

Garza's Vision for County Schools

NEWS, PAGE 8

Where Wishes Come True

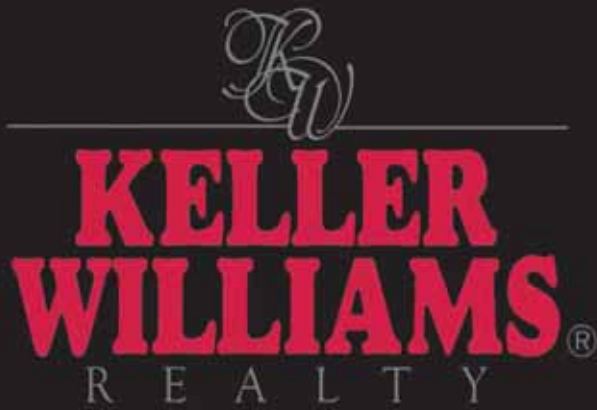
NEWS, PAGE 4

Ginger Mahon has organized the Wish List project from her home in Great Falls for 15 years. Teens and children in area shelters will get their holiday wishes granted.

OPINION, PAGE 6 ♦ ENTERTAINMENT, PAGE 10 ♦ CLASSIFIEDS, PAGE 14 ♦ SPORTS, PAGE 12

PHOTO BY REENA SINGH/THE CONNECTION





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LO8329961 - \$355,000 -
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The Old Brogue is located at the corner of Georgetown Pike and Walker Road in Great Falls.

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Celebrate Great Falls intern Mike Stys and director Erin Lobato at the information booth during the Concerts on the Green this summer. The group got a rise in volunteer support later in the year.



The candles lit after the Great Falls 9/11 memorial ceremony.

PHOTOS BY REENA SINGH/THE CONNECTION

2014 in Great Falls: A Year in Review

Groundwater contamination and a swell in volunteerism.

BY REENA SINGH
THE CONNECTION

In the past year, the village has gone through changes that will impact the future of the community.

2014 in Great Falls saw an uptick of volunteer support, walkability in the village center and a corrective action plan for the Methyl tert-butyl ether (MTBE) groundwater contamination.

"I feel like we saw our volunteer base start to grow, and that's an important thing," said Erin Lobato, director for Celebrate Great Falls (CGF).

Earlier this year, the same group of volunteers would be at all the events from dusk until dawn making sure they were setup and then broken down. However, more people are beginning to get involved ever since the Independence Day fireworks were canceled this year due to lack of volunteers.

Several Boy Scout troops have gotten involved in the events as well.

"I love the fact that younger people are getting involved, because it shows them how important connectivity is in the community," said Lobato.

THIS YEAR was the first year CGF started its adults only wine tasting - an event Lobato said was a smashing hit and will happen again in February, becoming another annual event in the village.

"We had our first winter wine tasting at River Bend," she said. "It generated a lot of buzz early on. We sold out tickets a week before the event."



Great Falls Citizens Association President Eric Knudsen stands on the nearly completed project site for the "Walker Road Diet" in late March.

She said the event became a way for neighbors and friends to catch up with one another.

"I think it will be a nice new tradition to look forward to in the dead of winter," she said.

Another change that resulted in connectivity was the Walker Road diet - reducing the lanes on Walker Road to add streetside parking and create better walkability in the



Great Falls Citizens Association member Glen Sjoblom speaks during the public discussion about groundwater contamination in November.

village center.

"It brought the two halves of the village together," said Great Falls Citizens Association Vice President Bill Canis. "We're putting the walk back into Walker."

According to GFCA Communications Coordinator Phil Pifer, many people felt uncomfortable crossing the street to head either to the shopping center or the village green.

"The traffic was out of control," he said. "Very fast."

In addition to creating more walkability with the zebra crossing, the speed limit was reduced to make sure vehicles were traveling at a safe speed through the area.

Big changes are happening under Walker Road as well. In November, GFCA called on Kleinfelder to tell the residents how they plan to speed up the MTBE cleanup. MTBE is an odorless liquid suspended in gasoline that has inconclusive tests on whether it is a carcinogen.

However, about 80 percent of the village residents are on a well water system and what they do know is that the State Department of Environmental Quality has a zero tolerance policy for it.

"It's still a work in progress," said Pifer.

He said the board has worked hard over the last few years to get a corrective action plan going after years of studies.

"I think it's momentous, because we are a well-based community," said Canis. "Very few communities go toe-to-toe with the state. We pushed the envelope in ways that would have never happened otherwise."

ON THE TECHNOLOGY FRONT, the citizens association also launched a new website, lead by Pifer, to create better communication between the civic group and the community.

More ways to communicate via the website will be unveiled further next year as social media begins to be a resource.

"The point is to create a more effective communications vehicle for us," said Pifer. "This allows for more two-way dialogue."



Ginger Mahon has organized the Wish List project from her home for 15 years.



Laila, Sara and Jazlyn Afshartous brought gifts from The Boyd School in Chantilly.

PHOTOS BY REENA SINGH/THE CONNECTION

Wish List Gathers 350 Gifts

Teens and children in shelters will get their holiday wishes granted.

BY REENA SINGH
THE CONNECTION

Every year in mid-December, Ginger Mahon's home looks like Santa's workshop.

Gifts wrapped in holiday-themed paper and bright bows for more than 300 displaced children and teens piled high as donors for the Wish List Project came to the Great Falls resident's home on Dec. 13 - and found a holiday party to thank them for their help waiting for them.

"This is miracle day," said Mahon.

For the 15th year of the project, she attempted to bring gifts to more underprivileged kids than ever - including 75 teens at Fairfax County Foster Care (FCFC). She said that there are only five children whose wishes weren't fulfilled - but she plans to make sure Santa visits every one on her list.

"Tomorrow, when the volunteers come over, we'll put together very personalized gift cards," she said. "When they open those cards, they'll know that someone is thinking of them."

In addition to FCFC, gifts will be donated to Reston's Embry Rucker shelter, Falls Church's Patrick Henry Family Shelter, Hyattsville's St. Anne's Center for Children, Fairfax's Katherine Hanley Family Shelter, Herndon's Artemis House Domestic Violence Shelter and Mahon's own Wish List Education Collection.

Every year, Mahon creates a list on Sign Up Genius and emails a link to potential donors. Everyone who puts together a package for a child or teenager gets to partake in the donation party. Everyone who entered the house was greeted by a hearty hug from Mahon herself and told they could not leave before helping themselves to some food and wine.

The donations, which were going to five different shelters throughout the county, were directed either to her basement or garage. In the garage, more than a dozen green and red storage bins were marked for specific families so Mahon could stay orga-

nized when she dropped off the gifts.

"This is what I do best," she said. "It's how I keep my sanity."

Gifts ranged from the latest Frozen-themed toys to bigger items like bicycles and a Barbie Dreamhouse.

"It's amazing," said Embry Rucker Shelter volunteer manager Susan Alger. "It's re-energizing because you see how generous the community is every year."

Alger said the shelter helps more than 1,000 children in the community and that no other single person other than Mahon helps to organize an operation of this size.

She said that there is no place to store the donations that come from all ends of the county - not just from Mahon - so the volunteers put them in the family's room to open over the holidays.

"They're in a high state of excitement and energy," she said. "For some of them, it's probably the nicest Christmas they're going to have."

Kesha Willis, marketing and communications manager for Shelter House, echoed Alger's sentiments.

"This is what this time of year is all about," she said.



Alex and Cathy Cooper, Great Falls, are regular donors of the Wish List Project.

This is Willis' first year with Shelter House - and the first time she has seen the magnitude of the Wish List Project.

"I am amazed, and it renews that spirit in you about human nature," she said. "I think it's amazing what she does. She's made it into such a community event."

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.

WEEK IN GREAT FALLS

Senior Center Event to Focus on Civil War in Fairfax County

The Great Falls Senior Center (GFSC) event for Jan. 6 will focus on interesting incidents of the Civil War in Fairfax County. Returning guest speaker Don Hakenson has spent countless years researching obscure Civil War incidents and sites in Fairfax County, especially regarding the confederate guerilla chieftain Colonel John S. Mosby and his rangers. Hakenson is a past president of the Stuart-Mosby Historical Society, founder and member of the Board of Directors for the Franconia Museum and is a civil war advisor for the Mosby Foundation. Hakenson is a Washington, D.C. native who has lived most of his life in Fairfax County.

The Jan. 6 event will be held at St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Church, 1020 Springvale Road, Great Falls. The program runs 11 a.m.-1:30 p.m. and includes lunch. A modest contribution is appreciated. The event sponsor is the Dr. and Mrs. William M. Busey Family. Reservations are a must. To reserve email Polly Fitzgerald at pollyfitz1@verizon.net or call 703-759-4345 you may leave a message.

BULLETIN BOARD

MONDAY/DEC. 29

New Voting Equipment

Demonstration. 11 a.m. Great Falls Library, 9830 Georgetown Pike, Great Falls. Staff from the Fairfax County Office of Elections will provide an opportunity to see and try out the brand new voting machines as well as provide an opportunity for photo ID processing and voter registration.

Spanish Conversation Group. 1 p.m. Great Falls Library, 9830 Georgetown Pike, Great Falls. Practice Spanish as a foreign language in this conversation group.

TUESDAY/DEC. 30

Adults Improve Your English

Skills. 11a.m. Dolley Madison Library, 1244 Oak Ridge Avenue, McLean. Free focused help with reading, writing, speaking and listening.

New Voting Equipment

Demonstration. 4p.m. Dolley Madison Library, 1244 Oak Ridge Avenue, McLean. Fairfax County Office of Elections staff will process your photo ID and voter registration through the brand-new voting machine.

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OPINION

Merry Christmas

A message of peace and joy.

Merry Christmas. It's a magical time of year, and perhaps Connection Newspapers has over indulged in displaying the many rituals of Christmas on our pages in the past few weeks. In events around the area, a sense of community has infused holiday parades, Christmas tree lightings, menorah lightings, choral performances, singing of carols and other traditional events with warmth and joy.

We have covered performances of "The Nutcracker" and "A Christmas Carol;" covered acts of compassion and giving in almost every corner of our communities; photographed Santa in so many places arriving in so many ways — by boat at Lake Anne in Reston, by firetruck in Vienna and McLean and other places, by motorcycle around Fairfax County; religious celebrations of many kinds; gift indulgences of many kinds.

But Christmas is about the birth of Jesus Christ. Whether you believe the Christmas story literally or in spirit, you know it is the story of joy, hope and love, the promise of redemption. So here, let us share the verse from the Bible, Luke 2: 4-19:

"So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the

house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

"And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.' Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.'

"When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.' So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the

manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."

Happy Hanukkah

Happy Hanukkah, which lasts for eight days and this year began Tuesday evening. While Hanukkah is not one of the most important Jewish religious observances, it is a celebration that gets added attention from timing. Hanukkah celebrates the miracle of a one day supply of oil for the temple lasting eight days.

Editor's Note about the Rest of 2014

This is our last regular edition of 2014. Next week, after Christmas, we will publish the children's edition, devoted entirely to the artwork and writing of local students. Our next regular editions will publish Jan. 7-8, 2015, with deadline for content and advertising of Jan. 2. In the meantime you can reach the editors at editors@connectionnewspapers.com and sales/marketing at sales@connectionnewspaper.com.

— MARY KIMM

MKIMM@CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

EDITORIAL

Do Fairfax County Police Act with Impunity?

Fifteen months, after the shooting of John Geer, no officer has been identified, no charges have been filed, no grand jury has been convened.

BY JEFF STEWART

I would like to begin by saying that I have always and still do support the police as a whole. I appreciate the job that they do and the risks they take on a daily basis in an effort to keep the public safe. The ongoing policy in Fairfax County of police self-investigation, when officers are involved in possible crimes, has to change.

I am willing to bet that all of you have heard of Michael Brown and Ferguson Missouri? How many of you have heard of John Geer? Probably not near as many. I would like to share a story about another life taken by police. It happened right here in Fairfax County over 15 months ago.

On Aug. 29, 2013 I witnessed the homicide of my best friend of over 25 years by a still unidentified Fairfax County police officer. Late that morning John had found out that his partner of 24 years and mother of his two children was moving out. John became distraught and began to throw some of her property in the front yard. One of John's daughters called their mom and she immediately came home from



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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)

work. After a heated discussion the police were called. John kissed his daughters and sent them to a neighbor's house. Nobody was in the home with John when police arrived. I arrived shortly after the police to find several officers on the scene. Two officers were holding John at gunpoint as he stood in the doorway of his home talking calmly with his empty hands resting on top of the storm door. John, feeling he had committed no crime, refused the officers' orders to come outside. The police were told that John owned firearms and reportedly he had expressed a willingness to use those firearms if the police tried to enter his home without a warrant. After around 40 minutes of what appeared to be calm conversation, John began to lower his hands almost deliberately slow, with his clearly empty palms pressed against the screen. I thought for a second that this confrontation was ending and John was coming out of the home. When John's empty hands were about even with his face, he was shot once in the chest from less than 20 feet. John had made no quick or aggressive moves of any kind and appeared to be no threat to police, to others or to himself. John quickly hunched over, grabbed his wound and retreated into the house. He

SEE POLICE, PAGE 15

Great Falls
CONNECTION

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LETTERS

Parisot will Stand with Vets

To the Editor:

Selfless service to our great country is the highest honor and privilege anyone can have, and it is an invaluable background for an elected officeholder to have. In the special election in Virginia House of Delegates District 34 for Barbara Comstock's previously held seat, the only candidate I trust to stand with and honor the promise we've made to my veteran community is our fellow service member, Captain Craig Parisot.

Captain Craig Parisot is a third-generation veteran who served in the U.S. Air Force. He understands the incredible sacrifices that all who have served have given and he will make sure that veterans'

needs are prioritized in Richmond. When I met Craig and shared with him that I had served in the U.S. Army, he thanked me for my service and retold me a story of the day he became a commissioned officer and the incredible amount of pride he felt that day knowing that he had committed his life to defending what is right for this country.

His commitment to his fellow veterans is admirable but I also believe he will be a principled legislator because of his strong belief in small government and fiscal responsibility. At a time when veterans services nationwide are stretched so thin and are so poorly administered, it is important that

Virginia's veterans support legislators who share an ideology of prudent governance as well as a service background.

Fellow veterans, families of those who have served or are currently serving, and all others living in Virginia's 34th House of Delegates district would be well served by Craig Parisot, a man who is not only dedicated to serving his country but who would be a dedicated public servant as well. On Jan. 6, you have the opportunity to vote for Capt. Parisot and ensure that Northern Virginia service members and military families have a voice in Richmond.

Mike Trader
Great Falls

Thankful for Support

To the Editor:

To the McLean, Vienna and Great Falls communities: The Woman's Club of McLean would like to express its gratitude for supporting the club's 48th annual Holiday Homes Tour and its MarketPlace. Preliminary esti-

mates show that the two events successfully met our goals of providing essential support to local charities and nonprofits. The proceeds will be especially meaningful in this time of general need, which is felt most strongly in the holiday season.

Thank you again for your generous support. Best wishes to all for the holidays and a fulfilling new year.

Mildred Thompson
President of Woman's Club of McLean

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AFTER



BEFORE

AFTER



Before



After

BEFORE

AFTER



BEFORE

AFTER



PROFILE

How Does She Do It?

Karen Garza's vision: the irresistible force moving the immovable object of Fairfax County Public Schools?

BY TIM PETERSON & EDEN BROWN
THE CONNECTION

Karen Garza is a good listener. And once she's listened, she is, admittedly, not very patient. "If there's a real issue, I don't think it has to be debated for 10 or 15 years," Garza said in an interview. "Either we're going to do something about it or not."
In May and June 2014, less than 12 months after taking the helm as superintendent of Fairfax County Public Schools, Garza and her staff hosted eight community meetings on the topic of later start times for high schools. According to FCPS, 1,000 people participated in person, another 2,000 weighed in online.



PHOTO BY ALEX McVEIGH



Dr. Karen Garza, incoming FCPS Superintendent and Dr. Daniel Domenech, former FCPS Superintendent, both in robes at Bryant Alternative School graduation, June 13, 2013, where Domenech was the graduation speaker.

PHOTO BY RENEE RUGGLES



Superintendent Karen Garza shares a moment with Debbie Kilpatrick, president of Fairfax County Council of PTAs at the Listening Tour on Dec. 6.

PHOTO BY EDEN BROWN/ THE CONNECTION



Senior Robyn Smith explains Active Minds while Lindsay Laiks, Rachel Chalkley, Karen Garza and Kim Dockery listen at a March 2014 assembly at Woodson High School. More than 1,100 people gathered for comfort and advice in the aftermath of two student deaths.

PHOTO BY BONNIE HONORS

Bio

KAREN GARZA

Current Position: Fairfax County Public Schools Superintendent
Salary: \$265,000
Age: 51
Hometown: Canyon, Texas
Spouse: Louis Garza
Children: Four, grown
Education: Ph.D., University of Texas-Austin, May 2002; M.Ed., University of Houston-Victoria, May 1994; B.S., University of Houston-Victoria, 1986.



schools. "It's my view that to better align a large system, you have to narrow the number of people at the highest levels making the decisions," Garza said. "I can create stronger, better alignment with five people than I can with eight people."
One of Garza's hires was Marty Smith as chief of staff, to whom she delegated the lead role on full-day Mondays. Smith was previously the superintendent of Cluster 1.

"He understands and knows the system," said Garza. "He knows the players, the right people to bring to the table to get it done. And he's a good listener, which I appreciate."
"The biggest thing with Dr Garza is trust," said Smith. "She places a lot in the individuals who work for her. While I carried out her vision, she was able to really build consensus with the board in terms of an individual approach. She did much of the same with teacher and principal associations."

Even with a streamlined and realigned support team, "Obviously Dr. Garza is the CEO for them to execute the vision," said Moon. To be a passionate captain of the ship, Garza is motivated by her lifelong love of schools and learning. She started her career as an elementary school teacher, aspiring to be like her father, a college English professor.

"I love being in classrooms, and I'm amazed at how gifted our students are," said Garza. "I'm very mindful of the fact that we have such an opportunity for a positive impact on students' lives. I try to never lose sight of the fact not only are you setting students up for success at that next level, but in many cases making a memory. Make it a positive one."

Hone said the teacher in Garza is apparent and one key to her current success. "Everything she does, it's how a teacher approaches things," Hone said. "It's clear, explained, pulling people in instead of telling them what to do. That dictatorship thing doesn't work. There's always someone run-

ning a rebellion."
Garza will be tested when she and the board tackle the \$63.9 million deficit she projected for FY2016 — and it gets worse in FY2017.

"She is such a good diplomat and everyone likes her," said Fairfax County Federation of Teachers President Steven Greenburg. "But there is an expectation on the part of some stakeholders that she will generate revenue and hold county or state officials accountable for the decisions they take. The only thing that would limit what she wants to accomplish is lack of funds."
If she can manage the funds, Garza has a Texas-sized list of goals for the county.

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Schools Need Community's Help

Superintendent Karen Garza begins and ends her Listening Tour meetings with a plea to those in the room — parents, teachers, employees, unions — to help her achieve what needs to be done for their school system.

"I am going to need your help," she says to audiences who voice concerns about class size, resources for special education, and teacher salaries.

Garza says she hopes to have a lot more people engaged during the budget process this spring. "Come and testify. Talk with your Board of Supervisors at those meetings. It's usually filled with folks. But we need a lot more parents and advocates for our public schools to be in that room."

Garza explains: "We grow by 17-20 students every single day. We have grown by 20,000 students in six years. This is a huge strain on our budget. We spend \$25 million a year to support new students. We aren't happy with teacher salaries. We need to help people in our area understand our budget. Help us as we enter this next budget year."

"Read our 'Citizens Guide'," says Garza. "There's lots of good information in there to help people understand how the system works and how they can help. This year it includes a section on why your year-end balance ends up

being what it is. The more we can get people to read that document, the more people will follow how the system works and make solid inputs. "We need to get more business and community leaders to understand: Poverty is growing, our county is definitely changing. We started some outreach this year with our superintendent round-tables."

The president of the Fairfax County Council of PTAs, Debbie Kilpatrick, underlined the need for more community involvement: "Karen Garza cannot do this on her own. Parents need to get more involved so they know what they can do to support Garza and their schools. They should look at the websites, come to PTA meetings, know what the issues are and vote on them. Can she get smaller classrooms achieved? If she says it, she will do it. But she will need help."

Steven Greenburg, president of Fairfax County Federation of Teachers, echoed Garza's plea. "Do we know as a group of people, as average citizens living in Fairfax County, how to take action? If this community sees value in education then voters have to make their views known. Karen Garza won't get what she wants without more involvement by the community," Greenburg said. "People will have to reach out to public officials and let them know where the voters stand."

Among them are making the compensation for teachers more competitive with nearby jurisdictions, developing a strategic plan for redesigning the curriculum to be more project- and problem solving-based, reducing class size, bringing technology to more students and doubling the availability of Pre-K/Kindergarten to qualifying students.

To address the funding, another priority is mobilizing support from businesses in the school system's communities. Garza said the FCPS Foundation, under a new yet-to-be-named executive director, will drive support from that relatively untapped resource.

"I'm hoping we're able to garner a lot more support from our business community," she said, "at least in those areas that can help us be more innovative with technology education."

ning a rebellion."

Garza will be tested when she and the board tackle the \$63.9 million deficit she projected for FY2016 — and it gets worse in FY2017.

"She is such a good diplomat and everyone likes her," said Fairfax County Federation of Teachers President Steven Greenburg. "But there is an expectation on the part of some stakeholders that she will generate revenue and hold county or state officials accountable for the decisions they take. The only thing that would limit what she wants to accomplish is lack of funds."

If she can manage the funds, Garza has a Texas-sized list of goals for the county.

The Road to Fairfax County

A timeline of Superintendent Karen Garza's career in education.

GRAPHICS BY LAURENCE FOONG/ THE CONNECTION

- 1 1986-1991:** Elementary School Teacher, Yoakum, Texas (1,539 students, 38% white and 50% Latino and spends about \$8,000 per pupil).
- 2 July 1991-1994:** Education Specialist, Region III Education Service Center, Victoria, Texas. Victoria ISD has 13,680 students and spends about \$7,500 per pupil annually.
- 3 July 1994-July 1996:** Principal, East Side Elementary School grades 5-6, Palacios Independent School District (ISD), Palacios, Texas (1,508 students, \$10,269 per student, 68% economically disadvantaged).
- 4 July 1996-July 1997:** Curriculum Supervisor K-12, El Campo ISD, El Campo, Texas (3,465 students, \$9,735 per student, 67% economically disadvantaged).
- 5 July 1997-July 1999:** Associate Executive Director for Governmental Relations, Texas Association of School Administrators.
- 6 July 1999-October 2002:** Executive Director for Curriculum, Staff Development, and Accountability, Katy ISD, Katy, Texas (58,444 students, \$7,740 per student, 29% disadvantaged).
- 7 October 2002-August 2004:** Associate Executive Director for Governmental Relations, Texas Association of School Administrators.
- 8 August 2004-June 2005:** Deputy Superintendent, Corpus Christi ISD, Corpus Christi, Texas (38,041 students, spends \$8,240, 68% disadvantaged).
- 9 June 2005-July 2009:** Chief Academic Officer, Houston ISD, Houston, Texas. (200,944 students, \$9,231 per student, 80% disadvantaged).
- 10 July 2009-June 2013:** Superintendent of Schools, Lubbock ISD, Lubbock, Texas (28,476 students, \$8,163 per student, 62% disadvantaged).
- 11 July 2013-present:** Fairfax County Public Schools Superintendent, Fairfax County Public Schools (186,785 students, \$16,880 per student, 26.4% free/reduced price meal eligible).

Sources: Fairfax County Public Schools, Washington Area Boards of Education, Texas Tribune

New Fairfax County Public Schools Superintendent Karen Garza speaks to parents and teachers at Sunrise Valley Elementary School Monday, Oct. 28, 2013.

tously been removed from the viewpoint and perspective of the community. That was key in our hiring of Karen. We were looking for someone who could bring the community back into the fold."

FORMER FCPS Superintendent Daniel Domenech still lives in Fairfax County, and his perspective differs somewhat from McElveen. "It didn't seem to me there was a distance with [Garza's predecessor] Jack Dale," he said. "I always felt that Fairfax as a school system was very responsive to the community, very much in tune with what's going on."

The two men agree that community involvement is crucial to moving the school system forward. In a county of 180,000 students that's growing by 17 a day (according to Garza), that's a lot of parents with a lot of voices to listen to.

Debbie Kilpatrick, vice president of membership with Virginia PTA, is impressed so far with Garza being "inclusive" and having "contagious high energy."

with the public first. "There was this sense there were members of the School Board who said they don't want to meet with people who disagreed with them," she said. "It takes courage to be a problem-solver,"

formance Pay initiative. "I had decided we'd do this, but honestly, I had no idea how to do it. Ordinarily I'd put it under HR but they weren't moving fast enough. Karen quickly took ownership. Of course I didn't have to ask Karen to take ownership," he said laughing. "This thing wasn't moving and she stepped up to the plate. It was tied to academics, so she figured she could do it as well as the HR folks could, and she did. That program continues today and is why Houston did so well. "

Saavedra was referring to the district's educational improvement and performance management model, called ASPIRE (Accelerating Student Progress. Increasing Results and Expectations). The ASPIRE program paid over 18,000 teachers and instructional staff more than \$70 million in performance bonuses over three years based on the academic improvement of children.

"She has a schedule not many people could keep up with and she really doesn't say no to anyone who wants her time," said Kilpatrick. "On the contrary, she says, 'No, I want to listen.'"

Tina Hone, a School Board member from 2007 to 2011 and founder of the advocacy group Coalition of the Silence, disagreed with Garza over her first budget proposal for the county.

"We had a little crossing of swords," said Hone. "What I really respect about Karen: I publicly made a statement, then she called me. I looked at the phone, pulled it away from my head and looked at it again. I was blown away by that."

Hone sees Garza in stark contrast to previous FCPS leadership that exhibited "very much an effort to control rather than respond." She cited the controversial closing of Clifton Elementary School in June 2011, when she said the board did little to consult

with the public first. "There was this sense there were members of the School Board who said they don't want to meet with people who disagreed with them," she said. "It takes courage to be a problem-solver,"

with the public first. "There was this sense there were members of the School Board who said they don't want to meet with people who disagreed with them," she said. "It takes courage to be a problem-solver,"

After Garza's first year, the average reading scores of HSD students on the SAT test increased five points while the Texas and national averages fell.

Saavedra noted that one of the most unusual things about Garza was her relationship with the Houston Chief Financial Officer Melinda Garrett. "Usually in those jobs," Saavedra said, "there are silos formed between the financial folks and the academic folks. Not between Garza and Garrett. They became good friends and worked together to make positive changes happen."

Garrett confirmed Garza's achievements: "People in Texas miss her but realize Texas' loss is Virginia's gain. They were all happy she got this major superintendent's job. It is something she really wanted and deserved. She will be great for Fairfax. She is not afraid to make decisions. She always has her hand on the pulse of the people she is working with."

Hone continued, "to try to turn the ship against the tide, with courage and grace to get this stuff done."

That courage, grace and increased input from the community are helping Garza get traction on the issues she prioritizes with the School Board, still in its honeymoon phase with Garza.

"We are all happy with her, the board members," said at-large member Ilryong Moon. "I can say that with confidence. We made a right decision bringing her to Fairfax. She's been helping the members to look at issues in a certain perspective that we otherwise wouldn't have an opportunity to take advantage of."

Garrett noted that she and Garza shared the same background as school teachers; that love of working with children is something they both brought to their work in funding schools and making sound decisions for school districts.

In Lubbock

As Lubbock's Independent School District's superintendent, a job Garza held for four years before coming to Fairfax, her accomplishments include implementing a standardized curriculum for the 29,000-student district, focus on student achievement, and financial stability. She left LISD with the largest fund balance they had ever had and worked through some hard times with state funding, getting gains for teachers, students, and taxpayers. Garza helped lead the effort to win voter approval of a \$198 million bond in 2010, the largest bond in the district's history. As

BUT GARZA is not a one-woman show, and she attributes her accomplishments in part to the cabinet and administrative structure she realigned within her first year. Unlike most new superintendents, Garza brought zero staff with her from the Lone Star State. Instead, she spent her first fall and winter assessing the team she inherited, before reorganizing in the spring.

Garza nixed the old eight-cluster administration group in favor of five regions and split the department of Professional Learning and Accountability roles among other departments. This eliminated five staff positions and saved \$637,000, according to John Torre, public information officer for the

Lubbock superintendent, Garza narrowed the achievement gap, increased the graduation rate and helped reduce the number of students who drop out.

Linda DeLeon, a Fairfax County resident who had served as a school board member in Lubbock, was delighted to see Garza come to Fairfax. "She was asked by someone to attend one of Garza's early public hearings in Fairfax. When her name was announced to the group, Garza lifted her head and gave DeLeon a big smile: "Well, here is Linda, someone I knew from Lubbock." DeLeon had been a school board member for 18 years in Lubbock under five different superintendents (but not during Garza's tenure) and had kept track of the things Garza did while there.

She was impressed: "Karen Garza was up to the challenge. What made her positive was she was willing to sit with groups of people and have discus-

SPORTS

Parent Coaches Searching for Balance

Coaching one's own child can be stressful, rewarding.

By JON ROETMAN
THE CONNECTION

Keith A. Kaufman, Ph.D., a sport psychologist with offices in Washington, D.C. and Old Town Alexandria, said two potential issues stand out for a young athlete coached by a parent.

"I think two issues that jump out to me are the athlete feels like they can never escape talking about the sport," Kaufman said in a phone interview, "or they feel too much scrutiny or not enough; like they feel like they're treated differently [than other members of the team]."

Kaufman said "it's absolutely essential there are boundaries," when a parent is coaching his or her child, and it's important the child is treated in the same manner as his or her teammates. While each case is different, he said the relationship can be beneficial.

"I would say most coaches are harder on their own kids than they are on the regular kids," Madison assistant volleyball coach Christine Zanellato said. "We tend to point out when they mess up more than you would with another kid."

Zanellato and head coach Carrie Hall each have a daughter on the Madison volleyball team, which was one point away from capturing the VHSL 6A state championship in the fall. Zanellato coached her daughter, Natale, when she was young, but stopped when Natale was in middle school.

Their relationship had some rough spots. "When I was in [sixth] grade, I hated it," Natale said. "I would cry most nights. I would cry on the way home [from volleyball]. I was very sensitive. I would get a little upset when she would tell me to suck it up or do this and that. I wasn't as good with her criticism."

After a few years playing for other coaches, Natale started to appreciate her mom's volleyball knowledge. Zanellato played collegiately at LSU and coached the Fairfax High varsity from 2007-2011. When it came time for high school, Natale, who attended Lake Braddock as a freshman, wanted her mom as a coach. Zanellato joined the Bruins' staff as an assistant in 2012.

"I think what has worked out well for us is that we have a really solid relationship and she trusts that

when I am working to improve her skills, I'm looking at her as an athlete," Zanellato said. "My criticism is all based on what she needs to do on the court. It's not about her personally. I think that's the hardest thing [about being a parent/coach] is kids sometimes personalize the comments."

Natale would later transfer to Madison. After not playing high school volleyball her sophomore year, Natale joined the Warhawk varsity as a junior and was a key contributor at outside hitter for the 2014 state runners-up.

"I love working with my mom," Natale said. "I respect her. I know that she played great. She's a great coach. When I was younger, it was a little rougher. I was just like, 'I don't want to listen to you,' that kind of stuff. I respect her judgment and I respect what she's saying. I really respect her opinion. I love having her on the coaching staff."

Hall said she treats her daughter, Kendal, a standout junior setter for the Warhawks, no differently than any other member of the team.

"It's not hard to me at all," Hall said. "I've been here 14 years and to me it's about the program. ... It's the program first, then my daughter."

Hall said the two talk about volleyball at home, but don't discuss strategy.

"We talk about if we think we had a good game or not that night, but nothing too elaborate," Hall said. "... That way she's part of the team, I'm part of the coaching staff. She doesn't need to know anything that's going on."

Kendal said she's appreciative of her mom's volleyball knowledge.

"It's definitely nice," Kendal said, "coming home and having someone to talk to who definitely knows what they're doing."

Lansley football coach John Howerton started his sons on a path toward gridiron success at a young age. Jack, now a sophomore at Stetson University in DeLand, Fla., and Tyler, now a sophomore at Langley, started strength and skill training before the age of 10. However, they did not play organized football until high school.

Howerton, who was inducted into the Shepherd University athletic Hall of Fame after garnering All-American status as an offensive tackle, taught his sons the basic fundamentals of offensive line play, such as getting in a proper stance. He also showed them the basics of strength training, including 15-minute workouts with a lightweight aluminum pipe.

Jack earned all-state honors during his time at



Natale Zanellato, left, helped the Madison volleyball team finish state runner-up in the fall. Her mother, Christine Zanellato, is an assistant coach for the Warhawks.

PHOTOS BY CRAIG STERBUTZEL/THE CONNECTION



Madison head volleyball coach Carrie Hall's daughter, Kendal Hall, is a setter for the Warhawks.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Lansley offensive lineman Tyler Howerton, left, is seen as a freshman in 2013. His father, John Howerton, right, is the Langley head football coach and is a member of the Shepherd University athletic Hall of Fame. Tyler's grandfather, Cig Howerton, is a member of the Randolph-Macon Hall of Fame.

SEE PARENT COACHES, PAGE 15

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THROUGH WEDNESDAY/DEC. 24

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

Tysons Plaza Christmas Market. 1961 Chain Bridge Road, Tysons Corner. 11 a.m. - 9 p.m. Lured by the scent of roasting nuts, bratwurst, mulled cider, and baked goods, shoppers will also find an excellent selection of gifts, warm hats, leather, wood and other crafts. The market will close at 4 p.m. on Dec. 24.

THROUGH SUNDAY/DEC. 28

Holiday Model Train Display. 11 a.m. - 4 p.m. Colvin Run Mill, 10017 Colvin Run Road, Great Falls. Every Saturday and Sunday. Fun for all ages. Watch G-gauge trains wend their way through a miniature western town in the Colvin Run Barn. Free.

THROUGH SUNDAY/JAN. 4

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

Bull Run Festival of Lights & Holiday Village. 5:30-9:30 p.m. Bull Run Regional Park, Centreville. The Portal Wreath signifying the official start of the beautiful Bull Run Festival of Lights, this display has been part of the show since 2006. Each year a new ornament representing a display in the show will be added to this collection, and the portal wreath is the first in the series. Santa's Enchanted Lights, with over 40,000 animated lights set to music! This great feature is merely a fraction of what you'll find at this season's Festival of Lights. Admission: \$20 per car.

THROUGH TUESDAY/JAN. 6

Christmas at Mount Vernon. 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. George Washington's Mount Vernon, 3200 Mount Vernon Memorial Highway, Mount Vernon. Themed decorations (including 12 Christmas trees) and historical chocolate-making demonstrations will be offered. Tour the rarely-open third floor of the Mansion and learn how the Washingtons celebrated Christmas. In 1787, George Washington paid 18 shillings to bring a camel to Mount Vernon for the enjoyment of his guests. During Christmas at Mount Vernon, visitors can meet a camel on the grounds.

THROUGH SATURDAY/JAN. 31

Exhibit of Colorful Nutcrackers. 11 a.m. - 4 p.m. Closed on Tuesdays. Sully Historic Site, 3650 Historic Sully Way, Chantilly. See an amazing array of nutcrackers, both old and new, in a colorful case exhibit. Did you ever wonder where the craze for collecting nutcracker dolls came from? Nutcrackers have a fascinating history. The first nutcrackers were produced to crack nuts more effectively and the oldest known metal example, on exhibit in Tarent, Italy, is from the third or fourth century B.C. The Leavenworth



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Watch The Capitol Steps on 8 p.m. on Jan. 3 at The Alden, 1234 Ingleside Avenue, McLean. The Steps have never needed new material... they always have an endless supply just down the road! This show always sells out when McLean gathers to find out who will be the butt of bipartisan jokes this time. Tickets: \$35-\$45.

Nutcracker Museum in Leavenworth, Washington, shows a bronze Roman nutcracker dated between 200 B.C and 200 A.D. German nutcrackers, made as decorative pieces, were developed around 1500. Early nutcrackers were in the shapes of animals, birds and people. Later, they were made in the likeness of kings, soldiers, church leaders and ruling class figures. Fine wood carved nutcrackers were created across Europe, especially in France and England by the 15th and 16th centuries. Admission: \$7/adult, \$6/student, \$5/senior or child.

THROUGH WEDNESDAY/MARCH 11

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

FRIDAY/DEC. 26

Friday Morning with Rocknoceros. 10:30 a.m. Jammin' Java, 227 Maple Avenue East, Vienna. As every family with youngsters in the D.C. area already knows, Rocknoceros (pronounced like rhinoceros) is three guys: Coach Cotton, Williebob, and Boogie Woogie Bennie, who make wildly popular, award-winning music for the whole family. Admission: \$5.

SATURDAY/DEC. 27

Cars and Coffee. 7-9 a.m. 760 Walker Road, Great Falls. Early on Saturday mornings you'll find an amazing gathering of cool cars at Katie's Coffee House in Great Falls, Virginia. Antique, custom, hotrods, exotic, sports cars, they're all here.

Colvin Run Dance for Everyone

6:30-11:30 p.m. Colvin Run Community Hall, 10201 Colvin Run Road, Great Falls. DJ music mix of contemporary and classic dance music including west coast swing, east coast swing, hustle, Latin, country western 2-step, waltz and more. \$12 per person includes optional lesson, dance, soda and snacks.

TUESDAY/DEC. 30

Winter Science Workshop for Kids. 3:30 p.m. Great Falls Library, 9830 Georgetown Pike, Great Falls. Children will learn hands-on in this

iSchool workshop. Registration required for this event. Ages 8-12.

WEDNESDAY/DEC. 31

New Year's Eve in Entyse Wine Bar & Lounge. 9 p.m. to Midnight. The Ritz-Carlton, Tysons Corner, 1700 Tysons Boulevard, McLean. Celebrate the New Year with live musical entertainment provided by The Christopher Linman Jazz Ensemble and culinary delights. As the clock strikes midnight, welcome 2015 with a complimentary champagne toast. \$100 minimum food & beverage purchase per person.

First Night Vienna

7 p.m. - midnight. Town of Vienna, Church Street. A family-friendly New Year's Eve Celebration. Featuring music, food, kids entertainment, and more. Four free music venues, a dance party, glitter tattoos, face painting, arts & crafts, balloon twisting, fire pits, corn hole, s'mores, popcorn popping, hot chocolate, hot apple cider, party hats, and much much more.

Jammin' Java's Good Vibes New Year's Party Featuring Melodime

p.m. Jammin' Java, 227 Maple East Avenue, Vienna. MELODIME, a rock band that blends haunting bittersweet melodies with emotionally rich vocals atop a bed of Southern-flavored alt rock, is not like most bands. Tickets: \$25-\$35. https://jamminjava.com

SATURDAY/JAN. 3

The Capitol Steps. 8 p.m. The Alden, 1234 Ingleside Avenue, McLean. The Steps have never needed new material... they always have an endless supply just down the road! This show always sells out when McLean gathers to find out who will be the butt of bipartisan jokes this time. Tickets: \$35-\$45.

Cars and Coffee. 7-9 a.m. 760 Walker Road, Great Falls. Early on Saturday mornings you'll find an amazing gathering of cool cars at Katie's Coffee House in Great Falls, Virginia. Antique, custom, hotrods, exotic, sports cars, they're all here.

SUNDAY/JAN. 4

Chamber Music Concert. 3 p.m. The Alden, 1234 Ingleside Avenue, McLean. Free chamber music concerts cosponsored by the Music Friends of the Fairfax County Public Library and The Alden. All concerts are open to the public. Tickets are not required.

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Yoshiko Doherty enjoys the work she does but says that she still has a lot to learn.



Moses Rayo stands next to a painting he did of Venice, Italy.



Gail Péan is an artist and also teaches art.

Artists on the Green Showcase Their Work at Great Falls Library

PHOTOS BY MARISSA BEALE/THE CONNECTION

This winter, artists from the Artists on the Green Studio and Gallery in Great Falls will gather to showcase their work at Great Falls Library. The exhibit will go through January, and visitors can stop in to see impressive work by artists in their own backyard.

The exhibit features work by artists who all have a distinct style.

“We all scribble and come out very different,” said Leslie Anthony, one of the artists whose work was showcased on Thursday, Dec. 11.

“This is the first time we, as a group of artists, have been able to show our art outside the studio,” said Coty Dickson, another artist.

The Artists on the Green Studio and Gallery, located on Walker Road, is home to the creative whims of 12 local artists. Visitors are invited to stop by to view original paintings and to even take art classes. All of the artists have had some form of instruction, but many of them are also self-taught.

“I’m still learning,” said Yoshiko Doherty, an artist with the studio from Japan who does still-life paintings. “I have a long way to go, but it’s fun. It’s a great experience and all the artists get to know each other well.”

All of the artists are eager to share their work with visitors. Some of the artists are even using their work to bring attention to causes they care about.

“I do art with my nonprofit organization,” said Princess Aliyah, an artist, and also CEO of the Kashmir World Foundation, a nonprofit that strives to improve the lives of people and animals around the world. She brought three paintings to the show, one of which will be a trilogy piece. Art is also a way to be introspective. “I want to understand artists and physics through my artwork. It’s also an effort to understand myself.”

Gail Péan, on the other hand, drew inspiration for her art from what she saw during a trip to Italy. “I went to Puglia, Italy, for a summer vacation and stayed in a hotel called ‘La Sommita,’” said Péan. One of her paintings at the exhibit featured the picturesque hotel, while another showed the Adriatic Sea. The final of the three paintings she brought was titled “Vineyard Dance,” a painting of a vineyard she saw in neighboring Loudoun County.

Another thing visitors of the exhibit can



Mary Nesbitt is a charter member of the Artists on the Green Studio and Gallery.



Stephanie Pickens does impressionistic work.



Leslie Anthony focuses on equine art. “I’ve been painting most of my life,” she says.



Connie Costello is a charter member of the studio. She returned to her love of painting after retiring.



Princess Aliyah Pandolfi uses art to express the different causes she cares about.

expect are art tips. “I used paint butter to speed up the drying process. It makes the paint thicker, otherwise it would take more than a year for the painting to dry,” said Péan, who also took classes at the Torpedo Art Factory.

Stephanie Pickens paints with the goal of reinterpreting the classics in a modern way. “I’m really playing with impressionistic work and also studying portrait painting. It’s an effort to apply the classics to the work, today.”

Artists on the Green will be at the Great Falls Library during the Library’s regular working hours: Monday and Tuesday, 10 a.m. - 9 p.m.; Wednesday and Friday, 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.; Thursday, 1-9 p.m.; and Saturday, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.

NEWS

"A Christmas Music Blessing," Robert "Mitch" Mitchell, director of music ministries, and Thomas Pandolfi, church organist, backed by the choir.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Great Falls Church Offers 'A Very Musical Service'

If you haven't heard, there are some wonderful sounds coming from the Great Falls United Methodist Church next to the fire station on Georgetown Pike. There are some seats remaining in the choir loft for anyone interested in joining in what is becoming a very musical Sunday service. At times, the musical program will include brass, string and percussion instruments.

What makes this so new and so special is the harmony coming from a combination of an accomplished music director and a pastor with complimentary talent.

Robert Mitchell has been recognized across the land by newspapers as a man of versatile talent from blues to gospel. You can see and hear it in his selections and adaptations. He has been a principal musi-

cian in the Washington Metropolitan Philharmonic Orchestra and has appeared in performances in Kennedy Center, Wolf Trap, Lincoln Center significant venues in South Korea, Belgium and the Armed Forces Network in both Europe and the Pacific.

Pastor Denise Childers may stay behind the scenes when it comes to the delivery of the musical programs but she is keenly aware of the importance of music in the context of religion. While you will find her modest in character, she has a unique Bachelor of Science degree in Music Therapy from the University of Wisconsin.

Chances are that if you pop in some Sunday at 10 a.m. you will be treated to a rewarding and spiritual experience.

— CAROL WESLEY WRIGHT

VIEWPOINTS

What is your favorite holiday tradition?

— REENA SINGH

Alex Cooper, Great Falls, student:

"My favorite thing is probably making a bunch of cookies with my mom and grandmother. We give them to our neighbors and firefighters."



Caitlyn Shumadine, Great Falls, student:

"The Elf on the Shelf. He does different things every night, sometimes good and sometimes bad. Every morning, we wake up and have to find him and see what he's doing."



Ginger Van Houten, Great Falls, stay at home mother:

"We get our Christmas tree the day after Thanksgiving and watch corny Christmas movies while we decorate."



Megan Salas, Great Falls, stay at home mother:

"We get tamales from Texas and eat them on Christmas Eve, because we're from San Antonio. Then we go to Christmas Mass and spend family time together."



Cecily Breiseth, Great Falls, Oakwood Elementary School receptionist:

"My favorite tradition is contributing to Ginger Mahon's Wish List Project."

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JANUARY

1/7/2015 Wellbeing, Renewal, Resolutions
1/14/2015 HomeLifeStyle
Martin Luther King Jr. Day is Jan. 19
1/21/2015 A+ Camps & Schools
1/28/2015 Neighborhood Outlook
1/28/2015 Winter Fun, Food, Arts & Entertainment;
Valentine's Preview

FEBRUARY

2/4/2015 Valentine's Dining & Gifts I
2/4/2015 Wellbeing - National Children's Dental
Health Month
2/11/2015 HomeLifeStyle
2/11/2015 Valentine's Dining & Gifts II
Valentine's Day is Feb. 14 • Presidents Day is Feb. 16
2/18/2015 A+ Camps & Schools
2/25/2015 Pet Connection Pullout

MARCH

3/4/2015 Wellbeing
3/11/2015 HomeLifeStyle Real Estate Pullout
3/18/2015 A+ Camps & Schools
3/25/2015 Spring Fun, Food, Arts & Entertainment
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The New Normal



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Loosey goosey, I suppose. As much as one might prefer some predictability in their life (certainly a cancer patient would – I know I would), I may be entering a cycle of permanent unpredictability. Whereas my previous schedule was chemotherapy every three weeks, a CT Scan every three months, followed up by a face-to-face appointment/examination/assessment with my oncologist sometime during the next week (in effect, every three months as well), my most recent abnormal lab results may very well be upsetting my apple cart. However, rather than change my infusion schedule to every four weeks due to recurring high creatinine levels showing up in my current every-three-week, pre-chemotherapy lab work, my oncologist wants to keep me on the same track. His thinking is, since my most recent CT Scan showed “shrinkage,” he wants to continue treating my cancer as aggressively as possible, since we’re having some success – so long as my body tolerates the drug, that is. My worry is that, from what little I understand, these last two lab results are indications that my body (kidneys) may in fact no longer be tolerating the treatment and that my future treatment is subject to change, shall we say.

For the moment however, the change will not be in the drug I’m infusing but with the frequency. I will still be scheduled for my chemotherapy every three weeks, with my usual pre-chemotherapy lab work the Wednesday before the Friday. If my creatinine level is too high on that first test, we will delay the infusion by one week and I will return to the lab the following Wednesday and hope for an improved result. What this means to me is, I can’t ever know, given the variability in my last two lab results, whether I can plan on chemotherapy every three weeks, every four weeks or some reasonable facsimile thereof. What little control I thought I had over my life: the predictability/regularity of my infusions, apparently is over. Now, so long as my creatinine goes down on the subsequent retests, I will live with the consequences – happily. Still, I have lost something very important in my life, something with which I have become quite accustomed these last few years: knowing who, what, when and where. Why this is happening, and whether or not a slope has become slippery all of a sudden (“all of a sudden” – after six years, nothing is all of a sudden) is the big question, a question/scenario that my oncologist will likely blame the cancer for causing (simple, isn’t it?). Because, that’s sort of what cancer does, he’ll probably say.

Part of me understands that “If It Ain’t Broke” there’s no need to fix it; we just need to work in some flexibility. And if the flexibility keeps me alive, I’m all for it. Nevertheless, this change will affect my life, my future. I can never know – for sure, and anticipate accordingly – what my lab results will be (as I have been able to these last few years) and plan/schedule/arrange my non-cancer activities. I will once again become a victim of my own circumstances. I will never know until I’m told (e-mailed actually; I’ll know by the results whether that next chemotherapy appointment will be put off) whether I’m busy two days hence or not. Moreover, I’ll likely repeat the cycle the following week and beyond. Maybe the regularity of the irregularity will become my new routine? Maybe breaking up the every-three-week schedule – sometimes – will give me and my body some much needed/appreciated rest. I can only hope so. I don’t want to think that it’s not so. I’ve gotten used to my life. And though this is definitely a blip, I’m thankful to still be showing up on the radar.

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

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Christmas Eve Services at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fairfax, 2709 Hunter Mill Road, Oakton. 4:30 p.m. on Dec. 24 – children’s service with Christmas pageant; 6 p.m. – family service with Christmas pageant; 8 p.m. – a wonderful, contemplative service with the Adult Chorale singing. For more information, go to: www.uucf.org or call the office: 703-281-4230.

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

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

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

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

The Antioch Christian Church offers a time of Prayer and Healing on Wednesday evenings at 6:30 p.m. for anyone wanting encouragement and healing through prayers. People are available to pray with you or for you. Antioch Christian Church is located at 1860 Beulah Road in Vienna. www.antiochdoc.org

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

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

McLean Bible Church Fitness Class at Body & Soul Fitness. Gain balance, energy

and strength at 9:45 a.m. Mondays and Fridays. Free childcare for registered students. bodyandsoul@mcleanbible.org.

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

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

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

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

EMPLOYMENT

Do Fairfax County Police Act with Impunity?

FROM PAGE 6

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pushed the door shut as he retreated and immediately collapsed on the floor less than 5 feet from the door.

This tragedy only gets worse. John lay just inside the door reportedly yelling for help. Despite his pleas for help, the officers on scene stood outside and did nothing while waiting for SWAT to arrive. The SWAT team entered an hour later to find that John had bled to death. It should be noted that the patrol officers on the scene had an entry shield and could have entered the house to rescue John with minimal risk yet chose to do nothing.

After 15 months, no officer has been identified, no charges have been filed, no grand jury has been convened and no reason has been given to the family or the public. In fact the Fairfax County Police Department, up until a recent legal action filed by the Federal Justice Department, had refused to provide requested information to anyone including the Virginia State Attorney. The attorneys for the Geer family have filed 127

requests for documents and in response, 122 objections have been filed by the county. Despite the incredible lack of cooperation from the Police Department, local county officials, the State Attorney General and the Governor have remained silent. It took over one year for Fairfax County supervisors to write a gently worded letter requesting that the case be resolved.

The case was turned over to federal prosecutors last January. The FBI conducted interviews in March. Still, no information has been released to the public and no resolution has been achieved. It has taken recent involvement from U.S. Sen. Grassley of the Senate Judicial Committee and legal action by Federal prosecutors to get the Fairfax County Police Department to only recently provide the requested information, information that should have been made public a year ago. It would appear that this police department does not feel compelled to answer to any Virginia or federal official. This has to change. The family, friends and the public have yet to be told anything about John’s death.

When possible crimes have been committed by police officers such as police shootings, nobody investigates the case but the police. There are no independent oversight procedures of any kind. Fairfax County supervisors endorse this policy and along with the Police Department, have rejected every attempt to create any kind of independent oversight procedures. It should be noted that the Fairfax County supervisors hire the police chief. They also control the money dedicated to the department. This policy of self-investigation, no oversight and the inevitable obstruction that occurs as a result will continue until the public demands better from its elected officials.

To date, no officer in the 75-year history of the Fairfax County Police Department has ever been charged in a wrongful shooting. These include the deaths of John Geer and at least two other unarmed citizens since 2006, all shot by police under questionable circumstances.

Jeff Stewart, a Chantilly resident, witnessed the shooting of his friend John Geer on Aug. 29, 2013.

Parent Coaches Searching for Balance

FROM PAGE 10

Langley. He could bench press 500 pounds and squat 675. He is now an offensive lineman at Stetson. Tyler recently completed his sophomore season as a starter on the Langley varsity. Both played right guard for the Saxons.

Howerton said he has tried to treat Jack and Tyler in an equal fashion to other players on the team, but admits he has higher expectations for his sons.

“I try to treat them as any kid out there,” Howerton said. “As a parent, you probably have more expectations for your own sons. I try not to yell at them any more or less

than anyone else. I do expect them to excel as much as possible because they’ve been exposed to me as a coach more than the other kids have.”

Howerton was coached by his father, Elton “Cig” Howerton, in youth football. Cig Howerton was an



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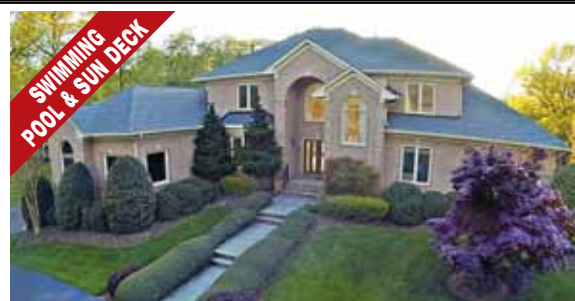
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