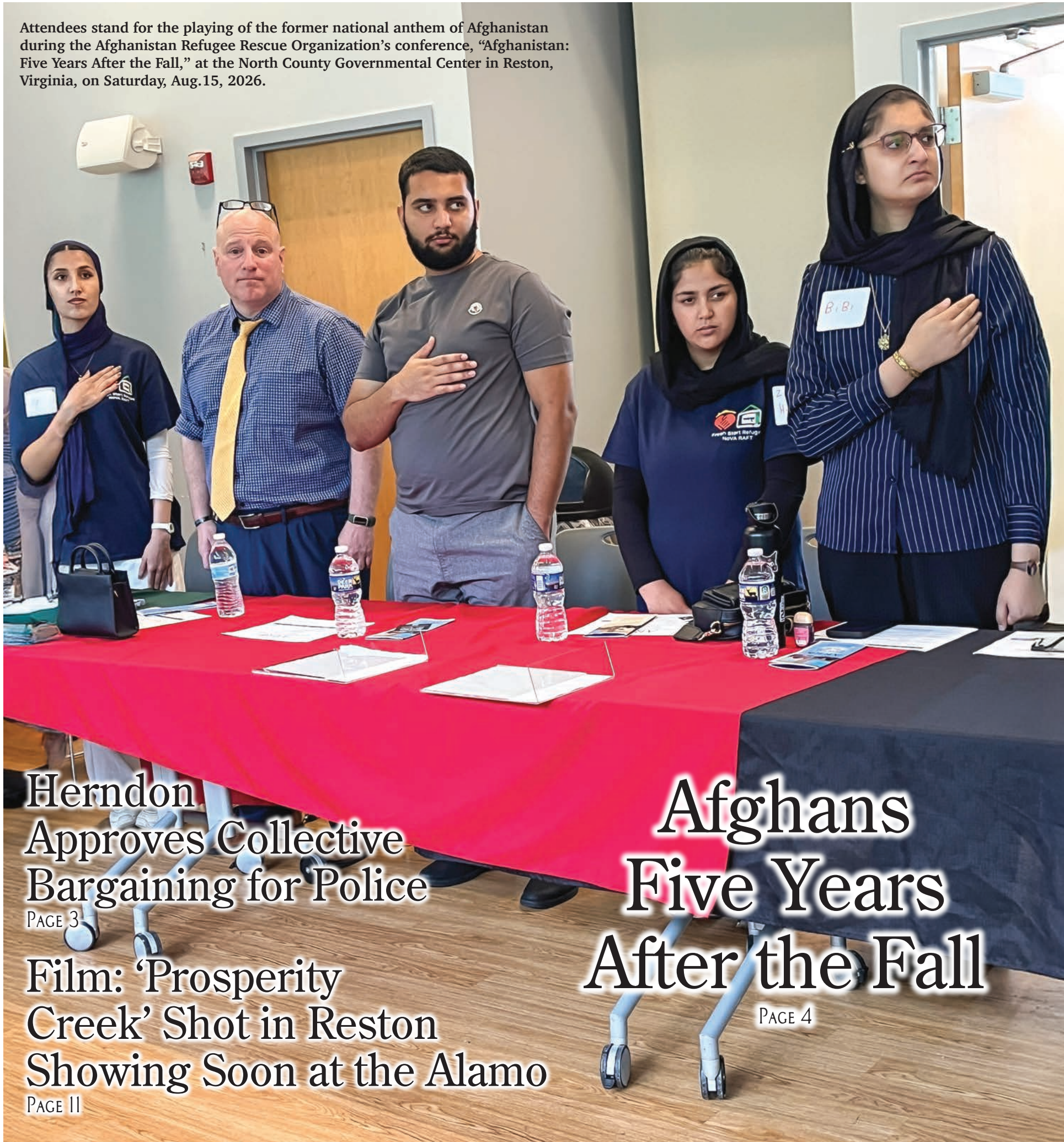


THE CONNECTION

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

Attendees stand for the playing of the former national anthem of Afghanistan during the Afghanistan Refugee Rescue Organization's conference, "Afghanistan: Five Years After the Fall," at the North County Governmental Center in Reston, Virginia, on Saturday, Aug. 15, 2026.



Herndon Approves Collective Bargaining for Police
PAGE 3

Film: 'Prosperity Creek' Shot in Reston Showing Soon at the Alamo
PAGE 11

Afghans Five Years After the Fall
PAGE 4

OPINION, PAGE 6 ♦ ENTERTAINMENT, PAGE 12 ♦ CLASSIFIEDS, PAGE 14

PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION



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
ORANGE	13035	675	DOLLEY MADISON ROAD	NORFOLK SOUTHERN RAILWAY	7/28/2026
LEE	10857	640N	ROUTE 0640	SHAFFER CREEK	7/27/2026
CAROLINE	4483	647	REEDY MILL ROAD	MATTAPONI RIVER	7/27/2026
TAZEWELL	18654	693E	ROUTE 693	CLINCH RIVER	7/16/2026
WISE	19475	748E	CUB HOLLOW ROAD	DOTSON FORK	7/8/2026
AMHERST	1417	610	PUPPY CREEK ROAD	HORSELEYS CREEK	7/8/2026

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.

NEWS

Woman Found Dead in Parking Area Leading to Local Trails

Fairfax County Police seek witnesses and camera footage.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Lizet Puch, 42, of Reston, and she was pronounced dead at the scene.

Fairfax County police are investigating the fatal stabbing of an adult woman who was found near the Great Falls and McLean border the morning of Aug. 17.

Detectives from FCPS Major Crimes Bureau are investigating a homicide that occurred in the parking lot of Difficult Run Park in the 8800 block of Georgetown Pike in Great Falls, according to Capt. Jason Chandler, commander of the Public Affairs Bureau during a news briefing at the scene.

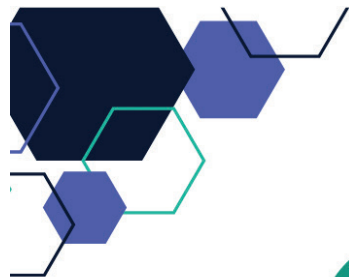
On Sunday, Aug. 17, just before 7 a.m., officers responded to the park for the report of an unconscious woman lying in the parking lot near a 2011 Honda Civic. Responding officers observed trauma to the woman's upper body. The victim was identified as Carmen

Homicide and Crime Scene detectives responded to assume the investigation. They determined the 2011 Honda Civic was registered to the victim.

A community member arriving for a morning run discovered the body near a vehicle registered to the victim. Detectives are canvassing the neighborhood for witness accounts and video footage. Police are specifically asking community members for surveillance camera feeds.

An autopsy will be conducted by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner to determine the victim's cause and manner of death.

Detectives ask anyone with information regarding this incident to call our Major Crimes Bureau through Crime Solvers at 1-866-411 TIPS (866-411-8477)



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Herndon Approves Police Collective Bargaining

Ordinance approved for collective bargaining with its sworn police officers.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

In a 6-0 vote with one member absent, the Herndon Town Council passed Ordinance 26-O-20 to amend Chapter 54 (PERSONNEL) of the Code of the Town of Herndon to add a new Article VIII, entitled Collective Bargaining during an Aug. 11 special meeting.

The ordinance authorizes collective bargaining with its sworn police officers over wages and pay scales. By acting ahead of its state-mandated Aug. 20 deadline, Herndon became both the smallest municipality and the very first incorporated town in Virginia to exercise the option under a 2020 state law.

On April 22, 2026, the Southern States Police Benevolent Association submitted a formal petition and proposed ordinance to the Town of Herndon on behalf of town employees. Under the 2020 state law's 120-day clock, the Herndon Town Council was mandated to vote to either adopt or reject the ordinance on or before Aug. 20.

Supporters and councilmembers cited officer recruitment, retention, and budget predictability as primary drivers. During public comments, Detective John Wallace of the Herndon Police Department urged adoption to build a strong partnership between the town and police department.

Steve Monahan, president of the Fairfax County chapter of the Southern States Police Benevolent Association, added that the ordinance creates a negotiation framework. "Collective bargaining doesn't have to create an adversarial relationship between the police union and the town ... It simply creates a process for the town, police leadership, and employees to sit down and negotiate in good faith and find solutions together," Monahan said.

Town Attorney Leasa Yates clarified that the vote fulfilled state legal requirements following a majority-signed petition from Herndon Police Department (HPD) employees.

Council members highlighted regional competitiveness and collaborative governance during discussion.

Mayor Keven J. LeBlanc, Jr.,



PHOTOS TOWN OF HERNDON VIDEO GRAB

Herndon Police Department officers and others await the start of a special Town Council meeting in Herndon on Tuesday, Aug. 11, 2026.

attending remotely, framed the decision as a balanced effort to support officers while protecting town interests. After the vote, he thanked staff and council for their diligence, praising the "collaborative spirit" and deep trust between HPD, town leadership, and the community.

Councilmember Kelvin Garcia, drawing on his background as a former D.C. police officer, stressed the urgency of retaining experienced talent rather than losing personnel to neighboring jurisdictions. He said the ordinance was "very much needed."

Councilmember Cesar del Aguila commended Herndon for taking a "proactive leadership role" on municipal labor relations, regardless of what happens in the General Assembly or in neighboring localities.

Vice Mayor Clark Hedrick expressed optimism that improving officers' work lives would enhance



A sworn officer with the Herndon Police Department patrols the town prior to Herndon becoming the smallest municipality in Virginia to adopt a collective bargaining ordinance for its sworn officers.

Prince William County (approved November 2022), the City of Alexandria (approved April 2021), and Arlington County (approved July 2021). Conversely, regional jurisdictions that have not authorized collective bargaining for their police or sheriff personnel include Loudoun County, the Town of Leesburg, the Town of Vienna, and the City of Fairfax.

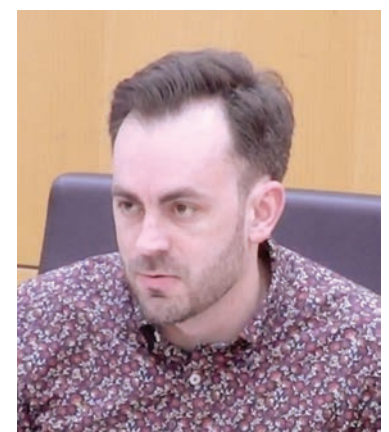
In a comment to The Connection Newspapers after the vote, Mayor LeBlanc said that the town is "now the smallest municipality in Virginia to adopt a collective bargaining ordinance." While Alexandria was the first city in Virginia to pass an ordinance in 2021, Herndon is the

smallest municipality — and the first small incorporated town — in the Commonwealth to pass its own local collective bargaining ordinance under the 2020 state law.

State Legal Shift Sets Backdrop for Local Labor Decisions

Councilmember Cesar del Aguila's statement—praising Herndon's "proactive leadership role" on municipal labor relations regardless of state action or neighboring moves—highlights two distinct legislative dynamics in Virginia.

In the Virginia General Assembly, a significant legal shift took root in 2020. For decades, Virginia strictly prohibited public-sector collective bargaining. That changed when state lawmakers passed enabling legislation (effective May 2021) allowing—but not requiring—locali-



Herndon Town Council Vice Chair Clark Hedrick officiates a special meeting of the council on Tuesday, Aug. 11, saying he is "sincerely hopeful" the ordinance improves quality of life.

ties to pass individual ordinances authorizing collective bargaining for public employees.

During the 2026 Virginia General Assembly session, Delegate Kathy Tran (D-18th District) introduced House Bill 1263 to repeal the state prohibition entirely and establish a mandatory statewide unionization framework.

Though HB 1263 passed both legislative chambers and was enrolled, Governor Abigail Spanberger (D) returned it with amendments to delay rollout until Jan. 1, 2030, and protect local budget flexibility. After the General Assembly rejected her revisions, Governor Spanberger vetoed HB 1263 on May 14, 2026. Her veto leaves Virginia's opt-in system active, requiring local municipalities like Herndon to enact their own local ordinances.

Herndon became both the smallest municipality and the very first incorporated town in Virginia to exercise the option for collective bargaining.

overall town services and quality of life, saying he was "optimistic and sincerely hopeful" the ordinance would "improve life for everyone."

Across Northern Virginia, collective bargaining for sworn law enforcement is active in Fairfax County (approved October 2021),

Five Years After the Fall of Kabul

Refugees, former allies, educators and advocates navigate the ongoing human cost locally.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

On Aug. 15, 2026, the Afghanistan Refugee Rescue Organization (ARRO-USA) hosted a conference titled “Remembrance, Truth, Solidarity and Action” at the North County Governmental Center in Reston. The event — one of several held nationwide on the fifth anniversary of the fall of Kabul — brought together evacuees, local officials, and advocates to confront ongoing resettlement hurdles following emergency airlifts to nearby Dulles International Airport.

The conference mixed gratitude with frustration. Afghan diplomats, educators, and service providers praised the welcome they received in Northern Virginia, but warned that failed federal programs, short-term funding, and deep language and literacy gaps have left many families stuck in legal and economic limbo long after the last planes left Kabul.

Broken Promises and Evacuation Gaps

“[The] American people opened their hearts and doors for us,” said Abdullah, who identified himself as a former Afghan diplomat from the northern parts of Afghanistan. He expressed his gratitude but also spoke candidly about the collapse of his home province and the sudden loss of support. “One of the things that I never forget was the fall of my province. I cried for almost 30 to 35 minutes because everything we had achieved ... was evaporating in just a moment.”

Abdullah warned that the collapse taught Afghans a hard lesson about international commitments: “When you open your eyes, the people who promised you for 20 years that ‘we will stand behind you’... they will be gone.”

Addressing the failures of existing pathways, Shawn VanDiver, founder and president of AfghanEvac, called for replacing ad-hoc evacuations with a standing, conflict-agnostic “mission partners” system that would begin tracking and vetting local allies as soon as they work with the United States or coalition forces. “The SIV program has been a failure. The refugee program has been a failure,” VanDiver said. “All of this has been a failure that was working until it got shut off, and we need to take this opportunity to refine.”

Compounded Educational Barriers

Beyond emergency evacuations, basic integration remains steep. Under Taliban rule, female education above sixth grade remains banned — a reality that UN Secretary-General António Guterres has repeatedly noted in official statements. Afghanistan stands alone as the only country in the world to bar girls from secondary and higher education, he says..

“Women are banned from everywhere — from home, from school, from work, from

SEE FIVE YEARS AFTER, PAGE 15



Speakers, panelists, partners, and organizing team members gather for a group photo at the conclusion of the Afghanistan Refugee Rescue Organization-USA conference in Reston, Virginia, on Saturday, Aug. 15, 2026.



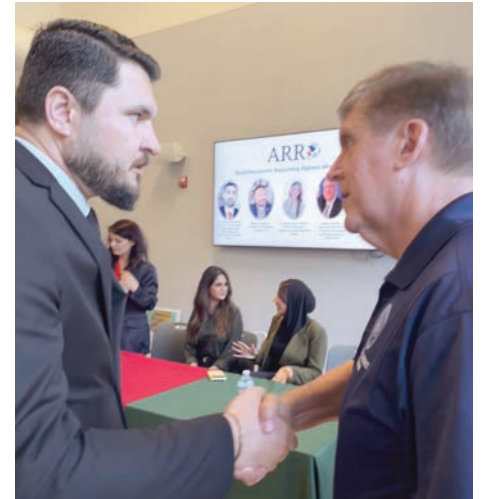
PHOTO FACEBOOK

Before the start of the Afghanistan Refugee Rescue Organization-USA conference at the North County Governmental Center in Reston, Virginia, on Saturday, Aug. 15, 2026.



PHOTOS BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

Attendees listen to a presentation during the Afghanistan Refugee Rescue Organization-USA conference at the North County Governmental Center in Reston, Virginia, on Saturday, Aug. 15, 2026.



Mohammad Iqbal Najm (left) shakes hands with Fairfax County Supervisor Walter Alcorn (D-Hunter Mill) following the ARRO-USA conference in Reston, Virginia, on Saturday, Aug. 15, 2026. Alcorn told Najm, “Tell me what I can do to help.”

By the Numbers

Afghan Resettlement Locally

Fairfax County as a Hub
❖ Role: Regional hub for Afghan resettlement in the Washington metro area.

Education Snapshot

Alexandria City Public Schools:
About 1,300 Afghan students, according to Daniel Altman.
Roughly 300 Afghan teens concentrated at a single high school.

Late SIV arrivals:

The “very last SIV family” arrived in December 2025.
16-year-old daughter had never attended school a single day before arriving in Northern Virginia.

Economic and Housing Pressures

❖ Initial resettlement support: Federal stipends typically last 30–90 days.
❖ Rents: Market-rate apartments in Fairfax County frequently exceed \$2,000 per month, leaving nonprofits and local governments to fill long-term gaps.

Systemic Gaps Highlighted at the Conference

❖ Visa Pathways: The Special Immigrant Visa and refugee programs have been “a failure,” said AfghanEvac founder Shawn VanDiver, who called for a permanent “mission partners” system.

❖ Language & Literacy:
❖ Women expected to learn English in 6–12-month programs and manage official correspondence “need much more” time and support, said Dr. Susan Antolin.

* Some teens approach graduation without the ability to read and write, Altman warned.

WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM



Almost Queen members John Cappadona (drums), Randy Gregg (bass), Joe Russo (lead vocals/piano), and Steve Leonrard (lead guitar).

Almost Queen, Reston Town Center, Saturday, Aug. 22

Almost Queen this Saturday, Aug. 22, at the Pavilion, 7:45pm concert start. Sip & Stroll event (begins 6:30pm). FREE and open for all ages. “Guaranteed to blow your mind” with iconic four-part harmonies, impeccable attention to detail, genuine costumes, and an authentic sound that leaves music fans of all ages with an unforgettable concert memory. This is the complete Queen experience, with everything from Bohemian Rhapsody to Radio Ga Ga to We Are the Champions.

More music to come at RTC: Second an-

nual Rocktoberfest Saturday, Oct. 10, at the Pavilion, 6pm start, with headliner Vertical Horizon and opens Everything and Virginia Coalition.

Oct. 24, inaugural DJ Dance Party where three in-demand DJs will turn the Pavilion into a giant dance floor.

All of these events are Sip & Stroll, where patrons can purchase beverages of choice from eleven participating establishments surrounding the concert venue (the Pavilion at Reston Town Center). Free all-day/night parking in Reston Town Center’s garages.



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OPINION

Back to School Costs More This Year. That Was a Choice

Chaotic tariffs are sticking Fairfax families with the bill.

BY CONGRESSMAN
JAMES R. WALKINSHAW

There is something special about the first day of school.

Whether it is a kindergarten walking into a classroom for the first time, or a teenager heading into another year of high school, thinking about college, a first job, or finally getting behind the wheel.

The milestones change, but the rituals are familiar.

A new backpack. Fresh notebooks and pencils. The first-day outfit laid out the night before. A hurried cup of coffee while packing lunch and getting everyone out the door on time.

My son starts kindergarten this year, so I know that excitement firsthand. There is pride in watching your child grow up, mixed with the realization that it is all happening too fast.

Across Fairfax, families are getting ready for those exciting moments when schools reopen on August 24.

But this year, there is another moment many parents will recognize: taking a second look at the sales receipt.

According to an analysis by Groundwork Collaborative, families are paying nearly 8 percent

more to stock a backpack than they did last year. Notebooks are up 23 percent. Lunchboxes are up nearly 27 percent. And families packing lunches could spend almost \$400 more per child over the course of the school year.

Parents will still zip up the backpack, take the picture, and send their kids off with a smile. But behind that smile, plenty of parents are already figuring out where else they can cut back.

What can wait until next month? Can we cut something from the grocery cart? Put off a purchase? Carry a balance on the credit card?

Back-to-school shopping is exposing a bigger problem: everyday life has become too expensive for too many families.

And President Trump's economic agenda is why families are getting sticker shock. An analysis by Joint Economic Committee Democrats found that since he took office, the average Virginia household has spent more than \$2,900 extra on goods and services.

Trump's chaotic tariffs are sticking Fairfax families with the bill. His trade policies are making the shoes, clothes, school supplies and

electronics parents are buying right now more expensive. Trump may set the tariffs from the Oval Office, but Fairfax families are paying the price at the checkout counter.

I voted earlier this year to end Trump's tariffs on Canada, and I'll keep pressing Congress to take back its say over trade.

Another round of tariffs expired last month because Congress never extended them. Almost immediately, the Trump administration imposed new ones under a different law. That is not how this is supposed to work. No president should have unchecked power to keep raising prices in the school supply aisle.

Families are also still feeling the consequences of the so-called "Big Beautiful Bill" Trump and congressional Republicans enacted last year. The law cut food assistance, and analysts project that as many as 18.3 million students nationwide could lose access to free school meals as a result of the SNAP changes. At a moment when parents are already paying more to pack a lunch, Washington should not be making it harder for children to get one at school.

President Trump and congressional Republicans made these choices. We can choose differently.

That's why I'm a cosponsor of the Restoring Food Security for American Families and Farmers Act, which would repeal those food assistance cuts and protect school meals for children.

I'm also a cosponsor of both the Child Care for Working Families Act to bring down one of the biggest expenses parents face and the American Family Act to expand the Child Tax Credit, so families have more room each month for groceries, clothes, child care and everything else that comes with raising a child.

For Fairfax families who need help today, Fairfax County Public Schools is accepting applications for free and reduced-price meals throughout the school year at fcps.edu/frm. Students who qualify can receive breakfast and lunch at no cost.

On August 24, parents across Fairfax will snap one more picture, hand over a lunchbox, and watch their children head off to begin a new school year.

We will smile because they are excited, and because these moments pass too quickly.

But parents should not have to hide financial stress behind that first-day smile.

Fairfax families are paying the price at the checkout counter.

Forgotten Founder of Freedom

BY PAUL GILBERT

George Washington and George Mason were from Fairfax County; Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry were from Virginia. But there was another local founder who was forgotten to time. On Aug. 1, 1791, just 8 years after the American Revolution ended, Robert Carter III began emancipating over 500 enslaved people, because he believed the words "all people are created equal," and acted on them.

This story based in Fairfax County lay largely forgotten for over 200 years. While the founders of our democracy had revolutionary ideas, when Carter took the step of acting on them he was largely ostracized and excluded from history.

The descendants of those eman-

cipated remembered what happened and kept the story alive from one generation to the next. But to the outside world, the largest emancipation prior to the Civil War was forgotten. That changed in 2022, when Paul McCray, a historian with NOVA Parks, began researching what had happened at Bull Run Regional Park in Centreville centuries ago. Eventually, the story unfolded as one lead led to another, and the picture expanded further when he connected with Chrystal Gaskins, a descendant of those emancipated by Carter and the keeper of the family history. The story of this site is now documented, and for the last five years the Fairfax NAACP and NOVA Parks have held Juneteenth celebrations at the site.

Carter was one of the richest SEE FORGOTTEN FOUNDER, PAGE 7



Doretha Spriggs, Paul Gilbert, and Chrystal Gaskins. Doretha and Chrystal are cousins and descendants of the 500+ emancipated in 1791. skins, The three are standing in the cemetery where 103 graves were found.

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Published by
Local Media Connection LLC

1606 King Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

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NEWS

Coach Charged with Embezzlement, Computer Fraud

Fairfax County police have charged a soccer coach with multiple counts of embezzlement and computer fraud. He is Ahmed Mohamed, 31, of Fair Oaks. Police arrested him in late June but didn't make it publicly known until July 14.

They said that, on June 25, detectives received information about him through the police department's Financial Crimes Online Reporting (FiCOR) system. As a result, they were able to identify 13 separate victims of an alleged scam involving promised international soccer camps. Authorities say each victim reportedly lost between \$2,000 and \$12,000.

According to police, "After a thorough investigation, detectives determined that Mohamed had [allegedly] conducted a scam by virtue of his employment with the Alexandria Soccer Association, through which he targeted some of his victims. Current losses among known victims are estimated at nearly \$60,000.

"Mohamed had created the Sporting Soccer Acade-



Mohamed.

my in December 2025 and targeted victims with advertisements of a travel summer camp in Italy. Mohamed [reportedly] collected money from victims under the false pretense of promised travel, camp arrangements and lodging."

Police arrested him June 30 in the 4100 block of Monument Court in Fair Oaks. He was then taken to the Fairfax County Adult Detention Center, where Financial Crimes detectives charged him with 13 counts each of embezzlement and computer fraud. He was later released on his own recognizance and has a Sept. 2 court date.

Meanwhile, police are asking anyone with information about this case to call its Financial Crimes Unit at 703-246-3533 or email FCPD-FiCOR@fairfaxcounty.gov. People may also contact Crime Solvers at 1-866-411-TIPS (866-411-8477).

- BONNIE HOBBS

Forgotten Founder of Freedom

FROM PAGE 5

people in America. As a youth he had been in a musical group with a young Thomas Jefferson, he knew Washington and Mason, and through marriage he was related to the Fairfax and Lee families. His name should be known at least as well as the others.

In 1775, he created the Baptist Meeting House in what is today Bull Run Regional Park. He encouraged everyone who worked for him, black and white, free and enslaved, to worship there. That church continued in operation until the 1820s, and while the wooden church is gone, those buried in the cemetery around the church are a key part of the evidence of what happened there. While the cemetery was mostly occupied by the enslaved, Carter buried his son in an unmarked grave in the same cemetery. Most of the graves there are unmarked because Carter believed in humility. He himself is buried in an unmarked grave at a different site.

By 1789, Carter wrote that he

was hoping a law would be passed freeing the enslaved. When that didn't happen, he wrote on Aug. 1, 1791, "I have for some time past been convinced that to retain them in Slavery is contrary to the true Principles of Religion and Justice, and that therefor it was my Duty to manumit [free] them." With that he set about freeing over 500 people over a few years, starting with the oldest. In addition, he helped the emancipated start new lives. He leased and sold land to them and helped them set up businesses. The area around the church at Bull Run became a thriving freeman's community. As the story was uncovered, NOVA Parks did ground penetrating radar and found 103 graves at this site, which speaks to the size of this community. "It has been so wonderful to see our family story lifted and shared with the world. I am grateful for all that NOVA Parks, and the Fairfax NAACP have done," remarked Chrystal Gaskins.

Research on this site is ongoing, as are improvements like the on-

line self-guided tour created this year by Girl Scout Camdyn Parker. The Religious Affairs Committee of the Fairfax NAACP have taken on the mission of promoting this site and story, and since Carter's motivation was based on his religious beliefs, many faith groups of all kinds have toured the site and reflected on what it means to live by their beliefs.

As we mark the 250th anniversary of our experiment with democracy, let's remember both the aspirational ideas of freedom and democracy, as well as the brave and bold actions of Robert Carter III and others in our history who have set the example for us to follow. This story of freedom and justice, based right here in Fairfax County, should be as well-known as any other from our founding.

Paul Gilbert was the Executive Director of NOVA Parks from 2005 to 2025. In 2022 Gilbert received the Freedom Fund Award from the Fairfax Branch of the NAACP for his work to tell diverse history in the parks.

BULLETIN BOARD

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

VOLUNTEER DRIVERS NEEDED

Have some extra time to drive a neighbor to a doctor's appointment? You pick the days, times,

and places that are convenient for you. There is no minimum driving requirement. Not only do you help older adults in need, you also get to meet wonderful folks, often with very interesting backgrounds and stories to tell. The Shepherd's Center of McLean-Arlington-Falls Church (SCMAFC), is an all-volunteer, non-sectarian, non-profit organization. Its mission is providing free transportation to seniors for medical and dental appointments or run errands to grocery stores

and pharmacies. Visit the website at <https://scmafc.org/> volunteer, or email contact@scmafc.org.

SUPPORT GROUPS

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

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High School Students Design an Open-Source Model for Alzheimer's Support

Nonprofit uses zero-dollar tech stack; expands to 30 chapters globally.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

PHOTOS COURTESY OF EVRYMEMORY

High school volunteer initiatives usually die at graduation. A passionate founder spends hundreds of hours organizing events, only for the organization to collapse when they leave for college.

EvryMemory shows how high school students can build a sustainable, low-cost nonprofit bringing comfort to people living with Alzheimer's and dementia through a two-minute application, mentoring, free playbooks, email templates, and volunteer tracking. Importantly, this model can be reimaged for other causes.



Moutki Yeruva, a rising senior at Chantilly High School, is president and founder of the nonprofit EvryMemory, which focuses on mobilizing high school students to provide brain-stimulating activities, companionship and support to patients living with Alzheimer's and dementia.

"If you start a nonprofit thinking, 'Oh, it's for the résumé ... I'm just doing it to look good in the moment,' it is going to be mentally taxing and difficult to do," said founder Moutika Yeruva.

Yeruva solved that bottleneck early. She founded EvryMemory as a sophomore at Chantilly High School to support Alzheimer's patients, families and caretakers. Joined by Vice President Marissa Turek, an Oakton High School student, the 17-year-olds engineered a decentralized, zero-cost framework designed to outlast its creators.



Marissa Turek of Oakton High is vice president of EvryMemory, supporting students leading activities and projects with memory care residents into a growing network of teen-led chapters around the world.

EvryMemory scales globally through an open-source franchise model powered by a zero-dollar tech stack. Rather than paying for enterprise software, the nonprofit uses free consumer platforms to cut overhead and administra-



EvryMemory chapters span 15+ states and multiple countries. Each week, student volunteers visit care facilities to lead arts sessions, music activities, and reminiscence programs that bring consistent, meaningful engagement to residents.

tive friction.

Recruitment relies on Instagram and Facebook outreach, where prospective chapter leaders submit a two-minute form. Leadership conducts interviews to vet candidates.

"We're working with real people, real residents ... we need someone who is sociable, empathetic, and very driven," Yeruva said. Approved leaders receive one-on-one mentorship, standardized playbooks, and outreach scripts.

Chapters run autonomously without centralized software fees. Local groups rely on existing school platforms, such as Fairfax County, Virginia, where public schools use x2VOL to track volunteer hours.

Turek said social media drives volunteer acquisition, eliminating the need for traditional recruitment campaigns.

"Since a lot of teenagers like to use social media, I think it's a great way to outreach, and that's how we get most of our volunteers," Turek said.

Their drive stems from personal experience: Yeruva's great-grandmother and Turek's grandfather both battled Alzheimer's. During an early visit to Chantilly Heights Memory Care, a resident tearfully grabbed a volunteer's hand to thank them, a moment underscoring the acute need for connection in understaffed facilities.

"Just the fact that someone is there to talk to them and have a personal connection with them was so important," Yeruva said.

That impact has scaled across 30 chapters globally. Beyond facility visits, a recent charity volleyball tournament raised over \$1,000 for "memory kits" with cognitive guidebooks and sensory tools.

Expanding into India, Bangladesh, and Japan—where nursing care is less common than

— START A CHAPTER

Bring EvryMemory to *your* community.

Our chapters are founded and led by high school students within their own communities. If EvryMemory does not yet exist in your area, we encourage you to take the first step.

- 01 Apply** Complete the interest form and share your vision for your local chapter.
- 02 Connect** We will pair you with a mentor from an established chapter to guide you through the process.
- 03 Launch** Using our provided resources and frameworks, plan and run your first community event.
- 04 Grow** Recruit volunteers, establish facility partnerships, and build a chapter that creates lasting impact.

Starting a chapter is not daunting using the EvryMemory model.

in the U.S.—the team adapts its model to provide hospital caregiving kits directly to families, tackling patient isolation and stigma.

To ensure continuity, Yeruva and Turek promote top-performing chapter leaders to a national board, handing authority to younger students who will steer the organization when they leave for college.

Both teenagers view EvryMemory as more than a high school project. Yeruva plans to pursue medicine and Turek public health, carrying these lessons into their future careers.

"It truly brings me joy to see how my work and my effort has actually paid off into the real world," Yeruva said.

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TOPSoccer Volunteer Finds Inspiration as Head Coach

Adapting to young athletes' needs reshapes a high school senior's leadership style.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

For six years, Rohan Kapil, a rising senior at Westfield High School in Chantilly, has dedicated his weekends to TOPSoccer, an adaptive soccer program managed by the Great Falls Reston Soccer Club. His support earned him a nomination for the 2025 "Buddy of the Year" award.

TOPSoccer is a community-based program designed for athletes ages 6 to 18 with physical, developmental or intellectual disabilities, bringing the enjoyment of playing soccer to young athletes of all abilities. The program is free for participants and includes seven weekly training sessions and an official GFR jersey.

After three years as a volunteer buddy, Kapil stepped into a leadership role as head coach, a position he has held for the past three years. Every week, he designs adaptive drills, leads one-on-one sessions to build teamwork, and trains and manages individual volunteers.

Working directly with these young athletes has reshaped Kapil's approach to leadership. Adapting on the spot taught him that "each kid needs something different," an insight he says now shapes his entire life.

Kapil called the nomination by Great Falls Reston Soccer "a huge honor," even without a win.

"Rohan has created a welcoming community where every athlete has the opportunity to play," said Erin Bonk. "My son has participated for several years, and Rohan has always made him feel supported and valued."

As Kapil prepares to head to college next fall, he is focused on training the club's next generation of volunteer leaders to ensure the program's seamless transition and continued success.

Registration for athletes opens on the GFR Soccer Club website before each season, early summer for fall and winter for spring. High school students looking for leadership roles or community service hours can apply to be peer buddies or youth coaches.

<https://www.gfrsoccerclub.org/topsoccer>

Head coach Rohan Kapil, back row, center, gathers with athletes and volunteers following a TOPSoccer session.

PHOTOS
CONTRIBUTED



Athletes and volunteer buddies run through drills during a TOPSoccer practice at Great Falls Reston Soccer Club.



Local WWII Veteran Celebrates 101st Birthday

A model of courage, resilience and service to others.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Romuald “Rom” Lipinski has lived a remarkable life – from his 1925 birth in Poland to his teens in Siberia to fighting in the Polish Army in Italy during WWII. He later became a civil engineer, moved to America, married and raised a family, never stopped learning and passed on his knowledge to others.

And on July 25 – still sharp as a tack – he celebrated his 101st birthday with his children and friends at Brightview Senior Living in the Centreville area, where he’s a resident. The festivities included Polish pierogies, birthday cake and entertainment by the Wiślanie Polish Folk Song and Dance Ensemble that first performed for him on his 97th birthday.

Afterward, he and his daughters, Eva Lipinski and Yolanda Hipski, told The Connection about his life. (His son Adam had already left).

When war broke out in September 1939, both the Germans and Russians invaded Poland. Rom was 13 then and his future wife, Izabela, was 9, but they didn’t meet until both were adults. And in the early 1940s, the invaders deported both their families to Siberia.

Then in late 1944, the British government helped the Polish people leave there. Izabela went to a refugee camp in Africa for five years, and teenaged Rom joined the free Polish Army – a branch of the British Army. An infantryman, he and his unit went to Sicily and then up through Italy to Rome.

Along the way, Rom Lipinski, then 19, fought in the historic Battle of Monte Cassino – one of the toughest and most significant campaigns of World War II. Monte Cassino was an Italian monastery occupied by the Germans on a high, rugged mountain. The Allies fought them there from Jan. 17 to May 18, 1944, and the resulting Allied victory opened the road enabling them to reach Rome.

Rom was in the 12th Podolski Lancers Regiment from the 3rd Infantry Division, at Monte Cassino



Director of Assisted Living Belinda Griffin and Rom Lipinski enjoying the entertainment together.



Rom Lipinski in 1944 or '45.

from April 30 to May 23, 1944. Finally, on the morning of May 18, 1944, a patrol from this regiment planted its pennant and the Polish flag on the ruins of the Monte Cassino monastery. Before then, however, came fierce fighting.

“The first patrol at Monte Cassino was from my regiment,” said Rom. “We did reconnaissance to find out where the German artillery and soldiers were. Everybody was scared; I was thinking about survival. These memories never leave me. But I considered it my duty to serve. I still keep in touch with the Polish regimental office in Poland.”

After the war ended and he was discharged from the Army, he resettled in England, attending the University of London to continue his education. “That was a feat in itself because, first, he had to learn English,” said Eva Lipinski. “He speaks five languages – Italian, French, Russian, Polish and English.”

“He literally fought for his education,” added Hipski. “He went to ninth and 10th grade in high school; and when he was fighting in Italy, he would take the test to place out of one grade level to another while wearing his battlefield gear. His high school wasn’t as thorough as it should have been. And when he got to college, he had to fight extra hard to get in.”

“Then he had to translate everything from English to Polish, understand those concepts in his mind and then translate them back from Polish to English. Later, he taught us that you go for your education. He’d say, ‘They can take everything away from you, but they can’t take your mind.’ And that’s what he conveyed to us and what I



This photo of Lipinski was taken a few years ago.

conveyed to my child.”

While he was in England, in November 1951, “There was a big rally in Manchester, England, and I went there to see my brother,” said Rom Lipinski. “We went to a dance, and I saw this beauty, and there was a spark between us. She came to our table and we hit it off, right away. After many years of marriage, she told me that, after our second meeting, she went home and started writing, ‘Izabela Lipinski.’”

However, her family had already applied for visas to move to America – which they did, two months later, in January 1952. Many letters and a long-distance courtship followed; and later that year, Izabela returned to England to marry him. Then in December 1953, they moved to America, settling in Perth Amboy, N.J., where Rom continued his studies. In 1961, he received a master’s degree from Newark College of Engineering and became a civil engineer.

“My first job was as a draftsman and designer for a company,” he said. “It paid \$56/week.” In 1965, he and his family moved to An-



Rom Lipinski with daughters (from left) Eva Lipinski and Yolanda Hipski.



Both children and adults performed for the birthday celebration.

nandale, and he became a civil engineer for the U.S. Navy before working for the federal government. He was a civil engineer for the Atomic Energy Commission, later renamed the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

“He wrote the building code, still used today, for nuclear power plants throughout the U.S.,” said Eva Lipinski. “Then in 1989, he left to work in a similar field in the private sector until 1997, when he retired at age 72.”

But instead of just relaxing, Rom continued his pattern of being a lifelong learner, taking college classes wherever he lived. He also made it a point to share his knowledge with others.

“After retiring, he took math and philosophy classes at George Mason University,” said Hipski. “He also tutored high-school and college students in math. And during his student career in this area, he tutored students at UVA and NOVA for their professional-engineering licensing exams. He did this until he was 90.”

“He was mowing his lawn until 1993,” added Eva Lipinski. “My mother used to yell at him to stop, but he said it was good exercise for him.” Izabela died in 2019 at age 90, after 68 years of marriage. Besides their three children, they have six grandchildren, one great grandchild and another on the

SEE LOCAL WWII VETERAN, PAGE 14
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Reston Filmmaker Debuts ‘Prosperity Creek’

Sci-fi social satire, inspired by growing up neurodivergent in this area, and resulting feelings of alienation.

BY SHIRLEY RUHE
THE CONNECTION

After a decade of ups and downs but never discouraged, a local filmmaker is screening “Prosperity Creek” at the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema One Loudoun on Sept. 2 for the Film Club Screening Series.

Much of the film was shot in Reston, and locals will recognize Lake Anne, the Dulles Toll Road, Baron Cameron Park and a green Reston sign reconfigured to say “Prosperity Creek.”

Zach Walsh says he first got the idea for the film back in 2015 when he was watching the Rachel Maddow Show with his dad. “It was about public policy polling and where the nation sat on incredibly ludicrous questions. It was so outlandish that people were open to believing a particular wild conspiracy theory. I thought it would make a great movie.”

Walsh says along the way he got involved with Robert Rodriguez as one of the possible contestants on his upcoming reality show, “Rebel without a Crew.”

“They helped me draft the film and taught me preproduction stuff on how to develop a movie.” Ultimately Walsh’s film wasn’t chosen for the show, “but without that help it wouldn’t exist today.”

Most of the filming took place in 2018 but then the bumps began with Walsh’s medical issues and then in 2020 “the world had other plans as Covid took hold.” Later he got in touch with the cast but some had moved to California so he had to rework the ending.

“But I never gave up. I was fortunate to have Stephen, my best friend since middle school who is a genius with a camera and my brother John who is the producer. Everybody stayed on board.”

The main character in the film is a young Black woman who is hired as a house sitter in a wealthy local suburb. “But the area is all white people, and she gets a lot of hostile stares.

She is an outcast in the com-



Alex Reeves and Jake Ehrlich sit on the bank of Lake Anne, a still from “Prosperity Creek”

munity but she realizes it is not because of who she is but because she is an outsider and they have plans to take over the world.” And she is the only one who can stop it. Ultimately she pairs up with the gardener and they discover crazy surprises about the neighborhood around them.

Walsh went to school in Centreville and experienced a similar alienation due his autism. “In a time of No Child Left Behind where everything was standardized and didn’t recognize differences like mine. I was very alienated, surrounded by the wealth gap and the proximity to power. It was like I wasn’t a human being.” He wanted to make something from that outsider point of view, and his own situation combined with the experience of the film’s main character.

Walsh explains the film as a tribute to the other in society within the power dynamics of the DMV with sci-fi twists. And Walsh says he hopes it reflects the quirky nature of an autistic person. “I want my movie to be like that.”

Walsh says the biggest challenge over the past decade of working on the film was his serious health issues. “And of course, raising the money.”

It cost about \$10,000 to produce the film. “But we did everything ourselves. The person who did the makeup is also in the cast. Someone plays a solo on a flute, and the only person associated with the film who got paid had written the music.”

Walsh says he has had a cam-



PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED

From left: Filmmaker Zach Walsh, lead Alex Reeves, Director of Photography Stephen Cox

See “Prosperity Creek”

Alamo Drafthouse Cinema One Loudoun,
Sept. 2 Film Club Screening Series

20575 Easthampton Plaza, Ashburn, VA 20147 (One Loudoun Center)

Sci-fi social satire, created by Zack Walsh and Stephen Cox with live Q&A. Shot in Reston.
<https://drafthouse.com/northern-virginia/event/film-club-prosperity-creek-with-live-q-a>

border in his hands since he was five and has been making videos with his best friend since he was 13. “I’m deep into it.”

Currently Walsh is seeking distribution for the film that has previewed at the ARTfactory in Manassas and has been seen in

Canada as well as the DC Film Fest. He is now pursuing a couple of scripts. “This is what I want to do with my life.”

ENTERTAINMENT

FAIRFAX COUNTY

FARMERS MARKETS RETURN

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

WEDNESDAYS

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

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

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

THURSDAYS

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

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

FRIDAYS

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

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

SATURDAYS

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

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

SUNDAYS

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

SUMMER CONCERT

& ENTERTAINMENT SERIES

Reston Community Center (RCC) transforms Reston's plazas and parks into community gathering places with its acclaimed Summer Concert & Entertainment Series, running from just before Memorial Day through September. All are invited to enjoy free live music and family-friendly entertainment set in some of Reston's most beloved outdoor spaces as we head into the heart of summer.

Wednesdays: Midweek Music on the Lake
Sunset Concerts | Schedule

Lake Anne Plaza

Wednesdays, June 24 – August 26

7:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Fan favorites return to Lake Anne Plaza for Sunset Concerts on Wednesday evenings, from 7:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. so audiences can enjoy slightly cooler temperatures and golden hour views by the lake.

Thursdays: Fresh Finds at Halley Rise
Take a Break Concert Series | Schedule

Halley Rise (2025 Fulton Place, Reston)

Thursdays, June 25 – August 27

7:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

In its third year, Take a Break Concert Series spotlights fresh talent in one of Reston's newest neighborhoods. This laid-back, open space offers plenty of room to dance or play and a new 7:30 p.m. start time lets the heat ease off a bit.

Summerbration Fab Fridays | Schedule
Reston Station

Fridays, May 29 – September 25

7:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Then head to Reston Station for the always packed Summerbration Fab Fridays, now starting at 7:30 p.m. so you can stop by Happy Hour with Darden first. These high energy cover bands turn the plaza into a dance party with favorite hits all night long.

Saturdays: Playtime in the Park
Family Fun Entertainment Series | Schedule

Reston Town Square Park

Saturdays, July 4 – August 22

10:00 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.

Saturday mornings bring the Family Fun Entertainment Series to Reston Town Square Park,



Circus Vazquez will be at Tysons II on Aug. 7-31, 2026 in Tysons Corner.



The OFC Ignite: Back to School Kickoff & Tailgate Party takes place Saturday, Aug. 29, 2026 at the Old Firehouse Center in McLean.

a summer highlight with puppetry, magic, music, juggling and more! Kids can dance, giggle and get the wiggles out, with plenty of fun for adults too.

Sundays: Classics Under the Sky

Sunday Art in the Park with Shenandoah Conservatory | Schedule

Reston Town Square Park

Sundays, June 21 – August 30

7:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Spend Sunday evening at Sunday Art in the Park with Shenandoah Conservatory in Reston Town Square Park, where rising classical musicians offer concert quality performances that are friendly, fun and accessible to all ages.

NOW THRU AUG. 27

Summer Concert Series. 7-8 p.m. At National Museum of the Marine Corps, 1775 Semper

Fidelis Way, Triangle. The Marine Corps Heritage Foundation invites the public to enjoy the 2026 Summer Concert Series at the National Museum of the Marine Corps. From June through August, audiences can experience six free, family-friendly evenings featuring premier U.S. military ensembles representing the Marine Corps, Navy, Army, and Air Force. Concerts are held on the Museum's entry plaza. Guests are encouraged to bring lawn chairs or picnic blankets. Admission and parking are free and open to the public. The Museum, Tun Tavern, and Museum Store will remain open until 6:45 p.m. on concert evenings. Visit the website: <https://www.marineheritage.org/>

Concert Schedule:

❖ August 20, 7 p.m. – U.S. Navy Concert Band

❖ August 27, 7 p.m. – “The President’s Own” U.S. Marine Band

FREE CONCERTS IN THE PARK

At Burke Lake Park, Burke. 7 p.m. every Wednesday night from June 24 to Aug. 19 at Burke Lake Park for an incredible line-up of bands, food trucks, 2 Silos beer, and Ice Cream. The atmosphere is informal, so bring a picnic blanket, lawn chairs, and relax with friends and family.

SCHEDULE

Aug. 19 – The Soul Shakers. Food Trucks: Kaziville (hot dogs), Ned’s New England Deck and Bruster’s of Alexandria

SOUNDS OF SUMMER: LOCAL

CONCERTS IN FAIRFAX COUNTY

Create your own summer soundtrack with the Summer Entertainment Series. Attend free, live concerts taking place at locations all around Fairfax through August. Award-winning entertainers take the stage in this series that is set to enrich the community and promote togetherness in Fairfax County. This season consists of 124 performances at 20 venues. Mark your calendar for some incredible performances including:

Thursday, Aug. 20, 7:30 p.m.: Alexandria A Cappella Collective, Nottoway Park

ARTISTS INVITED TO APPLY

FOR 2026 MCLEAN ARTFEST

The McLean Community Center (MCC) and McLean Project for the Arts (MPA) is now accepting applications from artists for McLean Artfest 2026, marking the first year the festival will be produced by both MCC and MPA. The juried outdoor fine arts festival will be held Sunday, Oct. 4, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. in McLean Central Park.

Artists working in all fine art and fine craft media are encouraged to apply. Selected artists will have the opportunity to exhibit and sell their work in one of Northern Virginia's premier outdoor arts festivals, connecting with collectors, art enthusiasts and families from throughout the Washington metropolitan area. The application deadline is Friday, July 31. Artists interested in participating can apply at www.mcleancenter.org/mc-lean-artfest and should contact Jen Lillis at jlillis@mpaart.org for additional application information.

WEDNESDAYS NIGHTS

Open Game Nights. 6:30-9 p.m. At Old Firehouse Center, 1440 Chain Bridge Road, McLean. Come enjoy table tennis, bridge, mah-jongg, arcade games, a sensory lab and more at the Old Firehouse. Children under the age of 18 must be accompanied by an adult.

AUG. 3-22

Dog Wash for Fairfax Pets on Wheels Fund-raiser. At Weber's Pet Supermarket in Reston. Every dog wash is \$16 with \$10 going to Fairfax Pets on Wheels.

AUG. 5-30

“Sun-Drenched” Exhibition and Show. At McLean Art Gallery, 6224B Old Dominion Drive, McLean. Opening reception on Friday, Aug. 7 from 5-7 p.m. to meet the artists, enjoy conversation about summer-inspired artwork, and relax with live music, wine, and light refreshments. “Sun-Drenched” captures the warmth, brilliance, and beauty of the season through original artwork inspired by long summer days, flourishing gardens, colorful still lifes, sunlit landscapes, and the simple pleasures of summer.

AUG. 7-31

Circus Vazquez. At Tysons II, 8025 Galleria Drive, in Tysons Corner. The production blends time honored circus tradition with contemporary elements to create a vibrant entertainment experience for modern audiences. Show times are 7:00 p.m. Mondays through Fridays; 1 p.m., 4 p.m., 7 p.m. on Saturdays and 11 a.m., 2 p.m., 5 p.m. on Sundays.

DRIVE-IN STYLE MOVIES

Grab your crew and head out to 3650 Historic Sully Way, Chantilly, to sit back, relax and

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ENTERTAINMENT

watch movies “drive-in” style — view and listen from your car or bring chairs and blankets to watch from the lawn. Pack a basket for a moonlit picnic or try a new treat from one of our food truck partners and enjoy free entertainment that comes to you as part of the Fairfax County Park Authority’s Summer Entertainment Series.

Starlight Cinema brings the community together for wholesome family entertainment with a feature film that begins at dark. Gates open at 6:30 p.m., so come early to get a good spot.

Mark your calendars for:

Aug. 22: “Cars”

AUG. 20-30

The 1st Stage Logan Festival of Solo Performance will run August 20-30, 2026 at 1st Stage, 1524 Spring Hill Road, Tysons, with performances of each show as follows:

LET IT BE ART!: Thursday, August 20 at 7:30 p.m.; Saturday, August 22 at 5:00 p.m.; Sunday, August 23 at 7:30 p.m.; Friday, August 28 at 7:30 p.m.; Saturday, August 29 at 2:00 p.m.; Sunday, August 30 at 5:00 p.m.

It Ends With Guinea Pigs: Saturday, August 22 at 7:30 p.m.; Sunday, August 23 at 2:00 p.m.; Wednesday, August 26 at 7:30 p.m.; Thursday, August 27 at 7:30 p.m.; Saturday, August 29 at 7:30 p.m.; Sunday, August 30 at 2:00 p.m.

Baron Vaughn: Cycle Breaker: Friday, August 21 at 7:30 p.m.; Saturday, August 22 at 2:00 p.m.; Sunday, August 23 at 5:00 p.m.; Tuesday, August 25 at 7:30 p.m.; Saturday, August 29 at 5:00 p.m.; Sunday, August 30 at 7:30 p.m.

Individual tickets can be purchased online at www.1ststage.org or by emailing the 1st Stage box office at boxoffice@1ststage.org.

BACK TO SCHOOL BOOK SALE

At Centreville Regional Library, 14200 St. Germain Dr., Centreville. Fiction and nonfiction for all ages, DVDs, audiobooks and more. Bag sale on Sunday. Fill a grocery bag with books and DVDs for \$10.

Friday, Aug. 21, 1-5 p.m.

Saturday, Aug. 22, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Sunday, Aug. 23, 12 to 5 p.m.

RESTON ASSOCIATION DOG PADDLES

Bring your dog for a dip in the pools that have closed for the season and bid farewell to the dog days of summer. Registration is required as space is limited. These events often sell out.

Saturday, Aug 22: Autumnwood Pool

Sunday, Aug. 23: Hunters Woods Pool

Saturday, Aug. 29: Newbridge Pool

Saturday, Sept. 5: Autumnwood Pool

Saturday, Sept. 12: North Hills Pool

Sunday, Sept. 13: Dogwood Pool

SUNDAY/AUG. 23

Cold War Conversation: Dreamland: The Secret History of Area 51. 7 p.m. Virtual. At the Cold War Museum. Aerospace historian Peter W. Merlin will discuss his book and more than 30 years of research into the National Classified Test Facility at Groom Lake, Nevada, better known as Area 51. Hidden in a remote desert valley since 1955, Area 51 became one of the most secretive sites of the Cold War, spawning decades of rumors and conspiracy theories. Merlin cuts through the myths to tell the history of this important flight-test and evaluation facility and the technological innovations developed there in response to evolving global threats.

AUG. 24-30

Metropolitan Washington Summer Restaurant Week. At various restaurants in the DMV. Presented by the Restaurant Association Metropolitan Washington (RAMW), Restaurant Week features over 300 restaurants; diners can choose from 11 current Michelin Starred or Michelin Bib Gourmand restaurants, 5 James Beard Awardees and Nominees,

www.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM



The 1st Stage Logan Festival of Solo Performance runs Aug. 20-30, 2026 in Tysons Corner.



The 33rd Annual Middle Eastern Food Festival takes place Sept. 5-6 at Holy Transfiguration Melkite Greek Catholic Church in McLean.

14 RAMMYS Winners or Finalists, and 30 first-time participants. The week will feature multi-course brunch and lunch selections for \$25 or \$35 per person, and multi-course dinners for \$40, \$55, and \$65 per person for on-premise dining. For the full list of participating restaurants, visit www.rwdmv.com.

Virginia restaurants include:

Cielo Supper Club

Darvish Kitchen

Fleming's Prime Steakhouse & Wine Bar

Locket Rosslyn

Oak Steakhouse

The Boulevard

The Simon at Reston Station

SENIOR MOVIE DAY

Reston Association presents Senior Movie Day, sponsored by Friends of Reston. Join them on

the fourth Wednesday of each month. Coffee, donuts and OJ are provided, and door prizes are distributed prior to the movie.

Location: LOOK Movie theater at Reston Town Center

Free. Ages 55+

Aug. 26: A Little Prayer (rated R)

Sept. 23: Reminders of Him

THURSDAY/AUG. 27

Lunch N' Life. 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. At American Legion Post 1976, 4206 Daniels Ave., Annandale. Join in a Game Day playing board and card games. To register, call 703-941-1419 or email shepherdscas@vacoxmail.com by August 25th.

SATURDAY/AUG. 29

OFC Ignite: Back to School Kickoff & Tailgate



The Burke Historical Society will meet on Sunday, Aug. 30, 2026 at Pohick Regional Library in Burke.

Party. 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. At Old Firehouse Center, 1440 Chain Bridge Road, McLean. Start the school year right with games, food, music and tailgate-style fun with friends at OFC Ignite, the monthly themed family play experience at OFC! Drop in to enjoy ping pong, board games, arcade games, refreshments, the Sensory Room, food and more.

SUNDAY/AUG. 30

Burke Historical Society Meeting. 3-4:30 p.m.

At Pohick Regional Library, 6450 Sydenstricker Road, Burke. Mary Lipsey, local historian, will discuss Myra

Bradwell, Mrs. Lincoln's friend who successfully got Mrs. Lincoln released from an asylum.

SEPT. 3 AND SEPT. 24

“Huzzah!”: Better Said Than Done. 7 p.m. At

Jammin' Java in Vienna. Better Said Than Done has been giving people a platform to share and listen to stories in Northern Virginia and beyond, for 15 years. To celebrate, the organization is staging two storytelling shows. September 3, “Huzzah!” will be presented live at Jammin' Java in Vienna at 7 p.m. On September 24, audiences around the country can watch “Hip, Hip, Hooray,” live on Zoom, starting at 8 p.m. Visit <https://better-saidthandone.org/events/>

SEPT. 5-6

33rd Annual Middle Eastern Food Festival.

Saturday from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.; Sunday from 12:30-5 p.m. At Holy Transfiguration Melkite Greek-Catholic Church, 8501 Lewinsville Road, McLean. The Festival will showcase authentic Middle Eastern cuisine, traditional pastries, music and dancing, vendors, church tours, a silent auction, and activities for all ages. Visit the vendors, take a guided tour of the church, or engage in a game of backgammon or chess. Children also can find plenty to do in the dedicated kids' zone, which includes a petting zoo, two moon bounces, 18-foot slide, face painting and a variety of games. A highlight of the event is the Saturday night, 6:30 p.m. “Hafli” (“party” in Arabic) that will feature live music and dancing, including opportunities to join the “Dabke,” a traditional folk line dance. Call 703-734-9566 or visit www.middleeastern-foodfestival.com

SEPT. 5-27

Natural Wonders by Rosemarie Forsythe.

At Reston Art Gallery and Studios, Reston. Reception to meet the artist on September 13 from 2-4 p.m. The exhibition features elements of the natural world Rosemarie saw in her backyard in Virginia and in the far-flung places of her life living and working around the world. Leaping horses, bright parrots, leopards, and even an alligator roam through her paintings. Colorful, highly patterned fish swim through a magical, deep blue sea. Forests of lilies, ferns, and wildflowers reveal glimpses of owls, monkeys, deer, and foxes. Palm leaves sway elegantly in a Pacific breeze by moonlight. Rich landscapes range from southern sand dunes to crisp, northern winter scenes of graceful birch trees rising to the distant sun.

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NEWS

Volunteer Fairfax: Pack 100,000 Meals at VolunteerFest 2026 Sept. 18

WHAT: Volunteer Fairfax will host VolunteerFest 2026, bringing hundreds of volunteers, businesses, nonprofit partners, and community leaders together for a high-energy day of service focused on addressing food insecurity. Participants will work side by side to pack 100,000 nutritious meals for neighbors facing hunger. Capital Area Food Bank will help distribute the meals to food pantries in greatest need throughout Northern Virginia and the Greater Washington region.

WHY: Nearly 1.5 million people in the region are experiencing food insecurity. VolunteerFest gives residents, companies, community organizations, and local leaders an opportunity to turn concern into direct action while raising awareness about hunger in the region.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE: Community members can support VolunteerFest in three ways: volunteer, donate, or fundraise.

Volunteer: <https://volunteerfairfax.app.neoncrm.com/nx/portal/neonevents/events?path=%2Fportal%2Fevents%2F47502>

Registration is required to participate in the meal-packing project, and space is limited for each shift. Meal-packing volunteers must be 16 years of age or older.

Donate: <https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/peer-to-peer/volunteerfest-2026>

Every contribution helps make the 100,000-meal goal possible. A \$10 donation can provide up to 40 meals for neighbors experiencing food insecurity.

Fundraise: <https://volunteerfairfax.my.canva.site/2026-vfest-toolkit/get-started>

Individuals, workplaces, schools, and community groups can create an individual fundraising page, start a team, or join an existing team to help Volunteer Fairfax reach its \$35,000 fundraising goal.

COMMUNITY FAIR: VolunteerFest will also feature a Community Fair with 30 local nonprofits and public agencies. Attendees will have an opportunity to meet organizations serving Northern Virginia and the surrounding region, learn about their programs and services, explore volunteer opportunities, and discover additional ways to stay involved in the community throughout the year.

WHEN: Friday, Sept. 18, 2026

First Shift
Check-In & Community Fair: 8:30-9:15 a.m.

Meal Packing Instructions: 9:15 a.m.
Meal Packing: 9:30-10:30 a.m.

Second Shift
Check-In & Community Fair: 11:00-11:45 a.m.

Meal Packing Instructions: 11:45 a.m.
Meal Packing: 12:00-1:00 p.m.

WHERE: Northern Virginia Community College – Annandale Campus, 8333 Little River Turnpike, Annandale, VA

MORE:
Bring non-perishable food donations to support NOVA's Nighthawk Nest Food Pantry. Donations will be collected in front of the Ernst Community Cultural Center at street level in front of the building for those who can only drive by on Sept. 18. Volunteers can bring their donation to the lobby/atrium.

volunteerfairfax.org/events/volunteerfest2026

Local WWII Veteran Celebrates 101st Birthday

FROM PAGE 10

way.

Growing up, recalled Hipski, "We used to go sailing in our sloop at Occoquan Regional Park and play on a little train there. We also went boating in Burke Lake Park and skiing in Vermont.

"Our dad was very principled and told us to stand up for justice and to fight and persevere in what we believe in. I also convey this to my son. My brother, sister and I were given gifts of freedom of education from our parents and said we needed to share them with our children and the world."

Pleased with her father's 101st birthday celebration, Hipski said it was planned by the Polish Embassy. "He's always been active in the Polish community and was in-

vited to embassy events, through the years," she explained. "Poland considered him a hero because of his activities at Monte Cassino.

"In 2025, he received a gold medal from the Polish Army's defense minister. And he also got the White Cross from the Polish government." The Polish White Cross symbolizes suffering, an unblemished past and hope for the future. Both the emblem and organization were established to support Polish soldiers abroad and encourage their physical and spiritual wellbeing.

After his birthday festivities, Rom spoke about his life now at Brightview. "I have my good and bad moments but, overall, I feel good," he said. When asked to what he attributes his many years, Eva Lipinski said his sister lived

until 102, so there's longevity in his family. He also does his best to keep his mind and body as fit as possible.

"I watch World War II movies on my iPad and exercise two or three times a day with 2-pound dumbbells," said Rom. "I also exercise my legs, stand up and down and wiggle my feet. I read a lot when my vision was better." He also enjoys listening to classical music and, once a week, a high-school student comes in and plays chess with him.

Appreciative of his birthday party, he said, "It was a nice celebration." He was also deeply touched by the musical performers. "Many of the songs I remembered from my childhood in Poland, and I was really moved."



PHOTOS BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

Attendees stand for the playing of the former national anthem of Afghanistan during the Afghanistan Refugee Rescue Organization's conference, "Afghanistan: Five Years After the Fall," at the North County Governmental Center in Reston, Virginia, on Saturday, Aug. 15, 2026.



PHOTOS BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

Daniel Altman, executive director of the Fresh Start Refugee Assistance Center, speaks during the panel discussion "Supporting Afghans After the Fall" at the North County Governmental Center in Reston, Virginia, on Saturday, Aug. 15, 2026. Listening alongside him are panel participants (from left) Meena Khalil, of ICNA Relief USA; Dr. Susan Aryan Antolin, executive director of Women for Afghan Women; Dr. Mohammad Mirwais Balkhi, former Minister of Education of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan; and Shawn VanDiver, founder and president of #AfghanEvac (appearing via video display). The Afghanistan Refugee Rescue Organization-USA hosted the event.

Five Years After the Fall of Kabul

FROM PAGE 4

public, from participation," said open-forum moderator Lima Anwari.

Local Realities in Fairfax County

With over 30% of its 1.1 million residents foreign-born, Fairfax County serves as the primary regional hub for Afghan resettlement in the Washington area. Yet local infrastructure struggles to match long-term needs. Initial federal stipends cover only 30-to-90 days of assistance, a brief window in a county where market-rate rents frequently top \$2,000 per month.

"One of the most common misunderstandings is that the journey of a refugee ends upon arrival," said Meena Khalil, a local practitioner working daily with newly arrived families. "The reality is very different. The journey begins upon arrival."

Dr. Susan Antolin, executive director of Women for Afghan Women, noted that short-term funding fails to account for language barriers and digital literacy. She explained that six- or 12-month programs cannot realistically overcome the language and digital-literacy gaps Afghan women face when reading government letters or supporting their children in school. "It takes much more than that, and it requires a lot more resources than that," she said, adding that "the digital literacy part is also missing."

Khalil stressed that access does not equal trust: "Just having those doors open does not mean that people will walk through them."

Moving From Vulnerability to Capability

Looking ahead, Dr. Mohammad Mirwais Balkhi, former Afghan minister of education, urged a pivot toward self-reliance. "We have to run from vulnerability to capabilities," Balkhi said, emphasizing vocational and technical education.



Bilal Ahmad Niazi, president of ARRO-USA, delivers opening remarks during the "Afghanistan: Five Years After the Fall" conference at the North County Governmental Center in Reston, Virginia, on Saturday, Aug. 15, 2026.



Fairfax County Supervisor Walter Alcorn (D-Hunter Mill) speaks about local government support for the Afghan community during the ARRO-USA conference in Reston, Virginia, on Saturday, Aug. 15, 2026.

"When you open your eyes, the people who promised you for 20 years that 'we will stand behind you' ... they will be gone."

Reaffirming ongoing support, Kris Adkison, representing U.S. Rep. James Walkinshaw, promised continued partnership with the diaspora: "In the years since the fall of Kabul, many Afghan families have rebuilt their lives and established new roots here in Fairfax County. Five years later, our responsibility to the Afghan people continues. ... I

look forward to continuing to work alongside Virginia's Afghan American community and ensuring their voices and contributions remain an important part of our shared future."

Following the panel, Supervisor Walter Alcorn approached Dr. Balkhi, shook his hand and said: "Tell me what I can do to help."

Water You Want from Me?



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Now that can't be good news. Yet another email from the company from whom I recently purchased a water fountain for our cats: "Don't skip this" was the message in the subject box. And since I certainly recognized the sender (after as many email solicitations from it as I have already received in a few short weeks) you would too. I'd almost characterize their email pursuit of me and my future dollars as stalking, but it doesn't really meet the threshold. Besides, it's not as if they're staring at me at home from across the street or standing at the end of my driveway waiting for me leave my home. But to insert a Jerry Seinfeld quote: "It's something."

The first headline in the body of their email was reasonable enough: "How to Make the Most of Your blank Water Fountain." So far, so good. Harmless enough, maybe even potentially helpful. And a bit further down the page more key words, so much so that they were in a gold oval. Two that gives yours truly - and so many others like me, pause: "Easy Assembly ... to assure a hassle-free experience." From my perspective and experience, when the products' advisory includes the words "easy" and "assembly" I know that the hours to follow trying to assemble their product will be anything but easy - for me anyhow, and unlikely will lead to anything assembled. Which I can accept though It's very hard on my wife though. I'm well aware of my limits, maybe even understand/rationalize them; she can do neither. From her vantage point, it's pure incompetence.

Continuing on with my meager attempt at resolving this life-long challenge; as I read on down the page, I begin to wonder if I have indeed been led down the garden path, so to speak. Not exactly lambs to slaughter as I'm only talking about a water fountain for cats, not the Bible. Putting things together is not what I do. Writing about the various tasks I can't do is more how I roll. I read further. There are filters that need to be changed on multiple parts of the unit, even a water pump that might need to be likewise changed. All of which I need to pre-order and pre-pay for the next quarter or two. And what's totally worse, in looking at this How-to set of instructions, there is no phone number for me to call, and when I went to their website, from which I originally ordered the fountain, I couldn't find a phone number - or any kind of lifeline there either. I am, in effect, all alone. All of which doesn't bode well for the cats who ultimately will be the true beneficiaries of this fountain.

Moreover, another definitely-not-expected warning came even further down the page: this fountain is not self-cleaning (it needs to be cleaned? Who knew?). That means it will be my self cleaning it. Which adds a bit of insult to my presumptive pain. I mean, if this fountain is so highly rated, shouldn't it be idiot proof? Present company included.

To be fair, I have already emailed the company - which they encourage, to trouble shoot. And in only two days - since they've had an overwhelming response to their product, I received back a very well thought-out and thorough response. (My problem, rather the problem I was having, was that one of our cats was knocking the lid off the fountain and thus stopping the water flow.) I was grateful for the response but, as helpful as it was - though not exactly timely, it has led to a barrage of subsequent emails soliciting me for this, that and the other thing as well all the fountain's accessories, I could possibly want; especially if I order another fountain; because cats behavior being what it is, as with litter boxes, the recommendation is that I have one fountain per cat. And since I have four cats, I've become, at least through their electronic outreach, their hopeful best repeat buyer

And here all I thought I was doing in buying this fountain was assuring our cats would have a steady flow of water. I had no idea - or expectation, that I'd be getting a new electronic best friend who seems to have nothing better to do than to email me, constantly (I exaggerate but I'm sure you get the idea.)

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

Region Has Serious Drought, Rainfall Deficit

Officials urge saving water.

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
THE CONNECTION

Virginia's Drought Monitoring Task Force updated the state's drought status on July 31: "The recent rain has prevented drought conditions from worsening, although severe drought continues in many parts of Virginia."

A drought warning advisory continues for Northern Virginia which includes Arlington, Fairfax, Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William counties and the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Manassas and Manassas Park.

The Washington, D.C. region is on track to have its driest year in the last 20 years, officials say.

In its assessments, the Virginia task force uses four classifications, with the most severe being "emergency": normal, watch, warning and emergency. Officials factor in current and predicted precipitation, streamflow, groundwater levels, reservoir levels, soil moisture, reported agriculture and water supply impacts and the current U.S. Drought Monitor map.

Rainfall Shortfall

The state's Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) on July 31 cautioned, "Longer-term precipitation continues to show severe and expansive deficits, with the 180-day Standardized Precipitation Index

"Longer-term precipitation continues to show severe and expansive deficits."

— Virginia DEQ

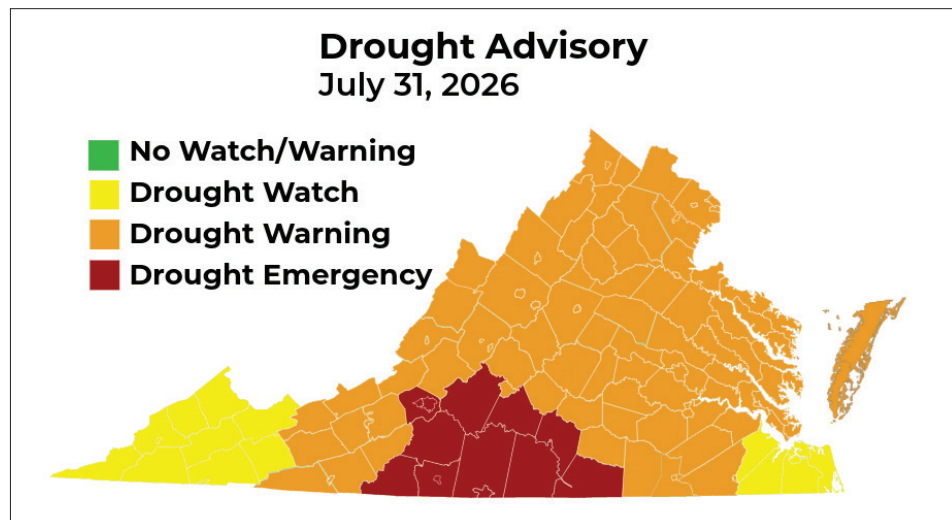
blend observation showing large areas of severe and extreme dryness throughout central and southcentral Virginia. Except for the Richmond area where normal year-to-date precipitation amounts are present, the

rest of the Commonwealth is experiencing deficits ranging from 5.3 inches in Norfolk to 9.4 inches in Danville."

Weedon Cloe, DEQ Office of Water Supply manager, said, "The Northern Virginia drought evaluation region has received approximately 81 percent of the precipitation that would be typical for the water year, which began on October 1.

"Despite the recent rain, streamflows in the region are still well below normal. Groundwater has continued to decline. Of the five groundwater monitoring wells in Northern Virginia, four have water levels below the 10th percentile and the well in Prince William is at its lowest level recorded since 2002.

"We will need sustained, above average precipitation over the coming weeks and



VIRGINIA DEQ

This map shows the current drought advisories as established by the Drought Monitoring Task Force.



This stream in Great Falls National Park in Fairfax County was dry on Sunday morning, Aug. 1.

months for groundwater in the region to recharge."

As for drinking water supplies, "Fairfax Water continues to have adequate supply to meet current customer demand, and our systems are operating normally," emailed Susan Miller, Manager of Public Affairs. "We encourage customers to continue practicing wise water use, but overall water availability remains stable." Around 2.2 million people

in Northern Virginia depend on Fairfax Water for their drinking water.

According to the U.S. Drought Monitor's July 21 reading, Alexandria is in moderate drought, the second mildest of five categories.

Virginia American Water, which supplies water to Alexandria, asks residential customers to voluntarily reduce nonessential water use.

Toilets Can Save Water

"Design improvements have allowed toilets to use 1.28 gallons per flush or less while still providing equal or superior performance. Toilets are by far the main source of water use in the home, accounting for nearly 30 percent of an average home's indoor water consumption. Older, inefficient toilets that use as much as six gallons per flush also happen to be a major source of wasted water in many homes."

— U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

More Calls for Conservation

Governor Abigail Spanberger asks Virginians to voluntarily conserve water use. On June 18, she said, "a significant lack of precipitation has resulted in Virginia recording its driest period since 1941. Precipitation totals are approximately eight inches below average across much of the Commonwealth."

If drought conditions continue, the Governor can declare a drought emergency and by executive order implement mandatory water use restrictions for certain users and industries.

Tips for Conserving Water

The following suggestions for saving water are from multiple sources, including Fairfax Water.

- ❖ Reduce or stop lawn and garden watering.
- ❖ Only water between dusk and dawn to reduce evaporation.
- ❖ Plant drought-tolerant plants and reduce grass.
- ❖ Use mulch and leave the leaves.
- ❖ Turn off ornamental fountains.
- ❖ Limit filling of swimming pools.
- ❖ Do not hose sidewalks and driveways.
- ❖ Use a commercial car wash that recycles water.
- ❖ Reduce shower length.
- ❖ Turn off water while brushing teeth.
- ❖ Wash full loads of dishes and clothes.
- ❖ Keep a container of water in the refrigerator to avoid running water for a drink. Use one glass throughout a day.
- ❖ Do not run water to thaw food.
- ❖ Use a bowl of water to clean and prepare vegetables, instead of letting the faucet run.
- ❖ Compost instead of using a garbage disposal.
- ❖ Fix leaks.

Information

Virginia DEQ, <https://www.deq.virginia.gov/water/water-quantity/drought>

U.S. Drought Monitor, <https://drought-monitor.unl.edu/>

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, drought information: www.mwco.org/environment/planning-areas/water-resources/drinking-water-and-drought-monitoring/current-drought-conditions/

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