

Mount Vernon Gazette

MOUNT VERNON'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER • A CONNECTION NEWSPAPER

JANUARY 8, 2026



PHOTO BY CELSO FERREIRA (GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY).

What happens when high tide and lots of rain come at the same time? Compound-nuisance flooding overwhelming stormwater infrastructure in the City of Alexandria during a high-tides and precipitation event.

Virginia Faces Climate Change Risks, GMU Warns

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
THE GAZETTE

Across Virginia, temperatures are rising, the state is getting wetter, precipitation is more frequent and extreme, drought is a growing concern and sea level is rising. These are the key findings of a recent, first-of-its-kind assessment of how climate change is impacting Virginia.

The state has been warming since the 18th century, said Dr. Jim Kinter, Director of George Mason University's Center for Ocean-Land-Atmosphere Studies, in a Dec. 12 briefing. He drew this conclusion in part using Thom-

as Jefferson's meticulous 1776 to 1826 weather logs, records that "raised more questions than answers."

Other conclusions of Virginia Climate Assessment:

Of Virginia's 8.7 million people, more than three million live in "relatively high multi-hazard risk" counties and 1.4 million "socially vulnerable residents face the greatest cascading impacts." Impacts vary by region.

Extreme weather, like floods, heat waves and wildfires, is worsened by the events' longer duration, frequency and severity and bigger temperature swings.

The northern and western parts of the state are most affected by

drought, with more flash droughts anticipated. Droughts especially affect water supply, data centers, forestry and agriculture. Data centers' water use rose 63 percent from 2019 to 2023. "In Northern Virginia, drought-induced disruptions to water availability in the Potomac River could reduce economic output by more than \$4.5 billion in just one month," according to the report.

In a follow-up email, Dr. Kinter stressed the urgent need to act because he expects the "negative impacts to become more intense and frequent if global carbon dioxide and methane emissions continue to grow as they have for the past several decades. ... Virginia needs

to take bold action within this decade to sharply reduce emissions of these pollutants through programs of both conservation and transition to non-fossil energy sources," he argues. He commends Fairfax County's resiliency plan.

Compounding or over-lapping climate events will bring more power outages, communication disruptions and threaten air quality, infrastructure and emergency systems.

Heat risk is increasing, creating significant health impacts and healthcare costs. Heat risk is "inequitably distributed," with the elderly and outdoor workers, for example, at high risk.

All areas "are experiencing flash

flooding and stream overflows," the study concludes. Spring and fall are getting wetter and the flood risk to housing is rising. Nine percent of Virginia's housing stock, 344,000 homes, is already at substantial risk. Flood insurance premiums could rise 45 percent, according to the report.

Warming and increased precipitation will continue through the middle to late 21st century.

All economic sectors and natural systems face more exposure because of climate change.

Northern Virginia

"Compound flooding" is already affecting Northern Virginia, the re-

SEE VIRGINIA FACES, PAGE 8

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Northern Virginia Families for Safe Streets 2026 Legislative Push

Fighting to expand automated enforcement beyond school and work zones.

By MERCIA HOBSON
THE GAZETTE

Advocates with Northern Virginia Families for Safe Streets say at least 15 pedestrians have been killed in traffic-related crashes and roughly 100 more have been seriously injured in Fairfax County in 2025, underscoring an urgent need for state funding and automated enforcement on the county's most dangerous corridors.

During a Dec. 30, 2025, inter-

view with The Connection, Mike Doyle, founder and president of Northern Virginia for Safe Streets, emphasized the physics of the crisis, noting that vehicle velocity is the deciding factor between a near miss and a fatality.

"You might survive being hit at 20 mph, but by 40 it's roughly one in 10 [who survive], and at 50 or 60 it's essentially over — if you live at all — you're likely to be permanently, severely injured," Doyle said. "Speed kills; speed maims."

Doyle and Phil Abendhower, a volunteer data manager with the group, are calling for increased state funding as newly formed Democratic majorities take control in Richmond. Gov. Abigail Spanberger (D) is set to be inaugurated Jan. 17, three days after the General Assembly session convenes Jan. 14.

A deadly monthlong surge in December which saw five pedestrians killed coincides with efforts by Doyle and Abendhower to support

the Speed Safety Camera Expansion Act, HB 2041. Carried by Del. Holly Seibold (D-Fairfax), the legislation seeks to expand Virginia Code Section 46.2-882.1 to authorize localities to place "speed safety cameras" on state-managed high-crash network roads. The bill moves beyond current restrictions that limit cameras to school and work zones, allowing enforcement in "high-risk speed corridors" and high-risk intersection segments with heavy pedestrian activity where speed limits are 45 mph or less. Doyle noted the proposal would specifically target corridors such as Route 29, Route 50, Blake Lane, Columbia Pike, and Duke Street. The bill requires that revenue from fines first cover the camera system's operating costs.

"Excess funds" are then directed toward traffic safety. While earlier versions mentioned the Virginia Highway Safety Improvement Program (VHSIP), Seibold also introduced amendments that allow localities to retain these funds in a



MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION VIA ZOOM
Mike Doyle



MERCIA HOBSON/THE GAZETTE VIA ZOOM
Phil Abendhower



SCREENSHOT
Del. Holly Seibold (D-Fairfax)

dedicated local fund for "planning, design, and construction projects for traffic safety, speed management, and bicycle/pedestrian safety."

Seibold introduced the bill in memory of three Fairfax teenagers struck by a student driver going 81 mph in a 35 mph zone in 2022. Two students, 15-year-old Leeyan Hanjia Yan and 14-year-old Ada Gabriela Martinez Nolasco, died from their injuries. The crash occurred on Blake Lane's sidewalk when they were walking home from Oakton High School.

"Most pedestrian fatalities occur outside school zones. Speed safety cameras, as outlined in HB 2041, save lives by reducing speeding

on high-crash corridors with persistent safety risks," said Seibold in a Jan. 5 email to The Connection.

Seibold's move follows the Gov. Glenn Youngkin's 2025 veto of similar legislation. Doyle calls the new proposal the "single most important, high-impact" safety bill of the year. He also supports a separate stop-sign camera bill to collect data on "close calls" involving pedestrians and cyclists.

"On the one hand, there is progress ... but we're far from being satisfied," Doyle said. "Part of the solution is to apply, on an equitable basis, the technology that exists today to encourage drivers to slow down and stop, because that will save lives."

The Human Cost

Five deaths in 22 days mark a deadly year-end surge.

By MERCIA HOBSON
THE GAZETTE

The 2025 fatal pedestrian count began with Erica Tibbs, 33, who was struck by a vehicle Jan. 29, 2025 at Richmond Highway and Buckman Road.

Following a summer and autumn of scattered incidents, the toll surged in the final weeks of 2025, claiming five lives in just 22 days. This deadly streak began when Roger Brown, 67, was killed Dec. 7 at Richmond Highway and Backlick Road.

On Dec. 23, 50-year-old Jimmy Patterson was found in a low point of the Fairfax County Parkway median, where he had been invisible to traffic for hours. On Christmas Day, a 75-year-old and a 15-year-old were killed in an Interstate 495 crash investigated by Virginia State Police. The year's latest tragedy occurred Dec. 29, when a 53-year-old woman of no fixed address was struck twice at Route 29 and Hideaway Road; the second vehicle fled the scene.

"In a perfect world, I would love to see no fatalities at all, and automobiles have come a long way, but you still have these huge vehicles and you have small people," said Phil Abendhower, a data volunteer for Northern Virginia Families for Safe Streets (NoVA FSS), during a Dec. 30 interview with The Connection.

While fatalities dropped from 20 last year to approximately 15 this year, NoVA FSS founder Mike Doyle cautioned that serious injuries, the life-altering crashes that often go unhighlighted, remain flat at about 100 per year.

Beyond Behavior

Why road design dictates pedestrian fatality rates.

By MERCIA HOBSON
THE GAZETTE

Safety is a design problem, not a behavioral one," said Mike Doyle, founder of Northern Virginia Families for Safe Streets (NoVA FSS), during a Dec. 30 interview with The Connection.

He noted that corridors such as Route 29 and the Fairfax County Parkway feature 12-foot lanes that subconsciously encourage highway speeds. Furthermore, a significant "visibility gap" exists: four out of five fatal pedestrian crashes in the county occur after dark, often in areas where streetlights are spaced for vehicles.

Doyle added that pedestrian collisions represent a "systemic failure" of road design rather than individual behavioral errors. While programs like the FCPD's "Road Shark" provided high-visibility enforcement in 2025, yielding nearly 50,000 citations, a 43% increase from the previous year, advocates like Doyle argue that police presence alone cannot be everywhere 24/7.

The 2026 legislative push is bol-



Sen. Danica Roem



Del. Kathy Tran

stered by other members of the Northern Virginia delegation moving toward engineering mandates. Sen. Danica Roem (D-Manassas), is proposing funding for lighting and pedestrian bridges on Route 28.

"My Route 28 STARS project for Manassas Park and Yorkshire includes innovative intersection designs, a raised median and 1.75 miles of contiguous sidewalk — including pedestrian refuges to make road crossings safer," said Roem in an email on Jan. 3.

At the same time, Del. Kathy Tran (D-Fairfax), is working to establish stricter engineering standards for the Springfield-Merrifield corridor through House Bill 42, often referred to in legislative previews as the "Safer Roads for Springfield-Merrifield Act." According to legislative filings for the 2026 session, Tran is seeking to mandate that the Virgin-

ia Department of Transportation (VDOT) prioritize safety-first design on high-traffic state roads. Her proposal includes lane narrowing (moving away from 12-foot highway-style lanes), reduced crossing distances through pedestrian refuge islands on stretches such as Old Keene Mill Road (Route 644) and Route 50, and the requirement of "Leading Pedestrian Intervals" (LPIs) to provide pedestrians with a three- to seven-second head start at intersections.

Doyle argues that until these systemic design flaws are addressed, the fatalities will continue regardless of police presence. Phil Abendhower, a NoVA FSS data volunteer, noted that the group uses community data to identify dangerous intersections before a fatality occurs. Residents can record a close call on the NoVA FSS Near Miss Dashboard at novasafestreets.org/report-a-safety-issue.

Community Action and Police Information

Detectives from the FCPD Crash Reconstruction Unit are searching for the driver of the second unidentified vehicle involved in the Dec. 29 fatality at Route 29 and Hideaway Road.

❖ Call the Tip Line: 703-280-0543.
❖ Call Fairfax County Crime Solvers Anonymously: at 1-866-411-TIPS (8477).



Mason Neck State Park Assistant Manager Jamie Leeuwrik explored the river's history.



PHOTO BY CATHY LEDEC
Tundra swans at Mason Neck. Read on for the best place to spot them.

The Potomac River, An Important Artery

River commerce history and more shared by Friends of Mason Neck State Park.

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
CONNECTION NEWSPAPERS

The Potomac River is a vibrant 383-mile thoroughfare. Among the latest to travel along the river are tundra swans that arrived recently from the Arctic to spend the winter at Mason Neck until February. Randy Streufert counted 220 of these white, long-necked birds on Dec. 4. He recommended the best places to see the tundra swans: the end of the Great Marsh and Wood Marsh trails in the Mason Neck Wildlife Refuge at high tide.

The Potomac was an important commercial thoroughfare for centuries for goods and people in dugout canoes, shallop, flat-bottomed boats, steamships, ferries, barges and other vessels.

Today, most of the river's traffic is recreational, anglers trying to snag a striped bass or leisure boaters just plying the waters.

On Dec. 7, 75 people gathered at Gunston Hall to learn about the river's historic role and connection to Mason Neck in a talk by Jamie Leeuwrik at a meeting dubbed "Swanfall" and sponsored by the Friends of Mason Neck State Park. Leeuwrik is Mason Neck State Park's assistant manager.

The Mason Neck peninsula in southeastern Fairfax County has been inhabited for over 13,000 years, she began. Artifacts and an oyster midden "show a heavy reliance on the river," for marsh creatures, fish and shellfish before European settlement, she said.

In 1608, English Captain John



First place, youth division winner Quinn Clark, won with a picture of a northern water snake.

Smith sailed up the Potomac and encountered the Algonquin-speaking Doeg people in that area. In the 17th and 18th centuries, when the Masons occupied much of Mason Neck, George Mason IV had several landings.

Tobacco farmers in the 1700s and 1800s needed a way to trans-

port 1,000-pound hogsheads of dry tobacco to inspection warehouses and then to boats for domestic sales and export. Hauling goods by water was easier than traveling on crude roads on foot, horse or wagon.

The Mason Neck town of Col-
SEE THE POTOMAC RIVER, PAGE 5



Snake by age 16
Rachel Elrod photographed an eastern rat snake on a sycamore tree.



PHOTOS BY GLENDA BOOTH
The Friends of Mason Neck State Park honored past president Hilary Clawson.

NEWS

The Potomac River, An Important Artery

FROM PAGE 4

chester, founded in 1753, had a ferry crossing on the Occoquan River to the port town of Occoquan, the location of two public wharves, a copper and a tobacco inspection warehouse. The river linked the Potomac to the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic, so goods reached larger markets and imports from Europe arrived.

In the late 1700s, steamboats came of age, used for commercial, recreational and military purposes. They transported vacationers as well as fish, farm products and other goods.

Toward the end of the 18th century, canal building along the river began, intended to facilitate navigation where the natural topography and rapids made navigation difficult or impossible. The canals included the Potowmack Canal and the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal (C&O), intended to connect the Potomac River to the Ohio River for transporting coal, lumber and agricultural products. The

C&O terminated in Cumberland, Maryland.

"The waterway's dominance gradually declined, but remained important in the 19th century," said Leeuwrik. Railways and roads eventually moved travel off waterways.

"Waterways like the Potomac River have continually shaped the livelihoods and identities of all living creatures," she said. "Without the river, which created the marshes, which attracted wildlife and people, we may not have had Mason Neck State Park or any of our public lands on the peninsula."

Photography Winners Recognized

The Friends group announced the winners of their photography contest. In the youth division, first place went to Quinn Clark for her picture of a northern water snake. "The snake was outside the visitor center," she said. "It was really cute."

Also in the youth division, Shayan Achmed won first place

for a photo of an eastern phoebe and Rachel Elrod for a photo of an eastern rat snake. Connor Marshall won the youth grand prize for his "headshot" of a five-lined skink.

In the adult category, the grand prize went to Lisa Mayo for her photo of a tan jumping spider and Mike Garth won first place for a photo of mushrooms.

"Some are National Geographic quality," said Streufert, the contest's manager.

Friends Accomplishments

President Steve Levenson honored past president Hillary Clawson with a bouquet.

He cited as among the Friends' accomplishments getting state funds for all-terrain wheelchairs and making the park more accessible for people with disabilities. They built a sidewalk so visitors in wheelchairs can more easily see the water, provided more accessible picnic tables, financed a new water fountain and bought "magic glasses" for colorblind individuals.

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.

VOLUNTEERS WANTED

Assistance League of Northern Virginia is an all-volunteer non-profit organization that feeds, clothes and provides reading assistance and books to children in need. Assistance League's programs touch the lives of hundreds of children in Fairfax and Prince William Counties and the City of Alexandria. There are many volunteer opportunities for community members to contribute to helping those in need. To learn more, email info@alnv.org, or visit www.alnv.org.

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

for the Advancement of Science's STEM Volunteer Program, stem-volunteers.org, during the 2018-19 school year. In the 2017-18 school year, there are 85 volunteers in 6 Northern Virginia school districts. Contact Don Rea at 571-551-2488, or donaldrea@aol.com.

RSVP, a volunteer network for seniors seeking service opportunities in and around Fairfax County, Arlington County and the City of Alexandria, offers a wide array of opportunities for volunteers 55 and older. RSVP volunteers enjoy flexible schedules, free accident and liability insurance while serving, optional mileage and meal reimbursement and are invited to volunteer group projects and social gatherings. To sign up for an upcoming orientation, email Carly Hubicki at chubicki@volunteerfairfax.org or call RSVP at 703-403-5360. To learn more about RSVP, visit www.rsvpnova.org.

Mentors Wanted. Two creative programs that help transform the lives of Alexandria's preteens are seeking volunteer mentors. SOHO, which stands for "Space of Her Own," and "Space of His Own," serves vulnerable fifth graders in Alexandria. The programs pair men and women with youth in need of positive adult role models, to help support and guide youth in making healthy choices and succeeding in school and in life. Visit www.spaceofherown.org and www.spaceofhisown.org. For more information on how to become a SOHO mentor, contact Sarah Maroney at sarah.maroney@alexandriava.gov or phone at 703-746-4687.

Farmer's Market Volunteers Needed. To volunteer for the Farmer's Markets, email Brian Morreale, brianmorreale@gmail.com

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Birds Are Front and Center

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
THE GAZETTE

Amid the throng of Canada geese on the Potomac River near Hunting Creek on Dec. 20, a white bird slightly larger than a mallard duck stood out for veteran birder Sherman Suter. It too was a type of waterfowl, a goose with a black-tipped tail and a triangular, pinkish bill, smaller than the Canada geese.

Suter had zeroed in on a Ross's goose, rarely seen in the region and likely migrating south from its arctic tundra breeding grounds. These birds typically winter on the southeastern Virginia and North Carolina coasts. Since the 1950s, Ross's geese have been expanding eastward, both on their breeding and wintering grounds, according

“From the swamps of the east to the mountains of the west, Virginia’s birds represent a rich cultural and ecological heritage. The management and conservation of this heritage is the province of all citizens of the Commonwealth.”

— Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas 2

to Cornell University's All about Birds.

Surveyors that day also spotted a white-fronted goose, a cackling goose and 10 flying tundra swans. The swans were likely headed to Mason Neck where hundreds typically spend the winter.

Between Dec. 14 and Jan. 5, thousands of volunteers counted birds across the United States in the annual Christmas Bird Count, identifying all birds seen or heard within a specific 15-mile diameter circle. In Northern Virginia, volunteers identified birds in Alexandria, Arlington, Fairfax City, Falls Church and in Fairfax, Prince William, Stafford and Loudoun counties.

In the Dyke Marsh count, 14 volunteers identified 56 species and 1,396 birds in total, from the four-inch ruby-crowned kinglet to the 30-inch turkey vulture.

The Christmas Bird Count, one of the country's oldest citizen science projects, started in 1900 as an alternative to a competition of killing birds.

Virginia's Second Breeding Bird Atlas

Most birds in the mid-Atlantic are not



PHOTO BY GLENDA BOOTH

Volunteers conducted bird surveys all over Northern Virginia for the annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count which continues into January.



PHOTO BY STEVE BIELAMOWICZ

Greater White-Fronted Goose seen in the Potomac River just north of Belle Haven picnic area.



PHOTO BY STEVE BIELAMOWICZ

This Ross's Goose seen at Lake Fairfax on Dec. 7, 2025.

Information

- ❖ Christmas Bird Count, <https://www.audubon.org/community-science/christmas-bird-count>;
- ❖ Virginia's Second Breeding Bird Atlas, <https://vabirdatlas.org/>

breeding this time of year, but keen observers report that some are exhibiting courtship behavior, like bald eagles adding sticks to last year's nests.

Virginia has a new statewide Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA), updating the first compiled in 1989, that confirms 196 breeders in the state, compared to 197 in the first atlas.

The atlas has information on the distribution, numbers and abundance for individual species over the past 30 years and findings that reflect habitat and other changes.

This bird survey, the largest in Virginia, conducted from 2016 to 2020, involved 1,500 people who documented the geographic distribution and status of Virginia's breeding birds and another 150 people who helped with administrative tasks, totaling 800,000 hours of effort. They observed

SEE BIRDS, PAGE 7

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PHOTO BY JAMES MANNING DUNN
Great blue herons begin building nests in rookeries in February.

Birds

FROM PAGE 6

breeding behaviors like birds copulating, feeding young, incubating eggs or carrying nesting material.

The state's Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) partnered with the Virginia Society of Ornithology and Virginia Tech's Conservation Management Institute to organize and manage the project. Most surveyors were volunteers. "Without the volunteer component, this project is one that could never have been carried out by Virginia's natural resource professionals alone," said Sergio Harding, DWR's Nongame Bird Conservation Biologist.

Changes in Northern Virginia

For Northern Virginia, the atlas shows some changes since the 1989 atlas. Bald eagles and ospreys have rebounded. The common raven has increased its distribution, now breeding in Arlington, for example.

Harding notes that "the Kentucky warbler, Northern bobwhite and yellow-breasted chat have a diminished distribution in Northern Virginia since the first atlas."

Ashley Peele, Atlas Coordinator, said, "Most of what jumps out at me about the region is how many of the change maps illustrate the impact of development and habitat loss. Lot of loss in NOVA!"

"Also, common mergansers have moved into Virginia from the north, tracking southward along our major rivers. Their numbers are higher in the western part of the state, but it is notable that there were not any established breeders in Virginia in the 1980s."

Libby Lyons, the Northern Virginia Bird Alliance's president, shared these observations: "As grasslands and farmlands have given way to housing, industry and other commercial uses, our grassland birds have suffered greatly. The atlas graphs confirm that birds such as American kestrels, prairie warblers, Eastern meadowlarks and purple martins have seen steep declines in our part

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Tundra swans in flight.

PHOTO BY RANDY STREUFERT



Tundra Swan.

PHOTO BY RANDY STREUFERT



They are never too young to start observing birds.

PHOTO BY GLENDA BOOTH



Prothonotary warbler feeding young, clear evidence of a breeding bird.

PHOTO BY ED EDER

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Virginia Faces Climate Change Risks, GMU Warns

FROM PAGE 1
port maintains, "caused by the interaction of precipitation, storm surge, tides and riverine overflow" in the Potomac River corridor.

One of Northern Virginia's vulnerabilities is aging stormwater infrastructure, with some systems a century or more old. The study includes a photo of flooded Alexandria streets during concurrent high tides and rain.

The assessment singles out as a "credible and growing concern" Northern Virginia's concentration of data centers as being at "emerging risk" and cites data centers in California and the United Kingdom overheating and shutting down from power failures during heat waves. "Northern Virginia, home to the world's largest concentration of data centers, with 13 percent of global data center capacity, has seen outages and is increasingly exposed to flash floods, extreme heat and grid strain," notes the report.

Federal agencies and contractors could face "disruption of mobility" and telecommunications. "Tidal flooding and storm surge at Naval Station Norfolk, the world's largest naval base, threatens military readiness," the report warns.

"Northern Virginia's economic output, based in government and data infrastructure, depends on continuous access to high-functioning transportation and facility operations," the report contends. "Flash floods in 2019 and 2021 overwhelmed parts of Fairfax County, shutting down arterial roadways and temporarily closing government buildings, demonstrating an instance where a localized event threatened government functions."

Global Warming Emissions

Greenhouse gas emissions in Virginia peaked in 2005 and declined by about 26 percent in 2023, according to U.S. Energy Information Administration data. Dr. Kinter attributes the drop to converting some electricity generation from coal to natural gas since "natural gas combustion emits about half as much greenhouse gases as coal combustion." The EIA data does not reflect Virginia's 2020 Clean Economy Act effects.

A State Climate Office?

Dr. Kinter advocated for a state climate office to collect and analyze data, conduct assessments and recommend solutions, noting that Virginia is one of only two states without one. George Mason is "willing to host it," he said, and will again ask the state legislature to fund a state climate office.

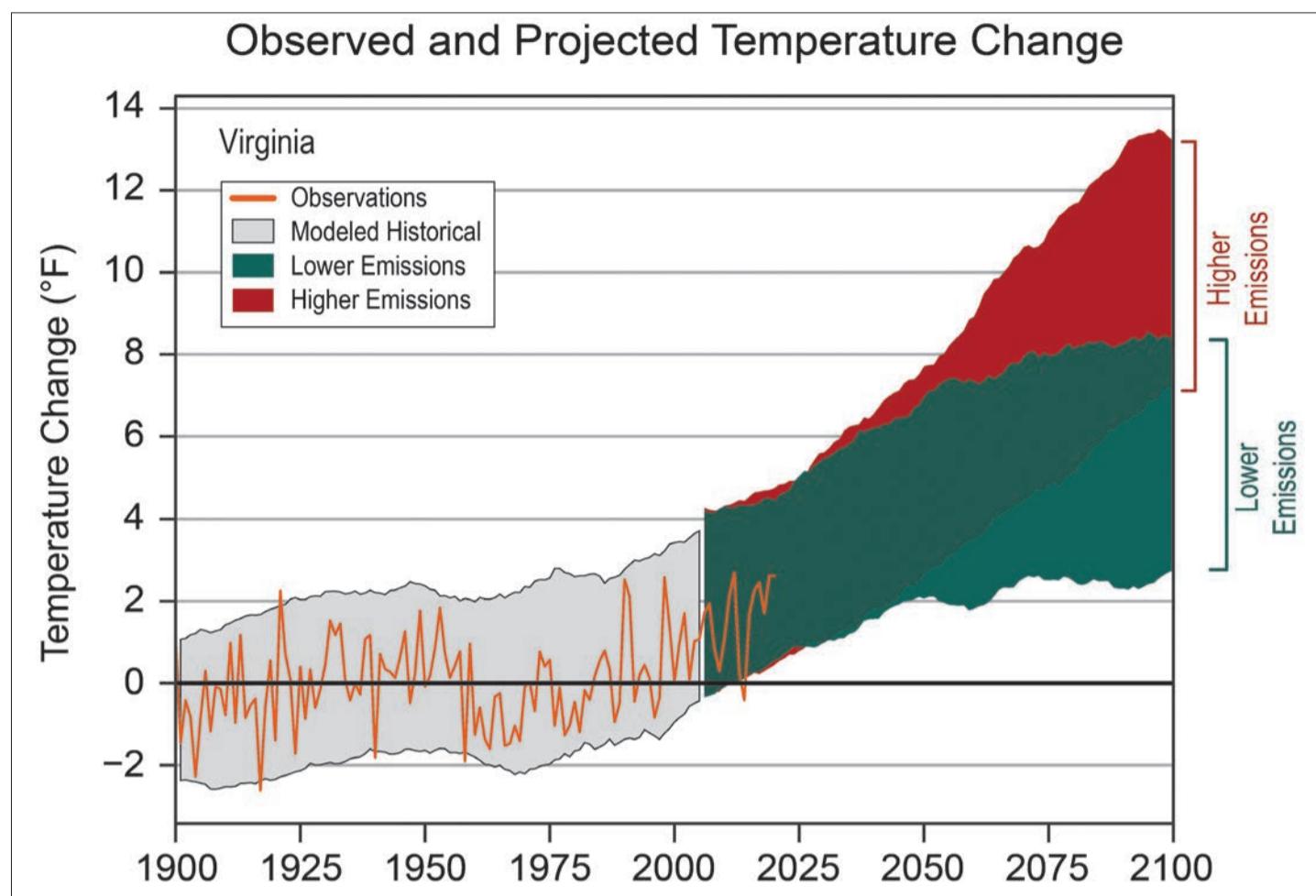
A Landmark Study

The science-based assessment is the first of its kind establishing a baseline for measuring future changes. Unlike national and global analyses which examine broad climate trends, this study focuses on regional impacts in Virginia.

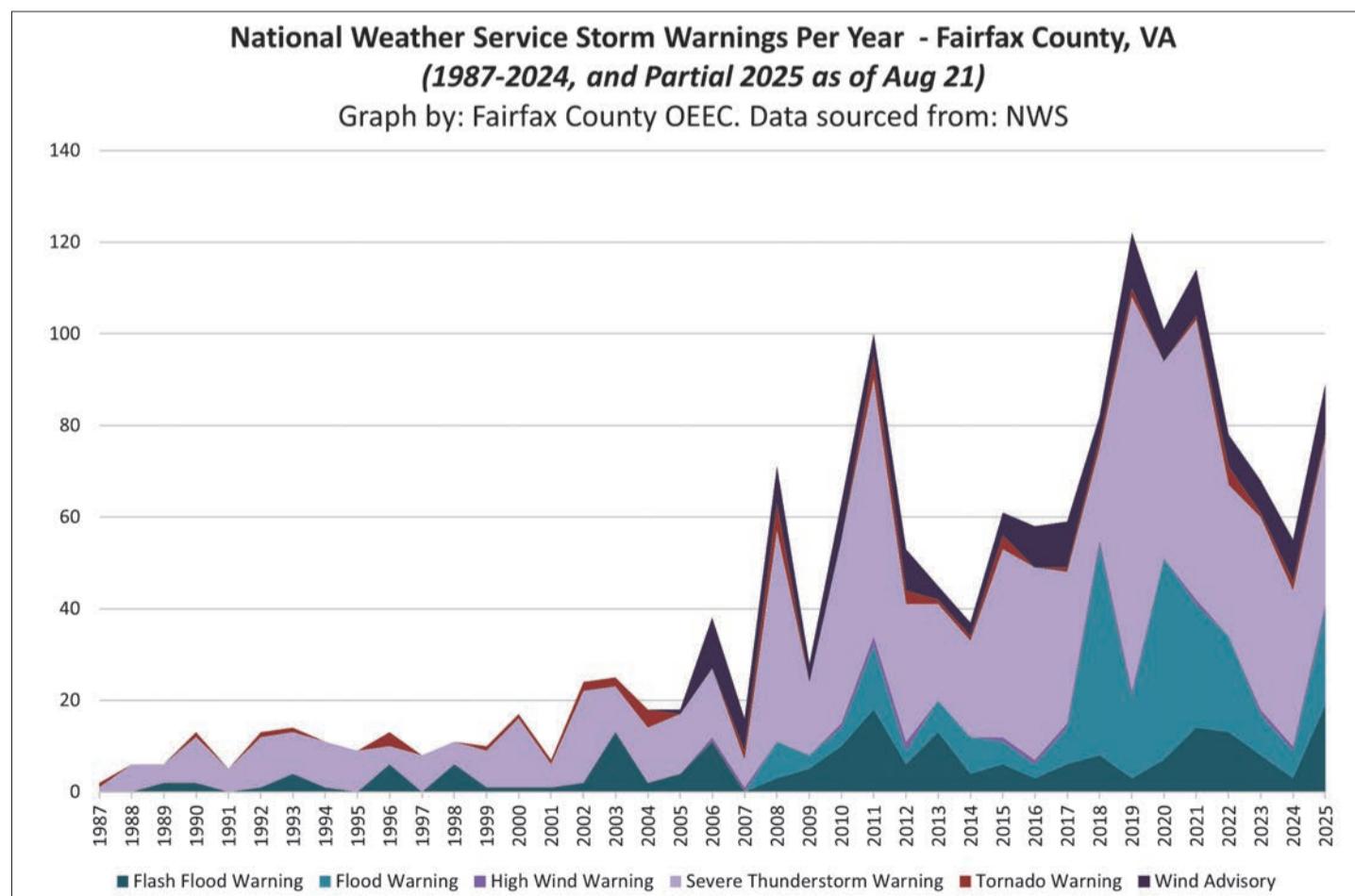
The 90-page study reflects the work of 26 authors, eight institutions and over 300 articles, coordinated by GMU professors. GMU plans future reports with finer-scale geographic details, sector impacts and "adaptation effectiveness."

For more, see

<https://www.gmu.edu/news/2025-11/george-masons-virginia-climate-center-releases-first-ever-statewide-climate-assessment>



NOAA TECHNICAL REPORT NESDISI49-VA. NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION. [HTTPS://STATESUMMARIES.NCICS.ORG/CHAPTER/VA/](https://STATESUMMARIES.NCICS.ORG/CHAPTER/VA/)
Observed and Projected Temperature Change (relative to 1901–1960 average) in observed statewide average mean annual air temperature for Virginia (1900–2020), and projected temperatures (2006–2100) under uncontrolled (higher) and optimistic (lower) global greenhouse gas emissions pathways. Shading reflects confidence around observed and projected temperatures.



PROVIDED BY ALLISON HOMER (FAIRFAX COUNTY OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND ENERGY COORDINATION)
Examples of flooding in Fairfax County, VA, showing A) a swift-water rescue, B) transportation infrastructure failure due to flooding, and C) the increasing trends of flash flooding, thunderstorms, tornadoes, and other related weather events over the past nearly four decades.

ENTERTAINMENT

YEAR ROUND

ON SATURDAYS

The City of Alexandria's historic Old Town Farmers' Market will temporarily move to the 100 block of North Royal Street and the courtyard at Tavern Square starting on Jan. 10, 2026. The new location is just across the street from Market Square. This move allows the market to keep operating during the upcoming renovations to City Hall and Market Square. The Farmers' Market has operated uninterrupted at Market Square since 1753. Because City Hall and Market Square will undergo major renovations starting in early 2026, the Farmers' Market must move to keep operating during the renovation. The Market Square Garage will also be closed during construction, and the new location provides easier access to nearby parking options. The Market Square Garage will be closed by Jan. 17. After this time, Farmers Market visitors are encouraged to use the Tavern Square garage (418 Cameron St.), which will offer FREE parking on Saturdays from 6:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. There is also parking at nearby Courthouse Square (111 S. Pitt St.). For a full list of parking locations, visit the Parking in Alexandria page. Shoppers can expect the same variety of local produce, baked goods, flowers, meats, dairy, and specialty items from over 70 vendors, now in a more spacious setting. The Market continues to run every Saturday morning from 7 a.m. to noon, year-round, rain or shine.

MEETS EVERY SUNDAY

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

MEETS EVERY MONDAY

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

WEDNESDAY NIGHTS

Wednesday Night Bingo. 7 p.m. At Atlas Brew Works, 2429 Mandeville Lane, Alexandria. The Capital City Showcase, the company that brings you some of the DC area's best events, is hosting an amazing night of everyone's favorite game at Atlas Brew Works Alexandria. Win prizes on every round, and the winner of the final round gets a \$50 Atlas



The Toy Stories Art Exhibit will be held Jan. 2-31, 2026 at Del Ray Artisans in Alexandria.

Brew Works gift card for your next visit! There's also \$6 select Atlas drafts! Plus pizza served from the world famous Andy's Pizza! Email at capitalcityshowcase@gmail.com

MGNV PLANT CLINICS ARE OPEN

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

YEAR ROUND ON SUNDAYS

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

ONGOING

Revolutionary War Exhibit. At the National Museum of the U.S. Army, Alexandria. The National Museum of the United States Army has opened a special exhibition, Call To Arms: The Soldier and the Revolutionary War. The two-year exhibition commemorates this year's 250th Birthday of the U.S. Army and next year's 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. This 5,000 square-foot exhibition features a rare collection, specially curated by the Museum, that includes Revolutionary War artifacts from the original colonies, England, France and Canada. Among the exhibit's highlights are a pair of General George Washington's pistols, the original flag of the 1st Rhode Island Regiment carried by the Army's first African American Soldiers, and a complete Loyalist uniform—one of the rarest items in the collection. The sword of British General Charles Lord Cornwallis, presented to Washington at the surrender at Yorktown, Virginia, will also be displayed for a limited time.

NOW THRU JAN. 25

A Winter's Walk. At The Athenaeum, Alexandria. This exhibition captures the beauty of winter through the lens of botanical drawings

and paintings by The Botanical Art Society of the National Capital Region. Featuring work by: Joseph Bailey, Esther Carpi, Anne Clippinger, Karen Coleman, Liz Cusell, Nancy Davis, Marcia Dewitt, Joan Maps Ducore, Cheryl Exley, Margaret Farr, Gail Goodrich Harwood, Mary Page Hickey, Ann Lesciotti, Joan Mathys, Elena Maza-Borkland, Marsha Ogden and Cynthia Rice.

JAN. 2-31

Toy Stories Art Exhibit. At Del Ray Artisans, 2704 Mount Vernon Ave., Alexandria. Explores the cultural, emotional, and imaginative world of toys. Celebrate the toys that brought you happiness in your childhood or comfort you with nostalgia as an adult. Opening Reception: Friday, January 2 from 7-9 p.m. Gallery hours are Thursdays 12-6 p.m., Fridays 12-9 p.m., Saturdays & Sundays 12-6 p.m. Details at DelRayArtisans.org/exhibits.

SATURDAY/JAN. 10

Public Hearing for 2026 General Assembly Session. 9 a.m. At Fairfax County Government Center, Board Auditorium, 12000 Government Center Pkwy, Fairfax. The Fairfax County Delegation to the General Assembly will hold a public hearing for the upcom-

ing 2026 General Assembly session. Fairfax County residents and those representing organizations serving Fairfax County residents will have the opportunity to address the Fairfax County Delegation to the General Assembly. Fairfax County residents who want to sign up in advance to speak at the hearing should register online (2026 Fairfax County General Assembly Delegation Pre-session Public Hearing Speaker Registration) or contact the Department of Clerk Services at 703-324-3151, TTY 711, by noon on Thursday, Jan. 8. Residents will also have the opportunity to sign-up on the day of the event.

THURSDAY/JAN. 22

The Chamber ALX's Professional Women's Network January Coffee & Connections. 8:30 a.m.-9:30 a.m. At Together We Bake, Alexandria. Start 2026 with meaningful connections and inspiring conversation! Join the Professional Women's Network for its first Coffee & Connections of the year, where you'll network with some of the region's most accomplished women (and men)! This quarter, they're thrilled to welcome Tricia Allen, Executive Director of Together We Bake, who will share her powerful journey and the inspiring mission behind an organization that's changing lives.

FEB. 6-28

"Lunar New Year: Year of the Horse" Art Exhibit. Del Ray Artisans presents "Lunar New Year: Year of the Horse" art exhibit celebrating traditions, mythology, and the dynamic symbolism of the horse in the zodiac through diverse interpretations inspired by movements, heritage, and storytelling with an emphasis on cultural respect and authenticity. View at Del Ray Artisans, 2704 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria. Gallery hours: Thursdays 12-6 p.m., Fridays 12-9 p.m., Saturdays & Sundays 12-6 p.m. Details at DelRayArtisans.org/exhibits

THE BIRCHMERE

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

JANUARY

Fri. 9: Ricky Skaggs & Kentucky Thunder \$55.00
Sat. 10: Ricky Skaggs & Kentucky Thunder \$55.00
Wed. 14: Derek Gripper & Ballaké Sissoko \$39.50
Fri. 16: Jarrod Lawson \$45.00
Sat. 17: GRAMMY Award Winner AVERY* SUNSHINE \$69.50
Wed. 21: Herman's Hermits starring Peter Noone \$65.00
Fri. 23: DEVOTION: An Earth Wind & Fire Experience \$39.50
Sat. 24: Who's Bad – The Ultimate Michael Jackson Experience \$39.50
Wed. 28: Jesse Cook \$49.50
Thu. 29: Loudon Wainwright III & Chris Smither \$45.00
Fri. 30: Will Downing \$79.50
Sat. 31: Will Downing \$79.50

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What Are Those Big Clumps in the Trees?

The Oh So Common Squirrel.

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

You may love 'em or hate 'em, but squirrels are here year-round, in our yards, parks and trees, running, scampering and jumping around like acrobats.

With most deciduous trees bare of leaves, round-ish clumps of dead leaves stand out high up in the trees. In the mid-Atlantic, these are likely the nests of Eastern gray squirrels. The nests, also called dreys, are typically clumps of dead leaves and small branches about 30 feet off the ground.

"Dreys are marvels of engineering," co-author of North American Tree Squirrels John Koprowski told former Washington Post columnist John Kelly who invited readers to send him squirrel pictures during his annual "Squirrel Week." The nests have three layers, Koprowski explained. "The outermost layer is made of leaves and twigs. Next is a tightly woven layer of bark and vines that provides some insulation. And inside that is the soft center where the squirrels snuggle." It has "fluffy stuff," he said, from shredded paper to bedding pulled from old couches left curbside. "The drey entrance is typically toward the bottom, often positioned on the opposite side from the prevailing wind."

On very cold days, squirrels snuggle up in the nests and may keep warm by wrapping their tails around their bodies. The gray squirrel eats nuts, seeds, wild fruit, tree flowers and corn. They bury nuts, a process called "caching," and if they don't retrieve the nuts, trees can spring up. Some call these critters "nature's reforesters." Opportunists, squirrels like to partake of seeds in many bird feeders.

Squirrel Facts

There are around 275 species of squirrels in the world, seven in Virginia: eastern gray squirrel, fox squirrel, red squirrel, northern flying squirrel, southern flying squirrel, Eastern chipmunk and woodchuck (groundhog). Chipmunks and woodchucks are ground-dwelling species primarily.

The Eastern gray squirrel, weighing 16 to 18 ounces and 12 to 21 inches long, is normally gray with a whitish belly and some yellow-brown on its face. Some can be beige, black or white. In March 2025, some Old Town Alexandria residents posted photos of a white squirrel near south Alfred and Wolfe Streets on Facebook.

Female squirrels have one or two litters per year, with two to three young per litter. The young are born helpless with eyes closed for about a month.

Unlike chipmunks, gray squirrels are active in the winter and typically move within about 200 yards daily, according to the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources. They have a range of calls — warning barks, chucks, mews, purrs and tooth chattering, for example.

Living with Squirrels

As rodents, squirrels have a pair of continuous



PHOTOS BY GLENDA BOOTH

Squirrels' nests stand out in the trees in the winter.



The author had a beige or blonde squirrel in her backyard last year.

uously growing incisors in each of the upper and lower jaws that they must wear down so the incisors do not become overgrown. Their chewing can damage outdoor furniture, siding, roofs and wiring. Homeowners may find chewed off, leafy twigs like hollies on the ground.

Squirrels have been known to disable vehicles by chewing filters, wires, hoses, plastic and other car parts. Mount Vernonite Cindy Brack was a victim of squirrel nibbling on her car's wiring.

Squirrels for Dinner?

Over 40 million squirrels are harvested

every year in the U.S., according to the Fairfax County Park Authority. Squirrels have historically been part of Indigenous and U.S. cuisine, with squirrel gravy a beloved dish in some southern kitchens. Springdale, Arkansas, has an annual World Champion Squirrel Cook-off.

Squirrels are "cute funny, silly, sad, heart-warming, aggravating, ... adorable, destructive, clever, maddening, evil critters," wrote Kelly. "And that's why there is a Squirrel Week."

It seems like every week is squirrel week. Tips on living with squirrels, <https://wildlifecenter.org>.

A Hannukah Miracle



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

No, this will not be a retelling of the legend of the menorah and the Maccabees who, with "one small purse of olive oil" kept their lamp lit for eight days, when they had only enough oil for one. This story will be updated "for your consideration," as Rod Serling used to say to begin the episodes of his "Twilight Zone" television show and whatever "dimensions" he was referring to. The miracle to which I now refer makes this legend hardly worth its holiday association and countless retellings.

It happened on Dec. 18, 2025. I ended up - per my intention, at the new Amazon Marketplace in Silver Spring, Md. It is, for all intents and purpose a supermarket, with a few Amazon touches which are hardly worth mentioning since they are not central to my miracle.

I had selected my items and placed them in my basket as I rolled it around the store until I ended up at the self-checkout area (cash not accepted) to pay for my goods. Naturally, I had to take out my wallet from my right rear pocket to select a credit card. The store was not crowded, and I wasn't the least bit flustered by this task. The register was a bit different than I had become accustomed to. Nonetheless, I figured it out, paid for and bagged up my groceries and then walked to my left to exit the store. Unfortunately, I didn't remember anything more about my wallet. I got to my car where I placed my one bag onto the back seat and then drove on home.

It wasn't until the next afternoon that I realized my wallet was missing. This 'missing' is not so unusual as I've experienced similar misplacements as I've aged into retirement and beyond. After exhausting all possible places in my house and car, I started thinking of places it couldn't or rather shouldn't be: outside the house and car. This exact 'missing' had happened a time or two before and in my retracing of my steps/drive there was a successful ending with wallet and contents remaining exactly where I had inadvertently left them.

As I now recalled that strategy, I had made multiple errand-type stops and realized that Amazon Marketplace was my last stop. In fact, I remembered taking my wallet out of my right rear pocket and laying it across the register's scanning window. A bit unusual, but nothing totally irregular. Moreover, I really can't say I remember placing my wallet back in my pocket. However, over the last 60 years, the number of times I've performed this movement has to be in the thousands. As such, it's become almost like a knee-jerk-type reaction. I have no conscious memory of doing anything with that wallet.

After sorting through my movements, I convinced myself that I had left my wallet at Amazon Marketplace and so I grabbed my car keys and off I drove. Finding the customer service counter, I asked about whether a wallet had been found/turned in since yesterday. The lady manning the window picked up a brown cardboard box and quickly she and I both saw my wallet. I said, "That's it." She grabbed the wallet and took out the driver's license and asked my name and home address. I answered correctly so she returned the wallet to me. Once in my hand I checked for cash and credit cards. All were present and accounted for.

Now that's what I call a miracle.

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



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