

Mount Vernon Gazette

MOUNT VERNON'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER • A CONNECTION NEWSPAPER

JULY 16, 2026



An osprey with a fish in Belle Haven Park along the Potomac River.



PHOTOS BY GLENDA BOOTH

An osprey pair with two young on the former platform at the Belle Haven Marina.

Ospreys Along Our Rivers Will Depart Soon

On the Mason Neck peninsula and Pohick Bay in May, surveyors counted 38 osprey pairs with 53 chicks.

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

Again this year, people near waterways have been intrigued by our annual avian “visitors,” the ospreys that return in March, mate, raise their young and then migrate to their wintering grounds in August.

Excellent anglers known as “fish hawks,” ospreys are chestnut brown and white birds, around 23 inches long, with a four- to six-foot wingspan and a dark eye stripe on the side of their white head. They build nests near water on trees, platforms, channel markers, waterfowl blinds and other manmade structures.

Convenient Viewing

January’s two-plus-week ice siege froze parts of the Potomac River and pushed down a long-standing platform at the Belle Haven Marina where many have delighted in watching a beloved pair raise their young for many years. Neither the marina nor the National Park Service has committed to replacing the platform.

Undaunted, presumably the same pair, moved slightly north and built a nest on the flat roof of what locals dub a “tiki boat” where they are raising one young. The



Ospreys have built a nest on the light pole in Martin Luther King Park for several years.

boat’s owner agreed not to disturb the nest. In the southern part of Dyke Marsh on Angel Island, a pair is raising two young.

Meanwhile, Porto Vecchio’s residents have front row seats to ospreys from their windows and terraces, enjoying the parenting underway in two nests. One nest has three young; the other, one.

Again this year, ospreys refurbished last year’s nests on Walt Whitman Middle School’s ballfield utility pole and atop the pole at Martin Luther King Park. No one

has confirmed young in those nests at this time.

On the Mason Neck peninsula and Pohick Bay in May, surveyors counted 38 pairs with 53 chicks total.

Arina van Breda who lives on the Potomac River in the Mount Vernon area watched a pair this spring that she says “seemed like young ospreys and not very good at nest refurbishment, certainly nowhere as accomplished at nest rebuild-

SEE OSPREYS ALONG, PAGE 10



Ospreys returned to this former platform every spring, nested and raised their young for many years, within sight of the Beltway.



In recent years, ospreys have built a nest on the light pole in Walt Whitman Middle School’s ballfield.

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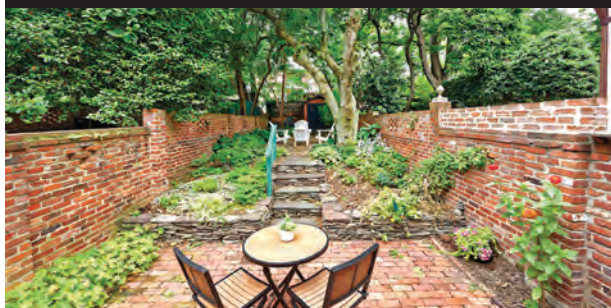
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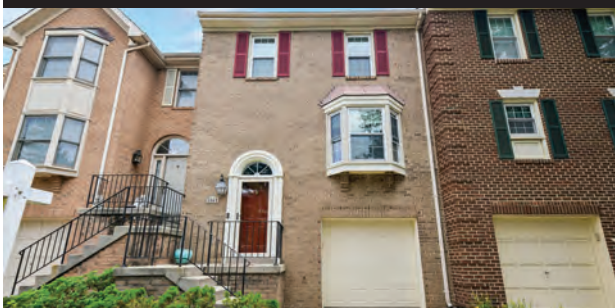
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MORTGAGE

Fairfax County's Heat Plan Shifts into High Gear

The heat spell in early July had air conditioners humming everywhere.

By Mike Salmon
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

If the first week in July is a sign of things to come, area agencies might need to shift gears in the cooling department to avoid potential fatalities that come with temperatures in the triple digits.

On Sunday, July 5, Fairfax County activated the Fairfax County Heat Plan, designating several county facilities such as libraries, community centers, REC centers, human services offices and homeless shelters as cooling centers. Those cooling centers are equipped with supplies for community members, including water, sunscreen, insect repellent, shower wipes and free Fairfax Connector bus coupons.

During this time, County leadership decided to open a 24/7 cooling center at the Jim Scott Community Center during the most recent extreme heat wave. It was open 24/7 starting on July 2 at 8 p.m. through July 5 at 8 a.m. and staffed continuously by county employees. The center served 85 community members over that period. Free transportation was available to anyone who needed a ride to the center or a ride from the center once it closed on Sunday morning. On Sunday, regional libraries and rec centers were open as cooling centers during their operating hours.

The National Weather Service listed the Daily Climate Normals (1991-2020) Washington Area, DC statistics on the Max Temperature Normal graph, which shows temperatures in July are all double digit numbers for the month, with 90 degrees as the high. This summer, the first week in July was full of triple digit temperatures which they list as an "extreme heat," situation. On their July 4 map, high temperatures for the area reached 101 and on the peak heat index in Leesburg was 113 degrees while Fredericksburg was 114 degrees. Fairfax County was also in the Severe Drought category although thunderstorms came on July 4 and 5 to bring some relief. But those rain events made little dent in the drought.

In the nationwide picture, Alaska posted their very first heat warning to residents.

County Cool

Fairfax County has three cooling programs available for residents. The Cooling Assistance Program

provides financial assistance with electric bills, security deposits to keep the electricity on, air conditioning repairs, fans for the house, and window air conditioners. To be eligible, at least one household member must be: 60 or older; 5 or younger; or disabled according to Social Security, Medicaid or 100% Veteran's Administration, the county said.

The Senior Cool Program helps low-income older citizens and the AC Rescue Program provide small air conditioning equipment when needed. To be eligible, at least one household member must be: 60 or older; 5 or younger; or disabled according to Social Security, Medicaid or 100% Veteran's Administration.

Trees Down in Burke

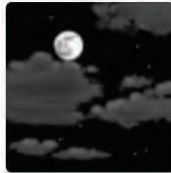
In the wake of the heat wave in early July, Braddock District Supervisor Rachna Sizemore Heizer (D) addressed all the heat preparations at a town hall meeting the following week and attendees included a representative from Chairman McKay's and Delegate Laura Jane Cohen. While the residents were concerned about the number of trees down from this microburst storm June 22, they also posed a question: What happens next time a storm comes like this? Safety was the initial message but there were few answers for the long term. Supervisor Heizer looked ahead to future storms "as things are changing weatherwise and climate wise," she said. For more, see <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/emergency/burke-microburst-incident>

Measuring Heat Islands in Northern Virginia

On Measurement Day, July 16, 2026, more than 30 teams of citizen scientists will measure temperature and humidity variations along 30 routes in Fairfax and Arlington counties, and City of Alexandria as part of the "Urban Heat Island Mapping Project."

Extreme heat is the leading cause of weather-related mortality in the United States. In an urban environment, temperatures can vary drastically between adjacent neighborhoods due to dark, heat-absorbing surfaces and a lack of tree canopy.

"This will be the most granular measurement of heat ever attempted throughout Northern Virginia," said Chris Topoleski, executive director of Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions. "We know

Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
				
High: 94 °F	Low: 74 °F	High: 101 °F	Low: 79 °F	High: 100 °F
Sunny	Mostly Clear	Hot	Partly Cloudy	Hot

Extreme heat returning this week, July 14-16, 2026.



The Jim Scott Cooling Center was in use for that early July heat spell.

that neighborhoods with few trees and a lot of asphalt can be dangerously hot in summer. Once we're done, we'll know how hot these neighborhoods are."

The Urban Heat Island Mapping Project is a collaboration between the Faith Alliance and George Mason University's Virginia Climate Center. The Climate Center forecasts Thursday, July 16, will be one of the hottest days of the year.

"Heat risk is on the rise and Virginians are already feeling the impacts," said James Kinter, director of GMU's Virginia Climate Center and Center for Ocean Land Atmosphere Studies. "High temperatures and humidity can lead to heat stress, heat stroke, and even death."

Each volunteer team will consist of at least two people in a vehicle with a rooftop sensor. A special phone app will transmit data to GMU. Measurements will be taken along routes previously selected by the Virginia Climate Center at three times throughout the day: Morning (6-8 a.m.), Afternoon (2-4 p.m.), and Evening (6-8 p.m.).

Fairfax County Activates Heat Plan for July 4; Opens 24-Hour Cooling Center

By Fairfax County Emergency Information on July 2, 2026



PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED

The heat hit the area hard over the July 4 weekend.

The Climate Center will later render the data into high-resolution heat maps that will indicate which neighborhoods need intervention to reduce dangerous summer temperatures.

In phase two, the completed research will be shared by Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions with

local elected officials and staff to inform policy decisions such as tree canopy expansion and other initiatives.

The American Red Cross-National Capital Chapter is supporting the Project by offering its regional headquarters in Fairfax County as a staging site.

Nepenthe Gallery's New Spot: More Visibility

By GLENDA C. BOOTH
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

In early August, Nepenthe Gallery, now behind the pastry shop in the Hollin Hall Shopping Center, will move to a prominent corner spot with windows facing both Fort Hunt and Shenandoah Roads, a space formerly occupied by Wells Fargo Bank.

"This will give us more visibility," said Carrie Garland recently, imagining art in the three big windows facing Fort Hunt Road that pedestrians and drivers passing by will easily see. She has co-owned and managed the gallery and frame shop with her husband, Jim, the framer, since 2022.



Beth Hamed and Carrie Garland. The sculpture is by Victor Ekpuk.



Jim and Carrie Garland opened Nepenthe Gallery in 2022.

The New Space

The new gallery will be 30 percent larger than the current space and have moveable walls and much more light. The Garlands will be able to display more sculpture and Carrie's hoping to get an elephant sculpture from the Great Elephant Migration, an artisans' group in southern India who make elephant sculptures from dried lantana plants fitted around a steel rebar frame. They sculpt life-size cows (females), bulls (males), tuskers (male elephants with tusks) and calves.

The first show in Nepenthe's new space, opening Aug. 6, will be works by Alexandria artist Kim Richards, who paints landscapes in the plein-air style and still life scenes.

Why a Gallery?

Carrie says she grew up "with art all around." Her parents collected 19th century American art and her mother was a docent at the National Gallery of Art for over 40 years. After the couple's four children



Hunt Flonem's rabbit paintings are popular.



The Thursday gatherings attract art lovers.

Selected Art by Local High School and College Students at Nepenthe Gallery

Nepenthe Gallery and Renée C. Gage Photography present the annual showcase of selected works of art by local high school and college students. More than 100 works were submitted and only 15 student artists' works were chosen which makes this exhibit the most selective ever. Five high schools, one home school, and two universities are represented in this exhibit.

Opening night is Thursday, July 16 at 6pm at Nepenthe Gallery in Hollin Hall. The exhibit will be up until Wednesday, Aug. 5. Nepenthe is open Tuesday through Friday from 11am to 6pm and Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 4pm.

The following students have been chosen to have their original artwork exhibited in this year's "Student Art Anthology"

❖ Eloise Andreozzi, Inner Child
West Potomac High School

❖ Malcolm Beane, Evening Drive
St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School

❖ Travius Best, JOY
George Mason University

❖ Eleanor Bogue, Sunny Morning
Catholic University

❖ Jay Betsill Damont, Fall's Beauty

St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School

❖ Tanya Erostequi, Smoke Break
George Mason University

❖ Rozalia Finkelstein, Twin Portraits
Alexandria City High School

❖ Margaret Gangi, Sisters
St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School

❖ Leanna Grimes, Sirenix Bloom
Culpeper High School

❖ Willa Johnson, Nesting
St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School

❖ Jovanny Felix Luna, Hijo
West Potomac High School

❖ Kate McGrew, Flower and Vines Keepsake Box
St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School

❖ Jacob Perdue, An Underclass Working Hidden in the Light
George Mason University

❖ Margo Semancik, Jimmy
Home School

❖ Caroline Tso, Porcelain Girl
Woodson High School

OPINION



The Mount Vernon District Has Got Your Back (to School)

BY SUPERVISOR DAN STORCK
MOUNT VERNON
DISTRICT SUPERVISOR

Backpacks, big smiles and back-to-school fun are just around the corner! Join us on Saturday, Aug. 1, from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. at the Lorton Community Center for our 4th Annual Back to School Community Day. Alongside School Board Member Mateo Dunne, Fairfax County Neighborhood and Community Services, LAZERA Ministries, ICNA Relief, Fairfax County Public Library, the Lorton Community Action Center and many other community partners, we'll help families get ready for a successful school year with a FREE day full of activities and lots of excitement.

Enjoy free school supplies, health screenings provided by ICNA Relief, food, yard games, face painting, a touch-a-truck experience, dozens of exhibitors and engaging activities for the whole family.

The event will also kick off with an Arts in the Parks children's concert featuring Rocknoceros at 10 a.m. It's the perfect way to connect with neighbors, discover local services and get excited for the new school

year.

School supplies are available for Fairfax County residents only and will be distributed on a first come, first served basis. Parents without children present may receive one backpack, while parents with children present may receive one backpack per child. Parking will be available across the street at the Lorton Little League fields, with a free shuttle to the event. Fairfax County Police officers will also be on site to assist pedestrians crossing the road. We look forward to seeing you there!

Can't attend this great event? Fairfax County Public Schools has resources available online for the first day of school on Aug. 24.

2026-2027 School Year Calendar (<https://www.fcps.edu/system/files/forms/2026-05/2026-2027-standard-school-year-calendar.pdf>)

School Registration (<https://www.fcps.edu/registration>)

Information about Mount Vernon District School Board Member Mateo Dunne (<https://www.fcps.edu/staff/mateo-dunne>)

School Supply Lists (<https://www.fcps.edu/supply-lists>)

Summer Meals

FCPS is offering free, nutritious meals through its Summer Meals program, to help make up for meals students would otherwise receive at school.

Children and teens can receive free breakfast and lunch at participating FCPS Summer Meals sites.

To help make family mealtime a little easier, one free breakfast and one free lunch for adults is available at six participating schools:

- ❖ Braddock Elementary School
- ❖ Dogwood Elementary School
- ❖ Glen Forest Elementary School
- ❖ Hutchison Elementary School
- ❖ Hybla Valley Elementary School
- ❖ London Towne Elementary School

Find a Summer Meals location near you: <https://bit.ly/FCPSSummerMeals>

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Backup Needed: Region's Water Supply

The Potomac River is the source for water for 5 million residents; recent events point to need for backup.

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

Turn on the spigot, water flows out. Most people take that for granted. Few of the five million people in the Washington metropolitan region who get drinking water from the Potomac River realize that this is their only source of water.

"The Potomac River has served this region exceptionally well for generations," said WSSC Water General Manager Kishia L. Powell, on June 9. "However, planning for the future means recognizing that a single source of supply, no matter how reliable, carries inherent risks."

Powell joined other leaders in announcing the launch of a two-year, \$25 million study to evaluate secondary water supply alternatives, titled "Secure the Source," to identify a water source that can provide several weeks of backup drinking water supply.

"Recent incidents such as fuel spills and sewage system failures underscore the importance of strong preparedness measures and demonstrate why dependable alternatives are essential in case the primary water source becomes unavailable without warning," said Susan Miller, Fairfax Water's Public Affairs Manager.

The study will evaluate four options: (1) no action; (2) Travilah Quarry, near Rockville, Maryland; (3) Washington, D.C.'s Blue Plains Advanced Wastewater Treatment Plant, advanced water reuse and (4) Luck Stone Quar-

"Planning for the future means recognizing that a single source of supply, no matter how reliable, carries inherent risks."

— Kishia L. Powell, WSSC Water General Manager

ries B and C in Loudoun County, Virginia, according to the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin (ICPRB).

Threats to the Water Supply

Possible disruptions to the water supply include drought, contamination, infrastructure failures and severe weather. In January, the Potomac Interceptor pipeline ruptured and sent over 240 million gallons of raw sewage into the river. American Rivers in April named the Potomac as "the nation's most endangered river," largely because of aging infrastructure and data center demands. This region has the



RENEE BOURASSA/ICPRB

Little Seneca Lake is a picturesque 505-acre reservoir located within Black Hill Regional Park in Boyds, Maryland. Originally built as an emergency water supply for the Washington, D.C. area, it is now a premier local destination for boating, fishing, hiking, and enjoying nature.

densest concentration of data centers in the world, with over 290 in operation and more anticipated, according to the Potomac Conservancy.

Unpredictable weather poses another threat. "Climate variability makes it harder to rely on historic trends to predict river flows, drought timing or the severity of dry periods," Miller said.

Not only is reliable drinking water at stake, so is the economy, contends the ICPRB. A prolonged disruption (one month) could bring a loss of up to \$15 billion in gross regional product and hundreds of millions in tax losses, ICPRB estimates. A major disruption could harm residents, businesses, the federal government, military operations and international organizations.

On June 3, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) declared a drought watch and urged people to reduce water use because of "unusually dry conditions that are expected to persist despite recent rainfall."

Currently, there are two backup water supply reservoirs for the Washington metropolitan area, the Jennings Randolph Reservoir be-

Current Water Suppliers

The three major regional water suppliers currently are Fairfax Water, WSSC Water and the Washington Aqueduct.

Fairfax Water, Virginia's largest water utility, serves over 2.2 million people in the Northern Virginia communities of Fairfax County, Loudoun County, Prince William County, Herndon, Vienna, Alexandria, Falls Church, Fairfax City, Fort Belvoir and Dulles International Airport. Fairfax Water gets water from two primary sources: the Potomac River and the Occoquan Reservoir, fed by the Occoquan River.

The Washington Aqueduct, a division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District, is a federally-owned and operated public water supply agency with approximately one million regional users. The Aqueduct provides water to three wholesale customers: DC Water, Arlington County and Fairfax Water.

WSSC Water, Maryland's largest water utility, provides drinking water and wastewater services to 1.9 million residents in Prince George's and Montgomery counties across 1,000 square-miles.

Information

The study, <https://www.potomacriver.org/>

Drought watch, <https://www.mwco.org/>

tween Garrett County, Maryland and Mineral County, West Virginia, and the Little Seneca Reservoir in Montgomery County, Maryland.

ICPRB's website says, "There is an above-normal probability of releases from the Washington metropolitan area's back-up water supply reservoirs for the 2026 summer and fall seasons."

WSSC Water has the lead in conducting the study, a joint effort involving WSSC Water,

Fairfax Water, Washington Aqueduct, ICPRB and MWCOG.

"Water is the foundation of public health, economic vitality and national security," said Michael Nardolilli, ICPRB Executive Director. "This study is about ensuring that future generations inherit a water system that is resilient, reliable and prepared for the challenges ahead."

SCC Silent as Lt. Gov. Hashmi Urges Pre-Filing Review of Massive Merger

Hashmi warns the standard six-month review clock is too short for a deal of this scale.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
GAZETTE PACKET

The Virginia State Corporation Commission has yet to respond to Lt. Gov. Ghazala F. Hashmi regarding her request for a rigorous regulatory review of a massive proposed utility merger.

In a July 6 letter to State Corporation Commission Chair Kelsey A. Bagot and Commissioners Jehmal T. Hudson and Samuel T. Towell, Hashmi formally requested that the commission implement a thorough pre-filing review framework before Dominion Energy and NextEra Energy officially file their acquisition application.

The historic \$67 billion transaction, announced in mid-May, would represent the largest utility merger in U.S. history and carries unprecedented implications for Virginia's rapidly evolving energy market.

The Connection requested comment from Bagot, Hudson, and Towell, but the commissioners did not immediately respond.

Hashmi attached 64 questions to her letter, divided into 11 categories, including transaction purposes, capital structure, finance costs, market competition, corporate governance, and consumer bill credits. Under Virginia law, once a utility merger application is formally filed, the commission typically faces a strict statutory deadline to issue its decision.

"Their depth and volume demonstrate that this highly complex transaction cannot be adequately reviewed under the current statutory six-month timeline," Hashmi wrote of her questions. "To that end, I respectfully urge the Commission to issue, expeditiously, an order requesting that Dominion and NextEra Energy not submit



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Lt. Gov. Ghazala F. Hashmi

their acquisition application until the companies have answered the essential questions needed to understand this transaction."

Hashmi noted that while she recognizes the commission has issued a baseline list of 28 questions under standard utility transfer provisions, "a more structured, granular framework is required for a merger of this magnitude."

The lieutenant governor's attached questionnaire would ask NextEra and Dominion to justify their financial claims under oath. The probe specifically questions why proposed customer bill credits would last only two years, seeks to identify the source of those funds, and asks whether the credits serve merely as a temporary sweetener to clear regulatory hurdles.

At the time of the merger's announcement, corporate executives focused public messaging heavily on consumer benefits. They highlighted a proposed \$2.25 billion in customer bill credits distributed across Dominion's customer base in Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina over a two-year period following the closing of the deal.

Executives also pointed to a massive 130-gigawatt large-load

pipeline, asserting that the combined company would achieve the capital efficiencies needed to manage skyrocketing energy

demands — driven heavily by Virginia's booming data center industry — while keeping power affordable.

Though the letter notes that Hashmi looks forward to a "favorable response," the commission's official stance remains pending.

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www.mountvernonspringfield.com/member-benefits/

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	Bridge Number	Route	Bridge Name	Crossing	Posted Date
PATRICK	13252	610N	HELMS ROAD/610	BRANCH DAN RIVER	6/24/2026
PITTSYLVANIA	13732	817	MOUNTAIN ROAD	TURKEYCOCK CREEK	6/9/2026
SMYTH	17509	800N	ST CLAIR CREEK ROAD	ST CLAIR CREEK	6/8/2026
PATRICK	13413	825	PALMETTO SCH ROAD 825	RUSSEL CREEK	6/1/2026

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.

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

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

SEE BULLEIN, PAGE 10

Tour Focuses on Stream Problems and Challenges

Friends of Little Hunting Creek, Nature Forward and Defensores de la Cuenca organized the tour of the Little Hunting Creek Watershed.

By Glenda C. Booth
Mount Vernon Gazette

Fairfax County's streams are sending signals that the way we live and the development patterns sanctioned since the 1940s are degrading our natural resources, especially our streams, 29 people learned on a June 27 bus tour of the Little Hunting Creek Watershed.

Several speakers outlined the problems. Mount Vernon Supervisor Dan Storck kicked it off saying, "We created the situation. We're now trying to fix it. We must help Mother Nature."

The Friends of Little Hunting Creek (FoLHC), Nature Forward and Defensores de la Cuenca organized the outing.

The 11-square-mile Little Hunting Creek Watershed stretches from the Groveton area southeast to the Potomac River and from its headwaters west of U.S. 1 in Huntley Meadows Park. The watershed has some of the oldest development in the county.

Carla Claire, with Defensores de la Cuenca, said, "Through educational, recreational and cultural experiences, we strive to strengthen families' connection with nature, foster community leadership and create opportunities for more people to become environmental stewards. Our goal is to build more informed, engaged and resilient Latino communities, where every individual has the opportunity to contribute to the conservation of our water, forests, wildlife and the natural spaces we all share."

FoLHC president Betsy Martin explained that with community input the county developed the Little Hunting Creek Watershed Plan in 2005. "The creek shouldn't just be an afterthought, a place where trash collects that nobody cares about," Martin said. "We wanted people to see how beautiful and really wild it is. And only if they care about the creek will they care about preserving it."

A Raven and Trash

At the first stop, a common raven called above the trash trap behind the Hybla Valley Shopping Center. Justin Pistore with the County's

Watershed Projects Implementation Branch explained that since 2020 the trap has snared several thousand bags of trash and shopping carts. Despite the degradation, this part of the creek has killifish, perch and the invasive snakehead fish, said Shannon Curtis, Assistant Director, Stormwater Planning Division.

Next up was the Janna Lee Bridge at Tamarind Street, which Martin called "the trashiest place on this creek." An annual spring cleanup, sponsored by the FoLHC, Senator Scott Surovell and Delegate Paul Krizek pulled out 35 shopping carts in April, she said, adding, "Costco's carts are big and heavy, hard to get out." Nine carts stood nearby as she spoke, and one was lodged in the creek.

Emily Burton with Operation Stream Shield explained that the county pays unhousted people to pick up trash. Since 2020 they've collected 32,000 bags of trash countywide.

At Napper Road, where the creek flows under U.S. 1, incessant traffic streaked by and within view of another abandoned shopping cart, Ron Chase, President of the Gum Springs Museum and Cultural Center, reflected on his community's connection to the creek. "There was once lots of water in it, like a rapid," he said, people caught hering and snapping turtles for food and Bethlehem Baptist Church held baptisms in the creek. "Now the stream is almost dead."

Then the group moved on to Stockton Parkway where the creek is also a tidal wetland, lush with spatterdock and other wetland plants and nesting ospreys calling. "This is a bird-watching hotspot," Claire Kluskens said. Northern Virginia Conservation Trust easements protect part of the shoreline.

Development Pollutes Streams

Curtis explained that human-made structures like malls, roads and buildings create impervious surfaces which block rain from naturally infiltrating into the ground. "We made things worse for the environment," he said. He reported in an email later that in 2005 the watershed was 29.5

percent impervious and today, 31 percent. "The watershed was essentially already 'built out' in 2005 and only very small areas have increased impervious area since then," he wrote.

"Now we are rebuilding natural channels so they can heal themselves," he said on the tour. His office tries to manage both runoff volume and pollution, pollutants like lawn chemicals, car leaks, fertilizers, E. coli bacteria from goose and dog poop and litter.

Improvements?

Fairfax County Environmental Quality Council's (EQAC) most recent report found, "In 2024, 75 percent of Fairfax County's streams were considered in 'fair' to 'very poor' condition; that is, they are impaired and lack biological diversity." In 2001, 75 percent of the county's streams were in very poor, poor or fair condition biologically.

Asked why streams have apparently improved little over the last 23 years, Shannon provided a lengthy answer and summarized: "Bottom line: The [Little Hunting Creek] watershed is very stable; it's already developed and very little new development is occurring, although significant re-development is anticipated. Therefore, we're not seeing big swings in water quality or stream health. ... It will likely take more time and investments to see these improvements."

"Countywide, we are actually seeing some streams improve, some degrade, and some hold steady. ... This is due to the increased diversity and abundance of the more pollution-tolerant aquatic organisms. This is a sign of success. We will never have pristine streams in a developed landscape like this, but we do have room for improvements in water quality and stream health, and this is part of our ongoing mission."

Why the Tour?

"This bus tour demonstrated how people are part of nature and that nature needs people, while uniting different communities in the same watershed to inspire them to take action to protect Little Hunting Creek," said Grebe.

Shirley Short remarked, "I discovered things I did not know were there."

Gobbling up pizzas donated by Costco, the group ended the tour in Riverside Park on the shoreline of the Potomac River, named the nation's "most endangered river" in April.



NORTHERN VIRGINIA CONSERVATION TRUST/ALYSSA HEMLER

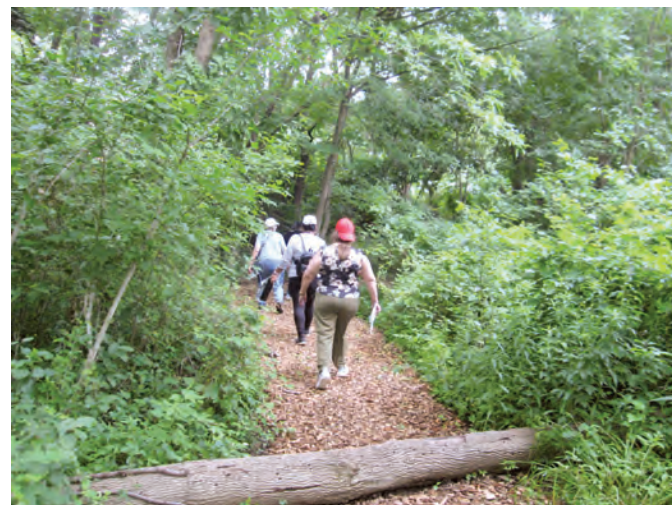
Group photo of last month's Little Hunting Creek bus tour participants and leaders.



Emily Burton with Operation Stream Shield explained that the county pays unhousted people to help clean up trash.



County official Shannon Curtis explained how suburban development has degraded Fairfax County's streams.



In the Little Hunting Creek Preserve on Stockton Parkway some ventured out on a trail next to the creek.



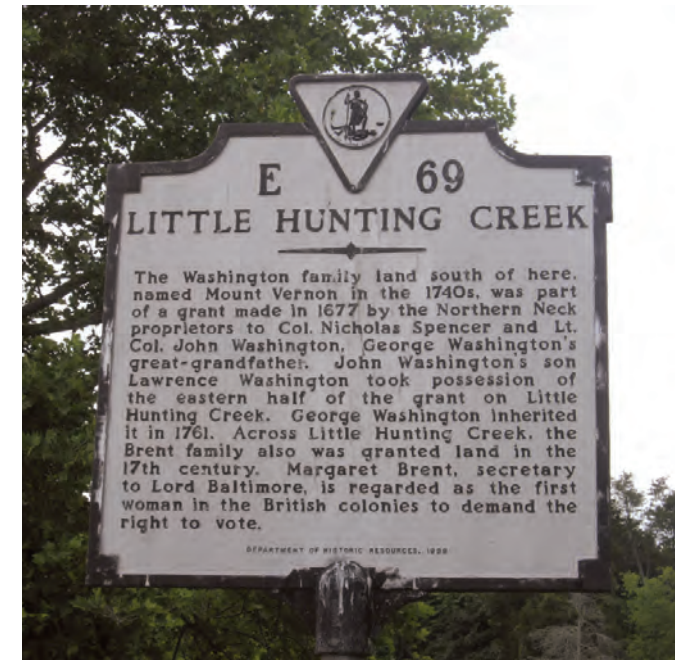
This Bandalong trash trap catches trash coming down the creek.



County official Shannon Curtis explained the goals of the county's watershed plans.



Nine shopping carts sat next to the Janna Lee Bridge.



This historic marker provides some of the history of Little Hunting Creek.



Some people on the tour saw the Little Hunting Creek wetland for their first time.



Ron Chase discussed the Gum Springs' community's connection to the creek.



With the platform at Belle Haven Marina pushed down by winter's ice, presumably the pair that nested there many years moved this year to a nearby boat.

Ospreys build nests on many human-made structures, including sailboats like this one in the Belle Haven Marina.

Ospreys Along Our Rivers Will Depart Soon

FROM PAGE 1

ing as prior pairs. It reminded me of teen parents who have the general idea about how things are supposed to be done, but not good on the details and follow through." She thinks the birds laid some eggs, but "then they up and vanished sometime while I was out of the country."

Some Ospreys in Trouble

In the southern, saline part of the Chesapeake Bay ospreys are struggling. A May 2025 survey of nesting ospreys on Virginia's Delmarva Peninsula, led by Dr. Bryan Watts of the College of William and Mary's Center for Conservation Biology, reported a 90 percent decline there, what Watts called, "a nearly complete collapse of the population."

Asked about this season, on June 23, 2026, Watts emailed, "The season is shaping up to be one of the worst that we have ever documented in the saltier parts of the Bay. Some of our study areas have already closed out for the year and others have very few active nests left. Many pairs abandoned territories early this year."

In a recent Audubon magazine article, David Gessner quotes Watts: "Osprey chicks are starving in their nests. And the reason is simple. Their primary food source is men-

haden. And that food source is no longer abundant." Some blame Ocean Harvesting for commercially over-fishing menhaden, a controversial issue that's been raging for some time. In the recently-resolved Virginia budget, the legislature approved \$2 million for a study to try to clarify the facts.

Osprey Facts

Ospreys mate for life. They typically incubate one to four eggs for 36 to 42 days. Their nests look like unkempt bundles of sticks and can be three to six feet across and 10 to 13 feet deep.

The birds may add odd objects like plastic bags, shoes, fast food debris and toys to the nests.

Ospreys can become entangled in things like plastic bags, balloon ribbons and monofilament fishing line. Porto Vecchio residents disentangled an osprey from fishing line a few years back.

To catch a fish, ospreys typically scan the water, hover and suddenly plunge feet first to grasp a fish in their sharp talons. They then fly to a nearby spot to eviscerate the prey or take it to its mate or young in the nest.

Over their 15- to 20-year lifetime, ospreys may migrate more than 160,000 miles.



Ospreys built a nest on this tree that fell into the Potomac River.

Watch Them Here

A few years back, William Young produced two videos about the ospreys at the now downed platform at the Belle Haven Marina boat ramp:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/williamyoung42?feature=watch>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1PN1YIF3rc>

BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 7

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.

Mentors Wanted. Two creative programs that help transform the lives of Alexandria's pre-teens are seeking volunteer mentors. SOHO, which stands for "Space of Her Own," and "Space of His Own," serves vulnerable fifth graders in Alexandria. The programs pair men and women with youth in need of positive adult role models, to help support and guide youth in making healthy choices and

succeeding in school and in life. Visit www.spaceofherown.org and www.spaceofhisown.org. For more information on how to become a SOHO mentor, contact Sarah Maroney at sarah.maroney@alexandriava.gov or phone at 703-746-4687.

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 suffer-

ing 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 suzjdoyle@gmail.com or 571-403-0673.

The Caregiver Support Group is facilitated by the Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services Division of

SEE BULLETIN, PAGE 13

Two Students Bypass International Bottlenecks, Deliver Direct Food Aid to Cuba



CONTRIBUTED BY PLATES WITHOUT POLITICS
Suraiya, 17, and Safiya Farooqui, 11, of Vienna, founded Plates Without Politics, a to raise money, build awareness and deliver critical aid to vulnerable individuals and families caught in Cuba's compounding food and fuel crisis. What started as a deeply personal effort to support extended family overseas has grown into a structured community initiative. <https://plateswithoutpolitics.org/>

'Hunger should never be political.'

BY MERCIA HOBSON
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

For two sisters from Vienna, Safiya Farooqui, an 11-year-old middle schooler, and Suraiya Farooqui, a 17-year-old high school student, their grassroots initiative to combat a humanitarian crisis thousands of miles away begins exactly where they feel most comfortable: together.

Their food activism project, Plates Without Politics, is dedicated to raising money, building awareness and delivering critical aid to individuals and families caught in Cuba's compounding food and fuel crisis. What started as a deeply personal effort to support their extended family overseas has grown into a structured community initiative.

For Safiya, the motivation is simple. "By helping them, it just brings me happiness," she said, noting that the project has brought her closer to the people she loves.

The project grew out of necessity as living conditions in Cuba drastically deteriorated. A crippling fuel embargo and macroeconomic collapse have left even working-class citizens unable to meet basic needs. Advocacy groups like Human Rights Watch and the Washington Office on Latin America have documented how temporary economic shocks have hardened into a chronic humanitarian crisis, severely limiting access to basic nutrition and utilities.

"There's been a multitude of issues across the island — inconsistent power because there's no fuel, inconsistent transport that's affected education, and it's been really terrible for the economy," Suraiya explained.

"Even individuals who have jobs are



PHOTO BY ZAIDA LIZET TORRES
An unidentified woman, over 80, sits inside her home where she lives with her paralyzed son in Havana, Cuba, on May 27, 2026. Plates Without Politics focuses its food aid on senior citizens, people who are sick and families who don't have relatives outside of Cuba.

struggling because food and basic resources are inaccessible," she added. "So, especially for elderly people, for people who are sick, and for families without connections outside the island, it's very, very difficult to find basic groceries."

For the Farooqui sisters, the crisis is personal. Safiya still carries vivid memories of visiting the island and being a part of that community.

To ensure the project remains practical and highly responsive, the sisters designed a strict operational model that bypasses traditional, bureaucratic obstacles. They deliberately avoid sending cash or wiring money directly to Cuba. Instead, the initiative uses donations to purchase nonperishable food through a vetted platform, Supermarket23, which delivers locally on the island.

From there, a network of trusted family contacts distributes the groceries, ensuring aid goes directly to elderly and infirm people and families with children who lack outside support systems. While Suraiya handles strategic expansion and logistics, Safiya manages donation tracking and assists with community communications.

Plates Without Politics initially leveraged the sisters' immediate network. "We are blessed to have an enormous extended family," Suraiya said. But as the crisis deepened, they knew they needed to expand.

The sisters are strategically scaling their



PHOTO BY ALEX RICHARDS TRAPAGA
Alex Richards Trapaga and Zaida Lizet Torres purchase groceries online through the Supermarket23 website from Havana, Cuba. Trapaga and Torres, who are cousins of the founders, Suraiya and Safiya Farooqui, bundle the items and deliver them to recipients' homes according to a community distribution list. <https://plateswithoutpolitics.org/>



PHOTO BY ALEX RICHARDS TRAPAGA
A monthly food bundle designed to feed one person for one month rests on a table in Havana, Cuba, on May 18, 2026.



PHOTO BY ALEX RICHARDS TRAPAGA
Graciela, left with her son, Victor, during a community wellness check and food delivery in Havana, Cuba, on May 19, 2026.

Crisis in Cuba

Mariam, a student from La Lisa: "...studying in Cuba is very difficult; it feels like surviving. Imagine your life with shortages of water, electricity, food and transportation."

Yosdaimy, from Bauta: "When there is no electricity, they cook with charcoal or firewood. Charcoal is very expensive, but sometimes it can be found, and firewood is gathered in the woods... In my family, there have been cases where they are making rice, and right when they set it to cook, the electricity goes out; the rice gets ruined."

Messages of Gratitude

"Thanks so much for everything that's been sent to me. I'm very grateful."

"My child, look, they made a gesture for me that I don't know how to pay them back for. Wow, I feel... it makes me so incredibly happy to see that these girls have come to my house. I would like to have a way to pay them back because it's a gesture that I appreciate, sincerely, with my heart in my hand." — An elderly food recipient in Havana.

outreach, targeting regional organizations and faith-based groups — including local churches, mosques, synagogues and Latino community organizations — to build a broader coalition. They also launched an official website to give the public a direct avenue to contribute.

The initiative had raised more than \$4,000, providing tangible relief on the ground where \$60 is enough to feed one person for an entire month. Having already supplied food to 63 people, the sisters have set their sights on a clear milestone.

"Our goal is to feed 100," the sisters

shared.

For both girls, the work is rooted in a deep moral responsibility. Suraiya frames the project as "very, very important to our hearts" and tied to "our shared sense of everyone's sense of humanity."

To learn more and help Safiya and Suraiya feed more families, visit plateswithoutpolitics.org to connect via Venmo, PayPal or Zelle. According to their website, the founders cover all platform service fees personally so that 100% of public support funds go to grocery purchases.

<https://plateswithoutpolitics.org/>

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.

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.

Live on Top of The Hill Concert Series Ages 18+

Friday, 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+

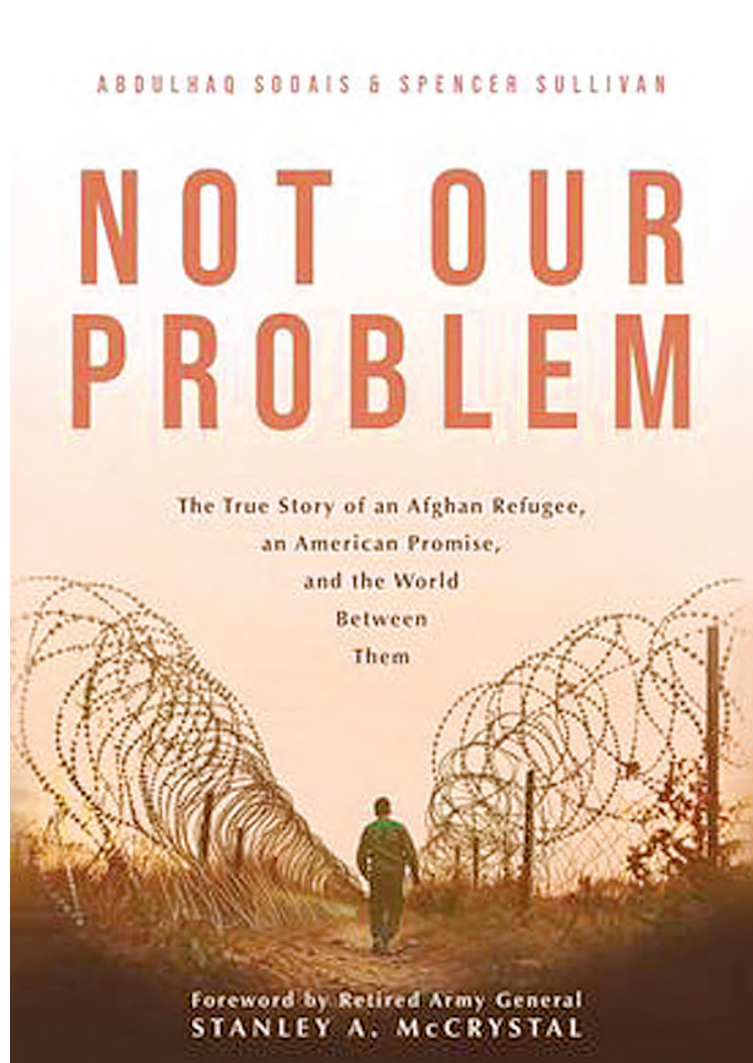
Friday, July 31, 6:30-9 p.m. | William Ramsay Recreation Center Connect, unwind, enjoy games and themed nights, and meet new friends in this casual summer gathering. Explore full details and register at alexandriava.gov/RPCA/Events.

<cal1>Now Thru July 26

<cal2>Story Cloths and the Book: Work by New Image Artists. At the Athenaeum, Alexandria. Artists' Reception: Sunday, June 14, 4 - 6 p.m. In Story Cloths and the Book, New Image Artists explore their relationship with reading, writing, meaning and process by pairing narrative textiles and mixed media with unique artist's books. A story cloth is a textile that contains a narrative that is community oriented, personal or historical in nature. The history of narrative textiles predates the invention of the printing press and books as we think of them today. The broad range of subjects interpreted in this exhibition includes an author of a classic mystery series, individual identity, family histories, the joy of summer and memories of well-loved books.

<cal1>Now Thru Sept. 17

<cal2>Summer Concerts at Carlyle Crossing. 6-8 p.m. At Carlyle Crossing, 2455 Mandeville Lane, Alexandria. Beginning June 11 and continuing through Sept. 17, the free outdoor series will bring an eclectic lineup of local and regional musicians to the plaza on select



Author Spencer Sullivan will speak on Monday, July 27, 2026 at Kingstowne Regional Library.



Tobago Bay Calypso Band will perform on July 23, 2026 at the Summer Concerts at Carlyle Crossing in Alexandria.

Thursday evenings, creating a lively gathering place for residents, visitors, and the surrounding community.

Concert dates:

July 23 – Tobago Bay Calypso Band (Caribbean, Soca Steel Drums)
August 6 – Eric Scott (Modern Soul, Funk & Groove)
August 20 – Seneca Creek (Bluegrass)
September 3 – Femi and the Foundation (Funk, Rock, Hip-Hop, R&B)
September 17 – Sol Roots (Funk, Blues, Soul & Rock)

JULY 2-26

AMERICA 250 Exhibit. At Multiple Exposures Gallery, Torpedo Factory, Studio 7, Alexandria. Multiple Exposures Gallery (MEG) is excited to present AMERICA 250, a fine art photography exhibition exploring the stories, symbols, and spaces that shape our understanding of America. AMERICA 250 features photographs selected by juror Andy Holtin, chair of the Department of Art at American University in Washington, DC.

WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN PHILHARMONIC ASSOCIATION

The Washington Metropolitan Philharmonic Association (WMPA) is proud to present its 36th annual Lyceum Chamber Music Series. Each concert is held on Sunday at 3 p.m. at the Lyceum, 201 S. Washington Street, in Old Town Alexandria. Tickets are not required (suggested donation of \$25). View the full schedule at wmpamusic.org/lyceum.

Keith Wright & Sam Runolfson Concert, Sunday, July 19, 3 p.m. This performance features Keith Wright on flute and Sam Runolfson on cello. Program to be announced.

Maxim Pakhomov Piano Concert, Sunday, July 26, 3 p.m. Join us and listen to the amazing Maxim Pakhomov perform on piano. Program includes Sonata No. 31 in A-flat Major by Ludwig van Beethoven, Scherzo (Op. 54) by Frederic Chopin, Annees De Pelerinage, Sonetto 104 del Petrarca, and Etude Transcendental in F Minor by Ferenc Liszt, and Bachianas Brasileiras No. 4 by Heitor Villa-Lobos.

SATURDAY/JULY 18

“Alexandria's Patriots Remembered.” 10 a.m. At the Old Presbyterian Meeting House, 323 South Fairfax Street, Old Town Alexandria. Alexandria Historical Society Presents “Alexandria's Patriots Remembered: A Revolutionary Walk Through the Old Presbyterian Meeting House.” Presented as part of the Alexandria Historical Society's History Behind the Scenes series and Alexandria's 250th celebration, this tour will explore one of the city's most significant founding era landmarks: the Old Presbyterian Meeting House, its 18th-century burial ground, and the men and women whose lives connected the congregation directly to the American Revolution and the early republic. Tickets are \$25 for non-members and \$20 for Alexandria Historical Society members. Additional information and tickets are available at https://www.alexandriahistoricalsociety.org/events/opmh_tour.

THURSDAY/JULY 23

The Art of the Duo: Tom teasley

WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

ENTERTAINMENT

and Chelle Fulk. 7 p.m. At the Athenaeum, Alexandria. DownBeat described Tom Teasley as having “spent his innovative career interweaving the worlds of jazz and world percussion,” celebrating his duo collaborations and “the surprising places they can lead.” Joined by acclaimed Celtic fiddler Chelle Fulk, Teasley brings that spirit of discovery to a musical conversation where Celtic melodies, world percussion, and jazz improvisation unfold in real time.

THURSDAY/JULY 23

Coffee & Connections 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. At United Way Worldwide, 701 N. Fairfax Street, Alexandria. Sponsored by The Chamber ALX’s Professional Women’s Network. Kick off your morning with the Professional Women’s Network at the July event—featuring coffee,

conversation, and valuable connections with professionals from across the region. Omoiyee O. Kinney, Executive Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer of United Way Worldwide, will share insights from her leadership journey in global marketing and communications.

MONDAY/JULY 27

Author Spencer Sullivan. 7 to 8:30 p.m. At Kingstowne Regional Library, 7130 Silver Lake Blvd., Alexandria. Not Our Problem, a war memoir and refugee story revealed in alternating voices, follows an Afghan refugee and an American soldier across borders and continents, tracing the long distance between a promise and its keeping—interrogating a world in crisis while celebrating how friendship can outlast the war that created it.

SATURDAY/AUG. 1

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.

AUG. 7-29

The ChronoScape: Artistic Explorations of Time Travel. At Del Ray Artisans Gallery, 2704 Mount

Vernon Ave., Alexandria. Art exhibit explores humanity’s enduring fascination with time travel. Join us for an experience that challenges and celebrates the infinite paths of time from ancient worlds to speculative futures. Opening Reception: Friday, August 7, 2026 from 7-9 p.m. Gallery hours are Thursdays 12-6 p.m., Fridays 12-9 p.m., Saturdays & Sundays 12-6 p.m. Details at DelRayArtisans.org/exhibit.

AUG. 14-23

Alexandria Restaurant Week. At restaurants located around Alexandria. Organizers at Visit Alexandria have locked in the calendar but haven’t yet released the details diners plan around — the roster of participating restaurants, this summer’s menus or final pricing. Those arrive a few weeks out, alongside a digital flipbook of menus.

THE BIRCHMERE

At 3701 Mount Vernon Ave., Alexandria. All shows are at 7:30 p.m., unless otherwise noted. Tickets available at Ticketmaster.com. Contact The Birchmere at 703-549-7500 or www.Birchmere.com.

JULY

Thu. 16: Lyfe Jennings \$75.00
Fri. 17: Magical Mystery Doors Presents: Beatles/Zepplin/Doors \$39.50
Sat. 18: The Second City “The Best of The Second City” \$55.00
Sun. 19: An Evening of Conversation with Stewart Copeland \$49.50 SOLD OUT!
Fri. 24: The Australian Bee Gees – A Tribute to The Bee Gees \$45.00
Sat. 25: Marion Meadows & Alex Bugnon \$55.00
Mon. 27: Hindley Street Country Club \$49.50
Fri. 31: Pat McGann \$45.00

Nepenthe Gallery’s New Spot: More Visibility

FROM PAGE 4

grew up, they decided they wanted to manage a community business and after considering several options, settled on an art gallery.

They considered opening a gallery in Washington’s Georgetown or in Old Town Alexandria, but opted to be close to their home in Mount Vernon’s Riverside subdivision. “I like being in the fabric of the community,” she said. “This is a community that appreciates art.”

“We want people to walk in and feel uplifted. Art should not be off putting,” she offered. The gallery’s name, Nepenthe, fittingly means “a place of no sorrow” in Greek.

Almost every Thursday the Garlands host “Art+Wine+Cheese” and the community shows up, from 40 to 100 people who commingle and enjoy art. Some of the Thursday events also feature music or books. They’ve had over 200 of these gatherings since opening.

She credits social media largely with steering artists her way, like Hunt Flonem, a New York City artist. She’s sold 25 of his works and is currently displaying his distinctive rabbits. The smallest one, eight inches by ten inches, goes for \$8,000.

Call to Artists

The Garlands have announced a



Nepenthe’s sign promotes the Thursday night art, wine and cheese events.

“call to artists” for a fall exhibit titled “Alexandria Experience,” original artworks that “reflect the artist’s reverence and/or affection for Alexandria.” Artists do not have to live in Alexandria and can submit one piece of art. Email a digital image to carrie@nepenthegallery.com by Aug. 1.

Carrie and Jim were high school sweethearts at Thomas Edison High School. Jim oversees the gallery’s frame shop which will move to a spot behind the Village Hard-

ware.

They are eager for the community to come in to see more uplifting art.

Nepenthe’s turquoise van in the Hollin Hall Shopping Center is a very familiar, visible reminder of the gallery.



A bright blue sign facing Fort Hunt Road announces the gallery’s move.



BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 7

Aging and Adult Services. Meetings are held the first Wednesday of each month at the Adult Day Services Center, 1108 Jefferson St., 4-5:30 p.m. Participants are full- or part-time caregivers providing care locally or long distance to a family member or friend. Participants share their experiences, provide support for each other and receive resources to assist them with caregiving. The next Caregiver Support Group meeting is June 7. For more information or to register, contact

Jennifer Sarisky at 703-746-9999 or email DAAS@alexandriava.gov.

FACE Center Support Groups provide parents with a space to share their daily parenting frustrations and triumphs while offering new strategies for helping parents to cope, build positive parent-child relationships and best support their children’s learning.

❖ Support Group in English, every Monday, 6-7:30 p.m. at ARHA Main Building, 401 Wythe St.

❖ Support Group in Spanish, every Wednesday, 6-7:30 p.m. at Community Lodgings

Brookside Center, 614 Four Mile Road. Registration not necessary. A light dinner and childcare services provided free. Contact Krishna Leyva at 703-619-8055 or krishna.leyva@acps.k12.va.us for more.

Divorce Workshop for Women. Second Saturday of each month, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. at Hilton Alexandria Old Town, 1767 King St. The workshops are designed to provide education on the legal, financial, family and personal issues of divorce in a logical, yet compassionate way. The workshop fee is \$25. Visit www.novasecondsaturday.com for more.

ONGOING

Robust Walking. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at 9 a.m. at Mount Vernon Recreation Center, 2701 Commonwealth Ave. Free 55+ robust walking 1-hour exercise class (with chair exercise option). No class on holidays. Contact jjkingconsulting@yahoo.com.

Seeking Donations. Computer CORE, which is dedicated to helping low-income adults become computer literate is seeking donations. Visit www.computercore.org/contribute.

Transform Your Bathroom and Change Your Life.

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Virginia Opens \$11M Land & Water Conservation Grants

The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation is now accepting grant applications for parks and outdoor recreation projects through the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

The federal Land and Water Conservation Fund State and Local Assistance Program, or LWCF, is a 50-50% matching reimbursement program for acquiring, developing and rehabilitating park areas. A total of \$11 million is available.

The minimum grant award will be \$150,000 with a total project cost of \$300,000. The maximum grant award amount is \$2.5 million with a maximum total project cost of \$5 million.

Since 1965, nearly \$135 million has been invested in more than 430 projects in Virginia, such as new public parks and improved amenities. All projects must be maintained and kept open as public outdoor recreation areas in perpetuity.

According to the Virginia Outdoors Survey, most Virginians (82%) place a high value on access to outdoor recreation. The most needed outdoor recreation opportunities are natural areas, trails and parks.

Eligible applicants include state agencies, cities, counties, park authorities and federally or state-recognized Indian tribes. Recipients must be able to fund 100% of their project while seeking periodic reimbursements.

Potential applicants can learn more about this funding opportunity and how to navigate the requirements by viewing the Virginia Outdoors Plan. Visit Section 4, which includes an interactive map of recreation resources supported through LWCF across Virginia, at: <https://vop-vdcr.hub.arcgis.com/pages/grants-page>.

An updated program manual, application materials and applicant resources is at <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreation-al-planning/lwcf>.

The deadline for submitting applications is Aug. 27 by 4 p.m. Applications must be emailed to recreationgrants@dc.virginia.gov.

Virginia School Divisions, Municipalities Face 25% Electric Bill Spike

Residential bills are shielded under the new budget, but local tax hikes to cover the public sector could pass some of the burden down to residents.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

On July 1, Virginia's new compromise biennial budget bill, HB 30, took effect, shielding residents from data center infrastructure costs through a \$0.011-per-kWh consumption tax.

But on that exact same day, local school divisions and municipalities face their own fiscal hurdles. The Virginia Association of Counties (VACo) said that public sector, governmental and municipal institutional accounts, not residential consumers, in Dominion Energy territory will experience an overall rate increase of 24.9% beginning on July 1, 2026.

"The overall impact on a particular member will vary depending on their individual rate schedules," the VACo advisory stated. "Members can also expect at least another 12% increase effective July 1, 2027."

The negotiation team for the Virginia Energy Purchasing Governmental Association (VEPGA) agreed in principle to a contract with Dominion Energy for the period July 1, 2026, to June 30, 2028, on behalf of counties, cities, towns, school divisions, and service authorities. The statewide 24.9% spike in electricity bills, could be passed on to residents in part.

Residential customers are insulated from direct grid infrastructure costs via the data center energy consumption tax in HB 30, enacted via Gov. Abigail Spanberger's signature. Following the General Assembly budget vote, Spanberger said, "Virginia will institute a statewide energy consumption tax on data centers — an idea I first proposed this spring — to ensure this industry pays its fair share and does not drive up costs for Virginia families."

However, local taxpayers could still ab-

sorb some of the system's growing costs. Former Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) Chairman Mark Christie, who served on the Virginia State Corporation Commission (SCC), warned that the compromise budget is merely an "offset" that leaves structural problems untouched. Christie said the measure "will do nothing to protect residential consumers from cost-shifting to them for all the new generation and transmission infrastructure needed to serve growing data center demand."

Because the state's budget protection does not extend to the public sector, local governments may be forced to use contingency reserves, alter spending, or raise local taxes to cover the unbudgeted increase.

In Fairfax County and its towns and cities, local leaders are calculating the financial fallout. According to VACo, the spike reflects rising demand for data center infrastructure and shifting service costs hitting public entities at once. For Fairfax County and its public schools — the state's largest school system — the rate hike hits a massive structural footprint, rippling across hundreds of municipal facilities, public safety centers, county offices, school campuses, and administrative buildings.

Smaller municipal operating budgets face immediate pressure to keep the lights on without delaying infrastructure projects. Brent Heavner, chief communications officer for the Town of Herndon, said the VEPGA rate will impact the Town's electricity costs.

"Inflation and fluctuations in input costs affect the Town's budget in much the same way as they impact businesses and households," Heavner said. "Through our annual budget process, departments account for electricity costs alongside other operations and maintenance expenses."

As for capital projects, Heavner said specific impacts "remain to be seen." However, he noted the Town has been proactive through a multi-year energy initiative underway since last year. "These energy efficiency projects at Town facilities are anticipated to help reduce energy use beginning in FY 2027. We expect to estimate and budget these savings starting with the FY 2028 budget cycle."

The City of Fairfax hopes to minimize the financial damage.

"The city is working to improve the energy efficiency of its buildings and has several cost saving measures that help keep costs down and will minimize these impacts," Matthew Kaiser of the City of Fairfax said. "Adjustments will be made to minimize fiscal impacts."

Kaiser added that Fairfax City's new energy manager will focus on tracking and improving energy efficiency throughout the city. "The recently adopted Green Building Policy raises performance standards for municipal buildings. The energy manager will seek ways to optimize building performance starting this fall," he said.

BY CONTRAST, residential rates are regulated by the SCC, which approved a residential base rate increase that took effect Jan. 1, 2026, adding roughly \$11.24 per month to a typical homeowner's bill.

The impact spans municipal boundaries because of how energy is purchased. While the Virginia Municipal League (VML) serves cities and towns and VACo serves counties, the two organizations pooled their collective bargaining power to create VEPGA. By combining forces, they represent over 170 entities — ensuring that counties, cities, towns, and school divisions all purchase under the same contract umbrella.

Looking ahead, VEPGA members are projected to face an additional 12% rate increase on July 1, 2027. Officials noted this projection assumes no further increases in fuel costs or riders, such as the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI). The multiyear, stepped-increase strategy was deliberately designed to reduce immediate rate shock in the first year.

Who You Calling "Sir?"



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Not that I'm anywhere near the age I used to be; nevertheless, I've been hearing a lot of "sirs" spoken in my direction lately. And what makes these utterances even more disturbing is that, generally speaking (no pun intended), the "utterers" all appear to be older than I am. Granted, I am the age that millions of my fellow baby-boomers are who survived their generational challenges: "sex, drugs and rock 'n roll" - and Vietnam so we aren't exactly hard to find and fairly recognizable at that. 'That' being said, with all the familiarity, I would expect that everyone sort of knows one when that see one and figures their age as older than they are. Ergo the "Sir." And since I was born in 1954, I am most definitely a boomer and older than lots of people with whom I interact. But that's what I am, not how I feel/what I perceive. Moreover, I feel this 'sir' isn't me; it's somebody else.

Besides, being addressed as a 'sir' seems misguided. 'Sir' is my late father. A man who was 35 years old when I was born, a World War II veteran (though he never left the states and spent most of his enlistment in Washington, DC), a child during the Depression, son of an immigrant, a successful businessman, ("Barry's Jewelers" in Boston) and of course the father of two boys; me and my late brother, Richard. I'm none of those. 'Those' which are deserving of respect and courtesy and dare I say, "Sir" when there's any doubt.

I'm not even a parent (never was one is what I meant) even though I've welcomed dogs, cats and rabbits into our house as surrogate children, I've never been to war. I may have endured a recession or two, but I've certainly never experienced anything like The Great Depression (any depression I experienced was in my head). Nor did I have a job at 10-years-old like my father did. He was selling concessions at the old Braves Field in Boston where the current Atlanta Braves and former Milwaukee Braves trace their lineage - and their team records. Instead, I played Little League baseball at age 10 and didn't get my first job until the summer after ninth grade when I began working at Baskin 'N Robbins as a rising 10th grader. Compared to my fathers life before age 21. No comparison. Sure, he graduated high school, but nothing more. I graduated from college but didn't start my own business as he eventually did. In addition, he started a family; I got a puppy and a kitten (Tillie and Gus, my first real pets) in Sept. of '75. Started writing a column (even then, junior year of college actually). In summary, I don't believe any of what I've accomplished warrants a "Sir." I don't feel like I look like someone who should be called 'sir' by another person, especially when that other person looks older than me. Yet, I'm regularly "sired." So often by so many older-looking people, that I've begun thinking it all disingenuous.

Sorry. I just got off on a tangent there. I know a "sir" isn't said because of one's accomplishments. At the very least, it's a sign of respect when speaking to someone (better safe than disrespectful) presumably older than you. And I imagine the 'sirs' I've received are in the safe-than-sorry category. Still, I've taken it personally - and not in a good way. Nobody knows me from Adam, but he must be receiving "sirs" because I certainly get them and I'm not him. I can't say that being on the receiving end of a "sir" ruins my day, but it does upset my appletart, and I don't even own one.

The question remains why am I so sensitive? I should be more grateful that I'm being treated so courteously and respectfully. But for some reason, my self-image seems to be caught up in these arbitrary 'sir' greetings. I can shake them off easily enough at the time, but I suppose I don't want to feel older than my actual age - since I'm not getting any younger. As such, any action/reaction that makes me feel older is unwelcome and certainly unappreciated. I realize there's minimal intent in these random greetings. Still, the 'sir' seems like it should be said to somebody else - someone older than me.

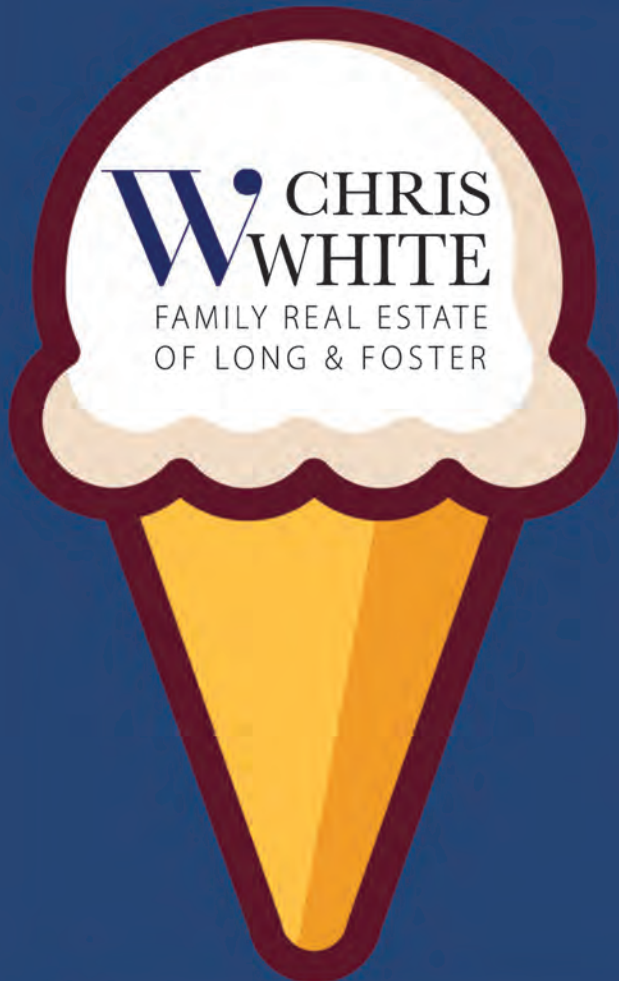
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