

Langley Principal Leaves for South County

NEWS, PAGE 3

Get to Know
Craig Parisot
NEWS, PAGE 4

Clemyjontri Park
Celebrates
Renewal
NEWS, PAGE 8

Langley High School Principal Matt Ragone in front of the trophy case. After more than six years as Langley principal, he became the principal of South County High School.



UPCOMING EVENTS

- ▶ **"A BROADWAY CHRISTMAS CAROL"**
AT METROSTAGE
NOVEMBER 26 - DECEMBER 28
- ▶ **THE LITTLE THEATRE OF ALEXANDRIA'S**
"A CHRISTMAS CAROL"
DECEMBER 5 - 20
- ▶ **DEL RAY ARTISANS**
19TH ANNUAL HOLIDAY MARKET
DECEMBER 5 - 21
- ▶ **ALEXANDRIA'S HOLIDAY MARKET**
AT CARLYLE
DECEMBER 5 - 24
- ▶ **CHRISTMAS ILLUMINATIONS**
AT MOUNT VERNON
DECEMBER 20
- ▶ **WATERSKIING SANTA**
COMES TO OLD TOWN ALEXANDRIA
DECEMBER 24
- ▶ **20TH ANNIVERSARY OF**
FIRST NIGHT ALEXANDRIA
DECEMBER 31

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MIDDLEBURG

REAL ESTATE

ATOKA PROPERTIES

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BERRYVILLE - Majestically positioned on the Blue Ridge Mtns, 472 acre (9 parcels) Cassique Farm backs up to Appalachian Trail. 4 bdrm, 4.5 bath home w/ spectacular views, entertainment barn w/ 8 stalls, 2 wash bays, 8 pastures, 8 run-in barns, 6 wells, 4 septic, and 2 ponds.
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FQ8470391 **\$4,300,000**
UPPERVILLE - Brick colonial on 50+ gorgeous acres in Greystone. 9000+ sq. ft. of spectacular living space, 3 finished levels. Heated pool, tennis court & brilliant gardens overlook picturesque pond w/ fabulous mtn views. Private & secluded.
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LO8269159 **\$2,800,000**
MIDDLEBURG - Beautiful stone home on 40+ acres just minutes from the town of Middleburg. Goose creek runs through the property. 4 bdrm 5 bath house is perfect for entertaining. Exquisite 8-stall stone horse barn with tack room. Additional guest house and lot available.
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LO8441685 **\$2,297,000**
STONEBROOK FARM - c.1750 house w/ Stone Addition c. 1793 & recent total renovation w/ all of the charm of period home coupled w/ modern amenities. 3 additional guest houses, fantastic horse facilities, riding arena, 8+ stall barn/living space.
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LO8175796 **\$1,765,000**
ROBIN CIRCLE, LEESBURG - Stone, brick and cedar estate on 3.54 acres. Heated indoor pool, a sports pub, racquetball court w/ hoop, audio/video system, roof top pavilion. 2, 2-Car garages & caretaker apartment.
Peter Pejacsevich 540.270.3835 Scott Buzzelli 540.454.1399

LO8412399 **\$1,495,000**
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LO8105401 **\$1,190,000**
MIDDLEBURG - Spacious brick house w/ roof top OBSERVATORY in private setting. Master suite w/ lots of closets. Family room w/ fireplace connects to open kitchen. 4 car garage w/ work benches. Lower level w/ in-law suite, media room & several work rooms. Pond. Mint condition.
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LO8092159 **\$995,000**
BLUEMONT - Custom all brick ranch with amazing views. Spacious open floor plan with over 6,000 sq/ft of finished space. Large new barn/ man cave for all your toys. Daylight basement with rear brick terrace. Extensive landscaping and very private. Near bluemont vineyards.
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LO8509475 **\$299,900**
MIDDLEBURG - Nice Bungalow rental. In the process of getting fresh paint & cleaning. Should be ready to go in 2 weeks. Agent owned, motivated to sell before the end of the year. Granite countertop, SS Appliances, Very private off gravel road, one Acre lot, close to school, Ceramic baths and showers. In good condition.
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Langley Principal Leaves for South County

Matthew Ragone created “Saxon Country,” says school family network committee co-chair.

BY REENA SINGH
THE CONNECTION

For six years, he was the glue that brought Langley High School (LHS) together.

LHS Principal Matthew Ragone has left the school to boost South County High School's academics as its new principal.

“South County has spent a long time looking for a qualified principal,” said Ragone. “I think I have the right fit to help a school like South County with qualities that have been dormant at Langley.”

Ragone has spent his entire 22 year education career at Fairfax County Schools. Even further back, he graduated high school from South Lakes High School in Reston.

“I always loved history,” he said. “I remember going to Monticello and downtown D.C., and I would finish our tour guide's sentences and it would tick everyone off.”

While studying at the University of Mary Washington, he taught swimming over the summers while on break. He said he was amazed that instructions could lead to action. He knew then that he wanted to become a teacher.

After years of being a social studies teacher, however, he realized he wanted more.

“I always thought I was going to be a teacher my entire life,” he said. “I always found it rewarding.”

However, he wanted to reach more than the 150 students who would come through his classroom every week.



PHOTO BY REENA SINGH/THE CONNECTION

Langley High School Principal Matt Ragone in front of the trophy case.

“Also, there were things you complain about as a teacher, and I didn't want to complain anymore,” he said.

AFTER BEING AT FOUR OTHER SCHOOLS, he landed at Langley High. Former Parent Teacher Association President and current Family Network Committee co-Chair Betsy Shomaker worked closely with him for many years, saying he created unity where there was little before.

“I think Matt's legacy will be his work and effort to change and improve school spirit and school culture,” she said.

Previous to his principalship there, the school celebrated Color Day where different school teams would wear different colors - a practice of rivalry within the school.

Ragone decided to change the day to Unity Day, instead, asking students to all wear school colors and stand together.

“He created the school idea of Saxon Country,” said Shomaker. “No matter who you are, we are one.”

Ragone said he was especially proud to have reached out to the students he called the “middle kids,” the students who were neither the disadvantaged nor overachievers.

Although student mental health is widely discussed topic within Fairfax County Public Schools and around the nation, Shomaker said he may have been one of the first people who talked about it five years ago.

She remembered a speech where he said,

“Students can't sacrifice current happiness for future happiness.”

“He was also a rock to the community during some dark times last year,” she said.

Last winter, two Langley students killed themselves during the same week - one on Monday and the other Tuesday - shaking the school system to the core and prompting changes like the addition of Crisis Text and later high school start times.

“He really binded the community together,” said Langley senior and FCPS School Board student representative Harris LaTeef.

LaTeef said he was sad when he found out that Ragone - who he called a role model - was leaving in the middle of the year.

“I was looking forward to crossing the stage at graduation and shaking his hand,” he said.

Ragone's first day at South County High School was on the Dec. 15. Former South Lakes principal Bruce Butler will replace him as LHS's interim principal.

RAGONE is excited for the fresh start and feels he is leaving Langley a better place than how he found it. He knows that he will face different challenges like lower test scores, a more diverse population and a greater percentage of students who are qualified for free or reduced lunch.

“South County is one of those really great places to be,” he said. “You walk in and see that people have so much school spirit. I think that their academics could match their spirit and enthusiasm at the school.”

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Fairfax County is offering a free Telephone Support Group for Family Caregivers of Older Adults. Join us for this open discussion. This telephone support group may be just what you need! Share your experiences, gain support and get important information without having to travel. The one-hour free sessions are scheduled for the second Tuesday of each month beginning at 7 p.m. Find out more and register at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dfs/olderadultservices/ and click on Caregiver Telephone Support Group.

Fairfax County needs volunteers to drive older adults to medical appointments and wellness programs Reston area. For these and other volunteer opportunities, call 703-324-5406, TTY 711 or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/olderadults and click on Volunteer Solutions.

Volunteers, fluent in American Sign Language, are needed in Reston, Herndon and Vienna. For these and other volunteer opportunities, call 703-324-5406, TTY 711 or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/olderadults and click on Volunteer Solutions.

Meals on Wheels needs drivers in Chantilly, McLean, Mt. Vernon, and Clifton on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. For these and other volunteer opportunities, call 703-324-5406, TTY 711 or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/olderadults and click on Volunteer Solutions.

The Lewinsville Senior Center in McLean needs instructors for the following classes: Certi-

fied Arthritis Exercise, Ballroom Dance, Square Dance, Knitting/Crocheting, Bridge and American Mah Jongg. For these and other volunteer opportunities, call 703-324-5406, TTY 711 or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/olderadults and click on Volunteer Solutions.

The **Northern Virginia Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program** needs volunteer advocates for residents in assisted living and nursing facilities. Training is provided in March. Call 703-324-5861, TTY 711 or email Lisa.Callahan@fairfaxcounty.gov. Find more information on the program at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/ltc.

The Annandale Adult Day Health Care Center in Annandale needs a licensed hair stylist to wash, cut and style hair for participants once or twice a month and Spanish-speaking social companions Monday-Friday. For these and other volunteer opportunities, call 703-324-5406, TTY 711 or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/olderadults and click on Volunteer Solutions.

The Wakefield Senior Center in Annandale needs a Chair Exercise Instructor and Bilingual English/Spanish Activity Leaders. They also need certified instructors for classes in Ballroom Dance and Pilates. Volunteer instructor positions could lead to part-time employment. For these and other volunteer opportunities, call 703-324-5406, TTY 711 or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/olderadults and click on Volunteer Solutions.



White House Ornaments Available in Great Falls

This year's White House Ornament represents a set of trains in honor of President Warren Harding who was very fond of trains. The ornaments can be purchased at Great Dogs, and The Studio, both retailers located in Great Falls. The cost per ornament is \$25, all proceeds benefiting Artemis House, a local Fairfax County shelter providing emergency assistance for women and children fleeing domestic violence. Store locations: Great Dogs: 9859 Georgetown Pike, Great Falls, 703-759-3601; The Studio: 10123 Colvin Run Road, Great Falls, 703-757-2330.

Running with Purpose

Colleagues say delegate candidate Craig Parisot's 'got his priorities straight.'

BY REENA SINGH
THE CONNECTION

Craig Parisot can juggle. Whether that means candy canes or work-life balance, he catches everything that comes his way.

With a growing new family, a growing list of leadership roles in the community and an active campaign as the Republican candidate for delegate for the 34th District, this is a job that requires both hands.

"If there is one thing I want people to know about me, it's that I'm not looking for purpose by running," he said, sitting in the tight quarters of his McLean "Parisot for Delegate" office. "I'm running with purpose."

Although his son Jackson is only 12 weeks old, Parisot has just weeks to knock on doors and pound pavement to win voters over. He loves having the opportunity, however, to talk to the diverse group of locals that make up McLean, Great Falls and parts of Loudoun County, an opportunity he said he would almost never have without running for office.

"It inspires me to do right by all people," he said.

He said his parents divorced when he was a young boy in South Carolina. His mother raised him, and at one point, the family had to go on food assistance while she put herself through school to become a nurse.

"I always paid attention," he said. "I asked why my mom was a Republican - what does it mean to be a Republican?"

Working in the House of Representatives, his eyes were opened to how the legislative process worked. His interest in politics found its spark.

"It's about being conservative," he said about what it means to be Republican. "The Republican Party I know and love welcomes everybody."

HE MOVED to the area 13 years ago after serving as an officer in the U.S. Air Force.

Sang Yi, a Navy reserve officer who met Parisot through community activities, says that service in the military gives him an edge to run for office.

"I think when people serve in the military, they learn leadership skills that are not readily available at other jobs," he said.

Also, with a child under 3 months, Yi is impressed that Parisot decided to run in a drastically shortened race.

"He's probably not getting a lot of sleep right now," he said. "He's a remarkable guy."

His wife, Kristen, and he lived in Washington, D.C. while they worked for many years, then moved to McLean three years ago.



PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED BY SEAN MCCORT

Kristen Parisot, Don Landefeld - Godfather - and Jill - Godmother - look towards the priest as Craig Parisot holds his son, Jackson, during his christening.

They finally bought a house in McLean two years ago. They also have a family farm in Great Falls where Kristen can ride horses.

Two years ago, he also sold his company Aperio International, that once had nearly 300 employees. He said the benefits and fair wages the company provided made them competitive in the field.

"NOVABizPAC, the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce's political action committee, is pleased to endorse and support Craig Parisot for Delegate," said NOVABizPAC Chair Scott McGeary in a press release announcing their endorsement. "It is our hope

that Mr. Parisot will take his pro-business and pro-jobs policy positions to Richmond to ensure Virginia remains a top state for business."

Serving in the military gave him drive to serve in other ways once he retired. He has taken leadership roles in local nonprofit boards and goes to McLean Citizen Association and Great Falls Citizen Association meetings to listen to the issues that impact the area the most.

In pursuit of a way to serve during the short time he lived in Chevy Chase, Md., he decided to run for mayor - something he

Q&A: Get to Know Craig Parisot

What are your top three accomplishments?

Craig Parisot: The number one is I am so fortunate to have a magnificent wife and things just keep getting better every day. I have such an adorable, healthy child.

My second is my service as an officer in the United States Air Force.

The third is really growing and operating a successful business where we had nearly 300 employees at one point. And we never missed a payroll. That was really special.

What would be your top three priorities as delegate?

Parisot: Growing and diversifying the Commonwealth's economy. Transportation. Education. They all go hand in hand. They're all key investments.

Why should our readers vote for you?

Parisot: I'm very deliberate about the decisions that I make. I'm deeply committed to this community, deeply committed to being the best delegate that I could possibly be. I've absolutely got the best background for this. I think it translates for the needs and priorities for the 34th district, and I am not a career politician.

How would you show off Northern

Virginia to out of town friends?

Parisot: First of all, we'd have to use a car, so hopefully the roads are clear and we don't come across much congestion. I would start by taking them out to our farm in Great Falls, just to show them the raw beauty. I'd then show them all my favorite spots here in McLean. If we get a little more daylight, we might go out to Great Falls National Park, take a little hike, because it's just so gorgeous.

What would people find surprising about you?

Parisot: I can juggle - apparently not odd sized objects - but cylindrical objects that in particular. I think the other thing is that my entrepreneurial roots run really deep. I was that typical kid that had the lemonade stand on the side of the road on a hot sunny day to make a little bit of money, because I do come from a single family home.

How do you relax off the campaign trail?

Parisot: Well, when you do get time, it's really about spending time with my family, making every opportunity to spend those moments with my wife and my son. Especially now, I'm watching him grow up and discover life.

Bio:

Current Position: CEO of Aperio International

Residence: McLean

Spouse: Kristen

Children: Jackson, 12 weeks old

Education: University of South Carolina BA
English, California State Polytechnic University
Pomona MBA

Current and previous organizations:

President of Volunteer Fairfax, Board of World
Police and Fire Games, Northern Virginia
Technology Council, McLean Citizens
Association, Great Falls Citizens Association.

says his opponents misread about his intentions.

"I knew I wasn't going to win," he said. "But I learned a lot of things. It really helped me to learn about my communities very quickly."

What he is learning from local communities this time around are the issues he plans to take to office if he wins: boosting the state's economy, promoting education and improving transportation. He believes that all three of those requests are connected.

"Listen, listen, listen," said Parisot. "You will learn so much, and your actions will be so much better by listening."

Fran Fisher, of Vienna, met Parisot when they were campaigning over the summer for Barbara Comstock's run for U.S. Congress. Fisher said she briefly contemplated running for her open delegate seat, but is excited that Parisot decided to.

"He's got his priorities straight," she said. "He's level-headed. He's got a good grasp of the issues of the district."

She also noted that his business background gives him an edge.

"As a business person, he understands a budget and how to live within a budget," she said.

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE he is facing is just letting voters know there is an election in January even though there was just an election in November. Between those two elections are some of the biggest holidays to nearly every denomination - but he does not want to compete with them. Rather, he is collecting canned goods while on the campaign trail to donate to a food pantry.

Ryan Rauner, who met Parisot through the Finance Committee on the Fairfax County Republican Committee, said Parisot's success in business will make him a successful delegate. He described his colleague as passionate, dedicated and business-minded - a smart person who understands the issues.

"He doesn't need to become delegate," he said. "I know he's doing it because public service is a service. It's not a career for him, it's a passion."

Jim Tragakis serves on the Volunteer Fairfax board that Parisot leads. He said he was excited when he found out Parisot was running for delegate.

"He's very strategic in his thinking and focuses on getting things done," said Tragakis. "I can see him working his way into leadership positions like committee chairman and other positions like that."

Parisot continues to knock on doors and go to community meetings where he can listen in and hopefully take those concerns to the General Assembly one day.

"When people talk to me, they know what they're getting," Parisot said.

NEWS

Herrick Named Chairman of History Commission

Carole Herrick was recently selected to serve as chairman of the Fairfax County History Commission. The commission helps to identify, document, record and preserve the county's historic past. It also sponsors events about local history. The commission meets at 7:30 p.m. the first Wednesday of each month in the Conference Room at the City of Fairfax Regional Library. The public is always welcome.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED
Carole Herrick

McLean Community Foundation Announces Grants Recipients, New Grants Cycle

The McLean Community Foundation (MCF) has announced the following grants recently awarded to organizations benefiting the citizens of McLean:

- ❖ **Share of McLean** received a donation that will help fund the purchase of a new truck to support Share's services for families in need.
- ❖ A grant to **SPARC** will fund the purchase of specially-adapted photography equipment and art supplies for its programs benefiting adults with disabilities.
- ❖ **McLean Orchestra** will re-

ceive funds to replace out-of-date computer equipment.

❖ **Longfellow PTA** received a grant to support Longfellow's participation in the National Wildlife Federation's Green Flag Award program promoting the cultivation of sustainable school grounds, the reduction of waste and promotes energy savings.

❖ **Redeemer Renaissance After-School Program** was awarded a challenge grant toward the purchase of a bus to transport students from area elementary schools.

FAITH NOTES

Faith Notes are for announcements and events in the faith community. Send to north@connectionnewspapers.com. Deadline is Friday.

"Once Upon A Holy Night" on Dec. 21 at 10:45 a.m. at Charity Baptist Church 1328 Spring Hill Road McLean. Join in for the annual Christmas concert. It will be a morning filled with joyous celebration, music, and worship. This year the choir performs an inspiring musical story of God's promise fulfilled. The program features Classical Christmas favorites as well as blues and jazz arrangements that beautifully tell the story of Christ's birth. A performance that is sure to ignite and kindle your Christmas spirit. Admissions is free. No tickets required.

"Blue Christmas" Worship Service for those struggling with loss or sadness this holiday season. 6 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 21. Emmanuel Lutheran Church 2589 Chain Bridge Road, Vienna. Everyone welcome. 703-938-2119 or www.elcvienna.org.

A Festival of Lessons and Carols. 9 and 11:15 a.m. on Sunday, Dec. 21 at St. John's Episcopal Church, 6715 Georgetown Pike, McLean.

Once Upon a Holy Night, 10:30 a.m. on Sunday, Dec. 21 at

SEE FAITH, PAGE 7

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OPINION

Holidays Are for Giving

In the scramble to finish Christmas shopping, remember tens of thousands of local children are short of food as well as presents.

The holidays are for giving. Christmas and Hanukkah are about children and family, about sharing, about joy, about being thankful and about faith and appreciation.

Here in Northern Virginia, many of us see few signs of families in need as we go about our daily lives and holiday shopping. Our neighborhoods are largely segregated economically; we mostly see the people who are most like ourselves economically.

But in Fairfax County, about 65,000 people live below the poverty line, about 6 percent. In Arlington and Alexandria, more than 8 percent of the population lives in poverty, about 18,000 people in Arlington and more than 12,000 people in Alexandria.

EDITORIAL

To be clear, the poverty line is \$19,780 for a family of three; it's \$11,670 for a single person household. Imagine for a minute how far \$20,000 a year would go in your family. To live in Northern Virginia, a family needs to earn about twice the rate of poverty to get by. The median household income in Fairfax County and Arlington is well over \$100,000.

In Fairfax County Public Schools, more than 52,000 students, or more than 28 percent, are poor enough to receive free or subsidized meals, a significant measure of poverty.

In Arlington more than 32 percent of the students are poor enough to receive free or subsidized meals; that's 7,452 students at last count.

In Alexandria, more than 8,500 students are

poor enough to receive free or subsidized meals. That's 60 percent of the 14,222 students enrolled.

These are children who may not be sure that they will have a meal between the meals they get in school. School holidays can bring uncertainty and hunger, a far cry from the celebrations, gifts and plenty that we associate with Christmas, Hanukkah and winter holiday vacations.

Many of these are children are living in families who must choose between medical bills, car repair, heat and food. Almost all are families where at least one adult is employed full time, but still many are one unexpected expense away from disaster. Many of these families live on the brink of homelessness.

There are literally hundreds, probably thousands, of ways to give locally this season. Also mark your calendar to help again in a month or two. The needs don't go away after the holidays. Here are a few ideas.

— MARY KIMM

MKIMM@CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

Where to Give Locally

In no particular order:

- ❖ **Our Daily Bread's Holiday Program** helps those in need with food for the holidays and gifts for their children. Donations are still needed, go to www.odbfairfax.com/holiday
- ❖ **Cornerstones**, 11150 Sunset Hills Road, Suite 210, Reston, serving Reston and Herndon. 571-323-9555, www.cornerstonesva.org. Programs and services include the Embury Rucker Community Shelter, Emergency Food Pantry, Hypothermia Prevention Program and the Thanksgiving Food Drive.
- ❖ **FACETS** helps parents, their children and individuals who suffer the effects of poverty in the Fairfax area. FACETS is always in need of volunteers, and offers a variety of one-time and ongoing opportunities. 703-865-4251 or volunteer@facetscares.org. www.facetscares.org. 10640 Page Avenue, Suite 300, Fairfax VA 22030
- ❖ **HealthWorks for Northern Virginia**, formerly the Jeanie Schmidt Free Clinic, provides medical, dental and behavioral health care to anyone in need, regardless of age or ability to pay. Herndon location, 1141 Elden St. Third Floor, Herndon, VA 20170, 703-481-8160 <http://hwnova.org/>
- ❖ **Alternative House** — Abused and Homeless Children's Refuge, 2100 Gallows Road, Vienna, VA 22182, 703-506-9191. www.thealternativehouse.org

- ❖ **SHARE** of McLean seeks donations of grocery gift cards and more. Checks and gift cards can be sent to: Holiday Celebration, Share, Inc. PO Box 210, McLean, VA 22101. 703-284-2179. www.SHAREofMcLean.org
- ❖ **Committee for Helping Others (CHO)**, Vienna, organized in 1969 by a group of concerned churches and individuals in the Dunn Loring, Merrifield, Oakton, Vienna community to provide simple, loving charity to those in need. 703-281-7614 <http://www.cho-va.com>
- ❖ **Herndon-Reston FISH** (For Immediate Sympathetic Help), 336 Victory Drive, Herndon, 703-391-0105 Also operates thrift store, The Bargain Loft, 336 Victory Drive, Herndon, 20170, 703-437-0600 <http://herndonrestonfish.org>
- ❖ **Northern Virginia Family Service**, providing gift cards and toys for 1,700 of Northern Virginia's neediest families this season. 10455 White Granite Drive Suite 100, Oakton, VA 22124 703-385-3267 <http://www.nvfs.org/>
- ❖ **Office to End and Prevent Homelessness** has a strategic road map to prevent and end homelessness, created by the Planning Committee to End Homelessness, in partnership with the cities of Fairfax and Falls Church, government agencies,

nonprofits, faith communities and businesses. <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/homeless/>

- ❖ **12 Ways of Giving:** Fairfax County Office of Public Private Partnerships' "12 Ways of Giving" campaign is an annual event that showcases many ways for meaningful, local giving during the holiday season, highlighting nonprofits in Fairfax County. www.fairfaxcountypartnerships.org
- ❖ **Assistance League of Northern Virginia** is an all-volunteer organization that clothes, feeds, educates and nurtures those in need focusing five of the neediest elementary schools. Volunteers and donors are always needed. Contact ALNorthernVA@yahoo.com or see www.northernvirginia.assistanceleague.org
- ❖ **Western Fairfax Christian Ministries** — food pantry at 13981 Metrotech Drive in Chantilly (near Backyard Grill and Bar). For more information or to sponsor a family, call 703-988-9656, ext. 105. To mail gift cards or send donations by check, add a note saying "food basket program" and send them to: WFCM, P.O. Box 220802, Chantilly, VA 20153. 703-988-9656. <http://www.wfcmva.org/>
- ❖ **Touching Heart** in Herndon is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to educate children to have giving hearts. <http://www.touchingheart.com>, 703-901-7355

Helping People without Homes

BY PAMELA L. MICHELL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
NEW HOPE HOUSING

The weather has turned colder and the holidays are in full swing, which means it's the time of year when people ask "what can we do for the homeless now that it's so cold?" Or "how can we help the homeless have a good Christmas?" For those of us working with men, women, and children who are experiencing homelessness, the great community interest in December in those we serve can be heartwarming — and overwhelming. Overwhelming because we are inundated by your extraordinary generosity during this time. But

heartwarming, because you are thinking about the persons in our program as individuals; as people with their own holiday dreams.

In my 30-plus years in homeless services, one of my pet peeves is the phrase "the homeless." When we use that phrase we unknowingly dehumanize the people we describe. We are also inaccurately lumping together a diverse group of people under one label as though they are all the same with the same needs. Nothing could be further from the truth. They are individuals, each with a unique story. They are children. They are mothers and fathers. They are veterans. They are people from all walks of life. The one thing they

have in common is not having a permanent address.

At New Hope Housing, we don't help the Homeless, we don't house the Homeless, we don't serve the Homeless, we don't work for the Homeless, because here, we don't believe the Homeless exist. We serve people. And sometimes people experience homelessness. We believe homelessness is something that happens to you. Our job at New Hope Housing — and the job of our nonprofit partners — is to prevent that experience from happening, or if it does happen, making it as short as possible by helping get people back into appropriate permanent housing.

We at New Hope Housing, and our partners, as well as the families and single adults in our pro-

grams, are truly grateful for your support in filling a holiday wish list, providing a meal, volunteering at one of the many hypothermia sites, or donating money to help our agencies end the homelessness of each person who walks through our doors. We will still need you on Dec. 26 and Feb. 5 and during the summer. Until each person is home, we've all got work to do.

Thank you for making this person-to-person connection this holiday season. Thank you for seeing that those who seek our assistance are not "the homeless," but men, women, and children with hopes and dreams, just like each of us who are blessed with a place to call home. Because there is no place like home — anytime of the year.

Great Falls CONNECTION

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FAITH

FROM PAGE 5

Charity Baptist Church, 1328 Spring Hill Road, McLean. Celebrating music and drama.

Great Falls United Methodist Church, 10100 Georgetown Pike, Great Falls, will host a Live Nativity on Sunday, Dec. 21. There will be three showings: 5, 5:20 and 5:40 p.m. Live animals, refreshments and singing! 703-759-3705.

Christmas Eve Service. 4, 7 and 10 p.m. on Dec. 24 at St. John's Episcopal Church, 6715 Georgetown Pike, McLean.

Oakton Church of the Brethren welcomes the community to a Christmas Eve service with lighting of candles and Holy Communion on Wednesday, Dec. 24 at 7 p.m. The theme of the message will be "The Response to the Knock" and there will be congregational singing, soloists and instrumentalists. The church is located at 10025 Courthouse Rd. in Vienna, Va., at the intersection of Route 123 and Courthouse Rd. near Oakton. For more information, call 703 281-4411 or go to www.oaktonbrethren.org.

Christmas Day Service. 10 a.m. on Dec. 25 at St. John's Episcopal Church, 6715 Georgetown Pike, McLean.

St. Francis Episcopal Church, 9220 Georgetown Pike in Great Falls, offers musical, educational, outreach and fellowship ministries in addition to worship services, including a 7:45 a.m. worship service without music; 9 a.m. worship service, children's chapel and children's choirs; 10 a.m. Sunday school and adult forum; and 11 a.m. worship service with adult choir. 703-759-2082.

The Antioch Christian Church offers a time of Prayer and Healing on Wednesday evenings at 6:30 p.m. for anyone wanting encouragement and healing through prayers. People are available to

pray with you or for you. Antioch Christian Church is located at 1860 Beulah Road in Vienna. www.antiochdoc.org

The Jewish Social Services Agency (JSSA) offers a wide variety of support groups for those with emotional, social, and physical challenges. www.jssa.org/growth-learning.

HAVEN of Northern Virginia offers a variety of free bereavement support groups, meeting on a weekly basis. 703-941-7000 or www.havenofnova.org.

McLean Bible Church Fitness Class at Body & Soul Fitness. Gain balance, energy and strength at 9:45 a.m. Mondays and Fridays. Free childcare for registered students. bodyandsoul@mcleanbible.org.

St. Dunstan's Episcopal Church, 1830 Kirby Road in McLean, holds a third Sunday service every month at 10:15 a.m. which allows children to play active roles in the music and as greeters and ushers. Traditional services are every Sunday at 8:15 and 10:15 a.m.

Vienna Christian Healing Rooms are open, every Saturday, 1-5 p.m., at 8200 Bell Lane. A team of Christians is available to anyone requesting prayer. Free and open to the public. 703-698-9779 or www.viennachristianhealingrooms.com.

Chesterbrook United Methodist Church is at 1711 Kirby Road, McLean. Worship service is at 11 a.m. Sunday school is at 9:30 a.m. for adults and children. 703-356-7100 or www.ChesterbrookUMC.org.

Centering Prayer Group meets Fridays, 9:30 a.m. at Andrew Chapel United Methodist Church, 1301 Trap Road, Vienna. The hour includes a brief reading related to Centering Prayer, followed by a 20-minute prayer period. E-mail Martha Thomas at mmthomas211@hotmail.com or call the church at 703-759-3509.

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President of the Friends of Clemyjontri Park Kathleen Helein joins the audience in applauding Grace Wolf after the announcement that she will be taking over for Rip Sullivan as the new Dranesville District Representative on the Fairfax County Park Authority Board.



Students in the McLean High School Armonia Choir perform classic Christmas carols during the ceremony. (From left) Kun Xing, Margaret Orrell, Alanna Milstein, Kendall Cobington, Rachel Weatherby and Gigi Iyob.

PHOTOS BY NIKKI CHESHIRE/
THE CONNECTION

Clemyjontri Park Celebrates Renewal

Community honors Adele Lebowitz who died earlier this month.

By NIKKI CHESHIRE
THE CONNECTION

After spending nearly \$1 million on renovations to repair Clemyjontri Park's worn-out surfacing, the park is ready to fully reopen. The Fairfax County Park Authority celebrated the renewal this past weekend at the park, hosting a holiday-themed event that included

pictures with Santa, a craft table for making ornaments, collections for the Toys for Tots program, and a visit by several farm animals from Frying Pan Farm Park. Clemyjontri Park was built when McLean resident Adele Lebowitz donated her land to the county, with the vision that it would become a fully accessible playground where every child, regardless of ability, could play with one another. With an estimated

200,000 unique visitors to the park every year since opening in 2006, Clemyjontri was due for a renovation. "Clemy is a very special place," said Rip Sullivan, Dranesville District Representative of the Fairfax County Park Authority Board. "With all due respects to the many and numerous wonderful parks in the Fairfax County Park System, I have long referred to Clemy as the crown jewel."

Lebowitz, who passed away quietly earlier this month at the age of 98, was honored at the renewal ceremony for the joy her vision and generosity continues to bring to the community. "Clemy is more than just a playground, it's really a community treasure," said Sullivan. "And it has always taken the support of the community to make this such a very special place." Sullivan praised the Friends of Clemyjontri group, who work to "maintain, expand, and protect" the park.

Kathleen Helein, the president of the Friends of Clemyjontri, says the park "really is a much loved and magical place." Helein also mentioned that the Concert in the Park, a black tie fundraiser for Clemyjontri, will be taking place this spring on April 25. Also at the ceremony, Sullivan announced that due to his commitment as an elected member of the Virginia General Assembly, he will be stepping down from the Park Authority Board and be replaced by Grace Wolf.



The Toys for Tots program joined the ceremony, collecting gifts for children in need. (From left) David Bowden, Director of the Planning and Development Division for the Fairfax County Park Authority; Harry Glasgow, Member of the Board of Directors for the Fairfax County Park Foundation; Kathleen Helein, President of Friends of Clemyjontri Park; Rip Sullivan, Dranesville District Representative; Clemyjontri Park employee Bob Lynch as Santa Claus; Grace Wolf, newly appointed Dranesville District Representative; Bobbi Longworth, Executive Director of the Fairfax County Park Foundation; and Rachel Georgelas, Board Member of the Friends of Clemyjontri, all hold up gifts donated to the Toys for Tots program during the ceremony.

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St. John's Episcopal Church Christmas Services and Special Events

Sunday, December 21

- 9:30 AM – A service of Advent Lessons and Carols, with Holy Eucharist

Wednesday, December 24, Christmas Eve

- 4:00 PM - Family Service of Holy Eucharist, with Children's Sermon, and

Christmas Organ Voluntaries

- 9:30 PM – Christmas Carols by the St. John's Choir

- 10:00 PM – Service of Holy Eucharist

Thursday, December 25, Christmas Day

- 9:30 AM – Service of Holy Eucharist

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CALENDAR

Send announcements to north@connectionnewspapers.com. Deadline is Friday for the following week's paper. Photos/artwork encouraged.

THROUGH SUNDAY/DEC. 28

Holiday Model Train Display. 11

a.m. - 4 p.m. Colvin Run Mill, 10017 Colvin Run Road, Great Falls. Every Saturday and Sunday. Fun for all ages. Watch G-gauge trains wend their way through a miniature western town in the Colvin Run Barn. Free.

THROUGH WEDNESDAY/DEC. 24

Santa HQ at Tysons Corner

Center, 1961 Chain Bridge Road, Tysons Corner. Visit Santa's Magical Workshop & Observatory, presented by HGTV - for photos and family activities, located in Fashion Court on level one between Nordstrom and Bloomingdale's - beginning November 14th. Reserve your space online to see Santa. Ongoing event.

THROUGH SUNDAY/JAN. 4, 2015

Meadowlark's Winter Walk of

Lights. 5:30 p.m. Meadowlark Botanical Garden, 9750 Meadowlark Gardens Court, Vienna. A winter wonderland, including a flowing stream of softly glowing lights, a two story animated fountain and a Gingerbread Village. Admission: \$13 adults, \$8 children ages 3-12; children under 3 are free.

THROUGH WEDNESDAY/ MARCH 11, 2015

Ice Skating at Tysons Corner

Center. Monday-Thursday, 11 a.m. - 9 p.m.; Friday-Saturday, 11 a.m. - 11 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. Tysons Corner Outdoor Center, 1961 Chain Bridge Road, Tysons. Adults, \$10; Child/Senior/Military, \$9; Skate Rental, \$6; Group of 10+, \$12 and includes skates

WEDNESDAY/DEC. 17

Pokémon League. 4:30 p.m. Great Falls Library, 9830 Georgetown Pike, Great Falls. Come play Pokémon with your friends! Ages 5-15.

Storytime With Furry Puppet

Friends. 10:30a.m. Dolley Madison Library, 1244 Oak Ridge Avenue, McLean. Ages 2-5 with caregiver. Join puppets and games guides on a journey through the life of a mammal. Real mamal fur and skulls help you learn about how they adapted and survived. Call and make arrangements for sign language interpreters, listening systems or real-time captioning.

Small Wonders. 10:30 a.m. Oakton Library, 10304 Lynnhaven Place, Oakton. Short stories for you and your child. Ages 13-23 months with adult.

Newborn Storytime - Rock-A-

Bye Baby. 11:30. Patrick Henry Library, 101 Maple Avenue East, Vienna. Newborn to 12-months-olds



PHOTO BY KENNETH GALL/COURTESY OF PAT HAZELL

"A Kodachrome Christmas" with Jay Byrd as Earlene Hoople comes to the Alden Theatre in McLean, Dec. 19-21.

with caregiver enjoy an early literacy storytime enhanced by songs and rhythms. Sign up for waiting list.

Artist Opening Reception. 7-9 p.m.

Havana Vintage, 1137 Walker Road, Great Falls. Artist Cecilia Aquino will be exhibiting her artwork at Havana Vintage, a boutique in Great Falls. It is a consignment shop with very interesting finds.

THURSDAY/DEC. 18

Winter Concert. 7 p.m. Oakton High School, 2900 Sutton Road, Vienna. The Oakton High School Orchestra will be performing a winter concert. Free.

Oakton Book Discussion Group. 7

p.m. Oakton Library, 10304 Lynnhaven Place, Oakton. Come and join Oakton's book discussion group. We will discuss Corelli's Mandolin by Louis De Bernieres. Adults.

FRIDAY/DEC. 19

Art & Acoustic Bluegrass. 7-9 p.m. Vienna Art Center, 115 Pleasant St. NW, Vienna. Bring your acoustic stringed instrument, your voice, your love of original art and join with the jam. Plenty of parking, chairs and a wooden floor to carry the sound. Free. **Playdate Café**. 10 a.m. Great Falls Library, 9830 Georgetown Pike,

Great Falls Toys and play for children. Coffee and Conversation for grown-ups.

Drop-in Chess & Backgammon.

3:30 p.m. Great Falls Library, 9830 Georgetown Pike, Great Falls. All skill levels welcome.

FRIDAY-SUNDAY/DEC. 19-21

"A Kodachrome Christmas." 2 & 8 p.m. The Alden, 1234 Ingleside Avenue, McLean. From the creator of "The Wonder Bread Years" and a writer for "Seinfeld" comes a one-woman, cable-access holiday special. Enter the colorful world of Earlene Hoople as she entertains with participatory bell ringing, cookie baking, a family slide show, some outrageous advice for surviving the holidays with relatives... and a whole lot more.

SUNDAY/DEC. 21

Living Nativity. 5 p.m. Great Falls United Methodist Church, 10100 Georgetown Pike, Great Falls. A Live Nativity outside. There will also be a Blue Christmas Worship at 7 p.m. in the sanctuary. 703-759-3705 or office@greatfallsumc.org.

Glorious Sounds of Christmas. 4 and 7 p.m. Vienna Presbyterian Church, 124 Park Street, NE, Vienna.

SEE CALENDAR, PAGE 11

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CALENDAR

FROM PAGE 10

Free concert with performances.

MONDAY/DEC. 22

Spanish Conversation Group. 1 p.m. Great Falls Library, 9830 Georgetown Pike, Great Falls Practice Spanish as a foreign language in this casual conversation group.
Evening ESL Conversation Group. 7 p.m. Great Falls Library, 9830 Georgetown Pike, Great Falls. Practice speaking English in this informal conversation group.

TUESDAY/DEC. 30

Winter Science Workshop for Kids. 3:30 p.m. Great Falls Library, 9830 Georgetown Pike, Great Falls. Children will learn hands-on in this iSchool workshop. Registration required for this event. Ages 8-12.

WEDNESDAY/DEC. 31

New Year's Eve in Entyse Wine Bar & Lounge. 9 p.m. to Midnight. The Ritz-Carlton, Tysons Corner, 1700 Tysons Boulevard, McLean. Celebrate the New Year with live musical entertainment provided by The Christopher Linman Jazz Ensemble and culinary delights. As the clock strikes midnight, welcome 2015 with a complimentary champagne toast. \$100 minimum food & beverage purchase per person.
First Night Vienna. 7 p.m. - midnight. Town of Vienna, Church Street. A family-friendly New Year's Eve Celebration. Featuring music, food, kids entertainment, and more. Four free music venues, a dance party, glitter tattoos, face painting, arts & crafts, balloon twisting, fire pits, corn hole, s'mores, popcorn popping, hot chocolate, hot apple cider, party hats, and much much more.
Jammin' Java's Good Vibes New Year's Party Featuring Melodime. p.m. Jammin' Java, 227 Maple East Avenue, Vienna. MELODIME, a rock band that blends haunting bittersweet melodies with emotionally rich vocals atop a bed of Southern-flavored alt rock, is not like most bands. Tickets: \$25-\$35. <https://jamminjava.com>

THURSDAY/JAN. 8, 2015

Dobet Gnahoré. 8 p.m. The Barns Wolftrap, 1635 Trap Road, Vienna. Discover delicate ballads and sensuous African grooves from this Grammy-winning vocalist, percussionist, and dancer praised as one of contemporary African music's most charismatic talents. \$25-30. 703-255-1900. <http://www.wolftrap.org/Barns.aspx>.

FRIDAY/JAN. 9, 2015

The Ying Quartet. 8 p.m. The Barns Wolftrap, 1635 Trap Road, Vienna. Ying Quartet occupies a position of unique prominence in the classical music world, combining brilliantly communicative performances with a fearlessly imaginative view of chamber music in today's world. \$35. 703-255-1900. <http://www.wolftrap.org/Barns.aspx>.

THURSDAY/JAN. 15, 2015

Kevin Griffin. 8 p.m. The Barns Wolftrap, 1635 Trap Road, Vienna. A rare solo show by the frontman and songwriting mastermind of alt-rock band Better Than Ezra, who has written for Train, Sugarland, James Blunt, Howie Day, Missy Higgins, Blondie, and more. \$25-27. 703-255-1900. <http://www.wolftrap.org/Barns.aspx>.



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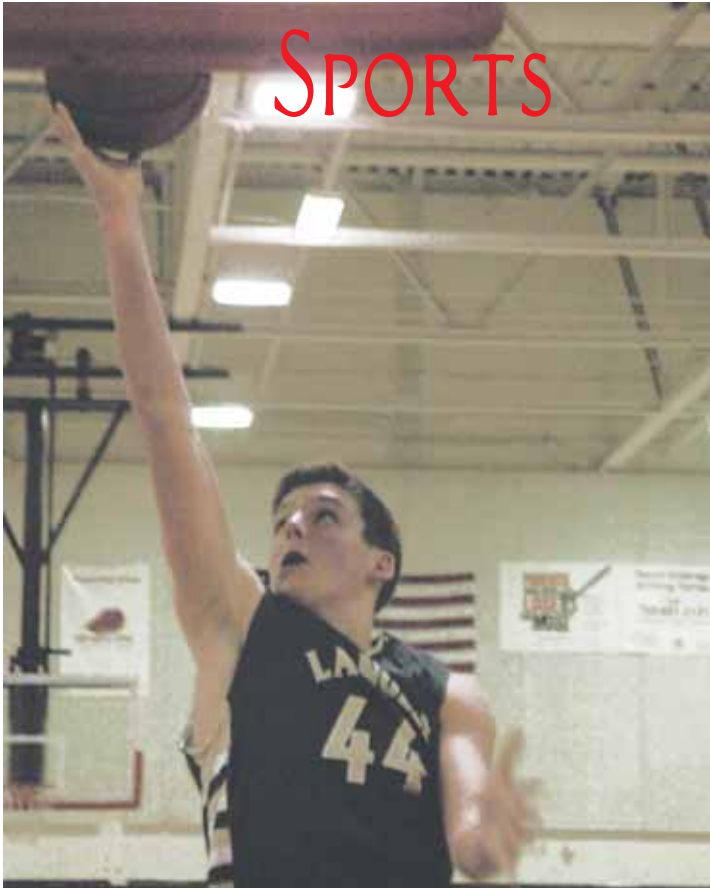
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SPORTS



Nate Shafer and the Langley boys' basketball team beat McLean on Friday.



Jackie Litschewski and the Langley girls' basketball team defeated McLean on Friday.

Langley Basketball Sweeps Rival McLean

The Langley girls' and boys' basketball teams swept rival McLean in a doubleheader on Friday, Dec. 12 at McLean High School.

The Langley girls opened with a 46-33 victory, improving their record to 3-0. The Saxons opened the seasons with wins over Osbourn and Herndon.

McLean dropped to 1-3. The Highlanders lost to Wakefield and Robinson and defeated Woodson.

Langley faced Fairfax on Tuesday, after The Connection's deadline. The Saxons will host Chantilly at 7:30 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 19. McLean faced Stone Bridge on Tuesday. The Highlanders will host Westfield at 5:45 p.m. on Friday.

After the girls' victory, the Langley boys beat McLean 41-38 for their first win of the season. The Saxons faced Fairfax on Tuesday and will travel to face Chantilly at 7:30 p.m. on Friday.

The Highlanders faced Stone Bridge on Tuesday and will host Westfield at 7:30 p.m. on Friday.

PHOTOS BY CRAIG STERBUTZEL/THE CONNECTION



Freshman point guard Jordyn Callaghan and the Langley girls' basketball team started the 2014-15 season with three consecutive victories.



Langley junior guard Blake Mintz shoots a jumper against McLean on Friday.

BASKETBALL ROUNDUPS

Oakton Girls' Basketball Beats Yorktown

The Oakton girls' basketball team defeated Yorktown 64-39 on Dec. 9, improving its record to 4-1.

The Cougars faced Lake Braddock on Tuesday, after The Connection's deadline. Oakton will travel to face Stafford at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 18.

Marshall Boys' Basketball to Host Madison

The Madison boys' basketball team will travel to face Marshall at 7:30 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 19.

Madison won its season opener against Oakton before dropping three straight. The Warhawks faced John Champeon Monday.

Marshall also dropped three of its first four, beating Centreville and losing to Annandale, Woodgrove and South Lakes.

The Statesmen faced Falls Church on Tuesday.

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An Essay To Remember

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

Local educators offer advice on acing independent school admission essays and interviews.

While many are knee-deep in wrapping paper and eggnog, some students are holed up with computer keyboards and books of quotations. In addition to driving to the mall for holiday shopping, some parents are throwing rapid-fire questions at their children to make sure they are fast on their feet.

For students and parents who hope for slots at the area's top independent schools next year, 'tis admissions season.

"As a school we want to know what the relationship will be between what a student brings to the table and what we will need to bring to the table," said Tim Simpson, assistant head of school and director of admission and financial aid at Bullis School in Potomac, Md.

Interviews are opportunities for admissions teams to get to know applicants and their parents, and share information about their



PHOTO COURTESY OF AUDRA WRISLEY

Students at Episcopal High School in Alexandria collaborate on a school project. Essays and interviews help admissions teams determine how an applicant would fit into the school community.

schools.

"We try to encourage students to view the interview as a conversation," said Julie Jameson, director of admissions at St. Andrew's Episcopal School in Potomac. "They should feel comfortable ... be themselves ... and feel free to ask any questions they might have."

In fact, the interview is really a two-way street, says Ann

Richardson Miller, director of admission and financial aid at The Madeira School in McLean. "The girl and her parents should be asking as many questions of me as I am asking of her," she said. "After all, this will be her school for the next four years, and fit is critical, both for us, but also for the girl and her parents."

"Learn as much as you can about the school before your visit and be

prepared to ask questions," said Scott Conklin, director of admissions, Episcopal High School in Alexandria. "This is also an opportunity to brag about your interests, talents and accomplishments. ... Be humble, but make sure you let us know all about you."

That doesn't mean you should ignore your flaws, however. "We look for genuine conversations that convey the student's real interests and passions," said Simpson. "We also want students and parents to be open to talking about strengths and weaknesses."

THE ADMISSION ESSAY is another opportunity for students to reveal facets of their personalities that might not be obvious through test scores, transcripts and even letters of recommendation, said Patricia Harden, director of admissions and financial aid at Connelly School of the Holy Child in Potomac. "It should be a well-written snapshot of how an applicant thinks and how she understands some aspect of her world," Harden said.

Some schools even require the admission essay to be completed in person.

"We want to see a student's true, natural writing ability, and we are interested in assessing their ability to develop and present a cohesive, thoughtful essay on the spot," said Michael Cresson, director of admissions, Bishop O'Connell High School in Arlington. "A polished essay prepared at home with lots of edits really doesn't tell us what we want to know to best evaluate an applicant."

No matter where the essay is written however, the same basic writing advice applies.

"We are looking for students to express themselves and give us an insight into what kind of person he or she is," Cresson said. "My suggestions for students ... would be ... to proofread their essay, allow for enough time, do some research on the school and include that in the essay. "These are simple suggestions, but it is disappointing as a director to read through essays and find simple mistakes and see that it was rushed."

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A Level That's Anything But

By KENNETH B. LOURIE



This is not a home improvement reference, but this is most definitely a do-it-yourself column. And though friends, family and all the medical professionals at The Infusion Center, and of course the Oncology staff, have been wonderfully supportive and encouraging throughout my nearly-six-year ordeal, at the end of the day – heck, at the beginning of the day, every day – the patient has to figure a way to navigate through this characterized-as-terminal minefield. More often than not, this has been my greatest challenge: keeping my spirits up and my attitude positive when there are only three people present and accounted for: me, myself and I.

Dealing with unexpected results – both good and especially bad, from lab work, diagnostic scans and/or in-person appointments/physical examinations/assessments – and the effect all of it has on the patient's presumptive life expectancy, are emotional hurdles I regularly endure. Moreover, interpreting any of these results, better left for the professionals, rarely prevents us amateurs (patients) from wishfully-thinking, denying or freaking out entirely. After all, your life is at stake and since there are no guarantees or 100-percent predictable outcomes in the treatment of stage IV, non-small cell lung cancer – other than it's not curable, according to my oncologist – anticipating the worst while praying for the best becomes your 24/7 reality.

This reality is never more apparent to me, since I'm relatively asymptomatic, than when I complete my every-three-week, pre-chemotherapy lab work. That's when (other than my quarterly CT Scan), the tale of my tape, so to speak, is updated. If certain measurements are too high: creatinine, bilirubin, potassium – then no chemo for me. If certain other measurements are too low: white and red blood cells counts, oxygen, also potassium; then again, no chemo for me. The real anxiety, new anxiety – for me, is what levels show up on the inevitable retest (the first order of business is to confirm the abnormality with additional lab work). Typically, at least historically, my retests, taken a week later (sometimes even a day later), have always returned to normal, and accordingly, chemotherapy has proceeded as usual. This week, however, something different has occurred. This is the first time that my creatinine levels were too high on consecutive three-week intervals. If my next retest does not return to level (as the previous one did), and chemotherapy is put off an additional week again, that too will be a first and cause – in my head anyway, for new concern. This would be a complication/result that in the previous six years has never happened.

Should I be worried? And whether or not I should be, can I even control my feelings and somehow patiently (no pun intended) wait for new results from the retest without coming apart at the seams? If I could, I would; but given this column's subject, apparently I can't. Wish me luck; hopefully, I won't need it.

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

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CAPPIES REVIEWS

Fictional Town, Real for Viewers

Madison High's production of "Our Town."

BY LUCAS STRIGEL
TUSCARORA HIGH SCHOOL

Plays can transport one to new places, perhaps a magical land, a pivotal point in history, or perhaps the small town of Grover's Corners. While it might sound stale, "Our Town," produced by James Madison High School, is a phenomenal play that always pulled me into the lives of these small town people.

"Our Town" was written in 1938 by none other than Thornton Wilder. The play is set in the small American town of Grover's Corners, New Hampshire, during the early 20th century. The "Stage Manager" acts as a narrator throughout the production, showing the everyday lives of the people who reside in the small town. Wilder decided to try something new, he decided to use minimal set pieces and props, relying on the use of pantomime. His logic behind this was "I know it's a play, you know it's a play, the only thing that's real in a play is emotion," so that's all he focused on. A difficult task, but given in the right hands, "Our Town" grew into a huge success, winning the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1938.

Surprisingly enough, James Madison did a great job of painting the image of their town with minimal and simple tech. Chad Robertson did a superb job on sound cues, they were always on point but not overwhelming whatsoever. Josh Laney, who worked on the lights, used different lighting cues for the different times of day, a cloudy moon, and even the stained glass windows of a church! The tech never overpowered the actors, but always provided

ominous sounds and lights the fit the scene.

Actor chemistry is the binding force of dramatic interpretation, and "Our Town" would be nothing without it. All of the actors in James Madison's "Our Town" had effective emotional bindings and feelings for one another. I felt as if they knew each other for all of their life, which immersed the audience. Another thing that added into the immersion was the use of effective pantomime. The various actors performed their daily tasks as if it was second nature, a good amount of work went into the pantomiming. One of the best moments of the show was when the two main children (Matthew Landsdell and Caroline Campbell) were conversing from their windows. They were across the street from each other, but I could feel the bond between them. What sealed this bond was the faint church choirs singing in the background, one could actually feel a part of their town.

In order to create a town with no set pieces, you have to have someone describe it to you, and that's where the Stage Manager (Mitch Coomer) came in. Coomer had a voice of gold, every little thing that came out of his mouth was perfectly enunciated with appropriate diction. Given into the wrong hands, the Stage Manager wouldn't be the interesting narrator that he was in this show.

The audience was always looking forward to hearing what he had to say, Coomer was an excellent casting choice.

The emotional binds brought everyone together, and pulled the audience in. James Madison may have thought they put on a play, but it was much more than that. "Our Town" hit the audience on an emotional level that they won't forget soon. This show really made one think about life and the purpose behind it. Although Grover's Corners is a fictional town, it will be real to the viewers forever.

BULLETIN BOARD

To have community events listed in the Connection, send to north@connectionnewspapers.com. The deadline for submissions is the Friday prior to publication.

WEDNESDAY/DEC. 17

Morning Book Group. 10:30 a.m. Great Falls Library, 9830 Georgetown Pike, Great Falls. Call branch for book title.

ESL Conversation Group. 2 p.m. Great Falls Library, 9830 Georgetown Pike, Great Falls. Practice English in this casual conversation group.

English Conversation Group for Adults. 1 p.m. Dolley Madison Library, 1244 Oak Ridge Avenue, McLean. Come practice conversational English in a group setting.

THURSDAY/DEC. 18

New Voting Equipment Demonstration. 4 p.m. Great Falls Library, 9830 Georgetown Pike, Great Falls. Staff from the Fairfax County Office of Elections will provide an opportunity to see and try out the brand new voting machines as well as provide an opportunity for photo ID processing and voter registration.

Reading Buddies. 4:30 p.m. Great Falls Library, 9830 Georgetown Pike, Great Falls. Beginning readers and teens practice reading together.

Evening Book Group. 7:30 p.m. Great Falls Library, 9830 Georgetown Pike, Great Falls. Call branch for Title.

English Conversation One-on One. 1:30 p.m.

Oakton Library, 10304 Lynnhaven Place, Oakton. English practice for a non-native speaker with a library volunteer. Call for appointment. Adults.

Patrick Henry Book Club For Adults. 1 p.m. Patrick Henry Library, 101 Maple Avenue East, Vienna. What's Next by Ann Patchett.

Homework Help 1st-8th Grade. 6 p.m. Lorton Library, 9520 Richmond Highway, Lorton. Drop in for homework help.

"Not Just For Teens" Book Club For Adults. 7 p.m. Patrick Henry Library, 101 Maple Avenue East, Vienna. Join us for desserts and a delightful discussion of Let It Snow by John Green, Lauren Myracle and Maureen Johnson.

FRIDAY/DEC. 19

New Voting Equipment Demonstration.

11a.m. Dolley Madison Library, 1244 Oak Ridge Avenue, McLean. Do not miss this opportunity and come see for yourself! Fairfax County Office of Elections staff will process your photo ID and voter registration through the brand-new voting machine.

English Conversation for Adults. 10 a.m. Patrick Henry Library, 101 Maple Avenue East, Vienna. Practise your English skills in a group setting.

Pokemon League. 3 p.m. Patrick Henry Library, 101 Maple Avenue East, Vienna. Age 5-18 learn and play Pokemon.



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