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Parks Closed, Trails Open

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Landscape Designer Raises \$5,000 for SHARE

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Local trails at Riverbend Park and Scott's Run Nature Preserve are a sample of the 330 miles of local trails under the Fairfax County Park Authority. While parks remain closed during the pandemic, the local trails remain open.

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NEWS

Who Earned the F in Best Practices?

Distance Learning goes awry for FCPS.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Maintenance releases, patch management and software updates keep users' experience optimal. Staying ahead of security threats is vital. So what caused and who is responsible for events leading up to the reflex action by the superintendent of Fairfax County Public Schools, the 10th largest school division in the nation located in one of the United States' wealthiest counties, to end the launch of the division's Distance Learning Plan, two days into the project because of load capacity and security issues?

That's what the twelve elected members serving on the Fairfax County Public Schools Board turned their attention toward Thursday, April 16, during their virtual Board Meeting. The first item on the Agenda read: "Distance Learning Update: Blackboard." The night before, Superintendent Scott Brabrand canceled teacher-led instruction through Blackboard scheduled for that day and Friday, April 17, due to continued login and security issues with Blackboard Learn FCPS 24-7 and Blackboard Collaborate Ultra. "Our teachers are ready and willing to do whatever is necessary to provide a robust learning experience for our students... We have identified our problems, and today we are proposing solutions," said Brabrand. Later, during the School Board Meeting, Marty Smith, Chief Operating Officer, said, "We were able to identify those students by IP address, and then work with those principals to then refer those students for any additional discipline as necessary."

FCPS twelve School Board members, Bra-



FCPS Superintendent Scott Brabrand



Marty Smith, Chief Operating Officer



COURTESY OF FCPS

Marty Smith,
Chief Operating Officer

Latest on Distance Learning: School System Looking for 'Plan B'

Monday evening's message to Fairfax County Public Schools; parents:

"Despite attempts to address identified technology issues over the weekend, this morning it became evident that Blackboard Learn 24x7 was not able to handle the system load of our virtual class meetings. This evening, Dr. Brabrand emailed the community with his comprehensive plan on addressing the problems that have arisen with

the current distance learning format.

To ensure students have access to continuity of learning, students will resume asynchronous assignments tomorrow (Tuesday). Students should log into Google Classroom in order to access choice boards for this week. Staff will be available to answer questions via email for students needing further guidance.

We will provide you with an update soon regarding our next steps as we shift our distance

learning plan. Please know that our teachers and staff have been working and adapting with every change to best teach our students in this new environment. As new plans are identified, the staff will continue to create assignments to engage students in meaningful learning activities.

We know that this is frustrating, and we appreciate your patience as we adjust to the new plan."

brand and his Leadership Team composed of Frances Ivey, Deputy Superintendent; Marty Smith, Chief Operating Officer; Maribeth Luftglass, Assistant Superintendent, Department of Information Technology and Sloan Presidio, Assistant Superintendent and Instructional Services Department and Tim Tomlinson, Chief Product Officer for Blackboard, Inc., attended the meeting virtually.

As the 3-hour portion of the School Board Meeting wore on, individuals provided different levels of insight. Whereas Tim Tomlinson of Blackboard initially commented with a prepared statement saying: "I'm here this morning on behalf of our (Blackboard's) leadership team to apologize for the challenges experienced this week in moving Fairfax County students to fully remote in-

struction," later he added: "We had no indication, based on our years of experience running the software for thousands of customers that we would have this issue at the levels of load that was expected this week."

One hour into the meeting, Sloan Presidio said, "As a Leadership Team, we failed to properly train the staff. We failed to properly communicate the expectations, and we failed to properly monitor the implementation." Presidio comment referenced security concerns and misbehaviors exhibited by then anonymous individuals who logged into virtual live class sessions via Guest Log-In, not through the preferred, guide-lined and more secure pre-populated email address access.

Nearly two hours into the meeting, School Board member Megan McLaughlin

(Braddock) said, "I remain shocked that the 10th largest school system in the country did not know, working with its vendor, to do a load testing. There is no getting around it... I want to say that the IT failures, the lack of flow testing, the software updates that didn't occur, the fact that we're doing information to our schools to prepare for this as guidance, versus direct as mandates, do speak to a larger problem we have in the system."

A letter on the FCPS official twitter account to FCPS families dated April 17, read: "Distance learning will resume Monday morning. Blackboard continues to make the necessary upgrades to the FCPS 24-7 system to bring students back to a safer, more stable online environment." FCPS signed the letter.

Q&A: What Went Wrong and Why?

Q- School Board member Ricardy Anderson (Mason): What were the issues?

A- FCPS Leadership Team member Luftglass: The first time that we saw some slowness and some challenges had to do with logging in. We had a lot of simultaneous logins on Monday (the day before Distance Learning went live to students) and Tuesday... There were a couple of different issues (with Blackboard 24-7), one with the logging system... and then once people got logged in, it overloaded the application servers... With Blackboard Collaborate Ultra sessions, there are a couple of different ways that you can implement those sessions. You pre-populate those sessions with the specific student email addresses that you want to have in your session. That's in the guidance documents... developed in terms of creating

those sessions in a secure way so that you don't have Guest Access... Documents were created, but they were not properly shared and properly highlighted in terms of the importance, and that's our fault...Anybody could use those links (Guest Access) to get into the session...We failed.

Q-School Board member Karl Frisch (Providence): Was any request made to Blackboard to do testing to make sure, beyond simply telling them what our load would be?

A-Luftglass: No, we did not. We relied on our vendor to do that testing.

According to Tomlinson and confirmed by Luftglass, until recently, FCPS generally updated its software once a year, taking a one-week downtime after the academic school year ended and before summer school started.

Q- School Board member Sizemore Heizer (Member-at-Large): Why (wasn't) the software update... just done automatically?

A- Tomlinson: The Fairfax County Team makes decisions about when and how the software is updated... This system actually hasn't been updated in two years. We recommend that all of our clients stay on the most current versions of our software. The version of the software that Fairfax County is running is three years old. Fairfax County has made the choice not to update that software."

Q- School Board member & Vice Chair Tamara Derenak Kaufax (Lee): What are your best practices in place to make certain that your clients are getting the most up-to-date product from you?

A- Tomlinson: We release major updates twice a year. We release patch updates as

frequently as needed. The system that's currently running (FCPS') was released three years ago. It's had two levels of patch updates applied to it... There have been seven updates made publicly available to the software that have not been applied.

Every time Blackboard releases an update, it's communicated directly to the client by email and its availability published on the company's Support Portal. Today...over one hundred of our clients are actually now running on a stats version of our product that's hosted by Amazon Web Services in the cloud... That's the most modern version of our software that we've been recommending to all of our clients for a couple of years. (It) is updated automatically every month; no action required by the client... That's the best practice we deliver for software. It's a change that Fairfax County has not chosen to take advantage of over time.

OPINION

Honoring Women in 2020

A look at the woman leading us through the coronavirus pandemic.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

BY SUPERVISOR DAN STORCK
D-MOUNT VERNON DISTRICT

Florence Nightingale, Elizabeth Blackwell, Clara Barton, Virginia Apgar, Rebecca Lee Crumpler, Marie Curie are just a few of the many women who have made our lives healthier through medicine and science. While women have influenced much of our society and knowledge base, health and science seem particularly important today, as we are led by Dr. Gloria Addo-Ayensu, Director of the Fairfax County Health Department. As I receive email after email and attend briefings and updates on COVID-19, I am inspired by the calm intellect Dr. Gloria displays every time she relays information or responds to questions. It is leaders such as Dr. Gloria who will guide us through this pandemic and see that we emerge a stronger and more united community.

As the County's health director, Dr. Gloria directs and manages public health programs across the county and serves as health advisor to the County's Board of Supervisors, Health Care Advisory Board, and Human Services Council. In her 17 years of service as director, the Department has virtually been restructured from the ground up and several new initiatives and systems have been put in place. She has

brought a new focus on emergency preparedness, health equity, the need to promote community health and resilience, and the importance of leveraging community assets that already exist if you want to create practical, sustainable approaches to complex challenges.

During the current pandemic, Dr. Gloria's mission to reorient the Health Department toward enhancing community resilience has been especially relevant and invaluable. For instance, the Bioterrorism Medical Action Team that she created in 2001—one of the first and largest local public health volunteer response programs in the United States—prepared Fairfax County to make a seamless transition to the Medical Reserve Corps program. MRC volunteers are presently working alongside our Health Department staff to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Disciplined, approachable, passionate, rigorous yet flexible, Dr. Gloria's leadership and work, honored through numerous awards, serve as an inspiring example to young women and men who aspire to making a substantial social impact because, no matter where they currently are in life, where there is a will, there is a way. No one, least of all Dr. Gloria herself,

would have predicted that a young woman from Ghana who had to clean hotel rooms to pay her way through college would someday rise to such distinction.

One would therefore have imagined that a leader of such professional accomplishments would never let on that, in her private moments, she still struggles with insecurities of one kind or another, and that she still gets stage fright when she has to deliver a speech. Three strengths have helped her overcome her personal struggles and achieve success.

First, Dr. Gloria sets high standards for herself and puts enormous pressure on herself, routinely waking up at 2 a.m. to begin her day. Second, she never gives up—no matter how complex or daunting the challenge. Even when overwhelmed, she tries not to show it, although you might hear it as a slight stammer in her speech when the pressure is really on, an impediment from childhood. Third, her deep faith, upon which her entire life is centered, anchors her and gives her a focus that allows her to ignore side distractions and concentrate on the most important goals.

Throughout history, leaders like Dr. Gloria both inspire and protect us in times of great challenge and times of great joy. We are all in this together and we thank you for your service, Dr. Gloria.

Dr. Gloria Addo-Ayensu,
Director Fairfax County
Health Department

Back to the Capitol

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

As you are reading this column on Wednesday morning, I will have left home in Reston and be heading south on Interstate 95 for a noon meeting of the General Assembly for its reconvened session, commonly referred to as the "veto session." A reconvened session can be deemed essential during this stay-at-home period because Article IV, Section 6 and Article V, Section 6 of the Constitution of Virginia and House Joint Resolution No. 99 (procedural resolution) require that the 2020 Reconvened Session convene on Wednesday, April 22, 2020, at noon, to act upon the Governor's recommendations and vetoes to legislation passed during the 2020 Regular Session. The constitutional requirement for a reconvened session came about after Virginians started electing a Republican governor ever so often who would have the audacity to veto bills that had been passed by the Democrat-dominated General Assembly. The constitutional amendment establishing the reconvened session gives legislators the last word as to what bills can become law without the Governor's signature if a two-thirds vote can be gotten in both houses. Also, the reconvened session provides an opportunity to correct technical glitches or provide clarifying language through amendments suggested by the Governor from



COMMENTARY

the bills that are passed in the fast-paced legislative sessions.

Social distancing will be strictly adhered to for the session which will be a challenge for legislators who are accustomed to a lot of handshaking and hugging. The House of Delegates will convene under a temporary tent covering on capitol grounds that will provide the space for the 100 members to be at least six feet apart. The Senate of Virginia will meet in a large space at the Science Museum of Virginia that will accommodate social distancing for its 40 members. The usual strict requirement that men wear neckties has been relaxed for apparently ties sweep up too many germs. The Governor and his staff are not wearing ties these days. Face masks will be required, and plenty of hand sanitizer will be available. It is suggested that members bring their own lunches.

The Constitution limits the business of the General Assembly at Reconvened Session to consideration of the Governor's amendments and objections. Of the 1,291 bills presented to the Governor, he signed 1,188 (92.02 percent), recommended amendments to 102 bills and vetoed 1 bill. An official summary of the bills passed during the 2020 General Assembly session is available at <http://dls.virginia.gov/pubs/summary/2020/summary2020.pdf>.

The effort that legislators have to make to finish our work for the session pales in comparison to the challenges that people worldwide face every day during the pandemic. I continue to be impressed with the ways that social distancing has brought us together. Every day on social media and other outlets I learn of people who are sewing masks, running food pantries, contributing to charities, and doing good deeds for others. Our medical personnel put their lives on the line every day and cannot be thanked enough. On my website, kenplum.com there is updated information on the pandemic and ways you can help. Stay safe. I will be heading back home immediately upon the conclusion of the one-day session.

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Parks Closed, Trails Open

BY JENNIFER FLANAGAN
THE CONNECTION

For residents looking for new ideas on how to pass time during the pandemic, the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) wants to help. On April 15, the FCPA launched a Virtual Exploration Center (<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/virtual>) which houses a collection of resources to aid in virtual recreation and exploration. Just a sample of the many resources include on-demand workouts, activities to entertain kids, and historical tidbits about Fairfax County.

"We want to engage with the people who come to our parks even though we are closed right now with the exception of our trails," said Judy Pedersen, the Public Information Officer of FCPA. "During these unprecedented times, we have to be creative to catch people's attention. While we are stuck at home, we are hoping this new page will really draw people."

Within a couple of hours of the release of the Virtual Exploration Center, more than 400 people visited the site. Pedersen said the site reflects the diverse on-site activities and mission of FCPA to offer visitors ways to engage with nature, health, fitness and life-long learning.

FOR HEALTH AND WELLNESS activities, the site includes a printable health journal, health and fitness trackers, video workouts



PHOTO BY JENNIFER FLANAGAN/THE CONNECTION

Local trails at Riverbend Park and Scott's Run Nature Preserve are a sample of the 330 miles of local trails under the Fairfax County Park Authority. While parks remain closed during the pandemic, the local trails remain open.

and nutrition information. For science and nature activities, the site suggests ideas for a nature walk and scavenger hunt bingo games, field guides to plants and wildlife, updates on the new baby animal arrivals at Frying Pan Farm Park, and resources from around the state on everything from feathers to fish. For culture and history activities, the

site offers links to history-themed coloring pages, interactive tours of county historic sites, a guide to historical roadside markers and historic sites, and information about the county's museum collections.

Pedersen noted one of the biggest challenges is keeping the site content fresh. To help deliver new material each week, FCPA

engages staff at local sites for ideas. From creative projects for kids to videos on local woodlands creatures, Pedersen said the staff have really stepped up.

In conjunction with the Virtual Exploration Center, FCPA offers a virtual museum at the artiFACTS website (<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/artifacts>). The artiFACTS website is an existing resource, but Pederson hopes it can provide residents with another virtual activity while staying at home during the pandemic.

With more than 14 million park visits per year and 330 miles of trails, Pederson acknowledges many people in Fairfax County feel connected to their parks and visit multiple times per year.

If people do visit parks, the FCPA encourages people to use their local trails and not drive, but if they do drive, to park legally. A mobile application and website called Trail Buddy (<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/trails/trail-buddy>) shows maps of all the local trails available throughout the county.

PEDERSON said all the resources are a small way for the FCPA to show during this unusual and unprecedented national pandemic that they are still there. "Our parks are closed, but we are still here and we still want to maintain that connection and engagement, and this is our expression of that."



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Landscape designer Lynley Ogilvie with plants for fundraiser for SHARE.

McLean Landscape Designer Raises \$5,000 for SHARE

Lynley Ogilvie has a long history of volunteer service to the McLean community through her church and local schools. Inspired by her children's desire to help those in need because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ogilvie realized she could use her connections as a landscape designer to raise money for a local food bank which was overwhelmed with the demand for services from needy citizens. She went

to work planning a fundraiser and finished by raising \$5,000 for SHARE, the McLean-based nonprofit that serves the emergency needs of local citizens.

"Several neighbors mentioned to me that they wanted pretty plants to brighten their gardens but were hesitant to go to the garden center," Ogilvie said. "When

SEE SHARE, PAGE 7

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Chaz's Drive-By Parade in Great Falls

By Joan Brady

Chaz Kiser's birthday celebration plans weren't shaping up the way he hoped, with a big party with friends and cupcakes. What is these days, really? But when you are turning seven, the disappointment can be overwhelming.

His mom, Silvie Stankova, struggled to find a way to make his birthday special. The most appealing idea she heard was to throw a "party" where people keep the recommended six feet social distance by driving by the birthday child's home. Running with that concept, "Chaz's Drive-By Parade" was born.

"[Chaz is] obsessed with police cars, fire trucks, toll trucks... ambulances," Stankova told the Fairfax County Police Department and Fairfax County Fire and Rescue when she reached out to see if they might participate. She didn't have high hopes, figuring they were very busy and was thrilled when each responded immediately to her request. Chaz's Drive-by Parade was on the schedule and barring emergencies, they would all be there.

Stankova cast a wide net, reaching out to friends in the area as well as posting on Nextdoor hoping a few would drive by.

Around 4 p.m. on April 16, Stankova and her husband, Charlie Kiser, bundled up Chaz and his 9-month-old sister, Evie, to get some fresh air. And the cars started coming. For an hour, they kept coming. And coming. And coming.

In addition to friends, neighbors and strangers, Chaz reported that there were three fire trucks, one ambulance and 4 police cars. Stankova added that while she couldn't confirm those numbers, North Point Fire Station 39 had sent the fire trucks and ambulance.

Several of Chaz's friends came by and decorated his driveway with sidewalk chalk to add to the festivities.

The farthest celebrants came from D.C., and friends and strangers alike made signs and brought cards and gifts. Children's author, Rick Rahim, who apparently lives in the area, stopped by to bring Chaz a signed copy of his book, *Way up High in the Blue Sky*. Chaz was delighted.

The folks at Edibles Incredible Desserts, hearing about the celebration via Nextdoor, dropped off a cake and cupcakes which were enjoyed by the entire family. Cupcakes are actually Chaz's favorite. One car pulled up and three strangers hopped out—all carrying



Chaz Kiser-age 7-in front of chalk art by friends.



Fire truck joins Drive-by parade.



Chaz with gift dropped by off local author, Rick Rahim.

signs and singing happy birthday.

Chaz was shocked by all of it. He was impressed that so many people "did a special thing for [him]." He estimates that 70 – 80 came by. His mother isn't so sure, but acknowledged there were a lot.

Chaz's parents were overwhelmed. Kiser was particularly impressed, "[The community's response] reinstated my belief in people wanting to celebrate life regardless of where you may stand on any issues. The whole commu-

nity, including people we don't even know and never met, chose to come out...in a safe way and celebrate life. It made me feel great."

It's worth noting that, even in the excitement, all gifts and cards were wiped down, prior to being enjoyed.

While Chaz would have loved to have had a party, he said this was better, "[A regular party] wouldn't have been as good, the fire department and police probably wouldn't have come."



Chaz and dad, Charlie Kiser.



Three strangers with homemade sign who hopped out singing happy birthday.



Chaz with desserts sent by Edibles Incredible Desserts.

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED BY SILVIE STANKOVA

Supporting SHARE

FROM PAGE 5

I asked my son George to help me deliver plants, he suggested we have a plant sale to benefit SHARE.” She added, “My daughter, Jayne, thought that was a great idea and both kids offered to help. We’re not medical professionals, and we can’t sew face masks, but this family knows plants, and it was a nice way to bring joy to people while raising money for a wonderful organization.”

Ogilvie, owner of Lynley Ogilvie Landscape Design, contacted one of her plant suppliers, Babikow Wholesale Nursery in Baltimore, Md., about her idea for a plant sale and then put together a list of spring plants, including native perennials and annuals. She emailed neighbors and friends in the McLean area and was overwhelmed when 91 of her neighbors purchased plants. Lynley worked with her children, George and Jayne, both students at McLean High School, to organize the pick up of plants from her house while following the guidelines for safe distancing set forth by the Centers for Disease Control.

“Lynley did some work in our yard a couple years ago that was beautiful,” said McLean resident Laurie Plishker. “So when I saw that she and her kids were doing a plant sale for SHARE, I knew I would get quality plants, as well as the right ones to be planting now,” she added. “The fact that the proceeds would benefit SHARE was even better.”

SHARE president Don Frickel said that the group celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2019.

“We have been helping our neighbors all these years because of generous people in our community like Lynley Ogilvie,” Frickel said. “We are so grateful on behalf of our clients for the giving spirit of our community,” he added. “We are the conduit, but people like Lynley are the source of this community’s caring response to our hurting neighbors.”

SHARE Inc. is a 501(c)(3) all-volunteer nonprofit corporation providing emergency assistance since 1969 to the less fortunate in McLean and nearby areas of Northern Virginia. The organization’s food and clothing donation rooms are housed in the McLean Baptist Church.

Local businesses, schools, churches and synagogues usually collect food during Easter and Passover and SHARE is feeling the loss of those donated items. The group asks McLean residents to take time to think about neighbors in need and consider donating to SHARE.

A list of most wanted items can be found at <https://www.shareofmclean.org/>. Additional ways to donate are listed on SHARE’S Facebook page located at <https://www.facebook.com/ShareOfMcLean/>. SHARE is not accepting clothing, shoes, or household items at this time.

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Wholesale Change



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Since I’m not doing the food and pharmacy out-of-the-house shopping anymore, as I have for the last 40 years (as I may have mentioned in last week’s column: “Money For What”) I am no longer in control of what we buy and how much we spend. The pandemic and my upcoming thyroid cancer treatment have combined to empower my wife, Dina, to set fairly strict guidelines. Primarily that I am to stay put in the house ALL THE TIME and that during my isolation, she will fill the purchasing vacuum. The effect being that all my years of experience reducing our grocery expenses has led to this: we’re paying re, re, retail for nearly all of our purchases. Not impoverished because of it but not very happy about it either.

I derived a certain pleasure in wandering around the stores, advertising circular and coupon book in hand, looking for sale items, checking the 50% off/discontinued merchandise rack, occasionally looking at the day-old bakery cabinet, using miscellaneous paper and digital coupons, buying in bulk/quantity, getting rain checks when products were sold out, as well as being open to any other in-store incentives I might find. The process, as tedious as it may sound, was not nearly so for me, especially considering that over the course of a year, according to the stores’ own online tally, I saved the Lourie family business upwards of \$1,000. Now it seems as if we’re paying it all back since product availability — due to pandemic pressures, has often laid waste to the stores’ shelves. And also laid waste to stores’ interest in offering products on sale. And why should they? Consumers are buying anything they can get their hands on, price be damned.

Moreover, the stores themselves, at least the ones where I have been a regular buyer, are providing fewer digital coupons on their sites than ever before and the advertising circulars, typically 10 to 14 pages, have now been reduced by one half or so. In addition, there are also fewer coupon inserts in the Sunday newspaper editions. The net effect of this is that the supermarket/pharmacy budget has been blown to smithereens. And the outlook for the future (immediate future anyway) is more of the same, or rather less, if you catch my drift.

Now further combine the fact that yours truly, a strategic shopper of some repute is not doing the in-store shopping anymore, and perhaps you can do the metaphorical math. Can you say through the roof? Let me be clear; this situation has nothing to do with control. It has to do with cash flow. I feel as if we’re being taken advantage of, like we’re sitting ducks almost, and there’s not a thing I can do about any of it other than to take solace in the fact that our stimulus checks will most definitely have somewhere to go, even if I don’t.

Still, I realize there are many others who are not complaining about what they’re paying for groceries because they’re too busy trying to make withdrawals from their local food bank. I would imagine their challenge is identical to mine, only much worse: hoping to find necessary items in limited supply without the proper money and means to do so. Means, unfortunately which are not leading to satisfactory ends. Ends which will either bust their budgets, overwhelm public-type assistance or swell credit card balances; thereby increasing future minimum payments and exacerbating pressures to even make monthly payments. A vicious circle and cycle if there ever was one, or two.

But I don’t have one or two so I am very lucky. Now I do have two types of cancer but that wasn’t the point of this column. The point was more narrow than that. It was simply to make a little fun at a predicament not of my own choosing but one that is impacting my life and totally out of my control. I wouldn’t say that it’s food for thought but it is something to chew on.

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

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