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Lucy, played by opera singer Emily Mensch of Herndon (soprano) chats endlessly on the phone while Ben, Will Meinert (bass), waits patiently trying to propose.

## Music Connects

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## Sheila A. Olem Wins Mayoral Race in Herndon

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## 'System Is Broken When Bad Plans Get So Far'

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PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

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## NEWS



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Scouts BSA Venture Crew 673 October Food Drive, with help from a few Pack 673 Cub Scouts, collected 526 lbs for SHARE in McLean.

## Scouting for Food Nov. 14

Things have changed because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Roberta Gosling, co-founder of the South Lakes High School Food Pantry said, "Since COVID -19, the SLHS PTSA Food pantry has pivoted to a contact-free distribution system. We pack 20-25 pound bags of food and distribute that along with many other items to approximately 140 families each week at South Lakes High School. This number continues to grow every week. Many have told us that these groceries and other products have been a life-saver for them."

Although the local BSA Scouts have also moved most of their regular meetings to virtual formats, they have not stopped answering the needs of their communities.

Many families have lost their jobs in the pandemic and food is an increasing need. Scouts of the Powhatan District's Venture Crew 673 have answered the call and have held monthly food drives since May. In total, they collected and donated 2125 lbs of food to SHARE in McLean. Also, Ethan from the district's Troop 158 held a Food Drive for his Eagle Scout service project.

As usual, the BSA and its National Capital Area Council, will have their annual food drive in November. Last year, more than 800 Scouts and 600 adult leaders collected 34,700 pounds of food in the Powhatan District covering Great Falls, Herndon, Reston, Oakton, and Chantilly. However, there is something unusual this year. In past years, Scouts have handed out bags and information to doors and coming back to collect the foods on specific days. This year, every BSA unit must submit a plan for their Scouting for Food events to keep Scouts safe when they reach out to help others. Operating the food drive safely during the pandemic is a primary concern for Scout Leaders. Some Scouts have contactless food collection points at their homes. Others will arrange contactless outdoor food gathering from neighbors while observing safety protocols and wearing gloves and masks.

On Saturday, Nov. 14, Scouts and their adult leaders from Troops and Packs all over Northern Virginia will be gathering food from their neighbors and bringing it to local charities in the annual Scouting for Food collection. The collected food will be sent

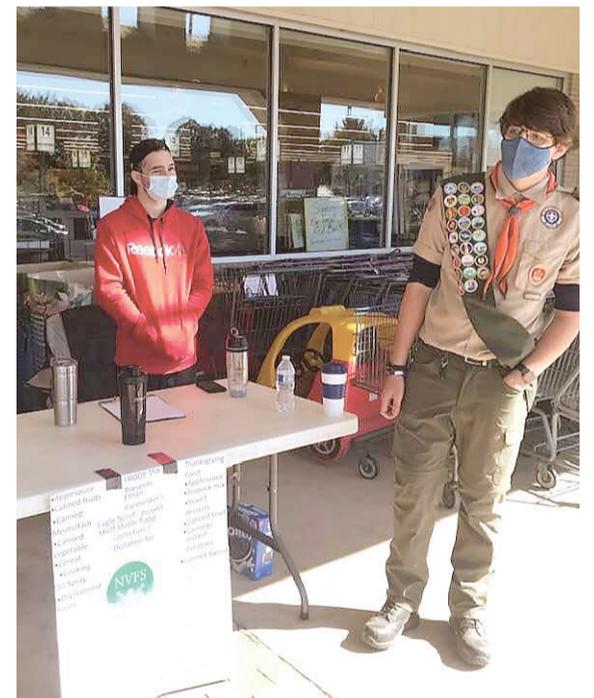


PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Ethan from Troop 158 in Herndon held a Food Drive for his Eagle Scout service project.

to LINK, Community of Faith UMC Food Pantry, Cornerstones and South Lakes High School PTSA Food Pantry. Those who may be missed by the Scouts are welcome to drop off food at one of the collection sites on Nov. 14.

### Where and When

**TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (LINK)**  
651 Dranesville Road, Herndon  
10 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

**COMMUNITY OF FAITH UMC FOOD PANTRY**  
13224 Franklin Farm Road, Herndon  
10 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

**CORNERSTONES**  
11484 Washington Plaza West, Reston.  
10 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

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Artist's rendition of part of the Boulevards at Westfields in Chantilly.

## ‘System Is Broken When Bad Plans Get So Far’

### Supervisors OK home construction under airport flight path.

BY BONNIE HOBBS  
THE CONNECTION

**D**etermined to place homes underneath Dulles International Airport’s flight paths, Fairfax County’s Board of Supervisors recently approved developer K. Hovnanian’s plan to build 442 residential units there. Called Boulevards at Westfields, it converts 23 acres in Chantilly’s Land Unit J from industrial use to high-density residential – over the objections of land-use and environmental groups alike.

“We’re excited to move forward with this project,” said Hovnanian’s representative, attorney David Gill. “It’s one of the first that offers a mix of home types, all on one site.”

Planned are 120 two-over-two townhouses, 67 regular townhomes and a 135-unit multifamily apartment building. The multifamily building will have underground parking, community gardens, a clubhouse and a pool on the rooftop.

Boulevards also touts its park space, with areas for games and grilling, a playground, plus a gathering space. And there’ll be a crosswalk from Park Meadow Drive across to the trail system and Wegmans grocery store.

Nonetheless, the controversy at the heart of this project still exists – the fact that it’s in an area the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (MWAA) says should be off-limits for residential neighborhoods. That’s because noisy, jumbo jets will fly overhead, 24 hours/day, coming in for landings every 6-9 minutes.

IN 2019, MWAA updated its noise-contour map delineating aircraft-noise decibel levels (dba) in Westfields. But the Board of Supervisors – contrary to guidance in

the county’s own Comprehensive Plan, advising any new, noise-contour information be included in it – chooses to deny the new map’s existence. Doing so allows it to let developers build there based on MWAA’s outdated map from 1993.

As a result, Gill claims Boulevards is between the 60-65 dba noise contours and notes that potential buyers will be told about their homes’ proximity to the airport and that planes will be flying overhead. But according to MWAA, that still doesn’t change the reality that almost all of this project is actually in the 65 dba contour.

During the Supervisors’ Sept. 29 public hearing, residents called in to voice their objections. “New residential uses in an inappropriate location could jeopardize the operation of the airport,” said Sully District Council’s Jeff Parnes. “Therefore, we oppose approval of this case. It’s inconsistent with Fairfax County noise and environmental protections”

He said the joint Sully District Council/West Fairfax County Citizens Assn. Land-Use Committee also opposes further approval of residential projects “using obsolete noise contour” from 27 years ago. So, said Parnes, “We ask you not to approve this, for the future health and safety of the residents who might be forced to live under this sound.”

Resident Tammi Patrine had some harsh words for Supervisor Kathy Smith (D-Sully) – who’s steadfastly refused to allow the county to adopt MWAA’s updated noise contours and consistently sided with developers. “Voters and leaders all over the county are aware of Smith’s efforts to undo the county’s sacred, 40-year rule of keeping housing away from the forbidden zones around Dulles,” said Petrine. “The airport is a huge, economic driver in our region, affecting billions of dollars in commerce and sustaining hundreds of thousands of jobs.”

She also called out Board of Supervisors Chairman Jeff McKay. “We’re aware that our system is broken when bad plans like this get so far,” said Petrine. “During this pandemic, McKay allows controversial, non-emer-



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Town of Herndon Mayor-Elect Sheila Olem

## Sheila A. Olem Wins Mayoral Race in Herndon

### Herndon Town Council 2021-22 boasts diversity.

BY MERCIA HOBSON  
THE CONNECTION

**S**heila A. Olem will be sworn in as the new mayor of the Town of Herndon 2021-22. Although the Virginia Department of Elections will not certify the final numbers until Nov. 16, Olem, the current Vice Mayor, defeated Roland B. Taylor. Olem received 5,138 votes, with Taylor receiving 3,152. As of Nov. 5, there were 13,360 registered voters in the Town of Herndon, and 12,865 are active voters, according to Brian Worthy at Fairfax County Office of Public Affairs.

Taylor’s candidacy stressed it was time for a change with “common-sense solutions, results not partisan rhetoric.” Olem’s candidacy prioritized continuing leadership as an environmentally focused town and bringing home county, state and other regional dollars. “It is a privilege and honor to have served the town for the past ten years, and I look forward to the challenge of serving as the Mayor of Herndon,” Olem said.

Early election results Nov. 3 showed Taylor in a decided lead. While the actual vote totals never changed, the results published were unofficial. Worthy said, “While we always strive for accuracy when we publish these unofficial results, county elections staff will make adjustments throughout the night as needed to correct any inaccuracies as occurred with the unofficial numbers for the Town of Herndon races. The unofficial results report may have been updated around 11 p.m., but

updates can be made at any point during the night...This was nothing more than human error in our unofficial report... We have staff who double-check our data entry of the unofficial results, and they noticed that it was done incorrectly.”

The six Town Councilmember-elects and their respective votes are: Cesar A. del Aguila 4,892; Pradip Dhakal 4,839; Sean M. Regan 4,713; Naila Alam 4,410; Signe V. Friedrichs 4,393 and Jasbinder Singh 4,386. They defeated challengers Clark A. Hedrick with 3,911 votes and Steve M. Porter with 3,818 votes. “I want to thank everyone for voting in our town election. It was amazing to see the level of participation this cycle. I am also very excited to see the range of diversity on council this session. Voters truly have chosen more inclusive representation for our town. I am humbled and thankful to serve our wonderful citizens once again,” said del Aguila.

Returning for his third, non-consecutive, two-year term, Jasbinder Singh said, “Needless to say, I’m very pleased with another opportunity the people have given me to continue to make this town a better place for all our citizens in every possible way.”

Traditionally, the councilmember who receives the highest number of votes during the general town elections is named to the post of Vice Mayor. That should be del Aguila if tradition stands. Olem and the 2021-22 Herndon Town Councilmembers will begin their two-year terms on Jan. 1, 2021.

SEE SUPERVISORS, PAGE 7

## Hail to the Chief-Elect

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



### COMMENTARY

Tears welled up in my eyes last Saturday evening as the President-elect Joe Biden and the Vice President-elect Kamala Harris addressed their supporters and the nation for the first time after having been declared the winners of the presidential election. The words they said, the message they delivered, and the tone they set struck the chords that have been so vitally important to me and to many others throughout our lifetimes. If we seemed ravenous in listening to their words, it was because we have not heard them for too long and were hungering for inspirational and positive leadership.

The President-elect made his approach to governance clear: "I pledge to be a president who seeks not to divide, but to unify—who doesn't see red and blue states, but a United States, and who will work with all my heart to win the confidence of the whole people." Start-

ing with that kind of attitude will go a long way toward his success in being a unifier.

My interest in politics goes back to my teenage years and has been influenced by the great speeches I have heard, not simply for the words that were said but because of the hope they offered and the vision for greatness for our country they inspired. I stood in the foot-deep snow at the United States Capitol on January 20, 1961 and heard a leader I revered, the new President John F. Kennedy, say in his inaugural speech, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

Another inspirational moment came for me on my birthday, November 3, 2008, when Jane and I stood for hours in a crowd estimated at 80,000 people at the Prince William County Fairgrounds waiting for candidate Barack Obama who arrived at 10:30 p.m. for the final appearance of his campaign to be president. In

his usual inspiring way he told us, "I come away with an unyielding belief that if we only had a government as responsible as all of you, as compassionate as the American people, that there is no obstacle that we can't overcome. There is no destiny that we cannot fulfill."

In an echo of President Kennedy's words, former President Obama this fall challenged the country with his words, "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek." And just as President-elect Biden reminded us of the unity of America, Barack Obama at the Democratic Convention in 2004 in a speech that brought him to the attention of political leaders had reminded us that, "There's not a liberal America and a conservative America—there's the United States of America."

While these quotes are words, they reflect attitudes and beliefs that can stir us to positive action to realize the potential for an honest and decent America that is open and inclusive and where the American dream can become a reality for all.

## Walker Nature Center Delivers Halloween Trail 2020

BY JOHN LOVANS  
COMMUNITY ACTIVIST AND FOUNDER OF RESTON FARMERS MARKET



### INDEPENDENT PROGRESSIVE

2020 has been a brutal year. The Covid-19 pandemic has cast a pall over us all since January. It has devastated our economy and revealed weaknesses in every level of government including abject failure at the top. It has broken down social and cultural activities while taking the lives of 230,000 of our people and inflicting long-term suffering on untold thousands of "long haulers." As I write this, Covid-19 is surging to its highest levels with no end in sight.

While the very young among us are not generally impacted physically or dying at the rates older folks are, they are losing loved ones and being deprived of the normal activities of growing up—like going to school, play sports, holiday celebrations. My granddaughter, who is wise beyond her 13 years, tells me, "I love Mom and Dad, but really! 24/7 for all these months!?" Think about it.

Our family recently cancelled our annual Thanksgiving dinner for 20 plus at our house—because of Covid. Fran and I fully expected that Reston Association also would cancel the 23rd renewal of the big Halloween Trail at the Walker Nature Center. This family activity always attracts 700 or more. We enjoy attending in costume to welcome children and parents at the Trail admissions tent. We were surprised and delighted when we got the call to do the job this year. I must admit we wondered how

Katie Shaw, the person who not only manages the Nature Center but also engineered its creation, could do it safely under Covid conditions? We soon found out. Before the big event, Katie and RA's longtime volunteer coordinator, Ha Brock, held a virtual training session for Trail volunteers and staff. They had meticulously re-imagined the big event consistent with Virginia policy and CDC guidance to proceed with the Halloween Trail activities and fun, while building in sensible precautions for everyone's safety.

The basics were simple—all guests required to wear now familiar face coverings; fewer people allowed (300 over two nights vs normal 700) for safe spacing; onsite eating or sharing of food prohibited (guests would get a treat bag of goodies upon departure!); hand sanitizer to be available everywhere; and heavy use surfaces frequently cleaned.

As admissions welcomers dressed up like Spider Lass and a friendly Dracula, Fran and I checked in each pre-ticketed family. After cheery Halloween greetings, we gave each group a pop quiz before entering the activities area, including: have you been exposed to anyone with Covid-19 in the last 14 days, do you have a cough, fever or chills, loss of taste, muscle or body aches, etc?? We were impressed by the close attention even the little ones paid to this process!

The kids were excited, anxious to get to it. They were not only in costumes, but also in character—Wonder Women, Spidermen, Darth Vaders, a huge balloon dragon, a princess or two, and a cool father-son combo of the Man in the Yellow Hat -Curious George. And many more! It really seemed to me that the young ones were especially animated, thrilled to be up to their ears in Halloween fun.

And the fun was abundant. Inside Nature House was Dr. Abby Normal, the reimagined Mad Scientist demonstrating her amazing Halloween concoctions, followed by the Troll with its very special bridge! The families then got to meet live creatures up close, including a local snake, turtles and owls.

Then there was a self-guided "Creature Feature Trail" of 14 activity areas where guests followed clues and learned about animals that make up much of Halloween's typical lore like spiders, bats and wolves!

Afterwards there was great feedback from families thankful to have had so much fun when so many other things were cancelled. Many people may not have realized the tremendous amount of work that went into planning, organizing, and physically assembling the multitude of moving parts making up the Halloween Trail under uniquely difficult conditions. A tip of the Progressive hat to Katie Shaw and her wonderful RA team!

Next up, these same folks invite you to Holiday Greetings on Sunday, Dec. 6 from 1 to 4 p.m. with the Nature Center all decked out for the winter holidays for all ages. Register at [www.restonwebtrac.org](http://www.restonwebtrac.org) or contact [naturecenter@reston.org](mailto:naturecenter@reston.org)



# Herndon Seeks to Amend Agreement with Comstock

Closing on property planned before or on Dec. 15.

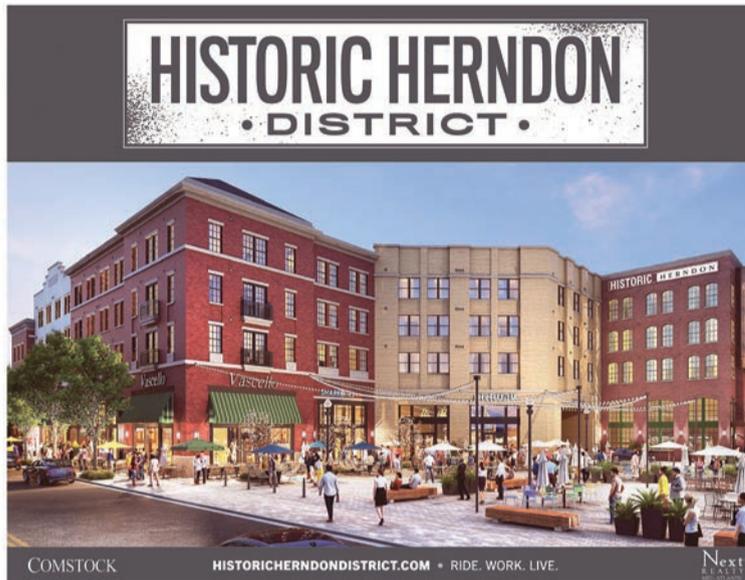
BY MERCIA HOBSON  
THE CONNECTION

**M**ayor Lisa C. Merkel may have the honor of inking the closing deal with Comstock Herndon Venture, LC on the Historic Herndon District project before her term ends on Dec. 31 of this year. During its Nov. 10 Work Session, the Herndon Town Council is considering an amendment to the Comprehensive Agreement dated Nov. 1, 2017, between the Town of Herndon and Comstock Herndon Venture, LC. The amendment would establish the closing date on the 4.675-acre property of Town owned land on or before Dec. 15, 2020. A little over three years ago, the Town and Comstock Herndon Venture LC entered into a public-private agreement for the redevelopment of the land into a vibrant mixed-use town center project with an Arts Center and associated parking.



MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION  
**Mayor Lisa C. Merkel may have the honor of inking the closing deal with Comstock Herndon Venture, LC on the Historic Herndon District project before her term ends on Dec. 31 of this year.**

According to the Staff Report available on the town website, the amendment, "Adjusts the outside satisfaction date by which Com-



stock must have the project under construction to Dec. 31, 2021; Extends certain rights of Comstock to pause the commencement of construction due to market conditions and other matters, including delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic; Increases the Parent guarantee by an additional 5 million to 10 million to cover the Arts Center and the Parking; Provides for licenses to the Town to allow

the continued use of the property owned by Comstock for Arts Space and Public shared parking."

**THE REPORT** cited recent construction delays for the project were related to significant problems created by conditions in the Metropolitan construction market. Covid-19 caused substantial increases in material costs. Production facilities reduced output

or shutdown as a result of governmental Covid-19 workforce restrictions. That caused supply to constrict at the same time demand held steady.

Fiscal investment and development incentives were reported at approximately \$16 million with the town anticipating the capital return to be over \$16.6 million.

The staff report named William H. Ashton II, Town Manager and Lesa J. Yeatts, Town Attorney, as contacts. Staff recommended that the Mayor and Town Council approve the resolution as proposed. Council will continue reviewing Thur. Nov. 12 and hold a public hearing on Nov. 17 according to published legal notice.

**LISA MERKEL**, Mayor of the Town of Herndon, said in an email on Sunday, Nov. 8, "For more than three decades, the town has worked to make the right downtown development happen at the right time. That time has now arrived, and I am pleased to finally be able to publicly share the details

SEE HISTORIC HERNDON, PAGE 6

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An expert is someone who knows some of the worst mistakes that can be made in his subject and how to avoid them.  
**-Werner Heisenberg**

**NEWS**

# Centreville Neighborhood Celebrates Halloween

Children in Centreville's Newgate community held a small but spirited parade, the day after Halloween. Parents and siblings marched with them through the neighborhood.

PHOTOS BY BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION



## Historic Herndon

FROM PAGE 5

of this long-awaited, well-negotiated comprehensive agreement between the Town of Herndon and Comstock Ventures. I hear from residents nearly every day who are anxious for financial details and certainty of a timeline. Tuesday night, we are able to provide that via the comprehensive agreement - a closing date on the property of Dec. 15, 2020, and a construction start date no later than Decem-

ber 2021."

She added, "Complicated and delayed at times by appeals, COVID19, and economic impacts, I am confident that after three years of negotiation, the Council is bringing forward a plan that provides the vitality, structured parking, arts and amenities Herndon has longed for in downtown - and at a good value for our taxpayers."

Ashton, Yeatts and a town spokesperson did not respond to a request for comment by press time.

# Supervisors OK Boulevards Development

FROM PAGE 3

agency applications to proceed with haste.” Instead, she urged the Board, “Please stop our pandemic of unvetted, unwise, wholesale development sweeping Fairfax County.”

Sully District Council’s Sheila Dunheimer also asked the Board to deny Boulevards. She stressed that the long-range timeline MWAA used in developing its newest noise contours – based on full buildout of the airport – is exactly the same as it used to develop its 1993 contours. And, she added, “MWAA didn’t select this timeline – it was originally established by Fairfax County, Loudoun County and the Town of Herndon so they’d have accurate mapping to use for fact-based, land-use planning.”

She said the planning timeframes Fairfax County used for other projects have ranged from 40-60 years, so it’s “unrealistic to force a 5-20-year planning timeframe onto Dulles Airport” – which will actually be expanding its operations.

“Short-term timeframes don’t align with a recent investment of \$50 million from the business community, airlines, MWAA and the commonwealth to make Dulles a more competitive airport,” said Dunheimer. “Nor do they align with an operation that’s part of a two-airport, regional system contributing almost \$4 billion in economic output and almost 35,000 jobs to Fairfax County.”

“Other large, hub airports are focused on studies to help them with already existing – as well as projected – surrounding housing in need of mitigation,” she continued. “They wish they could turn back time by actually preventing new, residential, land use from occurring in the first place – as Fairfax [previously] had the foresight to do.”

Furthermore, said Dunheimer, “As the number of flights increases every year, the

flight paths above the Boulevards “will become more congested – and with less quiet time between flights, residents’ overall exposure to these higher noise levels will only continue to rise.”

Also concerned that the updated contours are being disregarded, resident Amy Gould wondered, “How will MWAA be able to negotiate with the county in the future, if Fairfax ignores them now? Scientific data and voices of opposition have been ignored; this process is being streamlined for the benefit of the developer.”

**SUPERVISOR WALTER ALCORN** (D-Hunter Mill) asked if Boulevards was within a noise contour, and county staff member Kelly Atkinson said, “Per MWAA’s 2019 map, it’s in the 60-65 contour.” Smith then moved for approval.

She’s pleased the project includes 24 workforce housing units for those earning 80 percent of the area median income, plus 14 affordable dwelling units for lower-income residents. “Business parks were dying, and a mix of housing plus open space will help,” explained Smith. “We’ll be building a community in the Westfields Business Park.”

Still, said Alcorn, “My biggest concern is that we’re not working with the Airports Authority. And for us to not be using the updated plan is wrong – and may come back to bite us.” But because the county hasn’t included the new contours in its Comprehensive Plan, he voted yes.

Supervisor Pat Herry (R-Springfield) called the whole thing “a sin and a shame” and then abstained from voting. Supervisor John Foust (D-Dranesville) said, “It won’t hurt the airport. But it’ll hurt the county, from an economic-development and housing standpoint, if we don’t do it.” Ultimately, the Board approved it.

## AREA ROUNDUPS

### Sully Police Collecting Toys for Children

The best way to get onto Santa’s Nice List is to drop off some presents for the upcoming Santa’s Ride. For more than 30 years, the Sully District Police Station’s Motor Squad has been delivering toys for the children at Inova Children’s Hospital and the Georgetown Hospital Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center.

Anyone wishing to donate may bring new, unwrapped toys, games, books or other gifts to the lobby of the Sully District Police Station, 4900 Stonecroft Blvd. in Chantilly, this Saturday, Nov. 14, between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. Santa and his friends will be there to spread some cheer. For more information, go to <http://bit.ly/fcpdsanta>.

[fcpdsanta](http://bit.ly/fcpdsanta) and <http://bit.ly/fcpdsanta>.

### Car Seat Inspections on Nov. 19

Police officers at the Sully District Station, 4900 Stonecroft Blvd. in Chantilly, will be inspecting children’s car seats Thursday, Nov. 19, from 5-8:30 p.m. Inspections are done on a first-come, first-served basis; participants are asked to wear a mask and adhere to social-distancing and safety precautions. The seat must already be installed; then officers will properly re-install it, if necessary, and teach parents how to do it themselves, in the future. Inspections will also be done Dec. 3 and 17.

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## As Second Opinions Go ...



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

... it was first rate. A confirmation - of sorts that I have (and have had in all likelihood) thyroid cancer and not non small cell lung cancer. And I say ‘sorts’ because the medical records transferred did not include the original pathologist’s report on the tissue sample taken in 2009 and not all the scans from the nearly 12 years of treatment either. Nevertheless, this second oncologist summarized my cancer as being thyroid; partially because I’m still alive. Generally speaking, lung cancer patients don’t survive years beyond their prognosis. Addition by subtraction you might say. Unfortunately, lung cancer does what it does: grows, and when it doesn’t, it’s reason to consider another diagnosis. My primary oncologist had often said that the tumors in my lungs never acted as he had anticipated.

Good news then. Great news. I don’t have the “terminal” cancer with which I was originally diagnosed. I guess that explains why I have lived so many years past the “13 month to two year” prognosis that I was initially given in late Feb., 2009. Rather than having an incurable disease: non small cell lung cancer stage IV, I now have papillary thyroid cancer stage IV. Hopefully, I will be able to live with it much as I had lived with the apparent lung cancer” day by day, scan to scan. However, the day to day stress may be less because the worst case is not necessarily a scenario that I have to anticipate. Granted, it’s still cancer, and from what I was told, still incurable, but for the moment, very treatable. Surgery is likewise not an option and there is still medication - with side effects, that will remain part of my life, but there is life that remains. Moreover, there also remains regularly scheduled CT scans and lab work that will monitor my condition. And it is not until I receive the results from these diagnostic procedures that I can truly appreciate the change in my diagnosis.

It’s not that I don’t trust this second opinion, it’s more that I’ve spent the last nearly 12 years thinking one way and changing how I think now after one 45-minute appointment is not quite how I can roll.

Besides, my thyroid cancer has metastasized to the lung. And though it has been slow moving, it has moved. And it is rare. At present, it is responding to the medication but there are no guarantees in the cancer business, and I will continue to live from one scan to the next. I am grateful to be out from underneath, apparently, this terrible weight of fear and inevitability. However, as a long-time cancer patient, I can’t simply presume that life resumes as per usual, with per-usual being a pre-cancer-type life. Regardless of now being a thyroid cancer patient and not a non small cell lung cancer patient, I still am a cancer patient. As such, I still retain all the feelings and anxieties. I will still attend all the meetings, if you know what I mean? I can’t simply disconnect or forget all that I’ve endured these past 11-plus years

And lo and behold, I have a CT scan this Wednesday. By the end of the week, I will likely learn if my newly diagnosed thyroid cancer is still responding to treatment or whether there is something rotten in Denmark (me being Denmark). Even though I have a new working diagnosis - thyroid cancer, which on the face of it, is much less serious, I can’t approach my life any differently than I did before. Cancer is in charge, and until it tells me, so to speak, via scans and lab work, that it’s OKAY to breath normally, I won’t be able to. Now more than ever, almost, even with this new information, I can’t forget where I’ve been and what I’ve been told. It was lung cancer once. Perhaps, it can be again. For the moment, I’m going to try and enjoy my new-found status. But with the incomplete medical records painting a less-than-definitive picture, I will go along with the second oncologist’s assessment, but only from a distance. Unfortunately, having been told one thing before, and now being told another very different thing, doesn’t change the facts on my ground. I still have cancer.

And it’s still incurable. That problem remains.

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

# Music Connects

Virtual recitals strengthen stretched ties.

BY MERCIA HOBSON  
THE CONNECTION

**W**ill Meinert (bass) and Emily Mensch (soprano) of Herndon are opera singers performing and streaming recitals and short productions with a mix of discussions. The pair recently adapted Gian Carlo Menotti's 1947 opera 'The Telephone', into an original, fully staged production in their living room. They are also co-founders of the Parea virtual recital Series.

When COVID hit and canceled their gigs, Meinert and Mensch launched a music ensemble remotely from home. "We started thinking of ways to create musical projects that could take advantage of the fact that we couldn't meet in person but could take advantage of the fact that everything had to be remote now," said Mensch. The pair decided to create something new, virtual recitals, conceiving a fusion of music and discussion to allow personal connections. "When you're performing live, you don't always get to hear from the people who are contributing behind the scenes," said Mensch. Audrey Chait directed the opera remotely and the production featured curated discussion with Meinert, Mensch, Chait, and other guest artists.

Ben (Meinert) is in the original short comic opera trying to propose to Lucy (Mensch). She can't stay off her phone long enough to notice. Meinert and Mensch put a modern, pandemic twist on the opera, flipping it on its side to a comedy, from the current pandemic to the technological advances of the past twenty years. "I don't think a lot of people will have seen opera like this before. It's in English and filmed like a TV show. If you like TV comedies, you will like this opera," said Mensch.

**WHEN THEY FIRST LOOKED** at the score, they realized it was as if someone had written it yesterday. The pair set the production in April of 2020, as the pan-



PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION  
Lucy, played by opera singer Emily Mensch (soprano) chats endlessly on the phone while Ben, Will Meinert (bass), waits patiently trying to propose.

demical forced people inside. Mensch said they added some fun technology, FaceTime, text message pop-ups, and Siri and Alexa making small cameos in the production. "If you are someone who has not seen opera before and thinks it's intimidating, this is not what it is," she said.

According to Meinert, they had to learn many new skill sets to produce the TV-comedy opera from quarantine. "The lighting, the editing, the filming. I was learning all these things from the ground up. There was a moment in producing this when I realized we could just do a live performance immediately," he said.

Meinert and Mensch built the set in the living room, and between rehearsals and filming, the set remained there for a month. To top it off, they live with Meinert's parents. "We had to buy some of our set pieces, but we also retrofitted some of the existing furniture," said Meinert. Mensch added that since the opera was about two very relatable people today, many props were technology that they already had.

What makes the format special though are the pre-show and post-show talks. "The modern setting of this production helps bring people in, who might not already be interested in opera. But the discussion portion helps contextualize it for some who might have no experience at all with the art form," said Meinert.

**THE FULL PERFORMANCE** of 'The Telephone,' is available to download/stream for October and November. Anna Betka accompanies on piano. Run time 50 minutes: 25m-music and 25m-discussion. Minimum price \$15, Suggested price \$25. Available through Dec. 1 at Pareas virtual recital Series.

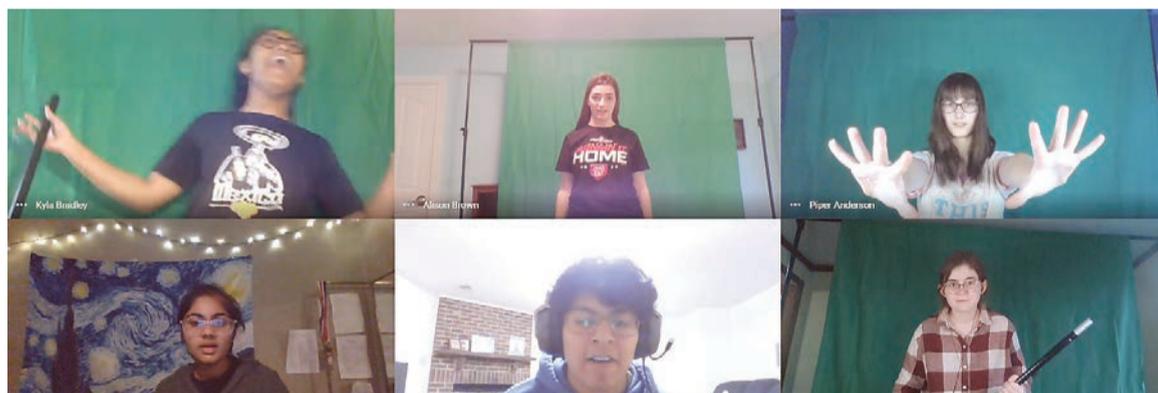


PHOTO COURTESY OF KAYLA GADLEY  
Kyla Bradley, Alison Brown, Piper Anderson, Spoorthi Nadkarni, Alejandro Cahoon and Zoe Brennan rehearse an intense battle scene over Google Meet.

## Westfield Theater Students Offer 'She Kills Monsters'

Westfield High theater students will livestream their first-ever, virtual production of "She Kills Monsters: Virtual Realms." Performances are set for Friday-Saturday, Nov. 20-21, at 7 p.m., and Sunday, Nov. 22, at 2 p.m.

Written by Qui Nguyen, "She Kills Monsters" tells the story of Agnes Evans, mourning the recent loss of her sister, Tilly. Soon after Tilly's death, Agnes finds her sister's Dungeons and Dragons notebook and goes on a fantastic adventure with amazing creatures.

Throughout the journey, Agnes learns more about the sister she thought she knew, while the play combines comedy, action and the 1990s.

Tickets are \$10 per household and \$5 for students and other individuals. They're free to 2020 alumni. Purchase them at [www.westfieldtheatre.com](http://www.westfieldtheatre.com). Ticket holders will receive a link to the streaming performance.

— KAYLA GADLEY



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Victoria and Jillian Felder - October 2020

## Chantilly Sisters Pursue Pageantry with a Purpose

These days, pageant competition is about so much more than ball gowns and pretty faces. Contestants compete for big money and are judged as much on the quality of their community service efforts as on their poise, presentation skills, and ability to positively influence others. It's rare to find two impressive young women in the same family both competing in national pageants while also having the time to give back to their local communities, produce a weekly podcast, in addition to balancing school and extracurricular activities. Two local sisters, Victoria and Jillian Felder — who've competed in pageants since they were little girls — plan to compete in the USA National Miss (UNM) pageant this November for national titles. The pageant awards more than \$100,000 in scholarships and gifts to each of its winners. The Felders offer an impressive example of how pageantry encourages girls to combine their brains and beauty with a passion for community service.

Victoria Felder, 15, the 2020 USA National Miss Old Dominion Jr. Teen and a sophomore at Chantilly High School, is most concerned about food insecurity and its effect on underserved and homeless kids. Her "Victorious Vision" project aims to address this problem. "Our

goal is to give hope to those with hunger and homelessness, and increase awareness on this critical issue affecting children," she says. With a goal of holding five food drive initiatives in 2020, she's already delivered several hundred meals to families, including coordinating food drives across several cities with Grace Covenant Church and their Mobile Hope program.

Not to be overshadowed by her big sister, Jillian, 12, the 2020 USA National Miss Virginia Preteen who fundraises for children's hospitals and delivers care packages to kids living with cancer and other serious illnesses. The Rocky Run Middle School eighth grader has delivered nearly 3,000 care packages around the Mid-Atlantic region and Texas, some of which through a partnership with her church, and has raised funds and sewn "cozy caps" for youth cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy with a local foundation, the Educational and Charitable Foundation.

While promoting their own personal platforms, Victoria and Jillian persuaded the CEO of SheEO Academy, a company that inspires girls to pursue entrepreneurship, to become a national pageant sponsor for UNM, adding an integration of the Crown C.A.R.E.S which is UNM's.