

95 Express
Lanes Open
NEWS, PAGE 3

Bringing Smiles to Military Families

NEWS, PAGE 8

Santa getting adored
by a young visitor
during the Operation
Homefront Holiday
Toy Party for children
of enlisted soldiers,
held in Lorton in
partnership with
Northrop Grumman.

Fairfax Station Hosts Holiday Train Show

NEWS, PAGE 4

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NEWS

Virginia Railway Express Riders Donate Toys for Tots

Virginia Railway Express riders gave from their hearts and wallets and donated a truck full of toys and nearly \$19,000 in the commuter rail agency's annual Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots Campaign. Riders were asked to leave toys on their seats when exiting morning trains and train conductors collected cash and checks from riders, which were then given to the Toys for Tots Program. "I am overwhelmed by the generosity of VRE riders and the number of toys and donations we received today. Undoubtedly Scrooge does not ride VRE," said Doug Allen, CEO of VRE. Marine Corps Staff Sergeants



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Marine Corps Staff Sergeants Eichelberger and Herbert presented Doug Allen, CEO of VRE, a Certificate of Appreciation from the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve for VRE's participation in the annual Toys for Tots event.

Eichelberger and Herbert presented Allen a Certificate of Appreciation from the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve for VRE's participation in the annual Toys for Tots event. VRE riders have been one of the largest contributors in our service area to the Toys for Tots Program in recent years. Toys for

Tots campaigns are held in over 290 communities throughout the 50 states. Marines collect new, unwrapped toys from Oct. 1 through Dec. 21. Thereafter, Marines distribute toys to the needy children of their community through local social welfare agencies and church groups.

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Santa Lives in Springfield

Greenspring resident starts a new career impersonating St. Nick.

He may be retired, but Jim Weedon still wears a suit...a Santa suit! A resident of Greenspring retirement community in Springfield, Weedon recently started a new career impersonating St. Nick.

About four years ago, Weedon grew a long white beard. His daughter, a costume designer in New York, thought it resembled Santa's beard so she decided to make him a one-of-a-kind Santa Claus costume. Three fittings later, Weedon had his very own Santa suit complete with faux fur and brass buttons.

Last year, Weedon was the official Macy's Santa Claus at the former Springfield Mall (now Springfield Town Center).



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Jim Weedon in his specially designed Santa suit.

He worked at the store during the three weekends leading up to Christmas. This year, he's already booked for a number of events including two upcoming breakfasts at nearby churches and appearances with the Greenspring Chorister's choral group for their annual holiday concert. Weedon has also served as Santa Claus at an annual brunch held at Greenspring for the last three years; this year, almost two dozen children (mostly grand- and great-grandchildren of residents) attended the brunch.

The most interesting request he's received from a child? Weedon said a little girl, about 6 or 7, once asked for the Madden NFL video game. After he inquired if she liked watching football, she responded that no, she was asking for the game for her father who watched football day and night. When asked what she wanted, the little girl responded with a sleeping bag – so she could fall asleep watching football with her dad.

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95 Express Lanes Open

Transportation project culminates after a decade and four governors.

BY ABIGAIL CONSTANTINO
THE CONNECTION

The 95 express lanes opened on Sunday, Dec. 14, after a decade of planning and since breaking ground almost two years ago. Gov. Terry McAuliffe—joined by Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine, U.S. Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx, members of the Fairfax, Prince William, and Stafford counties board of supervisors, and representatives from VDOT and Transurban—cut the ribbon on Wednesday, Dec. 10 in Alexandria. Drivers will have two weeks of free use before tolling starts on Monday, Dec. 29.

McAuliffe praised the work of all involved in the project, especially the people who moved the dirt and poured the asphalt, “We wouldn’t be here today,” without them he said. He extolled the private-public partnership (P3) of VDOT, the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration, and Transurban, which made the completion of the project possible. “P3s are great but only if they are negotiated in a way that puts taxpayers first and holds people accountable,” he said. He reminded the crowd of the failed P3 on Route 460 in southeastern Virginia with US 460 Mobility Partners in 2012, which was halted last March amid environmental permit and cost concerns. Between \$400 to \$500 million of state money went into the Route 460 P3 without ever breaking ground.

Virginia Secretary of Transportation Aubrey Layne said that unlocking congestion in key economic corridors is part of the governor’s plan. The express lanes will allow for diversification of businesses and tourism, said McAuliffe. “When Virginia grows, America grows,” he said.

Quality of life and giving people options and choices are the rewards for commuters. Stafford County Board of Supervisors Chairman Jack Cavalier said that the express lanes are important to the quality of life for the thousands of Stafford County residents who make the daily trek to work in Northern Virginia.

Supervisor John Cook (R-Braddock) said that the lanes give another option of how people can move around. “You can actually live down in Prince William, even Stafford County, and have a job in Tysons Corner and be able to get to work. That wasn’t the case before.”

“Whether you gotta get home to your kid or whether you have a critical work appointment, it gives you a choice in how to get there,” said Supervisor Pat Herrity (R-Springfield).

Senator Warner echoed the sentiment saying that he has seen the commute go from “two hours to forever,” and that the completion of this project is a “great day for Northern Virginia and the Commonwealth.”

Though the express lanes will not solve all the problems with congestion, construction manager for the project John Morse,



Senator Mark Warner shares his plans to find permanent funding source for transportation and national infrastructure financing during the 95 Express Lanes opening ceremony on Wednesday, Dec. 10.



Transurban CEO Scott Charlton, left, with Gov. Terry McAuliffe, says that his company is passionate about transportation structure and its impact on the community.



Supervisor Pat Herrity (R-Springfield), left, and Gov. Terry McAuliffe attend the opening ceremony of the 95 express lanes on Wednesday, Dec. 10 in Alexandria.



Supervisor John Cook (R-Braddock) believes that the immediate impact of the express lanes will be great and its long-term impact “incredibly great,” as people get choices in traffic mobility.

of VDOT, said that the addition of a third lane will solve a number of problems and give people options other than waiting in traffic. “People will have some freedom to do some things they couldn’t do otherwise,” he said, such as having the ability to bypass areas of heavy congestion, thus facilitating work schedule and personal life.

Secretary Foxx said that Virginia is on the path of a “growth tsunami”—with a projected 100,000,000 increase in population in the southeast region of the U.S.—and its completion of the 95 express lanes, funded in part by a \$300 million TIFIA loan from the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration, is a step to get ahead of population growth.

Still, Foxx said that “we are woefully under investing in the infrastructure of this country.” A blow to future investments is the Federal Highway Trust Fund shortfall announced by Sen. Warner. “We at the federal level have work to do,” said Warner, such as permanent funding source for transportation and national infrastructure financing that fall under the Grow America Act, a \$302 billion transportation proposal.



U.S. Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx attends the 95 express lanes opening ceremony on Wednesday, Dec. 10 in Alexandria. He said that Virginia should be a “model for the rest of the country for its infrastructure projects.”

But at the opening celebration, everyone is proud of the work completed on the 95 express lanes. “Some people are here tak-

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ing credit for projects they didn’t like,” joked Sen. Tim Kaine. Senator Warner quipped about naming opportunities for sections of the lanes. Secretary Foxx wondered that with so many governors of Virginia in attendance whether Thomas Jefferson was present somewhere.

Virginia State Police Sgt. Alex Willey and his fellow officers are prepared when tolling starts on Monday, Dec. 29. They underwent extra training in the new gantry system and the way the tolls operate. “It’s going to be interesting when it opens,” he said. But they are prepared.

Commuters should also be prepared. “The countdown is on,” said Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Chairman Sharon Bulova, who urged commuters to get their EZ Pass today.

PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL CONSTANTINO/THE CONNECTION



Adriano Oddi of Burke (kindergarten at Nativity Catholic School) checks out the N Gauge electric train setup at the Fairfax Railroad Museum. Kent Smiley of Alexandria (right) with the Northern Virginia NTRAK model train club runs the station.



Thom McKinney of Centreville manages a O Gauge train setup at the Fairfax Station Railroad Museum. McKinney is a member of the National Capital Trackers model train club.

Fairfax Station Railroad Museum Hosts 25th Holiday Train Show

Adriano Oddi is 5, and he likes that he can control whether his trains “go fast or slow.” The Burke resident was mesmerized by an N gauge model train whirring around a hand-made landscape, designed by the Northern Virginia NTRAK model train club to resemble local surroundings. Oddi and his family were inside the life-size caboose in front the Fairfax Station Railroad Museum for its 25th Holiday Train Show, held Dec. 6 and 7.

Model train clubs from around Northern Virginia, Washington, D.C. and Maryland filled the museum with classic N, O, HO, Z and Standard gauge sets dating back to the 1920s. One track even circumscribed the outside of the building itself. The museum will host the Art Guild of Clifton running a train-centric painting workshop for kids on Dec. 14. For more information on events and the museum, visit their Facebook page at www.facebook.com/FFXSRR.

—TIM PETERSON

PHOTOS BY
TIM PETERSON/
THE CONNECTION



Daniel and Lauren Derner of Springfield play with the caboose at the Fairfax Station Railroad Museum.



Hope Danielson and husband Dan of Gainesville collect model trains, including this 1926 Lionel Classic Standard gauge set, complete with tin signs and lead figurines.

ODB's Thank You to Combined Properties

Combined Properties donated store space at Courthouse Plaza in Fairfax City so that Our Daily Bread (ODB) and six other local organizations could conduct Fall Food Drives every Saturday from Nov. 1 through Dec. 13. This is its sixth year of supporting these food drives.

In addition, on Dec. 5, Linda Dreyer of Combined Properties delivered \$10,000 worth of grocery cards to ODB for the organization to give to local families enrolled in its holiday program – enough to help 200 families enjoy holiday meals this December. ODB has 3,000 individuals and families throughout Fairfax County on its holiday-assistance list, and the grocery cards are helping it provide

assistance to those whom they weren't able to match with sponsors from the community to provide meals. “We are so grateful to Combined Properties for their generous support of our programs to help those in our community who are struggling to make ends meet,” said ODB Executive Director Lisa Whetzel. “Their support is making a real difference for people who live very near us.” Organizations that benefited from the fall food drives are: FACETS, Marshall Road Elementary School's Food4Thought weekend backpack program, Koinonia Foundation, Our Daily Bread, Cunningham Park Elementary School's Weekend Backpack Program, Lorton Community Action Center and James Mott Community Assistance Program.



PHOTO COURTESY OF OUR DAILY BREAD

(From left) Combined Properties' Linda Dreyer presents grocery gift cards to ODB Holiday Program Manager Dawn Sykes, with Holiday Program Coordinator Stella Roberts, Holiday Data Coordinator Dee Osei-Boateng and Executive Director Lisa Whetzel.

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: Certified 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.

The Hollin Hall Senior Center in Alexandria needs a DJ to provide a wide array of music from ballroom to line dancing and a Ballroom Dance Instructor. For these and other volunteer opportunities, call 703-324-5406, TTY 711 or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/olderadults and click on Volunteer Solutions.

The Sully Senior Center in Centreville needs a certified personal trainer, preferably with experience working with older adults. For these and other volunteer opportunities, call 703-324-5406, TTY 711 or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/olderadults and click on Volunteer Solutions.

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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.

WHERE TO GIVE LOCALLY IN FAIRFAX COUNTY

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.

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

admin@echo-inc.org 7205 Old Keene Mill Road, Springfield. Provides food and financial assistance to those in short-term emergencies, and provides clothing and household goods to low income families, helping more than 5,000 people last year. www.echo-inc.org.

❖ **Lorton Community Action Center**, now collecting gift cards and food baskets for Christmas, drop off on Dec. 20, 2014. Also operates Lorton's Attic, 9506 Richmond Highway (U.S. Route 1), Lorton, VA 22079 703-339-5161 703-339-8611 www.lortonaction.org.

❖ **Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Washington Fairfax Area** operates clubs in two of the neediest areas of the county, Culmore and the Route 1 corridor, focusing on character and academic success. <http://www.bgcgw.org/fairfax/>

❖ **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

❖ **Comfort for America's Uniformed Services (CAUSE)** — organizes programs that promote recreation, relaxation and resiliency for members of the U.S. Armed Services recuperating from injuries received in support of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. 4114 Legato Road Suite B, Fairfax, VA 22033, 703-591-4968, [cause-usa.org](http://www.cause-usa.org)

❖ **National Capital Food Bank**, 6833 Hill Park Drive, Lorton, serving all of Northern Virginia, 703-541-3063. www.capitalareafoodbank.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

❖ **Bethany House** provides emergency shelter and supportive services to victims of domestic violence throughout Northern Virginia. www.bhmv.org, 6121 Lincoln Road, Suite 303, Alexandria, VA 22312, 703-658-9500. See <http://www.bhmv.org/getinvolved1/> for a list of needed items.

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>

❖ **Fairfax City Area FISH** (For Immediate Sympathetic Help), working with the Office of Coordinated Services Planning, Fairfax County Department of Human Services, FISH helps local citizens who are in temporary need of basic necessities such as food, clothing, and financial assistance for rent, mortgage payments, utilities, and medical treatments. 703-222-0880 <http://fairfaxfish.org/>

❖ **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>

❖ **Lamb Center**, www.thelambcenter.org. Day center for homeless, Fairfax 703-691-3178

❖ **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/>

❖ **United Community Ministries**, providing services to prevent homelessness, keep the utilities on, help with food insecurity and more. Mount Vernon, 703-768-7106, 7511 Fordson Road, Alexandria, 22306 <http://www.ucmagency.org/>

❖ **Food for Others**, largest distributor of free food directly to people in need in Northern Virginia, plus provides a safety net for people who suddenly face unforeseen emergencies such as a family illness or the loss of a job or spouse. 2938 Prosperity Ave., Fairfax, VA 22031, 703-207-9173. www.foodforothers.org

❖ **Ecumenical Community Helping Others (ECHO)**, 703-569-9160,



476

days since a still-unnamed Fairfax County police officer shot unarmed John Geer standing in the doorway of Geer's home in Springfield, then let him bleed to death on Aug. 29, 2013. No information has been released about the incident, officers involved not named, no explanation, no grand jury, no charges. (as of Dec. 10, 2014)

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OPINION

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 pre-

vent 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 programs, 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.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Giving Pets a Loving Home

To the Editor:

It is evident that the influx of cats and dogs in shelters is a problem.

With so many animals and not enough families to adopt them, a solution needs to be implemented to decrease the population being brought in.

Some of these animals are strays; families who can no longer take care of them are dumping others into the shelter. I have been researching this topic for over a month now, at George Mason University for my English class, and here are some of the reasons I think this problem is occurring.

Many of the animals are strays, which means that there are mostly stray unsterilized animals having many unwanted litters.

Thinking of how many of these stray animals can be saved by sterilization amazes me. Just think about if one cat or dog was to have a litter of five kittens or puppies, who in turn had five kittens or puppies, who also had five kittens or puppies. The numbers can go on and on. If there were less strays or at least, spayed and neutered strays, animal control would not be bringing in so many.

The other half of this problem is through the responsibility of

pet

owners. Many pet owners these days look at pets as disposable objects that they can return to the shelter as they please. Many companion pets end up here because owners cannot or will not properly take care of them. In this respect, I appreciate shelters that are able to care for animals when others cannot. However, owners should know their responsibility as a pet owner before adopting their pets. If they were informed, as they were adopting the animal, about how to take care of the pet and the responsibility it would require, fewer animals will be returned to shelters.

I think there are small effective ways that can be implemented to decrease the amount of overpopulated pets in our area. Firstly, encouraging spaying and neutering. By doing this, you are already

putting away the risk of unwanted animals, which ultimately end up in shelters. Some families, in the area, may not be able to afford the

procedure, which is understandable. So to fix this small sub-problem,

vets can maybe give reduced prices for surgeries to families who adopt from shelters. The other solution would be to spay and neuter pets before they are adopted.

This would, also, increase the chances of people adopting from shelters.

Another small change would be to make owners go through a briefing of sorts about the responsibilities of a pet owner. If owners were informed about what kind of responsibility and attention they will be needing to put towards their newly adopted pet, more owners might think twice if this is the right choice for them. They can also be informed about the type of animal and how that animal will behave. Some owners may have a certain type of breed that they have in mind. However, their wants for breed may not always be compatible with the characteristics they are looking for in a pet. This will ultimately lead to them giving the pet back to the shelter. By informing and educating potential owners, we may see a decrease in the amount of pets being brought back to the shelters.

I know this summer local shelters struggled with handling the influx of animals. My only hope is that something can be done to give these pets a loving home and to prevent a further increase in unwanted pets.

Jessica Honig
Fairfax

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- lost (adj): 1. unable to find the way.
2. not appreciated or understood.
3. no longer owned or known



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SPECIAL CONNECTIONS CALENDAR

Advertising Deadlines are the previous Thursday.

DECEMBER

Publishing

Wellbeing.....12/3/14

HomeLifeStyle: Home for the Holidays... 12/10/14

Hanukkah begins December 16.

★Holiday Entertainment & Gift Guide II..12/16/14

A+ Camps & Schools.....12/16/14

CHILDREN'S CONNECTION.....12/24/14

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'The American Dream'

The story of success via hard work makes the book a good gift.

By SAL RUIBAL
THE CONNECTION

Merrifield Garden Center has been a magnet for Northern Virginia gardeners since the store was founded by entrepreneurs and friends Bob Warhurst and Buddy Williams in the Merrifield area of Fairfax County in 1971. Since then, the company has expanded to two more stores in Northern Virginia: Fair Oaks in Fairfax and Gainesville in Prince William County.

The Merrifield stores are famous for their holiday displays, which attract thousands of excited shoppers looking for the perfect Christmas tree, wreaths, ornaments and other holiday accoutrements. There's even a one-of-a-kind "Merrifield Bow" that appears on hundreds of wreaths, swags and garland throughout the area.

This year, another special Merrifield item was created, but this one was made to last longer than the holiday season.

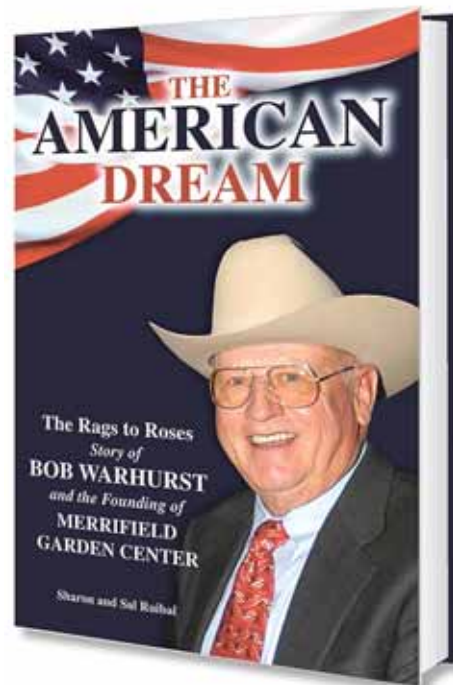
BOB WARHURST, 76, wanted to share the story of his hard-knock life from his birth in rural Alabama during the Great Depression to his current position as co-owner of Merrifield Garden Center. To write and research his book, Bob turned to seasoned professional writers: Me, Sal Ruibal, and my wife Sharon. Sharon is director of communications at Merrifield Garden Center. We are both former USA TODAY reporters with many years of experience writing about interesting people and what makes them tick.

I was especially interested in Bob's amazing personal story. The more I learned about this man, the more I wanted to know. He truly has a rags to riches story, so it made sense to title the book, "The American Dream: The Rags to Roses Story of Bob Warhurst and the Founding of Merrifield Garden Center."

While Bob is at the center of the story, it is also a journey shared by the Williams family, co-owners of Merrifield. The bond between the two families was important to their collective success.

We wanted to give readers insight into Bob's poor, but happy boyhood in Russellville, Ala., where he got his first job at the age of seven to help put food on the table. Bob quit school in the middle of the eighth grade and moved to Northern Virginia to make his way in life. The book reveals Bob's many adventures in post-World War II Washington, D.C., where he found that the land of opportunity was always open to the brave and the hardworking.

Washington, D.C., and the neighboring states of Virginia and Maryland enjoyed unprecedented growth in those giddy years. Longtime residents will recognize



The American Dream: The Rags to Roses Story of Bob Warhurst and the Founding of Merrifield Garden Center, available now.

names and places such as Shirley Highway, Hot Shoppes, Pizza Fair, The Southern Ramblers hot rod club and so much more in the book.

In late November, "The American Dream" became available online at merrifieldgardencenter.com and at the three Merrifield Garden Center stores. After just three weekends of book signings, more than 400 copies were sold.

"I can't believe all these people want to read my book," Bob says. "Many of these people I've never seen before."

AN INTERESTING PATTERN began to unfold. People who had purchased the book returned to buy more books for family members, saying that Bob's message of hard work, self reliance, perseverance and family values made it the ideal holiday present for their children, some of whom were struggling with finding their way in life. Some parents, with tears in their eyes, thanked Bob for giving them a way to express their own concern for their children's future while also showing a path to success.

"First, get up early and work as hard as you can," Bob says. "Stay late. Come home tired. Take a shower and feel refreshed. Eat and get ready to go again."

It is a routine his own kids know well. When customers visit any of the three Merrifield Garden Center stores, they are bound to bump into a Warhurst. After 43 years, Bob and his wife Billie Jean still work and are joined by 22 family members, many in key positions in the business.

Copies of "The American Dream: The Rags to Roses Story of Bob Warhurst and the Founding of Merrifield Garden Center" are available online and at their three stores: Merrifield, Fair Oaks and Gainesville. Go to merrifieldgardencenter.com to view the book trailer.

COMMUNITY

Bringing Smiles To Military Families

Operation Homefront, in partnership with Northrop Grumman, held a Holiday Toy Party for children of enlisted soldiers in Lorton. Five hundred families registered online to be part of the festivities on Sunday, Dec. 14.

Each child was given a set of tickets that could be used to purchase holiday toys of their choosing. With a donation of \$25,000 from Northrop Grumman, over 610 toys donated by Northrop Grumman employees, a wide selection of toys for boys and girls were available.

Operation Homefront is a nonprofit organization with 17 field offices serving 45 states in the U.S. Their mission is to provide emergency financial aid and assistance to the families of our nation's enlisted service members and wounded warriors. With the financial help of major corporations like Wal-Mart, Wells Fargo, Bank of America and Northrop Grumman, Operation Homefront is able to assist families with a wide-assortment of financial needs. From food, mortgage assistance, utility payment and school supplies Operation Homefront brings aid to the families of enlisted men and women.



Group photo of the Northrop Grumman volunteers at the end of the day.

PHOTO BY CYNDI LUCAS OF OPERATION HOMEFRONT

The Lorton Holiday Toy Party was one of three events held in the mid-Atlantic region. Over 190 Northrop Grumman employees who helped wrap presents and staff the vari-

ous gift tables staffed the Lorton Holiday Toy Party. During the event a woman who had registered for the event called to say she had given birth the day before and asked if her husband could attend. A Northrop Grumman volunteer said he would bring the presents

to her and with the help of others picked out presents and left for the hospital.

When Santa showed up to visit the children quickly lined up to take their turn with Santa.

—TERRANCE MORAN



Military families bringing their children to the tables to select toys.



A young man looks in amazement at Santa holding his sister.

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PHOTOS BY TERRANCE MORAN/THE CONNECTION



Kyle Seelman of Lorton, a junior at Hayfield High School, helping at a gift table.

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Delight in our HomeLifeStyle sections, the second week of every month. Peek at the top real estate sales, glimpse over-the-top remodeling projects, get practical suggestions for your home.

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An Essay To Remember

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

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."

SCHOOL NOTES

Send notes to the Connection at south@connectionnewspapers.com or call 703-778-9416. Deadline is Friday. Dated announcements should be submitted at least two weeks prior to the event.

Jacob Augelli, an eighth grade student at Robinson Secondary, finished in fourth place overall in the 2014 United States Geography Olympiad, junior varsity division. The competition consisted of two parts: a written exam and a quiz bowl tournament; Augelli placed sixth in the exam and tied for seventh in the quiz bowl tournament; overall scores were compiled by averaging each competitor's ranking for each part. Over 70 junior varsity students from as far away as Guam competed in the written exam and in a preliminary quiz bowl round, while those with high scores advanced to the final quiz bowl round. Questions ranged in difficulty from naming countries by their capital to identifying obscure islets in the North Atlantic. The top four varsity students earned the right to represent the USA at the 2014 International Geography Olympiad in Krakow, Poland, this summer. The Geography Olympiad was sponsored by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and HISTORY, commonly known as the History Channel, which also sponsors the National History Bee and Bowl. For more information on the competition, please visit www.geographyolympiad.com.

The Citadel has recognized **Cadet Martin Krawczak of Springfield** on the school's dean's list for his academic achievement during the spring semester. Recognition on the South Carolina military school's

dean's list is reserved for students who were registered for 12 or more semester hours and received a grade point average of 3.2 or higher with no grade below a C for the previous semester's work.

Yihan Zhou, Fairfax, earned a place on the Deans Honor Roll at Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kan., for the spring 2014 semester. Zhou is a junior majoring in general studies. To be eligible, students must have enrolled in 12 or more credit hours and have a minimum grade point average of 3.60 for the semester.

Samantha M. Bell of Fairfax, received her J.D. from Seton Hall University School of Law on May 23. In August, Samantha will become the Judicial Law Clerk to The Honorable Ronald D. Wigler, the Presiding Judge of the Criminal Court of Essex County. Samantha has been a Student Attorney for the Center of Social Justice at Seton Hall University. She was also a Law Clerk at Krumholz Dillon, P.A., and a litigator for the New York Legal Assistance Group/Clinical Center for Domestic Violence. Samantha graduated from New York University with a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in Spanish Language and Literature, with minors in History, Law, and Society, in 2011. She graduated Magna Cum Laude, with an Honors Degree in Spanish from the Presidential Honors Scholar Program. Her Honor's Thesis was on Rosa Montero's novel, 'Te Trataré Como a Una Reina' (1983), and Pedro Almodovar's film, 'Gender and Space', (1988). Samantha is a graduate of Robinson Secondary School in Fairfax. She is the daughter of William and Judith Bell of Fairfax.

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ENTERTAINMENT



Andy Ilachinski describes his colorful, powerful and magically manipulated images as "Synesthetic Landscapes," referencing the psychological, creative – even mystical – experience of synesthesia, a joining of the senses (smelling sounds, hearing colors, feeling shape) to communicate a point of view to another through his photographs. View his photos through Feb. 9, 2015 at the Jewish Community Center of Northern Virginia, 8900 Little River Turnpike, Fairfax.

Send notes to the Connection at south@connectionnewspapers.com or call 703-778-9416. The deadline is the Friday prior to the next paper's publication. Dated announcements should be submitted at least two weeks prior to the event.

THROUGH SUNDAY/DEC. 28

Sparkling Wine Tastings. 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Paradise Springs Winery, 13219 Yates Ford Road, Clifton. Recurring weekly on Sunday, Friday, Saturday. Taste all three sparklings from Paradise Springs as well as a unique Pineapple Sparkling from Maui. Ten percent off all sparkling wines purchased for anyone who does the tasting. Admission is \$20/person. Call (703) 830-9463 for more information. No reservations necessary as tastings will be done at our main tasting counter. Ongoing event.

THROUGH WEDNESDAY/DEC. 31

War on the Doorstep: Fairfax Militia in the War of 1812. Exhibition. The Civil War Interpretive Center at Historic Blenheim, 3610 Old Lee Highway. Open Tue.-Sat. 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Free tours at 1 p.m. 703-591-0560.

THROUGH MONDAY/JAN. 19, 2015

Dada Re-Discovered. Building W-16 Vulcan Gallery, Workhouse Arts Center, 9518 Workhouse Way, Lorton. Dada Re-Discovered explores how contemporary media and ideas can filter past Dada concepts and artwork.

The exhibit will feature sound, video, performance and other visual mixed media. 703-584-2900. www.workhousearts.org.

WEDNESDAY/DEC. 17

PJ Library Book Buddies. 10:30 a.m. Burke Centre Library, 5935 Freds Oak Road, Burke. Please join us as we read selections from the PJ Library and make a craft to take home. Ages 6 months - 5 years. 703-249-1520.

Legos in the Library. 4 p.m. Kings Park Library, 9000 Burke Lake Road, Burke. Have fun making friends and LEGO creations with our supply of LEGO bricks. LEGOs supplied by Friends of the Kings Park Library. Ages 6-12 with adult.

Things That Go! 10:30 a.m. Richard Byrd Library, 7250 Commerce Street, Springfield. Join us for stories and activities about planes, cars, boats, trains, etc. Ages 3-5 with adult.

Friends Of Pohick Library Holiday Book Sale. 10 a.m. - 9 p.m. Pohick Library, 6450 Sydenstricker Road, Burke. Holiday Gift Book Shopping.

THURSDAY/DEC. 18

An Album of a Century-Photographer Jacques Henri Lartigue. 7:30 p.m. Workhouse Arts Center, 9518 Workhouse Way, W-3 Theatre, Lorton. French photographer and painter Jacques-Henri Lartigue (1894-1986) is most famous for his stunning photos of automobile races, planes, and fashionable Parisian women from the turn of the century. This lecture explores Lartigue's photographs from his first sincere, often playful, presentation of friends, family, and French society made as early as age 6 to his later fashion layouts and portraits. \$10 per person, \$5 for Artists at and Friends of the Workhouse, Volunteers and Military. Contact Moria Nisbet, 703-584-2986.

Preschool Storytime. 10:30 a.m. City of Fairfax Regional Library, 10360 North Street, Fairfax. Build your child's early literacy skills while enjoying stories, songs and activities. Ages 3-5 with adult.

Friends Of Pohick Library Holiday Book Sale. 10 a.m. - 9 p.m. Pohick Library, 6450 Sydenstricker Road, Burke. Holiday Gift Book Shopping.

Preschool Storytime - Winter Wonders. 10:30 a.m. Pohick Library, 6450 Sydenstricker Road, Burke. Age 3-5 with caregiver enjoy seasonal stories, songs and activities.

FRIDAY-SATURDAY/DEC. 19-20

Horse-Drawn Carriage Rides. Fridays & Saturdays: 2-9 p.m. Mosaic District, 2910 District Avenue, Fairfax. Enjoy horse-drawn carriage rides through the tree-lit streets of Mosaic. www.mosaicdistrict.com.

SATURDAY-SUNDAY/DEC. 20-21

In Concert: O, Holy Night. Saturday: 7 p.m. Sunday: 5 p.m. Workhouse Arts Center, 9601 Ox Road, Lorton. Carolers perform some of the world's most beautiful music to celebrate the Christmas season. Workhouse cabaret vocalists perform the most loved music of the season on the Workhouse stage. Join us for a musical sleigh ride on a journey of music, love, laughter and memories that is sure to delight all. Running time approximately 90 minutes, appropriate for all ages. Concessions available before the performance and at intermission. Tickets: \$8-\$15.

SATURDAY/DEC. 20

Teen Book Club. 1 p.m. Burke Centre Library, 5935 Freds Oak Road, Burke. Join us for book discussion of The Book Thief by Markus Zusak an unforgettable story about the ability of books to feed the soul. Age 13-18. 703-249-1520.

Polar Bear Party For All Ages.

10:30 a.m. Pohick Library, 6450 Sydenstricker Road, Burke. Join Mariachi Estrellas for music and dancing to chase the winter blues away. Sign up for waiting list.

Wag A Tale - Read To A Dog. 10:30 a.m. Kingstowne Library, 6500 Landsdowne Centre, Alexandria. Age 5-12 will love to read to our therapy dog. Still openings.

SUNDAY/DEC. 21

Service of Lessons and Carols. 10 a.m. Pohick Church, 9301 Richmond Highway, Lorton. This service originated in Victorian England in the 1880s as "Lesson and Carols: A Festal Service for Christmastide," as a series of scripture readings interspersed with Advent and Christmas carols, hymns and choral anthems, tracing God's love from the creation of man and woman in the Garden of Eden, through the annunciation and birth of the Christ Child. For more information call 703-339-6572 or visit <http://www.pohick.org>.

THURSDAY/DEC. 25

"The Frisco Kid." 3 p.m. Jewish Community Center of Northern Virginia, 8900 Little River Turnpike, Fairfax. The day includes entertainment, food and fun for all ages. Magician Jay Mattioli performs (he was a finalist on TV's America's Got Talent), arts and crafts, games and activities, face painting, moon bounce, and a community service project. Kosher food available for purchase. At 3 p.m., the JCCNV will screen "The Frisco Kid"—a hilarious 1979 comedy/western starring Gene Wilder and Harrison Ford. J Fest fee per family (up to 6 people): \$20/\$15 JCCNV member. Film only: free. Call 703-323-0880 for details and to register, or visit www.jccnv.org.

WEDNESDAY/DEC. 31

Cool Cow Presents: Jeff Maurer NYE Special Engagement. 7 & 9 p.m. Workhouse Arts Center, 9601 Ox Road, Lorton. Cool Cow Comedy's headliners and featured performers take the stage in the W-3 Theatre once again! Host and Comedian Rahmein Mostafavi (who has performed stand-up at such venues as DC Improv, Richmond Funny Bone and Caroline's on Broadway) leads regular sold out shows, making Cool Cow a staple of the entertainment options in Lorton! This month, headliner Jeff Maurer appears on the Workhouse stage. Your ticket will include performance, light snack fare and complimentary admission to the New Year's Eve Concert and Dance in the McGuireWoods Gallery featuring The 6th Generation.

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The biggest things are always
the easiest to do because there
is no competition.
-William Van Horne

SPORTS

Hayfield's Overstreet Places First on Bars at Yorktown

Hayfield gymnast Molly Overstreet took first place on bars during a four-team meet on Dec. 11 at Yorktown High School.

Overstreet, a junior, earned a score of 8.85. Yorktown's Juliette Mitrovich (8.825) and Olivia Zavrel (8.75) finished second and third, respectively.

Overstreet placed third on beam with a score of 9.05. She posted a score of 8.8 on vault and did not compete on floor.

Washington-Lee's Sophie Hatcher won the all-around with a score of 36.35.

W-L won the team competition with a score of 136.95, followed by Yorktown (134.475), Hayfield (112.475) and South Lakes (109.5).

Last season, Overstreet set a VHSL record on bars with a score of 9.925 at the state meet, earning the then-sophomore a state championship.

As a freshman, Overstreet finished in a three-way tie for first on vault with a score of 9.8 at the 2013 state meet at Centreville High School.

Hayfield will compete in a meet at Fairfax High School at noon on Jan. 10.



PHOTO BY CRAIG STERBUTZEL/THE CONNECTION

Hayfield junior Molly Overstreet placed first on bars during a Dec. 11 gymnastics meet at Yorktown High School.

BULLETIN BOARD

WEDNESDAY/DEC. 17

Bilingual Storytime. 4 p.m. City of Fairfax Regional Library, 10360 North Street, Fairfax. Bilingual storytime in English and Spanish. Build your child's early literacy skills while enjoying stories, songs and activities. Ages 3-5 with adult.
Tales to Tails. 4:30 p.m. City of Fairfax Regional Library, 10360 North Street, Fairfax. Read to a trained therapy dog. Ages 6-12.
Genealogy Help Desk. 7 p.m. City of Fairfax Regional Library, 10360 North Street, Fairfax. Bring your family history stumpers to the experts. Accomplished genealogists and library staff will be on hand to assist you. Adults and teens.
Genealogy-Researching Vital Records. 1 p.m. Kings Park Library, 9000 Burke Lake Road, Burke. Learn how to research birth, marriage, death documents, as well as courthouse records including taxes, deeds, and wills. Find out where these records are and what they tell researchers. Adults.
English Conversation For Adults. 10:15 a.m. Kingstowne Library, 6500 Landsdowne Centre, Alexandria. Practise your English skills in a group setting.

THURSDAY/DEC. 18

Library Tech Help. 6 p.m. City of Fairfax Regional Library, 10360 North Street, Fairfax. Get your library-related electronic resources questions answered. Includes help with eBooks and compatible devices. Adults.
Spanish Conversation Group. 2 p.m. Kings Park Library, 9000 Burke Lake Road, Burke. Practice and improve your Spanish with a native speaker. Adults.
Springfield Writers' Group. 7 p.m. Richard Byrd Library, 7250 Commerce Street, Springfield. Share your work, give and receive feedback in a supportive setting. Adults.
Walk-In Ebook & Computer Clinic For Adults. 10 a.m.-12 p.m. Pohik Library, 6450 Sydenstricker Road, Burke. Boost your basic computer skills. Our wonderful volunteers will help you to download eBooks. Bring your device, its account ID and password.
English Conversation for Adults. 7 p.m. Kingstowne Library, 6500 Landsdowne

Send notes to the Connection at south@connectionnewspapers.com or call 703-778-9416. The deadline for submissions is the Friday prior to publication. Dated announcements should be submitted at least two weeks prior to the event.

Centre, Alexandria. Practise your English skills in a group setting.

FRIDAY/DEC. 19

Using Activities with Meaning to Promote Well-Being and Fun! 1:30 p.m. Insight Memory Care Center, 2812 Old Lee Highway, Suite 210, Fairfax. Learn strategies for sparking fun and laughter in caring for people with dementia; making your time enjoyable, frustration free and memorable. Call 703-204-4664 to RSVP and for more information.
Genealogy Help Desk. 2 p.m. City of Fairfax Regional Library, 10360 North Street, Fairfax. Bring your family history stumpers to the experts. Accomplished genealogists and library staff will be on hand to assist you.
English Conversation Group. 10 a.m. Kings Park Library, 9000 Burke Lake Road, Burke. Practice your English conversation skills. Adults.

SATURDAY/DEC. 20

Teen Advisory Board (TAB) Meeting. 10:30 a.m. Burke Centre Library, 5935 Freds Oak Road, Burke. Board members meet biweekly to plan and implement projects and programs that will enhance library services for teens. Age 13-18. 703-249-1520.
Tales to Tails. 10:30 a.m. City of Fairfax Regional Library, 10360 North Street, Fairfax. Need practice reading? Read aloud to a trained therapy dog. Ages 6-12.
Genealogy Help Desk. 2 p.m. City of Fairfax Regional Library, 10360 North Street, Fairfax. Bring your family history stumpers to the experts. Accomplished genealogists and library staff will be on hand to assist you.

MONDAY/DEC. 22

English Conversation Group. 7 p.m. Burke Centre Library, 5935 Freds Oak Road, Burke. Practice English with others and improve your skills. Adults. 703-249-1520.
One-on-One English Practice. 7, 8 p.m. Burke Centre Library, 5935 Freds Oak Road, Burke. Practice speaking, reading and writing English with a volunteer partner. Ages 8 through adult. 703-249-1520.
Library Tech Help. 11 a.m. City of Fairfax

Regional Library, 10360 North Street, Fairfax. Get your library-related electronic resources questions answered. Includes help with eBooks and compatible devices. Bring your library card, eBook reader, and laptop. Adults and teens.

Wag A Tale - Read To A Dog. 10:45 a.m. Kingstowne Library, 6500 Landsdowne Centre, Alexandria. Age 5-12 will love to read to our therapy dog. Sign up for waiting list.

Scratch Programming Demonstration For Ages 9-13. 2 p.m. Pohik Library, 6450 Sydenstricker Road, Burke. Learn the basics of Scratch programming language. Personal computers welcome.

Friends Of Pohik Library Holiday Book Sale. 10 a.m. - 9 p.m. Pohik Library, 6450 Sydenstricker Road, Burke. Holiday Gift Book Shopping.

TUESDAY/DEC. 23

Short Book Conversations. Burke Centre Library, 5935 Freds Oak Road, Burke. Join our lively book discussion. Call library for title. Adults. 703-249-1520.
Library Tech Help. 2 p.m. City of Fairfax Regional Library, 10360 North Street, Fairfax. Get your library-related electronic resources questions answered. Includes help with eBooks and compatible devices. please bring your library card, eBook reader, and laptop. Adults and teens.
Tales to Tails. 4:30 p.m. City of Fairfax Regional Library, 10360 North Street, Fairfax. Children ages 6-12 read to a trained therapy dog.
English Conversation Group. 7 p.m. City of Fairfax Regional Library, 10360 North Street, Fairfax. Practice speaking English with others and improve your skills. Adults.
Friends of the Kings Park Library Meeting. 7 p.m. Kings Park Library, 9000 Burke Lake Road, Burke. Board meeting.

WEDNESDAY/DEC. 24

English Conversation For Adults. 10:15 a.m. Kingstowne Library, 6500 Landsdowne Centre, Alexandria. Practise your English skills in a group setting.

Spartans Win Early-Season Matchup of Conference 7 Powers

West Springfield overcomes scoring drought to beat T.C. Williams.

BY JON ROETMAN
THE CONNECTION

West Springfield's Alanna Backus reluctantly answered reporters' questions following Friday's game against T.C. Williams, politely requesting media attention instead be directed toward her teammates.

The senior wasn't as passive when the game was on the line.

The West Springfield girls' basketball team went seven-and-a-half minutes without a field goal during the second half and T.C. Williams guard Bhrandi Crenshaw converted a three-point play to give the Titans a 37-36 lead with less than two minutes remaining in the contest. However, shortly after the Titans used a 7-1 run to take the lead, Backus responded with a clutch 3-pointer, putting West Springfield back on top. Backus added a pair of clutch free throws and the Spartans held on to beat the Titans 42-38 on Dec. 12 at T.C. Williams High School.

West Springfield improved to 5-0.

The game was ugly at the offensive end for both teams. West Springfield held a 25-20 advantage at halftime and took a 35-30 lead when Backus scored with 1:10 left in the third quarter. But it took the Spartans more than six minutes to score another point, and more than seven minutes to come up with a field goal.

T.C. Williams failed to pull away, however, and once the Titans took the lead, Backus snatched it right back.

"It was kind of crushing because we had the momentum," T.C. Williams guard Rejoice Spivey said. "We were coming back."

West Springfield head coach Bill Gibson praised Backus for hustling.

"She hit the 3 to get us up and hit a two [free throws] after that," Gibson said. "With the way she played, she was on the floor diving [after the ball]. If we had five players on the court playing that hard, it wouldn't have been as close."

Backus finished with a team-high 14 points.

"Alanna stepped up tonight," West Springfield forward Maura D'Anna said.

West Springfield entered the game averaging 65 points per contest, but was limited to its lowest offensive output of the season.

"We've had problems playing here before," Gibson said. "It's just a hard place for us to play in. ... You play bad and come away with a win, that's a good thing."

D'Anna, a 6-foot junior, finished with 12 points and 10 rebounds, but fouled out during the fourth quarter.

"She played hard, but she's got to be



West Springfield guard Emily Reba drives toward the basket during the Spartans 42-38 victory over T.C. Williams on Dec. 12.



West Springfield point guard Shelby Haynes scored five points against T.C. Williams on Dec. 12.



West Springfield forward Maura D'Anna (5) and T.C. Williams forward Grace Peterson battle for a loose ball during their Dec. 12 matchup.

smarter," Gibson said. "She can't foul out of the game. [She needs to] understand she needs to be a more integral part of our offense."

Shelby Haynes, a 5-foot-10 junior point guard, scored five points, grabbed nine rebounds and came up with a clutch steal in the final 20 seconds for the Spartans.

Spivey led T.C. Williams with 17 points. Senior forward Grace Peterson scored 12 points and grabbed 10 rebounds.

West Springfield and T.C. Williams for years battled for Patriot District supremacy, meeting in six of the final eight Patriot District championship games. The Titans beat the Spartans in four straight district finals from 2006-09. West Springfield won the next three titles, beating T.C. Williams in the 2011 and 2012 finals. The Titans won the final Patriot District championship in 2013, beating a Woodson team that knocked off West Springfield in the semifi-

"If we had five players on the court playing [as] hard [as Alanna Backus], it wouldn't have been as close."

— West Springfield girls' basketball coach Bill Gibson

nals. The VHSL went to a six-class realignment prior to the 2013-14 season. West Springfield went on to beat T.C. Williams 70-58 in the inaugural Conference 7 championship game in February of last season.

The Spartans are off to a strong start this season, winning their first five games. After graduating standouts Logan Battle (Georgetown), April Robinson (Duquesne) and Amy Berglund (Northwestern-St. Paul) in recent seasons, the Spartans' offensive output is more evenly distributed.

"We're working really good as a team, recently," D'Anna said. "Our connection is really good. We know each other's strengths and weaknesses."

West Springfield faced Herndon on Tuesday, after The Connection's deadline. The Spartans will host Lake Braddock at 7:30 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 19.

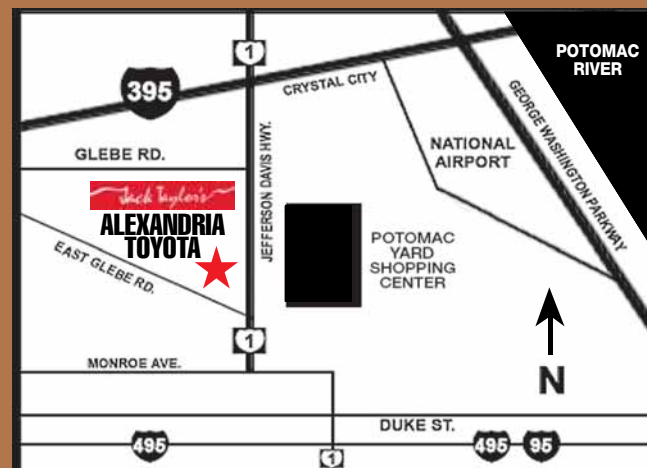
T.C. Williams improved to 3-2 with a victory on Saturday. The Titans will host South County at 5:45 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 19.

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Artists Sandi Goldman (left) and Kathy Stoner of Fairfax, create both wearable fiber art and custom necklaces.



Suellen Black of Fairfax standing next to her collection of holiday ornaments that are available for purchase.

PHOTOS BY TERRANCE MORAN/THE CONNECTION

One-of-a-Kind Art Gifts on Display at Workhouse

The Workhouse in Lorton offers a wide selection of artistic creations that would delight friends and family in this gift-giving season. The Workhouse Arts Center has a

colony of talented, working artists. Nestled next to Ox Road (Route 123), the former prison was remade into center dedicated to arts and education. There, juried artists refine and practice their craft while offering

their finished pieces for sale. Three of the 10 buildings are dedicated to specific art mediums – fiber, glass and ceramic. As you stroll through the buildings you meet the artists, each of them interested in sharing

their story and crafts. In addition, the Workhouse offers classes in movement, culinary arts, painting, ceramics, glass, drawing and photography.

—TERRANCE MORAN



Artist Suellen Black of Fairfax, holding a fused glass creation as she discussed the process of fusing glass with powders.



Sandi Goldman of Fairfax, stands by her fiber creations that are available for purchase.

Artist Carol Tripp Martens of Burke, discussing the process of bowl-making and preparing the pieces for glazing.

FAITH NOTES

Send notes to the Connection at south@connectionnewspapers.com or call 703-778-9416. Deadline is Friday. Dated announcements should be submitted at least two weeks prior to the event.

Calvary Christian Church Presents Annual Live Nativity, Saturday, Dec. 20, 5-7 p.m. Safeway shopping parking lot in Burke Town Plaza, 9596 Old Keene Mill Road, Burke. Come and see Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus, with Delilah the camel and other lovely beasts. Cocoa and Cookies will be served.

Fairfax Baptist Temple Christmas Service, Sunday, Dec. 21, 10 a.m., 6401 Missionary Lane,

Fairfax Station. Please contact the church office for more information: 703-323-8100, fbt@fbtministries.org

The Fairfax Baptist Temple choir, orchestra and drama team present "Ten Thousand Hallelujahs" a Christmas Musical by Ron & Shelly Hamilton, Sunday evening, Dec. 21, 5 p.m., 6401 Missionary Lane, Fairfax Station. Please contact the church office for more information: 703-323-8100, fbt@fbtministries.org

Bluegrass Christmas Eve service on Wednesday, Dec. 24, at 5 p.m. in Franconia Hall at Fire Station #5, 6300 Beulah Street, Alexandria. The community is once again invited to find meaning in the mayhem of the season.

The familiar Christmas story will be celebrated in a new way with traditional carols by the acclaimed Big Hillbilly Bluegrass band. Join your friends and neighbors at the firehouse this Christmas Eve. The service is sponsored by Aldersgate Kingstowne, a United Methodist Church that invites people to follow Jesus through the shared practices of worship, learning in groups, and hands-on service to the poor. For more information, go to www.aldersgate.net or call 703-660-2600.

Fairfax Baptist Temple, at the corner of Fairfax County Parkway and Burke Lake Roads, holds a bible study fellowship at 9 a.m. Sundays followed by a 10 a.m. worship service. Nursery care and children's church also provided. 6401

Missionary Lane, Fairfax Station, 703-323-8100 or www.fbtministries.org.

The Guhyasamaja Buddhist Center, 10875 Main St., Fairfax City provides free classes to both newcomers and advanced practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism. The center emphasizes working with the mind and learning how to understand the workings of the mind, overcoming inner causes of suffering, while cultivating causes of happiness. Under the direction of Lama Zopa Rinpoche, the center is a place of study, contemplation and meditation. Visit <http://www.guhyasamaja.org> for more info.

Lord of Life Lutheran offers services at two locations, in Fairfax at 5114 Twinbrook Road and in Clifton at 13421 Twin Lakes Drive. Services in Fairfax are

held on Saturdays at 5:30 p.m. and Sundays at 8:30 and 10 a.m. Services in Clifton are held on Sundays at 8:15 and 10:30 a.m. 703-323-9500 or www.LordofLifeva.org.

First Baptist Church of Springfield offers Sunday school at 9:15 a.m., followed by a 10:30 a.m. worship service at 7300 Gary St., Springfield. 703-451-1500 or www.fbcspRINGfield.org.

Clifton Presbyterian Church, 12748 Richards Lane, Clifton, offers Sunday worship services at 8:30 a.m. and 11 a.m. Nursery care is provided. Christian education for all ages is at 9:45 a.m. 703-830-3175.