

# Mount Vernon Gazette

MOUNT VERNON'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER • A CONNECTION NEWSPAPER

MAY 9, 2024



Native Gardens at Mount Vernon Governmental Center.



Supervisor Dan Storck and Cathy Ledec, the project's leader.

## Restoring Ecology at the Mount Vernon Governmental Center

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH  
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

**M**ay 4 was a cool, drippy day, but the plants were very happy, as 90 or so locals studied them on the Mount Vernon Governmental Center grounds.

Part of what was formerly grassy lawn is transitioning into beds of vibrant habitat that support native insects, birds and other wildlife, thanks to Supervisor Dan Storck. He explained, "When I first took office, I noticed the barren, unattractive and uninviting lawn that surrounded the Governmental Center and reached out and worked with our local flora and fauna advocates to change it. Creating native gardens to support our native birds and insects is an important environmental initiative as we continue to see loss of habitat, leading to the decline of these fundamental species in our ecosystem."

### How It Happened

Cathy Ledec, former Fairfax County Tree Commission Chair, led the effort, starting in 2018. Now living in Massachusetts, Cathy and her husband, George, returned on Saturday for the walkaround. "It's much better than I expected," she commented. She had assumed the ground was dry, but the roof's run-off supplies more water to some of the sites than she anticipated.

Pointing to a serviceberry shrub,



One bed is between the parking lot and Parkers Lane.

she said, "I wanted Dan and the staff to have something to look at instead of asphalt."

Referring to his staff, Supervisor Stock concurred, "TEAM MVD enjoys looking out our windows at perennials specifically chosen for year-round blooming that also provide an inviting public space for residents to enjoy."

Volunteers also planted 12 trees which can help shade and cool the building in the summer, thus reducing energy costs.

Suzanne Foster, a county landscape architect, led three tours of five beds and two stormwater bioretention facilities. Stantec designed the beds, planted with "large sweeps of one species," Fos-

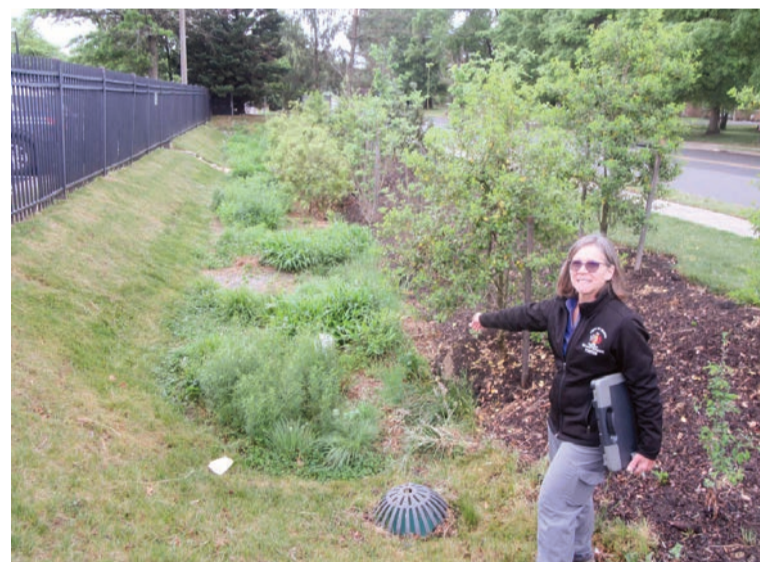


Many plants like spiderwort were thriving in the drizzly weather.

ter explained, plants like spiderwort, golden ragwort, green and gold, deer tongue, white wood aster, Christmas fern and black-eyed Susans. Some naturally spread and when they do, they can crowd out



New beds flank the entrance to the Mount Vernon Governmental Center.



Suzanne Foster led the tour of the beds and stormwater detention facilities like this one.

## Bringing Nature Home

The typical American lawn is an "ecological dead zone," said Dr. Doug Tallamy, University of Delaware entomologist, in a 2022 interview. "Lawn doesn't do any of the things that we need every landscape to do, and there are four of them . . . sequester carbon, manage the watershed, support a food web and support pollinators. If we replaced half of the more than 40 million acres of lawn with native plants, that would be more land than all of the national parks combined." Tallamy is the author of "Bringing Nature Home."  
<https://homegrownnationalpark.org/>

SEE RESTORING, PAGE 11

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OPEN SUN 5/12, 2-4

### Mount Ida | \$2,495,000

Built in 2008, this home has been recently updated. There is flex space throughout on 4 levels with 5-7 bedrooms—including main-level primary suite and an in-law/nanny suite—great gathering rooms, and separate private spaces. 3107 Russell Road  
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### Del Ray | \$2,000,000

Built in 2022, this gorgeous, spacious home features 6 bedrooms, 4.5 bathrooms, and a main level primary bedroom! Enjoy soaring ceilings, hardwood floors throughout, main and upper level laundry, a large back porch, and great storage spaces. 110 W Nelson Ave  
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OPEN 5/10 5-7, 5/11 & 15/12 1-3

### Potomac Yard | \$1,199,000

Lovely 4-level townhome in Potomac Yard! This home features 4 bedrooms, 4.5 bathrooms, 10-foot ceilings on the main living level with a stone accent wall, a double sided gas fireplace on the upper level with a beautiful deck. 2202 Potomac Ave  
**Adrianna Vallario 202.257.9901**  
[www.jenwalker.com](http://www.jenwalker.com)



OPEN SUN 5/12, 2-4

### Old Town | \$1,159,000

This stately, all brick semi-detached condo is conveniently situated in the heart of Old Town. This home is a lovely blend of historic charm and modern convenience. There's plenty of room for comfortable living in this spacious 3-level home. 804 Wolfe Street  
**Tracy Dunn 571.212.3658**  
[www.tracybdunn.com](http://www.tracybdunn.com)



OPEN SUN 5/12, 1-3

### Potomac Yard | \$975,000

This 3-bedroom, 2.5-bathroom gem of a townhome in Potomac Yard has gorgeous flooring, 10-foot ceilings, and a spacious floor plan that begs for entertaining! Private garage parking and sunset views from the balcony. 2107 Main Line Blvd #10  
**Mary Kern 703.994.5246**  
[www.marykernhomes.com](http://www.marykernhomes.com)



OPEN THURS 5/9 5-7 & SAT 5/11 11-1

### Del Ray | \$849,000

Amazing location and charm! Don't miss this 3-bedroom, 2-bathroom townhouse in the heart of Del Ray. Gorgeous open chef's kitchen, lower level den, generous primary bedroom, fully fenced yard and coveted off street 2-car driveway. 235 E Monroe Avenue  
**Sarah Picot 202.251.5635**  
[www.sarahpicot.net](http://www.sarahpicot.net)



OPEN SAT 5/11 2-4

### Marl Pat | \$664,900

Solid 3-bedroom detached home near the Metro, park, schools, and shopping. Large living room with a gas fireplace, skylight, and picture window. Nicely landscaped lot with an inground pool. 3007 Marl Pat Drive  
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OPEN THURS 5/9 4-6 & SAT 5/11 12-2

### Pinecrest | \$584,990

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OPEN SUN 5/12, 1-3

### The Plaza | \$365,000

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SCREENSHOT FAIRFAX COUNTY TRANSPORTATION



Public Hearing to Consider an Ordinance Amending Article 9 of Chapter 82 of the Fairfax County Code, Relating to the Right-of-Way Afforded to Pedestrians

SCREENSHOT PUBLIC HEARING MAY 7 VIDEO

Current crosswalk signs in Fairfax County.

Fairfax County Board of Supervisors hold a public hearing.

## Stop for Pedestrians in Fairfax County Crosswalks

Supervisors adopt ordinance amending county code to stop, not just yield.

BY MERCIA HOBSON  
THE GAZETTE

In 2023, Va. Code § 46.2-924 changed from among other things, requiring that the driver of any vehicle on a highway 'yield' to 'stop' "when any pedestrian crossing such highway is within the driver's lane or within an adjacent lane and approaching the driver's lane until such pedestrian has passed the lane in which the vehicle is stopped."

Furthermore, with the 2023 change, "the driver of any other vehicle approaching from an adjacent lane or from behind the stopped vehicle shall not overtake and pass such a vehicle."

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors held a public hearing on May 7 and, in a vote of 9-0 with Supervisor Pat Herrierty (Springfield) out of the room, voted to require drivers to stop for pedestrians in crosswalks.

The board approved an ordinance to amend Fairfax County Code Article 9 - Protection of Pedestrians. Section 82-9-2. - Right-of-way of pedestrians. and Section 82-9-7. - Penalty for violating Article 9. The ordinance is effective upon adoption.

During his staff presentation, Greg Searson of the Fairfax County Department of Transportation said the county's priorities were updating the code to match the state code and requiring drivers to stop for pedestrians at uncontrolled (unsignalized) locations. The county also aimed to prevent another vehicle from overtaking a

stopped vehicle, the same as the state code.

The county's signage tells motor vehicle operators to yield to pedestrians. "We'd be able to change those out to match the county code to say stop for pedestrians," Searson added.

Additionally, according to state code, Fairfax County, as the governing body, could implement an ordinance mandating the installation and upkeep of highway signs. The signage would require motor vehicle operators to stop for people crossing or attempting to cross. Failure to do so could result in \$100-\$500 penalties.

In 2023, Va. Code § 46.2-924 changed from saying that drivers had to yield to pedestrians to saying that pedestrians crossing a highway in the driver's lane or an adjacent lane and approaching the driver's lane had to wait until the pedestrian had passed the lane where the vehicle was stopped. Overtaking and passing a stopped vehicle from an adjacent lane or behind it is illegal. If police or traffic control devices regulate traffic, drivers must yield.

Mike Doyle commented during the public hearing. He founded the Northern Virginia Families for Safe Streets, an all-volunteer safety organization that works to end pedestrian and cyclist fatalities and injuries caused by motor vehicle drivers in the City of Alexandria and Arlington and Fairfax counties.

Doyle provided testimony to support amending Article 9 of Chapter 82 of the Fairfax County Code. Doyle said that amending



Public Hearing to Consider an Ordinance Amending Article 9 of Chapter 82 of the Fairfax County Code, Relating to the Right-of-Way Afforded to Pedestrians

SCREENSHOT FAIRFAX COUNTY

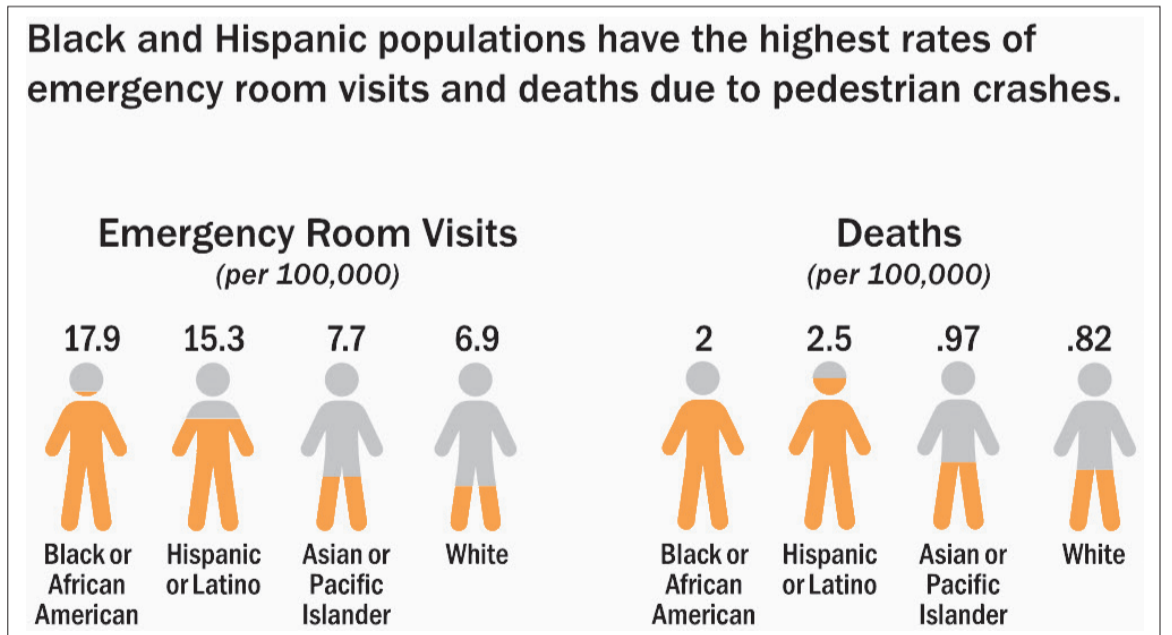
Greg Searson, staff presenter for the Fairfax County Department of Transportation.



Chris French  
President, Fairfax Families For Safe Streets

SCREENSHOT FAIRFAX COUNTY

Chris French, president of the Northern Virginia Families for Safe Streets Fairfax chapter president.



SCREENSHOT FAIRFAX COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

"Black, brown, and minority pedestrians suffer two to three times more fatalities or serious injuries than their white counterparts. So, pedestrian safety is an issue of equity as well as a public health concern," French said.

Article 9 could slow down drivers and prevent motor vehicle operators from running stop signs or passing another car, but it would

not be "the magic bullet." Nonetheless, Doyle said, "We strongly urge you on behalf of all of our chapters because a lot of our

members travel in and around Fairfax ... to pass this ordinance."

Northern Virginia Families for

SEE STOP FOR, PAGE 7

# 250 Year Old Jars of Cherries Unearthed at Mount Vernon

As part of the landmark privately funded \$40 million Mansion Revitalization Project at George Washington's Mount Vernon, archaeologists have discovered two intact European-manufactured bottles in the Mansion cellar. The dark green glass bottles were found upright and sealed, each containing liquid.

Cherries, including stems and pits, were preserved within the liquid contents, which still bore the characteristic scent of cherry blossoms familiar to residents of the region during the spring season.

The bottle shapes are characteristic of styles from the 1740s - 1750s and were recovered from a pit where they may have been forgotten and eventually buried beneath a brick floor laid in the 1770s.

The bottles have been sent for conservation and their contents will be shipped to a laboratory for scientific analysis and testing by specialists in a controlled environment.

"As we conduct a historic preservation effort at the iconic home of America's first President and revolutionary hero, we have been deliberate and intentional about carefully excavating areas of potential disruption," said Mount Vernon President & CEO Doug Bradburn. "Consequently, we have made a number of useful discoveries including this blockbuster find of two fully intact glass bottles containing liquid that have not

been seen since before the war for American independence."

Mount Vernon Principal Archaeologist Jason Boroughs said, "This incredible discovery at Mount Vernon is a significant archaeological find. Not only did we recover intact, sealed bottles, but they contained organic material that can provide us with valuable insight and perspective into 18th-century lives at Mount Vernon. These bottles have the potential to enrich the historic narrative, and we're excited to have the contents analyzed so we can share this discovery with fellow researchers and the visiting public."

After the bottles were unearthed, each was carefully removed and transported to the Mount Vernon archaeology lab. Upon consultation with archaeological conservators, it was determined that removing the liquid contents would help stabilize the glass, which had not been directly exposed to the atmosphere for approximately two centuries.

The Mansion Revitalization Project is underway because the mansion performs functions for which it was not designed. Built as a private residence, it is now a public monument visited by thousands daily, translating to a much heavier traffic flow than the Washingtons could have imagined. That increased visitation causes wear, tear, and strain on the building. Although repairs throughout the Mansion's 290-year histo-

ry have been accomplished using the best techniques available at the time, some of those repairs are now more than a century old. Significant advances in preservation technology afford exciting opportunities to improve structural and environmental conditions in the building, preparing it for another century of service.

Some of the earliest interventions completed in the Mansion were "localized" repairs intended to solve specific problems of immediate concern. Though successful, such repairs can have unintended consequences that affect the overall health of the Mansion. With this project, Mount Vernon's preservation team is proceeding holistically, approaching the Mansion as a complex network of interlocking systems. The primary tasks of the Mansion Revitalization Project include:

- ❖ Repairing sections of the Mansion's framing and masonry
- ❖ Designing and installing a new state-of-the-art heating/ventilation/air conditioning system for the Mansion
- ❖ Improving drainage in and around the Mansion's cellar

When the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association (MVLA) took possession of George Washington's home in 1860, it faced a monumental restoration challenge. Since then, the MVLA has meticulously restored the Mansion and surrounding outbuildings,



PHOTO COURTESY OF MOUNT VERNON LADIES' ASSOCIATION

turning Mount Vernon into a shining example of historic preservation. After extensive investigation, assessment, research, planning, and design, Mount Vernon is taking proactive steps to ensure the health of the Mansion as it enters its fourth century. The Mansion Revitalization Project is being conducted in four phases and is scheduled for completion in the summer of 2026.

## Amelia Heart & Vascular Center is pleased to introduce

### Dr. Daniel Gates



As the newest addition to our Cardiology team, Dr. Gates specializes in treating various cardiovascular conditions, including coronary artery disease, congestive heart failure, and arrhythmias such as atrial fibrillation, supraventricular tachycardia, and premature ventricular beats. Dr. Gates is a member of the American College of Cardiology and holds board certification in Cardiovascular Medicine. Originally from Pennsylvania, Dr. Gates has called Northern Virginia home since 2011. He obtained his undergraduate education at Pennsylvania State University. Following his graduation from PSU, he attended medical school at Uniformed Services University in Bethesda and ultimately completed cardiology fellowship training at Walter Reed. He served honorably for 26 years in the United States Army before retiring from military service, including positions as the chief of cardiology at Womack Army Medical Center and Fort Belvoir Community Hospital. He is pleased to continue serving the medical needs of the National Capital Region following his time in the military.



(703) 866-3131

6136 Brandon Ave, Springfield, VA 22150



PHOTO BY FAIRFAX COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE DEPARTMENT

## May Day, May Day, Fire in Lorton

### Smell lingered for miles.

BY MIKE SALMON  
THE GAZETTE

On Sunday, May 5 the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department responded to a fire in the 9900 block of Richmond Highway in Lorton for a large metal pile that was engulfed in flames. By

11:20 that morning, the fire was under control and remaining crews were on site, hitting hotspots, the FCFRD reported. HazMat crews remained on the scene monitoring air quality and nearby water supplies. There were no injuries.

Burning plastic could be smelled for miles during the incident.

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# COMMUNITY AT GLANCE

## Mount Vernon

### Honoring Fairfax County Retiree Charles Smith

In January of 2024, Charles Smith retired as Watershed Project Implementation Branch Chief. In this role, he led a team responsible for designing, constructing, and monitoring water quality improvement projects. These projects aimed to safeguard public safety, meet federal and state permits, and improve the local environment, including stream corridor restoration. Smith managed the team responsible for creating and monitoring project budgets totaling over \$50 million, annual work plans, capital funding plans, strategic plan actions, and agency plans.

At the Environment Expo in late April, Fairfax County Supervisors Dan Storck (Mount Vernon) and James Walkinshaw (Braddock) paid tribute to Charles Smith, recognizing his 26 years of service to the county and its residents as the former Branch Chief at the Fairfax County Department of Public Works and Environmental Services.



PHOTO: INSTAGRAM SUPDANSTORCK

## Fairfax County School Board

### Fairfax County School Board Student Representative, 2024-2025 elected

PHOTO: FCPS.EDU/NEWS

The countywide Student Advisory Council (SAC) elected Megan Sawant, a junior at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, to represent students on the Fairfax County School Board for one year starting July 1. Sawant targets increasing student engagement with the School Board, academic recovery, and student alcohol and drug abuse.



— MERCIA HOBSTON

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## Senior Services for You

BY SUPERVISOR DAN STORCK

If you are an older adult like me and enjoy connecting with others, Older Americans Month (OAM) and our Senior Safety Summit are for YOU! OAM is celebrated every May as a time to honor the contributions of older adults and address the issues impacting them. This year's theme in the County for OAM is "Powered by Connection." Social connections

### SENIOR LIVING

are incredibly important to our health and overall well-being, serving to enrich our lives and create a sense of belonging.

A great way to celebrate the power of "connection" for OAM and meet up with your neighbors is to join me and Neighborhood and Community Services on Wednesday, May 15, from 10 a.m. – 1:30 p.m., for the 6th Annual Senior Safety Summit at the Lorton Community Center. From 10 – 11:30 a.m. enjoy the popular exhibit hall with many County agencies and local organizations featuring information especially for our senior community. COVID, pneumonia, RSV and shingles vaccines will be available for residents to get immunized. Following the exhibit hall enjoy a free boxed lunch provided by Retirement Unlimited Inc., in coordination with the Paul Spring Retirement Community. Food will be available on a first

come first served basis. Beginning at noon join us for raffle prizes and four presentations by AARP, Department of Family Services, Fire and Rescue and KEG Consulting LLC, featuring driver safety.

The County has many services and resources available for our senior community to assist in everything from aging in place, to classes at the Rec Centers, even health and wellness workshops. The Department of Family Services, Adult and Aging division is a great County resource that supports older residents, family caregivers and people with disabilities to help individuals live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives. Neighborhood and Community Services has 15 senior centers located throughout the County that serve adults 50 and over. Here in the District we have the Gum Springs, Lorton, Kingstowne and Hollin Hall Senior Centers. The Park Authority also offers countless opportunities to form new connections with others that share your interests! Go birding or hiking; channel your creative side with various crafts, painting or even quilting; treat yourself by enjoying afternoon tea; try out dog training or obedience classes; or go on nature walks or garden tours. For other ways to stay connected, subscribe to the Golden Gazette which is a free monthly newsletter with a variety of topics and community news for older adults and caregivers.



Supervisor Storck and attendees enjoying the popular exhibit hall at the 2023 Senior Safety Summit.

## In Support of Mural on Water Tank, Gateway to Gum Springs

The Urban Land Institute identified the water tanks on Fordson Road as the gateway into Gum Springs. The West Ford Legacy Foundation (WFLF) is spearheading a community project by having a mural painted on one of the water tanks because the water tanks have become enormous in size and unsightly.

To ensure WFLF was not seeking to circumvent community control from any Gum Springs community-based organization,

WFLF met with Vincent Carter, New Gum Springs Civic Association (NGSCA) on March 25th and extended an invitation to NGSCA to participate as a partner. WFLF also reached out to Ron Chase, Director of the Gum Springs Historical Society/Gum Springs Museum, who is opposed to the community mural project. Viewpoints from those who live, work, visit and/or

worship in Gum Springs were obtained from an online survey implemented on March 27th. There are currently more than 300 signatures of supporters.

Letters of support were received from Virginia State Delegate Paul Krizek and the Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Associations.

Unfortunately, without engaging in a thoughtful analysis or communicating with WFLF, the Mount Vernon Supervisor chose to not take a position to support a worthy community project that would not only benefit Gum Springs but also surrounding communities. The Mount Vernon Supervisor did not provide a letter of support.

No valid reasons have been provided for opposing the community project. It would be useful for the opposers to answer two questions: 1) How would a mural depicting the founder and history of Gum Springs substantially jeopardize



the property surrounding the water tanks or quality of life for residents of Gum Springs; and 2) How is a mural depicting history and shows a sense of place and belonging as a

negative community benefit?

So, who or what is exactly the community?

**Queenie Cox**  
Gum Springs Homeowner

www.MountVernonGazette.com

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An independent, locally owned weekly newspaper delivered to homes and businesses.

Published by  
Local Media Connection LLC

1606 King Street  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

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NEWS DEPARTMENT:  
gazette@connectionnewspapers.com

Mary Kimm  
Editor and Publisher  
mkimm@connectionnewspapers.com

Jeanne Theismann  
jtheismann@connectionnewspapers.com  
@TheismannMedia

Mercia Hobson  
Staff Reporter  
mhobson@connectionnewspapers.com

Mike Salmon  
Contributing Writer  
msalmon@connectionnewspapers.com

Ken Moore, Glenda Booth  
Contributing Writers

ADVERTISING:  
For advertising information  
sales@connectionnewspapers.com  
703-778-9431

Debbie Funk  
Display Advertising/National Sales  
703-778-9444  
debfunk@connectionnewspapers.com

Helen Walutes  
Display Advertising, 703-778-9410  
hwalutes@connectionnewspapers.com

David Griffin  
Marketing Assistant  
703-778-9431  
dgriffin@connectionnewspapers.com

Classified & Employment  
Advertising  
703-778-9431

Publisher  
Jerry Vernon  
703-549-0004  
jvernon@connectionnewspapers.com

Editor & Publisher  
Mary Kimm  
mkimm@connectionnewspapers.com  
@MaryKimm

Art/Design:  
Laurence Foong  
Production Manager:  
Geovani Flores

CIRCULATION  
Circulation Manager:  
Ann Oliver  
circulation@connectionnewspapers.com

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# Mental Health Awareness Month: Focusing on America's Mental Health Crisis

BY DEL. PAUL KRIZEK

**Content Warning:** Discussion of mental illness and suicide throughout.

As May unfolds, our nation again turns its gaze towards an issue affecting every corner of American society – mental health. Mental Health Awareness Month serves as a poignant reminder of the challenges millions of Americans face, the urgent need for action, and what we are doing here in the Commonwealth to address this crisis.

The state of mental health in America is both complex and concerning. One stark statistic reveals that about 50% of Americans grappling with a substance use disorder also battle a mental illness (all statistics in this article come from the Pew Charitable Trusts and National Alliance on Mental Illness). This dual struggle creates a two-front crisis, compounding the challenges of treatment and care. However, there is hope in solutions such as integrating mental health care into opioid treatment programs, potentially saving countless lives.

Another alarming trend is the rise in suicide deaths by firearm, which increased by 11% from 2019 to 2022. In Virginia, that number was 718 suicides in 2022. Mental illness often plays a role in suicide risk, compounded by fac-

tors such as increased gun ownership during the pandemic. Healthcare providers can play a crucial role in saving lives by screening patients for suicide risk and assisting gun owners in developing firearm safety plans.

The intersection of mental illness and the criminal justice system paints a bleak picture, with Americans experiencing mental illness being jailed over 2 million times annually. Law enforcement officers frequently find themselves as the first—and sometimes only—responders to mental health crises, stretching resources thin and diverting attention from other public safety matters. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach, including improved mental health care access and community-based crisis intervention programs.

Workplace stress is another significant contributor to mental health challenges, with 84% of Americans reporting that work negatively impacts their mental well-being. However, there is a growing awareness of the link between work and mental health, with both employees and leaders recognizing the importance of fostering a mentally healthy workforce. Normalizing conversations about mental health in the workplace is a critical step toward creat-



Krizek

ing a culture of support and understanding.

Perhaps most distressing is the fact that suicide is the third-leading cause of death for Americans aged 10 to 24. Suicide rates are rising across all demographics, with certain groups, including

LGBTQ+ youth and students of color, facing disproportionately high risk. The American Academy of Pediatrics has declared this a public health crisis and recommends screening for suicide risk as a vital strategy for increasing access to care. Fifty percent of all lifetime mental illnesses begin by age 14, and 75% by age 24. And while 1 in 6 U.S. youth experience a mental health condition each year, only half of them receive treatment. In 2020, there was a 31% increase in mental health-related emergency department visits among adolescents. These statistics reveal an alarming mental health crisis for young people that must be addressed.

This year in the General Assembly we made progress to improve mental healthcare and the significant workforce shortage that continues to impact access to these critical services. The Governor signed a bill allowing mental health facilities to accept a minor for inpatient mental health treatment for either mental health

or substance use treatment. The General Assembly passed a bill to provide fairer pay and benefits for nursing staff at state psychiatric hospitals. We reformed the temporary detention order process to allow alternative transportation providers other than law enforcement. Stigmatization is often a significant barrier to receiving treatment. We passed legislation allowing schools to expand the mental health services they offer students by contracting with telehealth providers. While not a substitute for face-to-face services, telehealth improves accessibility. The House sent several proposals relating to the K-12 funding formula, including counselor-to-student ratios and additional support staff such as school psychologists, nurses, and social workers to the Joint Subcommittee to Study Elementary and Secondary Education Funding. Its first report is due on Nov. 1.

During the Reconvene session, the General Assembly rejected the Governor's amendments to a bill prohibiting carrying weapons in hospitals providing mental health services, requiring mental health awareness training for public school teachers and staff, and to an omnibus public school staffing and funding bill, encompassing issues such as hiring additional counselors, testing coordinators, and licensed behavior analysts. Both now await the Governor's fi-

nal decision.

In December, the governor proposed \$15 million for grants to health centers and organizations to provide mental health services to schools. The General Assembly's budget calls for that funding to go toward creating school-based health clinics that would provide mental health services in addition to primary and other care to students, their families, and staff. Despite different approaches favored by the Governor and General Assembly, it is clear that our leaders are eager to put forward comprehensive solutions to this problem. Ahead of us, the General Assembly will return to Richmond next week to take a second look at the biennial budget, which will undoubtedly contain vital funding aimed at mental healthcare.

Mental Health Awareness Month is a call to action for individuals, communities, and policymakers alike. By confronting the challenges head-on, fostering understanding and empathy, and implementing evidence-based solutions, we can keep the focus on prioritizing mental health, eradicating its stigma, and ensuring that every individual has access to necessary care and support.

*If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis: Call, chat, or text 988 to speak with a trained crisis counselor 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.*

## Stop for Pedestrians in Fairfax County Crosswalks

FROM PAGE 3

Safe Streets Fairfax chapter president Chris French questioned why they debated the amendments given authorization from Richmond (Va. Code § 46.2-924); the board had already approved the funds, and they were available.

Fairfax County has approved \$95,000 for signs to deliver a consistent message to the driving public.

In his testimony, French called the board's attention to the "Board Packet" and noted that under the equity impacts heading, one word said none, which perhaps meant "no adverse equity impacts."

However, French disagreed with such categorization, citing a study by the Fairfax County Health Department, "Pedestrian Safety Isn't Just a Transportation Problem." "Black, brown, and minority pedestrians suffer two to three

times more fatalities or serious injuries than their white counterparts. So, pedestrian safety is an issue of equity as well as a public health concern," French said.

French testified that of the 425 most recent "near miss" reports for Fairfax County, 282 involved crosswalks, with 222 citing drivers' failure to yield as the primary behavior of concern in the incident.

French said he fed the information into ChatGPT, an analytical tool for summarizing the data. The tool highlighted non-compliance issues among motorists, such as failure to yield to pedestrians, ignoring crosswalk signals, or speeding through designated pedestrian zones. This indicated the need for enhanced enforcement and public education campaigns.

"Looking specifically at data involving mid-block crossings, the reports are similar: high speeds, posing risks to pedestrians, [and] the lack of clear signage or mark-

ings," he added.

French read three Northern Virginia Families for Safe Streets comments to conclude his testimony:

\* "Theresa Crowley says crossing Beulah [a street in Franconia] means you're taking your life into your own hands. It doesn't matter if you're on the crosswalk; people speed up, swerve around you, etcetera. [It's] very dangerous when I'm crossing with my disabled son or alone."

❖ "Colleen Foster: Drivers do not slow or stop for pedestrians in the crosswalk. This morning, my son once again had a driver fly through the intersection while he was trying to cross it safely."

❖ "Max Gustafson: There's a crosswalk for my daughter to get across Balls Hill Road in McLean. Cars never stop for us and drive 40-plus miles per hour while we're in progress trying to get across the road."

French said he would not read the oth-

er 279 reports involving crosswalks in that data set. "But imagine that's three reports. This is happening across the county."

Supervisor Dalia Palchik asked Searson to confirm eligibility locations for signage.

Searson said that for unsignalized, uncontrolled locations there is a process that has to come through the board. "This particular process and the eventual board item coming in June is going to be about replacing the signs that currently exist. But for locations in the future, it's something that the board could approve for sure."

Visit <https://novasafeststreets.org/near-miss-and-dangerous-intersection-survey/> to report a near miss, dangerous location, or an existing crosswalk, signal, or sidewalk to the Northern Virginia Families for Safe Streets.

# ENTERTAINMENT

## WEDNESDAYS THROUGH SATURDAYS

**Tours Aboard Tall Ship Providence and Sen. John Warner Maritime Heritage Center.** 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. At Alexandria's Waterfront Park, 1A Prince Street, Alexandria. Guests of all ages are recruited into the Continental Navy aboard Tall Ship Providence with legendary Captain John Paul Jones. Recruits are assigned jobs on the ship, learn where they will work and live, how to load a cannon, etc... Tours conclude in the Naval History Theatre with a film about the ship. The Heritage center is a floating museum on the Alexandria waterfront. Visit <https://tallship-providence.org/>

## APRIL 4 TO MAY 12

**Japanese Inspiration:** Sean Donnan, David Gootnick, Yoshiko Ratliff. At the Athenaeum, Alexandria. To complement Washington's festivities celebrating the Japanese cherry blossoms around the Tidal Basin, the Athenaeum Gallery is featuring the work of three local contemporary artists whose work is influenced and guided by traditional Japanese art. Sean Donnan is an illustrator whose fanciful posters are inspired by Japanese mythology, anime, video games, and pop culture. David Gootnick creates lacy and delicate designs out of wood using an ancient Japanese artform called Kumiko. And Yoshiko Ratliff's paintings are bold, but intricately detailed representations of Japanese characters and Kimonos.

## APRIL 9 - MAY 19

**There and Back Exhibit of Photographic Art by Maureen Minehan.** At Multiple Exposures Gallery, Torpedo Factory Art Center, 105 N Union Street, Studio 312, in Alexandria. There and Back reflects Maureen's ceaseless desire to explore the beauty inherent in solitude. Through her artistic vision, she portrays isolated landscapes not as desolate or forsaken, but as sanctuaries where quietude reigns supreme, and narratives yet untold await discovery. Maureen will be at the gallery on Sunday, April 21st from 11 a.m. - 5 p.m.

## MAY 3 TO JUNE 2

**"The Art of Tea" exhibit** at Del Ray Artisans gallery features art that explores themes and stories woven around this aromatic beverage. From tea cups and tea pots to the Mad Hatter or Boston Tea Party, this exhibit intrigues and delights. Del Ray Artisans Gallery, 2704 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria VA. Reception: Friday, May 3, 7-9pm. Open Thursdays 12-6pm, Fridays 12-9pm, Saturdays & Sundays 12-6pm (June 2, 12-4pm). [DelRayArtisans.org/exhibits](http://DelRayArtisans.org/exhibits)

## APRIL 4 TO MAY 12

**Special Gallery: "Japanese Inspiration."** At The Athenaeum, 201 Prince St., Alexandria. To complement Washington's festivities celebrating the Japanese cherry blossoms around the Tidal Basin, the Athenaeum Gallery is featuring the work of three local contemporary artists whose work is influenced and guided by traditional Japanese art. Sean Doonan is an illustrator whose fanciful posters are inspired by Japanese mythology, anime, video games and pop culture. David Gootnick creates lacy and delicate designs out of wood using an ancient Japanese art form called Kumiko. And Yoshiko Ratliff's paintings are bold, but intricately detailed, representations of Japanese characters and kimonos.

## THURSDAY/MAY 9

**Jeffrey Rosen Book Talk.** At George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate. Meet Jeffrey Rosen, President and CEO of the National Constitution Center, at a book event. The



A Sunset Concert with Soulfire takes place on Thursday, May 30, 2024 at River Farm in Alexandria.

## Sunset Concert with Soulfire

6-8 p.m. At River Farm, 7931 E. Boulevard Dr., Alexandria. Get ready for a soulful evening to remember as the captivating band Soulfire takes the stage at River Farm, headquarters of the American Horticultural Society (AHS). This outdoor family-friendly concert promises an unforgettable evening of music, nature, and stunning views overlooking the Potomac River. The event is free. Donations are appreciated. Parking fee is \$20. For more information and to purchase parking in advance, visit [www.ahsgardening.org/sunsetconcert](http://www.ahsgardening.org/sunsetconcert). For more information, call (703) 768-5700 ext. 114 or visit [www.ahsgardening.org](http://www.ahsgardening.org).



The Mount Vernon Wine Festival takes place May 17-19, 2024 at George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate. The Mount Vernon Wine Festival takes place May 17-19, 2024 at George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate.

## Mount Vernon Wine Festival

At George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate. Secure tickets early for the popular Mount Vernon Wine Festival on May 17th, 18th, and 19th. Bring a blanket to relax on the east lawn overlooking the Potomac River while sampling wines from Virginia wineries and enjoying the live music of Bruce Ewan and the Solid Senders.

Declaration of Independence identified "the pursuit of happiness" as one of our unalienable rights, along with life and liberty. Hear from Rosen about what pursuing happiness meant to six of the most influential American founders, as detailed in his new book, *The Pursuit of Happiness*.

## FRIDAY/MAY 17

**The Thirteen: Beautiful as the Sky.** 7:30 p.m. At Washington Street UMC, 109 South Washington Street, Alexandria. In this program, The Thirteen explores moral beauty in three guises: the second World War, the American Civil War, and the women's rights movement

in America. Poulenc secretly composed his *Figure Humaine* in Vichy France, with the intention that it should be performed in Paris upon liberation from Nazi rule. Last performed by The Thirteen in 2018, this twelve-part tour de force is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and to the practice of remembrance. Leonard Bernstein Award-winning composer Hilary Purrington writes a new work for The Thirteen that traces the progress and intimate stories of the American women's rights movement. Jeffrey Van's *A Procession Winding Around Me* sets Civil War poems by Walt Whitman for choir and solo classical guitar with music as evocative and transcendent as the poetry.

## MAY 17, 19

**Mount Vernon Wine Festival.** At George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate. Bring a blanket to relax on the east lawn overlooking the Potomac River while sampling wines from Virginia vineyards and enjoying the live music of Bruce Ewan and the Solid Senders. Note that May 18th already is sold out.

## SATURDAY/MAY 18

**Annual Spring Garden Day and Plant Sale.** 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. At Green Spring Gardens, 4603 Green Spring Road, Alexandria. A vibrant showcase of diverse plant varieties offered by numerous vendors, ranging from beloved classics to rare and exotic specimens.

Whether you're eager to embrace native flora or add a pop of color with fruiting plants, the Spring Garden Day has something for every garden vision. In addition to the plant extravaganza, attendees can gain valuable

SEE CALENDAR, PAGE 9



# Supervisors Adopt Budget Plan: Tax Rate Increase

## Challenges, needs, and the reality that the county cannot do it alone.

MERCIA HOBSON  
THE GAZETTE

As expected, following the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors' approval of the FY 2025 Budget Mark-Up Package on April 30, the Board adopted the FY 2025 Budget on May 7, with the board's nine Democrats voting yes and Republican Supervisor Pat Herrity voting no.

The board set the Fiscal Year 2025 real property tax rate to \$1.125 per \$100 of assessed value, increasing the rate by three cents rather than the county executive's proposed four-cent real estate tax increase. The average tax bill hike will be just over \$ 450. It is the first increase in six years and is occurring alongside rising home valuations.

Chairman Jeff McKay read a series of three motions, which the board voted on separately.

With Fairfax County's FY 2025 tax rate resolution having established the real property tax rate of \$1.125 per \$100 of assessed value, the board then voted nine-to-one and adopted the FY 2025 tax rate

resolution adopting tax rates for Fairfax County (as detailed in the attachment to the memorandum to the board dated May 6, 2024). Supervisor Herrity voted no.

Lastly, the board approved, in a vote of nine to one, with Supervisor Herrity voting no, the FY 2025 appropriation resolution for county agencies, the FY 2025 appropriations resolution for school board funds, and the FY 2025 fiscal planning resolution appropriation resolution as set forth in attachments three, four, and five of the memorandum to the board dated May 6, 2024.

FY 2025 begins on July 1, 2024, and ends on June 30, 2025.

Following the motions, McKay said the board had heard "from hundreds of folks throughout the process." He thanked Supervisors Kathy Smith (Sully) and Dalia A. Palchik, Providence, who participated in the budget process, as well as budget staff.

"It's an intense period of time, but as I mentioned before, our budget staff is working on this stuff year-round. It just gets accelerated

here in the last couple of weeks." McKay said.

Due to the county's diminishing commercial tax base, the adopted FY 2025 Budget Plan proved financially tight and relied even more than usual on residential property owners for funding. Highlights of the process leading to the adopted FY 2025 Budget Plan include that the real estate tax rate of \$1.125 per \$100 of assessed value is down one cent from County Executive Bryan Hill's proposed four-cent increase in his FY 2025 Advertised Budget Plan presented Feb. 20. Nevertheless, the increase in average real estate tax bill will be approximately \$450.

Fairfax County provides a real estate assessment site at <https://icare.fairfaxcounty.gov/ffxcare/Main/Home.aspx>, allowing searches by address, tax map reference number, or map search.

The operational transfer of funding for Fairfax County Public Schools includes \$165 million, which is \$89 million less than the \$254 million FCPS requested. The FY 2025 Budget Plan increases

general county employee compensation from 3.25 to 6 percent and funds a 2 percent market rate adjustment, benchmark adjustments, and public safety collective bargaining contract obligations. The plan cites \$34 million in cut-backs by county agencies. Such reductions, though, in future years would affect county personnel and resident services.

Future Fairfax County challenges are significant, and the Commonwealth is adding to them.

Fairfax County is unable to fund everything on its own, especially since it must rely heavily on real estate taxes as a revenue source for expenditures. "About 80 percent of our revenue comes from property taxes (real estate and personal property). The Virginia General Assembly either caps or controls other revenues," according to the county's Budget and Finance Department.

The FY 2025 Budget Mark-Up states, "The state must recognize its own role in directly supporting public schools and Metro infrastructure."

The Fairfax County Public Schools division needs county and state funding support. Virginia's Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) study confirmed that the state underfunded Fairfax County Public Schools, like other Commonwealth divisions. The analysis said Virginia had a "complex and unreasonable" funding formula. Local homeowners pay a disproportionate share for school support. Implementing all JLARC recommendations will provide Fairfax County Public Schools with \$568.7 million in state money annually.

Metro is the only major transit system in the country without some form of dedicated and sustainable funding, as it reported in its April 25 news release, which announced that its Board approved a \$4.8 billion operating budget for Metrorail and bus service. The April 30 Fairfax County Budget Guidance for FY 2025 and FY 2026 states that funding the Metro system is a shared responsibility between the state and localities.

SEE BUDGET, PAGE 10

## ENTERTAINMENT

FROM PAGE 8  
insights and tips from knowledgeable Master Gardeners.

### SATURDAY/MAY 18

**Write Like a Woman Networking Workshop.** 1-3 p.m. At The Athenaeum, Alexandria. Enjoy an afternoon of engaging conversation and writing! Facilitated by poet, author, and Athenaeum Poet in Residence, KaNikki Jakarta, this workshop welcomes amateur to professional women writers ages 18-100. Each workshop centers on uplifting and inspiring through writing and allows participants to enhance their writing styles through writing prompts and encouragement. Space is limited, RSVP to [greatpublishing@yahoo.com](mailto:greatpublishing@yahoo.com)

### SUNDAY/MAY 19

**U.S. Navy Band Chamber Recital.** 2 p.m. At The Athenaeum, Alexandria. Join them for a special performance by the U.S. Navy Band chamber ensembles. The recital will feature a diverse array of traditional and contemporary music.

### SUNDAY/MAY 19

**Old Town Festival of Speed & Style.** 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Across lower King Street in Old Town Alexandria. Sponsored by Burke & Herbert Bank. The event is a high-sensory spectacle for participants, spectators and car enthusiasts, allowing them to experience the "Speed & Style" variety of exotic supercars and vintage motorcycles rarely seen sitting still for up-close viewing. Center-stage at noon, a unique Fashion Demonstration will be hosted by Maria Elizabeth of Alexandria-based Salon DeZEN. Maria will discuss the elegance and importance of natural fashion and its profound impact when paired with beautiful automobiles. An award presentation highlighting cars judged to be the finest in 11 categories, will immediately follow the Fashion Demonstration. In addition to the Festival itself, the pre-Festival High-Octane Ball will

take place the night before, on Saturday, May 18th from 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. at the Belle Haven Country Club in Alexandria. For more information about the festival and to purchase tickets to the High-Octane Ball, visit [www.festivalofspeedandstyle.com](http://www.festivalofspeedandstyle.com).

### TUESDAY/MAY 21

**Is He Dead? Benefit Performance.** 8 p.m. Benefit performance at the Little Theatre of Alexandria, Mark Twain's droll comedy *Is He Dead?* Penniless artist fakes his death to increase the value of his work, but doesn't anticipate the consequences. The evening's proceeds benefit the Board of Lady Managers of Inova Alexandria Hospital in their support of technological advances in the hospital's state-of-the-art medical treatment. Tickets \$45, \$65, \$125. Call 703-548-9485 or go to [www.boardofladymanagers.org/donations/](http://www.boardofladymanagers.org/donations/).

### TUESDAY/MAY 21

**Garden Sounds: Cicadian Serenade.** 5:45 to 8 p.m. A fundraising concert benefiting the Alexandria Symphony Orchestra. In the Garden of the Redmon Residence. The program will feature Dvorak's Wind Serenade and Mozart's Adagio from Gran Partita, conducted by Maestro Jim Ross. Guests will enjoy catered appetizer and wine in a beautiful backyard setting. Individual tickets are \$125 each.

### SATURDAY/MAY 25

**Singer Kate Campbell.** 7:30 p.m. At St. Aidan's Episcopal Church, 8531 Riverside Road, Alexandria. Kate Campbell is a southern singer-songwriter who writes and sings memorable folk songs infused with undercurrents of delta blues, folk, pop, and country that originate from a musical landscape spanning the less-traveled back roads from Nashville to Muscle Shoals to Memphis. Over the course of 20+ years since her acclaimed debut album *Songs from the Levee*, she has resisted the temptation to follow musical trends but

instead chooses to set the pace for her unique musical journey. Advance tickets \$25 at [www.focusmusic.org](http://www.focusmusic.org), day-of \$30 (member / congregation as-applicable \$25 at the door) | webcast \$15 | Info: at [rob@focusmusic.org](mailto:rob@focusmusic.org) or [www.focusmusic.org](http://www.focusmusic.org).

### SATURDAY/JUNE 1

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

### THURSDAY/JUNE 6

**Celebrating 50 years of Guest House.** 7-10 p.m. At ALX Community Atrium Rooftop, 277 S. Washington Street, Alexandria. Mocktails, music and memories. Join them as they celebrate 50 years of achievements helping 5,000 women reclaim their lives. This year's gala promises to be an evening filled with laughter, joy, and heartwarming moments as we come together to support the incredible work of Friends of Guest House. With live music, delicious hors d'oeuvres, and captivating company, it's an event you won't want to miss!

### SATURDAY/JUNE 8

**Old Town Alexandria Arts & Crafts Fair.** 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. At Waterfront Park, 1 Prince Street, Alexandria. Volunteer Alexandria is thrilled to present the Old Town Arts & Crafts Fair on June 8, 2024, at Waterfront Park located at 1 Prince Street on the Potomac River. The fair is free to attend and features local and regional artisans who showcase their pieces across various mediums including pottery, stationary, fabrics, paintings, jewelry, photography and more. Featuring more than 80-plus vendors

including food and drink to purchase.

### SATURDAY/JUNE 15

**Columbia Pike Blues Festival.** 1-8 p.m. At the intersection of South Walter Reed Drive and Columbia Pike in Arlington. This year the Festival celebrates women in blues with a lineup of all-women-fronted bands offering a full array of blues, R&B, and funk performers of national and regional note that includes: headliner Bette Smith, Eden Brent, Mama Moon & the Rump Shakers; The Stacy Brooks Band and the Honeylarks.

### THE BIRCHMERE

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

### MAY

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Sun. 12: The Longest Johns "The Voyage Tour" w/ Sean Dagher \$29.50 SOLD OUT!  
Mon. 13: Stanley Clarke Band \$59.50  
Wed. 15: David Sanborn \$49.50  
Fri. 17: BoDeans \$35.00  
Sat. 18: Harmony Sweepstakes A Capella Festival Mid-Atlantic Regionals \$35.00  
Sun. 19: The Sun Ra Arkestra - 100th Birthday Celebration of Maestro Marshall Allen \$39.50  
Mon. 20: Leonid & Friends \$65.00 SOLD OUT!  
Tue. 21: Lucero w/ William Matheny \$39.50  
Thu. 23: Ruth Moody (of The Wailin' Jennys) \$35.00  
Fri. 24: Chante' Moore \$79.50 SOLD OUT!  
Sat. 25: Walter Beasley \$49.50  
Sun. 26: Maggie Rose: No One Gets Out Alive Tour w/ Fancy Hagood \$29.50  
Fri. 31: The Manhattans featuring Gerald Alston \$65.00

# Budget

FROM PAGE 9

Metro fuels Northern Virginia's economy which benefits the Commonwealth's economy overall.

On April 8, 2024, Governor Glenn Youngkin announced recommended amendments to the state budget. He proposed that Northern Virginia localities (which are part of the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC), Loudoun County, Fairfax County, City of Fairfax, City of Falls Church, City of Alexandria, and Arlington County) could use previously allocated state aid to address Metro's shortfall. NVTC would redirect most of the \$113.8 million, or about \$98 million, to the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). It amounts to robbing Peter to pay Paul.

An April 16 unanimously board-approved letter by Chairman Jeff McKay, Braddock District Supervisor James Walkinshaw, and Dranesville District Supervisor James Bierman urged the county's General Assembly delegation to oppose the governor's proposed funding cuts and retain the necessary funding to address WMATA's estimated \$750 million shortfall. The letter said the Governor's FY 2025-2026 Biennial Budget amendment would eliminate state funding to NVTC that matched local WMATA contributions.

The letter said that doing so would add "an overly disproportionate burden on budgets" for NVTC localities. Furthermore, if the amendment moved forward, NVTC's Fairfax County funding for the Connector bus fleet replacement would run out in October 2024 without state aid.

On Thursday, April 25, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's (WMATA) Board of Directors approved a \$4.8 billion fiscal year 2025 budget and increased fares by 12.5 percent. In the future, Metro will face similar difficulties in balancing its budget annually unless there is dedicated funding.

The Virginia State Budget has yet to be approved, and Youngkin and the General Assembly continue negotiating. A special legislative session is planned to begin May 13.

## Civil War Show, Books, Relics & Memorabilia

Saturday, May 20, 10-5 - Arlington-Fairfax Elks Lodge, Rt. 50, Fairfax, VA Admission, \$5 Per Person Vendors Welcome 703-389-1505 / 703-785-5294.

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# Restoring Ecology at the Mount Vernon Governmental Center

PHOTOS BY GLENDA BOOTH

FROM PAGE 1

invasives and reduce maintenance.

People should expect failure when doing planting projects, Foster advised, and maintenance is key the first year. It usually takes several years for plants to get established, she said, recommending leaf mulch, not woodchips, which can smother plants.

The county retrofitted two stormwater facilities that collect runoff from the Governmental Center, fire station, Sherwood Regional Library, three parking lots and adjoining streets. There contractors planted, for example, sweet bay magnolias, Joe Pye weed, common milkweed and goldenrod. Prior to the retrofits, workers mowed four times a year. Now they mow only the perimeter once a year.

Mount Vernonite Deborah Matthews commented, "This is an excellent demonstration of what we can do with native plants. It's a public resource."

## Why Natives?

Matt Bright, Executive Director of Earth Sangha, a Springfield native plant nursery and supplier of the plants, explained, "Native plants are the foundation for how the ecosystem functions for wildlife and the food chain. It helps restore the soil. We can begin to restore the system, especially suburban lots which could have ecotones for insects and other wildlife." Unlike most invasive plants, native plants support the native insects with which they co-evolved.

## County Policy

In 2020, the Board of Supervisors adopted Supervisor Storck's amendment to Fairfax County's comprehensive plan to apply natural landscaping to county properties. Natural landscaping largely minimizes lawns and uses native plants to restore natural ecological functions.

Other project supporters include Audubon at Home, Boy Scouts, Fairfax Master Naturalists, the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District.



Green and gold can be a colorful, effective native ground cover.



Many people say that Supervisor Storck looks like Abraham Lincoln, hence this gift from his brother at the building's entrance.



**More information**  
<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/mount-vernion/mount-vernion-governmental-center-native-perennial-gardens>

**Cathy Ledec brought a photo of the site before all the plantings.**



PHOTO COURTESY SUPERVISOR DAN STORCK'S OFFICE

Native Gardens at Mount Vernon Governmental Center.



PHOTO COURTESY SUPERVISOR DAN STORCK'S OFFICE

Redbud and Golden Ragwort in bloom at Mount Vernon Governmental Center.



The project included 12 new trees, including redbuds, which have heart-shaped leaves.

## The Doggone Truth



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

When your computer is incapacitated because your golden retriever-puppy regularly lays himself down under your desk smack dab in the middle of all the jumbled computer/cable wires and inadvertently disconnects something and you can't figure it out, it's easy to blame the puppy; after all, that's what they do. However, the owner not being able to reconnect the wires/determine the reason for the loss of power; that's operator error - meaning yours truly. And though I may sound a bit amused now after the fact, for the three days I was disconnected from the world until my neighbor Robert returned home from North Carolina (who spent less than five minutes assessing and reconnecting my computer), I was most definitely at a loss of awareness and access, a pretty uncomfortable position.

A little background: my wife, Dina, is fond of saying about Burton (the golden): "Daddy's dog." Which means Burton is, generally speaking wherever I am. The reason being that goldens usually bond with one person in the household and I am his 'one.' Even though Dina and a neighbor drove four hours-plus to Lexington, Va. to meet up with the breeder, and then once home, Dina spent the next few months sleeping on the living-room couch next to Burton (in his crate) in order to take him outside multiple times during the night, (as puppies require to house-train as quickly as possible while I slept uninterrupted upstairs) didn't have an effect on Burton. Dina's over-night walks with him were a major commitment on her part and typically, the most arduous and hands-on task of puppy-hood. Once trained however, the joys of dog ownership increase exponentially. Despite Dina's months-long effort, Burton seems to have chosen me as "the bondee."

As such, often when I am sitting at my desk working on the computer, Burton is "denning" underneath, curled up with his head resting on the floor/wires. (Although I do cover the wires with an apron to minimize his direct involvement. Still, with miscellaneous dog and owner movements, invariably the wires and all get exposed.) I wouldn't want him any other place though. It's a great comfort to me - especially as a cancer patient, to have Burton at my feet/by my side/on the couch, et. cetera, to lessen the fear, anxiety, and occasional loneliness of a "terminal" diagnosis. (My original prognosis was "13 months to two years" in late Feb. 2009.) Having another life to take care of (Burton's) is a huge distractor and super positive reinforcer. And most importantly - and effectively, the presence and responsibility of owning a dog is a tremendous decompressor in my life, especially given the emotional demands of a cancer diagnosis.

Nevertheless, a cancer diagnosis plays havoc with your emotional state and your priorities. It's been my experience, (and I think 15+ years of gives me credibility), that your life changes after a cancer diagnosis (Duh!) But it's not as simple as that is obvious. Cancer takes over your life in numerous ways, some of which are top of mind, and others which are subconscious. Decision making, prioritizing, allocating, bucket-listing (if you're so inclined), what you want to eat, what you drink, what television shows you watch, what clothes you wear, what activities you engage in, and on and on and on. Cancer takes hold and without you realizing it, something or other matters for some reason - for which you have no substantive explanation except one: the cancer made me do it.

Moreover, your reactions, your mood, your tolerance (to people, places, and/or things), your inclinations, maybe even your instincts, become like those computer/cable wires: a jumbled mess. And just as I have no interest in unjumbling those wires, even with Burton's current location (at my feet, laying on the wires) endangering my connections to the world, a recurring thought I have is: "I don't care. Life is too short. I can't be bothered." When Robert suggested that he could arrange/wrap the wires and cable so that Burton is less of a threat, I shrugged my shoulders. In many instances, cancer makes you stupid. Your brain reorients your thinking/problem solving in unfamiliar ways and the outcome in some cases, is not you - or not as you remember yourself. You don't exactly get lost in your cancer-affected world, but you definitely get somewhere different than you had been your entire pre-cancer diagnosis life.

Someplace where I had been in my pre-cancer life was with our second golden, Bailey, and so it only seems fitting and helpful to be back in the dog business. If there are computer problems because of it, so be it. It's not worth the aggravation. "Life's too short" (Don't I know it!)

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



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