

Springfield CONNECTION

Franconia ♦ Kingstowne
Newington



Doodlehopper Sells Toys that Enlighten

GIFT GUIDE, PAGE 16

95 Express Lanes Open

NEWS, PAGE 3

The Business of Helping Others

NEWS, PAGE 4

Mary Tinsley (right), a Koinonia volunteer from Alexandria, helps Marcia Reid (left), of Woodbridge, load her car with groceries for a client who isn't able to come in for herself to the event held Dec. 11 at St. John's Lutheran Church in Franconia.



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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-

Learn More

http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ipd/project_profiles/va_i95.aspx
<http://www.95expresslanes.com/>

<http://www.vamegaprojects.com/about-megaprojects/i-95-hov-hot-lanes/>

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



Alexandria resident Pat Bauer inspects and folds donated clothing at Koinonia in Springfield.



Marian Johns of Springfield manages the Koinonia food pantry.

PHOTOS BY TIM PETERSON/THE CONNECTION

The Business of Helping Others Franconia nonprofit Koinonia moves to function more like a small business.

BY TIM PETERSON
THE CONNECTION

Mary Tinsley of Alexandria pushed the loaded shopping cart right out the door and into the parking lot where Marcia Reid of Woodbridge was pulling her car around. Mid-morning sun pierced through trees overlooking the parking lot behind Franconia United Methodist Church. Reid was picking up groceries for a Springfield-based client of Koinonia, a local nonprofit outreach organization.

"They're always so friendly, very welcoming," said Reid. "It makes it seem as though they're family. They treat us really nice when you come in here."

Since 1966, the Christian outfit Koinonia (greek for "community of fellowship of sharing and caring") has provided a wide range of support for the greater Franconia-Kingstowne area of Fairfax County living in poverty. They split a coverage zone with another Springfield and faith-based organization ECHO; Koinonia focuses on the zip codes 22310 and 22315.

You really can't get any more local than they are, they're perfect," said Supervisor Jeff McKay (D-Lee). "You know that every dollar that goes in there comes back out in our zip code."

Operating on a shoestring budget of just under \$300,000, the minimal staff and bench of volunteers, they operate a year-round food pantry and clothing closet in a cozy building behind Franconia United Methodist.

Like ECHO, they also do case management and offer emergency financial assistance. Seasonally, they sponsor additional programs including "Blessings in a Backpack" (school supplies for students at Hayfield, Franconia and Bush Hill Elementary Schools) and a Christmas toy store.

THE LATTER was held Dec. 11 at St. John's Lutheran Church in Franconia. The independent shopping aspect of the event was an opportunity Koinonia Executive Di-



Koinonia recently held a Christmas shopping program Dec. 11 at St. John's Lutheran Church in Franconia.

rector Robert Petitti said was meant to build confidence.

"Let them pick it out," he said. "Our philosophy is to empower our clients, so they're not always there trying to struggle. If they feel good about themselves, maybe they'll do a lot better."

Petitti said Koinonia sees on average 1,000 families a year: roughly 30-35 per week, 5-6 on a typical day, by appointment.

A large part of the demographic is Hispanic, according to Petitti, but they're beginning to see more clients from Middle Eastern and African descent as well. About 15 percent of the clients are home-bound senior citizens on fixed incomes.

"You'd be surprised the variety of people that come in here," said Petitti. "It could be your neighbor that's a contractor with the federal government. All of a sudden they're living month to month, the contract is cut. They come here for help for a month or so until they get a new gig. That's OK, that's what we're here for."

Appreciating the local level of poverty is one of the challenges for the community,

according to Supervisor McKay. "Certainly there's more in Springfield, along Route 1," McKay said, "but a lot of people overlook that Kingstown-Franconia area. There's still a lot of our neighbors who are living in poverty."

McKay often points to eligibility for free and reduced-price meals at Fairfax County Public Schools as an indicator of the level of poverty in a community. For the 2013-2014 school year, the Virginia Department of Education showed 27.83 percent of the county's students qualified.

From Koinonia's coverage area, VDOE reported Franconia Elementary School with 25.05 percent of their students eligible, Mark Twain Middle School at 34.57 percent and Hayfield Secondary School right on average with 27.41 percent, all in the 2012-2013 school year (latest available data).

To continue its half-century legacy helping those communities, Koinonia is facing challenges with its confined space, operating costs and lack of name recognition in the community. "If they don't know you're

there, they can't help you," said Petitti.

EXPANDING UP OR OUT is something Petitti is strongly considering, to be able to better distribute their supply of food drive non-perishables and clothing. But when commercial space is some of the most expensive in the county, they're a bit hamstrung until they can find more resources.

Which is why Petitti, who spent four decades in chemistry supply sales and marketing, is working to engage with the Springfield business community. "The hardest thing for a social worker to do is ask for something," he said. "I've been doing it for so long, it's second nature. We've been relying more on our faith partners. We can't do that anymore."

Nancy-jo Manney, executive director of the Springfield Chamber of Commerce, said the business-networking approach is an opportunity for nonprofits to build social, financial and intellectual capital in their community.

"If you can build a relationship with a printer," Manney gave an example, "then your annual report, letterhead, you might get those items more quickly, at a slightly lower price. You save time and money, and make your organization more profitable." So Petitti spends considerable time networking with local businesses including consulting firm Calibre, as well as applying for grants, trying to find creative resource-building solutions. Calibre was one of 27 Springfield businesses that participated in the chamber's month-long coat drive ending Dec. 17. The drive benefits both ECHO and Koinonia.

"This is another type of sale: Here I have to sell our donors on what we do, how we help people, make them feel about it," said Petitti. "What's our product? When we help the people. The food, clothing, bills we pay, the counselling. It's not for profit, but it's still a business."

Koinonia is located at 6037 Franconia Road, Franconia. For more information on how to get involved, visit their website at www.koinoniacares.org.

WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

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). 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

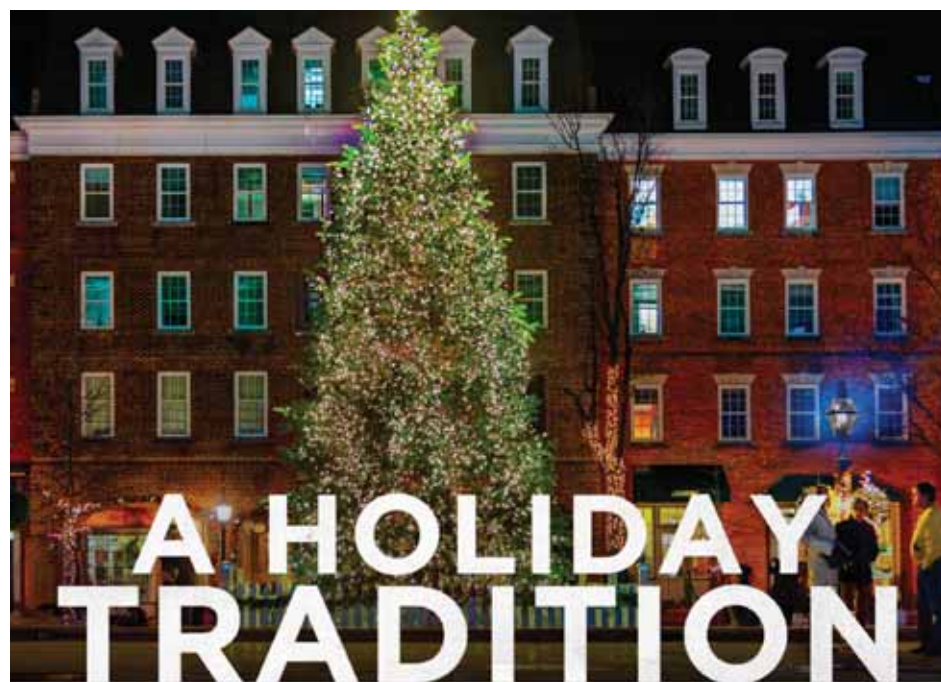


PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Jim Weedon in his specially designed Santa suit.

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.



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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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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LETTER

New Level of Accountability

To the Editor:

As a Christian, I believe we are all made in the image of God - and that means every life matters. However, our justice system is currently sending black people the message that their lives do not

matter the same way that others do. Fear and distrust of people who don't look like us is all too common, and it's a sin. Because of my faith, I add my voice to those boldly proclaiming that black lives matter.

New levels of accountability for police officers and justice for their victims is required if anything is going to change.

Stephen Nolan
Springfield

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 pro-

vided. 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 information.

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.



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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.

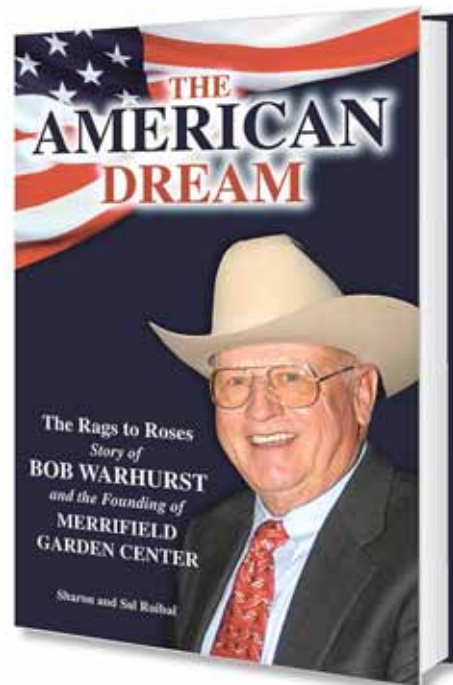
BOB WARHURST, 76, wanted to share the story of his hard-knock life from his birth in rural Alabama during the Great Depression to his current position as co-owner of Merrifield Garden Center. To write and research his book, Bob turned to seasoned professional writers: Me, Sal Ruibal, and my wife Sharon. 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.



PHOTO BY CANDI LUCAS OF OPERATION HOMEFRONT

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



PHOTOS BY TERRANCE MORAN/THE CONNECTION

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

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. 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 various 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



Santa getting adored by a young visitor.



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



Karen Goetz of Arlington, a Northrop Grumman volunteer, standing by the girls table.



Northrop Grumman volunteers looking for a present to give to a child



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



Karen Goetz of Arlington helping a mother choose a gift for her child.



Two young ladies spend time making an ornament at the craft table.

Christmas Eve at Aldersgate

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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 egg nog, 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."

Near Miraculous Production

"The Miracle Worker" at Paul VI Catholic High School.

BY TYLER LARKWORTHY
LANGLEY HIGH SCHOOL

"Helen, the chick has to come out of its shell sometime... you come out too!" For Helen Keller, life was a black void of ignorance. Almost sealed off from the outside world, pampered by her parents, she understood only desire and reward. And then one day, she encountered a new woman—a stubborn woman with dark glasses—a woman who, once blind herself, nevertheless had the vision to know exactly what Helen needed: language. Annie Sullivan would change Helen Keller's life forever. Paul VI Catholic High School told her incredible story in "The Miracle Worker."

Written by William Gibson, "The Miracle Worker" premiered on Broadway in 1959 and enjoyed a revival in 2010, receiving critical praise. It was also adapted into a 1962 film. The play follows the early life of

Helen Keller, who has been deaf and blind since infancy, and as a result is completely nonverbal. Helen's parents, the traditional patriarch captain and his softer wife Kate, have spoiled Helen, allowing her to take over the household with her tantrums. After years of chaos, captain and Kate contact the Perkins School for the Blind to find a governess and teacher for Helen. Annie Sullivan arrives by train a few days later. Shocked by Helen's lack of manners, Annie resolves to teach her to obey—and to understand language. Despite incredible struggle, after two weeks alone with Annie, Helen experiences a breakthrough when she comes to recognize that the word "water" she can spell with her hand corresponds to the actual water she touches.

Even with no spoken lines, Isabella Whitfield brought incredible depth to Helen Keller. Immersive and realistic, her frightening tantrums and sudden transformation revealed solid commitment. Opposite her, Abigail Rozmajzl embodied the stubborn

Annie Sullivan. From her first encounter with Helen, Rozmajzl established the monumental difficulty of her task and her inner conflict over her dead brother Jimmie. Whitfield and Rozmajzl cleanly executed numerous difficult fight scenes, further enhancing their engaging performances.

As Captain Keller, Nathaniel Smith boasted an imposing stage presence and stoic expression. His fierce demeanor contrasted perfectly with the more gentle nature of Kate (Madelene Whitfield). Meanwhile, Joey Arzeno created a volatile relationship within the family as James. Arzeno captured the pained obstinacy of his character, adding both valuable comic quips and explosive moments of frustration.

While some scenes could have been more poignant in a darker setting, overall lighting clarified scene transitions and greatly strengthened the show's emotional atmosphere. Make-up, which included life-like mustache and goatee pieces, tooth blacken-



PHOTO BY BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

Rehearsing a scene in "The Miracle Worker" at Paul VI Catholic High School are (clockwise from top) Luke Knodt, Sarah Giuseppe, Isabella Whitfield and Maddy Whitfield.

ing and diseased eye shadow for the decrepit crones, and subtle age lines for several characters, allowed actors to come to life on stage. An ensemble of costumed servants served as the show's tech crew, creating nuanced characters, including a memorable senile old man (Tommy Kelleher), while moving set pieces safely

and quickly.

"When we do the best that we can, we never know what miracle is wrought in our life, or in the life of another." Paul VI Catholic High School certainly fulfilled Helen Keller's words in their near miraculous production, bringing many in the audience to tears.

ENTERTAINMENT

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.

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 SUNDAY/FEB. 8, 2015

Dressing for the Occasion: An Exhibition of Costumes and Textiles Representing Fairfax Personalities and Events. Exhibition. Fairfax Museum & Visitor Center, 10209 Main Street, Fairfax. Open daily 9 a.m.-5 p.m. 703-385-8414.

THROUGH MONDAY/FEB. 9, 2015

"Synesthetic Landscapes." Jewish Community Center of Northern Virginia, 8900 Little River Turnpike, Fairfax. 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. Showcase artists: Marcia Gordon, "Gems by Meg;" Piper Strong, Metal Works/Judaica; and Joyce Zipperer, metal sculptor/mixed media/metal shoes and jewelry. www.jccnvarts.org.

WEDNESDAY-THURSDAY/DEC. 17-18

Moscow Ballet's Great Russian Nutcracker. 7 p.m. George Mason University Center for the Arts, 4400 University Drive, Fairfax. Moscow Ballet's classic Great Russian Nutcracker returns! <http://cfa.gmu.edu/>

WEDNESDAY-FRIDAY/DEC. 17-19

Christmas Book Sale. 6-8 p.m. The Franconia Museum, 6121 Franconia Road, Alexandria. A special Christmas book sale to purchase gifts. There will also be used books for sale (hard backs \$1 and paper backs 50 cents and DVDs for \$2). The Franconia Remembers books will also be on sale if you want to complete your collection.

WEDNESDAY/DEC. 17

PJ Library Book Buddies. 10:30 a.m. Burke Centre Library, 5935 Freds



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.

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.

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.

THURSDAY/DEC. 18

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.

Tales to Tails. 4:30 p.m. City of Fairfax Regional Library, 10360 North Street, Fairfax. Need practice reading? Read aloud to a friendly, trained therapy dog. Ages 6-12.

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

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

Christmas in Vienna. Saturday: 8 p.m. Sunday: 4 p.m. George Mason University, 4400 University Drive, Fairfax. Few experiences capture the wonder and the magic of the holiday season quite like the Vienna Boys Choir, who bring their angelic voices to George Mason University's Center for the Arts in Fairfax to perform a spirited Christmas concert of ancient hymns, traditional carols, popular holiday favorites and songs from around the world. Tickets: \$30-\$50. Visit the box office (open Tuesday

through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.) or charge by phone at 888-945-2468 or visit cfa.gmu.edu.

SATURDAY/DEC. 20

A Christmas Carol. 7 p.m. Art Room, Stacy C. Sherwood Community Center, 3740 Old Lee Highway, Fairfax. Solo performance. NYC actor / playwright, Greg Oliver Bodine performs his one-man performance of Charles Dickens. Children over 10 and adults. General admission \$15 / \$10 Seniors and Students. www.artful.ly/store/events/4306.

SUNDAY/DEC. 21

Light Up the Night: Community Menorah Lighting at Mosaic District. 4:30pm-6:30 p.m. Mosaic District, 2910 District Avenue, Fairfax. Join the community as they celebrate the holiday together by lighting candles, singing songs, enjoying entertainment, eating sufganiyot (donuts) and gelt (chocolates) and spinning the dreidel (top). Contact Laurie.Albert@jccnv.org or visit www.jccnv.org for more information.

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>.

MONDAY/DEC. 22

Pohick Prose Society For Teens. 7 p.m. Pohick Library, 6450 Sydenstricker Road, Burke. Age 13-18 will discuss their favorite books.

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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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NOTE: Objections to the issuance of this license must be submitted to ABC no later than 30 days from the publishing date of the first of two required newspaper legal notices. objections should be registered at www.abc.virginia.gov or 800-552-3200.

ABC LICENSE
TRG Westfield LLC, trading as Fosters Grille, 5007 Westone Plz, Chantilly, VA 20151. The above establishment is applying to the VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE CONTROL (ABC) for a Wine and Beer on and off Premises license to sell or manufacture alcoholic beverages. Jeremy Topper, Member
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Cellco Partnership and its controlled affiliates doing business as Verizon Wireless (Verizon Wireless) proposes to collocate wireless communications antennas at a top height of 30 feet on a 30-foot building façade at the approx. vicinity of 7210 Old Keene Mill Road, Springfield, Fairfax County, VA 22150. Public comments regarding potential effects from this site on historic properties may be submitted within 30 days from the date of this publication to: Trileaf Corp, Kaitlin, k.abrams@trileaf.com, 8600 LaSalle Road, Suite 301, Towson, MD 21286, 410-853-7128."

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-Ethiopian Proverb

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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.

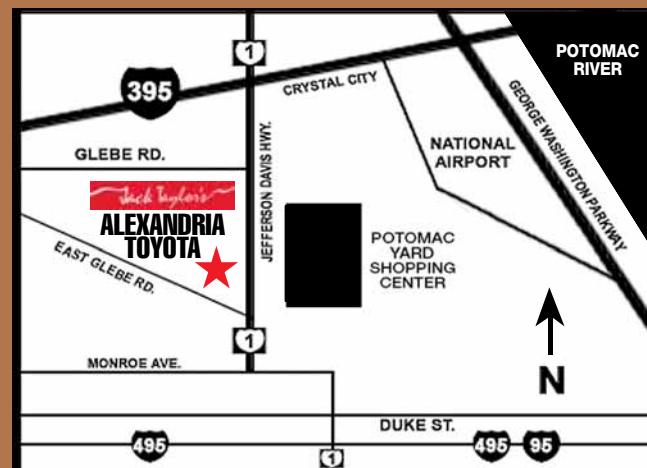
T.C. Williams improved to 3-2 with a victory on Saturday. The Titans will host South County at 5:45 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 19.

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HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

Doodlehopper Sells Toys that Enlighten

BY STEVE HIBBARD
THE CONNECTION

For toys, books, and baby and toddler gifts that tend to enlighten the child this holiday season, be sure to check out Doodlehopper 4 Kids, located in the Huntsman Square Shopping Center off of the Fairfax County Parkway in Springfield.

Owned by Terry and Phil Young of Arlington and in business for 22 years, Doodlehopper carries more engaging, inspiring, educational and learning toys rather than video or electronic games. The store selection includes everything from small stocking-stuffers like marbles and Mini Flyers for \$19.99 to life-sized stuffed animal tigers for \$79.99.

Other stocking stuffers include Thinking Putty, a rendition of Silly Putty in styles like glow-in-the dark, super magnetic, and heat-sensitive hyper colors for \$14.99; Mixels or Lego character monsters that you build for \$5.99; and Lego mini figures for \$4.99 for the Series 12.

Their products are geared towards baby ages through tweens (ages 10-12), says Ryan Bowden, 28, assistant manager. "We carry mostly a lot of active toys that you have to get up and play with," he said. "We carry toys that feed the imagination — like pretend dress up toys and fake food."

Fantasy butterfly wings are \$17.99, and the whimsical masks are \$8.99. Kids can take on the role of a chef with New Sprouts fresh-picked fruit and veggie tote that sells for \$29.99 (for ages 2-plus). Or nurses in training can get the Role Play Pediatric Nurse uniform for \$29.99.

What's popular this year are magnetic building blocks made by Magna-Tiles (32 pieces for \$52.99). Built a little more flexible than Legos, Magna-Tiles are designed for kids who like to build things, said Bowden.

ANOTHER HOT ITEM is The Melissa and Doug Felt Playfood (sandwich set for \$22.99), which is play food made of felt that sort of sticks together. "It's a great way to introduce a child to a variety of foods, and travel friendly too," said Bowden.

As an intro to human anatomy, the Squishy Human Body Set made by Smart Lab (\$29.99) comes with a squishy toy human and a book that explains what the organs of the body do. It's popular for boys and girls, and a fun introduction to anatomy, said Bowden.

One of the top 10 most popular items in the store is a game called Spot It, The "Frozen" Alphabet edition (\$16.99), which is geared for ages 3-8. The cards includes pictures, letters and characters from the movie, "Frozen," and will teach the alphabet while kids play. It's great for those who might not know all of the alphabet, and is very travel friendly.

For science and engineering toys for girls, the Goldie Blox Girl Inventor, Zipline Action Figure (\$24.99) comes with a zipline that you attach to a banister or table. It il-



A selection of popular toys from Doodlehopper 4 Kids of Springfield.



Doodlehopper 4 Kids assistant manager Ryan Bowden.



Doodlehopper store employees (from left): Angela Shook, Wysteria Cerva and Ryan Bowden.

lustrates points in science while also being fun for girls ages 4 and up.

The Foxy Pillow by Plush Craft (\$16.99), popular for ages 5 and up, is a no-sew activity for girls who want to be crafty. You use the stylus to push the fabric into the three-dimensional pillow. It has the feel of sewing without having to use a needle and thread, and comes in a dozen different styles, including a puppy dog, initials, and best friends pillow frame.

Another hot toy is the FM Radio Kit by Snap Circuits (\$25.99), for ages 8-108. It's

a simple science kit for making things like a radio; other brands are a flying saucer and a motion sensor. The pieces snap together like snaps on your clothing and it's geared towards kids interested in learning basic electrical circuits. With the pieces that come in the box, you can make other things like an electronic kazoo, a trombone and a power amplifier.

The Gravity Maze by ThinkFun (\$29.99) is a falling marble logic maze for ages 8 and up. This combines the fun of a marble run with the challenge of a logic game. It is a

single player game with four different levels of difficulty. Players pick a challenge card that shows how to set up pieces on the board, which pieces you need to add to solve the puzzle, and where the marble starts and where it needs to stop. The solution is on the back, in case you get stuck.

"I love this store because it has unique activities for children," said Joy Neyland of Springfield. "It has a wide variety of unique toys that you can't find in the big box stores."

"They have a lot of educational toys and the help here is fabulous," said Lynn Gayer of Fairfax Station. "They have a lot of these things that you have to put together; they're games but they teach you something."

"It's easy to find a cool birthday present," said Caroline Maso, age 11, of Fairfax, who was headed to a birthday party with the String Art kit.

"The service is wonderful," said Kitty Greenstein of Fairfax. "You can get things wrapped; very few places will do that for you."

"We come here because they have toys that kids like," said Chris Lo Grasso of Fairfax. "Any toys we purchase here it's a safe bet for gifts or kids."

THE 2,000-SQUARE-FOOT Doodlehopper 4 Kids is located at 7521 Huntsman Blvd., Springfield VA 22153, in the Huntsman Square Shopping Center off the Fairfax County Parkway. There is a second store, Doodlehopper Too, at 234 W. Broad Street, Falls Church, VA 22046. To shop online, visit www.doodlehopper.com or call 703-912-7200. The email is doodlehopper4kids@gmail.com.

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