thinking that my past will catch up to me. A past which hardly guarantees a future.

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



Liz Hutcheson, owner of Fast Snails, holds up today's customer favorite, the cards with her hand-created fox design.



Clare from Wild Birds Unlimited on Harrison Street hands out small bird feeders filled with Nyjer thistle and sunflower chips.



Melinda Miller from Oak Lane Soap offers a variety of options made with natural ingredients and essential oils.

Arlington Celebrates Earth Day

FROM PAGE 3

of Fast Snails, stands in front of a large display of cards which she says she designs herself and then draws by hand. "The most popular design today has been the fox cards which were inspired by the fox in the Little Prince."

Down the way Clare from Wild Birds Unlimited on Harrison Street offers a free small bird feeder filled with Nyjer thistle and sunflower chips. "It will attract finches and other small birds like nuthatches."

Melinda Miller from Oak Lane Soap offers a variety of soaps made with natural ingredients and essential oils. The most popular choice today has been honey-suckle. "Weather plays a big part in the choice. Right now spring is coming, and the flowers are up." Miller, a former Arlingtonian, says she makes the soap in her kitchen where she lives now in Vermont and comes back twice a year for these events.

Across the way the Italian Store is offering small plastic cups of its new pasta salad mixture of shells, kale and sausage. County Board member Julius Spain stops by for a taste after explaining the Board has been very busy with the Arlington County Budget which was just announced. Despite the especially tough choices this year, he says he is proud they didn't cut the Department



Mariachi Estrellas Band is a crowd pleaser at the Langston Earth Day event.



County Board Member Julius D. "J.D." Spain reflects on the recently announced County budget as he tastes the new pasta salad from the Italian Store.

of Human Services serving Arlington's vulnerable population which was his top priority.

The ranger at Long Branch Nature Center, has a snake entwined around his neck and down his chest.

He is explaining to a young observer that the jar of water on the demonstration table contains a bullfrog tadpole. "If you look closely you can see the tadpole is just getting its back legs. It wasn't like that a week ago."

Vision Zero sponsored by the

County's Department of Environmental Services has a display of questions soliciting resident input by May 4 on the draft transportation safety action plan.

The Long & Foster Arlington office is advertising a free shredding and junk removal event on Saturday May 2 just down the block at 4600 Cherry Hill Road. Their brochure asks for a canned food donation for AFAC at the event.

Earth Day was established 56 years ago with this year's theme "Our Power, Our Planet."



Vision Zero display invites input on County draft transportation safety action plan.