

THE CONNECTION

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

Urban Forestry

PAGE 10

Redistricting In Limbo

PAGE 3

HopeLink Answers the Calls

PAGE 6

Consolidating Police Accountability?

PAGE 8

Fairfax County Urban Forester Hugh Whitehead joins Hutchison Elementary School students next to the birch tree they helped plant on school grounds.

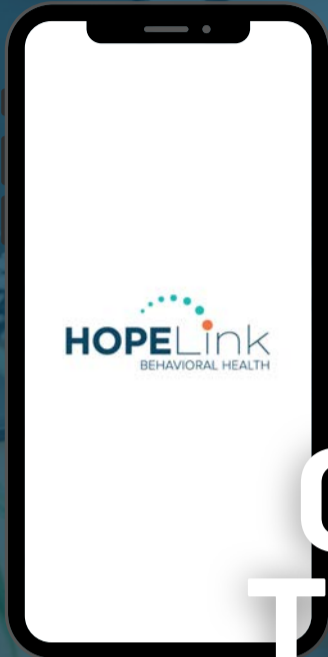
OPINION, PAGE 6 ❖ ENTERTAINMENT, PAGE 12

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Fairfax County's Unaffordable Housing Crisis Is Here, And We Can't Ignore It

BY REV. JONATHAN WILKINS

When my wife and our four children moved from Dallas to Northern Virginia nearly three years ago, we expected change. What we did not expect was the shock of the housing market.

Very quickly, we realized that Virginia prices were not Texas prices. In some cases, they were nearly double. Homes that would have been within reach in Dallas were suddenly far beyond it here. We had done what many are told to do — worked hard, built stable careers, prepared for the next chapter — and still found ourselves recalibrating what was possible.

And like many families, our decisions were not just about price, they were about our children. With a four-year-old and a one-year-old at the time, we wanted to be near good schools, in a community where they could grow and thrive. But proximity came at a cost. To make it work, I found myself working two full-time jobs just to cover the basics and remain close to those opportunities.

That experience was not unique to us. It was a window into a much larger reality, one affecting households across income levels, life stages, and professions throughout Fairfax County. Today, across Fairfax County, families are asking the same question: Can we afford to stay here?

In Fairfax County, you can earn a good salary, work hard, do everything “right,” and still not be able to afford a home. That reality is no longer theoretical. It is personal.

At Mount Olive Baptist Church in Centreville, we see it every day. College graduates with stable jobs are moving back in with their parents. Young professionals are delaying marriage and family plans. Essential workers, teachers, nonprofit staff, and county employees, are commuting farther away because living in the community they serve has become out of reach.

Consider the numbers. The average salary for a public school teacher in Fairfax County is roughly \$70,000 to \$80,000. Many first responders earn in a similar range. Yet median home prices are approaching \$700,000 to \$800,000, with many homes far exceeding that. Renters face similar pressure, with monthly costs continuing to rise beyond what many working families can reasonably afford.

Fairfax County is one of the most affluent jurisdictions in the nation. Yet prosperity has not translated into access to opportunity for all. Lower and moderate income households are disproportionately impacted by the cost of housing. Among renters earning less than \$75,000 per year, 87% are cost-burdened and spend at least 30% of their income on rent and utilities. Further, 52% of households earning under \$75,000 spent over 50% of their income on rent and utilities, making them severely cost-burdened. These trends raise important questions about who is able to access opportunity in Fairfax—and how we ensure that people across different income levels can continue to live, work, and contribute here.

Northern Virginia's high cost of living is driving residents away, particularly adults aged 25 to 44. In 2022 alone, Fairfax County saw a net population decline of nearly 30,000 residents, even as home prices continued to climb. Statewide, Virginia faces a shortage of approximately 200,000 affordable homes.

OPINION

Housing is not just a market issue; it is a community issue. County data and housing assessments have increasingly pointed to the same conclusion: without a range of housing options, it becomes harder for the workforce that sustains the county to live in the communities they serve.

A county is not measured only by its median income, but by whether its teachers, first responders, healthcare workers, and young adults can afford to call it home. When workers cannot live near their jobs, traffic worsens, families are stretched thin, and the social fabric begins to fray. When housing costs outpace what working households can afford, it affects more than individual families; it impacts workforce stability, local businesses, and the county's long-term economic success.

Some argue the market will correct itself. Others worry that affordable housing will lower property values or alter neighborhood character. These concerns deserve to be heard. But without intentional action, the market will not correct inequality, it will deepen it. Some believe the market will correct itself over time. Others have concerns about how new housing may affect property values or neighborhood character. These perspectives are important to acknowledge. At the same time, many communities are finding that thoughtful, collaborative approaches can help expand housing options while maintaining community character.

Well-designed, thoughtfully integrated affordable housing strengthens communities. It ensures that the people who sustain our neighborhoods can remain rooted within them. This is where we must move from conversation to action.

Mount Olive Baptist Church sits on 17.5 acres in Fairfax County. Twelve acres support our current ministry. The remaining 5.5 acres sit unused. We are beginning to ask a deeper question about what faithful stewardship looks like in this moment, how we might thoughtfully evaluate this land and explore new possibilities that serve both our church family and the wider community. We hope to enter into conversation and partnership with others as we discern what that could become. Across the county, there may be similar opportunities, through faith communities, nonprofits and public-private partnerships, to think creatively about how land and resources can be used to meet today's needs.

This is both an argument and an invitation. It is an argument that Fairfax County must take bold, collaborative steps to address this crisis before more families are pushed out. And it is an invitation to civic leaders, housing professionals, and community partners to join us in reimagining how underutilized land can become part of the solution.

Fairfax prides itself on being forward-thinking. The question is not whether growth will happen, but whether we will shape it in a way that includes the people who serve this county every day. The goal is not simply more housing, but ensuring that people across a range of incomes and backgrounds have the opportunity to live and contribute in the communities they serve.” In one of the wealthiest counties in America, will we make room for our neighbors—or allow affordability to become a privilege for a shrinking few?

A community that makes room for its people makes room for its future.

Jonathan Wilkins serves as the Senior Pastor of Mount Olive Baptist Church in Centreville.

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'Please Call the Case'

With no further Supreme Court sessions scheduled until late May, Virginia's redistricting remains in legal limbo.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Chief Justice Cleo E. Powell of the Supreme Court of Virginia opened the 58-minute special session hearing on April 27 with a clear directive: "All of the justices of the court are sitting. Please call the case." The clerk called the matter that has paralyzed Virginia politics: Don Scott, in his official capacity as Speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates, et al. v. Ryan T. McDougle, State Senator, et al.

For nearly an hour, the justices heard oral arguments by constitutional attorneys — including Matthew A. Seligman and John E. Lichtenstein for the speaker, and Thomas R. McCarthy for the Republican challengers. They discussed whether the Democratic-led legislature bypassed constitutional safeguards. The hearing focused on two primary questions that could determine the fate of the 2026 midterms: whether the Virginia General Assembly exceeded its authority by passing a redistricting amendment during a session originally called for budget disputes, and if the constitutional requirement for an "intervening election" refers only to the single day in November or if the process became "void" because early voting had already begun when the amendment was first passed.

As of Tuesday morning, May 5, the Supreme Court of Virginia holds the final say on the state's congressional power balance. The court is currently reviewing the contested April 21 redistricting referendum, which introduced a new map that could fundamentally alter Virginia's U.S. House representation.

Although unofficial data from the Virginia Public Access Project (VPAP) shows the amendment passing with 51.69% of the vote, the results have yet to be officially certified.

The Supreme Court's decision to freeze the map has left candidates and constituents in uncertainty, unable to identify their legal districts or representatives as candidate filing deadlines loom. Simultaneously, the State Board of Elections and local registrars face an administrative pause. They can-

not print ballots or assign precincts until the court resolves which maps are valid.

On April 28, the Supreme Court denied Attorney General Jay Jones's request for an emergency stay. The court's order was brief: "Upon consideration whereof, the Court denies the motion." The court's decision kept in place Judge Jack Hurley Jr.'s ruling from the Tazewell County Circuit Court, leaving the April 21 redistricting referendum results uncertified while the justices deliberate on the validity of the amendment process. The court has effectively hit "pause." Because the new map (House Bill 29) becomes legally operative only after the referendum is certified, the state is currently caught between two conflicting realities: the old 2021 commission-drawn districts and the new 2026 legislature-drawn districts.

'Six-Day Map' and Calendar Gaps

For a brief six-day window, spanning April 22 through the April 27 hearing, the new map in House Bill 29 served as the state's presumptive redistricting plan. Under these boundaries, Democrats could gain four seats based on 2025 election performance.

The Supreme Court's intervention effectively froze this process, suspending the redistricting effort championed by Democratic Gov. Abigail Spanberger.

No additional Virginia Supreme Court sessions are listed for early May. The next formal activity on the calendar is a writ panel on May 27. This creates a scheduling gap as candidate filing deadlines approach. While the court typically issues and posts opinions on Thursdays, it has the authority to issue a special order at any time. Without such an intervention, election officials are looking toward Thursday, May 7, or later as the next potential windows for legal clarity.

Resistance and Rhetoric After the Referendum

After the April 21 referendum, Democrats framed the redistricting as a defensive, pro-democracy counter-move, while Republicans characterized it as an unprecedented constitutional overreach.



A voter casts a ballot at a Fairfax County polling place during the special election for a redistricting constitutional amendment, April 21, 2026. The passage of the referendum 51.69% to 48.31% could pave the way for a new congressional map.

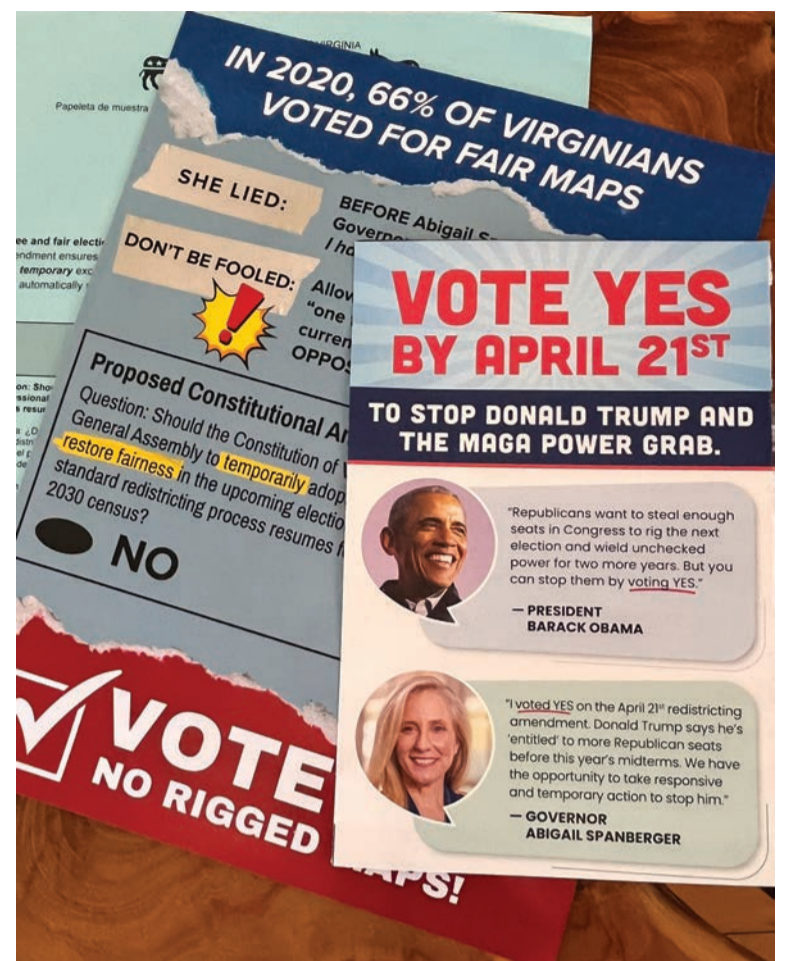
Spanberger said the "Yes" victory was a defensive necessity to counter a national executive branch seeking to expand Republican influence through gerrymandering. "Virginia voters have spoken, and tonight they approved a temporary measure to push back against a President who claims he is 'entitled' to more Republican seats in Congress. Virginians watched other states go along with those demands without voter input — and we refused to let that stand. We responded the right way: at the ballot box."

Senate Majority Leader Scott Surovell (D-Fairfax) described the referendum's "yes" approval as a victory for democracy. "Faced with unprecedented gerrymandering in other states, naked attempts to decide elections before a single vote is cast, Virginians refused to stand idle," Surovell said. "They voted to reclaim the founding principle that maps should reflect communities, not protect incumbents, and that Congress should be chosen by voters, not the other way around."

Jeff Ryer, chairman of the Republican Party of Virginia, signaled that the party's strategy shifted to a constitutional challenge. "The battle now shifts to the courts to determine if the General Assembly has the license to violate the Constitution."

The Republican National Committee (RNC) v. Virginia State Board of Elections successfully "froze" the process. The Supreme Court of Virginia denied the state's request for an emergency stay on April 28, keeping the referendum results uncertified.

Redistricting favoring Republi-



PHOTOS BY MERCIA HOBSON/ THE CONNECTION

Campaign literature for and against the redistricting constitutional amendment is displayed at a Fairfax County polling place during the special election, April 21, 2026. Handouts from both parties highlight the national political stakes of the local referendum.

cans moved forward in Texas already for five likely seats, while Virginia's new maps could favor Dems in four additional seats. California appears to be a four seat advantage for Dems. Florida redistricting is a likely plus four for the GOP. And so on.

Multitude of Courtroom Standoffs

The legal battle has currently been fought on legal fronts across the state. In the Richmond City Circuit Court, the case RNC v. Virginia State Board of Elections addressed a preliminary injunction regarding the contested results. Simultaneously, in the case known as Tazewell II (Koski v. RNC), Judge Jack Hurley Jr. ruled the special election "void ab initio" — finding the General Assembly violated Article XII, Section 1 of the Virginia Constitution by bypassing the mandatory 90-day public notice period.

In Tazewell I (Scott v. McDougle), Speaker Don Scott is defending the map's procedural history against State Sen. Ryan McDougle. McDougle argues the process was "void ab initio"—claiming the legislature failed to meet the "intervening election" requirement because the amendment was first passed after early voting had already begun. Attorneys for the Commonwealth and Democratic leaders maintained that the legislature followed the "letter of the law," defining "election" strictly as a single day. The justices' questions focused heavily on whether early voting essentially "starts" an

election, a pivotal distinction that could determine if the redistricting amendment is upheld or struck down.

Candidates and Districts in Limbo

The shifting district lines have left representatives in a state of limbo, effectively campaigning in two different versions of Virginia's districts simultaneously. Rep. Don Beyer (D-8th) could see his seat stretched 150 miles south to reach Williamsburg and Newport News. Rep. Suhas Subramanyam (D-10th) would find his district relocated out of eastern Fairfax and anchored heavily in Loudoun and Prince William counties. Rep. James Walkinshaw (D-11th) faces a district expansion that would reach to the West Virginia border, removing him from some areas in Fairfax County.

Supreme Court of Virginia To Decide

The seven-member Supreme Court panel, led by Chief Justice Cleo E. Powell, and includes Justices Chafin, Fulton, Kelsey, Mann, McCullough, and Russell, must decide whether the mid-decade redistricting referendum is a valid exercise of legislative power or a constitutional overreach. As of May 5, 2026, the Commonwealth awaits a final ruling that will determine the boundaries for the upcoming midterm elections.

Primary elections in Virginia are set for Aug. 4, 2026, with early voting beginning June 18.

Board of Supervisors Approves FY27 Budget Markup

Tax rate cut, schools underfunded, economic uncertainty reserve increases.



Chairman Jeff McKay – Voted Yes. “It’s not whether you agree with everything in this budget; it’s whether, in its totality, it reflects the will of our residents.”



Vice Chair Kathy Smith – Voted Yes. “I wish we didn’t have to have a reserve for economic uncertainty ... this isn’t like regular budgeting.”



Supervisor Walter Alcorn – Voted No. “I cannot support a reduction in the real estate tax rate, even a small amount, while also cutting services to some of our most vulnerable residents.”



Supervisor Dalia Palchik – Voted Yes. “The changes to the budget represent a balance of improving affordability while implementing targeted restorations to essential human services.”



Supervisor Pat Herry – Voted No. “Taxes are up 60% over 10 years, they’re too high... the \$20 credit from the quarter-penny doesn’t cut it because taxes are still going up.”

PHOTOS SCREENSHOT VIA FAIRFAX COUNTY



Supervisor Rodney Lusk – Voted Yes. “With this reduction, this will be the fifth time in six years the Board has lowered the real estate tax rate, recognizing residents’ serious affordability concerns.”



Supervisor Dan Storck – Voted Yes. “Budgets are value statements, and we are consistently making a strong, positive value statement for the people of the county.”



Supervisor Jimmy Bierman – Voted Yes. “This budget is balanced, and it is a practice in balance.”



Supervisor Rachna Size-more-Heizer – Voted Yes. “Budgets are never perfect, but they are a value statement—and we value growing our economy and keeping housing, schools, parks and services strong.”



Supervisor Andres Jimenez – Voted Yes. “It was wonderful to hear from our residents ... but our decisions will become harder, and we’ll be looking at tougher decisions next year.”

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors marked up the County Executive’s FY 2027 Advertised Budget Plan and the FY 2027 Add-on Package on April 28, informally agreeing in an 8–2 vote to a \$5.9 billion general fund budget for fiscal 2027. The plan reduces the real estate tax rate by one-quarter of a cent, from \$1.1225 to \$1.12 per \$100 of assessed value, while also strengthening the county’s commitment to social infrastructure.

The board dedicated \$8.8 million in recurring funds to support affordable housing — an investment equivalent to an additional quarter-penny on the real estate tax rate. This “brings our recurring baseline investment in affordable housing to a penny and a half on the real estate tax rate, or \$52.7 million,” Chairman Jeff McKay said.

The markup package began with a \$23,167,079 balance in the general fund, which the board allocated through a series of adjustments in the add-on package, including partial restorations for several human services programs. “The board is partially restoring funding for four programs: \$250,000 for the low-and-moderate-income home repair pilot, \$200,000 for

the contract providing a part-time preschool program, \$130,588 for home-delivered meals and \$310,000 for the BeWell program,” McKay said during the nearly three-hour-long meeting, which is available for online viewing.

Supervisors Pat Herry (R-Springfield) and Walter Alcorn (D-Hunter Mill) opposed the plan and voted no, for different reasons.

“Taxes are up 60% over 10 years; they’re too high. We’ve added a meals tax. The \$20 tax credit that the quarter-penny gives our residents doesn’t cut it, because their taxes are still going up,” Herry said.

Alcorn said, “I have listened, and I’ve come to the conclusion I cannot support a reduction in the real estate tax rate even a small amount, while also cutting services across several programs to some of our most vulnerable residents, so I will be voting no on this markup motion.” In a separate official statement on the Hunter Mill District budget, Alcorn said the overall goal was to fund “critical county services,” including strong support for schools and a larger recurring commitment to affordable housing, but he opposed pairing a tax rate cut with reductions in services for vulnerable residents.

**Fairfax County
Public Schools Impact**

The FY 2027 markup package started with a \$23.17 million general fund balance. Separately, as part of the FY 2026 third-quarter review, the Board directed the remaining \$1.7 million into the county’s reserve for economic uncertainty.

According to Fairfax County Public Schools’ advertised FY 2027 operating budget, the division proposed a \$4.1 billion budget for the fiscal year, specifically focusing on the School Operating Fund.

The county’s marked-up budget provides \$43.8 million less than the School Board’s requested, a gap Alcorn highlighted in his post-markup statement. Superintendent Dr. Michelle Reid framed the proposal as a “needs-based” or “essentials-only” budget, stating it focused on core requirements, primarily staff compensation and maintaining existing standards, rather than new programs. This approach was in response to the “budget of reality” requested by the County Executive, as reported by The Connection on Feb. 4.

The Board of Supervisors is scheduled to formally adopt the FY 2027 budget on May 5, 2026. Following that vote, the School Board will need to adjust its spending plan to reflect the nearly \$44 million shortfall, with those final decisions expected in mid-May.

What You May Not Know about the Budget

❖ Homeowners’ real estate taxes go up even as the rate goes down. Chairman Jeff McKay explained that while the real estate tax rate drops from \$1.1225 to \$1.12 per \$100, higher assessments mean the average bill still rises by about \$337, only \$20 less than it would have been without the cut.

❖ Four straight years of cuts inside agencies — but the budget still grew. McKay and Supervisor Pat Herry said the county has had four consecutive years of agency reductions totaling about \$124 million, yet the general fund still increased by about \$868 million over those years [

Over half of every county dollar goes to schools. McKay said more than 51 percent of the county budget — over \$3 billion — goes to Fairfax County Public Schools, leaving everything else to split the remainder.

❖ Affordable housing now has a “permanent” slice of the tax rate. McKay said the board is dedicating the equivalent of an additional quarter-penny (about \$8.8 million) to affordable housing, bringing the recurring baseline to about 1.5 cents on the tax rate (about \$52.7 million).

❖ A new reserve for “economic uncertainty” is quietly getting bigger. McKay and others said remaining balances are being pushed into a reserve for economic uncertainty to help handle “chaos in Washington, D.C.”

❖ The county covered required WMATA funds this year without new tax dollars by draining one-time funds. In budget guidance read by McKay, staff reported that the FY 2027 budget covers Fairfax’s Metro operating subsidy without new general-fund money by drawing on one-time state-aid balances at NVTC, creating a potential hit in FY 2028 if the state does not fix long-term funding.

❖ Fairfax is the only Northern Virginia jurisdiction with high school crossing guards — and they’re being cut. Supervisor Jimmy Bierman said Fairfax was the only Northern Virginia jurisdiction providing high-school crossing guards, and that the budget eliminates them, while Supervisor Rodney Lusk raised safety concerns about high-crash corridors.

❖ A single underused bus route costs over \$1 million a year. Bierman said a Fairfax Connector route with about 144 riders per day costs over \$1 million annually, one example behind a \$7.2 million reduction in Connector service by cutting or restructuring low-ridership routes.

❖ The “meals tax” is visibly doing what supporters promised. McKay and several supervisors, including Dalia Palchik, Rodney Lusk and Bierman, said the food and beverage tax is helping diversify revenues and making the quarter-cent rate cut and other investments possible without larger real estate tax hikes

❖ The board is warning FCPS to keep middle school after-school program or lose the money. In budget guidance, McKay said the middle school after-school program “must be continued” and that if FCPS does not maintain it, including a sliding-scale fee, “the associated county funding will be rescinded.”

❖ The board is considering closing or consolidating community centers. Budget guidance read by McKay directs staff to analyze community center utilization, governance and fee structures and acknowledges that structural reductions, including potential facility changes, may be needed.

❖ Future cuts may go beyond trimming to eliminating programs and closing facilities. In that same guidance, the board warns that, after \$124 million in prior reductions, the county may have to consider program eliminations, facility closures, reduced support for some nonprofits, and cutting services to state-mandated minimums to stay structurally balanced.

❖ The board delayed a major change for students with disabilities by one year. The board deferred by one year the realignment of transition services for high school students with IEPs to FCPS, to allow more time for coordination and to help ensure services are not disrupted during the shift

BULLETIN BOARD

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

ASSISTANCE LEAGUE OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA

April has been a busy month for Assistance League of Northern Virginia (ALNV). Earlier in the month, they sponsored a Build a Child's Library event (BACL) at Sudley Elementary school in Prince William County. Following that was a wonderful Golf Tournament and Luncheon Fundraiser held at Westfield's Golf Club. Finally, ALNV packed and delivered 1,900 bags of food for children in six Title 1 elementary schools in northern Virginia through their Weekend Food for Kids (WFFK) program.

Finally, the monthly Weekend Food for Kids packing event took place at Dominion Energy. ALNV partners with Dominion Energy to pack nonperishable foods for children experiencing food insecurity. Each month, 1900 bags of food are delivered to six schools where they are distributed to children each Friday to take home for the weekend. This month, ALNV was joined by volunteers from HITT Contracting and Nativity Parish at the packing event. Please visit alnv.org to find out what you can do to help support ALNV's programs that provide food, clothing and academic support to local children in need.

On April 6, ALNV hosted a BACL event at Sudley Elementary School in Manassas. Each of the school's 611 students chose a new book to keep, and it was great fun watching them select their books from the wide variety on offer. It's wonderful and so rewarding to see a student find that perfect book that captures their interest!

Westfield's Golf Club was the site for ALNV's 2nd Annual Golf Tournament and Luncheon

fundraiser. Golfers began the morning with a continental breakfast and a putting contest. Then they headed out for a shotgun start and played 18 holes of captain's choice. As they finished up their rounds, the golfers joined ALNV members and guests in the clubhouse for a delicious hot buffet luncheon. Winners of raffle prizes, silent auction items, and tournament contests were announced and everyone is already looking forward to next year's event.

FAIRFAX COUNTY OFFERS FREE TREES

Community-based organizations in Fairfax County can apply to receive free trees for planting on private properties, through a program by Fairfax County's Urban and Community Forestry Division (UCFD) of the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services.

The program, offered in partnership with Casey Trees, is designed to help community organizations in Fairfax County – such as volunteer groups, civic associations and faith-based organizations – obtain high-quality, professionally grown trees suitable for planting. Purchasing top-quality trees can be a challenge for these organizations.

This opportunity focuses on increasing tree cover in economically disadvantaged communities, which typically do not benefit from moderate to high tree cover.

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

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

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Powering Your Every Day.

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



A crisis worker at HopeLink.



Joe Getch

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 condi-

tion 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 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.

Intercity Bus Service Returns to Tysons

10-year transit desert for intercity bus travel, but is Tysons ready?

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

The first FlixBus stop in Fairfax County launched April 16 at Gosnell Road and Leesburg Pike, establishing a new regional hub in Tysons. The location connects local travelers to Richmond, Balti-

more, and New York City, while serving as a gateway to Dulles International Airport via the Greensboro Metro station, located two blocks from the stop.

The Tysons hub offers five daily coach departures. Two southbound trips to Richmond stop at Main Street Station and the Parham Road Park & Ride in Henrico Coun-

ty. Southbound buses typically depart at 11:15 a.m. and again in the afternoon, while three daily northbound trips serve Bethesda, Md., and New York City, with additional inbound service to Washington.

All routes operate from the Gosnell Road and Leesburg Pike curb and may be listed under the FlixBus or Greyhound brands. FlixBus

purchased Greyhound in 2021. Tickets include free Wi-Fi and power outlets; however, travelers should note that only ADA-recognized service animals are allowed on board.

The stop has raised local concerns regarding vehicles idling and sidewalk congestion on the narrow stretch of Gosnell Road.

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Performing with the JazzCats saxophones at last year's event are (from left) Daniel Ahn, Ryan Cavalieri and Grant Zadrozny.



From left, Cynthia Flores and Ethan Cheng (flutes), and Camilla An (oboe) playing in Bandemonium 2025.

Sweet Sounds of Live Music Under the Stars

Centreville High Wildcat Band presents 'Bandemonium!'

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

The Centreville High Wildcat Band's 5th Annual Bandemonium! – an outdoor music festival under the stars – is set for Friday, May 15, at 6:30 p.m. in the school's bus loop. The Indoor Drumline, Winterguard, Jazz Workshop, JazzCats, Percussion Ensemble, Chamber Ensembles, Concert Band, Symphonic Band and Wind Ensemble promise to dazzle the audience with music for all ages to enjoy.

The concert's free, and food will be available to buy from trucks including La Buena Empanada; KBBQ Box (Korean food); Two Smooth Dudes (gourmet tater tots, wraps, salads and pineapple smoothies); Kona Ice; and Adam's Delights ice cream. Attendees may also get their faces painted by members of the school's Art Club, acquire Centreville Wildcat paw-print tattoos and even dance along to some swingin' jazz tunes.

This year's theme is "Off Road," with each band performing a piece featuring a fast car. The event brings together all parts of the CVHS performing arts department – band, orchestra, choir and theater students. Some 500 folding chairs will be available, but guests are also encouraged to bring picnic blankets and camping chairs. In

case of rain, the concert will move indoors into the cafeteria.

"The entire Centreville High School community looks forward to Bandemonium each year," said Band Director Melissa Hall. "The Wildcat Band loves sharing music, spirit and energy with our community."

Kicking off this year's festivities will be a piece called "In Your Wildest Dreams," performed by all the student musicians together. "It sends the message that any dream is possible," said Hall. "It's a joyous and exuberant work that's both inspiring and powerful. It includes lively repetitions that pair with beautiful sweeping lines in a celebration of the world's dreamers and the determination needed to make those dreams a reality."

The award-winning Indoor Drumline and Wildcat Winterguard will perform their respective shows, "Less is More" and "Golden Hour." Jazz Workshop, the Percussion Ensemble and small-group numbers will be interspersed throughout the night.

The JazzCats, Centreville's Jazz Ensemble, will play music from several jazz genres, including swing, big band and samba. Three vocal selections – "Practice," "Over the Rainbow" and "S Wonderful" – feature student vocalists from the Band and Choral departments.

Scott Watson's "Race Car" will be played by the Concert Band. "The skill and thrill of auto racing is captured musically in this piece via its infectious groove and exciting syncopations," said Hall. "Written in one continuous movement, its sections – "Start Your Engines!" "They're Off!" "Pit Stop" "Back on Track" and "Finish Line" – will have guests imagining themselves sitting behind the wheel of a

Performing in the Wind Ensemble's French horn section in the last Bandemonium are (from left) Lance Choi, Vinh Nguyen and Vivien Berg.

PHOTOS
COURTESY OF
MELISSA HALL



powerful and agile racing machine over the course of a breathtaking speed contest."

Striking a different tone will be the "Heartland March" number. "Every time I hear bluegrass music, I think of my Uncle Paul, who'd play guitar and banjo at our family get-togethers," said its composer, Randall Standridge.

"The fiddle song-inspired melodies and Appalachian harmonies add a fun and folksy air to the march genre, one typically considered rigid and traditional," said Hall. "But the audience is encouraged to tap their toes or clap along if the notion takes them."

The Symphonic Band will open its performance with Jorge Vargas's paso doble, "Mil Estrellas" (a thousand stars). "The flowing lines in the woodwinds and the bravado in the brass and percussion create an exciting contrast," said Hall. This group will then play the bal-

lad, "Pastel Sunset," by Heather Hoefle.

"It's about the view from the composer's porch in her North Carolina home – a glorious sunset of elegant beauty with purple, pink, yellow green and Carolina blue framing the crescent moon," explained Hall. "But it's also about our own power to make positive changes in our lives. Change often takes courage and work but trusting your gut, taking control and moving forward can result in the satisfaction of living a life of your own design."

Finally, this band will perform "Speedway!" by Maryland composer and friend of the Wildcat Band, Mark Lortz.

It depicts a high-speed car race, including the engines starting, pole position, a caution flag, restart and the victory lap.

The Wind Ensemble opens with "Rev," also by Standridge, who

likes writing fast music. "The piece offers a driving soundscape intended to generate excitement in the performers and audience," said Hall. "There's a feeling of unbridled joy and energy."

Another number in the show, "First Suite in Eb for Military Band," occupies "a legendary position in wind-band repertory," said Hall. "Its influence is so significant that several composers have alluded to it as inspiring their own works. It's considered one of the masterworks and cornerstones of band literature."

As is tradition, the band will end the night by playing John Philip Sousa's "The Stars and Stripes Forever." Overall, said Hall, "We hope this family-friendly event will bring in many guests from the Centreville community. Come celebrate a tremendous year of music making along with the Wildcat Band family."

Police Oversight Agencies Merge into New ‘Office of Police Accountability’

Tension between efficiency and structural integrity of independent oversight.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors marked up the FY 2027 Advertised Budget Plan on Tuesday, April 28. In an 8-2 vote, the board approved a series of motions that set the final real estate tax rate at \$1.12 per \$100 of assessed value, a quarter-cent reduction from the previous rate of \$1.1225. The plan also sets the General Fund school operating transfer at \$2,802,243,987, leaving a \$44 million gap compared to the FCPS Superintendent’s initial request.

Along with these and other major fiscal measures, the board finalized several agency consolidations in the name of efficiency. The structural changes became official when the board formally adopted the budget on Tuesday, May 5.

In the modern history of Fairfax County, there is no documented instance of the Board of Supervisors changing the budget between its markup and formal adoption. The board treats the markup as the definitive decision point, as the subsequent adoption is considered a procedural finality rather than a period for further negotiation. The board generally adopts the budget in about three minutes with no discussion.

While the tax rate and program cuts dominated the April 28 debate, embedded in the line items of the FY 2027 Advertised Budget Plan is what some could call a potential retreat from the hard-won police transparency of 2015, moving the county away from autonomous oversight and toward a centralized model.

Reorganization consolidates funding and positions from the Office of the Independent Police Auditor (Agency 42) and the Police Civilian Review Panel (Agency 43) into a new Office of Police Accountability (Agency 44). Placing both entities under a single director who could centralize control over the flow of information and institutional interests.

According to the American Civil Liberties Union, such centralized structures can make it easier for departments to “police themselves.” The tension between streamlining oversight and preserving independent checks reflects a broader debate over whether consolidating power clarifies accountability or quietly blurs it.

Historically, a lack of independent police oversight in Fairfax

County led to significant public friction following the 2013 fatal police shooting of Springfield resident John Geer. That incident resulted in a 17-month public information blackout and a subsequent breakdown in community transparency. From August 2013 to January 2015, the county refused to release investigative details. That only ended when a judge’s court order forced the release of thousands of internal documents.

The officer’s fatal shooting of unarmed Geer catalyzed a push for transformative transparency in Fairfax County — a shift defined by its radical nature, systemic impact on county operations, and an unprecedented historical break from the past.

Former Fairfax County police officer Adam Torres’ indictment for second-degree murder of John Geer marked the first time in the department’s 75-year history that an officer was charged for an on-duty shooting. The event catalyzed the formation of the county’s first Police Civilian Review Panel, which was established Dec. 6, 2016, and held its inaugural meeting March 20, 2017.

To ensure police no longer policed themselves, the 2015 Ad Hoc Police Practices Review Commission explicitly designed the Office of the Independent Police Auditor and the Police Civilian Review Panel to be independent. This design, among other things, made prolonged delays in transparency a violation of established county policy and oversight mandates.

The Office of the Independent Police Auditor became operational on April 17, 2017, primarily to review Fairfax County Police Department investigations involving the use of force resulting in serious injury or death. The Civilian Review Panel held its inaugural meeting on March 20, 2017, to review complaints of abuse of authority or serious misconduct. One decade after their conception, the two entities are now merging to report to a single director.

From Autonomy to Gatekeeping

Under Fairfax County’s pre-FY 2027 model, both the auditor and the panel’s staff maintained operational autonomy with dedicated



Richard G. Schott



Adrian Steel



Supervisor Rodney Lusk

staff for each role and structural separation from the county hierarchy.

Under the FY 2027 budget finalized during Tuesday’s markup, the position of Police Civilian Review Panel liaison is reclassified as “panel manager.” The centralized command structure requires the panel manager and the independent auditor to report to a single director of police accountability. According to the position details, the office consists of four authorized full-time positions: one director, two management analysts III, and one management analyst II.

The Case for Efficiency

The county characterizes the move as a “strategic and forward-looking approach” to strengthen oversight by aligning “complementary functions.” According to the budget narrative, the reorganization will “enhance coordination, reduce administrative duplication, and provide a clearer, more accessible framework for community engagement.”

Richard Schott, Fairfax County’s independent police auditor, told The Connection on April 20: “I fully support the consolidation ... it will not impact or undercut any transparency or accountability. And ... I think the consolidation will really make oversight that much more efficient.” Schott explained that a unified office prevents confusion for residents and ensures that complaints are routed to the correct entity by the director.

Schott said that under the current system, both he and Police Civilian Review Panel liaison Craig Miles lead separate two-person county agencies, leaving the independent police auditor to juggle oversight work with administrative duties. Under the proposed Office of Police Accountability, there would be a single director — expected to be Miles — and an independent police auditor reporting to that director.

Expert Concerns and Safeguards

Adrian Steel, who served as the

chairman of the inaugural Police Civilian Review Panel and has years of experience in police reform, said in an interview with The Connection on April 20 that he is not opposed to restructuring in itself if specific safeguards are in place.

Steel says the auditor’s report must remain the auditor’s report: the auditor must continue to monitor and review investigations and issue reports in their own name. Under the proposed structure, the director of police accountability may review the auditor’s report and publish a disagreement, but cannot change the substance of the auditor’s conclusions. Steel stresses that the auditor must still have the “independent ability to monitor and review the investigations” and that the director should not be able to say, “don’t look at that issue.”

According to national best practices set by the National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement (NACOLE), “independence” is the first of 13 defining characteristics of legitimate oversight, referring to an absence of influence from law enforcement or political actors.

The ‘Davis Era’ Use-of-force statistics indicate a shift under Fairfax Police Chief Kevin Davis. For the seven years prior to Davis taking command (2015–2021), the department averaged roughly 1.1 officer-involved shootings per year. Under Davis, that frequency increased to four per year — a total of 10 incidents between 2021 and 2023, including the shooting of Timothy McCree Johnson, a Tysons Corner Center suspect thought to have stolen sunglasses.

A 2023 PERF report noted that five out of seven incidents reviewed during this era involved a mental health crisis. In early 2024, Davis officially disbanded the Police Reform Matrix Working Group, which had advocated for “Item 3.1”—a proposal to grant civilians independent investigative powers.

Fiscal and Work Impact

The county identifies the merger as a cost-saving measure. The \$65,956 reduction specifically tied to Agency 44 is referenced on page 28 of the Agency Reductions table.

Schott noted that the move frees the auditor from administrative duties like budget matters and performance reviews, allowing them to “conduct reviews of investigations full time.”

“[The auditor will be] doing much the same work that I’ve been doing now, absent all of the administrative responsibilities that come with being an agency head,” Schott said, noting that budget matters, employee performance reviews and interfacing with county stakeholders would shift to the director.

Supervisor Rodney Lusk, chairman of the Board of Supervisors’ Safety and Security Committee, has been the primary architect of the county’s police reform efforts since he took office in 2020. Lusk built his brand on police reform and transparency.

Consolidating Agencies 42 and 43 into Agency 44 saves some money by creating a single point, with a single director in charge of the flow of information. It could appear the county is moving away from the independent “checks and balances” model and toward a “gatekeeping” model.

The Fairfax County Independent Police Auditor Recommendations, updated March 26 (based on the Matrix), show several “Not Implemented” statuses — specifically regarding use-of-force on fleeing subjects and mental health crisis protocols. In the current model, these disagreements are public and transparent because the auditor and panel operate as independent agencies. Under the proposed Agency 44, the staff for both functions will report to a single director.

Asked to share specific structural safeguards being built into this new consolidated office to ensure checks and balances remain visible to the public, rather than being resolved or filtered behind the scenes by a single department head, Lusk replied with an emailed statement to The Connection.

“While much is left to be discussed and determined regarding the proposed Office of Police Accountability, we remain committed to ensuring transparency is maintained,” Lusk said. “The staff within the Office of the Independent Police Auditor and the Police Civilian Review Panel already coordinate closely due to the nature of their work. The functions of the Panel and the Auditor would remain unchanged, and the goal of this proposal is to provide stability and to further advance the current missions of both.”

Skip Castro Keeps the Dance Floor Rocking at Jammin' Java

BY MIKE SALMON
THE CONNECTION

For over 47 years the Skip Castro Band has been a musical component on the east coast, opening for famous blues artists, hitting the college towns, and keeping up the local sound that's kept them going all these years.

They didn't hit the big time like the Stones or Led Zeppelin, but that's okay, their name is out there and the members love the rock band lifestyle, so the smiles are genuine. The audience doesn't make a major ticket investment to have a good time either, so this semi-local party band stays on the schedule at Jammin' Java in Vienna.

The colleges are a big part of their tour, dating back to when the drinking age was 18. "We hit them all," said guitarist Bo Randall.

Boogie at Midnight is a big Skip Castro hit, with a music video featuring scenes that look like they're from the 1950s Happy Days show with poodle skirts, polka dots and saddle shoes. It's their big party hit though and keyboard player Danny Beirne sings, dances and jams. It was fashioned into an MTV video in the early 1980s but stands



On the stage at a previous Jammin' Java show.



Keyboard player Danny Beirne, center, with Charlie Pastorfield and Bo Randall.

the test of time on their song list.

The University of Virginia was the catalyst for Skip Castro starting with Charlie Pastorfield and Corky Schoonover who came up with the band idea while going to class at UVA. They each brought their own elements from the Virgin Islands and the Berklee School of Music, two influences that couldn't be farther apart but the band's name comes from a stage name that Schoonover

If you go...

The Skip Castro Band
Friday, May 15, 8 pm
Jammin' Java
227 Maple Ave E
Vienna, VA 22180

used in the past and it seemed to stick. Other band members included Danny Beirne who also had Charlottesville in his blood, and guitarist Bo

Randall.

They have an upcoming show at Jammin' Java in Vienna, and then Skip Castro will be back in the area on July 29, at Burke Lake Park as part of the Springfield Nights concert series where they've played before. This concert series is part of Supervisor Pat Herry's (R-Springfield) entertainment schedule, and since Herry went to Virginia Tech and the band's roots are UVA, it fuels

a little light-hearted rivalry banter.

"The Skip Castro Band has a huge following of University of Virginia alumni and fans from their east coast tours that are now raising families here. The Free Concerts in the Park series I host at Burke Lake Park gives them the opportunity to share the music they grew up with, dance and to have some fun with family and friends," Herry said.

Women's Pilgrimage Honors Earth

Journey of 32 days, 500 miles promotes unity and balance.

BY SUSAN LAUME
THE CONNECTION

Along with protests and marches, it seems pilgrimages have re-surfaced recently to promote interest, capture social media followers, and grow participation in spiritualism and causes.

In February, a group of Buddhist monks on their Walk for Peace, a 120-day, 2,300 mile, walking pilgrimage from Texas to Washington D.C. caught national and local attention. Through tragedy, hardship and poor winter weather conditions, the monks persevered to share their message of peace and mindfulness. In late April, another group of spiritualists reached our area on their 500-mile walk which started in March, from Asheville NC to Washington D.C. "The Great Mother March, A Women's Em-



PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION



Fully packed cars provided rides for walkers and transported camping gear.

Whitney Freya, organizer/leader of the Great Mother March, with her daughter Riley Ferre.

COMMUNITY NEWS AT A GLANCE



PHOTO VIA FACEBOOK.COM/FAIRFAXPARKS

The Reston Farmers Market opens for the 2026 season with vendors providing fresh produce, baked goods, flowers, and a celebratory atmosphere on April 25. From left: Jim Serfass with the Fairfax County Park Authority, VA House Delegate Karen Keys-Gamarra, Fairfax County Supervisor Walter Alcorn (D-Hunter Mill), Jai Cole, executive director of the Fairfax County Park Authority, Fairfax County Park Board Vice Chair Bill Bouie, and Brianne Baglini, deputy director of the Reston Community Center.

Bounty of Farmers Markets in Fairfax County

Park Authority and independent markets open, some dog-friendly.

MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Whether operated by the Fairfax County Park Authority or independent groups, numerous farmers' markets throughout Fairfax County provide plenty of options for local shoppers, with markets open Wednesday through Sunday. New to the area in 2026 is EatLoco at Halley Rise (Reston), which sets itself apart by being dog-friendly. Those looking for fresh produce on Mondays and Tuesdays can visit year-round brick-and-mortar local farm stores, such as Nalls Produce

in Alexandria or Cox Farms in Centreville, depending on the season.

Check the list below for official market websites and schedules for farm-fresh produce, fruits, vegetables and more.

Fairfax County Park Authority Markets

SNAP is accepted at select locations.

Wednesdays: McCutcheon/Mount Vernon, Apr. 22–Nov. 25, 8 a.m. to noon (SNAP accepted); Oakmont, May 6–Oct. 28, 8 a.m. to noon; Wakefield, May 6–Oct. 28, 2–6 p.m. (SNAP accepted).

Thursdays: Annandale, May 7–Oct. 29, 8 a.m. to noon (SNAP accepted); Herndon, May 7–Oct. 29, 8 a.m. to noon.

Fridays: McLean*, May 1–Oct. 30, 8 a.m. to noon; Kingstowne, May 1–Oct. 23, 3–7 p.m.

Saturdays: Burke, Apr. 18–Nov. 21, 8 a.m. to noon; Reston, Apr. 25–Nov. 21, 8 a.m. to noon (SNAP accepted).

Sundays: Lorton, May 3–Nov. 22, 8 a.m. to noon (SNAP accepted).

Independent Regional Markets

Markets marked with are generally dog-friendly; verify specific pet policies online.

Wednesdays: Reston - St. John Neumann (FRESHFARM), Apr.–Nov. 3–7 p.m. 601 Wiehle Ave., Reston.

Saturdays: City of Falls Church Market, year-round: Apr.–Dec. 8 a.m. to noon; Jan.–Mar., 9 a.m. to noon. 300 Park Ave., Falls Church; Great Falls Community Market, year-round, 10 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. 756 Walker Rd., Great Falls; Old Town Fairfax Saturday Market, May 9–Oct. 31, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. 1050 Page Ave., Fairfax; Vienna Farmers Market, May 2–Oct. 8, 8 a.m. to noon. Vienna Community Center, Vienna.

Sundays: Mosaic District (FRESHFARM), year-round: Apr.–Dec., 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.; Jan.–Mar., 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. 2910 District Ave., Fairfax; EatLoco at Halley Rise (Reston), Mar. 29–Nov. 22, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sunrise Valley Dr., Reston.

*McLean's market will be closed on Friday, May 15, for McLean Day.

Arbor Day in Fairfax County Hutchison Elementary School children plant trees.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Hutchison Elementary School students in Herndon helped county and local officials plant six native trees, including river birches, to support the county's climate resiliency goals. The event celebrated Fairfax County's 43rd consecutive year receiving the Tree City USA designation, part of its commitment to urban forestry. This initiative is part of a broader plan to reach 60% canopy coverage by 2030, ensuring that the environmental and cooling benefits of trees are distributed equitably across all communities.

"Arbor Day reminds us that every tree we plant is an investment in our future," said Brian Keightley, director, Fairfax County Urban and Community Forestry Division (UCFD). "In Fairfax County, we celebrate Arbor Day because our urban forest is one of our strongest tools for building climate re-

siliency — cooling neighborhoods, managing stormwater, expanding wildlife habitat, and providing carbon storage."

Dranesville District Supervisor Jimmy Bierman proclaimed Arbor Day in Fairfax County and received the county's 43rd consecutive Tree City USA designation from Jacob Zielinski of the Virginia Department of Forestry.

The program also included comments from Sarah Aiello, Hutchison Elementary School principal; Keven J. LeBlanc, Herndon Town Mayor; Lindsay Trout, FCPS Executive Principal for Region 1; and Barbara Ryan, Fairfax County Tree Commission Chair.

For updates on DPWES projects, services and events, follow us on Instagram @ffx-publicworks, Facebook @ffx-publicworks, X (formerly Twitter) @ffxpublicworks and on LinkedIn @Fairfax County Department of Public Works and Environmental Services.



PHOTOS COURTESY FAIRFAX COUNTY

Hutchison Elementary School students help Fairfax County Urban Forester Hugh Whitehead mulch a newly-planted birch tree.



Fairfax County Dranesville District Supervisor James "Jimmy" Bierman proclaims Arbor Day in Fairfax County at Hutchison Elementary School in Herndon.

COMMUNITY NEWS AT A GLANCE

Local Author's Book, 'The Cellar Below the Cellar'

Dark text lures readers 13+ into modern survival with ancient folklore.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

For anyone who has gone down into a dark, damp cellar with a dirt floor, lit by a fading flashlight beam, it is scary enough. It is a place one feels waited for, with draped cobwebs and skittering sounds while being surrounded by the cloying smell of decay — but a cellar below a cellar is worse.

Reston author Ivy Grimes' 150-page paperback, released in March 2026 by indie publisher Violet Lichen, is titled just that: "The Cellar Below the Cellar." The book received a starred review from Publishers Weekly: "Grimes conjures a



PHOTOS COURTESY OF IVY GRIMES

Reston author Ivy Grimes latest book is 'The Cellar Below the Cellar.'

world that is simultaneously vast, mysterious, and fully lived in, replete with idiosyncratic folk horror elements."

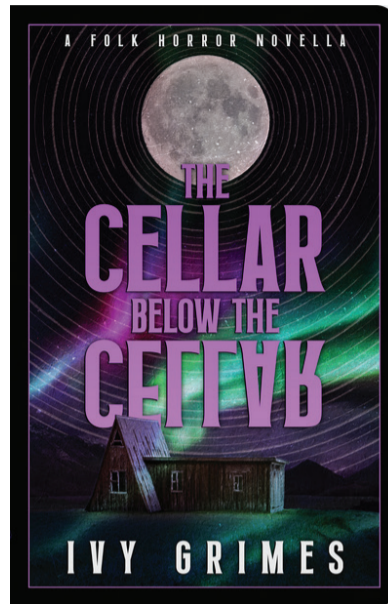
The novella is a survival story with Russian fairy-tale roots and Baba Yaga, transplanted into a story about a Carlington Event-style solar flare and community survival, Grimes said in an interview with The

Connection.

"I took the fairy tale 'Vasilisa the Beautiful' and did a modern-day spin," Grimes said. "It's a horror story, but it's not terrifying. It's just a little dark."

Grimes, a former law school and creative writing student, blends magic in a contemporary survival setting with hope and communi-

ty resilience. Grimes said she planned the ending and the character's journey from the start, noting that the horror would appeal to audiences 13 and older, given its quirky, speculative fiction. With memorable set pieces like the "demon jars" and the eventual reveal of the cellar below, it is a book for teens to adults to read outside on a bright summer day and finish in an afternoon.



'The Cellar Below the Cellar' has received a star review from Publishers Weekly.

Grimes is originally from Birmingham, Alabama, and has an MFA from the University of Alabama. Her stories have appeared in The Baffler, Vastarien, Hex, Maudlin House, Ergot, Potomac Review and elsewhere. She is the author of the collections "Glass Stories" (Grimscribe Press) and "The Ghosts of Blaubart Mansion" (Ceme-

tery Gates).

Printed in paperback and avail-

"It's a horror story, but it's not terrifying. It's just a little dark."

Author Ivy Grime

able as an ebook, the cover of "The Cellar Below the Cellar" hints at the dark mystery within: a striking black design with pink-purple typography and an eerie cabin image by Jack Hillside.

Order directly from the publisher at VioletLichen.com. Readers can find "The Cellar Below the Cellar" at major retailers, including Amazon, Barnes & Noble and Bookshop.org. Visit <https://www.apexbookcompany.com/products/the-cellar-below-the-cellar> to learn more about the book and read recent reviews.

Growing Great Falls: 500 Trees for Elementary Students

Rotary Club sparks interest in forestry.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

The Great Falls Rotary Club partnered with Bartlett Tree Experts for the third year in a row to distribute 500 dogwood and magnolia saplings to students at three local schools.

The saplings went to kindergartners and first graders at Colvin Run, Great Falls, and Forestville elementary schools. During an Earth and Arbor Day presentation, Rotarians and students discussed the role of trees in the environment and in the field of arboriculture.

Earth Day was observed on Wednesday, April 22, and Arbor Day followed on Friday, April 24.

Students shared their insights on why trees matter. "We get food from trees," one student said. Others noted that trees "help us breathe" and provide food for animals.

Student volunteers William, Sophia, and Charlotte Sandstrom — children of Rotarian Teresa Sandstrom — helped distribute the trees to their classmates.

Connie Sawtell, past president of the Great Falls Rotary Club, said everyone can do their part "one tree at a time" to help Fairfax County reach its goal of a 60% tree canopy by 2030.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GREAT FALLS ROTARY CLUB

Charlotte Sandstrom gives a sapling to a classmate during the tree distribution event at Great Falls Elementary School.



Student William Sandstrom prepares to distribute magnolia and dogwood saplings donated by Bartlett Tree Experts to his classmates in Great Falls, Virginia, on Tuesday, April 21.

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>

FAIRFAX COUNTY

FARMERS MARKETS RETURN

Operated by the Fairfax County Park Authority, these popular markets connect residents with local farmers and food producers at 10 convenient locations. Shop seasonal fruits and vegetables, meats, dairy, baked goods and artisanal products, while enjoying a vibrant, open-air market experience.

WEDNESDAYS

McCutcheon/Mount Vernon: April 22-Nov. 25, 8 a.m. - noon. Sherwood Library, 2501 Sherwood Hall Lane

Oakmont: May 6-Oct. 28, 8 a.m.-noon. Oakmont Recreation Center, 3200 Jermantown Road

Wakefield: May 6-Oct. 28, 2-6 p.m. Wakefield Park, 8100 Braddock Road

THURSDAYS

Annandale: May 7-Oct. 29, 8 a.m. - noon. Mason District Park, 6621 Columbia Pike

Herndon: May 7-Oct. 29, 8 a.m. - noon. Old Town Herndon, 700 Block of Lynn Street by the Red Caboose

FRIDAYS

McLean: May 1-Oct. 30, 8 a.m.-noon. Lewinsville Park, 1659 Chain Bridge Road

Kingstowne: May 1-Oct. 23, 3-7 p.m. In the Giant parking lot, 5870 Kingstowne Towne Center

SATURDAYS

Burke: Apr. 18-Nov. 21, 8 a.m.-noon. VRE parking Lot, 5671 Roberts Parkway

Reston: Apr. 25-Nov. 21, 8 a.m.-noon. Lake Anne Village Center, 1609-A Washington Plaza

SUNDAYS

Lorton: May 3-Nov. 22, 8 a.m.-noon. VRE parking lot, 8990 Lorton Station Blvd.

NOW THRU MAY 31

"Down the Shore" Exhibit. At Reston Art Gallery, Reston. Reston Art Gallery (RAGS) is pleased to announce its May exhibition, "Down the Shore" featuring acrylic paintings by RAGS Director/artist Pat Macintyre. The exhibit captures the beauty and atmosphere of the Eastern Shore, Isle of Wight Bay, and Ocean City. Coastal scenes, images of nearby rural villages reflect the artist's appreciation for the area. Parsonsburg's quaint restaurant's canvas comes with its recipe for muskrat dinner. Several other works include large shells which float on canvases washed with pale colors. A reception will be held on Sunday May 10 from 2-4pm. Guests may meet the artist, enjoy refreshments and experience the collection in the beautiful lakeside gallery.

MAY 1-31

"Wild Life" Exhibition and May Gallery Show.

At McLean Art Gallery, 6224B Old Dominion Drive, McLean. During May, the McLean Art Gallery is pleased to feature "Wild Life," a new seasonal exhibition from the local nonprofit McLean Art Society. The public is invited to enjoy 200 new works from 45 local artists. Included are paintings in oil, acrylic, pastel, watercolor and mixed media;



Pat Hazell's "Permanent Record" can be seen on Saturday, May 9, 2026 at the McLean Community Center.



McLean Day will be held May 15-16 at Lewinsville Park in McLean.

drawings; photography; sculpture; and works in wood, glass, ceramics and jewelry.

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 through 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.

MAY 8-9

OLLI Ideas Festival for Adults 50+. At GMU's Fairfax Campus (OLLI Mason). The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at George Mason University (OLLI Mason) will host its inaugural Ideas Festival on May 8-9, 2026, inviting adults ages 50+ to explore opportunities for lifelong learning, connection, and enrichment. Held on the Fairfax campus, the free, two-day event will feature more than 20 classes, demonstrations, and activities spanning art, music, history, health, and more. Highlights include hands-on sessions such as watercolor painting, tai chi, and chair yoga, as well as a panel discussion, "Global Perspectives on Longevity," on Saturday, May 9 at 3:00 p.m., featuring George Mason faculty and experts. For more information and to RSVP, visit olli.gmu.edu

WEDNESDAYS, MAY 6, 13, 20, 27

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

THURSDAY/MAY 7

Film: "El Norte" (1983). 1 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. When a group of Mayan Indians organize a labor union, their community is violently destroyed by the Guatemalan army. Teenage siblings Rosa and Enrique manage to escape the massacre and decide to start a new life in El Norte—the USA. The story combines magic realism and beautiful imagery.

FRIDAY/MAY 8

Wellness and Safety Expo. 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. At Vienna Community Center, 120 Cherry St., SE, Vienna. Older adults can take advantage of educational opportunities and giveaways from more than 50 local vendors providing a wide range of resources, including tips for mental, social, environmental, and financial wellness. This year, Matthew Quinn, of Quinn's Auction Galleries, will provide insights into sales trends in the auction world and offer suggestions on what to do with family heirlooms. Attendees may also have one or two items appraised by experts on a first-come, first-served basis (no books please). Appraisals will be available from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. For more information, visit www.viennava.gov/wellness, or call 703-255-7801.

FRIDAY/MAY 8

BYU's Noteworthy and Vocal Point. 7 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, Fairfax. Brigham Young University's two premier a cappella ensembles are coming to the DMV on May 8 with a lively, high-energy, family-friendly performance sure to captivate the young and young at heart. Noteworthy and Vocal Point take hit songs you know and love—from crowd-pleasing pop, country, R&B, and Broadway favorites to beloved hymns like "Amazing Grace" and "Nearer, My God, to Thee"—reimagine them, and deliver a new rendition, with all the complex instrumentation done entirely with their voices.

SATURDAY/MAY 9

Pat Hazell's "Permanent Record". 7-8:30 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. "Seinfeld" writer Pat Hazell goes in search of his own "Permanent Record" in a confessional night filled with humor, heart and humanity. Hazell hired an actual opposition research company to investigate his past, and he is now forced to define himself. Pat opens the vault to his faults, foibles and foul play to turn a stroll down Memory Lane into a high-speed chase down Memory Highway. If you can't laugh at yourself, why not laugh at him?

SATURDAY/MAY 9

Park and Bark. 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. At Walney Visitor Center, 5040 Walney Road, Chantilly. Fairfax County Park Authority and the Ellanor C. Lawrence Park Friends invite families and their four-legged companions to unleash the fun at Park and Bark, a community event supporting Ellanor C. Lawrence Park. Park and Bark offers something for everyone — both human and canine alike. Enjoy craft brews from Lazy Dog Restaurant, gourmet hot dogs and sausages from Kaziville, dog-themed vendors, local crafters and live music from Lucas Mason. Guests can also meet adoptable dogs from A Forever Home Rescue Foundation and explore services, such as on-site mobile dog grooming.

SATURDAY/MAY 9

AANHPI Heritage Festival. 12:30 to 5 p.m. At Mason District Park, 6621 Columbia Pike, Annandale. The Fairfax County Park Authority invites the community to celebrate Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Heritage Month at Mason District Park.

Event Highlights:

- Cultural performances: Watch traditional and contemporary dance and music from local AANHPI artists.
- Interactive experiences: Try hands-on activities, such as calligraphy, origami and martial arts demonstrations.
- Global flavors: Sample a variety of authentic dishes from local food vendors.
- Art and culture: Explore exhibits featuring works by AANHPI artists.
- Family fun: Kids can take part in crafts, storytelling and interactive activities throughout the day.

SATURDAY/MAY 9

Concert. 3 p.m. At Heritage Fellowship Church, 2501 Fox Mill Road, Reston. The Great Falls Philharmonic and Voce Chamber Singers will perform Beethoven's landmark Symphony No. 9 and Leonard Bernstein's Chichester Psalms. Visit <https://www.gfphil.org/odetojoy> for tickets and more information. The "Ode to Joy," the final movement of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, is one of the most recognizable and enduring musical statements in history—a declaration of unity, freedom, and shared humanity. Bernstein's Chichester Psalms blends Hebrew liturgical texts with rhythmic vitality and lyrical expressiveness. This performance marks a unique collaboration between the Great Falls Philharmonic under director Derek Maseloff and the Voce Chamber Singers.

SATURDAY/MAY 9

Workhouse Arts Center Gala. 5:30 to 10 p.m.

[WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM](https://www.connectionnewspapers.com)

ENTERTAINMENT

At Workhouse Arts Center, Lorton. Where Spring blooms and art collide. Act I: Monet's Garden Party 5:30 to 7 p.m. Arrivals. Red carpet. Reception. Champagne. Mingle with fascinating people and browse the Grand Silent Auction. ACT II: Van Gogh's Starry Night | 7:00 – 10:00 p.m. An elegant gourmet dinner followed by the D.C. Transit Band igniting the dance floor.

SATURDAY/MAY 9

Repair Cafe. 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. At Lorton Library, 9520 Richmond Hwy., Lorton. Fairfax County Repair Cafe is a team of volunteer "fixers" with a variety of skills. They diagnose, repair and recommend. Bring your items or questions and join them. Free household item repairs: sewing repairs, small appliance fixes, jewelry repair, computer help, knife sharpening, community fun.

SUNDAY/MAY 10

Mother's Day Craft. 1-4 p.m. At Fairfax Station Railroad Museum, 11200 Fairfax Station Road, Fairfax Station. Celebrate Mother's Day in a creative way at the Fairfax Station Railroad Museum. Guests of all ages can make beautiful paper flowers as a gift for the amazing Moms in their lives. All supplies are provided. Staff will be available for guided crafting help. While you're at the Station, take some time to explore our exhibits on the history of railroads and model trains as well as the local history of the Fairfax Station area. Admission: Moms are free today! Museum members and ages 4 and under, free; ages 5-12, \$4; ages 13 and older, \$6. Military, First Responders, and Teachers \$5; Seniors, 65+, \$5. www.fairfax.station.railroad.museum.org, 703-425-9225. www.facebook.com/ffxsrr.

<cal1>Thursday/May 14

<cal2>Movie: "Ballet Russes" (2005). 1 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. After impresario Sergei Diaghilev's death, the iconic and groundbreaking Ballet Russes was reborn as Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo. The documentary delves into this new period for the company and includes archival footage of original productions, interviews with surviving dancers, and hot goss on what went on behind the tutus.

THURSDAY/MAY 14

Red Cross Blood Drive. 1-6 p.m. At Christ the King Lutheran Church, 10550 Georgetown Pike, Great Falls. Register today at www.red-crossblood.org. Questions? Contact Melody Starya Mobley at 571-276-7356. Website: <https://www.gflutheran.org/news-events>

FRIDAY/MAY 15

Bike to Work Day 2026. More than 100 pit stops located across the metropolitan Washington region (777 North Capitol St NE, Suite 300 Washington, DC 20002). Join thousands of area commuters for the 25th annual free event celebrating bicycling as a fun, low-cost, healthy, and environmentally friendly way to get around! Free registration is now open. The first 18,000 to register and attend will receive a free T-shirt. Visit <https://www.bike-toworkmetrodc.org/> for more information!

MAY 15-16

McLean Day. Fri. May 15, 3-9 p.m. | Just Carnival Rides & Governing Board Voting; Sat. May 16, 11 a.m.- 5 p.m. At Lewinsville Park, McLean. McLean's biggest annual festival returns with live music, carnival rides, gourmet food trucks, a beer and wine garden, 100+ exhibitors, games, a petting zoo, commemoration of America 250, and more, drawing over 10,000 visitors each day. Free admission but ride tickets available onsite or online!

SATURDAY/MAY 16

String Theory Presentation. 12-2 p.m. At Reston Regional Library, Reston. Life, the Universe, and Everything: A String Theory Way. Join in a talk with scientist and author Dr. Howard Jeffrey Bender as he gives a light



Enjoy ping pong at OFC Open Game Nights on Wednesdays at the Old Firehouse Center in McLean.



Jenny Lin will perform Piano "Melody's Mostly Musical Day" on Sunday, May 31, 2026 at the McLean Community Center.

description of String Theory. We will learn how it may affect our consciousness and personality, how our universe has developed, and how Dark Matter may be explained. Website: <https://librarycalendar.fairfaxcounty.gov/event/16279696>

SATURDAY/MAY 16

Taste of Tysons Corner. 12 to 3 p.m. At Tysons Corner Center, McLean. Enjoy food samples from 40+ restaurants, live music, chef demos, activations & more. The foodies and shoppers are welcomed for a flavorful afternoon on the Plaza and beyond to explore a range of food and beverage offerings through tastings, live cooking demonstrations, chef appearances, raffles, giveaways, and more.

Event Schedule:
12-1 PM | Passport Pickup + Center-Wide Tastings

Start your culinary stroll by picking up your Passport to Delicious (a returning fan favorite) and explore 40+ participating restaurants throughout the center. Collect stamps along the way for a chance to win restaurant gift cards from Eddie V's, Earls, Barrel & Bushel, and Seasons 52.

1-2 PM | Live Chef Demos + Passport-to-Prize Entry

Head to PenFed Plaza for live chef demonstrations, broadcast on the new PenFed Plaza digital board. Drop your completed passport

at the plaza entry table to be entered into the restaurant gift card raffles.

2-3 PM | Live Music + Giveaways

Stay on the Plaza for live music from Risky Shenanigans, plus giveaways and additional surprises to close out the afternoon.

For more information, visit <https://www.tysonscornercenter.com>.

SATURDAY/MAY 16

Big Plant Sale. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. At Green Spring Gardens, 4603 Green Spring Road, Alexandria. The Fairfax County Park Authority and Friends of Green Spring Gardens invite plant lovers of all kinds to celebrate the season at the annual Spring Garden Day and Big Plant Sale. This free, family-friendly event is a must for anyone with a green thumb — or hoping to grow one. Browse an incredible selection of plants from dozens of local vendors, featuring everything from native and fruiting plants to colorful annuals, perennials, herbs and hard-to-find varieties. Get expert advice from Extension Master Gardeners, shop garden-themed goods from local artists and businesses and enjoy tasty offerings from food vendors. Don't miss the Friends of Green Spring Bake Sale for homemade treats to power your plant-shopping spree.

SATURDAY/MAY 16

Stronger Together Health Fair. 8 a.m. to 1:30

p.m. At Annandale Fire Department, 7128 Columbia Pike, Annandale. The Stronger Together Health Fair is a free, community-focused wellness event designed to help people get stronger, live longer, and stay connected. Attendees can explore a variety of local health and wellness vendors, meet specialists, and receive free on-site services, screenings, and resources that support long-term health — all with no registration required.

Here's what you'll experience: A Longevity Assessment Scorecard — discover how your strength, balance, and mobility stack up + leave with a personalized plan; FREE chair massages, massage gun sessions & stretch therapy; Chiropractic adjustments & physical therapy screenings; Advanced movement assessments using motion analysis software; Opportunity to get a DEXA scan for real insight into body composition & bone health. Plus delicious food & drinks from Cafe Hive — known for trendy coffee, tea, and chef-crafted pastries

SATURDAY/MAY 16

Polar Heat on Lynn Street. 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.

On Lynn Street, Downtown Herndon. This free, all-day community event will feature two stages of live entertainment, along with additional special performances and interactive experiences. Polar Heat on Lynn Street is built around a simple concept: everything at the event ties into either a "hot" or "cool" theme—from music and activities to food and community booths. The entertainment lineup reflects that approach, with two distinct stages offering different styles of performances throughout the day. Cool Vibes Stage Lineup Laid-back, family-friendly performances and interactive entertainment: • 11:00 – 11:20 AM: Herndon High School Latin Dance Team • 11:30 AM – 12:00 PM: NextStop Theatre "Dance-A-Long" (Songs from Frozen) • 12:15 – 1:00 PM: The Hula Monsters • 1:15 – 1:45 PM: School of Rock Herndon • 2:15 – 3:15 PM: Amanda's Bluegrass Band • 3:30 – 4:30 PM: Chris DeSantis • 4:45 – 5:15 PM: Freeze Frame: The Ultimate Icy Music Trivia Challenge • 5:45 – 6:30 PM: Crossing Elden • 6:45 – 7:45 PM: Al & Caro Hot Beats Stage Lineup High-energy performances and dance-driven acts: • 11:15 AM – 12:15 PM: LineDance4You • 12:45 – 1:45 PM: Good Morning Tomorrow Mailing: 777 Lynn Street, Herndon, VA 20170-4602 | Physical: 814 Ferndale Avenue, Herndon VA 20170-3431 herndon-va.gov • 2:15 – 3:45 PM: Radio Hero • 4:15 – 5:15 PM: Melissa Quinn Fox • 5:45 – 7:15 PM: Orquesta Nfuzion

MAY 16-17

Tephra ICA Arts Festival. At Reston Town Center, Reston. Tephra Institute of Contemporary Art (Tephra ICA) announces the 35th Tephra ICA Arts Festival will take place on May 16-17, 2026 at the Reston Town Center in Reston, Virginia. Over 200 artists will travel from across the country to present original artwork. This annual event attracts tens-of-thousands of people to the unique, outdoor environment of Reston Town Center. Now in its 35th year, this marquee cultural event provides the opportunity to purchase art directly from artists while also enjoying free programs, including performances by Pearson-widrig Dancetheatre, Glass Blowing Demos with Workhouse Arts Center, a Festival Art Park for all ages hosted by the South Lakes High School STEAM Team, food vendors, guided tours, free concert, and a sip & stroll.

SUNDAY/MAY 17

Monthly Model Train Show. 1-4 p.m. At Fairfax Station Railroad Museum, 11200 Fairfax Station Road, Fairfax Station. Every third Sunday, from February through November, the Fairfax Station Railroad Museum hosts our local model train enthusiasts with running model trains in N and T gauge. Admission: Museum members and ages 4 and under, free; ages 5-12, \$4; ages 13 and older, \$6. Military, First Responders, and Teachers \$5; Seniors, 65+, \$5. <http://www.fairfax.station.railroad.museum.org>, <http://www.facebook.com/FFXSRR>, 703-425-9225.

SEE CALENDAR, PAGE 15

200% OF BUSINESSES
using commuter benefits
to save money say it's a good idea

*If this stat is surprising, just see what else
free commuter support can do for your team!*

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BY DRPT

11 out of 10 BOSSES
agree that commuter benefits
help attract new talent

*This math may not add up, but offering your employees
commuter benefits makes perfect sense.*

ConnectingVA.org

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BY DRPT

WHERE THEY FELL **WHAT THEY CLAIMED**

Their lies come out of your wallet. Insurance fraud costs everyone in Virginia \$1,000 per year. Learn how to spot it and report it at TheCostOfFraud.com

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Employment

Cvent, Inc. seeks Lead SDET in McLean (Tysons Corner), VA. Telecommuting permitted. Apply at <https://www.jobpostingtoday.com/Ref# 15326>.

Legals

NOTICE OF TRANSFER OF MEDICAL RECORDS

This notice is to inform current and former patients of Michael Greene, MD who is retiring effective June 1, 2026 and Marc A. Eisenbaum, MD who will be joining Inova Health System on a part-time basis effective June 1, 2026 that their medical practices are undergoing a transition.

As a result, patient medical records will be transferred to Inova Health System for continued maintenance and care.

Release of medical records

If you would like to transfer your medical records to another provider or receive a copy of your records, visit Inova.org/medicalrecords and request your medical records using the online tool. Upon receipt of the completed transfer request, the records or copies will be sent, within a reasonable time, to the provider of your choice or provided to you. Please note that state and federal laws permit fees to be charged for copies of medical records that are not for continuation of care. You will only be charged the actual costs of copying and mailing or delivering the records.

To make an appointment or for further information contact:
Inova Primary Care - Fair Oaks
3580 Joseph Siewick Dr., 304
Fairfax, VA 22033
703.758.8200

CALENDAR

				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

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NEWS

Journey of 32 Days, 500 Miles Promotes Unity and Balance

FROM PAGE 9

powerment Pilgrimage” sought to “reweave the human and earth connection.” Their effort culminated in Washington after 32 days; arriving on Earth Day, April 22.

Not thought of as a center of mysticism, both groups did find Lorton a convenient stop on their journeys. The Monks took their lunch break at the Hoa Nghiem Pagoda on Feb. 8; and the Mother’s March was hosted by the Workhouse Arts Center for the evening of April 20. The women’s pilgrimage had walkers start, join and leave; coming and going as energy and weather dictate for each individual.

While many take rest days, three core pilgrims, ranging in age from 22 to 68, walked, or sometimes skipped, most of the distance since the start, traveling up to 27 miles per day.

The participants gathered from many locations across the country. Friendly and free-spirited, several are life coaches and artists who emphasize creative spirit. The Arts Center was a perfect fit for the travelers, who continued work on their community art canvas project, their typical evening activity.

One pilgrim, Megan Keeliher of New Hampshire, describes herself as a life coach, doula, and practitioner of Ayurveda: a traditional Indian medicine system emphasizing diet, herbal remedies and life-

style. She sees art as “sacred; with the use of art to heal, and as a philosophy of finding a better way.” At the Arts Center, they also took an opportunity to practice their “flash dance” choreography. About two dozen women participated in the dance at the side of the Tidal Basin in Washington DC, their final destination.

Whitney Freya of Oregon, the organizer and leader of the pilgrimage said, “We don’t expect an instant change [from problems faced today]. But it’s about a way to meet this needed change, modeling step by step, face to face interactions. We’ve been manipulated into believing we are our own enemies. That doesn’t do us any good. People we met share mutual respect ... We’ve been handing out hearts, lightening up the atmosphere.”

For more on the group, see www.greatmothermarch.com

Once prominent as described in the histories of ancient civilizations such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, and India, pilgrimages were made by people of several cultures and religions to show religious or spiritual devotion or as a demonstration of respect or dedication. In modern times, we often hear of pilgrimages taken to holy sites, such as Mecca or Jerusalem.

Recently, our area has become a last way-stop for those on journeys to Washington D.C.



PHOTO BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION

Participation was open and with pilgrims coming from a variety of states

ENTERTAINMENT

FROM PAGE 13

SUNDAY/MAY 17

The Hot Lanes Perform. 12:30 p.m. At St. Stephen's Methodist Church, Burke. St. Stephen's has become a popular venue for Hot Lanes performances over the years. This concert is to specifically raise funds for the over 55-year old St. Stephen's Preschool that has seen multiple generations of kids graduate through the ranks. Donations are asked and they also will be selling their album to support the fundraiser.

SUNDAY/MAY 17

Asian Festival on Main. 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. In Old Town Fairfax. The Old Town Fairfax Business Association (OTFBA) is pleased to announce its 6th Annual Asian Festival on Main. This year's festival will celebrate the "Year of the Horse." Features a full line up of live entertainment and cultural performances, 60+ Asian food vendors and food trucks, 60+ non-food vendors and exhibitions, kids activities, cosplay runway, beer garden and karaoke. New this year will be the Otaku Garden dedicated to Japanese pop culture, Panel Discussion on Asian Food Culture and an Asian Cultures Showcase featuring hands-on activities for all ages. Visit asianfestivalonmain.com.

SUNDAY/MAY 24

West Point Alumni Glee Club Performs. 9:30 a.m. At Lord of Life Lutheran Church, 5114 Twinbrook Road, Fairfax. Join in a worship service crafted for Memorial Day weekend and the festival of Pentecost, featuring songs that remember and honor those who gave their lives in service. All are welcome. Refreshments will be served following the service. The public is invited.

SATURDAY/MAY 30

Fairfax Choral Society's Celebrating America's 250th Birthday: Let Freedom Ring. 4 p.m.

At Veterans Amphitheater, 10455 Armstrong Street, Fairfax

From the birth of a nation to today, experience almost 250 years of American music live, performed by community musicians.

SATURDAY/MAY 30

Clifton 5K Run. 6-9 p.m. At the Town of Clifton, 7139 Main Street, Clifton. A family-friendly race with 5k and one-mile options. Live music, refreshments and an awards ceremony follow at the Red Barn near Clifton's Main Street area. Cost: 5K:\$30 per person; 1-Mile Fun Run:\$20 per person. Contact: Clifton Betterment Association email info@cliftonvirginia.org or (703) 968-0740. Website: <https://runsignup.com/Race/VA/Clifton/CliftonCaboose>. Online registration will remain open until 5:30 p.m. on Race Day. Packet pick-up will be at the Red Barn (7139 Main St., Clifton, VA 20124) on Friday, May 29, from 5:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m. and on Saturday, May 30, from 4:00 p.m.-5:30 p.m. To register online, please go to <https://runsignup.com/Race/VA/Clifton/CliftonCaboose> or the 5k's Facebook page.

SATURDAY/MAY 30

Let Freedom Ring. 4 p.m. At Veterans Amphitheater beside Fairfax City Town Hall, City of Fairfax. Presented by the Fairfax Choral Society and the City of Fairfax Band Association. Experience the sound of a nation's story. Free - no tickets required. Just come and enjoy

MAY 30-31

LEGO Model Train Event. Saturday 12-4 p.m.; Sunday, 1-4 p.m. At Fairfax Station Railroad Museum, 11200 Fairfax Station Road, Fairfax Station. Fairfax Station Railroad Museum is hosting a weekend LEGO Model Train Event! We invite everyone to explore the fascinating world of LEGO Trains. Highlights of the Event: Interactive Displays: Enjoy viewing Lego model trains crafted by skilled brick

masters. Most trains were hand designed and built. Running Trains: Watch as trains zip along beautifully designed tracks, it is sure to inspire both young and old. Admission: Museum members and ages 4 and under, free; ages 5-12, \$4; ages 13 and older, \$6. Military, First Responders, and Teachers \$5; Seniors, 65+, \$5. www.fairfax-station-railroad-museum.org, www.facebook.com/FFXSRR, 703-425-9225.

SUNDAY/MAY 31

Burke Historical Society Meeting. 3-4:30 p.m. At Pohick Regional Library, 6450 Sydenstricker Road, Burke. Mary Lipsey will share several stories of women who fought for America's Independence.

SUNDAY/MAY 31

Jenny Lin, Piano "Melody's Mostly Musical Day". 2 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Ticket price includes one copy of "Melody's Mostly Musical Day," a storytelling concert where pianist Jenny Lin leads children through Melody's day of discovery with 26 short classical pieces- from Tchaikovsky and Mozart to Grieg and Mussorgsky- encouraging young listeners to find joy and playfulness in music (one book per order; three tickets required).

SUNDAY/JUNE 14

Washington Balalaika Orchestra. 3 p.m. At Capital One Hall, 7750 Capital One Tower Road, Tysons Corner. Join the Washington Balalaika Orchestra's 55-person ensemble this June for a spectacular program of familiar tunes and exciting new favorites! From Tchaikovsky to Gershwin, and waltzes to klezmer, our diverse repertoire features something for everyone. You will hear beautiful arrangements of "Dance Macabre," "Hungarian Rhapsody," music from "Swan Lake," and even the classic 1967 pop song "Love is Blue". We guarantee you'll emerge humming some very familiar tunes!

BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 5

ery, regardless of where tree planting is proposed.

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

VOLUNTEER DRIVERS NEEDED

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

VOLUNTEER YOUR TIME

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

SUPPORT GROUPS

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

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

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

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

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

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

info@alnv.org, or visit www.alnv.org.

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

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

RSVP, a volunteer network for seniors seeking service opportunities in and around Fairfax County, Arlington County and the City of Alexandria, offers a wide array of opportunities for volunteers 55 and older. RSVP volunteers enjoy flexible schedules, free accident and liability insurance while serving, optional mileage and meal reimbursement and are invited to volunteer group projects and social gatherings. To sign up for an upcoming orientation, email Carly Hubicki at chubicki@volunteerfairfax.org or call RSVP at 703-403-5360. To learn more about RSVP, visit www.rsvpnova.org. Shepherd's Center of McLean-Arlington-Falls Church, 1205 Dolley Madison Blvd., McLean continues to have an urgent need for new volunteers to help area senior citizens get to and from their medical and therapy appointments. To find out more about the Shepherd's Center and how you can volunteer to provide transportation and other services, call the Center at 703-506-2199 or e-mail the Center at info@scmafc.org. The Center's website is www.scmafc.org.

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.

Today's Libraries, Way Beyond Books

Fix-it clinics coming on May 9.

By GLENDA C. BOOTH
CONNECTION NEWSPAPERS

Does that porcelain figurine need her missing arm glued back on? A dull kitchen knife need sharpening? Four Fairfax County libraries, including Sherwood, will have a fix-it clinic on May 9, 1 to 5 p.m. Skilled volunteers will repair fabrics, jewelry, small appliances and more.

County libraries, of course, are loaded with books and other materials for all ages, but today's libraries are much more than books. They lend binoculars. They stage concerts. They host craft projects.

County libraries also have a "Library of Things" from which people can borrow, for example, kits to determine appliances' energy use; framed artwork; board games; soil testing kits; air quality monitors; thermal imaging cameras to spot energy leaks; and nature backpacks for outdoor study.

Many of these items are things people only use occasionally and are pricey. Borrowing can also reduce the accumulation of "stuff."

And county libraries have programs galore. A few examples: Toddler Time, stories and music for little ones; Dungeons and Dragons for teens; plant swaps; costume contests; tech tutoring; adult English-language learning; painting classes and tax help.

And then there's music and dance like lion dance performances to celebrate the lunar new year; military musicians like U.S. Navy Band ensembles; mariachi bands and singers and guitarists.

For fitness, there's chair yoga, Tai Chi and line dancing.

Staff and volunteers provide hands-on technology classes and one-on-one computer tutoring at Sherwood's tech lab.

Using Memory Depot equipment, patrons can learn 3-D printing and how to convert photos, negatives, slides and cassettes to digital formats. Public computers and free internet access are available in all county libraries.

The Access Services Branch helps people who cannot read standard print materials or physically visit a library because of disability, health, illness or frailty. Some residents unable to visit a library are eligible for home deliveries.

The first Saturday of each month,



Here is a person getting sewing repair done at our Fix It Clinic last year. The next Fix It Clinic at Sherwood Library is May 9.



A delighted reader discovering new information in a book.

the Friends of Sherwood Regional Library hold a book sale, offering gently-used books and media. All proceeds support the library.

"Community Hubs"

County libraries strive to be what Sherwood Branch Manager Lyn McKinney calls "a community hub." For example, they work with schools to host science nights and book talks. "We have to be open to partners, get to know them and learn how to help each other," she says.

Sherwood opened in 1971. It is a regional library which has more materials and services than a community branch like the Martha Washington Library.

From Bookmobile to Big

The Fairfax County Public Library (FCPL) system is the largest in Virginia and many say, one of the best in the U.S. Consider a few 2025 statistics: the system had 3.4 million in-person visits; 610,481 card holders; a total circulation of 11.7 million and of that 7.8 million was print materials. There are 23 branches.

"All FCPL cardholders have access to millions of books and materials no matter what branch they walk into," says McKinney.

The numbers greatly mask the system's humble beginnings. On its 85th anniversary in 2024, then-Braddock Supervisor, now Congressman, James Walkinshaw recalled that the FCPL began in 1940 as a "Bookmobile," a converted Chevy panel truck that traveled around the largely rural county to lend books. His grandfather, who grew up on a farm in Chantilly, checked out books from the Bookmobile.

What about Books?

"Education is a big part of the library," McKinney stresses. "We have to have things available to discover." One of the system's goals is lifelong learning for people at all stages of life.

The library system has "floating" books and other materials. "They all can move around," says McKinney. "We move thousands a day." If a book is not on a library's shelf, library staff can usually get it in three days from another library.



PHOTOS BY FAIRFAX COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

A mother and son enjoying a book at Sherwood Library.



A dad and son deep into "checking things out" at Sherwood Library.

If the book is not in the county's system, staff can arrange for an inter-library loan from other states and institutions.

Sherwood offers in print eight newspapers, including the Washington Post, New York Times, Wall Street Journal and Washington Times plus 21 magazines including People Weekly, Hola!, Scientific American, Kiplinger's Personal Finance Magazine and House Beau-

tiful.

On the diverse array of services, McKinney says, "My job is to put it out there."

Ways to help Friends of Sherwood Library, <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library/branches/friends-of-sherwood-regional>

Fairfax Library Foundation, <https://www.fairfaxlibraryfoundation.org/>

WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM