

Bringing Joy and Message Of Hope to Area Children

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NEWS

Students and Parents Navigate Challenges of Virtual Learning

FCPS Virtual and In-Person Learning During COVID 2020.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Dec. 1 marked the day that Fairfax County Public Schools students in Group 5, those in Early Head Start, PreK, Kindergarten, and some who receive special education services would at last transition out of distance learning and walk through school doors to receive two days a week of in-person learning.

But FCPS metrics based on Virginia Department of Health data did not support the return to in-person learning. On Nov. 24, Superintendent Scott Brabrand announced in his Thanksgiving Message to families, “As we see COVID-19 infection rates continue to rise in our community, we must continue to pause in-person return for students in Group 5 ... Health conditions do not support bringing Group 5 students back to school in person on Dec. 1 as we had hoped.”

Dec. 1 is 264 days since the release of Brabrand’s March 12 Coronavirus Update Message that closed all FCPS schools on Friday, March 13, the last day many students attended in-person. It was then that Brabrand wrote, “This remains a very fast-moving narrative.” Those words proved to be one constant in the yet to be fulfilled FCPS Return to School plan.

As FCPS began the last month of 2020, with majority of students learning virtually, the Connection highlighted actions and reports by the division from March 13- Dec. 1, 2020, including analyses of Quarter 1’s increased number of Ds and Fs for Students with Disabilities and English learner students during virtual instruction.

The Connection also invited parents and students to share personal narratives and statements on the challenges and benefits of learning virtually in a COVID environment.

Highlights of FCPS from March 13 - Dec. 1, 2020

When FCPS closed on March 13, it was the tenth-largest school division in the country with a diverse prekindergarten through 12 student population of 188,000 — 29 percent economically disadvantaged, 14.7 percent with disabilities, and 27 percent English speaking learners.

Looking back, technical issues with Blackboard the first week of distance learning be-



PHOTO BY STEVE KRAUSS

Caitlyn Berman, 5, of Vienna, on her first day of distance kindergarten at Mosby Woods Elementary, Fairfax. No ride on the school bus and no in-person FCPS teacher. All learning remains virtual as of Dec. 1.

ginning April 14 prompted Brabrand to cancel online learning for the rest of the week. School Board member Megan McLaughlin (Braddock) said, “I remain shocked that the 10th largest school system in the country did not know ... to do a load testing.” A second issue surfaced, failures to implement and monitor security protocol by FCPS. Sloan Presidio, the school system’s assistant superintendent for instructional services, described it as a leadership failure. “We failed to properly train the staff,” Sloan said.

School year 2019-2020 ended with no fourth-quarter grades assigned to elementary students due to equity issues of access to technology and limited student ability to submit work during distance learning. Secondary students received a “no mark” for the fourth quarter, with submitted assignments allowed to influence the overall final year grade positively. School Board chair Karen Corbett Sanders said, “This Board is committed to working with the Superintendent, staff members, and our families to get through this period.”

In the summer, FCPS reshaped distance learning with Schoology, a management system to start fall 2020 as a pilot at 17 schools.

School year 2020-2021 began with virtual learning for everyone. However, the fall population declined by 8,859 students dipping to 180,151 compared to data recorded the year before at the same time, according to Assistant Superintendent of Facilities and Transportation Services Jeff Platenberg.

Oct. 5, 19, and 26 saw FCPS begin its Return to School in-person instruction for small groups of students whose families opt-



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Sebastian Krauss, 17, of Centreville, a senior at Westfield High School in Chantilly, shares a makeshift basement classroom in the family home with his twin sister, Jordan.

ed in and might be experiencing the greatest challenges with distance learning — high school career prep, preschool autism, early childhood, English learner newcomers, special needs and adapted curriculum.

The school division passed the first quarter (Q1) milestone only to receive the 2020 FCPS Study of Teaching and Learning During the Covid 19 Pandemic, Analyses of Q1 Secondary Marks by the Office of Research and Strategic Improvement. Learning-disabled students and English-as-a-second-language students fell significantly behind according to the new study, with the trend “especially concerning.”

According to the study, “Students who performed well previously primarily performed slightly better than expected during Q1 of this year. In contrast, students who were previously not performing well-performed considerably less well. A greater proportion of low-performing students received failing grades during Q1 than would have been expected based on patterns of marks in prior years...The amount of increase among racial/ethnic, gender, and other student groups was highest among Students



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Ritisha Sen helps her sister, Riyana as they continue their education virtually in the FCPS system. Having arrived in the United States from Singapore summer of 2020, according to their father, Shaurav, the girls always say: “Wish our teachers would create more opportunities for us to connect with our classmates so we get to know each other better — learning is a lot more fun when we can do it sometimes together with our classmates and friends.”

with Disabilities (111 percent increase), and English learner (106 percent increase) students and lowest among Black (63 percent increase) and White students (67 percent increase). Nonetheless, all groups showed increases in the percentage of F marks received during Q1 of the current year compared to the prior year, indicating that more students were failing courses during the (primarily) virtual instruction period than had occurred when the instruction was delivered in-person.

Moving toward Thanksgiving week, COVID-19 cases per 100,000 in the community trended consistently upwards. On Sunday, Nov. 22, FCPS notified parents of students in Group 4 that their children would return to all virtual instruction because health metrics reached a threshold based on guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). “The number of cases per 100,000 must be equal to or less than 200 and the positivity rate must remain at, or equal to, 10 percent. When either one of these metrics exceeds the threshold for seven consecutive days, students will temporarily return to all virtual instruction.” COVID-19 Pandemic Metrics for Core Indicators, Fairfax, 11/16/2020 showed total cases per 100,000 first recorded greater

SEE SCHOOL YEAR, PAGE 10

The Work Goes On...

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

Sonny Bono wrote a catchy tune reminding us that "the beat goes on...History has turned the page, uh huh."

So it is in the Commonwealth of Virginia: the action of governance goes on. Since 1619 there has been a form of representative government in first the colony and now the state. The legislative branch, the General Assembly, has since 1971 been meeting every year; prior to that time the House of Delegates and the Senate met only every other year. The legislative sessions convene as prescribed in the Constitution on the second Wednesday of January for sixty days in the even-numbered years and for thirty days in the odd-numbered years unless at least two-thirds of the members agree to extend the session for not more than thirty days. The sessions have always been extended but by not more than 15 or so days. There is talk by the minority party of not agreeing to any extension of the session scheduled to start on January 13, 2021.



COMMENTARY

In addition to the regular session, there is a reconvened session beginning on the sixth Wednesday after the adjournment of the regular session to consider any bills returned by the governor with amendments or with a veto. The governor may call a special session "when in his opinion the interest may require" or when two-thirds of the elected members of both houses request it. There is a regular beat to the work of the General Assembly: regular session, reconvened session, special session. For even a part-time legislature, the work goes on!

But there is much more to legislating than the formal and now virtual floor sessions of the House and Senate. Earlier this week there was a deadline to request drafting of legislation to be pre-filed before the session. There is a limitation on how many bills a legislator can introduce especially after the convening of the legislature. For members of the legislative staff who actually draft the bills, this is the intense period

between Thanksgiving and the opening of the session when 140 members present their best ideas to be crafted into a form that would be suitable to go into the Code of Virginia. The entire support staff of the legislative branch could not be more helpful and deserve our thanks for helping get us through the stressful period of the session.

Pre-session work also includes meetings with advocacy groups (virtually now), monthly meetings of the Appropriations Committee and the Joint Legislative Audit Review Commission and other committees on a less regular basis until the session gets underway, and caucuses with our party colleagues. Constituent inquiries and recommendations are very helpful and take time to read and consider.

Prior to the pandemic there was a need to find housing in the Capital city and to arrange to be away from home for the week. The session beginning in January will be virtual so there is the need to make sure your home office has the broadband that will support daily committee and floor sessions. The work is demanding, but I am honored to be part of it. As the song continues, "drums keep pounding a rhythm to the brain." The work goes on!

December is Virginia's Puppy Mill Awareness Month

BY SUSAN LAUME
THE CONNECTION

In February, the 2020 General Assembly unanimously designated December as Virginia's Puppy Mill Awareness Month. This December, and each succeeding year thereafter, Virginians are encouraged to observe Puppy Mill Awareness Month by supporting efforts to raise awareness of puppy mills, support rescue organizations, and promote responsible dog breeding and responsible pet adoption. (See Great Falls Connection, July 20, 2020)

What is a puppy mill? No one common definition has been established in law, but puppy mills are generally defined as high-volume commercial breeding operations; factory farming of dogs, with inhumane treatment of adult breeding dogs where profit is put above the welfare of the dogs. These factory farms may have 50 to hundreds of dogs of various breeds held in poor conditions. Many such operations have been repeatedly cited for violations of the federal Animal Welfare Act. And while Virginia's restrictions on commercial breeding have kept such operations out of the Commonwealth, the General Assembly recognized that out-of-state operations regularly transport and ship puppies into Virginia.

The resolution recognized that Virginia consumers face purchase of dogs which are often underdeveloped, sick, or suffer from genetic deformities or behavioral defects as a result of poor socialization and mistreatment, and some may even die only days or weeks after purchase. Many pets purchased as holiday gifts



PHOTO COURTESY SARA YASSIN

Small mixed breeds, favored by puppy mills, often come with hidden poor health price tags, warn animal welfare organizations

come from puppy mills, by way of Virginia puppy stores or on-line sales, and animal welfare organizations see increased numbers of rejected and unwanted dogs following the holidays.

What can you do to stop puppy mills?

It's simple — don't buy from puppy stores which sell dogs/cats/rabbits! Instead, do your business with pet stores that work cooperatively with local rescues to display animals in need of a home. Don't buy animals on-line. Instead, identify responsible breeders or rescues and work directly with them, insisting on seeing their breeding/housing site and health testing.

Talk with your friends and neighbors about puppy store factory farm sourcing. Encourage others to avoid puppy store and on-line puppy/kitten/rabbit purchases. Also, contact your State legislator to voice your dissatisfaction with loop holes in the law that allow puppy mills to sell through puppy stores in Virginia. Ask your Congressional representative to strengthen federal animal welfare act regulations related to commercial dog breeding; to move and pass the Wolf Act and the Puppy Protection Act.

Read more information on Puppy Mill Awareness Month in Connection during December.

www.ConnectionNewspapers.com

An independent, locally owned weekly newspaper delivered to homes and businesses.

Published by
Local Media Connection LLC

1606 King Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

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Bringing Joy and Message of Hope to Area Children

Fairfax County Fire and Rescue participating in TOYS FOR TOTS Campaign.

The Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department will be participating in the Annual National Capital Region Fire and EMS Departments' 2020 TOYS FOR TOTS Campaign. The intent of the campaign is to "bring holiday joy and deliver a message of hope to children." Stations will accept donations now through Sunday, Dec. 13, 2020.

In years past, firefighters and paramedics have welcomed residents donating toys into fire stations. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, this is not possible and collection boxes will be placed outside the front door of each fire and rescue station every morning. This will make it easier for the public to drop off toys while minimizing contact with firefighters and paramedics. Residents will be able to drop off toys until 8 p.m., each evening.

Please help us to help those less fortunate this holiday season - asks Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department. The need will be even greater this year. Thanks to the generosity of those who live and work in Fairfax County, we were able to provide the Marines with approximately 12,000 toys that filled two tractor trailers last year!



PHOTO BY TECHNICIAN ERIC RUSSELL

Station 42, Wolftrap, already in the spirit and awaiting toy donations. Fairfax County Fire And Rescue is participating In TOYS FOR TOTS Campaign.

Children who are served by this campaign include toddlers and youths through age 17. The campaign will only accept new, unwrapped toys. Toys used as weapons or considered to be weapons (i.e., toy guns or knives of any kind) will not be accepted. Checks or money orders for donations must be made payable to TOYS FOR TOTS.

Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Stations will accept donations through Sunday, Dec. 13. Toys will not be accepted after this date.

McLean Holiday Art & Crafts Festival Goes Virtual

The 2020 McLean Holiday Art & Crafts Festival, produced by the McLean Community Center, is being broadcast live this year at 4 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 5, and Sunday, Dec. 6. Founded in 1982, the popular juried show features an exceptional group of regional artisans. Admission to the show is free; however, registration is required.



According to MCC Special Events Manager Catherine Nesbitt, the live broadcast will allow viewers a behind-the-scenes look at how artists and crafters create their products. "During our in-person event, we require the artists to be onsite, which allows attendees to meet them, but in some ways the virtual show allows for an even more intimate experience of how these artists are inspired to create their masterpieces," she said. "In addition, the format will allow attendees to ask the artists questions in real time."

This year's festival includes

high-quality, traditional handcrafted works by established and seasoned artisans as well as innovative concepts by a number of new artists who are exhibiting. There will be pottery, glass, jewelry, holiday decorations, mixed media, fashion accessories, wood, fine art, artisanal foods, and more, all on display and all for sale—just in time for the holidays.

For more information, call the center at 703-790-0123, TTY: 711 or visit the website at www.mcleancenter.org/special-events.

Ho-ho-holiday Events in Vienna

With safety in mind, the Town of Vienna is sharing a handful of ho-ho-holiday activities for all ages. Check out what Santa has on his sleigh this year:

Dial in for Santa's message of safety and celebration

Santa has a special 2020 holiday message for all Vienna boys and girls. Call 703-255-6333 and put your phone on speaker to hear and share Santa's words of wisdom about kindness, caring, and safely being there for one another during the holiday season and into the coming year.

Sweaters and tea for holiday glee

Looking for a relaxing, safe, free way to get into the holiday spirit? Those ages 55+ can put on the kettle, wrap themselves in their favorite holiday hoodie, and join friends via Zoom for a Virtual Holiday Tea from 2-3 p.m. Friday, Dec 4.

To sign up, go to viennava.gov/registration and put in ac-



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Town of Vienna is sharing a handful of ho-ho-holiday activities for all ages.

activity code #610702. Questions? Call Kathy Blevins at 703-255-7801.

#WhereIsSanta Scavenger Hunt Santa Claus is coming to Vienna! Where he'll be exactly, well, that's for you to figure out.

Join in the #WhereIsSanta Scavenger Hunt through Dec. 22. Use clues provided on the Town's Face-

book page (@townofviennava) to determine where you can find Santa each week.

Clues on Santa's location will be posted at noon each Tuesday through Christmas week. You also may call the Vienna Community Center at 703-255-6360 to receive the clue. Santa will be on the move to a new #WhereIsSanta location each Tuesday morning.

Be sure to take your phone or camera to take a picture with Santa at each location. Share a photo of yourself with Santa at the scavenger hunt location on social media and tag Vienna, using the #WhereIsSanta hashtag, to be entered into a raffle for a \$50 Amazon gift card. One raffle ticket will be awarded per family at each Santa location. A maximum of four raffle tickets 8per family will be issued.

A special thank you to Vienna Arts Society elves for sponsoring this event. For more information, contact Javonta Campbell at 703 255-6352.

Zoom with Santa

Children are welcome to sit on Santa's virtual knee and share their 2020 Christmas wishes via Zoom from 3-5 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 9, and Thursday, Dec. 10.

Registration is required and free. One ticket may be reserved per family. Each family will have a five-minute Zoom session with Santa. Reserve tickets at viennava.gov/registration (search "Zoom with Santa") or at the Vienna Community Center. At least one par-

ent/guardian must accompany children on the Zoom call.

The Zoom link will be emailed to registrants prior to the Zoom event date. Please save the link and do not share with friends or family. Please be sure the name on your Zoom session matches the name used to register for the event. You will be admitted to the Zoom meeting by Santa's elves once he is ready.

Required Zoom etiquette:

- ❖ Input your first and last names as registered.
- ❖ No profanity is allowed while on the Zoom session. (Otherwise Santa may place you on the naughty list, and your Zoom session will be ended.)
- ❖ Appropriate attire is required; no pajamas allowed.
- ❖ No eating, drinking, or smoking while on Zoom.

Please ensure that you are familiar with the Zoom platform prior to the event. If you have technical difficulties, call 703-255-6352.

WELLBEING

Have Yourself a Sober Little Christmas

Battling addictions during the holidays.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

With the holidays come an increase in imbibing. For battling addiction, the ubiquity of temptations can make attending social events, even those that are virtual or small in-person outdoor gatherings can be difficult, but not impossible, say local mental health practitioners.

"Staying sober is a daily, sometimes even hourly, choice," said Carolyn Lorente, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Northern Virginia Community College and a private practitioner in Maryland. "During a pandemic, this may be especially difficult because of loneliness and social isolation. In order to protect ourselves from spreading the virus, so many people are experiencing being lonely, which is hard at any time, but especially during the holidays."

Advanced planning when anticipating times when there might be triggers or temptations to drink is important.

"Build in activities, set up alternative things that are pleasurable," said Linda McKenna Gulyn, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology, Marymount University. "Keep yourself busy with tasks or appointments to greet or meet people virtually, by phone or go out on a brisk walk. And tell a trusted loved one that you are planning, too."

Have plans in place to help with those urges, says Lorente. "I also encourage my clients to make a list of tools that they will use to counteract the urges that I call choosing health and happiness, such as going for a 15 minute walk," she said.

Give forethought to situations that might lead to temptation. "It is important to have a plan and work your plan," said Lorente.

Even if conducted virtually, make sure to participate in regular meetings, advises Lorente. "Stay in touch with your recovery support person, whether it is a sober friend or a dedicated sponsor," she said. "And to counteract the isolation that many of us are feeling, reach out to help another person,"

There are a variety of options for those looking for support. "For instance, call someone you know is alone," said Lorente. "Meet up for a socially distanced coffee with a neighbor or friend where you each bring your own thermos and blanket."



Alcohol can flow freely during the holidays. Develop a plan to maintain sobriety.

PHOTO BY MARILYN CAMPBELL

"Make a list on your phone of why ... you want to maintain your sobriety and check it whenever you start to get the urge."

— Carolyn Lorente, Ph.D.

Practice benevolence, suggests Lorente. "Volunteer to help provide food to those that need it," she said. "When we help others, we help ourselves."

It is important to acknowledge and understand the reasons why sobriety might be challenging during this time of year, advises Jerome Short, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology at George Mason University. "It may be difficult for people to

stay sober during a pandemic holiday because many of us are experiencing anxiety, depression, or loneliness and want to feel better," he said. "We also have expectations that we should enjoy the holidays and do fun social activities. Alcohol and other substances may help us feel better briefly and stop thinking about problems."

When spending time with difficult family, or navigating gift giving and money shortages, alcohol or other substances might appear to provide temporary stress relief. "Those feelings are fleeting so engaging in or developing hobbies can help fill the void normally satisfied by substances," said Short.

Maintain one's physical health, continued Short. "Get adequate sleep, exercise, and nutrition to reduce urges to use substances."

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The (Virtual) Show Must Go On!

BY MILES YANG AND FRANCISCO YANG

Starting at a computer for online class is far from the true experience of a classroom setting. COVID-19's closure of schools in March has prevented Langley students from taking courses the way they were designed to be taken, but apps like Schoology and Blackboard Collaborate allow students to learn material virtually. However, the Langley High School Orchestra has a completely different problem.

We can't play.

Firstly, video calls have the slightest delay in audio, which makes it impossible for orchestra students to synchronously play their instruments. Even more, the built-in microphones in school-issued Chromebooks don't always pick up all audio, often leaving out higher pitches and softer sounds that are filtered out. Danyal Ashraf, a junior in the Symphonic Orchestra, remarks how "being online has made it much more difficult to fully experience orchestra class because it makes practicing harder because you can't hear the other sections."

Well, how will we hold concerts?

LANGLEY ORCHESTRA students have found a solution: virtual performances. Each student practices their part on their own and records a video of themselves playing. Then, the Langley Orchestra Tech Team, led by senior cellist Riker Wilson, uses video editing software and a bit of movie magic to stitch the hundreds of clips together, ultimately creating a video of the entire performance.

Not only does the virtual performance solve the problem of holding concerts, but it also gives room for more creativity in the visual aspect of performances. While the melody plays in the background, skits and small videos play on the big screen to add a bit more fun to the viewing experience.

Executing a virtual performance, however, requires a great deal of work from the tech team; even with 14 team members from all four grades, lining up audio, stitching videos together, and fine-tuning the final product demanded more than 80 hours of work. Every student must do their part, and coordination throughout the entire orchestra is key. The leadership of Tri-M (Langley's orchestra honor society) and the Langley Orchestra Tech Team have taken a central role in organizing this Herculean project, and with their fearless leader, Dr. Scott McCormick, at the helm, students are able to create a spectacle for all to enjoy.

The Langley Orchestra carries a tradition of concert themes, and for the first virtual concert of the year, Dr. McCormick chose "film composers." During the first quarter, students studied a number of famous film composers throughout film history including Benny Goodman, Hans Zimmer, and John Williams. For Langley Orchestra's "Film Composers Concert," each orchestra practiced and performed one famous piece from award-winning film soundtracks.

Beginning the program, the Concert Orchestra, along with soloists Alyssa Kim on the violin, Fay Shuai on the cello, and Alyssa Katahara on the harp, plays the "Theme to Schindler's List" by John Williams (arr. Longfield). The film's en-



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALYSSA KIM

Senior violinist Alyssa Kim was one of the soloists playing the "Theme from Schindler's List" in the Langley HS Orchestra's virtual concert.



PHOTO BY PATRICIA LORIA

Senior cellist Nick Loria submits his recording for the Langley HS Orchestra's virtual concert.



PHOTO BY RITVIK CHENNUPATI

Senior Otto Janke plays viola in a video recording that is included in the Langley HS Orchestra's virtual concert.

tire Oscar-winning soundtrack features the traditional Jewish music of central Europe and expresses the sorrow and despair of Jews during the Holocaust.

NEXT, the Symphonic Orchestra performs "The Incredibles" by Michael Giacchino (arr. Moss), with Craig Hunter on drums. "The Incredibles" is one of my favorite movies from my childhood," says Gabriel Krieger, a senior violinist in the Philharmonic Orchestra. "I wished I could've seen it live, but the virtual concert was even better." Although the soundtrack uses a style of jazz dominated by brass instruments, violins with the melody greatly emphasized their dynamics in order to mimic the resounding sound of trumpets.

To end the program, the Philharmonic Orchestra performs "Cinema Paradiso" by Ennio

Morricone (arr. Krogstad). Morricone is famous for writing compositions in a wide range of genres, but he is most well-known for his spaghetti westerns. Morricone's passing last July inspired Dr. McCormick's "film composer" theme, and the Philharmonic's performance is a small tribute to one of the greatest film composers of all time.

With hundreds of views since its premiere on Saturday, Nov. 21, the first virtual concert of the year was an overwhelming success. Viewers at the premiere were even able to make live comments, creating an environment where students could connect with one another while watching safely from home. While students may be apart, making music brings the students of the Langley High School Orchestra together.

Our first concert can be viewed at [Langley-Orchestra.org](https://www.langleyorchestra.org).

BULLETIN BOARD

Submit civic/community announcements at [Connection-Newspapers.com/Calendar](https://www.connectionnewspapers.com/Calendar). Photos and artwork welcome. Deadline is Thursday at noon, at least two weeks before the event.

STARTING DEC. 1

Light up Vienna for the holidays. The Town Business Liaison Committee (TBLC) will host a Town-wide holiday decorating contest this December, inviting both businesses and residents to participate, in order to bring a little shine to Vienna. The theme for the contest is "Light up Vienna." In order to participate, a business or resident must be located within the Town limits. Decorations must be visible from the street or sidewalk and may be as simple or as elaborate as desired. The contest will kick off December 1. Participants may register at viennava.gov/holiday. All decorations must be completed and photos of the decorations submitted by December 7. Town of Vienna residents will determine the business and resident winners via "People's Choice" awards. Residential applicants will be judged in the following categories: single-family home, townhome, condo, or apartment/patio. First, second, and third place awards will be given to businesses. For Town of Vienna residents interested in taking in the holiday décor and/or voting on their favorite displays, a self-guided tour route will be provided by December 8 at viennava.gov/holiday along with a link to vote. Be sure to vote for your favorites by midnight December 16. Winners of the "People's Choice" awards will be announced December 17 on social media. Mayor Linda Colbert will offer one hour of her time as a guest employee to assist the winning business during the holiday season. Resident winners will receive gift card prizes from local businesses.

THURSDAY/DEC. 3

Blue Christmas Service. 7:30-8:30 p.m. Online. For those who experience loss or grief around the holidays. Blue Christmas is an annual observance that acknowledges the fact that for some people the holidays are not the "ha-, ha-, happiest time of year." This meaningful experience allows individuals to experience peace while honoring their experience of loss or grief. Visit the website: <https://www.unityoffairfax.org/content/sunday-streams>

FRIDAY/DEC. 4

Virtual 50+ Employment Expo. Mark Your Calendar for the Virtual 50+ Employment Expo. (A service of the Jewish Council for the Aging and made possible with a grant from The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation). The Employment Expo is targeted to the Over 50 Crowd. There will be multiple recruiters, workshops, as well as, a listing of community resources/training/education. Go to <https://virtualexpos.accessjca.org/>

CALENDAR

TYSONS CORNER CENTER HOLIDAY PLANS

Santa Is Back (Now through Dec. 24). Careful consideration has been given to the Santa set to ensure that they are both healthy and magical to meet the moment. Santa will be seated a distance from his guests to maintain a healthful distance, with a physical barrier to prevent young guests from trying to sit on Santa's lap. Santa and his young visitors will wear masks and maintain a healthful distance, in a contactless visit and photo experience fully re-designed to meet the moment.

Grinch's Grotto (Now thru Dec. 31). Located on Level 2 next to A Christmas to Remember. Guests will meet The Grinch and interact with him right in his cave, as well as pose for a photo. Admission includes a free 6x8" printed photo with a playful Grinch catchphrase. With over 20 sayings to choose from, guests can customize their own Grinch holiday memory. Admission also gets you a collectible Grinch ornament. Each ticket allows admission for up to 5 guests to meet the Grinch as a group. This ticket secures your individual time to meet the Grinch and experience his cave. Social distancing and mask usage will be in accordance with local and mall regulations.

Stuff-A-Truck Event (Friday, Dec. 4, 3 - 7 p.m.) Together with WGTS, the official radio sponsor of the Salvation Army's Angel Program, the Johnny and Stacey show will broadcast live from the Hyatt Regency Tysons Corner Center near the Plaza, encouraging listeners to help "Stuff

the Truck' with toys for donation to the Salvation Army.

NOW THRU THE HOLIDAYS

Santa at Springfield Town Center. Santa and his reindeer have arrived at Springfield Town Center to kick-off the holiday season. In an effort to create touchless experiences and accommodate varying levels of visitor comfort, Santa will be available at Springfield Town Center via numerous experiences and offerings: Picture with Santa; Virtual Experience; Family Pet Photos on Mondays; Family Photos and Visits with Santa. Reservations are required for all Santa and photo offerings.

NOW THRU DEC. 15

BUMC Holiday Marketplace. Burke United Methodist Church is hosting an online Holiday Marketplace. Proceeds will benefit our Cambodia ministry and the preschool. Includes links to many local crafters. Visit www.burkeumc.org

DEC. 4 AND DEC. 11

Centrestage Spotlight. 6-8 p.m. Virtual Event. Centrestage Spotlight is a virtual show that will feature songs, monologues and scenes performed by Theatre Centreville students. Audience members will receive a link so the show can be enjoyed virtually. The first show can be viewed between Dec 4th and Dec 7th. The second show can be enjoyed Dec 11th through Dec 14th. To purchase tickets, go to <https://www.theatrecentreville.com/wpa/>

FRIDAY/DEC. 4

Holiday Drive-In Movie. At Tysons Corner Center. Friday, December 4 - Elf from 5 p.m. - 9 p.m. Each night, the fun will kick-off at 5 p.m. (movie starts at 7:30 p.m.) and will last until the movie has concluded with food available from participating eateries as well as some live entertainment, trivia, and music prior to the show. Reservation required, with a donation of \$10 or more to Food for Others, a local nonprofit providing food to neighbors in need.

DEC. 4-6

Capital Craft Fair. 12 to 5 p.m. At Dulles Expo Center, 4320 Chantilly Shopping Center, Chantilly. A Showcase of Artistry and Craftsmanship - The Capital Craft Fair will feature works of art and fine crafts presented by more than 100 juried artists. Artists will offer a wide variety of handmade art in several mediums. Cost: \$10 Adults (in advance) \$12 (at the door). Visit the website: <https://hubs.la/H0y-gJs0>

SATURDAY/DEC. 5

Living Nativity. 11:30 to 1 p.m. At St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, 6320 Hanover Ave., Springfield. St. Christopher's Living Nativity and unwrapped toy drive is on - drive or walk by. Rev. Connors: "Come experience the joyous Christmas story - and make a child's life a little brighter." Free. Visit the website: www.saintchristophers.net

SEE CALENDAR, PAGE 11

Healing Through Art in McLean

McLean Branch of American Association of University Women (AAUW) is hosting a program on bringing people of diverse culture and ethnicity together and cultivating healing for generational, gender, and racial trauma through Art.

A dynamic presentation by artist Brinda Guha will be held on Saturday Dec. 5, 2020 at 12 noon via Zoom.

Guha is a trained Indian Classical Kathak dancer for more than 20 years and has traveled throughout USA and has performed in India, England, and Spain. She co-founded Kalamandir Dance Company in 2010. Brinda has choreographed for many national stages including the North American Bengali Conference at Madison Square Garden. She created Wise Fruit NYC, a seasonal live arts installment,



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Brinda Guha

(established in 2017) dedicated to the feminine divine and honoring select women-led organizations. Between live installments, Wise Fruit NYC functions as a community-led space for beginner tools in social justice

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NEWS

School Year Like No Other

FROM PAGE 3

than 200 at 211.2. The indicator remained greater than 200 for seven consecutive days, to 11/22/20, with cases recorded at 264.3.

On Nov. 24, in his Thanksgiving Message from the Superintendent, Brabrand said, "As we see COVID-19 infection rates continue to rise in our community, we must continue to pause in-person return for students in Group 5 (Early Head Start, PreK and Kindergarten). Health conditions do not support bringing Group 5 students back to school in person on December 1 as we had hoped."

Parent and Student Comments

Dave Krauss of Centreville: "We went through the fourth quarter of last year, Sebastian's and Jordan's junior year, like everyone else, online. I think both of them were somewhat of the opinion that it was a bit of a waste... We all felt that Fairfax County was so unprepared to move to that model. (However) they were focused on their AP exams...For those classes specifically, they were on the ball. They were studying with each other. That was one of the benefits of having twins... They both did very well on their AP tests...Heading into the summer, we were asked a survey by Fairfax County whether we wanted them to be in school or at home remotely. Now, both my wife and I did not feel that it was particularly dangerous to send them into school...After the fourth quarter expe-

rience, we felt that a hybrid learning situation where they go into school would probably be for the best. Fairfax County obviously decided to go fully virtual, regardless of everyone else's choice...They (Sebastian and Jordan) had us a little worried. But I think the combination of them focusing on their AP classes for their AP exams, plus, the whole college thing that we're now still in the middle of, they both really understood they needed to focus.

In the basement, we set up a table. On each side of it, they have both their FCPS laptop and personal laptop, in case the FCPS one has issues, which has happened. Within a week, they were starting to complain to us that their backs were hurting. I suddenly realized; how could I not have realized they needed comfortable chairs. So, we went out to Office Depot, a little bit late, and luckily, we're able to find a couple of decent chairs. Instead of spending money on school supplies this year, I wound up spending money on office chairs.

(As for metrics used by FCPS to determine when to phase in high school classes) my first reaction would be I agree with Fairfax County using those indicators. On the other hand, I kind of don't care. And the reason why I say I don't care is that we pretty much already made up our minds that they were not going to go back into school...That decision had very little to do with our safety concerns but had everything to do with how we felt they were successful in this online environment. We didn't want to disrupt that now...It turns out they're able to do just fine online."

SEE SCHOOL YEAR, PAGE 11

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-Werner Heisenberg

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Questions?

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CALENDAR

FROM PAGE 9

SATURDAY/DEC. 5

Healing with Horses. 9 a.m. At Ohana Equestrian Preserve, 24240 James Monroe Hwy., Aldie. Capital Caring Kids will host a free event for seriously ill, grieving children and their families in the region to be introduced to the special bond between humans and horses. Registration is required by Dec. 1. Call 703-407-2741 or visit the website: <https://www.capitalcaring.org/event/healing-with-horses/>

SATURDAY/DEC. 5

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. 3 p.m. At Reston Community Center Hunters Woods, CenterStage, Reston. Cost is \$5 Reston/\$10 Non-Reston. Mark Brutsché brings his unique spin on this childhood favorite that

will be fun for the whole family. Visit the website www.restoncommunitycenter.com/ptas.

SATURDAY/DEC. 5

Cookie Cutter Creation - 3D Printing Workshop. 10-11:30 a.m. Online. Get into the holiday STEM spirit and explore the world of 3D design to create your very own cookie cutter. In this virtual workshop, the STEM educators will take you through the process of designing a 3D cookie cutter on TinkerCad. Cookie cutters will be printed on the Children's Science Center 3D printer and available for pick up on Friday, December 18 from 4 p.m. - 6 p.m. and Saturday, December 19 from 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. Cost is \$25. Visit the website: <https://www.childsci.org/events/diy-workshop-cookie-cutter-creation>

School Year Like No Other

FROM PAGE 10

Jordan Krauss, 17, of Centreville, senior at Westfield HS: "One positive thing about the FCPS learning and teaching model that came from distance learning, is better organization. Teachers are more inclined to post all of the class work and homework assignments on Schoology because there are no paper copies. Being able to access the material we are taught online is really helpful for me to truly learn the material."

Sebastian Krauss, 17, of Centreville, senior at Westfield HS: "Because FCPS had outdated and hard to use technology, the 4th quarter of last year was a complete mess."

The switch to virtual learning has forced FCPS to overhaul their online classroom through applications like Schoology and Blackboard Collaborate. In the past, online resources were confusing, and there were too many places to find your assignments - (Blackboard Learn, Google Classroom, AP Classroom)."

Shaurav Sen of Vienna: Daughter Riya is in seventh grade at Thoreau Middle School in Vienna and Ritisha is in ninth grade at Oakton High School, both learning virtually. "The last we heard was Jan. 26, that they were looking at going back to a hybrid model...But now, with the cases rising, I think even that is up in the air. Fairfax County is relooking at their plan, so we don't know honestly... I've been setting my children's expectations... Jan. 26 looks highly unlikely...I doubt very much they will go back this year based on the news and information around us. But, you know, I'm keeping my fingers crossed that I'm wrong. I think I would send them back...For me, more than anything else, it's the social connections."

We moved from Singapore and landed here on June 29. At that time, the expectation was that they would...start school in late August as was originally planned... My wife and I had originally opted for the hybrid as soon as it started, just because I wanted them to interact socially. I don't know what damage this is doing long-term right from a social standpoint... It's more important that they go to school, make one or two friends with whom they

can at least connect, even if it's through the phone or socially distant over the weekends. That's something that's been missing, and that's what worries me the most frankly...They are not enjoying school as much as they used to. In Singapore, they would love to go to school. Not only because it gave them an opportunity to interact with the teachers and really enjoy the learning, but also their friends were there. Here, what is happening is they don't have friends."

Amy Berman of Vienna: "We ended up making a choice in July for Caitlyn to be hybrid because we felt this was her first real school experience...I had some nights that it was difficult falling asleep or staying asleep thinking about it. We made the choice feeling that Fairfax County was taking the right measures to provide a safe environment. We felt that at her age, especially as a single child, it was important that even with masks and all that, she be around other kids."

Like everything else this year, you make a decision, and then... We were given an option ...If we wanted to come to the parking lot, we could meet the teacher in-person with masks and social distance. We did that. I went to ask the teacher another question, and the teacher looked at her phone and basically said, "Oh no. The decision is reversed."

I don't know if it was more upsetting for me, the parent, or my daughter. I think it was just frustrating, and I understand the metrics...I reminded Caitlyn of what we've just been saying since all this happened. We're flexible. We're flexible... Things keep changing, and we must remain flexible."

Caitlyn Berman, 5, of Vienna: "My teacher has dark brown hair. She read my favorite book, Bubble Gum Brain...and gave us asynchronous work. There's one that has two apps, one for one day and one for the other...I love Monster Math Squad."

Joshua Dantine, 18, Chantilly High School: Q - How was your first week back at school?

A - It was ok. Not what I was expecting, but I liked getting out of the house. Q - What were you expecting? A - Chaos, honestly, but they had it together.

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A Bone To Pick



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Not that I'm the most-stressed about it, but I am at least stressed about a bone scan I'm having this week. The reason being that thyroid cancer that's metastasized - which mine has, sometimes moves to the bones. And since I have some knee-hip discomfort, particularly when I get up from a seated position, my oncologist ordered this two-step diagnostic process: an injection of something followed a few hours later by the actual scan to assess the damage. Not that I want to look for trouble (since it has already found me) but it's important - though scary, to tell your oncologist about any new symptoms, especially, if this new symptom has persisted for more than a few weeks. Rather than be an idiot and not mention the problem, I mentioned it during our last phone call on Thursday the week before Thanksgiving and tomorrow, Monday, 10 days after the new fact, the bone scan will occur. I imagine I'll receive the results by the end of the week. Waiting for results all the time is another negative aspect of this disease. Very little happens while you wait, if you know what I mean?

I wouldn't say exactly that common sense has prevailed here. It really doesn't take a genius to call a doctor when you're experiencing some new and unusual pain. In fact, the first lesson of oncology 101 is to contact your oncologist if any new symptom presents. It might actually be serious. Moreover, you're never to presume anything. You are to let the doctor know and let him be the judge. Keep the self-diagnosing and self-medicating to a minimum, if at all. You don't know best. In fact, you hardly know at all.

Part of the occasional apprehension I've had in not sharing any new symptoms with my oncologist is fear. If I tell him about a new symptom, it might actually indicate a problem/complication with my disease/treatment. The illogic is: if I don't tell him, my overall medical situation can't get worse - which is obviously stupid, and not true. But since I'll never receive medical confirmation that my health situation has taken a turn, I can continue to delude myself. But my thought process - as a previously diagnosed "terminal" non small cell lung cancer patient stage IV, was just that. What I don't tell him won't hurt me. 'Hurt me' meaning leading to a premature death (I know, any death is premature). I realize even before writing this that it doesn't make any sense. As I have said on many occasions, I'll blame the cancer.

And why I'll blame the cancer is because more than the damage it does to your body, it is the damage (effect really) it has on your brain. In a subconscious kind of way, your brain is totally rewired. After receiving such a life-changing/potentially life-ending diagnosis, you begin to think differently about life. Your obligations change. Your priorities change. Your responsibilities change. Your perspective changes. As such, your answers to questions and preferences no longer seem to be coming from the same place as they were before your diagnosis. It's not so much physically as much as it is emotionally, psychologically, spiritually. You're almost an entirely new person. At a minimum, you definitely become a variation of the previous you. You might look the same, but you don't exactly act - or sound the same.

All your decisions become controlled by your disease, not literally, but made through the prism of your being a cancer patient. It's not that, if you're lucky, you need someone to prepare your meals/assist with your activities of daily living, but you do lose yourself in the disease with all the appointments, scans and treatments. And the worst part of it, none of it guarantees anything other than more appointments, scans and treatment. The bone scan I'm having is a perfect example. And unless I embrace the process, the stress and anxiety is likely to do as much damage as the cancer. Fortunately, I'm up to the challenge. Nevertheless, it's worrisome.

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



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