

Michael Austin
Kane and Catherine
Powers at the
exhibition at
ArtSpace in
Herndon.

For the Love of Art

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WELLBEING
PAGE 5

French Immersion in
Jeopardy at Herndon
Elementary

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Town Council
Approves
Downtown
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NEWS

Elden Street Players Receive 10 WATCH Nominations

The Elden Street Players have been nominated for 10 Washington Area Community Honors (WATCH) for artistic and technical excellence in Community Theater. The Elden Street Players have been performing for 25 years.

The Players are in residence at the 114-seat Industrial Strength Theater, 269 Sunset Park Drive, Herndon.

The Washington Area Theater Community Honors (WATCH) is the organization that adjudicates productions and presents annual awards recognizing artistic and technical excellence in Community Theater. The WATCH awards help to foster and encourage the growth of community theater. A total of 126 productions—from which the nominations were developed (43 musicals, 83 plays)—were adjudicated in 2012.

The 10 Elden Street Players nominations were for productions of "Clean House," "Flowers for Algernon" and "Glengarry Glen Ross." The WATCH awards will be announced at a ceremony at the Birchmere in Alexandria on Sunday evening, March 13.

The Elden Street Players nominations included:

- ❖ Outstanding Featured Actress in a Play—Lorraine Magee as Virginia in "Clean House"
- ❖ Outstanding Cameo in a Play—Stuart Orloff as Teen Charlie in "Flowers for Algernon"
- ❖ Outstanding Direction of a Play—Gloria DuGan in "Flowers for Algernon"
- ❖ Outstanding Hair Design in a Play—Arthur Rodger in "Flowers for Algernon"
- ❖ Outstanding Lead Actor in a Play—Matt Baughman as Charlie Gordon in "Flowers for Algernon"



PHOTO BY DAVID SIEGEL/THE CONNECTION

From left, standing, Lauren Kiesling as Alice, center seated, Matt Baughman as Charlie, and right standing, Steve Custer as Burt Selden in the Elden Street Players production of "Flowers for Algernon."

- ❖ Outstanding Play—"Flowers for Algernon"
- ❖ Outstanding Sound Design in a Play—Stan Harris in "Flowers for Algernon"
- ❖ Outstanding Featured Actor in a Play—Chuck Dluhy as Roma in "Glengarry Glen Ross"
- ❖ Outstanding Featured Actor in a Play—Michael Kharfen as Levene in "Glengarry Glen Ross"
- ❖ Outstanding Set Design in a Musical—James Villarubia in "Rooms, A Rock Romance"

—DAVID SIEGEL

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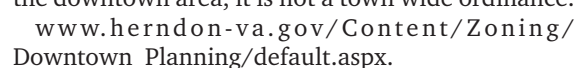
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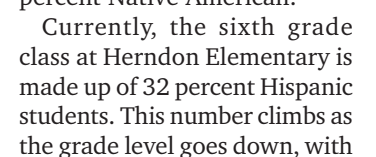
Pattern book lays out principles for downtown design principles.

Storefront windows are recommended to have high visibility and low daylight reflection, with colored, visibly tinted or mirrored glazing deemed to be “not appropriate.”



- Lighting
- Awnings
- Signage
- Planters
- Cafe Seating

"Because of the size of French classes, if you're at [the county's ratio], there is a seat somewhere else that has to balance it out," Gwynn said. "When we start trading things to make one



OAK HILL/HERNDON CONNECTION ♦ FEBRUARY 6-12, 2013 ♦ 3

THE COUNTY LINE

Making the Difference Between Struggle and Success

BY CARMEN JORDAN

All youth need stability and loving parents to give them the best chance for success in life. This is why finding adoptive homes and permanent traditional foster homes for our youth is so critical. Over the last six years, as a Fairfax Families4Kids mentor, I have seen foster youth struggle, especially when circumstance has caused them to be moved frequently from foster care placement to foster care placement (including traditional foster homes and foster group homes).

There is one 14-year-old youth in particular that I recall that was originally removed from his biological home, then lived with another biological family member for a time, then was moved into a traditional foster home, then to a group foster facility—all of this taking place over a few short years. This youth has been participating at group FF4Kids mentoring events for several years. I remember the poor behavior demonstrated at times by this youth at the group events, including not following the rules, speaking out of turn in an effort to gain attention, occasional physical outbursts due to not being able to control his anger, actually teasing other foster youth in an effort to get them to chase him around the room.

This behavior was his way of crying out for the love and attention he was not receiving at “home.” He wanted so desperately to be seen and heard by anyone in his life. This foster youth was just recently placed in a loving, adoptive home. The youth’s behavior at the group mentoring events has made a complete turnaround. He no longer needs to be the center of attention, always has a smile on his face, and demonstrates positive interaction with both mentors/volunteers and the other foster youth. This is due to him finally feeling safe and knowing that there are loving adults that he can trust to protect and take care of him. There is no amount of support from the county, school system, programs, and organizations that can replicate the day in and day out support that a child receives from a loving family.

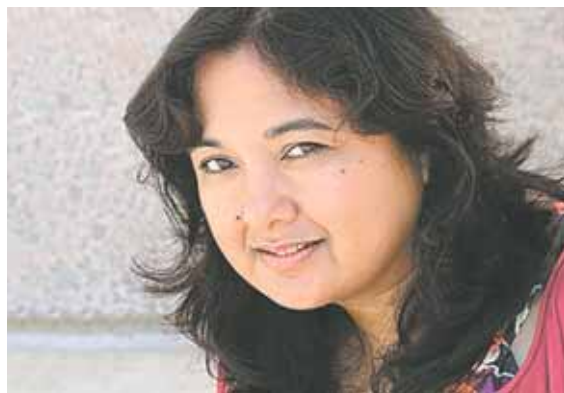
MY HOPE is that as a community, we do more to seek out Fairfax County families that are willing to provide loving adoptive and long-term foster homes for foster youth. There is a reason that the name of our program is “Fairfax Families4Kids.” It is our mission to find Fairfax County families for these foster kids. Mentoring through the program helps prepare these youth for placement. The county’s ability to more effectively find long-term, loving homes for foster youth is the key to a foster youth’s ability to grow to become mature, responsible, independent adults.

I have mentored many foster youth both through their years in foster care and their transition out of foster care. Though many foster youth have positive transitions out of foster care into independent, adult lives, there are many foster youth whose outcomes are less successful.

I can tell you stories about Fairfax County foster youth that transition out and become homeless within weeks or months. They share with me the “life skills” they have learned to survive.

“The metro trains/buses run all night except 3 to 6 a.m., so if you have metro money, you can ride all day and night to stay warm. Then you just need to walk the streets during those hours.

* Another youth said he sleeps on the floor of a



Carmen Jordan, mentor for Fairfax Families4Kids: “My hope is that, as a community, we do more to seek out Fairfax County families that are willing to provide loving adoptive and long-term foster homes for foster youth.”

About the Author

Carmen Jordan of Reston has been a mentor for Fairfax Families4Kids for six years. She is considered one of the most experienced mentors in the program. In addition to working full-time as a marquee account manager at Deltek in Herndon, Jordan makes herself available to “trouble-shoot” for the children and families she mentors. In the following column, she details her experiences with the program, and at-risk foster youth.

friend’s motel room or catches a few hours of sleep at the 24-hour McDonald’s until the police ask him to leave.

* They can tell you about their stays at the various community homeless shelters. “The crack heads and heroin addicts will steal from you so you need to keep your stuff with you at all times.”

* They will tell you where they can find public computers where they can apply online for jobs. They can make enough money to feed themselves but not enough to find permanent housing. They live with health ailments because they no longer have health insurance.

AT TIMES it is painful to witness, but as mentors, our mentoring does not cease just because they transition out of foster care. Through FF4Kids mentoring, a trusting relationship is formed, allowing foster youth to be receptive to the advice and counseling that we have to offer. This is key: if there is no trust, it is difficult for foster youth to accept advice and counseling.

For many of these foster youth, the relationships they have with their mentor is the longest term relationship they have with a responsible adult. I can’t tell you how many times a social worker, case worker, life skills coach or foster parent has said “Carmen, you have known him longer. Talk to him and explain how important it is for him to stay in school, obtain his high school diploma.”

It has been an honor and privilege to mentor many of the foster youth within our Fairfax County community. They have taught me more about perseverance through adversity than I could ever teach them. Mentoring can be difficult at times, they will make missteps along the way but they will also surprise you with their ability to accomplish goals they have set for themselves in an effort to become mature, independent young adults. Mentoring is about being there for them through the ups and downs!

Building Blocks for Success

Fairfax Families4Kids: a community of hope.

BY SUPERVISOR MICHAEL FREY

When it comes to building buildings or fixing things, Fairfax County does a great job. Schools, fire stations, parks—the county has a proven track record of exemplary projects.

Building or fixing families and people—that’s tougher to evaluate.

Fairfax is probably no better or worse than most local governments. Fixing people is hard. There is no plan that, if followed to the letter, results in a split family being made whole, or a person with mental illness or substance abuse issues being cured. People are different than buildings.

Maybe that’s why I was so excited about the Fairfax Families4Kids program when I was introduced to it, and became such a huge supporter of it immediately.

Kids in foster care really have the deck stacked against them. For whatever reason their family situation didn’t work and someone—typically the courts—stepped in and forced change. They are left looking to total strangers to do what their family should have done but couldn’t. That’s a lot to ask. They are dependent on government programs to find them temporary housing, maybe a permanent foster home, and for some of the luckier kids, a family.

FF4Kids is a partnership between the county and a whole lot of people who really believe these kids in foster care deserve more help. The program offers the kind of opportunities and experiences that the county can’t possibly provide by itself. Without the volunteers, who serve as mentors, friends, teachers and occasionally substitute parents, most of these kids would bounce from one temporary situation to the next, usually aging out of foster care with little skills, no love, and little chance for future success.

I have been so impressed with everyone I have met who is involved with the program. It has increased my sense of optimism about the chances that more of



Supervisor Michael Frey (R-Sully)

these kids will find forever homes with adoptive families. Clearly, there is a positive effect on the kids when they see the mentors devoting so much time and effort to them. Many of these kids have never had the love and attention they get within this program. Certainly they have never had the life education they get, and for the first time many of them begin to believe in themselves. Self-confidence and optimism are not qualities you find in many foster children. A program that gives them those two things, in my mind, can’t help but benefit them.

There have been success stories for kids in this program, including adoption of some of the children by some of the mentors. Of course, not every child has been so lucky. Some still age out of the system with no family back-up to catch them if they fall. But they do have the FF4Kids family, and that in itself is a confidence-builder. They also have life skills and social skills that they likely would not without the FF4Kids programs. There are no guarantees in life, but there is no doubt in my mind whether or not they find the adoptive family we all hope that they will, they will be much better prepared young adults.

As long as there are incredibly caring and dedicated people like the FF4Kids mentors and volunteers, I will be doing all I can to help support them.

BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

WELLBEING

Preserving Mental Health as We Age

Experts say diet, exercise and mental stimulation are key.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

Randy Weadon walks six miles each day around the perimeters of his retirement community, Greenspring in Springfield. He also does crossword puzzles daily.

"During tax season, I walk around the halls and mentally do my income taxes in my head," said Weadon, a retired Coast Guard officer. "If I had not started walking, I don't know if I'd be alive. I am 86-and-a-half years old, but I don't feel that age at all."

Geriatric experts say healthy lifestyle habits like regular exercise, eating a nutritious diet and brain challenges can help preserve mental health as we age.

"The one thing that I always tell my patients is that if you don't use it, you lose it. I recommend crossword puzzles, mentally challenging games and reading, especially about current events," said Dr. Lisa Calusic, a psychiatrist at Inova Behavioral Health Services in Al-



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Geriatric experts say healthy lifestyle habits like regular exercise, eating a nutritious diet and brain challenges can help preserve mental health as we age.

exandria, and an Arlington, resident.

Researchers Pamela Greenwood and Raja Parasuraman, professors at the Department of Psychology at George Mason University in

Fairfax, have spent more than 20 years studying the way the human brain ages with a focus on Alzheimer's disease. The two wrote a book, "Nurturing the Older Brain and Mind," in which they explore

ways middle-aged people can stave off mental deterioration.

"We know that if we can put off dementing illnesses, even by a year or two through lifestyle changes, that will reduce the number of people with Alzheimer's disease, which is reaching epidemic proportions," Parasuraman says.

The duo says that preventing and staving off mental deterioration is more important than ever now that workers are staying employed longer for economic reasons. Physical activity is an important tool as well.

"Exercise [is] the 'lifestyle' factor with the strongest effect," said Greenwood. "A number of different research groups have found benefits of aerobic exercise on both brain structure and function, and on cognitive performance."

Joel Martin, a professor of kinesiology at George Mason, agrees: "Regular exercise has been proven to slow the aging process," he said. "People have their actual age, which they can't do anything about, and their biological age. Someone could be 40 years old, live a very inactive lifestyle and not eat very well, which may cause

them to be closer to 60 in terms of their biological age. Vice versa: Someone who is 60 could be very active and eat a healthy diet and feel like they are much younger, perhaps a biological age closer to mid-40s."

As an octogenarian, Weadon credits his sharpness to regular mental challenges. Martin agrees. "Regularly engaging in activities requiring cognitive function is important," said Martin. "Most tissues in the body respond to stress placed on it by becoming stronger or adapting to handle the stimulus you place on it. If you lift weights, your muscles get bigger and stronger. If you don't do any sort of physical activity to stimulate your muscles, then they get smaller and become weaker. The brain is the same way, it needs regular stimulation to maintain its function."

Experts also say not to rule out the importance of good nutrition. "The antioxidants in foods, especially fruits and vegetables, can help to preserve and protect tissues from damage that occurs as part of the natural aging process," said Martin.

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OPINION

Homeless, Not Hopeless

BY PAM MICHELL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NEW HOPE
HOUSING, INC.

George and Mary spent many years homeless and unsheltered in Fairfax County. Yes, Fairfax County, one of the wealthiest counties in the country. But in Fairfax County, homeless persons such as George and Mary are generally hidden. They live in the woods, behind dumpsters, and in shopping centers. Out of sight, out of mind.

For many years, local non-profit partners have been working with county staff day in and day out to offer persons who find themselves homeless a chance to start anew. When given the stability of housing and the support of professionals and volunteers, homeless adults—including those who have lived many years on the streets and in the woods—can and do change and become stable, contributing members of our community. We non-profit homeless services providers can tell story upon story of what a difference stable housing and supports can make in a life of someone whom others have given up on, whom others have discarded as “hopeless.”

In January 2012, 697 single adults were counted as homeless in Fairfax County and 51 percent of them (353) were chronically homeless—12 consecutive months or four separate incidences of homelessness in the past three years; 24 percent of homeless adults were unsheltered. These numbers are going up.

This month you can help us find out who is “out there.” You can hear their stories and you can help provide them the housing they need.

As part of a nationwide effort to put a name and a face to each



PHOTOS
CONTRIBUTED

Homeless camp: In January 2012, 697 single adults were counted as homeless in Fairfax County and 51 percent of them (353) were chronically homeless.

number, the Fairfax-Falls Church community is participating in a national campaign—100K Homes—that will help us understand who is homeless, why they are homeless and how we can get them housed.

Join us on Feb. 25, 26, and/or 27, as a part of a volunteer team visiting campsites to interview homeless individuals. On March 1 we will give a detailed report to the community about who we found and where we go from here. See <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/homeless/100khomes/> for details.

Help us help everyone in Fairfax County find a way home.

For more information on New Hope Housing in Alexandria, go to www.newhopehousing.org.



The Fairfax-Falls Church community is participating in a national campaign—100K Homes—that will help in understanding who is homeless, why they are homeless and how we can get them housed.

We Are a Family

To the Editor:

Thank you for the wonderful articles highlighting the positive impact of Fairfax Families4Kids and the relationships and families that have come about because of the program.

As a mentor, I know firsthand how important mentoring programs such as Fairfax Families4Kids can be in a child's life.

Initially I got involved with

FF4Kids because I wanted to give back. In other words, I wanted to be there for children because I have had adults in my life that have mentored me and helped to mold me into the person I am today.

Also, my grandparents and my mother have been foster parents and I have seen the impact on foster kids of hav-



Shavonne
Hayes

ing loving/caring adults in their lives.

What I have realized is that spending time with the kids has had a tremendous impact on me. I think of the various experiences of the kids—multiple foster homes, aging out without a place to live or no job. It always reminds me to remember how truly blessed I am no matter what happens. If they can survive the

hand life has dealt to them then there is nothing I cannot overcome. I continue to be amazed and humbled by their resiliency.

To see the challenges they have aging out of the system makes me want to do all I can to ensure they have the support they need. We are more than mentors and mentees. We are a family.

Shavonne Hayes
Sterling

Oak Hill & Herndon
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CELEBRATE VALENTINE'S

Wax romantic or celebratory with a Valentine's outing:

♥ Friday/Feb. 8

Valentine's Day Bouquet Consultation. Noon-7 p.m., at Mayflowers Floral Studio, 11959 Market St., Reston. A personal consultation with designer/owner May of Mayflowers to create an arrangement. mayflowersreston.com.

♥ Tuesday/Feb. 12

Ultimo Di Giorno Di Carnevale. 5-9 p.m., at Il Fornaio, 11990 Market St., Suite 106, Reston. A special night with live music, costumed performers and a Venetian carnevale dinner menu. 703-437-5544 or banquets.reston@ilfo.com.

♥ Thursday/Feb. 14

Horse-drawn Carriage Rides. 4-8 p.m., in front of Talbots, on Market St., 11888 Market St., Reston. Rides all evening, rain or shine; proceeds benefit March of Dimes. \$5 per person; children restontowncenter.com.

Four Course Valentine's Day Dinners. 5-10 p.m., at Reston Town Center, 11900 Market St., Reston. Get casual-chic and sit down to a prix-fixe candle-lit dinner with many choices to compose your three or four course meal. \$95 per person at Vinifera; \$59 per person at Market Street Bar & Grill; \$45.95 at Paolo's. www.restontowncenter.com.

♥ Saturday/Feb. 16

Calabrian Wine Tasting. 4 p.m., at Il Fornaio, 11990 Market St., Suite 106, Reston. Five 3-ounce pours paired with appetizers. Reservations. \$25. 703-437-5544 or banquets.reston@ilfo.com.

ENTERTAINMENT

SATURDAY/ FEB. 9

Dumpling Cooking Demonstration. 9 a.m., at Big Bowl, 11915 Democracy Drive, Reston. See how dumplings are made; proceeds benefit Make-a-Wish Foundation. Reservations. \$50 per person; \$10 for kids 13-and-under. 703-787-8852 or www.bigbowl.com.

Chocolate Festival. 11 a.m.-3 p.m., at Floris United Methodist Church, 13600 Frying Pan Road, Herndon. Carnival games, large inflatables, a silent auction, face painting and balloon art go well with chocolate in every shape and form. 703-898-2330.

Black History Month Event. 1-2 p.m., at ArtSpace Herndon, 750 Center Street, Herndon. Student-Athletes from Herndon HS will present readings on the document, its history and importance. www.ArtSpaceHerndon.com.

Contra Dance. 7:15-8 p.m. and 8-10:45 p.m., at RCC Hunters Woods, 2310 Colts Neck Rd., Reston. Susan Taylor calls contra dances and squares to the music of the June Apple Band; an hour-long workshop precedes the dance, which begins at 8 p.m. and requires no partner. 703-476-4500.

SUNDAY/FEB. 10

Dating Abuse Stops Here. 9-10 a.m., at Dulles Town Center Mall, 21100 Dulles Town Circle, Dulles. The third annual DASH at Dulles 5K Walk in memory of Siobhan Russell in protest of dating abuse is open to the public. \$15. www.datingabusestopshere.com.

TUESDAY/FEB. 12

St. Timothy's Pancake Supper. 6-7:30 p.m., at St. Timothy's Episcopal Church, 432 Van Buren St., Herndon. Pancakes, French-toast, ham, applesauce and coffee with leftovers given to the Emily Rucker Community Shelter. \$15 per family; \$8 per adult. www.saint-timothys.org.



Catherine Powers, Laura Merten (daughter) and Dot Powers (mother) at the exhibition.

For the Love of Art

Photo exhibition draws art lovers to ArtSpace in Herndon.

BY OLUFEMI AKINSITAN
THE CONNECTION

The night was cold and windy, but there was hardly enough space to contain visitors and art lovers at ArtSpace in Herndon, who came to see the works of two photographers—Catherine Powers and Michael Austin Kane—in their exhibits, “U.S. 17: The Scenic Highway” and “Hopeful Calm & Beginnings” on Friday, Feb. 2.

Catherine Powers, an attorney, showed her work in the U.S. 17: The Scenic Highway exhibit. Her intention was to bring “the character of the people, the culture and the beauty of the land along this 1,100 mile byway—the marsh-lined rivers, pristine white beaches, quaint fishing villages, small farms, proud military heritage, large cities, and historic communities” to the audience.

In Michael Austin Kane’s words, “Hopeful Calm & Beginnings” is meant to “represent visual discoveries that have provided me with an instinctive reaction, at first a sense of contentment followed by a hint of excitement and, of course, a desire to uncover more. I have chosen the images in this collection because I was particularly drawn to the intersection of light color, texture, line and

rhythm.”

Project U.S. 17 started for Catherine Powers, a mother of two, about a year-and-half ago during her travels along the north-south highway spanning the southeastern United States close to the Atlantic Ocean; a part of the country where she has lived for the greater part of her life. The self-taught photographer confessed, “I’m attracted to the diversities, as well as the similarities, of the people and the scenery along this southern landscape.”

The diverse crowd of friends, families, professional photographers and other professionals who came to see the collections of these two photographers were not disappointed. Expressing her impression of the photo exhibition, Dawn Kirk from Herndon said, “I think they are beautiful, I like the water and the beach scene.”

Speaking at the event Harlon Reece, president of the Herndon Foundation for the Cultural Arts, described the exhibits as “really top quality photography.”

Robin Carroll, the former president of the foundation, said, “the center hopes to bring fine art to Herndon and create an activity around the town.”

The exhibition runs through Sunday, Feb. 24. Find out more at www.ArtSpaceHerndon.org.



Michael Austin Kane poses with some of his works on display.

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SPORTS

South Lakes girls' basketball coach Christy Winters-Scott has the Seahawks atop the Liberty District standings.

PHOTOS BY
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South Lakes Girls' Basketball Atop Liberty District

Seahawks' Rendle, Aghayere making plays in paint.

BY JON ROETMAN
THE CONNECTION

South Lakes girls' basketball coach Christy Winters-Scott said her team "didn't play like I know we know how to play" following Friday's contest against the Marshall Statesmen.

The Seahawks won by 13 points, anyway.

South Lakes center Abigail Rendle was frustrated at times with her inability to secure the basketball, saying she had "butterfingers."

The junior finished with 22 points.

Winters-Scott said sophomore Princess Aghayere passed up shot attempts near the rim.

Aghayere made an impact with 12 rebounds.

Facing a Marshall team in search of its first Liberty District victory this season, South Lakes beat the Statesmen 45-32 despite a less-than-stellar effort on Feb. 1 at Marshall High School. The Seahawks beat Thomas Jefferson 53-48 on Saturday and lost to Madison 45-42 on Monday, moving their record to 18-3. Despite losing to the Warhawks, South Lakes sits atop the Liberty District standings at 11-2 with one regular season game remaining—a Feb. 8 home contest against Stone Bridge.

SOUTH LAKES CAN WIN on an off-night and is in position to enter the district tournament as the No. 1 seed thanks in part to the size and performance of post players Rendle and Aghayere. Rendle, listed at 6-foot-4, scored 22 points against Marshall. She struggled at times handling the ball, but the junior also showed her athleticism, scoring multiple transition buckets.

"I was getting frustrated about dropping the ball a lot—butterfingers," Rendle said. "I've got to move

past that."

Rendle finished with five rebounds, three blocks, two steals and an assist.

Aghayere, listed at 6-foot-2, finished with two points, one block and an assist, but her biggest contribution came on the glass as she finished with 12 rebounds. Aghayere's explanation for her mentality as a rebounder was simple: "Just to stop the girl next to me from getting it and then just going after it."

Winters-Scott credited Aghayere's "heart" for the sophomore's ability to grab boards, calling her a "determined soul."

"Princess is only in 10th grade and the upside is tremendous for her," Winters-Scott said. "She has really—especially in the second half of our season—changed the pace in terms of the production that she's been giving us. ... On the boards, she's been steady for us. ... For three years, [Rendle has] been an advantage for us inside. For both of them to be in there together, I think it really gives us a special look."

"For both [Rendle and Aghayere] to be in there together, I think it really gives us a special look."

—South Lakes girls' basketball coach Christy Winters-Scott

MARSHALL, which entered the contest with a 4-15 record, pulled to within eight when Lexi Stalcup buried a 3-pointer with 3:38 remaining in the fourth quarter, but South Lakes responded by scoring six of the game's final seven points.

Gabrielle Schultz finished with six points, six rebounds, three assists and three steals for the Seahawks. Mary Severin, Sasha Sprei and Caitlin Jensen each had four points.

South Lakes will close the regular season at home against Stone Bridge at 5:45 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 8, before entering the district tournament. Last season, the Seahawks lost to Madison 78-47 in the Liberty District championship game before suffering a 68-48 loss to Annandale in the opening round of the Northern Region tournament.



South Lakes junior Abigail Rendle scored 22 points against Marshall on Feb. 1.



South Lakes sophomore Princess Aghayere reaches for the ball against Marshall on Feb. 1.

French Immersion in Jeopardy

FROM PAGE 3

33.5 percent in fifth grade, 36.5 percent in fourth grade, 40 percent in third grade, 42.5 percent in second grade, 46 percent in first grade and 56 percent in kindergarten.

The school has also been affected by the new state requirement that requires teachers in elementary school immersion programs to be certified in Elementary Education. Previously teachers could be certified K through 12 French.

This new requirement means that longtime French teacher Mona Samaha, a fixture at the school, will be leaving for a middle school position after this year.

Samaha said she thought about trying to keep her position, but called the requirements "excessively high," meaning 37 credits and multiple tests just to keep her current job after this year.

MORE THAN 100 PARENTS from Herndon Elementary showed up at a meeting at the school Wednesday, Jan. 30, to express their concerns over the French program going away.

Begona Morton moved with her family from Belgium, and she said they specifically chose Herndon Elementary because of its French program.

"The level of French education here is better than when my children were taking it in Brussels, this is a special program," she said. "We don't just want to save the French program here, we want to improve it."

Herndon Elementary parents said they are worried about the program being able to retain any teach-

ers, teachers who know they will need to find a new position by 2019.

"I'm not leaving, that's for sure," said Megan Kelly, a current French teacher at the school. "I don't have any intention of leaving, and I don't think those of us who can stay do either. I'm here to the end."

Other parents are concerned because they were just informed about this change a few weeks ago.

"We heard about it when we got a piece of paper in the mail about two weeks ago, but when I reached out to Principal Gwynn, she said she had been discussing it with the PTA for more than two years," said Tracy Brooks, a parent. "To say that we're upset is an understatement."

Kimberly Wood, who serves as vice president for volunteers for the school's PTA, says she was happy to see parents come out and support the program, and hoped that if it were to continue, the support from parents would be there.

"This program needs support both internally and externally from the community," she said. "In the past few years, we've had to cancel the French Club, the French Media Club and others because that support wasn't there."

Herndon Elementary parents have created a Facebook page entitled "French Immersion at Herndon" and an online petition located at www.ipetitions.com/petitions/keep-french-at-herndon.

Gwynn said the change at this point is "just a proposal," and plans to hold another meeting in the next month to answer questions and provide more statistics.

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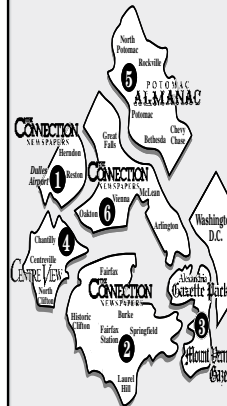
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A Complicated Answer



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

And a further explanation and corollary to last week's column: "A Simple Question," which attempted to sort through my reactions to being asked an extremely innocent, appropriate, well-intended and always appreciated courtesy: "How are you?" and the problem that it sometimes causes me. That problem being: a question which had it not been asked would then not require an answer. An answer that I'll always give, but not before I've given it some thought, which if I hadn't thought about, wouldn't have bothered me in the least. And in the most, it doesn't really bother me, but after four years, a sort of cancer-fatigue has set in. I'm tired of talking about it. "Not that there's anything wrong with that"; being asked the obvious question. Still, if I'm going to keep pretending that my coast is semi-clear, I'd rather not be reminded that five hundred years ago, that coast/that horizon represented the end of the world.

This first paragraph was yet another attempt by yours truly to offer some insight into the thought process of a cancer survivor (OK, maybe just this cancer survivor; or a person with some issues, although I would deny that). The related point being that there are the obvious problems being a cancer patient (need I elaborate?) and then there are the less-than-obvious, almost subliminal-type problems which can just as easily ruin your day – and night, as much if not more than a chemo-cocktail infused straight into your body for six hours every three weeks can.

And just like the Philadelphia-born comedian, David Brenner, used to joke about mosquitoes: "It's not the ones you hear you should worry about, it's the ones you can't hear." So too with cancer. There's plenty to worry about that you know – or think you know or have heard about, or maybe have even anticipated: lab work, diagnostic scans, biopsies, surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, doctor's appointments, etc. But it's the down time, the private time alone and away from all the people, places and things with which you've grown familiar and dare I admit, accustomed, that becomes cherished. Then, when you least expect it, a courtesy question inquiring about your overall health, not even one particularly cancer-centric. Still, the question takes you (at least it does to me), right back to cancer central. The one place – for me, I try to avoid. The one place I never imagined I'd be, and now that I'm there often, the one place where I'd rather not be reminded that I semi-reside.

Four years post diagnosis, I realize this jackpot I find myself in is hardly a winning hand, and it's more than a bad dream. It's a reality. Yet avoiding the nightmare directly – and indirectly, as often as possible, has been my M.O. I can't say I've been particularly successful doing so, but I've had my moments and have made my peace. However, it's the random nature of the spoken and written word that occasionally has undercut my emotional foundation. A foundation built on a lifetime living and learning, trying not to make a bad situation worse; and one striving to not be irrational, unreasonable, illogical and ill-prepared for all that life throws at you. I ceded control four years ago and now when I'm asked, 'How I'm doing?', I'm always reminded how fragile and unpredictable life can be; "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," as Cerphe used to say back in the day, on the original WHFS.

I know – and appreciate – that you have to ask. Please understand that sometimes, I might not feel like answering.

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

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