THE CONNECTION

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



The Herndon High School NJROTC Color Guard presents the colors during the Veterans Day Observance on the Town Green in Herndon.

Photo by Mercia Hobson/The Connection

Honoring Veterans

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Veterans Day 2026 at American Legion Post 184

Unexpected candor and an appeal.

By Mercia Hobson
The Connection

During the Town of Herndon and American Legion Post 184's Veterans Day observance Wednesday, Nov. 11, at the Town Green Veterans Memorial, guest speaker and former U.S. Army Capt. Ross A. Berkoff urged the community to help bear the moral weight of the war in Afghanistan.

"Making sense of the Afghanistan war isn't a burden that all veterans should carry alone. It's a moral weight that belongs to the whole country," Berkoff said. "It can't be buried, it can't be sanitized. It demands some real accountability. And it demands future leaders of our country never again to send young Americans into harm's way without absolute clarity of purpose."

From Fairfax County, Va., to U.S. military bases around the world, communities gathered to honor all who have served in the U.S. armed forces' six branches, from the soldiers of the Army to the guardians of the Space Force, on Veterans Day 2026. With the Herndon High School NJROTC Color Guard presenting the colors, The Reston Chorale singing the national anthem and Post Commander Nicolas Leshock leading the Pledge of Allegiance, the program unfolded in familiar fashion. In his remarks, Leshock said nearly 43 million Americans have served in uniform over the nation's 250-year history, and nearly one in 10 Fairfax County adults is a veteran.

Following Leshock, Town of Herndon Mayor Keven LeBlanc Jr. and Berkoff, of Chantilly delivered the ceremony's featured remarks. Berkoff served two combat tours in Afghanistan with the 10th Mountain Division between 2002 and 2007 and wrote "Beyond the Outpost."



From left, Herndon Mayor Keven LeBlanc Jr., American Legion Wayne M. Kidwell Post 184 Commander Nicolas Leshock and guest speaker Ross A. Berkoff participate in the laying of the memorial wreath during the Veterans Day Observance at the Veterans Memorial on the Town Green in Herndon.



Photos by Mercia Hobson/ The Connection

Community members and veterans stand and salute during the Pledge of Allegiance at the Veterans Day Observance on the Town Green in Herndon.



The Herndon High School NJROTC Color Guard presents the colors during the Veterans Day Observance on the Town Green in Herndon.

Remarks by Town of Herndon Mayor Keven LeBlanc Jr.

During the American Legion Post 184 Veterans Day observance, Mayor Keven LeBlanc Jr. spoke about the unseen cost of military service.

He said he has met many veterans around Herndon as mayor, noting that while some speak openly and proudly about their service, "others rarely speak about it at all."

"We should never mistake silence for the absence of sacrifice," LeBlanc said, explaining that the quiet neighbor standing next to someone at the grocery store, walking their dog or volunteering at a community event may have "experienced more hardship, fear and loss than we can imagine" — yet is still serving the community in everyday ways like coaching children, mentoring youth and helping neighbors.

LeBlanc said patriotism "is something we demonstrate in how we treat one another." He noted that in a politically divided time, people often disagree on priorities and what it means to love their country, yet the military brings together people of different races, religions and backgrounds who learn to trust one another with their lives. Because of that, he said, the freedoms veterans defended carry a responsibility for civilians "to listen to one another, respect the dignity of people whose lives may be different from our own, and stand up for those who are vulnerable."

LeBlanc thanked Post 184 for preserving veterans' stories and, on behalf of the Town of Herndon, thanked veterans and their families for "the ordinary moments" they surrendered — from waking up at home and holding loved ones to walking through neighborhoods, speaking freely and being present for birthdays and family dinners.

"May we honor you, not only through our remembrance today, but through the lives we choose to lead tomorrow," LeBlanc said.

Remarks by Former U.S. Army Capt. Ross A. Berkoff

Berkoff reflected on his Army service in Afghanistan and the loss of fellow soldiers, including Lt. Col. Joseph J. Fenty Jr., 41. Fenty was killed on May 5, 2006, with nine other 10th Mountain Division soldiers when their helicopter crashed during combat operations in Kunar province in eastern Afghanistan. Fenty left behind his wife and infant daughter. Berkoff also spoke about veterans' difficulty processing the war's outcome and why preserving their firsthand accounts matters: to honor the fallen, help families understand their loss and ensure the country reckons honestly with the war's consequences.

Speaking to the challenges veterans faced after the war, Berkoff said, "The value of our service is not and never will be defined by how that war tragically ended." He said this while reflecting on veterans' reaction to the Taliban's return to power and the painful questions it raised about their service.

Berkoff widened his account beyond combat to include the direct relationships and assistance he remembered. War leaves veterans with a shared experience that can be difficult to convey to others. Berkoff opened with Oliver Wendell Holmes' description of veterans' "incommunicable experience of war," then spoke of the intensity of that experience and the bonds among those who served.

Service in Afghanistan also meant helping civilians and building local ties. Berkoff said U.S. service members "brought food and medical supplies, clean water, and sports to Afghan children and families" and "forged bonds, unbreakable ones, with Afghan security forces."

Berkoff described struggling with anger and bitterness after the war, and said he chose to seek answers by transcribing his old notebooks. Later, he said, "We can choose to let the anger or bitterness consume us, or we can carry forward some light of our humanity."

After discussing the loss of his commander, Lt. Col. Joe Fenty, and other fellow soldiers, Berkoff said veterans were "trying to find that pathway to share our stories, especially with the Gold Star families like the Fenty family." He connected sharing those accounts with helping the families understand the experiences and sacrifices of those they lost.

Berkoff wrote the book "Beyond the Outpost" to help bridge the gap between veterans' experiences and the families of those who did not come home. "Someday, Lauren [Fenty's daughter] will learn about her dad from the men with whom he served," Berkoff said.

Berkoff concluded by bringing his themes together around what veterans can carry forward. He said veterans couldn't control the conflict's strategic outcomes, policies or withdrawals, but could control how they carried themselves: "our duty, our courage, our humanity, our devotion to the soldiers, airmen, Marines to our left and right." He also said their honor "never loses meaning."

Berkoff then turned from veterans to the wider community: when veterans, neighbors and Americans tell the stories of those lost, he said, "we are bridging that gap" and ensuring their sacrifices are "honored and never forgotten."

"So I want to carry that light. I hope you'll carry it with me."

Teen Chantilly Crash Victim Succumbs to Injuries

Residents: 'Don't add even more vehicles on Stringfellow Road.'

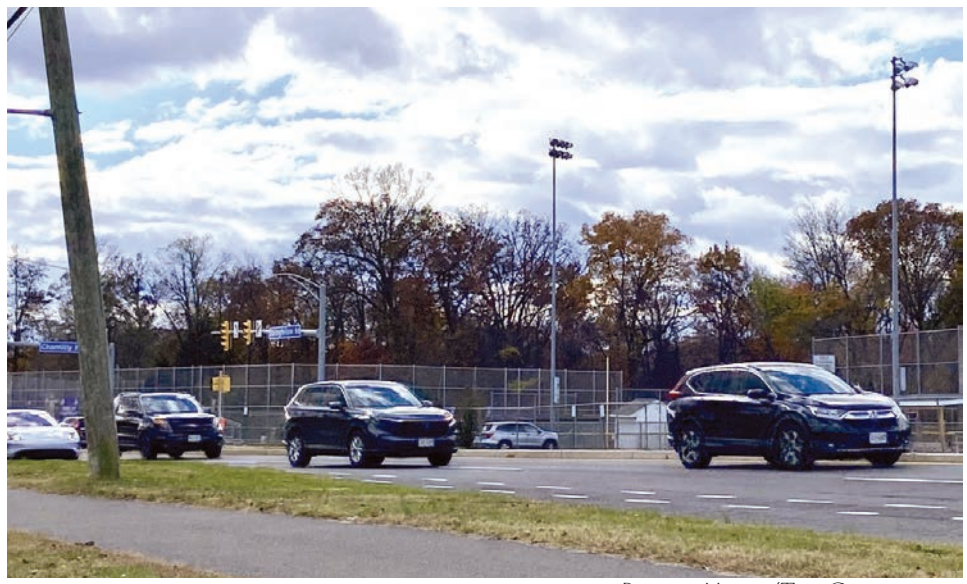
By Bonnie Hobbs
The Connection

Friends and family members of a teenage boy struck by a car outside Chantilly High are in mourning after he died of his injuries last week. Neither Fairfax County police, nor Fairfax County Public Schools, have released any specific information about the victim, including his age or whether he attended that school.

The tragedy occurred Wednesday, Nov. 4, shortly after school ended. Police responded around 3:12 p.m. after receiving a report of a teenage pedestrian struck by a vehicle on Stringfellow Road.

Detectives from the Police Department's Crash Reconstruction Unit preliminarily determined that a 2016 Volkswagen was traveling north on Stringfellow Road when it struck the teenager, "who was attempting to cross the roadway from east to west outside of a marked crosswalk."

He was rushed to a local hospital in life-threatening condition; but sadly, last Tuesday, Nov. 10, he succumbed to the injuries he'd sustained in the crash. The Volkswagen's driver was not injured and remained at the scene. Police said they initially determined that alcohol was not a factor in the crash; they were still investigating whether speed played a role.



Bonnie Hobbs/The Connection

Cars traveling Sunday afternoon along Stringfellow Road in front of the school. There's much more traffic on weekdays.

Detectives would like to speak to anyone who may have information about this case.

Those with information are asked to call the Crash Reconstruction Unit at 703-280-0543. Submit a tip anonymously through Crime Solvers of Fairfax County by calling the Crime Solvers tip line at 866-411-8477.

In a message to the community, Supervisor Kathy Smith (D-Sully) wrote the following in her weekly newsletter: "Like many of you, I was shocked and heartbroken when I learned that a Chantilly High School student had been seriously injured after being struck by a vehicle.

"This tragic incident should remind us all of our shared responsibility in building and keeping a safe community. County staff have already begun research into possible ways to address the safety of the particular area where this took place."

Because of cuts to the FCPS budget, Chantilly High is one of the schools that began this school year without crossing guards. But they were later restored after several students throughout the county were struck and injured by vehicles. This teenager's death marked the second one in two months involving a vehicle.

The first fatality, Sept. 9, involved a 13-year-old Frost Middle School student who was struck and killed by a truck while he was bicycling along Pickett Road in Fairfax. It was shortly after school had let out for the day and occurred just uphill from the school, outside the Turnpike Shopping Center. The boy, who was wearing a helmet, was pronounced dead at the scene.

Besides the fact that a teenager lost his life, the vehicle-pedestrian crash outside Chantilly High is also troubling because Stringfellow is a busy, four-lane road that's a major conduit between Route 50 in Chantilly and Route 29 in Centreville. And with Stringfellow's continuous stream of weekday traffic because of all the schools, parks, shopping centers and residential communities – including Greenbriar and Poplar Tree

See Teen Chantilly Crash, Page 15

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School Board Votes 8-2 in Support of Superintendent

Fairfax County School Board approves legislative agenda, Willow Springs renovation and disputed student-environment report.

By Mercia Hobson
The Connection

The Fairfax County School Board at its Nov. 12 regular meeting, voted 8–2 after debate to find Superintendent Dr. Michelle Reid in compliance with Executive Limitation 10 — the standard set by the School Board that guides how the superintendent manages the school division's learning environment and relationships with students.

The debate followed questions about whether current metrics adequately capture school safety, discipline and student support across the division. Some board members expressed concern about the adequacy of current data, such as self-reporting surveys, and the impact of teacher working conditions and student discipline approaches.

One concern focused on the quality of data. School Board member Seema Dixit, Sully District, questioned whether the student-safety survey fully captures students' experiences, noting, for example, that it appeared to ask only whether students felt safe at school, without follow-up questions. Dixit said, "There are no subsets of questions on it."

Dr. Reid answered, "Yes, ma'am. We'll take a look at the survey, and also we do an SEL screener, which is a different survey. But I take your point that it's important to make sure we're accurate and know how our students are feeling."

Melanie Meren, (Hunter Mill), voted no, with concerns regarding the monitoring report for Executive Limitation 10. "We are hearing how low membership into high school is creating a very poor learning environment for those students." Meren described confusion about what the rolling grade book implementation does and does not mean. She raised questions about keeping the same counselor or mentor year to year, teacher turnover and the frequency of substitute teachers. She asked whether these issues should be examined more deeply.

As for teacher concerns, Meren said employees had shared "sobering comments" on a range of issues. Meren ended her comments saying she could not support the executive limitation that evening.

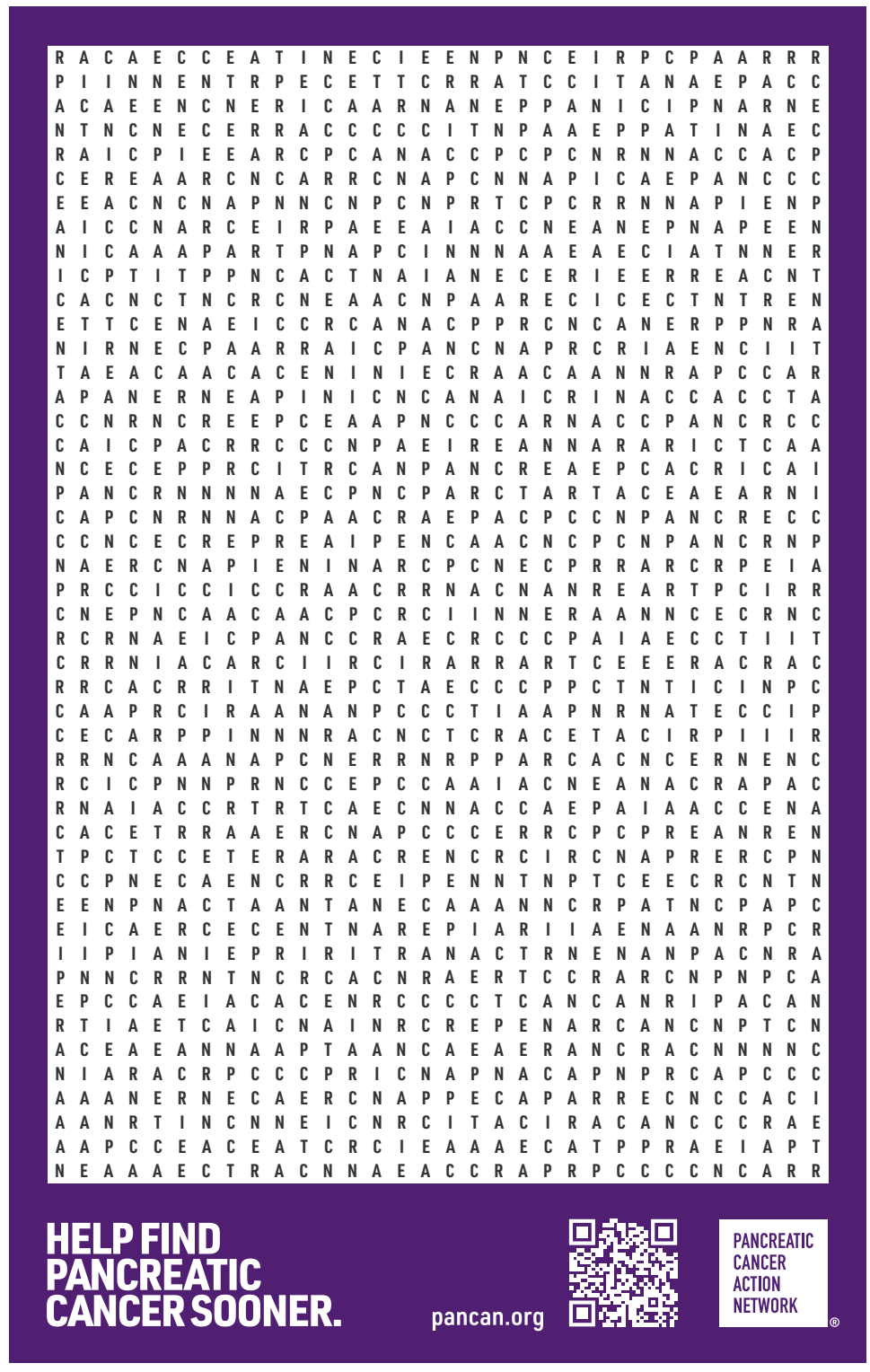
Mason District member Dr. Ricardy Anderson also voted no, citing concern that the report focused heavily on administrative activities rather than tangible results for students. She said she was "not seeing the through line" regarding the manner in which efforts directly impact the learning environment and student relationships. While she recognized the value of the programs presented such as annual summits and inclusion initiatives, she struggled to connect these "great activities" to the actual, day-to-day educational outcomes and student experiences.

Voting in favor of finding Dr. Reid in compliance were Chair Robyn Lady (Dranesville), Vice Chair Karl Frisch (Providence), Sandy Anderson (Springfield), Tom Dannon (At-Large), Seema Dixit (Sully), Mateo Dunne (Mount Vernon), Ilryong Moon (At-Large) and Marcia St. John-Cunning (Franconia). Voting against were Dr. Ricardy Anderson (Mason) and Melanie Meren (Hunter Mill). At-large member Ryan McElveen and Braddock District member Rachna Sizemore Heizer were absent.

The board also unanimously approved its 2027 legislative agenda ahead of the upcoming Virginia General Assembly and congressional sessions. Key last-minute amendments included requests for state funding for two proposed $1.5 million high school programming initiatives aimed at boosting enrollment at John R. Lewis and Mount Vernon high schools. Also added were positions addressing utility/energy costs, school safety and early-childhood education funding.

In a third action, the board unanimously awarded a $59.5 million renovation contract for Willow Springs Elementary School to add roughly 32,000 square feet to the building and allow the division to remove eight temporary classroom trailers.





Local Authors Map Mosby's Civil War Raids

Hidden Northern Virginia battle sites come to light in final book in field guide series on Confederate Col. John S. Mosby.

By Mercia Hobson
The Connection

After logging more than 17,000 miles on the road together during their 20-year collaboration, Civil War historians Donald C. Hakenson of Franconia and Charles V. Mauro of Herndon released the seventh and final book in their field guide series on Confederate Col. John S. Mosby.

Titled "The Definitive Tour Guide and History of Colonel John S. Mosby's Combat Operations," the 472-page volume traces the raids and battles of Mosby and his 43rd Battalion, Virginia Cavalry, from 1863 through April 1865. The guide pairs historical narrative with modern-day navigation, mapping out more than 240 raid locations across Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Washington.

"Not only do we tell the history, we give you the address and show you photographs of where each site is located," Mauro said.

In a late October post, Mauro explained the broader strategy behind the sites featured in the book: "Mosby's mission was to attack and harass as many Union outposts, camps, communications and supply points he could find. By successfully raiding behind enemy lines, Mosby would keep large numbers of Union soldiers guarding the city of Washington, thus denying federal forces in the field from fighting against General Robert E. Lee and the Confederate army."

Visual grounding matters because many historic locations are easy to miss, according to the authors. At Fairfax Station, Mauro noted, drivers on Route 123 must pull into the St. Mary's Catholic Church parking lot just to spot the historical marker.

Some Civil War sites have few visible traces today. Hakenson said a Civil War fight took place at the former Franconia School in Fairfax County. Mauro later identified its location as Old Franconia Road and Potters Lane. The school is gone, and Hakenson said there is no historical marker. He said Mosby's men attacked a Union patrol there on Aug. 8, 1864, and chased Union troopers toward Rose Hill and Alexandria. "You would never know anything ever occurred there unless you had our book," Hakenson said.



Photo by Chuck Mauro

The headstone of Confederate soldier Thomas B. Turner, who rode with Mosby's Rangers before dying of battle wounds at 19, stands in a private family cemetery at Kinloch near The Plains in Virginia.

Having collaborated since 2006, Hakenson and Mauro said they had long wanted "one book that covered everything." To shape the final volume, the pair sat down with a spreadsheet to list the sites and select the stories for each stop.

"We knew what we had," Mauro said.

The authors highlighted the Fairfax Courthouse raid as a daring operation that made Mosby famous in both the North and the South. Mauro said the Confederate commander deliberately chose a dramatic target to build his reputation: "He did it on purpose to make himself famous too. He wanted to do something dramatic, and he did. And he succeeded."

At Fairfax Courthouse, Mosby captured "various soldiers" and "a brigadier general in bed," then escaped "without a single shot being fired and without a single man being killed," Hakenson said. The raiders pulled off the capture while surrounded by an estimated 8,000 to 30,000 Union troops. Mosby told only one person what he planned to do that night, Hakenson noted. "If his men would have found out where he was going, I don't know if they'd have gone with him."

Field research for the authors also meant spending decades trying to reach a private cemetery at Kinloch, near The Plains. Hakenson recalled being "denied over and over and over" before his niece connected with the property owner through the estate's landscaper to secure permission.

For Hakenson, standing on the grounds made history tangible. "When you're at a historic site, you start to feel what it was like 150, 160 years ago," he said. "This is when I like to tell people, 'Can you feel it?'" He added that finally reaching the grave after 30 years "was really inspiring for me."

According to the authors' website, the volume features "maps, historical markers, history, the men, and all the locations associated with the Grey Ghost, Colonel John S. Mosby." Mauro described it as "a great book that people can give to people who love Civil War or just love local history."

In a postwar pivot, Mosby switched political allegiances — joining the Republican Party, then the party of Lincoln and Grant — and became a close friend and political ally of former Union Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, as well as an outspoken supporter of Black voting rights during Reconstruction, according to Encyclopedia Virginia.

The book is available for $40 plus shipping on Amazon and through the authors' website, mosbyvirginiahistory.square.site.

The authors will sign books at Jimmy's Old Town Tavern, 687 Spring St., Herndon, on Tuesday, Dec. 15, from 7 to 9:30 p.m.

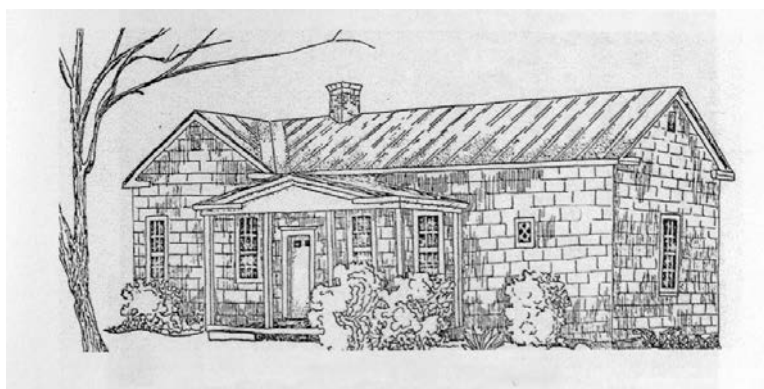


Photo contributed

An early drawing of the Old Franconia School, provided by Chuck Mauro.



Photo by Dan Woolley

Civil War historians Donald C. Hakenson and Chuck Mauro pose on the steps of the Truro Church rectory at Fairfax Courthouse, where Confederate Col. John S. Mosby seized 58 horses and captured Union Brig. Gen. Edwin Stoughton in bed.

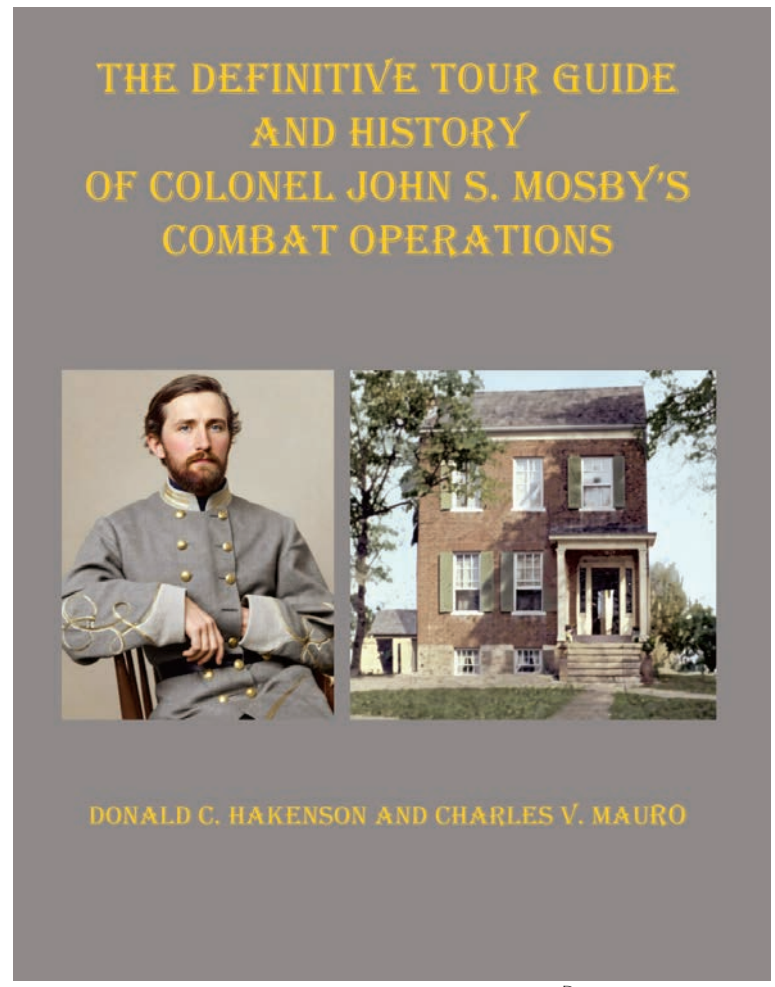


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Book cover



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Photos courtesy of The Lusk Report, Nov. 10, 2026

Participants received health and wellness resources.

Fairfax County Area Agency on Aging Celebrates 50 Years

The Fairfax County Area Agency on Aging celebrated 50 years of service to Fairfax County older adults on Nov. 13. Operating within the Fairfax County Department of Family Services, the agency serves adults age 60 and older, adults with disabilities, and family caregivers across Fairfax County and the cities of Fairfax and Falls Church. The event included a screening of the film "Facing the Falls," workshops and resources for aging well.

— Mercia Hobson/The Connection



Cara Yar Khan discusses her film "Facing the Falls."



File photo by Mercia Hobson/The Connection

This year's free Herndon WinterMarkt returns to the historic downtown on Saturday, Dec. 12, from noon to 6 p.m., bringing the Old-World charm of a European Christmas to Lynn and Center Station streets, near the W&OD Trail and the Herndon Municipal Building at 777 Lynn St. In this Dec. 13, 2025, file photo, visitors walk beneath the Herndon WinterMarkt archway during the annual holiday event.

— Mercia Hobson/The Connection

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Fairfax Water

NOTICE OF WATER RATE AND BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING

December 10, 2026 at 6:30 p.m.

At 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, December 10, 2026, Fairfax Water will conduct a public hearing on its Proposed Schedule of Rates, Fees, and Charges. The hearing will be held in Fairfax Water's offices at 8570 Executive Park Avenue, Fairfax, VA.

The proposed changes, to be effective April 1, 2027, include the following:

- An increase in the Availability Charge from $5,090 to $5,370*.
- An increase in the Service Connection Charge from $1,960 to $2,050*.
- An increase in the Account Charge from $50 to $51.
- An increase in the Quarterly Service Charge from $17.55 to $26.00*.
- An increase in the base Commodity Charge from $4.35 to $4.61 per 1,000 gallons of water.
- An increase in the Peak Use Charge from $4.20 to $4.45.
- An increase in the Turn Off / Turn On Charge from $61 to $62.
- An increase in the Fees for Use of Fairfax Water Fire Hydrants to include the increase in the Commodity Charge and Peak Use Charge.
- An increase in the Overhead Charges for Labor from 104% to 106% and a decrease for Materials from 14% to 13%.
- An increase in the Installation of Sewer Use Meter Charge Inspection Fee from $48 to $49.
- An increase in the After Hours Service Restoration Charge from $58 to $60.
- New proposed rate: Cross-Connection Control and Backflow Prevention Non-Compliance Charge ranging from $150 to $2,400.

**Charges reflect fees associated with a standard 5/8" residential meter. Changes in charges for larger residential and commercial meters are reflected in the Proposed Schedule of Rates, Fees, and Charges.*

Fairfax Water is also proposing a $281 million budget for calendar year 2027.[1] Water sales are expected to provide $249 million and the remaining $32 million is expected from connection charges, investment income and other sources.

The major areas of operation and maintenance expense are:

Category	-- $1,000s -- 2026	2027
Personal Services & Employee Benefits	$ 78,983	$ 86,354
Power and Utilities	14,759	17,200
Chemicals	14,476	15,410
Purchased Water	10,622	9,625
Supplies and Materials	8,315	9,038
Insurance	1,402	1,285
Fuel	849	915
Postage	650	700
Contractual Services	16,877	18,630
Professional Services	2,421	2,221
Other	3,220	3,293
Sub-Total	152,574	164,671
Transfer to Improvement Fund	(12,104)	(12,632)
Total	**$ 140,470**	**$ 152,039**

Net revenues are expected to be appropriated as follows:

Debt Payment	$52,802,485
Improvement Fund	$11,000,000
General Fund	$63,691,000

[1] *Fairfax Water's Board will continue to monitor economic factors and review revenues and expenditures at mid-year to determine if additional action is needed.*

Visit **fairfaxwater.org/rates** to view a copy of the proposed changes.

Those wishing to speak at this hearing or desiring a copy of the proposed changes should call Ms. Jessica Love at 703-289-6029. Interested parties may submit written comments to **PublicHearingComments@fairfaxwater.org** or mail written comments to:

Fairfax Water
Public Hearing Comments
8570 Executive Park Avenue
Fairfax, VA 22031

All written comments must be received by close of business on **Wednesday, December 9, 2026** to be included in the record of the public hearing.

Opinion

Ireland Trip — Meeting the Family Tree

The Independent Progressive
John Lovaas

Since we retired in 1994, Fran and I have visited Ireland several times. I am one-half Irish. My mother, her parents and five sisters were all 100% Irish. Yet none of them nor any of my siblings or cousins had ever visited the ancestral homeland. Fran and I decided that we would be the first!

Shortly after my retirement from USAID in 1994, we made our first trip to Ireland. We bought a package deal which included roundtrip air, rental car and 10 B&B vouchers good for lodging anywhere we stopped along the way. Before we travelled, I got what little Ireland family background was available from my Mom. She had a cousin who had gone to Ireland twenty years earlier and reported making contact with a relative in a pub just south of Carrick-on-Suir, on the border of County Tipperary and County Waterford. What an adventure that first trip was! We learned to drive a stick-shift rental car on the left side of the roads, even found the right pub and made contact with two genuine relatives, one of whom was the barmaid! What an experience! When the guys in the bar learned why we had come they insisted on buying us dinner … and all the Smithwicks beer we could drink.

This September we made our seventh visit to the Emerald Isle. This time my youngest sister and her hubby joined us for their first visit, an eight-day Gate One tour of Ireland highlights, all new to them but ones we'd seen before. It was a special visit, perhaps the last for octogenarians Fran and myself. The four of us planned to leave the Gate One group toward the tour's end in order to spend a bit of time with one genuine Irish relative, Mary Phelan, a practicing genealogist. We had been in touch with Mary online, but we had never met her. Our communications focused on the family tree Mary was putting together. The grand tree included Mom's entire family and ours as well. Now we would actually meet her and possibly meet others sharing the family tree with us.



John Lovaas

As planned, we met sister Karen and husband Erich on a very Irish day, cool and rainy, at the hotel in Dublin where the Gate One tour began. The tour bus took us first across Ireland to Galway on the west coast. We enjoyed seeing the Irish scenery along the way, including numerous castles. The trip took only two and a half hours, reminding me how small Ireland really is — roughly the size of South Carolina. I was able to reach Mary Phalen in Dublin from the bus. She had great news. Not only could we have lunch with her in Dublin, but she had arranged for "a few cousins" to meet with us at Carraig Hotel in Carrick-on-Suir! Imagine having a beer with relatives previously unknown to our generation.

After dining on lovely Galway Bay, we journeyed across the rugged Burren region and south to the famed Blarney Castle. Built in 1446, the castle is known for its Blarney Stone which is said to bestow the gift of eloquence on whoever bends over backwards and kisses the Stone. None of us felt a need for additional eloquence and passed on kissing the oft-smooched rock. After an overnight in Cork and passing through Cobh, the departure port for my ancestors and many thousands more fleeing the great potato famines, we took the scenic south coast to Waterford, home of famed Waterford Crystal Works. In Waterford, the four of us split from the tour and called Uber for a ride to Carrick-on-Suir and the meeting with our previously unknown relatives.

It was a Saturday none of us will ever forget. As we entered the Hotel Carraig, a couple about our age greeted us. It was Mary Phelan's brother and his wife who led us into the hotel bar. I had been expecting maybe three or four relatives and a spouse or two. Instead, we were greeted like rock stars or conquering liberators with hardy handshakes and major league hugs by 15 happy men and women, ten of whom were cousins. Mugs of beer were handed to everyone. It made me tingle all over. The four of us dived into lively conversations. After two hours of sometimes riotous conversation, exchanges of information and picture taking, the party was ending with tears in many eyes.

As we said our goodbyes, a cousin offered to take the four of us back to the tour group by way of Rathgormack, the area where my great grandparents lived before emigrating to Massachusetts. He took us through the whole village, which besides one short main street was mostly single lane roads through very rural, barely populated areas. My cousin reminded me the village had been hit hard by the famine. In one small cemetery, we saw a couple of headstones with the name Gough, the name of a great grandparent. Another special memory.

We rejoined our tour group and accompanied them to Dublin. There we got an additional happy surprise. My other remaining sister, Judy, had arrived in Dublin to join us for our last two days in Ireland. She flew in from Scotland where she'd been vacationing. The next day, the FIVE of us had lunch with Mary Phelan. Mary was even more amazing than we'd imagined — smart, charming and a most competent genealogist. She had in fact researched thousands of records in compiling the data necessary to build our family tree. She impressed us with her phenomenal knowledge of our family history, as we had been with her ability to bring together ten relatives to come from all over to meet us. Fran and I had travelled the world with the U.S.A.I.D. and more extensively since. Yet, thanks at least partly to Mary, this trip to Ireland ranks as perhaps our most memorable.

Fairfax County Must Protect the Accotink Watershed While Building New Sewer Pipeline

By Martin E. Shepherd
Former Member, Task Force on the Future of Lake Accotink

Major sewer construction upstream of Lake Accotink demands stronger environmental safeguards, coordinated sediment monitoring, and public accountability.

Column

Fairfax County faces an important test of its commitment to environmental stewardship as it undertakes a major sanitary sewer expansion through the environmentally sensitive Hunters Branch corridor, a tributary of Accotink Creek. The Accotink Gravity Sewer Improvements Project will provide additional wastewater capacity to accommodate continued development, particularly in Tysons. While the need for this infrastructure is legitimate, the environmental consequences of its construction deserve greater public attention and oversight. The project involves approximately three miles of new sanitary sewer pipeline, with construction extending through established stream corridors, forested areas, and sensitive habitats.

Friends of Accotink Creek has raised concerns about the potential removal of more than 630 mature trees, disturbance of wetlands and vernal pools, and sections of the proposed pipeline alignment that depart from existing utility corridors. These concerns extend well beyond the immediate construction area because Hunters Branch flows into Accotink Creek, which carries water and sediment downstream toward Lake Accotink.

A Watershed Already Under Stress

Lake Accotink has suffered decades of sediment accumulation that have substantially reduced its surface area and threatened its future as a recreational and environmental resource. Fairfax County is now investing considerable public resources in the Smaller Lake Accotink Preservation Feasibility Study and associated Sedimentation Rate Study to better understand sediment transport, accumulation, and the alternatives available for preserving the lake. These investigations involve scientists from the United States Geological Survey (USGS) and engineering consultants, including Arcadis and WSP/LimnoTech, who are examining the complex relationships between watershed conditions, sediment movement, and lake preservation. At the same time, another County project will introduce extensive excavation,

See Accotink, Page 14

The Connection Newspapers
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Reston❖Herndon❖Oak Hill
Chantilly❖CentreView

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Donate to FACETS's Food and Gift Drive

Via its Holiday Hope initiative, nonprofit FACETS is hoping to fill 1,200 grocery bags so local families in need can celebrate the holiday season their way. The goal is to collect groceries, plus gifts for children, ages 0-17. And there are several ways members of the community may help – individually or in groups, in person or online.

The deadline for FACETS to receive these donations is Monday, Dec. 7.

To see the list of needed food and suggested gift items, go to https://facetscares.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/10/Holiday-Hope-Flyer.pdf.

❖ Individual collections: People are asked to download the list of needed food and suggested gifts and purchase or collect as much as they can. $25 grocery store or Visa gift cards (Aldi, Lidl, Walmart, etc.) are especially helpful. Please give non-perishable, unexpired and unopened food, plus new, unwrapped gifts. Then drop them off at FACETS, Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., at 10700 Page Ave., Suite 160, in Fairfax.

❖ For congregations, companies, schools or neighborhoods wishing to collect as a group, choose one item from the list, gift cards or kids' gifts, and FACETS will give them a goal and a drop-off date. Email development@facetscares.org to sign up.

❖ People may also shop online from FACETS's Amazon wish lists and have items sent directly to FACETS. Financial donations are also welcome. For more information on either of these giving options, go to https://facetscares.org/ways-to-give/holidayhope/.

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.

FAIRFAX CIRCUIT COURT RELEASES FREE PROPERTY ALERT NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

The Fairfax Circuit Court Clerk's Office, in collaboration with the Fairfax County Department of Tax Administration (DTA) and the Department of Information Technology (DIT), announced the launch of the new Fairfax Circuit Court Property Alert Notification System, a free e-alert service available through MyFairfax for Fairfax County and City of Fairfax property owners.

The Fairfax Property Alert System is designed to help property owners stay informed and receive an email alert if any documents are filed on their real estate record with the court. By providing a timely alert, the system provides early detection of potential fraud, including unauthorized deed filings, or other suspicious activity involving real property records.

Key features of the Fairfax Property Alert System include:

Email alert when a document is filed with Fairfax Circuit Court's Land Records office matching the property owner's name

Monitoring for unauthorized transfers or potentially fraudulent activity

Online access and management through the MyFairfax portal (www.fairfaxcounty.gov/myfairfax)

Quick, easy, and no-cost enrollment

For more information and to set up Property Alerts, please visit:

Fairfax Circuit Court: www.fairfaxcounty.gov/circuit

VOLUNTEER DRIVERS NEEDED

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

VOLUNTEER YOUR TIME

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

SUPPORT GROUPS

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



Meadowlark's Winter Walk of Lights Opens

Screenshot via Facebook: Meadowlark Botanical Gardens

Meadowlark's 15th annual Winter Walk of Lights opened Nov. 11, 2026, following an opening-night lighting ceremony with NOVA Parks Executive Director Justin Wilson and Fairfax County supervisors. The ticketed event, featuring a half-mile illuminated walking trail, runs nightly through Jan. 3, 2027, including Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's. https://www.novaparks.com/events/winter-walk-of-lights

— Mercia Hobson/The Connection

VDOT
Virginia Department of Transportation

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
HALIFAX	9250	639	ROCK BARN ROAD	BUFFALO CREEK	10/30/2026
APPOMATTOX	1665	700E	TRENT HATCHERY ROAD	BRANCH CUB CREEK	10/30/2026
NELSON	12612	776	GRAPELAWN DRIVE	DAVIS CREEK	10/29/2026
WISE	19495	1135N	LITTLE LEAGUE ROAD	TOM'S CREEK	10/26/2026
HALIFAX	9295	685	LEWIS FERRELL ROAD	BIRCH CREEK	10/22/2026
SCOTT	16704	625N	ANGLERS WAY ROAD	BRANCH	10/20/2026
LEE	10829	624N	ROUTE 625	CREEK	10/15/2026
PITTSYLVANIA	13652	713	BIRCH CREEK ROAD	BIRCH CREEK	10/15/2026
LEE	10745	912E	ROUTE 912 (OLD 58)	BRANCH	10/13/2026
KING & QUEEN	26123	33E	ROUTE 0034	MATTAPONI RIVER	10/6/2026
BATH	2492	618	DUNNS GAP (ROUTE 618)	COWARDIN RUN	10/2/2026
TAZEWELL	29681	0	SAGE HILL ROAD	INDIAN CREEK	10/1/2026
TAZEWELL	18616	643	BRUSHFORK ROAD	NS RAILWAY	10/1/2026
PATRICK	13211	40	CHARITY HWY/ROUTE 40	POPLAR CAMP CREEK	9/30/2026
GRAYSON	8756	58E	HIGHLANDS PKY	HELTON CREEK	9/30/2026
SCOTT	16690	621N	ENGLAND VALLEY ROAD	BRANCH	9/30/2026
TAZEWELL	18614	643E	ROUTE 643	MUD FORK	9/30/2026
NELSON	12521	640	WHEELERS COVE ROAD	DUTCH CREEK	10/31/2026
ALLEGHANY	1031	159N	DUNLAP CREEK ROAD (ROUTE 159)	DUNLAP CREEK	10/20/2026
DINWIDDIE	6050	624	HILLS DRIVE	WHITE OAK CREEK	10/24/2026

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.

Entertainment

WEDNESDAYS NIGHTS

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

CONCERTS AT OLD BROGUE IRISH PUB

Each concert has two performances: 4:30–6:00 p.m.; 6:30–8:00 p.m. Meets at The Old Brogue Irish Pub, 760 Walker Road, Great Falls, VA

Sunday, Nov. 22 – Piper Jones Band

Sunday, Nov. 29 – Kinnfolk

Sunday, Dec. 13 – Jody Marshall & Friends Annual Holiday Concert

NOW THRU NOV. 24

Lions Citrus Sale. At American Legion Post 177, 3939 Oak Street, Fairfax. Fresh from Florida's Indian River Groves: Navel Oranges; Mandarins; Pink

Grapefruit; Whitley's VA Peanuts. Pick up orders Dec 10-12, 2026 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (or fruit shipped to you). Visit the website https://www.fairfaxlions.org/

NOVA PARKS HOLIDAY LIGHT SHOWS OPEN

Drive, Walk and Smile into the holidays with three unique holiday light show experiences. Tickets for the 2026 holiday season are now on sale, and all 3 NOVA Parks light shows will be open as of Saturday, November 14.

Meadowlark's Winter Walk of Lights

Walk a sparkling half-mile garden trail while sipping on a hot beverage for an enchanting evening at Meadowlark's Winter Walk of Lights in Vienna.

Meadowlark's Winter Walk of Lights is an elegant garden trail aglow with countless sparkling lights, perfect for a date night or family holiday outing. The half-mile walk through the enchanting Meadowlark Botanical Gardens (Vienna, VA) features lighted nature themes and animated displays along a paved wheelchair and stroller-accessible trail. Stay warm by sipping on a hot beverage (with or without spirits) as you walk and s'mores to finish out the evening. Treat your pup to their favorite walk of the year on specific dates. The Winter Walk of Lights is illuminating the gardens for its 15th season, bringing joy to more than 110,000 visitors each year.

Open nightly November 11 through January 3. Capacity is limited; reservations are required to ensure access on a specific date. Tickets start at $19 per person; promotions are available for specific dates. Visit novaparks.com/WinterWalk for details.

Bull Run Festival of Lights

Drive through 2.5 miles of dazzling lights at Northern Virginia's largest drive-through light show at the Bull Run Festival of Lights in Centreville.

Experience the magic of the holidays at the Bull Run Festival of Lights, Northern Virginia's largest drive-through holiday light show! A family favorite for three decades, the Bull Run Festival of Lights dazzles with a 2.5-mile display of holiday and fairytale vignettes. Enjoy time with family while staying warm and cozy as you slowly drive through the animated displays in Bull Run Regional Park. New displays are added every year–drive through the Winter Wonderland where it's always snowing and see the tallest light display yet. Don't miss the Holiday Village and Carnival at the end of the drive to visit animals at the stable, roast marshmallows, and new this year, enjoy an extra special treat at the new hot chocolate and dirty soda bar!

Open November 14 through January 3. Price per vehicle varies by date. Book now for visits before December 11 for the lowest rates of the season. Visit novaparks.com/FestivalofLights for details.

Bright Nights – The Winter Village at Cameron Run

Explore a winter village wonderland for a playful outdoor experience at Bright Nights – The Winter Village at Cameron Run in Alexandria.

Just minutes from Old Town Alexandria, explore new, dazzling light displays at Cameron Run Regional Park (Alexandria, VA). Bright Nights offers a fun, unstructured outdoor family experience to explore unique light displays, snap family pictures or selfies with a variety of festive scenes and enjoy a hot beverage and snack. New this year, enjoy lighted mini golf, a scavenger hunt, a giant maze, and bring your own camera and capture a special holiday memory with Santa Claus through December 23. Visits and photos with Santa are free with admission to Bright Nights.

Open weekends November 14 through 22, then nightly November 27 through January 3. Admission is $9 online; promotions available for specific dates. Visit novaparks.com/BrightNights for details, hours and Santa's schedule.

Visit novaparks.com/Lights for more information and to purchase tickets.



Enjoy Holiday Gingerbread House Decorating on Saturday, Nov. 21, 2026 at the McLean Community Center in McLean.



The Duo Mosaic Piano Duo will perform Sunday, Nov. 22, 2026 at the Alden Theatre at McLean Community Center in McLean.

NOW THRU DEC. 24

Santa Photos at Tysons Corner Center. At the Lower Level 1 near Wasabi.

The heart of the season returns as Santa arrives for his 39th year at Tysons Corner Center, inviting families to share their Christmas wishes and capture festive photos together located on the Lower Level near Wasabi. Sponsored by CAMP, the experience allows guests to reserve a time in advance and receive a complimentary personalized digital message from Santa, powered by Portable North Pole. Photo package purchases also include additional perks, such as discounted Shutterfly prints and access to a digital greeting card platform.

NOV. 4-29

McLean Art Society's "City Life" Exhibition and Members Show. 12 to 6 p.m. At McLean Art Gallery, 6224B Old Dominion Drive, McLean. "City Life" explores the energy, character, and beauty of urban living through original artwork inspired by city streets, architectural forms, vibrant neighborhoods, bustling cityscapes, and the quiet moments tucked within the rhythm of daily life. The exhibition celebrates the many ways artists interpret the movement, contrasts, and unexpected beauty of the city. Opening reception will be held Friday, Nov. 6 from 5-7 p.m. to meet the artists, enjoy conversation about summer-inspired artwork, and relax with live music, wine, and light refreshments.

WEDNESDAY/NOV. 18

"Arias and Duets" Virginia Opera. 7 p.m. At the Stacy C. Sherwood Center, 3740 Blenheim Blvd., Fairfax. Enjoy a live performance of operatic arias, duets, and musical favorites while the artists share insights into the music and stories. This engaging community concert for people of all ages provides an accessible and welcoming introduction to opera!

Fairfax County Farmers Markets

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

SATURDAYS

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

Reston: Through 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.

Prepare to be amazed! Featuring professional singers from the Herndon Foundation Emerging Artists Program. Supported in part by a grant from the City of Fairfax.

NOV. 18-22

Book Sale. 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. At Richard Byrd Library, 7250 Commerce Street, Springfield. Preview sale, Wed., Nov. 18, 2 - 5 p.m. Entry fee $10. General sale, Thu. – Sat., Nov. 19 - 21, 10 a.m. - 6 p.m., Free. Bag sale, Sun., Nov. 22, 12 - 2 p.m. $5/bag. Get a head start on your winter/holiday reading at bargain prices. Thousands of like new books to choose from. Funds raised support library programming, children's and adult. Contact the Friends at rbfriends@gmail.com.

WEDNESDAY/NOV. 18

Virginia Opera "Arias & Duets". 7 – 8 p.m. At Stacy C. Sherwood Center, 3740 Blenheim Blvd., Fairfax. Virginia Opera's Arias and Duets concert features selections from beloved operas and musical theater, highlighting a diverse range of composers, styles, and languages. Virginia Opera brings the beauty and accessibility of opera to all ages through intimate, high-quality performances sung by our Herndon Emerging Artists. Supported, in part, by a grant from the City of Fairfax Commission on the Arts.

THURSDAY/NOV. 19

UMW Onsite Regional Reception. 7-9 p.m. At Stacy C. Sherwood Community Center, 3740 Blenheim Blvd., Fairfax. Join us at a fall Mary Washington regional reception to connect with admissions staff, current students, and alumni while enjoying light refreshments. You'll learn more about UMW and what makes our community unique. Visit the website: https://www.umw.edu/admissions/meet-us/

NOV. 20-22

Sterling Playmakers Present Camelot. At Theatre at Seneca Ridge Middle School, Sterling. Journey back in time to the majestic kingdom of CAMELOT, to King Arthur's court, and the knights of the round table. Packed with thrilling sword fights, pageantry, suspense and romance, this legendary Golden Age musical has enchanted generations of theatregoers.

Show times:

Friday, Nov. 20 at 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, Nov. 21 at 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, Nov. 22 at 2 p.m.

General Admission available at the door or online at https://www.sterlingplaymakers.org/tickets



The Old Town Hall Performance Series – The Capital Hearings will take place on Friday, Dec. 11, 2026 at Old Town Hall in Fairfax.

FRIDAY/NOV. 20

Old Town Hall Performance Series - Bokor, Snedecor, Hill - Chamber Trio. 8 p.m. Location: Visit website: www.fairfaxva.gov/culturalarts. Join us for this evening for a trio of trios! Brahms's trio is celebrated for its lush, flowing melodies woven seamlessly among the clarinet, cello, and piano. Muczynski's Fantasy Trio offers a striking contrast, driven by bold, energetic, and punchy rhythms. Nino Rota—best known for his score to The Godfather—composed his trio in 1973, infusing it with a charming, cinematic character that reflects his signature style. This concert is sponsored by the City of Fairfax Commission on the Arts.

SATURDAY/NOV. 21

Finnish Christmas Bazaar. 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. At Prince of Peace Church & School, 8304 Old Keene Mill Road, Springfield. What's Christmas like in the world's happiest country? Here's a chance to find out without leaving Northern Virginia! For over 50 years, the Finnish Christmas Bazaar has brought a little piece of Finland to the Washington, DC area. Visitors can experience authentic Finnish Christmas traditions, enjoy traditional Finnish pastries and baked goods, and shop for unique Nordic gifts and handmade crafts.

FRIDAY/NOV. 20

The Bokor, Snedecor, Hill Trio. 8 p.m. At Old Town Hall, 3999 University Drive, Fairfax. This talented clarinet, cello & piano trio will perform a trio of musical selections! https://www.fairfaxva.gov/Fun-Facilities/Cultural-Arts-and-History/Cultural-Arts

SATURDAY/NOV. 21

Holiday Gingerbread House Decorating. 10 a.m. – Noon. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Celebrate the holidays with us! Families decorate a gingerbread house to make their own one-of-kind designs. The Old Firehouse will supply a prebuilt house, frosting, and toppings along with light refreshments. Price is per gingerbread house. Registration is required!

SATURDAY/NOV. 21

WWII Book Launch. 2-4 p.m. At Truro Anglican Church Community Room, 10520 Main Street, Fairfax. Her family remembered Rita as cold-hearted and self-centered. But what if they were wrong? Come hear about the true story of a half-Jewish mother facing impossible choices in Nazi-occupied Holland. Visit https://ramblingruminations.com/the-truth-was-different

NOV. 22 TO JAN. 20

Transformations & Permutations: New Work from Old Things. At McLean Project for the Arts – Emerson Gallery, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. A four-person sculpture show featuring works by Tory Cowles, Mary Decan Opasik, Jordan Tierney, and Sherry Trachman. Opening Reception: Thursday, Dec 3, from 7- 9 p.m. Artist talk: Thursday, Jan. 7, 7 p.m.

SUNDAY/NOV. 22

Duo Mosaic Piano Duo. 2 p.m. At the McLean Community Center's Alden Theatre, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Wildly popular pianist Ching-Yi Lin returns to The Alden with his wife and musical partner Grace Liu. The two will dazzle on The Alden's two Steinway pianos, the first time in decades that both instruments have shared the spotlight.

SATURDAY/NOV. 28

Skye Ballet Center Nutcracker. 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. At South Lakes High School, 11400 S. Lakes Drive, Reston. Tickets: https://events.ticketleap.com/events/skyeballet. Tickets also available at the door.





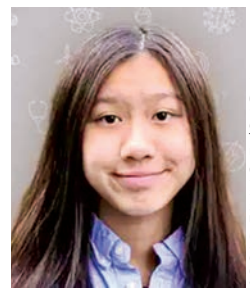




Young Innovator Wins National Recognition

Millie Pradawong is a finalist in 3M Young Scientist Challenge.

By Susan Laume
The Connection


FCPS/Donnie Biggs
Millie Pradawong

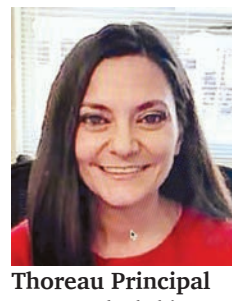

Photo by Susan Laume
Thoreau Principal Teresa Khuluki


Photo by Susan Laume
Sandy Anderson

Northern Virginia has a star of a young scientist in its midst. A student at Thoreau Middle School when she applied, and now freshman at James Madison High School, Millie Pradawong, was selected as a finalist in the 2026 3M Corporation's Young Scientist Challenge. Her achievement in reaching the finals in a strongly competitive field of thousands of entrants is noteworthy, even though she was not the top winner in the national contest. Her understanding of the complexities of biology at such a young age is mind-boggling.

In her competition video entry, Pradawong described her design of a computational tool to predict how gene editing could influence micro algae metabolism to produce more biofuel, while balancing the organisms' growth and efficiency. In a world looking for renewable energy solutions to mitigate climate change, micro algae biofuel has been viewed as promising for its ability to grow quickly, absorb carbon dioxide, and produce oils that can be used as fuel. Pradawang's tool could contribute to important advances in this area.

In her entry Pradawong said, "My favorite invention of the last 100 years is CRISPR-Cas9 gene editing. I think it is fascinating because it changed what scientists can do with DNA. Before learning about CRISPR, I thought of DNA mostly as information. CRISPR made me realize that DNA could also be edited in a much more targeted and meaningful way. The part I find most interesting is that CRISPR came from bacteria. It was not invented out of nowhere. Scientists noticed a system bacteria already used to defend themselves and turned it into a tool for research, medicine, agriculture, and biotechnology. I like that because it shows how many useful ideas might already exist in nature, but we have to notice them first."

For her project, Pradawong designed her own modified MACRO (Machine Learning-Augmented CRISPR Reprogramming Optimization) tool.

3M's top young scientist for 2026, and winner of the $25,000 grand prize, is Raji Doshi, an eighth grader from Farmington, Connecticut. Doshi's project engineered a natural algae and aragonite system to address ocean acidification by increasing alkalinity and removing carbon dioxide from seawater. And yes, an eighth grader did that.

The genesis of Pradawong's idea began during a unit on pollution in her Thoreau Middle School science class.

The school's principal, Teresa Kahului says Pradawong indeed may have stood out among her classmates for her tremendous level of curiosity. Kahului also credits their science teacher, Amie Oehm, for teaching problem-based critical thinking, and encouraging students to take science concepts and find projects and applications for the real world. One of Fairfax County Public School's five strategic goals is based on a mission of preparing students for innovations to " thrive in life after high school with skills to navigate, adapt, and innovate for a sustainable future."

Sandy Anderson, the Springfield District School Board member who manages meetings related to Strategic Goal 5 says, "As a former college instructor, I saw every day what students need to succeed after high school.

That's why Goal 5 is where everything else we do pays off. Reading by third grade and earlier access to Algebra I matter because they are stepping stones that lead somewhere: a job, a degree, a trade. We're preparing students for jobs that don't exist yet, so the most important thing we can teach them is how to adapt, solve problems, and be curious. If any student walks across the graduation stage without a plan and the skills to carry it out, we haven't finished our work."

Pradawong received a $1000 prize as one of ten national challenge finalists. She also had the opportunity to participate in a summer program at the 3M Innovation Center in St Paul Minnesota, with mentoring by a 3M scientist; and a trip to the final event in Minnesota this past October. She hopes eventually to have a career as a physician scientist; caring for patients but continuing work as a researcher. Of course, first, she must finish high school.

For information on eligibility and entering future 3M challenges, see

https://youngscientistlab.com/annual-challenge/about-the-challenge.

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soil disturbance, and vegetation removal within the same watershed. Construction activities can increase erosion and sediment transport when inadequate controls allow exposed soil to enter nearby waterways, particularly during significant rainfall. This creates an important question for County officials: How will Fairfax County ensure that construction of its new sewer infrastructure does not worsen the very sedimentation problem it is simultaneously spending public funds to investigate?

Regulatory Compliance Is Only the Starting Point

The Accotink Creek watershed has a history of controversies involving stormwater management and environmental protection. In 2012, Fairfax County and the Virginia Department of Transportation successfully challenged an Environmental Protection Agency stormwater-flow regulation intended to address sediment-related impairment of Accotink Creek. Although the court resolved that dispute on statutory grounds, its decision did not eliminate the underlying environmental problem. Major transportation construction projects, including the I-495 Express Lanes, have also generated concerns about erosion, stormwater runoff, and sediment entering local waterways.

These experiences illustrate why residents should expect more than assurances that construction contractors will comply with existing environmental regulations. Regulatory compliance establishes minimum requirements, but effective watershed protection also demands measurable performance,

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Teen Chantilly Crash Victim Succumbs to Injuries

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– located just off of Stringfellow, accidents could easily happen anywhere along that approximately 3-mile stretch of road.

The Chantilly Regional Library is across from the high school, and Rocky Run Middle School is just down the street, as are Greenbriar and Poplar Tree parks and a commuter parking lot served by Connector buses. A large apartment complex bordering Route 50 is next to the high school, and Stringfellow is also the road leading to Poplar Tree, Greenbriar East and Greenbriar West elementary schools, as well as the Greenbriar Town Center and the Fair Lakes shopping centers.

Now, however, Smith and her fellow members of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors are seriously considering a proposal to redevelop the library site by constructing a new library, plus a high-density residential complex containing 240 housing units. And it's already facing opposition.

In its Change.org petition, a group called the Chantilly Coalition for Safety and Equity – which includes local residents, parents and community members – is demanding the Supervisors stop this project. They say that "building the proposed 240 housing units onto this public parcel will directly undermine the safety, traffic flow and wellbeing of our neighborhood and schools. Adding hundreds of additional vehicles directly across from Chantilly High School will exacerbate already dangerous traffic patterns along Stringfellow Road and Route 50."

As for Smith, she said, "Over the past several months, the Chantilly community has shared valuable feedback and raised important concerns about traffic and transportation safety in the area surrounding the Chantilly Library site. The recent tragedy on Stringfellow Road underscores these concerns.

"Our immediate priority is to better understand and address short-term transportation and pedestrian-safety concerns, while also considering the long-term needs of the Chantilly Library redevelopment and the broader Sully community." Noting the importance of resident's voices, Smith said she wants people to remain engaged in this issue "as we continue this work and return to the discussion next year."

But the group that started the Change.org petition is not assuaged. It wrote, "Following the serious accident on Nov. 4, our community urgently needs a standalone pedestrian bridge at the north entrance to [Chantilly High], now – not as a delayed bargaining chip tied to a multi-year residential development. Adding high-density housing directly across the street places our youth in constant jeopardy."

To read the petition, go to https://change.org/p/stop-the-chantilly-regional-library-redevelopment-proposal. At press time, it had more than 2,000 signatures.

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timely inspections, prompt corrective action, and transparent reporting. Fairfax County should demonstrate that its environmental safeguards actually prevent avoidable damage rather than relying exclusively on documentation showing that contractors followed prescribed procedures.

Put Existing Scientific Resources to Work

Fairfax County already has an opportunity to strengthen environmental oversight by coordinating the Accotink Gravity Sewer Improvements Project with its ongoing Lake Accotink studies. The County has assembled scientific and engineering resources to investigate sediment transport and accumulation throughout the watershed. Rather than allowing separate project teams to work independently, DPWES should formally engage USGS scientists, engineering consultants, and responsible County officials in developing a coordinated approach to evaluating potential construction-related sediment impacts.

Before major land disturbance begins, the County should establish baseline stream conditions and collect appropriate turbidity, suspended sediment, and other environmental measurements. During construction, monitoring should evaluate changes that may result from excavation, vegetation removal, and stormwater runoff. The study team should also determine whether existing monitoring stations, field investigations, and sediment transport models can identify or quantify additional sediment attributable to sewer construction. Where current monitoring methods cannot adequately distinguish construction-related impacts from other sediment sources, the County should consider supplemental measurements and monitoring locations.

This coordination should produce more than an exchange of information between project managers. The County should document participating organizations and their responsibilities, establish procedures for responding to adverse monitoring results, and make relevant inspection findings and corrective actions accessible to the public. Incorporating these findings into both project records would strengthen accountability and provide valuable information for the County's ongoing evaluation of sedimentation in Lake Accotink.

Protect the Corridor and the Communities Downstream

Environmental oversight must also extend to the physical construction corridor. Fairfax County should minimize unnecessary removal of mature trees, understory vegetation, and established stream buffers while protecting wetlands, vernal pools, and designated Resource Protection Areas. Where the selected pipeline alignment departs from existing utility corridors, DPWES should explain how it evaluated the environmental consequences of alternative routes and why the selected alignment balances engineering requirements with natural resource protection. Independent technical verification, regular inspections following significant rainfall, and clear authority to suspend work when serious environmental deficiencies occur would provide additional assurance that environmental protection remains a priority throughout construction. These measures should complement, rather than replace, the County's existing regulatory and permitting obligations.

Supervisors Walter Alcorn and Dalia Palchik, whose Hunter Mill and Providence Districts encompass the construction corridor, have an important opportunity to lead this effort. Their colleagues representing downstream communities, particularly Braddock District Supervisor Rachna Sizemore Heizer, also have a direct interest in the outcome. I have formally requested that County officials establish specific environmental safeguards, coordinate the sewer project with the Lake Accotink studies, and provide a substantive written response identifying the responsibilities, monitoring arrangements, and accountability measures they will implement.

One Watershed, One Responsibility

Fairfax County should not manage sanitary sewer construction and Lake Accotink preservation as unrelated undertakings simply because different project teams administer them. The watershed does not recognize political boundaries, departmental responsibilities, or separate project budgets. Sediment entering Hunters Branch can move into Accotink Creek and ultimately affect Lake Accotink, making coordinated planning and environmental oversight essential to protecting the entire watershed.

Residents who have questions or concerns about protecting the Accotink Creek watershed should contact their Fairfax County District Supervisor, the Accotink Gravity Sewer Improvements Project Manager, and the Smaller Lake Accotink Preservation Feasibility Study Project Manager. Share your concerns, ask what environmental safeguards and sediment monitoring measures the County will implement, and encourage coordination between the two projects. Public involvement and informed oversight can help ensure that necessary infrastructure improvements do not come at the expense of the watershed and Lake Accotink's future.

Residents should not have to choose between reliable sanitary sewer service and preserving their natural resources. Fairfax County can provide both, but doing so requires measurable environmental safeguards, effective coordination, and accountability before construction causes damage that may prove difficult and costly to reverse. The County already possesses substantial scientific resources, engineering expertise, and institutional knowledge to address these challenges. It now has an opportunity to demonstrate that responsible infrastructure development and meaningful environmental stewardship can advance together.

Martin E. Shepherd is a former member of the Fairfax County Task Force on the Future of Lake Accotink and a longtime advocate for preserving and restoring Lake Accotink.

For More Information or to
Express Your Concerns
Fairfax County Board of Supervisors
Contact your district supervisor:
https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/boardofsupervisors/
Accotink Gravity Sewer
Improvements Project
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https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/publicworks/capital-projects/accotink-gravity-sewer improvements-project
Smaller Lake Accotink Preservation Feasibility Study
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"Cartality"



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Every month when I receive my paper bill from Audi (the car, not the belly button) to make my monthly payment, I also take notice of how many payments I have remaining (I purchased this SUV and financed it for 60 months after having completed a 42-month lease on the same car). Given my diagnosis, I am also mindful of what my car future may or may not be. It's in this context I remember a conversation I had with Dina's late Italian grandfather: Cesear aka "Chez." It was about cars, specifically the Oldsmobile Omega sedan parked in front of his house. Chez took the opportunity to begin listing all the cars he remembered buying over his lifetime before summarizing that the Omega would be the last car he'd ever buy; acknowledging his own mortality. Being 85-ish, give or take, at the time, "Chez" wasn't driving very much anyway so his comment was hardly a revelation. Still it was funny how he recounted all the other cars that he had owned/had previously driven and laughed at their memory while understanding his car future was over.

I feel similarly about my 2022 Audi Q3. One of two cars we own/lease in our retirement. Additionally, our driving demands are somewhat less than while we were working. As such, our cars are odometer friendly: the miles just aren't adding up. Therefore, there's less wear and tear on both the car and the driver and since I'm not a car guy (sports and chocolate are my areas of expertise), but rather more of a budget guy, I would much rather have two paid-off cars than new/leased cars with payments. As the years have passed, I have gained much less pleasure in making my car payment. Those payments never seemed to be a means to an end as they feel now (not an end to my life but instead an end to car payments). I anticipate the joy I'll feel when I no longer have to pay $631. 30 every month. I think then, this Audi might be my last car. And every month receiving its bill reminds me of my goal and how much closer I am to reaching it. It also reminds me of the time when the late comedienne Joan Rivers burned her home's mortgage on live television after she had paid the balance due. She was free, unencumbered. Likewise, I'll be car rich rather than car poor. Granted there might have been a time in my life when my car mattered more. Not anymore. Now that car payment represents my future. I just hope I get to enjoy it sort of the way "Chez" enjoyed knowing his Omega was going to be his last car. Meaning to me that he was content with his life/what his life had been and the car was incidental.

Unlike "Chez" I won't be aged 85 when my car is paid off; I'll be 75-ish with a few good years likely to have left. Still, I have to temper my anticipation/enthusiasm because I am an active cancer patient still undergoing treatment. And considering one's cancer diagnosis is generally not an ideal way to plan your retirement, it is hopefully not the impediment it used to be. Some cancer survivors are now treated as if they have a chronic disease, sort of like diabetes, with many normal-type years left to live. My "13 month to two years" prognosis back in 2009 is a thing of the past. Nevertheless, for the moment, life goes on and though I'm not throwing caution to the wind (hardly), I am certainly throwing myself into my car as per usual knowing that each trip is getting me closer to heaven on earth: car-payment freedom. And though I'm not exactly planning on how I am going to spend this $600+ monthly windfall, I am looking forward to not having to send it to Audi. I can only imagine the effect it will have on our budget. Can you say "Come to papa?"

The older I get, it's discretionary income that tickles my fancy, and being able to say "yes" to a random demand for my cash. Saying "no" all those previous years was prudent certainly, but in the midst of a cancer-centric life, it was a bit of a, to quote my late father, "confliction." If I didn't have as long to live as I had anticipated/planned/hoped et cetera, budgeting money became a sort of which way the wind/diagnosis was blowing. What seemed to end up most was me spending in the present in a way that might not bankrupt my future. It was a fine line to be sure and one not always appreciated. When diagnosed with a "terminal" diagnosis, it's nearly impossible to not live exclusively in the present. And a big expense like a car is front and center in that spending dilemma. And though I may have driven myself anxious over this issue over the preceding years, I've survived, no thanks to my cancer diagnosis.

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

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