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From left, Faith Chun, Kate Persell and Becca Perron are in Encore's upcoming holiday musical, "Finding Santa."

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## NEWS

# 'This Was a Brutal and Heinous Act'

60 years' prison for murdering Sunoco Station clerk.

By BONNIE HOBBS  
THE CONNECTION

**W**hen Resham Bajgain, 40, went to his clerk job on July 3, 2018, at the Franklin Farm Sunoco Station, he had a wife, a 6-year-old daughter and his whole life ahead of him. But in the early morning hours of July 4, a teenager with a penchant for violence stole his future – viciously killing him over a phone and then bragging about it.

After being arrested, the assailant, Mohamed Abdullahi, then living in Franklin Farm, told police, "Imagine being me, right now – just 19 and already caught a body." He stood trial in late August in Fairfax County Circuit Court; and after hearing and seeing all the evidence, the jury convicted him of first-degree murder and recommended a sentence of 60 years in prison and a \$25,000 fine.

He returned to court, Nov. 22, and Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Ryan Bredemeier asked the judge to impose the entire sentence. And in the end, that's exactly what Judge Brett Kassabian did.

"The jury heard the awful facts of this case and the defendant's juvenile record," said Bredemeier. "This was a brutal and heinous act; he cruelly tortured a defenseless man over a phone. The victim was repeatedly punched, kicked, slapped and told he was going to die. One can only imagine the terror going through his mind. There was absolutely no provocation, and it was done by someone with a history of escalating violence."

**IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE MURDER** police responding to what they thought was a robbery saw Abdullahi – who matched the suspect's description – in the gas station's parking lot and arrested him. After customer Stephen Briscoe entered the store during the incident, Abdullahi ordered him outside, followed him and tried unsuccessfully to borrow his phone.

Abdullahi also tried to snatch another person's phone through his car window before returning inside to finish off the victim. That's when Briscoe called 911, and officers arrived within three minutes. K9 Officer J. Kevin Clarke then went inside the store to talk to the clerk to see if a crime had occurred – and discovered Bajgain's body.

"There was merchandise strewn about and blood in several locations," he testified during the trial. "The clerk was tucked up under the counter; I observed no vital signs."

Also responding was fire Capt. John Haywood, a paramedic. He said Bajgain had "a head injury with bleeding and a skull deformity, plus face lacerations. He was confirmed dead at 1:38 a.m." The entire crime was caught on the Sunoco convenience store's surveillance camera, and the jury watched it.

On the video, Abdullahi walks into the store and tells Bajgain his best friend was just killed, and he wants to call his older brother. Bajgain dials the number Abdullahi gives him, but the call doesn't go through, so Abdullahi starts throwing around the store merchandise.

He yells at Bajgain, "What is the first number to use this phone?" But Bajgain – who'd come to the U.S. from India in late 2017 – doesn't understand what he's saying. So an angry Abdullahi hits him, and continues striking him after he falls to the ground. At one point, Abdullahi goes into the store's office, sees himself on the computer monitor and



**Abdullahi**



**Resham Bajgain,  
the victim**

smashes it.

"Tell me the first number, or you will die tonight," says Abdullahi. "I don't understand," Bajgain replies. Then Briscoe enters and leaves, with Abdullahi following him out. Bajgain stands but is clearly dazed from the beating. Abdullahi returns and knocks him to the floor several more times, repeatedly screaming, "Use the phone," and telling him seven times, "You are going to die."

Bajgain never fights back, and Abdullahi strangles him until he falls again. Abdullahi then looks around, sees the fire extinguisher, grabs it, adjusts his grip so he can swing it at the victim's head as fast as possible and – while holding onto him – does just that. He then leaves and Bajgain takes his last breaths.

Afterward, said Bredemeier, Abdullahi was proud of what he'd done. "When told he was being charged with murder, he said, 'Just murder, huh?'" said Bredemeier. "And when police tell him they don't know the victim's name, he said, 'Of course you can't identify him, his face is smashed in.'"

**ON NOV. 22**, seeking a 60-year sentence for Abdullahi, the prosecutor reminded Judge Kassabian of his juvenile convictions for crimes including assault and battery, felony assault on a police officer, and felony malicious wounding. However, defense attorney Negin Farahmand asked for 40 years instead, explaining that Abdullahi grew up poor, malnourished and abused by his father and brothers.

"He was taught that violence and aggression are ways to solve problems," she said. "He was diagnosed with ADHD, but untreated for most of his life. He's only 20 and not yet fully mature and was never taught any skills to cope with the traumas in his life."

But Bredemeier said there's good reason for the jury's recommendation. "This was a sustained, brutal attack over a period of 20 minutes," he said. "This defendant strangled Mr. Bajgain to the point of breaking bones in his neck, after smashing his face into a counter. And then he grabbed the heaviest thing he could find and swung it at the victim's head. He's so dangerous, he doesn't belong in society."

"This event left Mr. Bajgain's wife a widow and his child without a father, ruined a family and brought heartache to many people," continued Bredemeier. "And to the defendant, it's a joke – a badge of honor and a way to improve his street cred. In a call from jail, he boasts, 'I was on six news channels.' It's disgusting. It's not a question of if, but when, he'll hurt somebody else – and he was in a loving home, the night of this murder."

Furthermore, said the prosecutor, "He senselessly, violently, took a life, but he gets to go on living his.

SEE PAGE 10



# NEWS



PHOTOS BY DENISE LEW/THE CONNECTION

**Founder Krissee D'Aguiar gives a chocolate factory tour.**



**Children participate in coloring activities at the celebration.**

## Chocolate Factory Celebrates One-Year Anniversary

By DENISE LEW  
THE CONNECTION

**R**iver-Sea Chocolates, a local chocolate boutique and factory, celebrated its one-year anniversary at its new location on Saturday, Nov. 16 in Chantilly. The company creates partnerships with small farms who practice sustainability in growing fine cacao beans.

The all-day celebration featured factory tours, family-friendly activities, music, and samples of chocolates made from beans originating from Colombia, Fiji, India, Nicaragua, Peru, Tanzania, the U.S. and Venezuela. Guests partook in additional cost experiences such as guided chocolate tastings, chocolate bar decorating, Brazilian cheesy bread, chocolate and beer pairings, and chocolate and wine pairings.

Participants enjoyed chocolate samples and various activities at the celebration. "I love this shop for their wide variety of cocoa beans and chocolates from different countries," said Robin Bahn, from Fairfax.

Launched in 2017, Krissee D'Aguiar and her husband Mariano, from Herndon, stumbled upon their newfound passion purely by accident, eventually founding a full-time business.

"My kids climbed up a cacao tree in Brazil and asked how chocolate was made. So I tried making chocolate and fell in love with the process," said D'Aguiar. Since the factory's opening, their chocolate bars have been sold to 25 local stores in northern Virginia, D.C., Maryland, Indiana, and Ohio.

River-Sea Chocolates partners with small-scale growers that practice sustainability to source fine cacao beans. In April of 2019, the company spearheaded efforts to sail the first wind-powered sail cargo ship in America, one of only four operating sail cargo ships in the world, to import a ton of



**The Hutchins family from Centreville volunteer at the celebration.**



**Owner Krissee D'Aguiar tempers liquid chocolate.**



**Participants add toppings to make their own chocolate bars.**



**From left, Steph Silva and Jessica Cooke, from Ashburn, sample teas.**

beans from Colombia after meeting strict import regulations. Shipments by wind power usually cost significantly less than conventional shipping methods as fuel is not needed and half of the crew comprises volunteers, according to D'Aguiar. "To avoid contributing to the enormous problem of shipping pollution and whale deaths, it is a pollution-free way of transporting products for import and export. We are planning on bringing more beans on the next shipment and growing the sustainable shipping movement," said D'Aguiar. They aim to have their next shipment in spring of 2020.

As for future plans, the owners look forward to expanding their reach in the area. "I see ourselves continuing to grow within the community in the D.C. area," said D'Aguiar.



# Getting Bills Ready for the 2020 State Legislature

BY SEN. SCOTT SUROVELL  
(D-36)

**T**he 2020 Virginia General Assembly will convene in about a month and legislators are now preparing bills to propose. Many constituents and advocacy groups are proposing legislation.

Two weeks ago, I reported on some of the bigger issues we are likely to tackle. In this column, I am covering a few of the bills that I will introduce. I will discuss more in future columns.

In the 2018 and 2019 sessions, we came very close to passing legislation prohibiting drivers from having a phone in their hand in a moving vehicle. In the last session, we approved legislation to prohibit this in construction zones, but the Speaker killed it by ruling Governor Ralph Northam's attempt to widen it to all highways not germane. It will pass this session.

I will propose several predatory lending reforms. Using Native American tribes as fronts, online lenders continue to make loans over the internet in Virginia at over 400 percent interest rates and requiring far off tribal arbitration for

disputes. Other states have enacted consumer protections, including steps to rein in interest rates, fees, collection practices and repeat loans.

I will introduce bills to curb firearm violence. The Unite the Right March in Charlottesville coupled with the four-armed men who appeared at the Alexandria Farmer's Market in September underscore the need for local governments to have the ability to prohibit firearms at permitted public events. Second, suicide is the leading cause of firearm death in Virginia. One of my bills will allow people to place themselves on a "do-not-sell" list for firearms so they cannot be sold a gun if they have a moment of weakness. Third, Virginia's Department of Game and Inland Fisheries is still allowing permittees to license duck blinds in counties and areas where duck hunting is illegal under local ordinances. I will introduce legislation to fix this along with Del. Paul Krizek (D-44).

I will introduce a bill to create a new Public Defender's Office for Prince William County and the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park. Virginia currently has 25 public defender offices, but

Virginia's second-largest jurisdiction does not. A public defender's office will professionalize defense representation, improve justice outcomes and cost taxpayers little more than funding private court-appointed counsel.

In the late 1990s, Virginia required the use of alternative sentencing analyses to inform judges when convicted defendants should be considered for non-prison sentences. Over time, judges have ignored these recommendations more than followed them. I will carry legislation requiring the state to assemble data on judicial use of this data and require probation officers to provide findings about the costs of various sentencing alternatives to the courts before a judge renders a final sentence in a case. This would hopefully encourage more informed decision-making and better outcomes.

Virginia's civil justice system should also be modernized. Virginia and Mississippi are the only states in America that do not allow class action lawsuits. Virginia also still adheres to ancient doctrines that punish largely innocent collision victims, and we have not adjusted Virginia's auto insurance minimum policy limits since the

1970s when medical care cost a fraction of today's cost and the average car cost 25 percent of today's vehicles. This allows wrongdoers to escape responsibility and leaves innocent collision victims holding the bag for their own injuries.

Virginia's three boards governing mental health professionals issued regulations prohibiting therapies that attempt to change one's sexual orientation, known as "conversion therapy." We need to put that prohibition into law to ensure that it will not be reversed. I will introduce that bill.

For the last four sessions, I have introduced legislation to address the lack of available driving permits for many of my immigrant constituents.

Since 2014, Maryland and the District of Columbia have allowed driving permits to anyone who can show that they pay taxes, pass a driving test and pay fees. My bill has died in committee by one vote each year. I am hopeful the new majority will mean a better outcome.

Please email me at [scott@scottsurowell.org](mailto:scott@scottsurowell.org) if you have any questions or feedback

## Will Democrats Deliver Real Change?

BY JOHN LOVAAS  
RESTON IMPACT PRODUCER/HOST

**O**n Nov. 5, the Democrats captured majorities in both houses of Virginia's General Assembly after a long period of Republicans' having their way with public policy in the Commonwealth. Now, let's see what the Dems do. Because Gov. Ralph Northam is also a Democrat and because the composition of the Party now is very different—both more diverse and more progressive—from the Democrats of old it seems reasonable to expect a major shift in a more progressive direction. In fact, there is a lot of talk among the new legislators about many overdue actions including addressing gaping income inequality, gun violence, basic health care, expansion of pre-school education, gerrymandering and voting rights—in addition to actually ratifying the E.R.A!

Some specific measures are being discussed, but we are starting to hear voices of some long-time incumbents counselling us not to expect too much too soon. Be realistic! We might expect bills introduced to raise the hopelessly outdated \$7.25 minimum wage with gradual increases actually

passing. But, there have also been reports that repeal of Virginia's so-called "right to work" law is unlikely even to be submitted and certainly will not pass if it were to surface. Corporations and their chambers of commerce still hold sway with too many legislators including a junior local state senator and other longer serving members. Many of us believe that the "right to work" law which stifles creation of unions is a major factor in income inequality, severely tilting the playing field against working men and women. Sadly, it appears that the new majorities may lack the spine to remember who got them elected and to confront "right to work." hence unlikely to take a real bite out of income inequality in Virginia.

I am assured that ERA ratification is a real priority on the agenda. Also, there may be more willingness to address gun violence, which in Virginia is remarkable. For example, universal background checks and a ban on large capacity magazines and bump stocks are already being discussed and deemed likely to pass. In Vir-



INDEPENDENT PROGRESSIVE

ginia, this one falls under the category of I'll believe it when I see the Governor's signature on the actual pieces of legislation. Banning assault weapons much less buying back those already in circulation, while crucial to reducing the killings, are definitely a bridge too far for the new majority,

Increased funding for pre-school education and expanded health insurance coverage have strong backing and may make it through the legislative minefields as long as no noticeable increases in taxes are required to implement them! One prominent local legislator suggests tax increases are unlikely in the first General Assembly session. This would suggest that it may be feasible in the subsequent GA. Really?!? A tax increase in the second year of the delegates' term as they face election? No way! Will not happen. For me, the biggest shock, and a tie for biggest disappointment along with the bleak outlook for "right to work" repeal, is what I've seen in the Post and gotten talking to a state senator that the constitutional amendment reforming redistricting (a dagger

to the heart of gerrymandering) is in jeopardy. The amendment passed the outgoing legislature and was presumed a slam dunk in the 2020 session, thus meeting the Virginia requirement of a second passage to effect an amendment to the constitution, is in jeopardy. Sen. Dick Saslaw, long time Senate Minority Leader and now returned to his old Majority Leader status, is a big fan of gerrymandering and anxious to avenge what Republicans did to Democrats for many years. Saslaw, who unfortunately barely beat rising star Yasmine Taeb in a primary, and others may scuttle the excellent compromise amendment that would create a commission to draw maps consisting of 8 citizens and 8 legislators, evenly divided by party and requiring a supermajority of both sides to approve a new map. This requires a genuine consensus and is regarded as one of the strongest redistricting reforms undertaken to date in the U.S. If Saslaw and friends succeed in killing the amendment, maps reflecting the new 2020 census will be gerrymandered as before except that the Democrats, not Republicans, will dictate the outcomes. Reform would be delayed until at least the 2030 census.

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**NEWS DEPARTMENT:**  
[centreview@connectionnewspapers.com](mailto:centreview@connectionnewspapers.com)

**Jean Card**  
Production Editor  
[jcard@connectionnewspapers.com](mailto:jcard@connectionnewspapers.com)

**Bonnie Hobbs**  
Community Reporter, 703-778-9415  
[bhobbs@connectionnewspapers.com](mailto:bhobbs@connectionnewspapers.com)

**Andrea Worker**  
Contributing Writer  
[aworker@connectionnewspapers.com](mailto:aworker@connectionnewspapers.com)

**ADVERTISING:**  
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**Editor & Publisher**  
Mary Kimm  
[mkimm@connectionnewspapers.com](mailto:mkimm@connectionnewspapers.com)  
[@MaryKimm](https://www.facebook.com/MaryKimm)

**Executive Vice President**  
Jerry Vernon  
703-549-0004  
[jvernon@connectionnewspapers.com](mailto:jvernon@connectionnewspapers.com)

**Managing Editor**  
Kemal Kurspahic  
**Art/Design:**  
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## HOLIDAY ENTERTAINMENT

# 'It Brings Broadway and Christmas Together'

Encore presents holiday musical, "Finding Santa."

BY BONNIE HOBBS  
THE CONNECTION

The Christmas season is officially in full swing when Encore Theatrical Arts Project presents its annual, Broadway-style, holiday musical. This year's glittery production, "Finding Santa," will burst upon the stage 12 times between Dec. 13-22 at NOVA's Richard Ernst Theater, 8333 Little River Turnpike in Annandale.

Show times are Fridays at 7:30 p.m.; Saturdays, noon, 4 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.; Sundays, noon and 4 p.m. Tickets range from \$19-\$26 and may be purchased at [www.Encore-tap.org](http://www.Encore-tap.org). For group rates, call 703-222-5511.

"It's Thanksgiving Day in New York City and, after the parade, Santa was scheduled to arrive at the Grand Hotel to meet his adoring fans, but he never arrives," explained Director and Choreographer Raynor van der Merwe. "So the search is on, and it's up to the hotel staff to find him. Meanwhile, they must also entertain a horde of kids who want to give their letters to Santa, telling him what they want for Christmas."

The scenes take place mainly in the hotel lobby and at the North Pole, and the cast of 24 girls and two boys – plus guest actors Jack Stine, Allen McRae and Matt Scarborough – has been rehearsing since August. And van der Merwe says things are really coming together nicely.

"There's a new playwright this year, Lorraine Magee, and seven new company members," said van der Merwe. "So we have a lot of young, new faces and talent, in addition to our seasoned veterans. They've all been working so hard and are wonderful singers and dancers."

**THIS SHOW** features a slew of new numbers and a couple perennial favorites, such as "Toy Soldiers." Van der Merwe's favorite is "Disappearing Santa," which is among the new ones. "We have 20 musical numbers total," she said. "I try to find different versions of the old favorites everyone enjoys, as well as new songs that'll further the storyline."

She said "Finding Santa" has "all the excitement and anticipation of Christmas that we all have, whether we're old or young. It'll transport people from their everyday life and the stresses of the holiday season.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LINDA HELMS PHOTOGRAPHY

From left, Becca Perron, Kendra Walsh and Vilas Iyer performing in the show as Raggedy Ann and Andy dolls.



From left, Faith Chun, Kate Persell and Becca Perron are in Encore's upcoming holiday musical, "Finding Santa."

And for two hours, they can live in this fantasy world. The show is upbeat and fun, and the audience will leave the theater singing a song."

Becca Perron, 16, of Franklin Farm, plays Twinkle, one of the main elves trying to find Santa. "She's stressed because she loves Santa and they've never lost him before,"

sparkly, red-and-silver dresses with sequins. And because I'm 5-foot-4, I'm not tall enough to be a Rockette in real life, so this is my opportunity to be part of that world, and I appreciate it."

Perron said the audience will be surprised at "the level of professionalism coming from such young people, ages 11-18. Our show is original and has all the shine and showstopping numbers audiences have come to love."

With Encore since age 8, she likes how dancing "allows you to story-tell in a unique way. Singers and actors can tell you how they're feeling, but dancers have to emote it – and I love that challenge."

Chantilly High sophomore Vilas Iyer, 15, portrays Joe, a mall Santa full of Christmas spirit. "He's called to the Grand Hotel to help out with the kids waiting for Santa," said Iyer. "He loves winter, Christmas and New Year's, so he's bummed out when Santa goes missing. And I like exploring both his happy and disappointed sides."

Iyer's favorite song is "Nobody Cares about Santa." It has 11 Santas in it and, he said, "We're all venting about how we're out of our jobs while Santa's missing, because then kids won't believe we're the 'real'

Santas. We're singing and tap dancing, and I love all the fun choreography in it."

He's been dancing 10 years, and this is his seventh with Encore's performing company. "I like how I can move around and express myself in a way I can't usually," he explained. Iyer said the audience will enjoy everything about this show – "the sets, storyline, choreography, actors and songs. And it helps you get into the Christmas spirit."

**A NEW MEMBER** of the company is Liberty Middle eighth-grader Ginny Shaw, 13, who plays one of the children, Patty Precious. "She's 10 and quite whiny," said Ginny. "She always exaggerates things and is kind of annoyed at everybody. It's really fun playing someone different from me; she has this attitude about her, and I love to play around with that."

Ginny especially likes the "Kid at Christmas" number.

"The kids are starting to get excited again about Christmas," she said. "I love it because everyone is truly a kid at Christmas. And when we perform it, it gets me excited for Christmas, too. Our whole show is family-friendly and is like having a Broadway show close to home. It brings Broadway and Christmas together in a fun and wonderful production."



From left, Bea Tremblay and Teagan Pallet are dancing dolls.

said Perron. "But she's also put-together, positive and happy and is best friends with the other elf leader, Sparkle."

She likes playing an elf because "it gives you more opportunities to play around with the character, unlike with a human role. And she's over-the-top and energetic. My favorite dance is our brand-new, Rockettes-style number, 'Swinging with Santa.' We wear



**CALENDAR**

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## SPORTS



Westfield Bulldogs, Northern Region Champs, after defeating Yorktown Patriots 35 - 7.

## Westfield Bulldogs Win Region Championship

**Bulldogs to face South County High in State semi final game Dec. 7.**

The Westfield Bulldogs (12-0) hosted the (11-1) Yorktown Patriots on Nov. 30 in Chantilly for the North Region Class 6 Championship. The winner advancing to the semifinals of the Virginia State Championship.

The Patriots would start off strong capping a nearly 9-minute drive when QB Grant Wilson connected with teammate Evan Rotker for a 6-yard touchdown reception. After a successful PAT the Patriots lead 7-0. Later in the quarter, Avery Howard takes a pass 31 yards for a touchdown and the score is tied up after a successful PAT.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter Carson Saint Germain would take a Noah Kim pass 25 yards for a touchdown. PAT was successful and Westfield would take the lead 14-7. Later in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter Chase Whippen would be the benefactor of Noah Kim's 3<sup>rd</sup> touchdown pass. Westfield's kicker was successful on the PAT and Westfield now led 28-7.

After a scoreless 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter, Avery Howard would take a Yorktown punt 45 yards for a TD, the score now 28-7 with 10:35 to play in the game. Westfield would capitalize again adding the games final score with 7:47 left. A successful PAT closed out the game scoring. Westfield would win the Regional Championship and advance to the State Semi Final game with South County HS, winners over Lake Braddock 31-15. That game will be played on Dec, 7 at 2 p.m. The winner of that game playing either Oscar Smith or Colonial Forge for the Virginia Class 6 State Championship in Hampton, Va.

—WILL PALENSCAR

PHOTOS BY WILL PALENSCAR/THE CONNECTION



Tahj Summey is all smiles after teammate Avery Howard #17 returned a punt 45 yards for a touchdown.



Mikal Legall runs for positive yardage in Westfield's win over Yorktown



Kyle Whippen #98 scored on this 14-yard touchdown reception.



## ROUNDUPS

# Rocky Run Toy Drive, Winterfest

The Rocky Run Middle School National Junior Honor Society will sponsor a Toy Drive at its school to benefit Our Neighbor's Child, from Dec. 2-6, then on Saturday, Dec. 7, from 9-11 a.m., it will host The Raise the Ram Winterfest. During that time, community members are invited to drop off donations of new toys while children make holiday crafts, play games and listen to holiday music.

# Abdullahi

FROM PAGE 2

He's repeatedly shown, no matter what punishment he gets, he won't change his ways – and he's only gotten more and more violent. He didn't learn from his past mistakes or reach out for help, and Mr. Bajgain's life is the price. He doesn't care about others or rules, and he doesn't care who he hurts."

Then, Abdullahi stood and said he's not what he seems to be. "I want the family to know I have friends who've been murdered, so I can't say sorry and know everything will be OK," he said. "But I apologize for the permanence of death I caused in their lives."

In sentencing him, Kassabian said he considered, among other things, Abdullahi's age and the violence he was subjected to growing up. But, he stressed, "These factors pale in significance to the facts of this case – the gratuitous brutality, prolonged in duration, stopped and resumed, and your cowardice because you knew he'd done nothing to provoke or resist this attack. And you escalated it."

"I'm also struck by your complete lack of remorse, then and afterward in jail," continued Kassabian. "And I find your statement of contrition today tardy and empty of empathy for the crime you committed and the loss you caused." He then imposed the jury's sentencing recommendation, plus three years' post-release supervision.

Afterward, the victim's cousin, Thakur Dhakal, said he was pleased with the sentence. He also said Bajgain's wife and daughter are "healing, but it takes time."

## BULLETIN BOARD

Submit civic/community announcements at [ConnectionNewspapers.com/Calendar](http://ConnectionNewspapers.com/Calendar). Photos and artwork welcome. Deadline is Thursday at noon, at least two weeks before event.

# Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Meeting in 2019

12000 Government Center Parkway  
Fairfax, VA 22035  
Dec. 10 Committee Meetings  
❖ 9:30 a.m. - Health, Housing and Human Services Committee  
❖ 11 a.m. - Development Process Committee  
❖ 1:30 p.m. - Transportation Committee  
❖ 3 p.m. - General Assembly Annual Reception and Work Session

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<b>ELECTRICAL</b> <b>K &amp; D ELECTRIC</b> COMMERCIAL / RESIDENTIAL SERVICE Family Owned & Operated Recessed Lighting Ceiling Fans Phone/CATV Computer Network Cabling Service Upgrades Hot Tubs, etc... Licensed/Bonded/Insured Office 703-335-0654 Mobile 703-499-0522 lektrkman28@gmail.com		<b>LANDSCAPING</b> <b>Quality Tree Service &amp; Landscaping</b> Reasonable prices. Licensed & insured. <b>Winter Cleanup...</b> Tree removal, topping & pruning, shrubbery trimming, mulching, leaf removal, planting, hauling, gutter cleaning, retaining walls, drainage problems, etc. 25 years of experience – Free estimates <b>703-868-5358</b> <b>24 Hour Emergency Tree Service</b>	
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# False Sense of Security



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

I never want to look a gift-oncologist in the mouth or take a "stable"-type CT scan with a grain of salt, however; self-preservation is a funny instinct. It can change from day to day (heck, even hour to hour) and dominate your pre-occupation or intrude your thinking not at all. You can rationalize away the good, bad or indifferent (results) or irrationalize away the less-than-expected or the more-than-anticipated. Results from lab work and/or diagnostic scans are the axis on which your entire life revolves. You either roll with the punches or you get knocked down by them. For a cancer patient, the punches often keep coming.

The punches thrown in my direction occur bi-weekly when I have my pre-immunotherapy lab work for my every-other Friday 30-minute opdivo infusion. (Although the actual lab work and even the infusion is more of a jab.) The left hook/right cross combination occurs quarterly. That's when I slide through the computerized tomography scan and wait for results (as I had been for most of the last week). Since I have generally been asymptomatic - other than for miscellaneous side effects from the various medicines with which I've been infused, the tale of the tape, to continue the boxing references, happens when my oncologist emails the radiologist's report to me with a brief sentence summary: "a little worse" (this time), "stable," or something less discouraging that needs to be discussed at our next face-to-face appointment which generally is scheduled a week or so after the previous week's scan.

Regardless of what these mostly cryptic emails have said, until I hear exactly what my oncologist says, I am neither too high or too low. Granted, hearing "stable" is extremely encouraging whereas "a little worse, not so much. Nevertheless, the fight goes on. Cancer treatment is a series of actions and reactions (punches and counter punches, you might even say) so depending on how one's body reacts, determines what action is recommended. I am living proof, literally. Over my nearly 11 years of treatment, I have been infused with upwards of a dozen different medicines. Once one treatment loses its luster, we change to another hoping it will be more effective, and so on. It's science, not arithmetic. As such, any guarantees left the building with Elvis.

Being a cancer patient is not for everybody. One has to make the most of the least. It's easy to let the hard facts make you soft. Unless you find a way to be up, the cancer will take you down. Somehow, even when it's doing the worst to you, you have to be at your best. Being positive generates positivity in return. When I look at people, I try to smile so that they'll smile back (I'm being selfish, really). Do you remember George Costanza describing the look of disappointment on his mother's face when he told her he wanted to play the accordion? Like that, only the complete opposite.

When I interact with people, I don't want them to feel "poor, poor, pitiful me" to quote Warren Zevon from his song first sung in 1976. And I don't want them to see cancer either. I want them to see everything about me. I may be diagnosed with a terminal form of cancer: stage IV, non-small cell lung cancer, but I don't want to be defined by it. Just because I'm living with cancer doesn't mean it's who I am. It's what I have, that's all.

And what reminds most me that I have cancer and what challenges my reactions to it more than anything, is when I have these quarterly CT scans (and the annual MRI, too). As much as I try to fend off the possible effect on my mortality (my true sense of insecurity), I'd be lying if I said I was always successful. In truth, I'm always worried about it. How could I not be? I guess I'm not quite ready to throw in the towel. I suppose that means, regardless of what my oncologist says at our next meeting, I'm still ready to live and fight another day.

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



# CALENDAR

Submit entertainment announcements at [www.connectionnewspapers.com/Calendar/](http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/Calendar/). The deadline is noon on Friday. Photos/artwork encouraged.

## ONGOING

**2019 White House Ornaments.** The 2019 White House Ornaments are available from the Assistance League of Northern Virginia. White House Ornaments are wonderful for gift giving. This year's White House Ornament is a "whirlybird" honoring Dwight D. Eisenhower, 34th president of the United States. To purchase, contact Cindy Burgess at [burgessgl@verizon.net](mailto:burgessgl@verizon.net). Cost per ornament is \$22. Proceeds support ALNV's local children's programs. Visit the website: [www.alnv.org](http://www.alnv.org).

**The Rocky Run Middle School National Junior Honor Society** will sponsor a Toy Drive at its school to benefit Our Neighbor's Child, this week through Dec. 6, Then on Saturday, Dec. 7, from 9-11 a.m., it will host The Raise the Ram Winterfest. During that time, community members are invited to drop off donations of new toys while children make holiday crafts, play games and listen to holiday music.

## Holidays and Christmas

### NOW THROUGH JAN. 5

**Bull Run Festival of Lights.** 5:30-9:30 p.m. Mon.-Thurs.; 5:30-10 p.m. Fri.-Sun. and holidays. At Bull Run Regional Park, 7700 Bull Run Drive, Centreville. Every year from Thanksgiving through New Year's Day, visitors can drive through the Bull Run Festival of Lights. It stretches 2.5 miles and is illuminated by holiday light displays. After viewing the festival of lights, visitors may go to the holiday village to enjoy rides, refreshments, and photos with Santa Claus (holiday village open select nights). Visit the website: <https://www.novaparks.com/events/bull-run-festival-of-lights>

### FRIDAY/DEC. 6

**Holiday Bazaar.** 5:30-9 p.m. Union Mill Elementary School, 13611 Springstone Drive, Clifton. Shop this fourth-annual bazaar featuring 40 vendors, raffle, jewelry, pottery, cosmetics, toys, apparel, crafts, woodworking and more. For information, email: [umesholidaybazaar@gmail.com](mailto:umesholidaybazaar@gmail.com).

### SATURDAY-SUNDAY, DEC. 7-8

**"The Nutcracker."** Saturday and Sunday at 3 p.m. At Centreville High School, 6001 Union Mill Road, Clifton. Mia Saunders School of Ballet presents "The Nutcracker." The 2019 production marks the first for new MSB Artistic Director Hannah Woodruff, an alumna of MSB and 2017 graduate of University of Virginia. Proceeds for this annual giving tradition will benefit CVHS Drama Scholarships and the Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research. Enjoy this holiday classic with your family and support local dancers and CVHS students. Tickets are \$12, (cash or checks payable to CVHS Drama Boosters only) and are available at the door. Visit the website: <http://miasaundersballet.com/>

**"The Nutcracker."** 12 p.m. and 5 p.m. At Richard J. Ernst Community Cultural Center, 8333 Little River Turnpike, Annandale. Metropolitan School of the Arts' Nutcracker brings to life the gift of imagination with Clara and her Nutcracker in a magical journey from her Victorian home through the Land of Snow and into the Land of Sweets, with dazzling dancing, a larger-than-life Christmas tree, more than 100 dancers, and Tchaikovsky's glorious score. Tickets \$26 to \$28. Go to [www.metropolitanarts.org](http://www.metropolitanarts.org) to purchase tickets.



The Moscow Ballet will present "The Nutcracker" on Dec. 10-11 at GMU's Concert Hall.

## "The Nutcracker Ballet"

### TUESDAY-WEDNESDAY, DEC. 10-11

**Moscow Ballet's "The Nutcracker."** 7 p.m. At GMU's Concert Hall, 4373 Mason Pond Drive, Fairfax. The Moscow Ballet "Dance with Us" cast will perform their ancillary roles as Party Children, Snowflakes, Mice, Snow Maidens and Variation Dancers. The aspiring ballerinas and danseurs, ages 7 to 17, perform in ancillary roles developed for their age and skill level by dancer, choreographer, and Julliard graduate Mary Giannone Talmi, also co-producer of Moscow Ballet's North American tours. Tickets are \$34 to \$180.

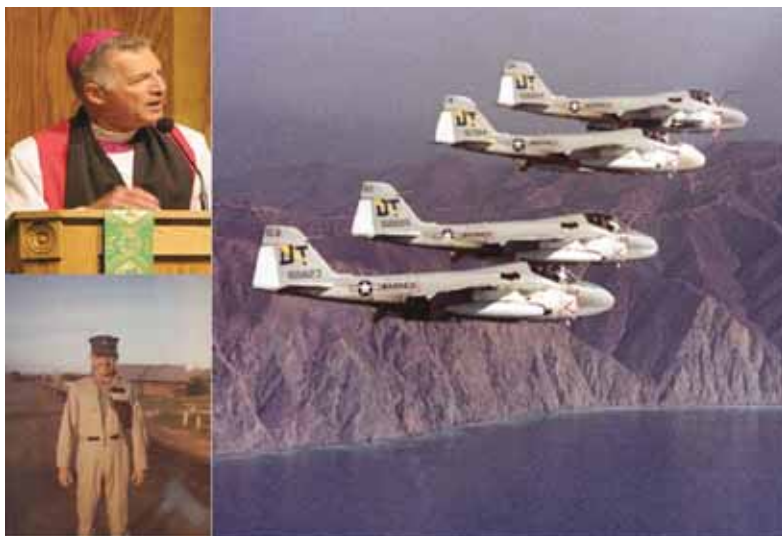


PHOTO COURTESY OF COLD WAR MUSEUM

Dave Bena and Ray Burns and their former aircraft.

## Talk on Vietnam Air War on Dec. 9

### MONDAY/DEC. 9

**Vietnam Air War.** 2-4 p.m. At Old Bust Head Craft Brewery, 1734 Farm Station Road, Vint Hill. Hear from two A-6 Intruder navigator/bombardiers about what the Vietnam air war looked like to eyewitnesses. Cost is \$35. Visit the website: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/stopping-the-flow-on-the-ho-chi-minh-trail-tickets-72645289015>

### SUNDAY/DEC. 8

**A Celtic Family Christmas.** 4 p.m. At Hylton Performing Arts Center, 10960 George Mason Circle, Manassas. Featuring Natalie MacMaster and Donnell Leahy. One of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia's most important exports and a superstar in the Celtic music world, fiddler and step-dancer Natalie MacMaster has built a sterling, multi-decade career on electrifying playing and must-see live performances. She performs with husband and fellow fiddler, Donnell Leahy, recognized as one of the best Celtic fiddlers in the world. Tickets are \$33 to \$55. Visit [www.hyltoncenter.org](http://www.hyltoncenter.org)

### TUES.-WEDS., DEC. 10-11

**Moscow Ballet's "The Nutcracker."** 7 p.m. At GMU's Concert Hall, 4373 Mason Pond Drive, Fairfax. The Moscow Ballet "Dance with Us" cast will perform their ancillary roles as Party Children, Snowflakes, Mice, Snow Maidens and Variation Dancers. The aspiring ballerinas and danseurs, ages 7 to 17, perform in ancillary roles developed for their age and skill level by dancer, choreographer, and Julliard graduate Mary Giannone Talmi, also co-producer of Moscow Ballet's North American tours. Tickets are \$34 to \$180.

### SATURDAY/DEC. 14

**Holiday Ice Show.** 6:30-8 p.m. At Ion International Training Center, 19201 Compass Creek Pkwy., Leesburg. The Snow Story is a Holiday Ice Show featuring the Loudoun Ballet, 21st Battalion Grey Coats Fife & Drum Band and Four-Time World Champion Kurt Browning. Cost is \$20-\$30. Visit the website: [www.ionitc.com](http://www.ionitc.com).

## Local Calendar

### FRIDAY/DEC. 6

**4th Annual Holiday Bazaar.** Union Mill Elementary School, 13611 Springstone Drive, Clifton. 5:30 - 9 p.m. Stop by and enjoy one-stop shopping: Crafts, Jewelry, Makeup, Clothing, Gourmet coffee and sweets, popcorn, woodworking, gift wrapping and more. Still accepting vendors: [Umesholidaybazaar@gmail.com](mailto:Umesholidaybazaar@gmail.com)

### DEC. 6-7

**Mesdames de la Halles.** Dec. 6 at 8 p.m.; Dec. 7 at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. At Hylton Performing Arts Center, Gregory Family Theater, 10960 George Mason Circle, GMU Campus in Manassas. Celebrate the joy of the Holiday Season and join Mason Opera for a production of Mesdames de la Halles, a comic one-act opérette bouffe by

Jacques Offenbach, with libretto by Armand Lapointe. First performed in Paris in 1859, this comedy revolves around the competitive street vendors of a famous Parisian fruit and vegetable market, "La Halle." All the women vendors have fallen head over heels in love with the handsome kitchen boy, Croûte-au-pot, and they compete for his attention. Croûte-au-pot however loves the beautiful fruit vendor, Ciboulette. After a comedy of errors and misplaced identity, true love triumphs. Tickets are \$15 for Adults, \$10 for seniors, \$5 for youth, and may be purchased in person, by phone, and online. To purchase in person, visit the Center for the Arts Box Office located on George Mason University's Fairfax campus or Hylton Performing Arts Center Box Office located on the George Mason University Manassas campus. Tickets may be purchased by phone at 703-993-2787 or 703-993-7759. To purchase online, visit [cfa.gmu.edu](http://cfa.gmu.edu) or [hyltoncenter.org](http://hyltoncenter.org).

### SATURDAY/DEC. 7

**Parents Night Out Winter Luau.** 5-8:30 p.m. At Chantilly High School, Stringfellow Road, Chantilly. For ages 3 (potty trained) to 10 years. Includes games, pizza and "Moana," bring a waterbottle, blanket and wear PJs. Pre-register \$30 for first child; \$10/additional related child. \$35 at door for a child; \$10/additional child. Funds go to the Class of 2022.

### SUNDAY/DEC. 8

**Victorian Times.** 1-2 p.m. At Sully Historic Site, 3650 Historic Sully Way, Chantilly. Long before there were video games, boys in the 1800s would amuse themselves by making horses from potatoes. Give it a try at the "Make a Potato Horse" event at Sully Historic Site. Round out your visit by making some fun Victorian crafts for your tree, too. The activities hark back to an era when a young visitor to Sully described a beautiful tree she saw adorning the big hallway as "... bedecked with glowing candles, strings of popcorn and cranberries, cut out paper angels." For ages 5 to adult. Cost is \$10. Call 703-437-1794 or visit [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/sully-historic-site](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/sully-historic-site).

**Free Chair Yoga.** 3:30-4:30 p.m. At Centreville Regional Library, 14200 St. Germaine Drive, Centreville. Join in gentle and mindful chair yoga for adults. No registration required. Free. Call Christine Turner at 703-830-2223.

### MONDAY/DEC. 9

**Vietnam Air War.** 2-4 p.m. At Old Bust Head Craft Brewery, 1734 Farm Station Road, Vint Hill. Hear from two A-6 Intruder navigator/bombardiers about what the Vietnam air war looked like to eyewitnesses. Cost is \$35. Visit the website: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/stopping-the-flow-on-the-ho-chi-minh-trail-tickets-72645289015>

### SATURDAY/DEC. 14

**Wreaths Across America.** 12 noon. At Chestnut Grove Cemetery, 831 Dranesville Road, Herndon. The Town of Herndon, in partnership with the Herndon Woman's Club, will join Wreaths Across America to honor 850 veterans who were laid to rest at Chestnut Grove Cemetery. The goal is to place a wreath on every veteran's grave. Volunteers, including members of the military, fire and police departments, Herndon Fortnightly Club, Herndon Boy Scouts Troop 1577, Reston Chorale, and South Lakes Junior ROTC, will participate. The cost to sponsor a wreath is \$15. To show your support and to sponsor a wreath, send a check made payable to Herndon Woman's Club, P.O. Box 231, Herndon, VA, 20172. Donations are needed by Dec. 2, 2019. Donations are also accepted online at [www.wreathsasscrossamerica.org/pages/search?searchType=group](http://www.wreathsasscrossamerica.org/pages/search?searchType=group). When you either click on this link or type this website in your browser, you will be brought to a search page. Here you will type in Herndon Woman's Club for the Group Name and select Herndon Woman's Club (VA0143P). Visit [www.herndonva.gov/recreation](http://www.herndonva.gov/recreation), or call 703-787-7300.

### JAN. 17-26

**Joshua's Hands Quilting Event.** Location TBA in Purcellville. Joshua's Hands is a non-profit in Loudoun County that hosts free quilting events to support wounded servicepeople. Joshua's Hands will host 10 days of quilting fun to make handmade quilts for servicemen and women wounded while serving our country. All are welcome. No sewing experience or registration needed. All materials are provided but donations are appreciated. Come for an hour or the day. Monday-Saturdays 9 a.m.-9 p.m.; Sundays 1-9 p.m. Purcellville. Check website for exact location. [Info@JoshuasHands.org](mailto:Info@JoshuasHands.org), or call 540-454-7827, or visit [www.JoshuasHands.org](http://www.JoshuasHands.org).