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CONNECTION

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A Series of Fortunate Events

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'We're Grateful You Were Our Theater Director'

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Resilience and Recovery

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Michael Wemyss, editor-in-chief of Herndon High newspaper, holds his first (right) and last (left) issues.

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JUNE 17-23, 2020

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NEWS

A Series of
Fortunate Events

Serendipity scores
for a print school
newspaper.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

When Michael Wemyss, Herndon High School Class of 2020, sat down on day one in his junior year journalism class, he assumed the course focused on the school yearbook. "I could take a couple of pictures...I wasn't looking to do anything big," he said. The problem was teacher Dawn Crosson announced the class would bring back the school newspaper, The Stinger, and do it in print. "Maintaining a high school newspaper as a platform to share student voices and to unify the learning community was a necessary and important task," she said. According to Wemyss, the students chose two editors who, within days, dropped the course. He said, "I could tell things were going in the wrong direction. I felt something in me that made me stand up and say, 'Hey, I'll be editor.'"

Wemyss' life changed. It centered on copy, editing, layout and advertising. "I was the editor-in-chief... a difficult task to take on... When we started the newspaper, we had nothing. There were so many times that everything was about to collapse... We figured out all the jobs... The stressful part was all the editing... We would order pizza and work in the classroom until eight o'clock at night."

By the end of November 2018, the first edition hit the hallways of Herndon High. "I was elated Michael, and the rest of the staff were dedicated to producing and printing a physical copy of the paper," said Crosson. Wemyss said the response was very good. "People demanded a second issue. However, it proved the most stressful. He, co-editor Audrey Powell and student staff produced it in three weeks and sent it to the printer before winter break. However, the trucker



PHOTO BY AMY WEMYSS

Michael Wemyss with the website used during the COVID-19 pandemic.

drove the copies to Richmond. Luckily, he made it back to Herndon before students left for the holidays.

Wemyss returned his senior year. According to Powell, Wemyss proved passionate. She said, "He always had a bright idea... In times of deadlines and crisis, he never gave up and did whatever it took to pull through and finish." For Wemyss, his goal was seven issues. "I think we got out four. We were working on our fifth one before the shutdown," he said. According to Wemyss, the situation did not look good for print. He and others considered alternatives and eventually expanded the paper to an online version, featuring the Senior Hall of Fame.

Looking back, Crosson said when school starts up again; they plan to continue The Stinger in monthly print versions. "I love the kids getting to hold in their hands what they've created," she said. However, "Michael was my right-hand man on a mission—the face of the newspaper for the school. According to Powell, when she signed up for journalism, she wasn't expecting to meet one of her best friends, "kind hearted, funny, and brilliant Michael."

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Resilience and Recovery

Cornerstones holds 'A Virtual Town Hall with Fairfax County Officials.'

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Three words characterize Cornerstones' work - stability, empowerment and hope. On Monday, June 8, the nonprofit organization held a Virtual Town Hall with Fairfax County officials from the Dranesville and Hunter Mill districts. Board supervisors John Foust and Walter Alcorn, along with School Board representatives, Elaine Tholen and Melanie Meren, participated. "Our purpose of gathering here today is to give our panelists, an opportunity to talk about the hope that we have for our community and to focus on the practical way, local government can help achieve those goals of Cornerstones and our partners," said Greg White, Chief Operating Officer at Cornerstones.

Facilitators provided additional comments during the dialogue, including Casey Veatch, Principal at Veatch Commercial Real Estate, who moderated the Town Hall. Given their field of expertise, panelists examined topics. They began with an overview of changes and what next year would look like in Fairfax County and their district. Key issues included affordable housing, social programs, work, learning, and more.

FOUST said that when COVID struck, the Board dealt with reduced revenue. "A particular thing that hurt me the most as Chairman of the Housing Committee was we had originally planned to put an additional \$25 million into the housing fund...to help development of new housing units. We were unable to do that, but we have fallback plans... We made the commitment, and we will make the investment," Foust said.

According to Alcorn, he watched what kind of federal contracting money was going to come into the community. He said, "That's really driving a lot of our economy, and if that keeps coming, we'll be okay." Alcorn said the loss of the penny increase for the affordable housing initiative would not change the rebuild course of Embury Rucker Center, the library and needs at Reston Town Center North. The shutdown made visible though they had been warehousing many of the homeless population in the library system. "I think it's now convinced me it's something I want to work with Cornerstones going forward. We need to look at more daytime services, not just check-in but actually, services to provide

Fairfax Co Board of Supervisors



Walter Alcorn
Hunter Mill District

Fairfax Co Board of Supervisors



John Foust
Dranesville District

Fairfax County Public Schools, School Board



Melanie Meren
Hunter Mill District

Fairfax County Public Schools, School Board



Elaine Tholen
Dranesville District

SCREENSHOTS VIA CORNERSTONES

Panelists participating in 'Resilience and Recovery COVID-19 A Virtual Town Hall with Fairfax County Officials' presented by Cornerstones in Reston on Monday, June 8, 2020.



Kerrie Wilson, CEO, Cornerstones

"We know that what the pandemic has just brought home to each and every one of us, is what we see as the chronic nature of what so many in our community face every day. And we're all concerned what happens when the federal money runs out."

— Kerrie Wilson,
CEO, Cornerstones

real futures for our homeless population that they can take advantage of during the day. Not just housing people overnight, but actually ... (putting) people on a path to employment, to self-sufficiency and certainly into housing," said Alcorn.

Foust said that COVID-19 demonstrated the "unbelievable contribution" that low-income workers in the service industries and others made to the community, economy and society. "They deserve an affordable



Mohammed-CS Ambassador

Town Hall Facilitator, Lubna Mohammed,
Neighborhood Ambassador, ON-Reston.

place to live in that community. On the Silver Line, we have workforce housing that we're looking at now, trying to lower the income levels... for the workforce housing. There will be a very significant amount of that in the Reston and Tyson areas," he said.

According to Veatch, Meren and Tholen each had three Title One schools in their districts with many students from homes where English was not the first language. The representatives discussed how the school system was working with families and partner organizations to ensure students had the support and resources they needed. Meren said federal changes in Title One funding would impact students in the community, "not positively," forcing them to do more with less." One of the things that we looked at...was social-emotional support. Before any child can be ready to learn, if the child is scared or being abused, homeless, hungry, we know that kids can't learn... We are dipping forth in our budget to have additional special education resource teachers throughout the whole division that would assist with students who may have lagged..., and that's any student, not just our vulnerable population; then additionally, ten system-wide social workers," Meren said.

Tholen said that when COVID forced schools to close, food distribution expanded." So far, we've served over 1.2 million lunches and breakfasts... We've distributed over 22,000 laptops and over 2,500 devices



Greg White, Chief Operating Officer of
Cornerstones

to students." Tholen said teachers formed teams who spoke multiple languages. They reached out to parent liaisons that contacted families to make sure "every student had actually been reached." "Individualized care is so important," she said.

ONE OF THE FINAL conversations centered on affordable, accessible health care and screening. Veatch said challenges due to the coronavirus disproportionately impacted seniors, immigrants, persons of color and other vulnerable members of the community. Foust said, "A lot of those areas involve Hispanic communities. We've got 17 percent of the population in Fairfax County, Hispanic, and over 60-65 percent of confirmed cases of COVID in that community...So we've been targeting testing." He also said the County was sending in nurses at senior housing programs, to train their staff on how to prevent the disease and monitoring them. "There's a lot more we need to do," Foust said.

Alcorn said the County was focusing on assistance to people who could not isolate themselves in their homes. "They may have a three-generation household with literally two bedrooms," he said. Addressing Supervisor Alcorn, Veatch said, "It's ironic here the people working the hardest out there, they're getting the hardest hit, right on the front lines for us... It is incumbent upon us to do exactly what you and Supervisor Foust just said."

Black Lives Matter

We are on the verge of making the statement a reality.

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



COMMENTARY

Black lives matter. Period. No further explanation or expansion of the phrase is needed. Do not try to switch the subject by wanting to suggest that all lives matter. For more than four centuries the lives of black people have been degraded. There have been numerous instances during that time when events would have suggested that there might finally be a recognition that black lives do matter. With the American Revolution and the Declaration of Independence proclaiming that all men are created equal one might have concluded that black Americans might finally achieve some semblance of equality, but they did not. With a constitution for the new country, blacks were counted as worth only three-fifths of a person. Virginia and the Southern states seceded from the Union and fought a civil war to be able to keep black people in bondage. After more than 250 years of slavery black people were given

a hollow promise with the Emancipation Proclamation. Jim Crow laws replaced slave codes. Many ingenious ways were contrived to keep black people from voting. Lynching was among the ways used to instill fear in black people to keep them "in their place." Police too often became less public safety protectors and more keepers of a divided society where black lives have less value than that of others.

With all this history and more, is there any wonder why leaders who are willing to take a stand are insistent that we keep the message clear: Black Lives Do Matter! Too much has happened to turn our backs on much-needed changes in so many aspects of our society and our governance. When a cop feels that he can grind his knee in the back of the neck of a black man until he dies while three other cops look on, we know that the time has arrived for change. No excuses. Enough is enough.

The General Assembly will take up significant

reforms to our policing and criminal justice system when it meets in August. I look forward to cosponsoring and voting for meaningful bills that will redefine policing, shift resources from policing to community and social services, and reform our criminal justice system. The needs are so extensive that one legislative session will not be adequate to deal with all the needed reforms, but there can be no delay in taking the first very big step forward.

Make no mistake thinking that all that is talked about will be popular. Some will think that if black lives matter their lives and their security will somehow be lessened. Politicians will jump on the divisions that exist in our society and suggest that everyone will somehow be less safe if changes are made. They will twist the meaning of the movement to reform policing, referred to as "defund police" by some, as leaving communities unsafe. The white supremacists among us, and they are more numerous than we might like to realize, will be marching and protesting any changes.

Black lives matter. We are on the verge of making the statement a reality. We cannot falter in our resolve to make it true!

Houses of Worship Will be Open, But Not Their Buildings

The State of Virginia and Fairfax County have told us that we can reopen our houses of worship at fifty percent capacity. We will not be doing so at this time.

Faith leaders bear a special duty. Whether at a mosque for Friday prayers, a synagogue for Shabbat, or services in churches or temples, worship spaces crowded with loving song and prayer present a dangerous risk. We urge everyone to follow the lead of public health officials, who overwhelmingly urge people to continue maintaining social distance. Faith institutions can demonstrate leadership and set an example of love and care for our communities.

As local clergy in Reston, Herndon, and Fairfax, we long to gather in our sacred spaces. We mourn the loss of in-person ritual, fellowship and music. But we are continuing to serve our congregations online. We are convinced that our faiths require us to protect each other's well-being by refraining from gathering in person at this time.

Rather than putting lives at risk, let us instead protect the health and the economic security of

everyone in our community. Each and every person is precious. The time has come to build a society that honors the call to justice and enables life to flourish. We must strongly advocate for economic recovery measures that extend to all -- including lower-wage workers, people who have lost jobs, immigrants, uninsured people, seniors, people who are incarcerated and small business owners. Exclusion is inexcusable.

Our faiths are bigger than any building. Drawing strength from that faith, we mourn our dead and commit to action. Acting in a spirit of love and an ethic of protecting the health of all is the true way to serve the divine and to love our neighbor.

Our buildings may be closed but our work as communities of faith goes on.

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FLORIS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
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Oakton Neighborhood Hosts a Black Lives Matter Rally

Miller Heights neighborhood of Oakton hosted a Black Lives Matter rally attended by more than 150 people. The speakers at the event included: NAACP Michele Leete, FCPS Board member Karen Keys-Gamarra, Providence Supervisor Dalia Palchik & U Pitt student Liam Bloom, who served as MC.



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OBITUARY

A Life Well-Lived

Robert A. Shawn of Herndon dies shortly after 100th birthday.

By Mercia Hobson
The Connection

Robert A. Shawn passed away at home on Sunday, May 24, 2020. Born May 6, 1920, "Colonel Bob" celebrated his 100th birthday two and half weeks before his passing. In recognition of his birthday, fellow post members at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Loudoun County Post #1177 organized a birthday drive-by car parade, 120 units strong, escorted by the Herndon and Fairfax County Police Departments and County Fire and EMS.

Shawn's expansive military career spanned actions in World War II, Korean War, Vietnam Conflict, Desert Shield/Desert Storm, Bosnia, other distant places and most recently, during the Global War on Terror. His many exploits included flying his P-51 Mustang under the Eiffel Tower when Paris was liberated in 1944, mistakenly being shot down by the Free French forces in 1944 while supporting Gen. George Patton's forces and helping to break the Germans at the Battle of the Bulge where he "liberated" 500 bottles of Dom



PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

Retired Air Force Col. Robert A. "Bob" Shawn, Herndon Centenarian and former Air Force fighter pilot, at his 100th birthday drive-by parade on May 6, 2020, organized in his honor by comrades at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Loudoun County Post #1177.

Pérignon held by the Germans. Shawn flew more than 328 combat missions.

Shawn received a Bachelor of Science in Military Science from the University of Maryland. After returning to the United States with his first wife, Emily, Shawn continued his education at Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration before managing country clubs. He was active in VFW Post 1177, The Wayne M. Kidwell American Legion Post 184, Military Vehicle Collectors Association, The Capital Wing of the Airmen's Preservation Society and volunteered for the Herndon Police Department.

Shawn is survived by his second wife, Julia (Herndon), son, William and wife Glenna, daughters Tracy and Victoria Walker and husband Robert as well as grandchildren Hamilton, Kristen, Mason, Reagan, Laurel, Brandon and Grace and 6 great-grandchildren. The Adams Green Funeral Home will announce funeral services in Herndon with interment following at Arlington National Cemetery.

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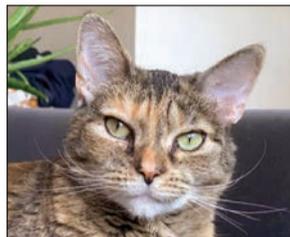
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Announcements

Announcements



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NEWS

Change Through Communal Voice

Local high school students join Black Lives Matter movement.

Leaders of Change Coalition held a Black Lives Matter March in front of the Herndon Municipal Center Sunday, June 7. Organized by youth from South Lakes and Oakton high schools, according to Wynter Beasley of Herndon and rising senior at South Lakes, the purpose of the March was to bring awareness and let people in the community have the opportunity to protest for the Black Lives Matter movement. The Herndon location provided easy access and walkability.

"George Floyd's death was not an isolated incident," said Beasley. "It is time to take action on systemic racism that oppresses the black community impacting their daily life," she said. Co-organizer Diana Ho of Reston and student at South Lakes High School estimated approximately 175 people turned out for the peaceful protest.

Rei Linam, a rising senior at South Lakes High School in Reston, said, "The reason I went was to see what people my age could do. I remember how the speakers said that peaceful protesting would bring change, and voices needed to be heard. The words were insightful. My generation can create something and do something that will benefit Black Lives Matter."



PHOTO BY REI LINAM

Leaders of Change Coalition, students from South Lakes and Oakton high schools, hold a Black Lives Matter March in the Town of Herndon.

— BY MERCIA HOBSON

AREA ROUNDUPS

Man in Crosswalk Killed by Driver

Fairfax County police are investigating after a Centreville man was struck by a car and killed, while walking in a crosswalk. The victim was Rafael Raymundo Bernal, 24, and the tragedy occurred last Thursday, June 11, around 9:48 p.m.

Crash Reconstruction Unit detectives said he was one of two men crossing Route 29 at the intersection of Centreville Farms Road. They say the driver of a 2004 Pontiac Vibe was traveling southbound on Route 29 when his vehicle struck them while they were in the crosswalk.

The driver remained on the scene and is cooperating with detectives. Both men were taken to local hospitals. Bernal died from his injuries; the other victim's injuries weren't life-threatening. Preliminarily, say police, speed doesn't appear to be a factor for the driver, but "alcohol may be a factor for the pedestrians."

Anyone with information about this crash is asked to contact the Crash Reconstruction Unit at 703-280-0543. Tips may also be submitted anonymously via Crime Solvers by calling 1-866-411-8477 or texting FCCS plus the tip to 847411.

Tow Truck Driver Killed in a Multi-Vehicle Crash

At 10:22 p.m. on Monday, June 8, Trooper L. Vajglova responded to a multi-vehicle crash on I-495, less than a mile north of Route 236 in Fairfax County. A 2015 Ford Edge was traveling south on I-495 when it was struck in the rear by a southbound 2013 Honda Pilot. The impact of the crash caused the Honda to run off the right side of the highway and strike a tow truck. The tow truck, with its amber flashing lights activated, was stopped on the shoulder to assist a disabled motorist.

The tow truck driver, Derrick A. Marbury, 49, of Alexandria, was outside his vehicle when it was struck and as he ran to get away from the crash, he was struck by a 2015 Mercedes-Benz M35. The towing operator died at the scene.

The Virginia State Police Fairfax Division Crash Reconstruction Team responded to the scene and is assisting with the ongoing crash investigation.

SEE ROUNDUPS, PAGE 7

BULLETIN BOARD

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

HERNDON FARMERS MARKET OPENS
The Fairfax County Park Authority's Farmers Market in Herndon will open for the season on Thursday, June 18, 2020. Herndon's market is located on the 700 block of Lynn Street, by the Red Caboose in downtown Herndon. It will be open on Thursdays from 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. It sells fresh fruits, vegetables, meats, baked goods and more. Farmers and producers may only sell what they raise on their farms or make from scratch.

NEW DISTRICT OFFICE OPENS
On the afternoon of June 12, Delegate Dan Helmer (HD-40) and Senator George Barker (SD-39) opened their new legislative office in downtown Clifton. The new address is 7137 Main Street, Clifton, VA 20124. As Northern Virginia enters Phase 2 of the Commonwealth's re-opening, the new district office will provide the legislators and their staff the physical space to serve the community in a safe fashion. Contact Noah Bardash, Delegate Dan Helmer's Chief of Staff at 571-445-0251 or noah@danhelmer.com, or Andrew Millin, Senator George Barker's Chief of Staff at 703-303-7539 or district39@senate.virginia.gov.

SATURDAY/JUNE 20
Shop, Drive and Drop. 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. At Trinity Presbyterian Church, 651 Dranesville Road, Herndon. Join Trinity Presbyterian Church for Shop, Drive and Drop, a food collection event in support of LINK. LINK delivers groceries to Herndon, Sterling, and Ashburn community members all year long. To meet urgent food needs, LINK has increased service 1000%, and your donation will help feed 850 neighbors every week.

AREA ROUNDUPS

FROM PAGE 6

Suspicious Death Ruled Homicide; Juvenile Suspect Charged with Murder

A 17-year-old has been charged after detectives linked him to the June 23, 2019 murder of Jose Lorenzo Guillen Mejia. Guillen Mejia's body was found by officers investigating the report of gunshots around 1:45 a.m. near a walking trail between Hunters Woods Plaza and Breton Court in Reston. An autopsy later revealed he died from multiple gunshot wounds.

Detectives from Major Crimes Bureau identified the suspect following a comprehensive investigation and obtained a felony petition for first degree murder on June 9, 2020 after consulting with the Office of the Commonwealth Attorney. The suspect, who is already incarcerated at the Fairfax County Juvenile Detention Center for an unrelated offense, was served and remains held without bond.

Anyone with information is asked to contact the Fairfax County Police Department Major Crimes Bureau at 703-246-7800, option 2. Tips can also be submitted anonymously through Crime Solvers by phone - 1-866-411-TIPS (866-411-8477), by text - Type "FCCS" plus tip to 847411, and by web. Download Mobile tip411 App "Fairfax Co Crime Solvers". Anonymous tipsters are eligible for cash rewards of \$100 to \$1,000 dollars if their information leads to an arrest.

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Taking the Results in Stride



By **KENNETH B. LOURIE**

Apparently, I'm back in the lung cancer business. According to the video visit I had June 8 with my endocrinologist, my thyroid cancer has not moved into my lungs where my oncologist thought it might have - given the results of a previous biopsy and some surprising tumor inactivity in my lungs. The 'surprising inactivity': the tumors didn't kill me. Living, as they say is the best reward. And it sure beats the alternative.

Nevertheless, I can't say I'm thrilled with the outcome. All the tumors in my lungs still being non small cell lung cancer squashes my dream that those tumors were curable papillary thyroid cancer (as it had been suggested by my oncologist in a previous phone call) that had moved rather than the originally diagnosed incurable lung cancer which itself had metastasized. In fact, papillary thyroid cancer is called "the friendly cancer," according to one of my oncology nurses at the infusion center. There's nothing friendly about non small cell lung cancer, stage IV.

I was hoping that the diagnosis of thyroid cancer was going to change my life from being cancer-centric to being thyroid-cancer-are-you-kidding? You mean to tell me, after 11 years and four months living as, and being treated for, lung cancer, the actual diagnosis is thyroid cancer? But alas, poor Yorick, 'twas not to be. If what I've been told recently is the absolute-without-a-doubt truth/accurate diagnosis, than I am back on the emotional precipice waiting for the other shoe to drop or at the very least, have one of my socks fall down around my ankles and get all balled up in my sneakers. (Which I hate by the way; when socks get all rearranged like that. I like the heel of the sock to be lined up properly with my heel and the toe of my sock not twisted away from the toes and so forth.)

Once again, I suppose I'll have to pull myself up by my own boot straps, which I don't even own, and step lively, putting one foot ahead of the other and trying not to back up one step for every two I take. I've progressed too far for too long to backslide now. And even though my working thyroid-cancer-instead-of-lung-cancer narrative is now a thing of my medical past, it was sort of fun and uplifting - while it lasted. Now, I have to reconnect with my previous lung cancer reality and try to find some new approaches to living with a "terminal" disease.

It reminds me of what Cpl. Klinger (Jamie Farr) the cross-dresser from the television series M*A*S*H once did when he returned to camp after assisting the doctors off-site at an aid station. He was all business away from the 4077th, but upon his return, a few hundred yards outside "the upholstered toilet seat" as Trapper John (Wayne McIntyre) once called it, Klinger put his female nurses cap back on and reverted to his previous form as a skirt-wearing Section 8 wannabe, and life for him and all the other M*A*S*H personnel returned to their abnormal.

So too must I return to mine: as a stage IV, non small cell lung cancer patient who hasn't died and somehow has managed to keep under the reaper's radar. I mean, how else does one live so far beyond one's original "13 month to two year" prognosis? Granted, I have a good attitude and have made some changes to my diet and lifestyle, but hardly would I characterize my behavior as any kind of poster-boy status. Sure, I've tried to make light of an extraordinarily heavy burden and made lots of jokes in the face of what I was led to believe was certain premature death (what death isn't premature?), but that's more about personality than procedure. I was up for the challenge is all. Not everybody is. As Kenny Beatrice, a long time sports-talk-show host in the Washington DC area used to say: "You can't teach height." Lucky for me, as my late father often said, I was "born with broad shoulders."

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

'We're Grateful You Were our Theater Director'

Zoom retirement party for Centreville High's Mike Hudson.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Mike Hudson's taught for 40 years – the last 30 as Centreville High's theater teacher/director. And he and his students have always had such a strong bond that they didn't call him "Mr. Hudson," but "Huddy," as a term of endearment.

He planned to retire July 1, but COVID-19 closed the curtain on the school year in March, robbing both him and his thespians of their last months together and Hudson's final production at Centreville. "We'd started rehearsals for 'Peter Pan,' he said. "This wasn't the way I anticipated going out."

In fact, drama mama Toni Strauch had organized a surprise, retirement party for him at her home in May, but the pandemic quashed it, too. So 2010 grad Krista Catalfamo gathered Hudson's students from across the years and held that party via Zoom. More than three dozen participated in the three-hour event from throughout the U.S., with Hudson thinking he'd been invited to a 10-year reunion of his Class of 2010 students.

"You made an impact on our lives, so we wanted to thank and congratulate you," said 2012 grad Anthony Ingargiola, as the others applauded. "Your office was a place where we could be ourselves. I remember the way my moments in theater made me feel. And, Huddy, you made it safe to be different in a sports-oriented school."

Classmate Emily Dwornik, now a Washington, D.C., theater teacher, told Hudson, "You're the reason I had the courage to follow my dream, and I modeled myself as a teacher after you." The students discussed their past shows, and Ingargiola shared photos of them.

Amita Rao told Hudson how much he meant to her life, and Zaida Schebish called him a "no-judgment zone" and "a blessing" to his students. "I owe a lot of where I am in life today to you and what you taught me," said 2004's Rick Mathews. "Centreville grads have won Tonys and Grammys, and that says a lot about the training you gave us."

2010's Andrew Myers showed his "Dracula" script, telling Hudson, "I was underappreciated in choir until I showed up on your doorstep, senior year. When I auditioned, you said I had to do the work and prove I was worthy of being in the theater program. You were the first one who gave me a chance; and even though I didn't know anyone, I still felt included."

"I was a lonely person back then, and you made it better," continued Myers. Then, proudly displaying his Best Male Under-



Centreville High Theater Director Mike Hudson (center) and the cast of 2017's "Twelfth Night."



Mike Hudson

study, Centreville Thespie Award, he told Hudson, "I hang this in my office to remember what you taught me – that every time you work hard, you get something out of it."

2004 grad Tim Bartlett wrote, directed and starred in a musical version of "Dracula," last year in New York's Greenwich Village. And 2005's Benjamin Myers said Hudson taught him how to do theater correctly. Now an actor, he said, "Whenever I'm doing a production, I measure it against your standards and ethics and think about them every day."

HUDSON was Centreville's technical director before becoming theater director in 2010. And in 2019, Mark Rogers – the man he replaced – was instrumental in Hudson's being named the first master theater teacher in Virginia.

"I was disappointed, the way the school year ended, because I'd planned to do so many more things and to say goodbye to the kids. So this has meant so much to me; thank you."

— Retiring Centreville High's Theater Director Mike Hudson

Catalfamo, now in Chicago, told Hudson, "I was awkward in high school and had low self-esteem, and you wrote the best college recommendation for me, saying I had a 'contagious exuberance.' You saw something in me I didn't know I had, and that changed my life. You're an amazing human being, and I want you to know how much we all appreciate you."

Jamal James became an actor because of a compliment Hudson gave him on a monologue, the first time he performed. "You empower your students in a way you may not know," he said. "I have my career because of you."

With tears in his eyes, Hudson said he has every thank-you card, signed cast photo from his shows and wonderful memories of all his students. "I learned more from you than I learned in college or working professionally," he said. "I learned to appreciate loyalty, humility and support. I've taken a lot of risks, over the years [choosing the shows we did], and we've done some really wonderful theater."

Telling his students, "I've always been proud of everything you've done," he recalled them performing "The Mask of Hiroshima" at the Virginia Theatre Assn. competition. "We didn't win," said Hudson. "But we had a great time and put on a really good show."

He also loved Centreville's "Phantom of the Opera" and "Alice in Wonderland." And, he added, "I was so proud and pleased with both productions of 'The Laramie Project.' It was the most powerful high-school show I've ever seen." After the first production ended, then-Principal Mike Campbell showed Hudson a stack of printed emails from the community, praising the show. He also offered Hudson the director's job for the following year.

Other favorite shows included "Beauty and the Beast," "Cabaret" and "Working." But, said the typically humble Hudson, "The success of the shows we did was because of the people in them. I always cast them according to the talent we had."

2020 grad Steve Choi loved working on sets and being an extra. "You helped me break out of my quiet shell, and I'll always remember and treasure those times," he told Hudson. "You'll always have a place in my heart. On behalf of the Senior Class, thank you."

From New York, Paige Williams told Hudson she'll never forget the sets he created. "The commitment you put into all the pieces made us feel like we weren't just students – we were actors. And because of the talent, passion and caliber of the work you put into it, we knew we had to step up."

Likewise, 2013's Binta Barry told him, "Seeing this community of people that came together tonight has been an incredible reminder that you instilled so much in us that helped us in our careers. We're all lucky and grateful to have had you as our theater director."

FROM CALIFORNIA, Ally Nasta, working in TV development, said, "My theater background still lives in me. You were always a joy to work with and made me feel empowered as an actor." And Nick Dell 'Omo thanked Hudson for the learning opportunities and creativity that molded him into the person he is today. Similarly, Annemarie Scerra, a sound engineer in New York, appreciated how Hudson encouraged and believed in her.

Millie Prescott, 2005, didn't like school, but said Hudson gave her "a reason to show up. You made me feel important; I could just be myself, and that got me through high school." And Cameron Daly, 2015, said no words can describe how impactful he's been on her life.

At the end, Hudson said, "I was disappointed, the way the school year ended, because I'd planned to do so many more things and to say goodbye to the kids. So this has meant so much to me; thank you."