

Mount Vernon Gazette

MOUNT VERNON'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER • A CONNECTION NEWSPAPER

MAY 21, 2026

Bottle Cap Mural Encourages Environmental Stewardship

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

Youngsters ages five to 15 and their parents eagerly got their hands and knees into the earth at Hollin Meadows Elementary School's 22nd Earth Day celebration, where officials cut a yellow ribbon for a new bottle cap mural featuring the Earth as its centerpiece.

The new mural, four feet by seven feet mounted outside near the front entrance, is made of over 2,000 plastic bottle caps of varied sizes and colors collected by the students. Designed by Scott Curtis, owner of Lorton's Signs by Tomorrow, the mural features Virginia symbols, including cardinals and a dogwood tree; a hornet, the school's mascot; a student reading a mathematics book and another holding a ruler.

Fairfax County schools' Superintendent Dr. Michelle Reid said, "It's great to have young children involved. Art unites us."

Supervisor Dan Storck saluted his wife, Deborah, standing nearby, who was a counselor at the school for 25 years and remarked, "This community showed us the way for Earth Day."

State Senator Scott Surovell said he was an alumnus of "one of the three Hollins," the former Hollin Hall Elementary School. He presented the school's principal, Jasibi Crews, a commendation from the Virginia General Assembly honoring the school's 60th anniversary, which prompted an alert student to pipe up, impromptu, that the school's founding was one year before the first Superbowl football championship. Urging the children to "take care of our planet," Surovell drew applause by "promising" to introduce a bill requiring that "students

have only ice cream for lunch."

Supervisor Storck credited Sue Conway, whose now grown children attended the school, with "harnessing people to make a difference." Conway led the mural project team, setting up a collection box and engaging students to sort the caps by color and size. The plastic caps came from juice, jam, ketchup, chocolate milk bottles and felt-tip markers, for example.

Conway credited Anila Angjei, an alumna, as the "chief gluer," and Angela Palmer with managing the collecting process. "This project took many people to come together," Conway said. "It is a true reflection of what our school is. We truly are rooted in community."

Around the campus, led by artist Ursula Seckel, some students made a rainbow

SEE BOTTLE CAP MURAL, PAGE 10



PHOTOS BY GLENDA BOOTH

The new Hollin Meadows Elementary School bottle cap mural made its debut on April 25.



Hollin Meadows' principal, Jasibi Crews, cut the ribbon to applause.



A bright yellow sun "shines" from the sky.



The mural includes a hornet, the Hollin Meadows' mascot.



This student is reading an arithmetic book.

corcoran

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ACM ATLANTIC COAST
MORTGAGE

JOIN US For Fun in the Sun at the 2nd Annual Summer Palooza

BY SUPERVISOR DAN STORCK

Get ready to kick off summer at the 2nd Annual Mount Vernon District Summer Palooza on Saturday, June 6, from 11 a.m. - 3 p.m. at the Mount Vernon Governmental Center, 2511 Parkers Lane! This FREE, family-friendly celebration is the perfect way to welcome the summer season with a day full of fun in the sun for all ages.

Enjoy live music from local band Highway Legends while exploring a variety of exhibitors featuring information on dogs and animals, environmental resources, County programs and services, local small businesses, and much more. Be sure to stop by the 250th Experience table hosted by the Fairfax County 250th Commission to learn more about the County's Semiquincentennial celebrations (America's 250th anniversary). Animal lovers also won't want to miss the petting zoo, featuring furry friends from Frying Pan Farm Park.

This year's event also features a "Taste of Mount Vernon," with free food samples from local favorite restaurants including Dishes of In-

dia, Honeygrow, Haymi BBQ & International Grocery and more, giving attendees a chance to experience some of the delicious flavors our community has to offer or find a new favorite restaurant!

Kids will have plenty to enjoy in the Kids Zone, hosted by the Mount Vernon District Arts Advisory Council (MVDAAC) and the Southeast Fairfax Development Corporation (SFDC), featuring interactive arts activities, bounce houses, lawn games, and exciting touch-a-truck opportunities where they can get up close to their favorite big trucks.

Parking for the event will be located across the street at Whitman Middle School and Sherwood Library with Fairfax County Police assisting with road crossing.

Summer Palooza is quickly becoming a beloved Mount Vernon tradition and a wonderful opportunity to connect with neighbors, celebrate our community, and make lasting summer memories. Bring your family, invite your friends, and join us for an unforgettable day of fun as we kick off the season together! <https://www.fairfax-county.gov/mountvernon/mount-vernon-district-summer-palooza>

Mount Vernon District Supervisor Dan Storck's

SUMMER PALOOZA

Saturday, June 6
11 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Mount Vernon Governmental Center
2511 Parkers Lane

FREE!

Petting Zoo Dog Friendly Exhibitors
Live Music Kids Zone Made in Fairfax
Environment Fun Food Bounce House
Touch-A-Truck

2026 Alexandria and Mount Vernon Cappies Nominations

Winners will be announced at the 2026 Cappies Gala will be held at DAR Constitution Hall on Sunday, June 7 at 7 p.m.

Find the winners at <https://www.cappiesna.com/nominations-awards>

Returning Critic (11th Grade)

Erin Allen, Bishop Ireton High School nominated

Costumes

CW Johnston, Nancy McDougal, Keira Shearon, and the BITA Costuming Team, Jane Austen's Emma, Bishop Ireton High School, nominated

Creativity

Augie Russo, Director, Anastasia: the Musical, Alexandria City High School, nominated

Stage Crew

Mia "Star" Halsey, Cooper Zissman, Samara Belinsky, and the Anastasia Crew, Anastasia: the Musical, Alexandria City High School, nominated

Ensemble in a Musical

Sasha Guerra, Jane Austen's Emma, Bishop Ireton High School, nominated

Featured Actor in a Female Role in a Musical

Hannah Moline, Anastasia: the Musical, Alexandria City High School, nominated

Featured Actor in a Male Role in a Musical

Ailinn Colarulli, Anastasia: the Musical, Alexandria City High School, nominated

Dancer in a Female Role

Georgia Anderson, Anastasia: the Musical,

Alexandria City High School, nominated

Vocalist in a Female Role

Page Vogel, Anastasia: the Musical, Alexandria City High School

Juliet Pascoe, Once Upon A Mattress, Mount Vernon High School, nominated

Comic Actor in a Male Role in a Play

Anderson Wexler, A Midsummer Night's Dream, St. Stephen's and St. Agnes School, nominated

Comic Actor in a Male Role in a Musical

Adrian Lawlor, Anastasia: the Musical, Alexandria City High School, nominated

Song

Stay, I Pray You, Anastasia: The Musical, Alexandria City High School, nominated

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 email to calendar@connectionnewspapers.com

VOLUNTEERS WANTED

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.

STEM Professionals Needed. Help assist K-12 STEM teachers as part of the

SEE BULLETIN, PAGE 6

Climate Change Complicates Water Planning

Study: River flows will decrease 'due to rising water use in upstream areas of the watershed, including use by data centers.'

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

Demand for residential water is declining, which is "a good thing," but local decision-makers must cope with uncertain predictions of the Washington region's future water supply because of climate change, Greg Prelewicz, Fairfax Water's Director of Planning and Water Resources, told attendees in a May 9 online presentation.

Prelewicz attributed the downward water use trend in part to more water-efficient home appliances like dishwashers. The Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District sponsored the talk, the "Green Breakfast."

Because of a changing climate, future dry years will be dryer and future wet years will be wetter and wetter conditions could bring more flooding, he predicted.

He cited a December 2025 Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin (ICPRB) study that analyzed water supply and demand and factored in climate change under three emissions scenarios specific to the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay region.

The study predicts that water demand will increase and the river flows will decrease "due to rising water use in upstream areas of the watershed, including use by data centers." The study says that climate change will affect river flows, but the net impact is "highly uncertain." (See www.potomacriver.org/publications.)

Water Sources, Demands

Fairfax Water draws water from two primary sources: the Potomac River and the Occoquan Reservoir, fed by the Occoquan River. "We are highly dependent on the Potomac River," Prelewicz said, adding, "The river is 75 to 80 percent of the water supply of the Washington region."

Water Backups

The Occoquan Reservoir typically holds 8.5 billion gallons of water and provides water to up to nearly one million people. "Natural flows to the reservoir may not be enough," he said.

To build in what he termed "resiliency," he described two initia-

tives. The authority is converting a rock quarry next to its Lorton plant into the Edgemon Reservoir to store 17 billion gallons of water when completed in 2085.

The second is the "indirect reuse system" at the Upper Occoquan Service Authority (UOSA) in Centreville which sends treated water to the reservoir. This augments the natural flow, he said, "a vital source we highly rely on," and UOSA could provide up to 90 percent of the reservoir's inflow during droughts.

Is the water supply adequate for future demand? "We are utilizing the best available information that we have," he answered, saying, "The goal is to minimize risk. It's all about risk reduction." Traditionally, to predict water demand, planners use population and employment statistics, the number of people estimated to work in a building. As types of residences and businesses change, new water demand forecasting methods may be needed.

Fairfax Water is part of a multi-jurisdictional planning effort, the Potomac River Basin Drinking Water Source Protection Partnership to protect area water supplies.

Sewage Spill Impact

Asked about the implications of the Jan. 19 raw sewage spill into the Potomac River for Fairfax Water and whether the utility is evaluating the integrity and age of sewage infrastructure, he responded that after that incident, ICPRB issued a letter urging DC Water and other water utilities to prioritize replacement and rehabilitation of facilities upstream of the drinking water intake.

Nancy Rybicki, a retired U. S. Geological Survey environmental scientist, expressed concerns about preventing future spills above the intake. Drinking water from the river was not affected by the Potomac Interceptor rupture because the spill occurred below the intake. "Who is in charge of preventing the next spill that could be catastrophic?" she emailed after the talk.

The Potomac Interceptor collapsed near the I-495/Clara Barton Parkway interchange and discharged over 240 million gallons



PHOTO COURTESY FAIRFAX WATER

The Occoquan Reservoir.



PHOTO BY GLENDA BOOTH

A visitor observed water treatment at Fairfax Water's Lorton facility on a special tour.

of untreated sewage. The 54-mile pipe that carries 60 million gallons of raw sewage a day from Dulles Airport to the Blue Plains Treatment Plant in southeast Washington, D.C. Various organizations are sampling water quality in the river. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (USACE) is conducting a feasibility study to identify a backup water supply for the Washington region.

Asked how water users can save

water, Prelewicz urged people to dispose of waste and chemicals properly, limit fertilizer and pesticide use, plant native plants and install permeable surfaces to reduce runoff.

About Fairfax Water

Fairfax Water, Virginia's largest water utility chartered in 1957, serves over two million customers. The system has 4,027 miles

of water mains, over 30,000 fire hydrants and \$2 billion in infrastructure and operates the Frederick P. Griffith and James J. Corbalis water treatment plants. Fairfax Water serves 97 percent of Fairfax County's population as well as Alexandria, Falls Church and Fairfax cities.

Information
Fairfax Water, <https://www.fairfaxwater.org/>



Representatives from PostNet of Alexandria, Bishop Ireton High School and SPARKS received their new Chamber Membership plaques from Mount Vernon Springfield Chamber of Commerce Chairman Mark Viani of Bean, Kinney & Korman PC and Chamber Board Member and Member Engagement Committee Chair Rachel Tyson of Fairy Bronze Mother.

Chamber Membership Growth Reflects Regional Business Collaboration

BY DAVID GRIFFIN
MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS,
MOUNT VERNON SPRINGFIELD
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Mount Vernon Springfield Chamber of Commerce has welcomed several new members in recent months, reflecting the wide range of businesses, organizations, and services that continue to shape the region's business community.

The Chamber's membership has long included a mix of local storefronts, regional organizations, nonprofits, healthcare providers and professional service companies. These relationships help create stronger business connections while exposing members to industries and resources they may not otherwise encounter.

D.C. Divas Football is among the newest Chamber members. D.C. Divas Football has spent more than two decades promoting op-

portunities for women in sports while building a national reputation on the field. The organization's mission is to create opportunities for girls and women through athletics while encouraging leadership, confidence, and personal growth.

The team has won three national championships and has also gained attention for helping women move into leadership roles within sports, including coaching and administration. The organization notes that its work extends beyond football itself, with an emphasis on mentorship, empowerment, and visibility for women and girls in athletics.

Bishop Ireton High School recently joined the Chamber as part of its continued involvement within the Northern Virginia community. Located in Alexandria, the Catholic college preparatory school focuses on spiritual,

SEE CHAMBER MEMBERSHIP, PAGE 7

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Governor's Cannabis Veto

BY DEL. PAUL KRIZEK
(D-MOUNT VERNON)



Krizek

Earlier this week, Governor Abigail Spanberger vetoed legislation that would have finally established a regulated adult-use cannabis marketplace in Virginia. As one of the bill's Chief Patrons, I believe this was the wrong decision, and Virginians will feel the consequences.

House Bill 642 and its companion Senate Bill 542, which I carried alongside Senator Lashrece Aird of Henrico, were the product of years of serious policy work. The legislation emerged from extensive deliberation through the Joint Commission to Oversee the Transition of the Commonwealth into a Cannabis Retail Market — a body created for exactly this purpose and

on which I served as Chair — and reflected input from the stakeholders who will be most affected by, and responsible for, any retail system we build. We took lessons learned from states across the nation who have already implemented these markets and crafted a system that would work best for Virginia's unique needs. That work now sits on the shelf for the third year.

Virginia legalized adult cannabis possession in 2021. At the time, we did so with a clear-eyed recognition that the War on Drugs had

caused disproportionate harm to Black families and communities across this Commonwealth. Legalization was an acknowledgment of that failure and a commitment to do better. But without a regulated retail market, that commitment remains incomplete. Cannabis is being sold every day across Virginia: just not in any store that we license, regulate, or tax. These products carry no safety standards. There is no age verification. No consumer protections. The illicit market is thriving, and we are the ones allowing it to thrive by failing to provide a legal alternative.

I want to be direct: this veto does not reduce cannabis use in Virginia. It simply ensures that use continues to happen in the shadows, beyond the reach of any oversight. Those profiting from the

illegal market should feel relieved today. Everyone else should feel frustrated. Continued inaction is itself a choice; one with real costs to public safety, to racial equity, and to the communities we represent across the Commonwealth.

My colleagues in the General Assembly gave Virginia an opportunity to lead on this issue, but instead the Governor's veto prolongs this uncertainty.

I remain committed to establishing a safe, transparent cannabis market that protects consumers, keeps products away from children, and honors our promise to end racially discriminatory marijuana policing in this Commonwealth. I hope that we will find a path that moves Virginia forward in the next legislative session.

Virginia has waited long enough.

HopeLink Named among 50 Best Nonprofits to Work For

NonProfit Times list cites training as a factor in success.

HopeLink Behavioral Health was named for the 15th time to The NonProfit Times national list of 50 Best Nonprofits to Work For. HopeLink, a regional nonprofit with national reach that helps individuals who live with serious behavioral health issues or that are in crisis, ranked number 49 among the nation's top employers with its focus on training cited as a reason.

"As mental health needs have grown so has HopeLink. Our employees are fundamental to our ability to serve our clients," said Joseph Getch, CEO, HopeLink. "We invest in our talented em-

ployee base, ensuring they have the training and benefits to do and be their best.

"Being able to attract and retain a great team helps us achieve our mission to save and change lives," Getch said.

Until two years ago, HopeLink was ranked among medium sized employers. With its growth, the nonprofit is now compared to the largest sized employers. HopeLink has 350 employees that work at its Oakton headquarters and throughout the nation. HopeLink offers a work environment that encourages teamwork, professional growth and work-life balance. It's a culture where employees enjoy coming to work, are accountable and can excel in the services they provide. The organization provides supported resources and training for continued learning and growth, a competitive industry-related salary, and an excellent benefits program.

The NonProfit Times created this nationwide survey and awards program to honor the best employers in the nonprofit sector. The evaluation included a survey of each nominated organization's workplace policies, practices, philosophy, systems and demographics. The evaluation included a much more heavily weighted anonymous employee survey to measure the employee experience.

Results were analyzed and categorized according to eight core focus areas: leadership and planning; corporate culture and communications; role satisfaction; work environment; relationship with supervisor; training, development, and resources; pay and benefits; and overall engagement. Organizations that made the list scored near 92% across all categories.

HopeLink is a leading nonprofit helping those living with

diverse behavioral health issues and anyone who faces life crises achieve independence, self-sufficiency, and safety. HopeLink provides the people it serves with skill training and support to help them recover and rebuild their lives through a range of services including Psychosocial Rehabilitation Day Program Services, Mental Health Outpatient Therapy, Mental Health Skills-Building, TIP Children and Youth Mental Health and Substance Use Treatment Navigation, Individual Supported Employment, Peer Support Services, Coordinated Specialty Care, and other services.

HopeLink is a 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline Center and Regional Crisis Call Center answering calls, texts, and chats from across Virginia and the nation. For 24/7 support from HopeLink, call 988. For 24/7 chat support, visit 988lifeline.org/chat. www.hopelinkbh.org

BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 3

American Association for the Advancement of Science's STEM Volunteer Program, stemvolunteers.org, during the 2018-19 school year. In the 2017-18 school year, there are 85 volunteers in 6 Northern Virginia school districts. Contact Don Rea at 571-551-2488, or donaldrea@aol.com. Volunteer Drivers Needed. Drivers needed by the American Cancer Society to take cancer

patients to treatment in Northern Virginia. To volunteer, call 1-800-227-2345 or go to cancer.org/drive. 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. Farmer's Market Volunteers Needed. To volunteer for the Farmer's Markets, email Brian Morreale, brianmorreale@gmail.com

SUPPORT GROUPS
Postpartum Support Virginia sponsors

a free, bi-monthly support group for women suffering depression and/or anxiety during pregnancy or in the first year following childbirth. Meets on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of each month at Inova Alexandria Hospital, Health Education Center, rooms 1-2, 4320 Seminary Road. Contact co-moderator Susan Doyle at suzdoyle@gmail.com or 571-403-0673.

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A Connection Newspaper



Chamber Membership Growth

FROM PAGE 5

intellectual, creative, social and physical development while preparing students to “Advance Always” through learning, service, and leadership opportunities.

Healthcare and wellness-related services continue to account for a significant share of Chamber membership growth.

❖ T.H. & Associates LLC, a minority-owned behavioral health firm based in Alexandria, recently joined the Chamber. Co-owned by Dr. Tierra Hereford and Kameron Orelie, the company provides outpatient mental health services, substance use treatment, workforce development training, clinical supervision, and behavioral health consulting throughout Virginia, Washington, D.C., and Tennessee.

❖ Another healthcare-related addition is MyEyeDr. Kingstowne, which recently opened its new location in Alexandria. The practice combines vision care services with eyewear and modern diagnostic technology while emphasizing personalized patient care through local optometrists and consultants.

❖ Tilden Memory Care & Assisted Living has also joined the Chamber. Located near Inova Mount Vernon Hospital, the locally owned assisted living and memory care home provides dementia care in a smaller residential environment designed for more individualized attention. Owner Wade Chil-

coat said the goal is to provide families with a more personal alternative to larger institutional settings, with an emphasis on communication, consistency, and structured care. The facility includes private bedrooms and bathrooms for residents and works closely with hospice and clinical support providers.

❖ SPARKS joined the Chamber earlier this year as it continues expanding autism services and awareness throughout the region. Established in 2010, the organization provides individualized support for children and young adults with autism through applied behavior analysis (ABA) programs and has worked with families across Washington, D.C., southern Maryland, and Northern Virginia for more than a decade.

Several of the Chamber’s newest members also provide services aimed at helping businesses operate more effectively.

❖ Federated Insurance recently joined the Chamber through Marketing Representative Chimaobi Iwumune, who works with business owners throughout the region. The company focuses on commercial insurance, workplace safety, and long-term risk management strategies for industries ranging from manufacturing to professional services.

❖ PostNet of Alexandria, almost ready to open its doors, will bring a combination

SEE CHAMBER MEMBERSHIP, PAGE 14



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PUBLIC NOTICE

Please be advised that there will be a 5-minute fireworks display taking place as part of a private evening event at George Washington’s Mount Vernon on

**Wednesday, June 3
between 9:10 p.m. and 9:40 p.m.**

The Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association thanks you for your tolerance and apologizes for any disruption. To receive Mount Vernon fireworks notifications via email, please write to events@mountvernon.org.

**GEORGE WASHINGTON’S
MOUNT ★ VERNON**



Public Notice

Updated weight limits on Virginia bridges and culverts

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

Jurisdiction	Fed Struc Id	Route #	Route Name	Crossing	Posted Date
CUMBERLAND	5734	613	SPORTS LAKE ROAD	RANDOLPH CREEK	4/30/2026
CHARLOTTE	4963	693	TERRELL ROAD	BRANCH OF TURNIP CREEK	4/28/2026
PRINCE EDWARD	13995	666N	DOUGLAS CHURCH ROAD	BUFFALO CREEK	4/28/2026
WYTHE	19731	663N	BISHOP THOMAS LANE	PINE RUN	4/23/2026
APPOMATTOX	1582	602	MT. PLEASANT ROAD	CABIN BRANCH	4/15/2026
AMHERST	1441	622E	STAPLETON ROAD	CHRISTIAN MILL CREEK	4/11/2026
CARROLL	4609	100	SYLVATUS HGWY/101	ROCK CREEK	4/3/2026

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

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

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

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

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A monarch butterfly on a swamp milkweed plant.



A monarch butterfly caterpillar.

PHOTOS BY GLENDA BOOTH

Keeping Nature's Puzzle Pieces Together



Pinesap



Indian Pipes



American Cancer-root (Squawroot)



Beechdrops



Autumn Coralroot

Myco-heterotrophs Mycorrhizal Cheaters

PHOTOS BY ALONSO ABUGATTAS

These plants do not produce chlorophyll but rather survive by stealing food from the specific mycorrhizal fungi and the specific host plant it needs.

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
THE GAZETTE

Nature is like a puzzle, with all the pieces interconnected, Alfonso Abugattas told an 80-member audience on May 13 in a Zoom program sponsored by the Friends of Dyke Marsh. "We are part of the puzzle too and what we do has consequences," he said. Abugattas is the Natural Resources Manager for Arlington County Parks and founder of the Capital Naturalist blog.

He quoted environmental advocate John Muir who said, "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe."

Nature's Interdependence

Abugattas began by describing how cer-

tain plants require fungi to survive. Yellow lady slippers, a type of orchid, have a relationship with mycorrhizal fungi. The root tissues of the fungi and plant have a symbiotic association and grow together. "They rely on each other," he said.

Host plants are also examples of co-dependence in nature. A host plant is a specific plant that an insect or its larvae eat, live on or lay eggs on, a plant with which the insect evolved. Monarch butterflies are one of the most familiar examples, Abugattas said. The monarch's caterpillars feed on milkweed as do the caterpillars of 12 other insects, like the milkweed tussock moth.

Mistletoe is a hemiparasite, he said. It does not depend totally on a host plant but needs some interaction with its host plant.



Lichen is an organism made up of two other species, algae and fungi.



A Yellow lady slipper orchid requires certain mycorrhizal fungi to be present or they cannot survive.



A section of Battery Mount Vernon vandalized with graffiti and the same section after the graffiti was cleaned off.

NPS Seeks Reports of Vandalism at Fort Hunt Park

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

The U.S. National Park Service (NPS) requests the public's help in reporting graffiti on historic structures at Fort Hunt Park. Park officials say that "for years" the 19th-century concrete batteries have been the target of vandalism. Park staffers have found letters, drawings and paint smears on them.

The park, located five miles south of Alexandria City on the south George Washington Memorial Parkway in the Mount Vernon area, attracts people for picnicking, recreation and community events. It is a unit of the 25-mile parkway, managed by the U.S. National Park Service.

In April, NPS rangers, preservation specialists and maintenance crews from around the country cleaned up and removed graffiti using low-pressure washing, hand scrubbing, non-acidic cleaning agents and repeated rinsing to remove paint from the porous surfaces without stripping original material.

"Thanks to the hard work of National Park Service professionals, Fort Hunt Park is once again looking its best. The cleanup effort helps ensure the park remains a clean and welcoming place for the thousands of people who visit and use the park each year," says the NPS website.

Fort Hunt Park's History

Indigenous people hunted and fished in the Fort Hunt area from 6,000 B.C. to the mid-1700s. English explorer Captain John Smith encountered the Conoy tribe in the area in 1608. Later, the land became part of George Washington's Mount Vernon plantation where he established a "slave village."

In 1885, when federal officials decided that the United States was not prepared for naval attacks, the War Department built multiple artillery batteries between 1898 and 1904 to defend the Potomac River and the nation's capital, intended for the Spanish American War. The batteries have a semicircular top so guns could swing around. Shells could weigh several hundred pounds and were raised from below on elevators. The installation was named for Brevet Major General Henry Jackson Hunt (1819-1889).

The battery commander's tower, with concrete walls over two feet thick, looks today much as it did when completed in 1902. From the top, the commander could see down the Potomac River and coordinate the firing from the batteries.

During the Great Depression, the site was used as a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp. The CCC planted two clearly aligned rows of trees in the 1930s that today mark the camp's service road. A pin oak still standing honors the 1939 visit of England's King George VI and Queen Elizabeth.

In World War II, from 1942 to 1946, Fort Hunt was a top-secret camp for interrogating 4,500 German, Japanese and Italian prisoners of war (POWs), given an intentionally innocuous name, P.O. Box 1142. Many prisoners were Nazi naval officers and German scientists.

Most of the covert camp's facilities were demolished, replaced today by grassy fields, a few woody areas and popular picnic pavilions. Remaining from that era are four chunks of cement which were bases of former guard towers.

"The recent cleanup effort ensures that visitors can continue to enjoy the park in a setting that reflects its historical significance and natural beauty," the NPS announcement notes.



A section of Battery Mount Vernon vandalized with graffiti and the same section after the graffiti was cleaned off.



One of the concrete batteries at today's Fort Hunt Park.



The school collects rainwater in two cisterns for reuse in their gardens.



Senator Scott Surovell (far right) presented a commending resolution from the Virginia General Assembly. Left to right: Supervisor Dan Storck, Sue Conway, Principal Jasibi Crews, Surovell.

Bottle Cap Mural Encourages Environmental Stewardship

FROM PAGE 1

artwork by gluing leftover bottle caps.

Page Bradford helped students make seed bombs by squeezing potting soil, clay, water and wildflower seeds into a ball to plant at home. Bradford owns Hooray for Art in the Hollin Hall Shopping Center.

Some families weeded the school's raised vegetable and wildflower beds, in the shadow of two rainwater cisterns. "We want our kids to be outside," said John Fulginiti. Some parents sold herb and vegetable seedlings.

Hollin Meadows Elementary made headlines in 2009 when former First Lady Michelle Obama visited the school as part of her healthy schools' fitness and nutrition initiative. When the students showed Obama how they harvest lettuce, she remarked that she did the same in the White House garden that she initiated.

Hollin Meadows enthusiasts say that outdoor education fosters learning by enhancing the curriculum, creating immersive learning experiences, helping improve concentration and reducing anxiety, among other benefits.

By upcycling bottle caps into art, collecting and reusing rainwater and caring for outdoor gardens, the school's leaders hope to set the example for environmental stewardship every day, not just Earth Day.



Hollin Meadows' parents managed a seedling sale and accepted donations to support the school.

PHOTOS BY
GLENDA BOOTH
THE GAZETTE

The schools' gardens support native plants, discourage grass, in some areas.



Some families spread mulch at the event at Hollin Meadows Elementary School.



Hollin Meadows students loved squeezing balls of soil, seeds, clay and water, seed bombs for planting at home.

Gov. Spanberger Vetoes Collective Bargaining Bill

Unions say the veto violated campaign promises

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE GAZETTE

A legislative push for labor rights in Virginia ended Thursday, May 14, when Gov. Abigail Spanberger (D) vetoed collective bargaining bill HB 1263, which aimed “to establish a system for public sector collective bargaining.” Unions said the veto violated campaign promises.

HB 1263, sponsored by Del. Kathy Tran (D-Fairfax) with an identical bill, SB 378, by Senate Majority Leader Scott Surovell (D-Fairfax), would have extended bargaining rights to over 500,000 Virginia public employees — including firefighters, teachers and state and local workers — seeking wages, benefits, and working conditions by overturning bans on collective bargaining.

In April, Spanberger proposed a Governor’s Substitute to delay collective bargain-

SEE UNIONS SAY, PAGE 12



PHOTO VIA X

Virginia gubernatorial candidate Abigail Spanberger speaks at a union rally in Henrico County on April 8, 2025, about the positive impact of labor unions on her family.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY SEIU

Members of SEIU Virginia 512 rally outside the Fairfax County Government Center on May 6, 2026, to urge Gov. Abigail Spanberger to sign House Bill 1263.

With the veto, the 2021 law remains the status quo, leaving collective bargaining optional for individual municipalities to adopt via local ordinance.

Spanberger Signs 25-Bill Package

Fairfax lawmakers drive key reforms on data center costs, gun safety, and healthcare caps.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE GAZETTE

Gov. Abigail Spanberger signed 25 bills into law on May 13. While the broader package includes legislation from across the commonwealth, members of the Fairfax County legislative delegation heavily influenced the outcome. Local representatives spearheaded six landmark bills in the package, advancing measures to adjust regional public safety policies, utility infrastructure costs, health insurance coverage standards and more.

Three ‘Kitchen-Table’ Bills

These laws alter regulations governing household expenses, healthcare cost structures and insurance standards for families across Northern Virginia.

The \$35 Insulin Cap (HB 1214), patroned by Del. Karrie Delaney, D-Chantilly, concerns health insurance cost-sharing payments for insulin and diabetes equipment and supplies. “As the mother of a T1D child, I am all too familiar with just how costly equipment like CGMs or insulin pumps can be. I’m proud of this legislation, passed unanimously, that will bring real change to Virginians’ lives,” Delaney said.

“We are taking action to bring down healthcare costs,” Spanberger said.

❖ Data Center Cost Protection (HB 1191), patroned by Del. Irene Shin, D-Herndon, requires high-energy-use facilities to undergo local reviews to protect residential utility



PHOTO SCREENSHOT VIA FACEBOOK

Del. Karrie Delaney, third from left, applauds as Gov. Abigail Spanberger signs HB 1214 to lower healthcare costs by capping the price of insulin, supplies and equipment used to manage diabetes at \$35 a month, May 13, 2026. Delaney is the chief patron.

customers from infrastructure cost shifts.

❖ Essential Health Benefits Expansion (HB 328), patroned by Del. Rip Sullivan, D-McLean, directs the state’s Bureau of Insurance to select a new benchmark plan, expanding required baseline coverage to include treatments such as hearing aids, infertility treatments and doula care. “HB 328 will ensure those who need health coverage for things

like fertility treatment, doula care, hearing aids, donor breast milk, and more will have it,” Sullivan said. “It’s a major step in ensuring health care in the Commonwealth covers what Virginians need affordably.”

Three ‘Public Safety and Justice’ Bills

These state statutes outline adjustments

to Virginia’s criminal code and firearm regulations led by Fairfax County representatives.

❖ The Assault Weapons and Magazine Ban (HB 217 and SB 749), patroned by Del. Dan Helmer, D-Clifton and Sen. Saddam Azlan Salim, D-Vienna, prohibits the future sale, manufacture, importation or transfer of defined semi-automatic assault firearms and restricts ammunition magazines holding more than 15 rounds. Salim said, “When I ran for State Senate against an incumbent who voted against prior versions of an assault weapons ban, the people who believed in this vision stood with me to make the impossible possible.”

❖ Weapons Ban in Healthcare Facilities (HB 229), co-sponsored by Del. Laura Jane Cohen, D-Springfield, and Del. Holly Seibold, D-Vienna, restricts firearms in hospitals and psychiatric facilities to reduce workplace security incidents.

❖ Marijuana Conviction Resentencing (HB 26 and SB 62), co-sponsored by Shin and Salim, establishes a court hearing process to review sentences for marijuana offenses legalized or decriminalized under the 2021 updates.

Gov. Spanberger said, “For decades, marijuana enforcement disproportionately impacted minority communities and communities of color, contributing to inequities in the criminal justice system that Virginia must no longer ignore.”

The full list of signed bills is available here: <https://lis.virginia.gov/>

Campaigns Suspended After U.S. Supreme Court Order

Local former 7th district contenders re-evaluate next steps.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE GAZETTE

Following the 18-word U.S. Supreme Court's May 15 order denying an emergency request to stay in *Scott v. McDougle*, Virginia's congressional boundaries reverted to 2021 Virginia court-ordered maps.

The U.S. Supreme Court gave no explanation, nor did justices dissent, and the docket did not disclose the vote. The order left in place a Virginia state supreme court ruling that reversed a lower circuit court decision and invalidated a temporary congressional redistricting map approved by 51.69% of voters in the April 21 special election, upending as many as 12 campaigns in the invalidated "new" 7th Congressional District.

There was outrage at both supreme courts invalidating an election.

Gov. Abigail Spanberger posted, "What do we do with our outrage? We WIN in November. Volunteer, donate, vote, WIN."

Virginia Senate Republican Leader Ryan McDougle said, "The Supreme Court of the United States has affirmed what we always knew: you cannot violate the

Constitution to change the Constitution."

Whether it's a stunning betrayal or procedural sanctity depends entirely on which side of the 2021 map one is standing on.

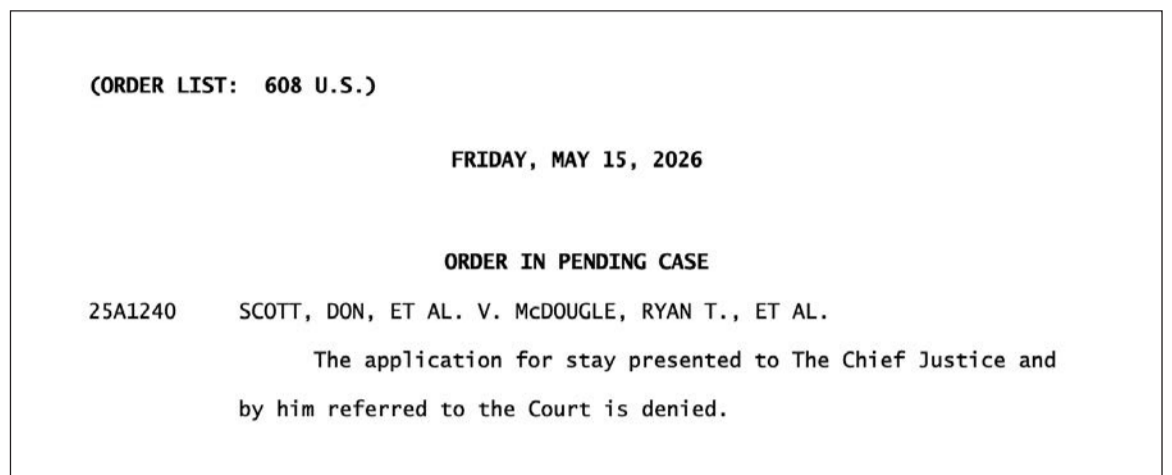
If Virginia wants to change its maps or its court, it will have to win the 2027 state elections and restart the amendment clock.

But it will be too late to counter out-of-turn redistricting in GOP states trying to stem possible GOP losses in November's election for U.S. House.

Northern Virginia candidates quickly shifted focus to their home districts. U.S. Rep. Suhas Subramanyam, continuing his reelection campaign in western Fairfax County, stated the court "decided to let the partisan Virginia Supreme Court overturn the will of millions of Virginia voters."

Del. Dan Helmer returned to his 2027 state delegate campaign in Centreville, noting that while the decision ended his congressional bid, "one court ruling won't change that."

State Sen. Saddam Azlan Salim remains in office through 2027, representing Fairfax and Falls Church, posting, "The movement



SCREENSHOT SUPREMECOURT.GOV

The U.S. Supreme Court order issued Friday, May 15, denies an emergency request by Virginia Democrats to use a new, Democratic-leaning congressional map for the 2026 elections. The 18-word order denies an emergency application for a stay in the case *Scott, Don, et al. v. McDougle, Ryan T., et al.* (Docket 25A1240). The application, filed by House Speaker Don Scott, Senate Majority Leader Scott Surovell, Senate President Pro Tempore Louise Lucas, and the Commonwealth of Virginia, requested the high court to pause lower court proceedings.

we built does not end here."

Other regional Democratic contenders suspended their campaigns with online statements. Former Virginia first lady Dorothy McAuliffe stated she would "keep working for my neighbors."

Del. Adele McClure called the moment "beyond disappointing. ... it is dangerous," urging supporters

to protect democracy.

Former federal prosecutor J.P. Cooney noted, "While my congressional campaign is ending, our movement to take on corruption and lawlessness is just beginning." Alexandria national security expert Olivia Troye affirmed her commitment to "standing up to Trump's and MAGA extremism."

Conversely, the map reversal altered the race for four Republican contenders running outside Northern Virginia: State Sen. Tara Durant, John Gray, Douglas Ollivant, and Waverly Washington, all also ended their campaigns.

Fairfax County GOP posted, "Democrats tried to change the rules illegally. Spent millions."

Unions Say the Veto Violated Campaign Promises

FROM PAGE 11

ing for local employees without an agreement until 2030. The General Assembly rejected the delay on April 22, returning the version unaltered.

In her veto statement, Spanberger said: "While preserving the enrolled bill's focus on allowing public employees to achieve collective bargaining, my amendments would have also provided flexibility for public employers. ... However, the General Assembly rejected these amendments."

Labor leaders pointed to her April 8, 2025, messaging that she would "look forward to working with members of our General Assembly to make sure more Virginians can negotiate for the benefits and fair treatment that they earn."

Union heads said that the promise was broken. "Collective bargaining is not a privilege – it is a right," leaders from the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) said in a statement. "Governor Spanberger met with our members, stated her support, and

made a promise. Today, she broke it."

IAFF General President Edward Kelly stated: "This veto is a step against every worker who put their faith in Abigail Spanberger to deliver," Kelly said. "Firefighters keep their word every day on the job. The Governor did not do the same." (Read the statement via the IAFF News Portal).

Teamsters General President Sean M. O'Brien added: "Gov. Spanberger's actions in Virginia are a reminder that unions must

demand more of elected officials," O'Brien said. (Read the press release at the Teamsters Official Website.)

At a May 6 Fairfax rally, LaNoral Thomas, president of SEIU Virginia 512, said: "Making Virginia affordable means making sure the public servants who keep this state running can [afford to] live here."

Fairfax County Supervisor Dalia Palchick (D-Providence) said: "We know that when unions are active, our economy is stable." She said

that without labor protections, workers are vulnerable.

Thomas noted the bans were rooted in the 1970s: "When collective bargaining was banned in Virginia over 45 years ago, it was banned because a group of Black women at UVA stated that they wanted the right to collectively bargain," Thomas said.

With the veto, the 2021 law remains the status quo, leaving collective bargaining optional for individual municipalities to adopt via local ordinance.

Sun Season Is Here and So Is Melanoma

Melanoma Monday was May 4 followed by National Safe Sun Week starting Monday, May 18.

BY MIKE SALMON
CONNECTION NEWSPAPERS

Each spring when May rolls around, everyone is ready to stretch out on the lounge chair by the pool but that has its drawbacks in the form of sun cancer, so early in the month is "Mela-

nomia Monday" to raise awareness.

Melanoma is the most invasive skin cancer and can be fatal. It can start as an innocent looking mole or just normal skin with little signs that can become life threatening in just six weeks.

To kick off the sunny season, Med-Star Health is actively spreading the

word about Melanoma Monday, and recommends seeing a dermatologist every year for a skin check.

Sunscreen, hats and shirts are the best protection they said.

The whole month of May has been dubbed "skin cancer awareness month," and the American Academy of Dermatology Association notes that every day, about 9,500 people in the United States are diagnosed with skin cancer. But there are precautions to take, and that includes protecting skin from the sun and avoiding tanning beds. When using sun screen lotion, go

for 30 SPF or higher, they said.

Melanoma is the most serious type of skin cancer but if caught early, melanoma is highly treatable, AAD said.

They point out the ABCDE's of skin cancer which hones down the self-examinations to pinpoint causes and places that skin cancer might be. "Early detection is the key," said Darrell Rigel, MD. The doctor who invented the ABCDE's of melanoma:

A for "asymmetry," meaning one half of the spot is unlike the other half.

B is for "border," where the spot has an irregular border.

C is for "color," the spot has varying colors.

D is for "diameter" of the spot which is usually greater than six mm, or the size of a pencil eraser.

E is for "evolving," and this is when the spot changes in size, shape or color.

Treating Melanoma starts with a self-exam, and this includes a full-length mirror and hand mirror to check all the spots. Following it up with a dermatologist visit is always a good idea.

ENTERTAINMENT

MEETS EVERY SUNDAY

Bird Walks. 8 a.m. At 6401 George Washington Memorial Parkway, Alexandria. Friends of Dyke Marsh organizers lead bird walks every Sunday morning. Meet at 8 a.m. in the south parking lot of the Belle Haven picnic area. Walks are led by experienced birders and everyone is welcome to join.

MEETS EVERY MONDAY

Monday Morning Bird Walk. 7 a.m. Meets at 3701 Lockheed Boulevard Alexandria. The Monday Morning Bird Walk is sponsored by the Friends of Huntley Meadows Park and takes place every Monday at 7 a.m. April-September and 8 a.m. October-March. Following the walk, members of the group gather at the nearby Denny's for breakfast and to compile the morning's bird list. Call (703) 768-2525.

WEDNESDAY NIGHTS

Wednesday Night Bingo. 7 p.m. At Atlas Brew Works, 2429 Mandeville Lane, Alexandria. The Capital City Showcase, the company that brings you some of the DC area's best events, is hosting an amazing night of everyone's favorite game at Atlas Brew Works Alexandria. Win prizes on every round, and the winner of the final round gets a \$50 Atlas Brew Works gift card for your next visit! There's also \$6 select Atlas drafts! Plus pizza served from the world famous Andy's Pizza! Email at capitalcityshowcase@gmail.com

MGNV Plant Clinics Are Open

The Alexandria Old Town Farmer's Market Plant Clinic at 301 King St., Alexandria operates on Saturdays from 7 - 9:30 a.m. Del Ray Farmers Market Plant Clinic at Oxford & Mt. Vernon Avenues, Alexandria operates on Saturdays from 8:30 - 11 a.m. The Arlington Farmers' Market at N. 14th and N. Courthouse Roads, Arlington operates on Saturdays from 8 - 11 a.m. The Fairlington Farmers' Market Plant Clinic at 3308 S. Stafford St., Arlington, operates on Sundays from 9 - 11 a.m.

YEAR ROUND ON SUNDAYS

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

AMERICA'S 250TH BIRTHDAY

Starting now through summer 2026, Alexandria will host major events and experiences commemorating America's 250th birthday. Located on the Potomac River just minutes from Washington, D.C. and George Washington's Mount Vernon, Alexandria, Virginia invites families, friends and history-lovers to stay in, explore and commemorate America's 250th birthday in a city older than the United States itself with a dynamic lineup of events and immersive experiences. Learn more and find additional details on these and other events at VisitAlexandria.com/250.

250th Events Itinerary:

- ❖ May-November: A temporary public art installation from artist Sandy Williams IV will commemorate the signing of the Declaration of Independence as part of the City of Alexandria's Time & Place public art series.
- ❖ June 12-14: Alexandria's major signature 250th event, Sails on the Potomac, will host iconic tall ships as a Sail Virginia 2026 Affiliate Harbor and will feature a weekend packed with activities including Alexandria Jazz Fest performances.
- ❖ June: A new exhibit will open at the Alexandria History Museum at The Lyceum. Called Stories of U.S. Collections Capture our History, the exhibit will bring out objects from the collection that are seldom seen.
- ❖ July 3-4: Enjoy evening Fourth of July fireworks shows at George Washington's Mount Vernon on July 3 and 4, and a daytime fireworks show on July 4.
- ❖ July 11: Take part in the City of Alexandria's



"The Drowsy Chaperone" is playing now through June 6, 2026 at The Little Theatre of Alexandria.

277th/USA 250th Birthday Celebration complete with fireworks, music and more at Oronoco Bay Park along Alexandria's waterfront.

CITY OF ALEXANDRIA DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION, PARKS & CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

From glow parties and jazz on the waterfront to family picnics and fireworks on the Potomac, there is something happening in every corner of our city. Grab your calendar. You are going to want to mark a few dates.

❖ Events are free unless otherwise stated. Asian American Pacific Islander Month Celebration Saturday, May 30, 3-7 p.m. | Patrick Henry Recreation Center

Celebrate culture, history, and community through food, live performances, art, youth activities, and storytelling in this vibrant family-friendly event.

48th Annual ALX Jazz Fest Friday, June 12, 12-6 p.m.; Saturday, June 13, 12-9 p.m.; Sunday, June 14, 12-6 p.m. | Waterfront Park

ALX Jazz Fest celebrates its 48th annual event as part of the Sails on the Potomac series honoring the USA's 250th anniversary, featuring three days of music: Americana Roots (Friday), American Jazz and Poetry (Saturday), and Future Sounds of America (Sunday).

Juneteenth Block Party Friday, June 19, 4-7 p.m. | Charles Houston Recreation Center

Come and celebrate the people, contributions, traditions and culture of Black Americans who have helped build and shape America. Enjoy food, live music, dance presentations, and recreation programming in celebration of this national holiday.

Alexandria and USA Birthday Celebration Sunday, July 12 | Oronoco Bay Park Celebrate Alexandria's 277th birthday and the USA's 250th with live music, food, and a fireworks finale over the Potomac River at 9:30 p.m. A can't-miss summer night.

Kids and Teens Nerf the Turf \$19, Ages 7-12 Friday, June 5, 6:30-8:30 p.m. | Patrick Henry Elementary School

Build teamwork and sportsmanship in this instructor-led foam dart showdown. Bring your gear; we'll provide the ammo.

Parents Night Out

\$25, Ages 5-12 Friday, June 12, 6:30-8:45 p.m. | Mount Vernon Recreation Center

Enjoy an evening out while your kids enjoy games and activities in a safe and energetic setting.

Charles Houston Kiddie Cabaret \$6, Ages 1-5 Saturday, June 13, 10 a.m.-12 p.m. | Charles Houston Recreation Center

Dress up, dance to kiddie favorites, enjoy lunch,

and celebrate in style with a parent or guardian.

Live on Top of The Hill Concert Series Ages 18+

Fridays, June 27 & July 25, 12-3 p.m. | William Ramsay Recreation Center

Relax with live folk, cover, and mariachi music in a welcoming community setting.

Top of The Hill Adult Social

Ages 18+

Friday, July 31, 6:30-9 p.m. | William Ramsay Recreation Center

Connect, unwind, enjoy games and themed nights, and meet new friends in this casual summer gathering.

Explore full details and register at alexandriava.gov/RPCA/Events.

Alexandria Aces Seek Local Hosts

The Alexandria Aces collegiate summer baseball team, the reigning heart of Alexandria's summer sports scene, is officially seeking local families to host student-athletes for the upcoming 2026 season. Celebrating 18 years of premier competition in the Cal Ripken Sr. Collegiate Baseball League (CRSCBL), the organization is looking for residents to provide housing for players from May 30 through July 25. Requirements for hosting are simple: families provide a private bedroom and access to laundry facilities. In return, families receive all-access season tickets for their household and an invitation to the team's annual Host Family Appreciation Night at Frank Mann Field. How to Apply: Interested families can find full program details and application forms by visiting the "Host Families" section at alexandriaaces.org. For more information, contact Maggie Crane, Host Family Coordinator, at 617-645-5860 or email her at maggi-crane19@gmail.com.

MAY 1-23

The Alexandria City High School Titan Student Art Exhibition. At Del Ray Artisans Gallery, 2704 Mount Vernon Ave., Alexandria. Experience student creativity firsthand. Gallery hours: Thursdays 12-6pm, Fridays 12-9pm, Saturdays & Sundays 12-6pm. Details at DelRayArtisans.org/exhibits

MAY 5 TO JUNE 28

"Catching the Light" 2026 Art Exhibition and Sale. At Green Spring Gardens Horticultural Center, 4603 Green Spring Road, Alexandria. Artists Reception - Sunday, May 17 from 1-3 p.m. Potomac Valley Watercolorists presents "Catching the Light," the 2026 edition of their annual nature-focused Art Exhibition and Sale. Green Spring Gardens "Art in The Garden Program" sponsored by the Friends of Green Spring invites visitors to enjoy this local, creative event. This annual fine art show spotlights many of our region's most highly-skilled and well-known water media artists,

and features more than 100 original framed works on display and available for purchase. Visit www.potomacvalleywatercolorists.org

NOW THROUGH JUNE 6

"The Drowsy Chaperone." At The Little Theatre of Alexandria. Winner of five Tony Awards, The Drowsy Chaperone is a playful tribute to the Golden Age musical — and one of Broadway's purely fun shows. The story unfolds when a man alone in his apartment puts on his favorite cast recording, and the 1928 musical magically comes to life around him: two lovers on the eve of their wedding, a bumbling best man, gangsters posing as pastry chefs, and one hilarious intoxicated chaperone. Director Kristin McGregor brings a warm eye to all the madcap delight, finding in the show's humor something genuinely moving — a reminder of why we turn to art in the first place, and why joy is always worth seeking.

THURSDAY/MAY 21

Community Champions Honors. 8-10 a.m. At Belle Haven Country Club, 6023 Fort Hunt Road, Alexandria. The Chamber ALX is proud to announce the public safety honorees for our Community Champions Honors.

WEDNESDAY/MAY 27

Shipwreck on the Potomac. 7 p.m. At The Lyceum, 201 South Washington Street, Alexandria. The Alexandria Historical Society will host author Karen E. Stone for a lecture on her book, Shipwreck on the Potomac: Disaster in Pursuit of Lincoln's Killer. Stepping away from Revolutionary War topics this month, the Alexandria Historical Society will present a compelling program on a little-remembered Civil War-era tragedy tied to the aftermath of Abraham Lincoln's assassination.

SUNDAY/MAY 31

Arts & Crafts Fair. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. At Tavern Square in Old Town Alexandria, 415 King Street. Presented by Volunteer Alexandria and Made in ALX. Discover a curated selection of jewelry, pottery, soaps, home décor, and unique gifts while supporting local artists at this free event. This family-friendly gathering invites you to shop local and explore beautiful crafts in the heart of Old Town Alexandria at Tavern Square.

JUNE 5-28

The "USA at 250" art exhibit celebrates our country's 250th birthday and captures the spirit of our nation, its past, present, and future, with artworks that highlight the splendor of our landscapes, people and history. View at Del Ray Artisans Gallery, 2704 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria VA. Opening Reception: Friday, June 5, from 7-9 p.m. Hours are Thursdays 12-6 p.m., Fridays 12-9 p.m., Saturdays & Sundays 12-6 p.m. Details at DelRayArtisans.org/exhibits

SATURDAY/JUNE 6

Summer Palooza. 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. At Mount Vernon Governmental Center, 2511 Parkers Lane, Alexandria. This free, family-friendly event will include live music by local band Highway Legends, free food, a petting zoo with animals from Frying Pan Park, exhibitors with information about dogs and animals, the environment, County resources, local small businesses and much more. There will be a kids zone with arts activities by the MVD Arts Advisory Council (MVD AAC), bounce houses, lawn games and touch-a-truck opportunities.

SATURDAY/JUNE 6

First Saturday Used Book Sale: 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. at Sherwood Regional Library, 2501 Sherwood Hall Lane. Selection of over 20,000 gently used children's books, fiction, history, biography, home and garden, cooking, crafts, sports, religion, travel, CDs, DVDs, and more. Unless specially priced, \$1 for hard backs and large paperbacks, and 25 cents for mass market paperbacks. Open every day, various hours. Visit <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library/branches/friends-of-sherwood-regional> for information on other days and times for the library's ongoing book sale.

**NOTICE OF AVAILABILITY
FOR THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
AND DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT FOR THE
PROPOSED STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT PLATFORM
AT JOINT BASE MYER-HENDERSON HALL, ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA**

Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall (JBM-HH) hereby gives Notice of the Availability (NOA) for the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) and Draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FNSI) for the Strategic Engagement Platform at Fort Myer. The Proposed Action involves the demolition of the current Patton Hall (Building 214), except for the original guard house, which will remain in place. The Proposed Action also involves the construction and operation of the Strategic Engagement Platform facility within the Limits of Work (LOW). In addition, there may be several related actions that occur within the LOW, including the realignment of Custer Road; grading and resurfacing of Buffalo Soldier Avenue and Johnson Lane; replacement of the sidewalk in front of the current Patton Hall; utility tie-in work; and stormwater management as required by applicable law.

The existing Patton Hall facility is in a state of deterioration after years of continuous use, and is experiencing failing systems, mold, pest infestations, water damage, and structural issues. The new Strategic Engagement Platform facility would provide a newly constructed, safe, modern, and appropriately sized conference center that meets the needs of the military community in the National Capital Region while maintaining the unique historical character of this location. The EA has been prepared to identify, evaluate, and consider the environmental consequences of the proposed partial demolition of the existing Patton Hall facility, the construction of the new Strategic Engagement Platform facility, and the related actions within the LOW.

The Draft EA has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, 42 U.S. Code (U.S.C) 4321 et seq., DoD NEPA Implementing Procedures (30 June 2025), and Army Regulation 200-1, Environmental Protection and Enhancement.

The Draft EA is available to view in printed form at the Arlington Central Public Library and the D.C. Southwest Neighborhood Library. It can be viewed/downloaded electronically at <https://home.army.mil/jbmhh/teamJBMHH/about/Base/environmental-management-division> website. Comments or questions on the Draft EA/FNSI may be directed in writing to: Directorate of Public Works - Environmental Division, 111 Stewart Road, Building 321, Fort Myer, VA 22211 or by email to: JBMHH_NEPA@usace.army.mil. Comments must be received no later than 30 days after publication of this NOA.

NEWS

American Horticultural Society's Starlit Garden Gala

Celebrate horticultural leadership and honor community support for River Farm.

The American Horticultural Society, the national nonprofit promoting the beauty and benefits of plants, will host its annual Gala at River Farm, its headquarters in Alexandria, Va., on Saturday, June 6, 2026. This year's theme, Starlit Garden Gala, was inspired by River Farm's beautiful new outdoor event space, featuring a stunning clear top with views of the starlit sky. The Gala will take place in River Farm's elegant gardens overlooking the Potomac River. Learn more about the AHS Gala, including ticket pricing, at ahsgardening.org/gala.

Long-time Alexandria residents Roger and Mary Bowers, the 2026 AHS Gala Co-Chairs, said, "We believe places like River Farm matter deeply, both here in our community and in communities across the country, highlighting the unique ability of gardens to connect people with nature and with one another. We look forward to celebrating with friends and supporters at this memorable evening under the stars."

The 2026 AHS Gala Committee features a dynamic group of horticultural leaders, community champions, and supporters who share a commitment to advancing AHS' mission. Committee members include Skipp Calvert, Amy Golden, Jane Jozoff, Gayle Palmer, and Stephanie Parkes. Kathryn Acer-

bo-Bachmann and James McGrath, AHS Board members, serve as Creative Advisors.

During the Gala, AHS will honor Dr. John Dole, winner of AHS' 2026 Liberty Hyde Bailey Award. In addition, Tim Conlon, Laura Dowling, and Holly Shimizu will be honored with AHS' 2026 Meritorious Award for their visionary leadership in saving River Farm in 2021.

AHS recently announced the completion of a conservation easement on River Farm, ensuring that the historic 25-acre property will remain permanently protected for nature lovers, gardeners, horticulturists, and families across the region.

Gala guests will hear from special guest Jennifer Jewell, Executive Director/Founder/Host of the award-winning public radio program and podcast Cultivating Place, whose work focuses on gardeners as keystone species for people and places. Guests will also enjoy live music by Little Big Band, delicious food from Occasions Caterers, and beautiful flowers by celebrated floral designer Holly Chapple, whose work was featured in The Bachelorette star Hannah Brown's wedding.

AHS' annual Gala brings together garden enthusiasts, local community members, and horticultural leaders to support AHS' mission

and inspire a culture of gardening across America. Proceeds from the Gala directly support the stewardship of River Farm and AHS programs, which foster growth, learning, and community.

Individual Gala tickets are available at ahsgardening.org/gala.

For questions about the AHS Gala, contact Johanna Tschebull, AHS Communications Manager, jtschebull@ahsgardening.org.

About the American Horticultural Society

Founded in 1922, the American Horticultural Society (AHS) is one of the most respected and longstanding nonprofit gardening organizations in North America. Celebrating the diverse and unique American gardening experience, AHS' membership includes gardeners, plant enthusiasts, and horticultural professionals, as well as regional and national horticultural organizations.

Through educational programs, awards, and publications, AHS inspires a culture of gardening and horticultural practices that creates and sustains healthy, beautiful communities and a livable planet. AHS is headquartered at River Farm, a 25-acre site in Alexandria, Virginia that was once a part of George Washington's original farmland. Learn more at ahsgardening.org.

Chamber Membership Growth

FROM PAGE 7

of printing, shipping, mailbox and design services to the local business community. The company offers marketing materials, signage, and shipping support to businesses and residents. It will be a one-stop resource for operational support services.

❖ Meanwhile, Staresque provides virtual assistance services designed to help businesses manage administrative work and day-to-day operations more efficiently.

Chamber leaders say one of the benefits of membership is the ability for businesses from

very different industries to interact regularly through networking events, committees, advocacy discussions, and educational programs.

In recent months, new members have already participated in Chamber breakfasts, LeadShare networking groups, Business After Hours events, and legislative discussions involving topics such as workforce policy, economic development, and regional growth.

The Chamber has also continued expanding its focus on workforce development and community engagement through partnerships with schools, local government, nonprofits, and healthcare organizations. Officials say the growing variety of industries represented

within the membership helps strengthen those efforts while creating more opportunities for collaboration across the region.

While the businesses themselves may differ significantly in size and industry focus, Chamber representatives say the common thread is a desire to remain involved in the community, build regional connections, and contribute to the long-term economic health of both the Mount Vernon area and Fairfax County.

More information about Chamber members, networking opportunities, and upcoming events can be found at www.mountvernonsspringfield.com.

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SPARC Opens Specially Adapted Resource Center at Hybla Valley Community Center

Expanding opportunities for adults with complex needs.

SPARC, a non-profit that provides day programs for adults with disabilities who are often “forgotten,” hosted a ribbon cutting on April 17 with dozens of dignitaries and participants. The opening of SPARC’s newest location at the Hybla Valley Community Center in Alexandria included the debut of the new Mobile Exploration Lab, a controlled multisensory environment on wheels.

Ellen Dyke, Chair of SPARC’s Board of Directors, underscored the collaborative effort behind the new center: “I want to express our deep gratitude to Supervisor Lusk, whose steadfast support made it possible to open this new center on the Route 1 corridor, now giving adults with complex needs a rightful place in our community.”

SPARC’s day programs are cost-effective,

unique programs which serve young adults who have aged out of the special education support offered by public schools. Due to the severity of their disabilities, they have been rejected from traditional Medicaid programs. The van is engineered to meet a wide range of sensory needs, providing calming regulation for participants who become overstimulated, and active engagement opportunities for those who seek stimulation.

The event marked a significant milestone in expanding inclusive opportunities for adults with severe and multiple disabilities. The program included remarks from Fairfax County Supervisor Rodney Lusk, former Virginia Secretary of Education Jim Dyke, Congressman Don Beyer, and Virginia’s First Gentleman Adam Spanberger, all recognizing the importance of creating spaces where individuals with complex needs can fully participate in community life.

Additional distinguished guests in attendance included Congressman Eugene Vindman and Dr. Cindy Vindman, Virginia State Senator Kannan Srinivasan, Delegates Karen Keys-Gamarra and Paul Krizek, former Congressman Bill Alexander and SPARC board directors Gaston Araoz, Hannah Irsfeld, Will

Schermerhorn, Dave and JoAnne Adams, and others who have championed SPARC’s mission.

SPARC CEO Debi Alexander emphasized the broader policy urgency and need for systemic change: “Folks, we have a problem. Virginia is under a permanent injunction for failure to serve our population adequately. ... This center represents what is possible when public leaders, private partners, and families come together with a shared vision.”

SPARC hosts centers that operate five days a week at various locations in Fairfax, Arlington, Loudoun, and now Alexandria with staff-led programming. The curriculum is rooted in therapeutic recreation principles that consist of continued education/leisure learning, skill building, exercise, excursions, cooking, music, art, lectures, discussion groups, and more. SPARC’s participants require support with all daily living activities. SPARC’s annual cost per participant is \$21,000. If the SPARC participant instead attended a Medicaid provider, the taxpayer cost would average \$58,000 per year. The Hybla Valley location is part of SPARC’s expansion to serve more people across the Northern Virginia region.

Keeping Nature’s Puzzle Pieces Together

FROM PAGE 8

“Mistletoe anchors on a tree, takes what it needs from the tree and is still green so it can photosynthesize,” he said.

Carolina chickadee nestlings are very dependent on caterpillars for food. “They have to have protein.

They cannot survive on bird feeders,” he said. He cited the work of entomologists Dr. Doug Tallamy and Desiree Narango which confirmed that a clutch of chickadee young eats about 350 to 570 caterpillars per day, depending on the number of chicks. If 70 percent of native biomass is non-native, they won’t survive, they’ll lay fewer eggs, fewer young will fledge and they will weigh less, he said.

In the mid-Atlantic, 18 species of bats eat insects as their main food source. “Their

favorite is moths, so they too need caterpillars,” he said.

Abugattas sang the praises of “the mighty oak.” He explained, “If it went extinct, over 600 species would disappear because they rely solely on oak trees,” including over 40 mammals, 60 birds and 557 caterpillars.

Continuing the theme of interconnectedness, he said that 75 percent of flowering plants rely on animal pollinators to move pollen, including 70 percent of agricultural crops. “Bees are built for being pollinators,” he said, and they need their host plants.

Asters host 112 Lepidoptera species, butterflies and moths, like the pearl checkerspot, and eight bee species. Goldenrods host 115 Lepidoptera species.

People may think negatively of galls, but they are “edible homes,” he said. Galls, like

the “witch hat” galls created by aphids on witch hazel leaves, host critters like mites.

How to Garden Better

Typical Northern Virginia gardens are dominated by non-native plants like bamboo, forsythia, nandina and zelkova trees which few caterpillars feed on. “Gingkos support zip,” he said. “Nothing.”

Native plants are key, he emphasized, and people do not need a large space to support natives, like goldenrods.

Returning to nature’s puzzle, he said, “We don’t want to lose the pieces,” reminding attendees of conservationist Aldo Leopold’s admonition, “To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering. ... We are part of the puzzle too. What we do has consequences,” Abugattas challenged.

Having a Ball, Almost Literally



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

A few weekends ago, I had the opportunity of a lifetime (I exaggerate), when my wife Dina went away for the for a few days and I was left unsupervised. Not that I can’t fend for myself, it’s more so with Dina away, that’s all, other the dog and four cats, I had to tend for. (If we had a fenced-in yard, I wouldn’t have had to fend for the dog, but as of now, that’s wishful thinking. As it happens now daily, I’m up early and out late - with three additional outings/“walkings” in-between making for four total, between me getting up and me going down.

Though I am referring to the weekend, it’s primarily Saturday during the day/early evening that I’ll be writing about. Since the Red Sox were not televised where I could watch, the Bruins had been eliminated from the Stanley Cup playoffs the night before, and the Celtics weren’t on television until 8 pm, I had some time to fill you might say. So, with remote in hand and my rear end on the couch - and no one’s preference to consider, I turned on the television and began “flipping the cable” as my late brother Richard used to call it and see if I could find anything worth watching. Boy did I! And not the usual fare either. As it was found, most of it was programming reminiscent of my formative years growing up in Newton Centre, Ma and sport if you could call it that, that I had never seen on television. The first bit of familiarity was of a dodge ball match/tournament. It wasn’t exactly six grade, as adults were competing, but it could have been. There were sides, mostly men but each side included a woman, a line in the center of the gym keeping them apart and balls flying from side to side, some caught and others wayward while still others hitting their opponents with boinks heard all over leading to immediate disqualification. I loved playing dodgeball, but until this afternoon, I had never seen it on television. Watching it brought back memories of my occasional misspent youth.

Soon I became bored watching the competition and “flipped the cable.” I couldn’t believe what sport I came upon next: kickball. Just like I played on the playground at Bowen Elementary School in the mid 1960s. Men, women on a baseball diamond with a pitcher rolling the ball to the opponent in the former “batter’s box” which I now call the “kicker’s” box. Other than the swerve the pitcher put on the ball as he rolled toward the kicker, it was just like I used to play 60 odd years ago. But I never saw adults playing kickball on television before. Just like I had never seen dodgeball on television before. After watching the kickball game for a few minutes, I likewise grew bored and “flipped the cable.”

I couldn’t believe what I happened onto next. Yet another sport, if you even call it, that I spent countless hours playing, mostly in my backyard against Freddie Klashman, our downstairs neighbor, and son of the family who owned the two-family house I grew up in on Athelstane Road.

Whiffle Ball: Can you believe it? In succession. It’s as if the television was programming me down memory lane. Taking advantage of my eyes/feelings being the only ones to consider. None of this would have interested Dina, well, certainly not back-to-back-back like I had just “happened-anced.” It was surreal almost. One memory after another, and all are great memories - for me anyway.

The next few “flips” were not as productive. I saw more conventional sports: women’s college softball, women’s beach volleyball, some men’s and women’s professional basketball, some PGA golf, (no LPGA women’s golf however), a bit of Ping Pong, some NHL playoffs but no bowling.

After watching all these sports, I still had not had my fill as I was waiting to watch the Celtics later that night. Unfortunately, the Celtics lost and were eliminated from the NBA playoffs, a totally non-fitting end to what otherwise had been an amazing day.

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



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