

Oak Hill Herndon CONNECTION

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Budgeting the State's Resources

BY KENNETH R. "KEN" PLUM
STATE DELEGATE (D-36)



COMMENTARY

In contrast to the federal government's method of budgeting, the budget for the Commonwealth of Virginia is more than balanced. The state Constitution prohibits the borrowing of money for operations, and it requires a "rainy day fund" of reserve monies that can be drawn upon in an economic downturn. That is in part why the state has a perfect AAA bond rating giving it the best terms when monies are borrowed for capital projects.

Both the House and the Senate have completed work on their versions of the budget that was proposed by Governor Ralph Northam earlier this year. The two budgets will be reconciled in a conference committee that will resolve differences between the two. Total spending for the biennium will be about \$48 billion in general funds raised through taxes. Individual and corporate income taxes provide three quarters of the revenue with sales tax providing about seventeen percent and additional smaller taxes making up the rest. General funds coming from taxes make up about

36 percent of total revenue. Non-general funds that consist of fees such as motor vehicle and gas taxes, college tuition, federal grants and other fees make up 64 percent of the budget.

Noteworthy features of the House and Senate budgets that are being reconciled and are subject to change before a final budget is adopted include a much needed increase in rates for personal care providers in Medicaid programs, an increase in developmental waiver disability slots by 1,135 in the Governor's budget to 1,635 in the Senate version of the budget. While the increase will help, the number of persons on the waiting list still number in the thousands. The Governor and the House budgeted for 630 supportive housing slots for persons with serious mental illness while the Senate provided 1,630. Budget language provides for the establishment of a state-based exchange for health insurance.

The budgets of both houses provided for teacher raises as did the Governor's budget.

The amount differs in each with an expected three to four percent over the biennium. The ratio of counselors to students in the public schools will be improved. The Governor proposed a ratio of one counselor per 250 students. The House ratio is 325 and the Senate's is 300. Likewise, the ratio of teachers for English learners will be improved. A major point of contention among the Governor's and the House and Senate budgets is that only the House has proposed to restore the cost to compete funding for Northern Virginia schools because of the high cost of living in the region. The average per pupil direct aid for public school students range from \$6,206 in the Governor's budget \$6,297 in the House budget.

A major emphasis in the budget is an increased investment in preschool education that was championed by the First Lady. The Governor's "Get skilled, Get a job, Give back" (G3) funding to provide tuition assistance to low- to moderate-income students who meet certain criteria is receiving significant funding. The Housing Trust Fund will receive a much-needed infusion of cash proposed in all the budgets.

For information comparing the three budgets, go to www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org.

We Both Deserve \$15. Why Don't Our Senators Think So?

BY NICK RIVIERE AND
TONY HEDGEPEETH



Riviere



Hedgepeeth

Like millions of Virginians, we work hard. As home care providers, we work every day to help older adults and people with disabilities live independently at home and in the community. By keeping people out of costly nursing homes and institutions, we save taxpayers money and deliver quality care.

We do the same work but in different parts of Virginia – Fairfax County and City of Richmond – and have different backgrounds. One of us is a 21-year-old assisting young adults with developmental disabilities and one of us is a 61-year-old Army veteran helping his fellow vets who suffer from PTSD.

However, we both love what we do. It's a blessing to be able to help others live with dignity.

We both deserve to make at least \$15 per hour and live with dignity ourselves.

Unfortunately, our Virginia state Senators seem to disagree.

Earlier this month, the Virginia House of Delegates passed a bill to raise the minimum wage to \$15 for all workers by 2025. They recognized that working families are falling behind no matter how hard we work, and that we need to build an economy that works for everyone.

The Senate, however, passed a bill which would create different minimum wages in different regions, even for workers who do the exact same jobs like us.

Their bill also forces workers to wait even longer to get a raise.

If the Senate bill becomes law, people working in Fairfax won't make \$15 until 2027, while those in Richmond won't make \$15 until 2032. Our fellow homecare providers and others working in Hampton Roads won't make \$15 until 2034.

Delaying the minimum wage increase for 14 years, and paying different wages for the same work, is not only unfair; it's unacceptable.

Every person who works hard and plays by the rules in Virginia deserves equal respect. We deserve living wages, paid sick days, affordable health care, a secure retirement, and the right to join together in a union.

While the cost of living varies in different parts of Virginia, we all feel the same pain when we struggle to pay rent, buy groceries and pay utilities. Housing costs are skyrocketing in both Richmond and Northern Virginia. Health care costs, food costs and transportation costs are all increasing. We need a state-wide \$15 minimum wage to ensure that no one gets left behind.

To our Senators, we ask: why should a home care worker in Richmond or Roanoke make less than a home care worker in Fairfax when we make the same contribution to Virginia's families?

We elected Democratic majorities to the House and Senate because they promised to deliver a brighter future for working Virginians. It's time that our Senators delivered on that promise.

LETTERS

A Time to Elect a Fixer

To the Editor:

As a physician who has treated kids in Northern Virginia for more than two decades, I've seen firsthand the transformative impact of the availability of high quality health care. It's also clear that uninsured families and high prescription drugs costs are a fiscal burden on families and means that people receive less timely medical care. The stakes of the 2020 election are crystal clear - do we stay on the same dangerous path of skyrocketing prescription drug costs and constant attempts to repeal the Affordable Care Act? Or do we elect a fixer, someone who has spent his whole career solving problems? The choice is clear: we must elect Mike Bloomberg President.

A Bloomberg Administration would put the focus back where it belongs - on helping citizens like those I care for in Virginia every single day.

While the Trump administration has filed multiple lawsuits attempting to repeal the Affordable Care Act, Mike Bloomberg would use the federal government's bulk price purchasing power to dra

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NEWS

Retiring Flags, with Respect

Eagle Scout candidate hosts U.S. Flag Retirement Ceremony.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Behind every Eagle Scout service project, there's a story of work and perseverance, the impact of the project on the community, and those individuals - mentors, parents and others - who offered support and guidance to the candidate.

Scout David Mercado from Troop 1570 of the National Capital Area Council, Powhatan District, located in Herndon, did not need to look any farther than the right sleeve of his uniform for project inspiration as he sought to earn the coveted rank of Eagle Scout, the organization's highest honor. A United States flag emblem was sewn on his standard Scout uniform. Scouts learn that the United States flag is more than a banner of red, white and blue. It is the symbol of our nation.

On Thursday evening, Feb. 20, in coordination with The Wayne M. Kidwell American Legion Post 184 Herndon-Reston (Post 184), Mercado hosted a Flag Retirement Ceremony at the Herndon Public Works Complex on Sterling Road in Herndon.

MERCADO involved others in his project, among them fellow Scouts and veterans from Post 184, demonstrating leadership to benefit others. The Post collects used flags and performs a Flag Retirement Ceremony several times a year according to its website.

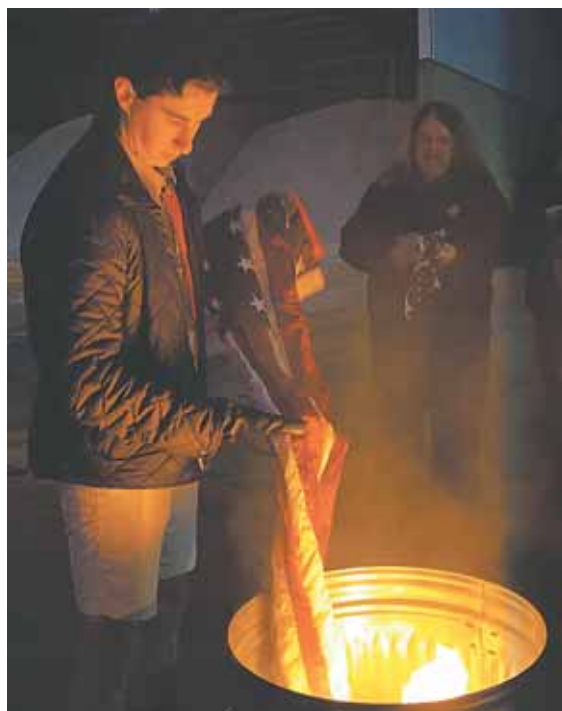
"These Scouts of Troop 1570 do it right," said Post 184 Commander David Womack. "Events like this honor our flag and help instruct the next generation on proper respect to the flag," he said. "It's great to have Scout involvement in a solemn and meaningful ceremony," said Rob Martin, Post 184 Sergeant-at-Arms. "It is indeed an honor to help Scouts to retire these great symbols of our great nation," said Michael Cutler, Post 184 Second Vice Commander.

U.S. Code: Title 36, Chapter 10 Section 176 states: "...The flag represents a living country and is itself considered a living thing...The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning."

According to Mercado, to date, he has donated 40 hours of service to produce the solemn ceremony that retired 100 unserviceable and or sufficiently worn American flags collected over several months by Post 184. Citizens dropped the flags into a labeled box in front of Herndon Moose Lodge # 2274 in downtown Herndon, 779 Center Street.

During the ceremony, Mercado recognized Post Commander David Womack and other members of the Post as well as Scouts of Troop 1570, for their help to him in preparing and conducting the ceremony. Scouts posted and retired the Colors and provided a brief history of the American flag during remarks.

According to Roger Claff, Troop 1570 Life-to-Eagle Advisor, Mercado planned the ceremony and the hospitality service. He drafted, edited and finalized the ceremony's script. Claff said, "He (Mercado) prepared the flags for retirement, arranged for the cer-



Eagle Scout candidate, David Mercado, 17, of Troop 1570 of the National Capital Area Council, Powhatan District located in Herndon, helps burn unserviceable flags after hosting The Wayne M. Kidwell American Legion Post 184 Herndon-Reston U.S. Flag Retirement Ceremony.

PHOTOS BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION



Members of The Wayne M. Kidwell American Legion Post 184 Herndon-Reston, Post Commander David Womack and Post member Mike Cutler retire a worn and unserviceable U.S. flag during the Post's Flag Retirement Ceremony.

emony equipment to be in site, and rehearsed the ceremony with his volunteers in advance of the ceremony. He will also prepare a promotional brochure for Post 184, including information about flag retirement." Claff added that Mercado still has other items and paperwork to complete for his Eagle Scout project before the board of review can be conducted; however, Mercado expressed a personal goal to complete his review for Eagle Scout rank before Apr. 1.

CLAFF said that Mercado would become the 128th Eagle Scout in the history of Troop 1570. Mercado's mother, Cynthia, attended the ceremony. "I am so proud of David for his high school accomplishments and Eagle. He is a well-spoken, organized young man," she said.

According to scoutingmagazine.org, in 2018, 6.49 percent of eligible Scouts earned the Eagle rank.



Kerry Gallagher of Herndon High School on uneven parallel bars. She won All-around Champion at the Northern Region 6D Gymnastics Championship at Washington-Liberty High School in Arlington on Feb. 13.

PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

All-around Regional Champion

Herndon gymnast Kerry Gallagher wins regional title.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

One of the most prolific, accomplished and successful gymnasts to ever compete for Herndon High School is Kerry Gallagher, said Keith Naquin gymnastics assistant coach at Herndon High School. "She consistently scores a 38 in most meets (over 9.5 per event average) whether injured, under the weather or with a slew of photographers snapping away during her performance," he said. Named All-around Champion at the Northern Region 6D Gymnastics Championship at Washington-Liberty High School in Arlington on Feb. 13, Gallagher prepared the following week to compete in the VA 6A State Gymnastics Individual Open Championship in Nokesville, Va. "She's tough as nails, physically and mentally," said Jonathan Frohm, Director of Student Activities Herndon High School.

FOR THE ATHLETE, it's been slow but steady progress. Gallagher won her first meet as a freshman but did not make it to states. "I won a few more meets during my sophomore and junior years, and made it to states but only in one event, bars. This year as a senior, I ...adjusted my routines... to score a little higher... I really

wanted to qualify for all four events. I felt good going into Districts... I won 1st on bars, beam and floor, came in 3rd on vault and won 1st All-around, so I was able to advance to Regionals. Then, when I got to Regionals, I had a good day and was able to hit all my routines. I took 1st on bars, beam and floor, and 2nd on vault," Gallagher said.

According to Frohm, Gallagher possesses a "mental toughness." She focuses on her routines and skill sequence timing in a calm and confident mindset, according to Naquin, who called Gallagher, "a formidable competitor." Gallagher acknowledged that gymnastics is a hard sport. "You have to put in a lot of time to compete, so you... have to have a strong desire and determination," she said. According to Gallagher, she goes to the Apollo Gymnastics training facility in Woodbridge every day after school except Wednesdays from 4 - 9 p.m. and Saturdays from 9 a.m.-2:30 p.m., plus she travels for competitions. In addition, Gallagher, a senior, is on the Herndon High School Gymnastic Team and is captain.

Gallagher's mother, Jill, said that as a parent of a gymnast, it's been hard to manage the schedule, the travel and the costs. However, the benefits

SEE GALLAGHER, PAGE 5

PET CONNECTION



A Walk in Herndon Neighborhood

A brisk walk on a beautiful day in the Herndon neighborhood, with main leash holder Vicki Morse (Herndon). Walkers are: Mimi - maltipoo (white) 3 years old; Raven - toy poodle (black) 15; Fergie - miniature poodle (red), 13. We tried to capture selfies but it takes a lot to hold a camera with little paws. Fortunately, all we had to do was “woof” to snap the picture. Finally a group shot ... smile

Meeting Mayor's Pets



Lisa Merkel, Mayor of Herndon. Sent us these two photos of family pets: Cat - Socks, 5 years old, Tuxedo kitty, He's a sweet boy who loves to snuggle next to you, especially on a fuzzy blanket. We call him “The Chairman” because he looks stately, like he's wearing a vest. He's the little brother to our 18 pound orange tabby, Punkin.



Dog - Minute, 8 months old, Pomeranian. Lila (age 11) finally convinced her cat people parents to add a puppy to the family last summer. Minute is tiny, the runt of her litter, and full grown weighs 5.5 pounds! We named her Minute because she's “no bigger than a minute!” She love chasing balls and treats from Great Harvest.



Milo is a pit bull mix. He's five years old, and we got him a shelter. Milo's very friendly, mellow, and loves to kiss. He gets bursts of energy, but he's very calm. - Jordan Truitt with Grady Austin, formerly of Reston now living in Herndon

PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/
THE CONNECTION



PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

Nothing like red plaid to set off the white fur of Cotton from Herndon known to accompany Arthur Nachman not only on walks but to go for a spin with Arthur, seated in the backseat of his convertible.



PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED BY OLLIE GALLARDO OF HERNDON

I like chasing squirrels and barking at the mailman. - Bane Gallardo, 3 1/2 years old- Follow Bane at Instagram: @banethedestroyerdog



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY IGOR BIRMAN OF HERNDON
Igor Birman of Herndon with Samwise.



PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION
Daisy owned by Jason Sickels of Herndon.



Color coordinated - Sweet Sophie of Herndon tries out pink sunglasses belonging to Izzy Atkinson, 2, while Maddy Atkinson, 5, holds Sophie's pink leash.

News

Gallagher Wins Regional Title

FROM PAGE 3

outweigh the struggles. “The sport provides a lot of structure and discipline, which I think has transferred over to other areas of her life. She’s a hard worker on and off the mat and has great time management,” said Jill Gallagher.

Admitting to pre-event jitters before competitions, Gallagher utilizes coping techniques. “I talk to my team-mates to try to relax...and have fun during the competition. We all cheer each other on, and that helps,” she said. “Kerry’s mental focus this year has been outstanding... Knowing you can win each event and the all-around at the district and region level, and then actually making it happen is an incredible feat for a young athlete. Kerry was able to accomplish this with strong coaching, parental support and mental toughness,” said Frohm.

Gallagher’s ability to balance a hard-working environment with spirited-fun and helpfulness made her “a most delightful and coachable athlete,” said Naquin. “She has a pleasant demeanor, never complains, and embraces gymnastics and its physical challenges... Because of her gymnastics prowess and daily training regimen, she instills team camaraderie by way of engaging with her team-mates who also seek her guidance. She also cheers for her competitors by recognizing their training dedication, and genuinely desires for them to do well,” Naquin said.

Looking beyond states and graduation toward the future,



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Herndon High School gymnast Kerry Gallagher at the Northern Region 6D Gymnastics Championship at Washington-Liberty High School in Arlington on Feb. 13.

GALLAGHER said that she plans to go to the College of Brockport in New York. “It’s a small school, has my major, physical therapy, and they have a great gymnastics team. I have been up for a visit and...I have family nearby... It’s a great fit for me.”

Gallagher competed in the VA 6A State Gymnastics Individual Open Championship in Nokesville, VA on Feb. 22. While the Herndon High School gymnastics team did not qualify to have a shot at a state title, Kerry Gallagher competed as an individual, having earned All-around Champion at Northern Region 6D Gymnastics Championship at Washington-Liberty High School in Arlington, VA on Feb. 13.

“(At states), Kerry medaled on floor (9.45) and got the highest she ever has on vault (9.575); did good on bars (9.45) but had a little stumble on beam (9.3) that bumped her down a little in All-Around. Out of the 60 or so kids, she was 7th All-Around. She was a little sad, but that’s how this sport is - up down, up down all the time,” said Jill Gallagher, mother of gymnast Kerry Gallagher.

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<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/springfield/teenjobfairs>

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OPINION

Climate Change at Our Doorstep

How Virginia is taking the high road.

By ROHAN MANI

Growing up in a world in which scientists predict we only have 12 years to limit climate change catastrophe is under standably unnerving for an 18-year old. And the most worrisome concern is that we are doing almost nothing about what is looming over the horizon.

For decades, our planet has experienced consistent increases in temperature, changing rainfall patterns, increasing frequency of floods, droughts, melting of glaciers and more. While cutting back greenhouse gas emissions responsible for global warming is the only way forward, limited progress has been made on this front. Coal and oil continue to dominate as major energy sources despite the availability of relatively cheap and abundant solar and wind energy. What then are realistic and sustainable solutions that we should pursue in order to leave a thriving planet for our children and grandchildren?

According to the Fourth National Assessment Report, the impacts of global climate change are already being felt in the United States and are projected to intensify in the future. But the severity of future impacts will depend largely on actions taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to adapt to the changes that will occur. This report draws a direct connection between the warming atmosphere and the resulting changes that affect Americans' lives, communities, and livelihoods, now and in the future. Multiple studies have now projected that the climate of our region will turn more southern over

the coming decades. The unusually warm winter of this year may not be an exception but a norm for coming years. That means, less need for jackets, gloves, hats, scarves etc.

Many communities are attempting to answer this question in different ways. And it's been fascinating to see how some are gearing up to cope with immediate problems through advocacy and the support of local governments. It's obvious that communities need to adapt to a changing climate irrespective of what happens globally to reduce greenhouse gases.

There is, however, a ray of hope. The Virginia lawmakers passed an unprecedented climate legislation last week that will significantly alter use of clean energy in our power generation. The measure, called the Clean Economy Act, lays out a plan to get Virginia to 100 percent renewable generation by 2050. The legislation will significantly alter our generation energy capacity with solar and offshore wind taking the lead. That will not only reduce our dependence on fossil fuel-based energy generation but will put Virginia among the top US states in terms of dealing with climate change.

Climate change has the potential to significantly transform every aspect of our lives, ranging from where we live to what we eat and the stories we tell. It is an existential crisis for our generation and generations to come. I believe this is the time to act now to save the planet and it begins at our doorstep. We can do our own bit by driving less, switching to cleaner energy sources, using energy efficient appliances and reducing usage of water. As activist Greta Thunberg put it aptly, "the climate crisis has already been solved. We already have the facts and solutions. All we have to do is to wake up and change."

Rohan Mani is a Senior and a student journalist at McLean Highlander.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FROM PAGE 2

matically bring down the cost of prescription drugs. Mike would ban drug company payments to the people who make decisions at pharmacies so drug makers compete on the value of their products — not on the amount of money they pay to get preferential treatment. As a businessman, Mike would also work to increase competition in the marketplace, giving consumers more options at lower costs.

Mike Bloomberg is a trained engineer, a businessman, and a philanthropist who has spent his life solving the big problems facing Americans and I know that if he is elected, he will work tirelessly to reverse the rising cost of

healthcare in the United States.

Marjorie Brennan
MD MPH Pediatric Physician
McLean

Targeted by Scammers

To the Editor:

Recently, I was stuck at home and unable to go to work for a few weeks due to health reasons. While to some people that may seem like a welcome respite from the drudgery of commuting to a 9 to 5 job, let me tell you it was not.

While Week 1 wasn't too bad, one can only watch so many episodes of Law and Order: Special Victim's Unit! What I would like to share with everyone is just how many calls we all get on our house landlines each day. When we're at work and don't answer, most callers don't leave messages so we have no idea of the volume of these calls each day.

I can honestly say that 99 percent of these calls are cold calling sales people or scammers! Yes,

there is the occasional call from Giant Food that "a prescription is due for pickup," but for the most part they are from strangers trying to separate you from your hard-earned cash.

Social Security scams, lower credit card interest rates, police benevolent association donations, hail damage inspection teams that are in my neighborhood and countless free vacations I've won where I only have to sit through a short two hour presentation, are just some of the calls I get every day!

Boredom forced me to pick up the phone and actually speak with these people. Civic duty caused me to engage in as long a conversation as I could so they would have less time to rip off my neighbors. They target the young and the old. Their metrics must show they succeed enough to make it profitable. And our number is registered with the "Do Not Call" list! Something must be done.

Bill Byrne
Oak Hill

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By e-mail:
editors@connectionnewspapers.com

BULLETIN

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

WEDNESDAY/FEB. 26

DMV2Go at the Pavilion. 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. At the Pavilion at Reston Town Center, Reston. The wireless office on wheels offers all DMV services: driver's license and ID card applications and renewals, driving records, vehicle titles, license plates, decals, order disabled plates, and more. Information on all services available at dmv.virginia.gov/general/#dmv_2go.asp.

THURSDAY/FEB. 27

Affordable Housing For Seniors: Preservation Project Kick-off. 1:30 p.m. At Hunters Woods Fellowship House, 2231 Colts Neck Road, Reston. Join in a kick-off of a major renovation project on the 225-unit Hunters Woods Fellowship House. They are investing \$12 million to modernize and upgrade this important community landmark that helps so many seniors who otherwise could not afford to live in the Reston area. Hear from all the key stakeholders – including the residents – what this project means to them and to the community.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Parent Support Partners, a service of the Healthy Minds Fairfax initiative, are all parents who have received training and are qualified to offer education, support and assistance at no cost to families or caregivers. They provide reliable information that families can use in decision-making and are familiar with services and resources that can help families in distress. Visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/healthyminds/fairfax or www.nami-northernvirginia.org/parent-peer-support.html.

ONGOING

STEM Professionals Needed. Volunteers are needed to assist K-12 STEM teachers in northern Virginia as part of the American Association for the Advancement of Science's STEM Volunteer Program, stemvolunteers.org, during the 2019-20 school year. Contact Don Rea at 571-551-2488 or donaldrea@aol.com.

Assistance League of Northern Virginia is an all-volunteer nonprofit organization that feeds, clothes and educates children in need. Assistance League's philanthropic programs touch the lives of thousands of children, including those at 11 Title 1 elementary schools in Fairfax and Prince William counties and the City of Alexandria. There are many volunteer opportunities for community members to contribute to helping those in need through Weekend Food for Kids, tutoring programs and providing new clothing and layettes. To learn more, email: info@alnv.org, or visit www.alnv.org.

Volunteer Adult Mentors Needed. Help assist the Department of Family Services' BeFriendA-Child mentoring program. The mentors provide opportunities for companionship, guidance and support to children who have been abused and neglected, or who are at risk of abuse and neglect. Contact Ibrahim Khalil at Ibrahim.khalil@fairfaxcounty.gov or 703-324-4547.

RSVP, a volunteer network for seniors seeking service opportunities in and around Fairfax County, Arlington County and the City of Alexandria, offers a wide array of opportunities for volunteers 55 and older. RSVP volunteers enjoy flexible schedules, free accident and liability insurance while serving, optional mileage and meal reimbursement and are invited to volunteer group projects and social gatherings. To sign up for an upcoming orientation, email Carly Hubicki at chubicki@volunteerfairfax.org or call RSVP at 703-403-5360. To learn more about RSVP, visit www.rsvpnova.org.

Sunrise at Reston Town Center offers a monthly Caregiver Support Group on the fourth Wednesday of the month, 6:30-8 p.m. Monthly support group offers a safe place for family caregivers, to meet and develop a mutual support system and to exchange practical information and possible solutions. Learn about resources available in the community and how to manage caregiver related stress. Call 703-956-8930 or email Reston.ED@sunriseseniorliving.com to RSVP.

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Useless Is As Useless Doesn't Have To Do



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

It began years ago when technology enabled many public bathrooms to change to hands-free. Other than the obvious hands-on responsibilities, many of the other elements no longer required any touching. Be it the paper-towel dispenser, the hand dryer, the hot and cold/on and off functions in the sinks, and of course, the urinal and toilet flushing functions. All providing a convenience never before possible. Other than an automatic entry/exit function for the bathroom door, and one as well on the inside for the stalls themselves, using many public bathrooms has become much less involved, shall we say, than ever before. And it has not stopped there. It has gone public in a very big way.

Driving, specifically through tolls, that is. Thanks to EZ-Pass, tolls or rather interacting with them by having to hand money over to a "toll collector," (or even to stop and toss money into a basket) has nearly been eliminated. Due to a device (transponder) attached to my licence plate, as me and my car approach the toll booth, I simply go about my normal driving business with nary a worry in the world. I steer into the dedicated EZ-Pass lane at a bit less than the posted speed, and ding!, as I drive through the toll booth, the toll is paid. No fuss, no muss, no window roll-down and no scrambling for change or digging for dollars. What's done is done so long as the yellow light illuminates and "paid" appears. (Although if what's done isn't done, you'll soon receive a paper bill in the mail at the address on file.)

Metro, our local public conveyor, also provides a hands-free or very nearly hands-free experience. If you have a plastic "Metro card" linked into their system, all you need do as you enter the turnstyle is tap your card and go. No more standing in line at the "Fare"/"Add Fare" kiosks to load your card with money to start or end your journey. As with your EZ-Pass, once you sign up and link your Metro card to a credit/debit card, you are "In Like Flint," as some of us from a certain generation might say. Henceforth, your card is automatically updated to always provide sufficient dollars for this trip and any subsequent trips to make sense.

Now imagine if I had a "smart phone." How many more functions/people-free interactions might I enjoy with a tap, a scan or a wave? Unfortunately, I have what my wife, Dina calls a "stupid phone." That's a flip phone with no internet access. As such, I am cut off from an evolving world. A world in which I'll likely not have to interact with anybody or reach into my pocket for anything resembling money. All I'll have to reach for is my "smart phone." I've seen its functionality at the airport in lieu of a paper ticket, on Amtrak, at concert venues and of course sports venues. It seems to help speed up the entry process.

I don't really don't want to be the last flip-phone-holding man standing. But neither do I want to get into a life-accident while negotiating the learning curve. At the moment, the road ahead seems full of twists and turns with more curves than I can possibly imagine. How do I negotiate something I can't see? Moreover, how do I negotiate the road less traveled, by me? Where will I draw the experience necessary to acclimate to these ever-changing signposts? I mean, the words may be familiar, but some of the context may be off putting and counterintuitive, to me.

I'm not a complete Bozo. I have partially integrated into this new world. I have had insurance and car payments automatically debited from my bank account for years. I have some over-the-counter medicines, supplements and a variety of cat-related care and feeding products automatically delivered to my home. However, sometimes I feel like a pinball (and I'm no wizard) without the bells and whistles banging around trying to stay on top of what product is debit/paid and when. Now that's a service I could use: an automated weekly reminder of what's happening when. And the beauty of it, I wouldn't need any new devices. I use what I always use: my home computer. Turn it on, click the email, open, read and then close. Even Bozo the clown could do that.

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

CALENDAR

Submit entertainment announcements at www.connectionnewspapers.com/Calendar/. The deadline is noon on Friday. Photos/artwork encouraged.

ONGOING

AARP Tax-Aide Program. Feb. 1 to April 14. At RCC Hunters Woods, 2310 Colts Neck Road, Reston. Tuesdays: 9 a.m. – 2 p.m.; Thursdays: 4:30 p.m./– 8:30 p.m.; and Saturdays: 9 a.m./– 3 p.m. Free. For taxpayers with low and moderate incomes with special attention to those 60 and older. AARP's Tax-Aide program was created nearly 40 years ago to assist older adults as well as persons with low and middle incomes in successfully navigating the tax code. All tax preparation is free and confidential. For more information, contact the Lifelong Learning Program Director, Casmera Lebron at 703-390-6157.

"Ordinary Days." Now thru March 15. At NextStop Theatre, 269 Sunset Park Drive, Herndon. "Ordinary Days" is an intimate musical about four young New Yorkers searching for love, beauty, and purpose in a big and unforgiving world. Performances are Thursday-Sunday and tickets start at \$40. This production is directed by Jay Brock, who previously directed Eurydice and Assassins for NextStop, and features Bobby Libby, Sarah Anne Sillers, Carl Williams, and Anna Phillips-Brown. Visit the website www.NextStopTheatre.org

WEDNESDAY/FEB. 26

DMV2Go at the Pavilion. 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. At Reston Town Center, Reston. The wireless office on wheels offers all DMV services: driver's license and ID card applications and renewals, driving records, vehicle titles, license plates, decals, order disabled plates, and more. Information on all services available at dmv.virginia.gov/general/#dmv_2go.asp.

"Downton Abbey" Movie. 10 a.m. At Meet Me at the Movies – Senior Movie Day at Bow Tie Cinemas, Reston Town Center. Reston Association presents the feature film Downton Abbey. Refreshments and prizes provided prior to movie. Free to 55+. Information: Ashleigh@reston.org. Call 703-435-6577 or visit www.reston.org

Wednesday Morning Book Club. 10 a.m. At Scrawl Books, 11911 Freedom Drive, Reston. Featuring A Woman of No Importance. If you enjoy history, biography and memoir, this is the book club for you! Each month, club members choose a new non-fiction title highlighting someone who's experiences offer an interesting perspective on life in both the past and present.

Memory Depot Orientation. 6:30 p.m. At Reston Library, 11925 Bowman Towne Dr., Reston. Learn about the Memory Depot station, a do-it-yourself location for scanning your slides, negatives and photos and to transfer your VHS or audio cassettes to digital formats!

Off-the-Shelf Trivia. 6:30 p.m. At Scrawl Books, 11911 Freedom Drive, Reston. Want to find out how much fun a bookstore can really be? They talk, laugh, wander off topic, compete, listen to music and play trivia. The professional trivia master picks a theme and writes the questions; the staff awards prizes; and the customers are hilarious (and smart).

THURSDAY/FEB. 27

Toddler Storytime — Sesame Street. 10:30 a.m. At Reston Library, 11925 Bowman Towne Dr., Reston. Interactive games, duckie prizes, and puppet show theatre play time. Age 2 with adult. No registration required.

Homeschool Book Exploration. 1:30 p.m. At Reston Library, 11925 Bowman Towne Dr., Reston. Explore a book's history, artistry and story. Come read with us and find out something new. Age 8-12. No registration required..

Teen Advisory Board. 7 p.m. At Reston Library, 11925 Bowman Towne Dr., Reston. Join TAB to gain leadership and volunteer experience and share your ideas about how to make the library a wonderful place for teens! Volunteer hours granted. Age 13-18. No registration required. Call 703-689-2700.

Dollars and Sense. 7 p.m. At Reston Library, 11925 Bowman Towne Dr., Reston. Monthly group discussion focuses on business leaders and markets. We will be discussing "The Next Millionaire Next Door" Thomas J. Stanley. The event is free and open to the public. Adults.

FRIDAY/FEB. 28

Duplo Play. 2 p.m. At Reston Library, 11925 Bowman Towne Dr., Reston. Build and create using Duplo blocks. Age 2-5 with adult. No registration required.

Retro Game Night. 6-9 p.m. At Reston Historic Trust & Museum, 1639 Washington Plaza, N, Lake Anne Plaza, Reston. Grab your friends and play board games in the museum after hours. Choose from over a dozen games provided by Staring Player Pop-up. Feel free to bring your own games and grab some of the provided snacks. The event is free and open to the public but space is limited so come early to grab a spot! Everyone who attends will receive a poster of "The Game of Reston." Visit the website: <https://www.restonmuseum.org/>

Indian Cooking. 6-7:30 p.m. At RCC Hunters Woods, 2310 Colts Neck Road, Reston. Learn to cook healthy vegetarian food from different regions of India. This will be a demonstration with some hands-on opportunities. Students will be able to taste the results. Cost is \$20 (R)/\$15 (R55+)/\$30 (NR), #503590-0A.

SATURDAY/FEB. 29

Get to Know Your Muslim Neighbor. 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. At Reston Regional Library, 11925 Bowman Towne Drive, Reston. Celebrate community with fun multicultural activities for all ages. Enjoy food, exhibits, henna and arts and crafts. Free. Contact Adrienne Leo at adrienne.leo@fairfaxcounty.gov

Photography Class. 12:30 to 5:30 p.m. At ArtSpace Herndon, 750 Center Street, Herndon. With Mary Louise Ravese, fine art photographer. This class is for digital camera users who are interested in learning how to successfully use their camera beyond automatic / program modes. The class concentrates on the 5 most essential camera settings that have the most



Master flutist Galen Abdur-Razzaq

TUESDAY/MARCH 3

Flutist Galen Abdur-Razzaq. 7-8:30 p.m. At Reston Regional Library, 11925 Bowman Towne Drive, Reston. Experience the history of women in jazz through lecture, trivia and live performance. Presented by master flutist Galen Abdur-Razzaq. Adults.

impact on the look of a photograph: focal length, aperture, shutter speed, ISO and white balance. Call 703-956-6590 or email info@artsherndon.org.

Line Dance Workshop. 3-6 p.m. At YMCA Fairfax County, 12196 Sunset Hills Road, Reston. Join Northern Virginia Country Western Dance Association for an introduction to line dancing. Beginner Line Dance lessons followed

by a bit of open dancing for practice. You do not need to be a member of the YMCA. You do not need to be a member of the Association. Come see how much fun and exercise you get. Children must be at least 13 years old. Cost is \$5. Visit the website: NVCWDA.org

"Paris" Concert. 7:30-9:30 p.m. At UCP Reston, 11508 North Shore Drive, Reston. The Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra of Greater Washington Maestro Dimitar Nikolov conducts an all-French program featuring works by Faure, Saint-Saens, Roussel, and Debussy. With guest soloist Alan Murray on piano. A "Meet the Musicians" reception will follow the performance. Tickets are Adults: \$30; Seniors: \$25; Students: \$20; Children free.

SUNDAYS IN MARCH (BEGINNING MARCH 1)

Sunday Fun-Day. 1-4 p.m. At Reston Regional Library, 11925 Bowman Towne Dr., Reston. Drop by the Children's desk on any <call> Sunday for a fun independent activity. Perhaps you will create a flannel board, or play Book Bingo, or explore the library with a scavenger hunt. We will have a new activity each month. Age 5-11.

SUNDAY/MARCH 1

Depot Reopening Event. 12-4 p.m. At Herndon Depot Museum, 717 Lynn Street, Herndon. A Model Train Show, a working Telegraph Exhibit, and a Silent Auction of railroad collectibles at the Herndon Depot Museum. Visit the website: www.herndonhistoricalsociety.org

MONDAY/MARCH 2

Baby Storytime. 10:30 a.m. At Reston Regional Library, 11925 Bowman Towne Dr., Reston. Enjoy nursery rhymes and songs while building early literacy skills for your child. Age Birth to 17 months with adult.

Preschool Storytime — Making Music. 2 p.m. At Reston Regional Library, 11925 Bowman Towne Dr., Reston. This month we will foster your little one's love of all things noisy with stories, songs, and crafts focused on music. Age 3-5 with adult.

Pokemon Club. 6:30 p.m. At Reston Regional Library, 11925 Bowman Towne Dr., Reston. We choose you...to bring your Pokemon trading cards to trade or play. Poke-crafts and games, too. Age 6-12.

TUESDAYS/MARCH 3

Toddler Storytime. 10:30 a.m. At Reston Regional Library, 11925 Bowman Towne Dr., Reston. An interactive, tot-tailored storytime for you and your child. Age 18 months to 2 years with adult.

Baby & Toddler Playtime. 11 a.m. At Reston Regional Library, 11925 Bowman Towne Dr., Reston. Join us for an hour of unstructured play and social time for babies. Cosponsored by Friends of the Reston. Regional Library (FRRL). Age birth-23 months with adult.

Women in Jazz. 7 p.m. At Reston Regional Library, 11925 Bowman Towne Dr., Reston. Experience the history of women in jazz through lecture, trivia and live performance. Presented by master flutist Galen Abdur-Razzaq. Adults. (R)

"Boys Don't Cry." 8 p.m. At Reston Community Center, 2310 Colts Neck Road, Reston. Boys Don't Cry is inspired by text from Chantal Thomas and is a funny and tender reflection on what it means to dance when you are a boy from North Africa and the Arab world. Cost is \$15 Reston/\$20 Non-Reston.

WEDNESDAY/MARCH 4

Memory Depot Orientation. 10:30 a.m. At Reston Regional Library, 11925 Bowman Towne Dr., Reston. Memory Depot station is a do-it-yourself location for scanning your slides, negatives and photos and to transfer your VHS or audio cassettes to digital formats!

DIY Club - Calligraphy and Elegant Writing. 6:30 p.m. At Reston Regional Library, 11925 Bowman Towne Dr., Reston. Join us to learn calligraphy and handwriting with lessons and exercises. Supplies provided. Adults, Teens.

THURSDAY/MARCH 5

Millennial's Book Club. 7 p.m. At Reston Regional Library, 11925 Bowman Towne Dr., Reston. "Born a Crime" by Trevor Noah. Check out a library copy or pick up a copy of your own. Adults from early 20s to early 30s.

DINING

Street-style Mexican Food Comes to NoVa

Restaurant Review: Señor Ramon Taqueria, Reston.

BY ALEXANDRA GREELEY
THE CONNECTION

Amazing how restaurants grow. Take, for example, Señor Ramon Taqueria, a Tex-Mex taco place that started out in Loudoun (Leesburg) and the owner and management have since opened three more eateries. Their goal, according to a website blurb, has been "to bring authentic, street-style Mexican food to Northern Virginia; using antique homemade recipes and the freshest ingredients."

Now, welcome to Reston, in the Home Depot shopping center, with its location on the opposite side next door to several local merchants. Obviously, the word has gotten out, for at a recent very early lunch, patrons began trickling in; one fellow was already seated with a tableful of taco containers.

Ordering here is easy...there is no waitstaff, so patrons need to eye the menu posted on the wall (or pick up a paper menu) and figure out what to order. With a dozen different Taco Ramon

taco choices and fillings, plus 9 traditional tacos, it may take a while to sort through the favorites...for the house tacos, fillings include carnitas (crispy pork) with caramelized onions; crispy shrimp with charred corn salsa; carne asada (grilled beef) with shredded cheese and guacamole; and crispy tripe with braised tongue, plus several more choices.

Traditional fillings include grilled beef short ribs, shredded beef, grilled chicken, and spicy lamb, plus more. Patrons can add to the assorted nacho choices (how about spicy lamb?), assorted sides like empanadas, roasted corn, and fried calamari sticks; tostados; tortas (sandwiches); and a choice of green bowls and sliders.

After placing the order and getting seated (or waiting for takeout) patrons can sip a beverage of choice, and within seconds (well, minutes), the order appears. On a nearby side table the staff has set up three choices of salsas, from mild, medium, to hot (flaming hot, fiery hot 12). Then, it is time to plunge in.

Dessert may or may not be available but if flan is on hand, that's a sweet way to end your taco feast.

Señor Ramon Taqueria, 11790 Baron Cameron Ave., Unit #4A, Reston. Phone: 571-313-0374. Hours: Mon.-Sat., 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Sun., 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.