

Great Falls CONNECTION



Sharing Irish Heritage With Great Falls Community

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Scavenger Group (from left) Niamh DiOrio, Kate DiOrio, Blair McLendon, Hope Berns, James DiOrio, Kian Ambrose, and Joe DiOrio, with dogs: Finnegan and Blue, celebrate Irish heritage in Great Falls.

A Lawsuit Challenges TJ Admission Changes

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NEWS

A Lawsuit Challenges TJ Admission Changes

Parents sue to stop TJ's admission policy changes alleging anti-Asian race discrimination.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Fairfax County School Board and Fairfax County Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Scott Brabrand face a new lawsuit filed against them last week in United States District Court in Alexandria. The lawsuit alleges race discrimination against Asian-American students by the School Board and the superintendent in changing the admissions process to Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, known as "TJ." The Pacific Legal Foundation filed the civil suit on Wednesday, March 10, on behalf of their client, Coalition for TJ, a group of mostly concerned parents at the high school.

"This type of racial balancing is unconstitutional," said Pacific Legal Foundation attorney Erin Wilcox at a press conference held that morning outside the courthouse.

The Plaintiffs allege FCPS' recently-implemented overhaul of the TJ admissions process changes, which eliminated the long-standing race-neutral standardized admissions test is specifically aimed to reduce the number of incoming Asian-American students to racially balance the school according to the racial demographics of the school. "Up until this year, admissions to TJ have been race-blind," said Wilcox. "Unfortunately, Fairfax County Schools officials apparently believed that this is too many Asian students," she said.

THE COMPLAINT alleges that without the court issuing an injunction, the number of Asian-American students in the incoming TJ Class of 2025 is likely to be cut in half due to the "defendants' stated desire to manipulate TJ's demographics." "The discriminatory intent they've shown is intertwined and an inseparable part of the policies they put in place," Wilcox said.

According to the lawsuit, in the fall of 2020, Superintendent Brabrand and the School Board saw a reporting requirement by the Virginia Department of Education to include the racial/ethnic make-up and socioeconomic diversity of its students, faculty, and applicants as an opportunity "to completely overhaul the TJ admissions process in order to racially balance the school's demographics, going far beyond the minimal reporting requirements."

Located in Alexandria, TJ is a regional Virginia state-chartered magnet school operated by FCPS with students eligible for admission from Fairfax, Arlington, Loudoun, and Prince William counties, and the City of Falls Church. TJ is ranked the number one public high school in the 2020 National Rankings.

The School Board voted to eliminate the TJ merit-based admissions test at its Oct. 6



PHOTO BY SUSHANT SEHGAL

Erin Wilcox, attorney with Pacific Legal Association



PHOTO BY SUSHANT SEHGAL

Julia McCaskill, mother of a TJ student and two younger children, one in eighth grade and the other in sixth grade.

work session with no public comment opportunity. The complaint quotes Brabrand during the discussion at the work session with the Board to say that eliminating the merit admissions test "eliminat[es] the testing component that squeezed out talent and squeezed out diversity in our system." Board members said they hoped the new process increased Black and Hispanic representation in the student body.

On Dec. 17, the School Board voted and adopted, with immediate implementation, further changes to the TJ admissions policy applicable to the incoming TJ freshman Class of 2025 and to future years. The Board adopted the challenged admissions policy that limits the number of students accepted from each county feeder middle school to the top 1.5 percent who meet the minimum evaluation criteria-GPA, student portrait sheet, problem-solving essay, and experience factors: including economically disadvantaged students, English language learners, or special education students.

The lawsuit alleges that coupled with the high concentration of Asian-American students at four middle schools -- Carson, Kilmer, Rocky Run, and Longfellow -- and their history of sending large numbers of students to TJ, racial balancing could be accomplished.

According to the complaint, the plaintiffs sought "to vindicate the rights of Asian-American public school children in and around Fairfax County, Virginia, to compete on an equal footing for admission to the nationally-ranked Thomas Jefferson



Asra Nomani, a cofounder of Coalition for TJ and the parent of a senior at TJ, speaks at the press conference.



Pacific Legal Foundation holds a press conference on March 10 announcing that they filed a lawsuit against the Fairfax County School Board and Superintendent Scott Brabrand on behalf of their client, Coalition for TJ, challenging recent changes to the admissions policy at Thomas High School for Science and Technology.

High School for Science and Technology (TJ) without regard to their race." Overall, Plaintiffs' data analysis reported in the complaint that the student body at TJ, at approximately 73 percent Asian-American students under the merit-based race-blind admissions system would drop to 31 percent under the new racial-balancing admissions system for the Class of 2025 with "no other racial group projected to lose seats."

The lawsuit alleges changes to admissions violate the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment "...a promise that government at every level will treat every American as an individual, not simply as a member of his or her racial group. Policies like the one implemented by FCPS stand in direct opposition to that promise."

THE PLAINTIFFS requested entry of an order requiring the Defendants to return to

the admissions procedure for entry into TJ in the fall of 2020. "The Coalition for TJ is not going to stand for this kind of discrimination against Asian-American students and they are here to fight for equal protection for their children," said Wilcox.

Julia McCaskill, an immigrant, and parent of a TJ student and students in grades 8 and 6, said at the March 10 press conference that TJ does not belong to a certain race or certain group of people. Low admission rates at TJ for Black and Hispanics are the failure of the FCPS Board, according to McCaskill. "They failed those under-represented areas over the decades instead of fixing the pipeline issue. The authorities are stirring up hate against Asian-Americans hoping to slash the number of Asian-American students will fix the overdue school problem."

SEE TJ ADMISSIONS, PAGE 11

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Law and Order and Justice

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



COMMENTARY

There is no more important function of government than ensuring public safety. The challenge in a constitutional form of government is achieving safety for the public without jeopardizing the rights and freedom of some to protect others. Public safety has been like a political football with some raising fears about crime and perceived threats to the community. Few is the number of politicians who until recently have been willing to suggest that our laws and institutions of justice require a review of the balance of public safety, the application of laws, and justice.

Over the last several decades there have been many political campaigns built around a suggestion of increasing crime rates and simplistic solutions to keep everyone safe. California started the trend with legislation with the slogan "Three Strikes and You're Out" that increased penalties for repeated offenses. A governor's race in Virginia was won by an underdog candidate with a slogan of "no more pa-

role." Legislative sessions during an election year would see more ideas about expanding the list of crimes for which the state could put someone to death, and the list lengthened of crimes for which mandatory minimum sentences were prescribed. At the same time guns became easier to purchase and own, and every mass shooting was followed by more gun purchases.

Capital punishment, extending the time prisoners were held, and arming more citizens resulted in Virginia being the number one state in putting people to death (first with an electric chair and more recently with lethal injections), increased prison construction, severe over-crowding of prisons, and protests at the state capitol in Richmond of more than 22,000 armed persons.

The disproportionate impact on people of color and in minority communities has become glaringly clear as the videos of body-cam and other devices show us the unfair way some laws have been administered. The slogan "Black

Lives Matter" hit a responsive chord as the inequities in administering laws became obvious.

With the outcome of the elections of 2019 and the election of more progressive members in the House of Delegates, Virginia has become more realistic in its dealing with criminal justice and law and order issues. Abolishing the death penalty was one of the first among many reforms taken. A recognition of the connection between Jim Crow laws of the past and current policing resulted in the repeal of laws that were most strongly felt in the Black community. No-knock warrants were eliminated as were minor offenses that resulted in Black persons being stopped regularly by the police. A bill for the expungement of records of convictions for several misdemeanor crimes passed as did a bill to establish a process for seeking expungement through the courts for other crimes. Major progress was made in the discussion of eliminating mandatory minimum sentences with the likelihood that a bill will be passed in future sessions.

Some will call the actions of the legislature being soft on crime. I believe that a more realistic view is that the state has become less political and more balanced on ways to keep the community safe and to realize justice for more of our citizens. You will hear more of these opposing views in the campaigns coming up this fall.

Celebrate International Women's Month. And then Keep Going

BY KATE VIGGIANO JANICH

If nothing else, the past few years have taught us this: It's International Women's Month 2021 — and we still have a lot of work to do to achieve equality for women in our country.

Only last year in 2020 did Virginia become the 38th state to ratify the long-contested Equal Rights Amendment (the ERA). The ERA is an addition to the US Constitution that would prohibit discrimination based on sex.

Only last year did we elect our first woman Vice President — a leadership position higher than any woman ever before her. Yet, while we celebrated this incredible achievement, we wonder — why is this incredible at all? Should it not be the norm?

And, as we watched Vice President Kamala Harris step up on this platform, the women on the ground around us took significant steps down. Women's progress in the workplace rolled back with alarming speed. Because when

the chips fell and families were forced to make tough choices due to COVID, the women were the ones who took a step back. They left their jobs (that still paid less than men's roles), cut their time down, or put aside their fledgling businesses to care for their families.

Let us be clear.

We are thankful for the women who helped us get where we are today. Our ancestors fought for our right to speak up with a vote. For protecting our bodies, for using our brains and creativity in new ways, for exploring the world's possibilities.

We are thankful for the groups of women and advocacy coalitions who remind us every day the importance and power of #womensupportingwomen.

And yet. We have a lot to do so all the work doesn't go to waste. We must keep moving so that when a woman steps into power, it's considered part of the norm. So that working mothers aren't the ones who step down in their

careers by default.

For our part at Rowan Tree, we are committing to supporting women business owners. We are fighting on behalf of minority groups to achieve equity. We are fostering collaboration and learning opportunities, because we all know that we are #strongertogether. Let's keep going.

Kate Viggiano Janich, Co-Founder, Rowan Tree, a coworking + cogrowth community focused on women, open to all.
www.workrowan.com

FAIRFAX COUNTY ACTIVATES CORONAVIRUS INFO CENTER

Fairfax County activated a Joint Information Center in response to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) on March 13.

Fairfax County Health Department COVID-19 webpage — www.fairfaxcounty.gov/health/novel-coronavirus

Emergency Information Blog (you can subscribe by email or follow by RSS) — www.fairfax-county.gov/emergency/blog

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Call Center — The

community may call 703-267-3511 with questions. The call center is open from 9 a.m. until 9 p.m. weekdays and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekends.

Residents may also text FFXCOVID to 888777 to receive updates from Fairfax County about COVID-19.

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Scavenger Hunt Winners and Helpers (from left) Charlie Griffith Participant, Helpers: Hope Berns, Kate DiOrio, Blair McLendon, Participant, Josie Griffith



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PETER FALCONE/GFCA

Sharing Irish Heritage with Great Falls Community

Great Falls resident launches St. Patrick's Day celebration.

St. Patrick's Day 2021 would be a special holiday for Great Falls resident Niamh DiOrio. This year, the Dublin, Ireland native planned a celebration by bringing a little bit of Irish culture and history to the Great Falls community.

About a month ago, DiOrio began planning a St. Patrick's Mobile Scavenger Hunt. "This year was about getting the kids involved in a project that would also be a fun way to promote the Irish heritage and, perhaps, let them learn some of the history of Ireland," DiOrio said. "You know, we all come here from somewhere else, and it's important to celebrate your heritage and share your culture."

Participants in the Saturday morning Mobile Scavenger Hunt began at a starting point in the Great Falls Village Center's parking lot, near the community Christmas Tree. There, the children received a list of the "Shamrock" locations scattered around the Great Falls Community. Each "Shamrock" contained Irish facts that the participants collected before returning to the starting point. They were given a short quiz and were awarded prizes consisting of emerald green beaded necklaces and gold wrapped chocolates for their efforts.

DiOrio was pleased that one of the outcomes of this event was that the children were able to find out information about Ireland that they didn't know beforehand, and they were able to have fun while learning. Six residents hosted a "Shamrock" loca-

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Niamh DiOrio of Great Falls, a new American citizen from Dublin, Ireland, organized the St. Patrick's Day Celebration to share her heritage with others.

tion, and more than a dozen children were involved in the game. Children and adults alike, learned from the shamrock clues that the population of Ireland is small when compared to Virginia, that there have been 23 U.S. Presidents who claimed Irish roots; and that St. Patrick, the Catholic Patron Saint of Ireland, reportedly lived to the age of 120.

DiOrio was inspired this year because this is the first year she will celebrate St. Patrick's Day as a new American Citizen. A resident of Great Falls since 2009, DiOrio said: "I'm not ready to lose my connection with Ireland, so why not bring it to Great Falls."

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Virtual Public Hearing on the McLean Community Center's FY 2023 Programs

Wednesday, March 24, 2021, 7:30 p.m.

The governing board and staff of the McLean Community Center seek **input from residents** of Dranesville Small District 1A at a Virtual Public Hearing on Programs for FY 2023 (which runs July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023).

This is an opportunity for residents to suggest class offerings, community events, theater programs, art exhibits, youth events and teen activities that are meaningful to the community.

If you would like to speak at the hearing, call the Center to have your name placed on the speakers' list. You may also submit comments to holly.novak@fairfaxcounty.gov.



www.zoom.us



ZOOM meeting ID: 817 619 39845
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McLean Community Center
1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean VA 22101
703-790-0123, TTY: 711
www.mcleancenter.org

County Highlights

Actions and words by Fairfax County leadership and citizens.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

In our new series, County Highlights, the Connection spotlights actions and comments by Fairfax County officials, public servants, and local citizens who call the County's 406 square miles home. Interesting fact: If Fairfax County were a city, its population of 1.46 million residents would rank it as the 10th largest city in the United States. The County has more residents than six states-Montana, Alaska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Delaware, Wyoming, and Vermont.

Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Meeting of March 9, 2021

Zoning Ordinance Modification (zMOD)-Approved to Postpone Decision- 10-0

Following five hours of public testimony on March 9 and action by the Fairfax County Planning Commission the week before, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors approved to defer its decision on the Zoning Ordinance Modification (zMOD) draft until March 23. Chairman Jeffrey C. McKay (D-At-Large) said the Board postponed the decision "to make sure we get it right."

Among those testifying, Jeffrey Landon representing the Fairfax National Estates Homeowners Association in Centreville, said, "Do it honestly with full citizen participation. The scope of zMOD, from the scope of the project statement, does not appear to align with what has been tucked inside the several hundred-page document." Debbie Smith, Chair of the Mason District Council Board, expressed concern about the more substantive proposals in zMOD that could potentially impact single-family neighborhoods by removing public notice, engagement, and land use matters for Accessory Living Units (ALUs) as well as home-based businesses. She said, "Sensitive ordinance changes like ALUs and home-based businesses should not be casually slipped into the massive zMOD project." Holly DePaul of Vienna said, "I'm against any regulation on the size, quantity, or content of flags flown."

Supervisor Pat Herrity (R-Springfield) said that he did not think in his 13 years on the Board, he had ever heard such opposition to proposed changes from as broad a group. "I certainly couldn't support what's on the table right now, either the Planning Commission or the staff recommendation," he said. The zMOD advertised options for consideration can be found on the County website.

Solar Panels-Approved 10-0

The Board approved the motion to lease County-owned property to Sigora Solar, LLC



zMOD - accessory living unit for illustration purposes

to install, operate, and maintain solar photovoltaic panels for on-site electric generation on 22 County locations. It did not represent a complete list of the sites at which Sigora Solar will install solar facilities. Electricity costs for facilities at which PPA solar projects are installed are expected to decrease as soon as the panels are activated. Under its contract with Fairfax County, Sigora Solar offered a fixed rate of \$0.069 per kWh delivered for a 25-year contract term. "This will help in our environmental sustainability and also save County funds on utility bills," said McKay.

Advertised Tax Rate and Tax Assessments - Approved 9-1, Herrity opposed

The Board approved to authorize advertisement of a brief synopsis of the FY 2022 Budget and a real estate tax rate for FY 2022 of \$1.15 per \$100 of assessed value. "This represents no change from the current real estate tax rate," said McKay. It was one cent higher though, than County Executive Bryan Hill's proposed budget plan for FY 2022.

"I think we should be doing what our struggling residents are doing, finding ways to work within our means," said Herrity. The Board may lower any advertised tax rate, but higher tax rates cannot be imposed without advertising such rates. The approval set the cap at \$1.15.

Tax assessments in the County are rising, leading to a \$224 increase in the average home. The Department of Taxation assesses

tax bills based on the real estate market by analyzing sales of homes of comparable value in comparable neighborhoods.

2021 Forest Pest Management System and Disease Carrying Insect Program- Approved 10-0

The Board approved the County Executive's recommendation that the Board of Supervisors direct staff take action concerning Fairfax County's Calendar Year 2021 Forest Pest Management Program. Supervisor Dan Stork (D-Mount Vernon) said, "It's essential that we manage, not only pests that can impact and severely denude out forests, but also that we look overall at forestry management."

The Board also approved the annual submission of the Disease Carrying Insect Program, including the continuation of the county-wide mosquito surveillance program, testing mosquitoes for West Nile virus (WNV), Zika virus, and other pathogens, larviciding of mosquito breeding areas, and aggressive community outreach and education program to increase County residents' awareness of mosquitoes, West Nile virus, Zika virus, and other mosquito-borne diseases, as well as personal protection and prevention methods.

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority - No Shutdown Letter - Approved 10-0

The Board approved in a vote a letter con-



Silver Line Reston Metro Station

PHOTOS BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

veying Fairfax County Board of Supervisors' Comments on WMATA's FY 2022 Operating Budget and FY 2022-2027 Capital Improvement Program to WMATA. McKay said there were "a lot of troubling things in the budget proposal." "You don't get people back into the system by cutting service and closing stations."

Supervisor Walter Alcorn (D-Hunter Mill) said the proposal in Metro's budget to shut down stations in January generated much attention and concern. "The impacts...would be just horrible for our residents and our businesses... Specific to the Silver Line...it would be doubling down on the pain again given that residents and folks that use the Dulles Toll Road are paying for and have been paying for several years the construction of that line." Alcorn said he was optimistic that with federal help, that "terrible outcome" can be avoided.

News From School Board Member, Rachna Sizemore Heizer Member-at-Large

Prom and Graduation for FCPS Seniors: In her newsletter to County students, families, and staff, School Board Member Rachna Sizemore Heizer (Member-at-Large) said she promised plans were being made for some form of in-person prom and graduation. "Exactly what it will look like depends on the Governor's restrictions, but everyone is committed to at least giving you those two seminal events despite all you have lost," Sizemore Heizer said.

PHOTOS BY WILL PALENSCAR/THE CONNECTION



Mikal Legall #28 tries to evade Madison's John Hurley #22.

Madison Beats Westfield, Improves to 3-0

The Westfield Bulldogs traveled to Vienna for a conference football game with the Madison Warhawks on March 12. Early in the first quarter Mikal Legall would run in from 2 yards out to give Westfield a 7-0 advantage. Later in the second quarter, Westfield would take a 14-0 advantage

when quarterback Toviell Jung ran in from 7 yards on a quarterback keeper. However 6 minutes later Madison would get on the board when Connor Sevy kicked a field goal. With Madison trailing 14-3 and Westfield driving on the ensuing series, Westfield QB Toviell Jung was intercepted by Justin Williams after Jung's pass was tipped at the



Barry Connor and Madison defeated the Westfield Bulldogs for the first time in school history.

line of scrimmage and Williams would take the ball 65 yards for a Warhawks score with 2:34 to play in the first half. After a scoreless third quarter Connor Sevy would kick his second field goal of the game pulling Madison to within a point, 14-13 with 8:28 to play in the game. Madison QB Connor Barry would score from 1 yard



Braden Holt #32 is in motion before Madison's QB snaps the ball.



Toviell Jung passes the ball to a Westfield receiver.

out with 1:35 to play in the game. Madison would opt for a two point conversion which was successful and the Warhawks would hold on for a 21-14 win, the school's first against Westfield in school history. Westfield falls to (1-2) (0-1), while Madison improves to (3-0)

(2-0). Madison will host Marshall on March 19, and Westfield will host Centreville. Chantilly sits atop the conference at (4-0)(1-0), Centreville (4-1)(2-1), and Oakton is (1-3) (0-2).

— WILL PALENSCAR



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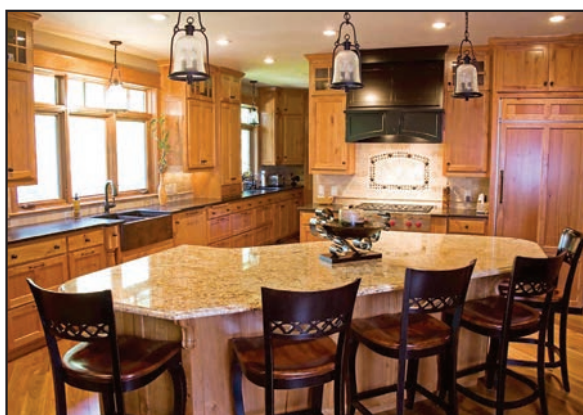
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Virginia Journalist of the Year

Marina Qu of McLean High School wins top state honor.

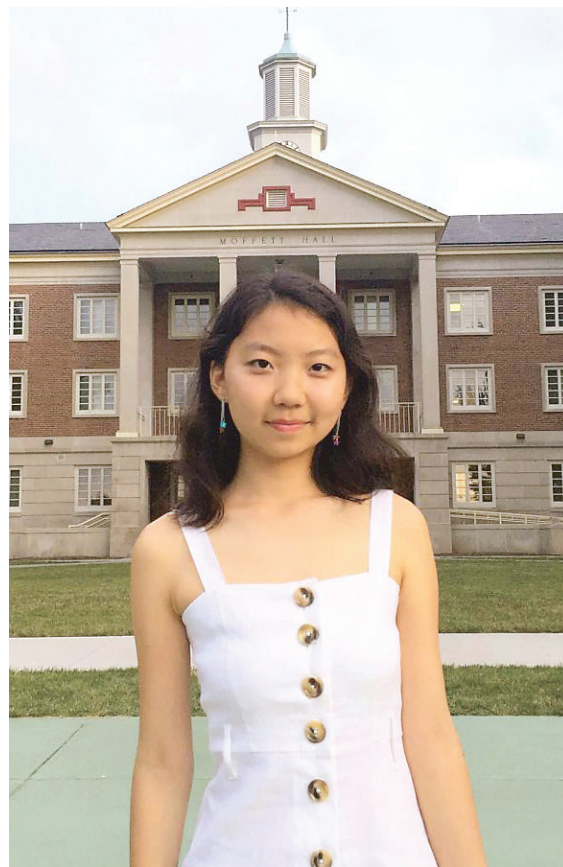
McLean High School senior Marina Qu has been named the 2021 Virginia Journalist of the Year by the Virginia Association of Journalism Teachers and Advisers. Qu serves as editor-in-chief of The Highlander newsmagazine and The Tartan literary magazine; she has been on both publications' staff for three years.

In her Journalist of the Year portfolio, Qu wrote, "Our role as student-journalists did not diminish in spite of the global emergency that was unfolding—our responsibilities were heightened. We overcame challenges that we didn't know we would ever face. And we did it against all odds."

Qu will compete for the Journalism Education Association's national Journalist of the Year award, to be announced in April.

According to her profile in The Highlander online, "Marina Qu enjoys writing about local news relevant to the community and collaborating with other reporters. Outside of journalism, she loves to spend time with her little sister Regina and taste food from around the world!"

Pratika Katiyar, the editor-in-chief of tjToday at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, came in second in the Virginia competition.



Marina Qu

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE HIGHLANDER

Shepherd's Center of Northern Virginia Welcomes New Executive Director

The Shepherd's Center of Northern Virginia (SCNOVA) Board of Directors has named Wendy Finn as the nonprofit's new Executive Director.



Wendy Finn, Executive Director, SCNOVA

PHOTO COURTESY OF SCNOVA

"The Shepherd's Center of Northern Virginia has grown substantially over the past two years, expanding into Reston and Herndon and then merging with the Shepherd's Center of Great Falls. We knew that we needed an experienced leader with very strong non-profit management credentials and a commitment to serving seniors. Ms. Finn checked all our 'boxes' and she brings warmth and considerable talent to our administrative team and dedicated corps of volunteers," said Scott Schroth, Chair of the Board of Directors.

Finn joined the Shepherd's Center of Northern Virginia as Executive Director in March 2021. She also serves as a board member for Empowering the Ages, which nurtures intergenerational relationships. She was previously the Executive Direc-

tor of a Village, one of the many villages across the country providing services to seniors to help them successfully age in place.

Finn earned a Bachelor's Degree from Brandeis University and a Nonprofit Management Executive Certificate at Georgetown University.

Since 1998, Shepherd's Center of Northern Virginia, (serving Oakton, Vienna, Reston, Herndon, Great Falls) a 501 (C) (3) non-profit organization, has been dedicated to improving the quality of life as we age, through supportive programs and services, personal enrichment and volunteer engagement that enable our senior neighbors to live full and productive lives while aging in place.

She Keeps On Giving

BY CHAR MCCARGO BAH

This wife, mother, grandmother, entrepreneur and First Lady of the Improved Benevolent Protective Order of Elks of the World, Inc. (IBPOEW) is always on the move in fundraising and helping her communities in Sterling and Vienna.

Cynthia C. Polk is a multi-talented person who keeps giving and helping the communities. Her professional careers are paralegal for a general practice law firm in Sterling, Va. and an entrepreneur licensed nail technician, sole proprietor. She was also appointed as the third serving Grand Organizer (First Lady) of the organization for the Grand Temple Daughters of Elks in 2018. As an organizer, she developed the Grand Organizer's Department, "Wings of Hope," whose primary purpose is to assist families in crisis, regardless of their social-economic background. Because of COVID-19, many families in her communities needed help because they lost their jobs. By donating her own money, and with the help of the Elks members, they raised the needed funds for the Wings of Hope.



Cynthia C. Polk

THE WINGS OF HOPE under the leadership of Mrs. Polk has assisted families in getting their children school supplies, medical expenses, rents, groceries and household supplies. In addition, she has sponsored many community service projects in Virginia, District of Columbia, Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina, New Jersey, Kentucky and Indiana since 2019. Some of the community service projects included free dinners for furloughed workers, free food for families in need, annual diaper-bag-drive and meals-on-wheels. Her community services

Cynthia C. Polk is always on the move in fundraising and helping her communities in Sterling and Vienna.

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED



Cynthia and Leonard Polk

were expanded to include an Easter-Egg-Scavenger-Hunt for the children, food pantry, women and children clothes (closet).

Cynthia and Mr. Prentice Booker are the Directors of the Beauty & Talent Pageant Program for the State of Virginia Elks.

Cynthia brings her organizational and managerial skills in her role as First Lady. Mr. Lawrence Robinson of the IBPOEW says this about Mrs. Polk, "A strong attribute to Cynthia's success is her ability to get along with people, young or

old regardless of race, color or religion."

Cynthia was born in Athens, Ala. and moved with her family at the age of six to Louisville, Ky. She attended Doss High School in Kentucky. She married Leonard J. Polk, Jr of Vienna. Leonard is the son of Leonard J. Polk, Sr and Thelma Polk. Cynthia and her husband have four children: Leonard III, Gregory, Leniesha, and Tanja. Cynthia and Leonard have three grandchildren. Her husband, Leonard attended James Madison High

School in Vienna and he graduated from George Mason University. He then graduated from David A. Clarke School of Law in Washington, DC and he earned his Juris Doctor Degree. Mr. Polk is a practicing lawyer and a counsellor for the Supreme Court of the United States of America since 2008. He is also the 14th Grand Exalted Ruler/Grand Patriarch and Chief Executive Officer of the IBPOEW of Jacksonville, Fla.

WHEN CYNTHIA WAS EIGHT years old, her mother told her that she could do anything she sets her mind on. Well, Cynthia took her mom's advice and pursued her passion in helping others. She firmly believes that, if you help one person, then, that is one less person struggling in the world.

Mrs. Cynthia C. Polk keeps giving and giving. She is truly a woman on the move.

Char McCargo Bah is a published author, freelance writer, independent historian, genealogist and a Living Legend of Alexandria. She maintains two blogs, <http://www.theother-alexandria.com> and <http://www.findingthingsforu.com>.

Creating Healthy Mother-Daughter Relationships

Local authors and therapists offer thoughts and guidance.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

As a middle school student, Sofie Jacobs was at times mocked by other girls for her fastidious study habits and the good grades she received as a result. She joined an after-school cheerleading and dance class, but was taunted because of her lack of talent. At the time she didn't want to discuss the pain she felt from the rejection by peers, who she now labels as "mean girls." Initially, Sofie rebuffed her mother Meredith's efforts to console her. There was one place, however, where she felt comfortable expressing her feelings without the shame or humiliation: her journals.

"I remember so clearly the night she came home, ran to her room, and slammed the door," said her mother, Meredith. "I could hear her crying, but she didn't want to open the door or talk to me. Finally, she opened the door and handed me the journal where she had poured everything onto the page. After I read it, we were able to talk about it."

"Writing in my journal took away any worries about my mom's immediate reactions," said Sofie, now 24. "It also let me work out my thoughts and have space for myself. I've always thought the most important thing in writing is the eraser. You rarely risk saying something you wish you hadn't said when you're writing."

Journaling became part of the foundation of Meredith's relationship with Sofie. To help others, they created an interactive journal called, "Just Between Us: Mother & Daughter Journal" that is designed to inspire conversations and healthy communication. It will be released next month and is an updated version of their first book, which they published ten years ago.

MOTHER-DAUGHTER relationships can be among the most difficult to navigate and maintain, say mental health professionals. Patterns range from an unhealthy closeness to a distant connection that is devoid of emotional intimacy, affecting mental and emotional health.

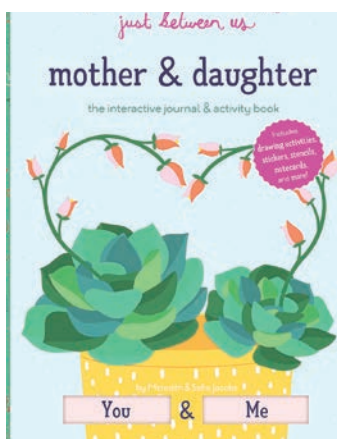
Enmeshed, is the way that Springfield psychotherapist Joyce Marter describes relationships that lack boundaries. "This is when the mother and daughter have a symbiotic relationship that doesn't allow for healthy separation and independence," she said. "They simply are too close. This can make it difficult for the daughter to develop a healthy sense of self as her own individual person or to separate and individuate into an independent adult."

At the opposite end of the relationship spectrum is a relationship that is characterized by control and disconnection. "The mother and daughter are not emotionally close," said Marter. "This can happen when they haven't had a proper bonding experience, haven't spent enough time together, or don't relate or connect



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MEREDITH AND SOFIE JACOBS

Meredith and Sofie Jacobs of North Potomac use journaling as a way to maintain a healthy relationship.



"Just Between Us: Mother & Daughter Journal" will be released next month and is designed to strengthen mother-daughter relationships.

ly age.

"Try to be emotionally present when you are with your daughter and listen when she is ready to talk," she said. "Resist the impulse to provide advice or solutions. You can ask, 'Is there anything I can do to help?'"

During teen and preteen years, mother-daughter relationships can be difficult to navigate. "Give choices whenever possible. Set expectations [and] reasonable limits that have reasonable end dates," said Stone. "Let your daughter know the consequence in advance. For example, cell phones are a privilege, if you do not follow through on responsibilities, you will lose your phone privilege."

Securing and harmonious relationships requires parental guidance, but also space to flourish, says Stone. "Detaching with love does not mean we don't care about our loved ones," she said. "Rather, it means having a healthy separation in relationships where you do not try and control. We must separate enough to allow them to make their own mistakes so they can learn. They need to be free to be their authentic selves instead of living as we hope or expect them to be."

Infusing an element of light-heartedness into a mother-daughter relationship is an important element that the Jacobs express in their books.

"We thought we could help other mothers and daughters have the kind of conversations we had through our journal, but insert the humor that Sofie and I share to make it fun," said Meredith. "There is a lot of trust that is built through those silly moments that help form the foundation for when it's time to have harder conversations."

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ROUTE 7 BUS RAPID TRANSIT MEETINGS

The Fairfax County Department of Transportation (FCDOT) will hold two virtual meetings on the Route 7 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Study on Friday, March 19, at 12 noon, and Wednesday, March 24, at 7 p.m. The meetings will include three potential BRT routes along Route 7 and through Tysons with station locations, performance analysis of the proposed routes, FCDOT's preferred route of these options, and time for questions and feedback from attendees. To attend a meeting, register online or dial in:

Friday, March 19, 2021, 12-1 p.m.
Register to attend online
Dial In: 1-844-621-3956 Access Code: 129 633 4672

Wednesday, March 24, 2021, 7-9 p.m.
Register to attend online
Dial In: 1-844-621-3956 Access Code: 129 505 2135

For more information, visit the project webpage at: <https://www.fairfax-county.gov/transportation/study/route7-brt>.

CALENDAR

FRIDAY/MARCH 19

The Old Firehouse 5th and 6th Grader Party. Virtual: The Glow Party. 7-9 p.m. Gather your family and dance the night away with the Old Firehouse with our virtual dance party. Request some of your favorite songs, dance along with us and the music and stay for some games and surprises along the way. To register, visit: www.oldfirehouse.org or call 703-448-8336, TTY: 711.

MARCH 20 TO APRIL 11

Fairfax County's Festival Central at the Fairfax County Visitor Center. The official Fairfax County Visitor Center in Tysons Corner Center (on 2nd level outside Nordstrom) is "Festival Central" in Fairfax County. The public is invited to stop in for free souvenirs, Festival schedules and the latest information on activities throughout the region. On March 27, the Center will host its annual National Cherry Blossom Festival Day with a special event from 1-3 p.m. with craft demonstrations, free gifts, and more. (<http://www.fxva.com/plan-your-trip/visitor-center>; 703-752-9500)

SATURDAY/MARCH 20

Maple Syrup Boil Down. 11 a.m., noon, and 1 p.m. At Colvin Run Mill, 10017 Colvin Run Road, Great Falls. It's sugaring time at the mill, so bundle up, brave the weather and watch and learn as sap is boiled down into a sweet syrup over an open fire. While supplies last, sample some of this delicious syrup over cornbread baked with cornmeal ground at Colvin Run. Call 703-759-2771.

SATURDAY/MARCH 20

Fairfax Genealogical Society Spring Fair - "Power Up Your Family Research with DNA". Virtual meeting. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Genealogist Karen Stanbury will present this one-day program featuring tips and tools for using DNA data to aid your family research. Registration (\$50 for non-members; \$30 for members of FxGS) at <https://fxgs2021mar.eventbrite.com> or on the FxGS web page, www.fxgs.org/2021springfair. Details of the program and other FxGS activities on the web site, www.fxgs.org or by calling 703-644-8185.

MARCH 20-APRIL 17

The 2021 Vienna Photo Show will be on display at the Vienna Community Center March 20 through April 17. The exhibit will be open 8 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday-Friday and 8 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturdays. Applications to the annual photo show will be accepted 3-8 p.m. Thursday,

March 18, and 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m. Friday, March 19. The entrance fee is \$5. Assigned drop-off times will be staged in 10-minute intervals to allow for social distancing and to keep the number of people in the Vienna Community Center at one time to a minimum. Visit viennava.gov/photo to register and for additional instructions and details.

WEDNESDAY/MARCH 24

The Unruly Theatre Project's Virtual Improv Show. 7 p.m. Sponsored by The Alden. Join us for (the) Unruly Theatre Project's virtual improv shows from the comfort of your couch! Register online and a Zoom link and password for the show will be emailed to you. Participants must register two hours in advance of showtime. Register online at www.aldentheatre.org. <call1>Wednesday/March 24

MARCH 26-28

"Dear Elizabeth." Presented by The Vienna Theatre Company. The play by Sarah Ruhl is drawn from one of the greatest correspondences in literary history between two of the 20th century's most brilliant American poets, Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell. Sarah Ruhl adapts more than 400 published letters spanning decades, continents and political eras, tells the tale of an unconventional friendship and intimacy both platonic and romantic, and brings it all to life on the stage. This moving, innovative play starts in 1947, ends in 1977 and describes a love that resists easy definition. The performance will be filmed live and aired online as follows: Friday and Saturday - March 26 and 27, April 2 and 3 evenings at 7:30 p.m. Ticket Prices: \$15. Purchase online at <https://vtc.booktix.com>.

FRIDAY/MARCH 26

Old Firehouse Family Event. 7-9 p.m. Gather the whole family around the computer or tablet and get ready for some socially distant trivia. Prizes for winning teams! To register, visit: www.oldfirehouse.org or call 703-448-8336, TTY: 711.

SATURDAY/MARCH 27

GMU School of Dance. Gala Concert. 8 p.m. George Mason University's School of Dance announced its 2021 Mason Dance Company Gala Concert, featuring Sunlit Song by choreographer and longtime Mason Faculty Susan Shields and a world premiere by legendary choreographer Hope Boykin. Visit: <https://dance.gmu.edu/mason-dance-fete>.

TJ Admissions Challenged by Lawsuit

FROM PAGE 3

Asra Nomani, a cofounder of Coalition for TJ and parent of a senior at TJ, said during the press conference that she came to the United States at age four from India. Nomani said she was proud to be working the past nine months with families who came to the United States from communist China and eastern Europe, India, and other places where they faced injustice. "They never could have imagined that they would face injustice in America," she said.

A Fairfax County Public Schools spokesperson provided a statement saying, "The process continues to be race-neutral and merit-based... As a Governor's school, we value diversity and believe that it contributes to the richness of the education at TJHSST."

Parents of 17 middle school students filed the initial lawsuit in November 2020 to overturn the School Board's decision to eliminate the standardized admission test for TJ and the \$100 application fee. On Feb. 2, a Fairfax Circuit Court Judge John M. Tran denied the parents' request to require mandatory standardized testing in the admissions process. Tran said, "The debate over standardized testing belongs to educational professionals."

On Friday, March 12, Wilcox said that the next step would be the defendants' response, either an Answer or a Motion to Dismiss, in approximately 60 days. "I've seen in various news articles that FCPS issued a statement on Wednesday. Their legal response to our complaint will be one of the documents mentioned," Wilcox said.

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A Shot in the Arm



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Literally and figuratively. After a year or so living the pandemic life; staying at home/quarantining, wearing a mask, social distancing, washing my hands and watching the death toll from covid-19 top 500,000 - in the United States alone, I recently became of the lucky ones to have been injected with a vaccine. I have to wait another two weeks to get my second shot. No worries. I have some protection now, but according to Dr. Fauci, the second/follow up shot increases one's protection "tenfold." It wouldn't exactly be foolish to throw caution to the wind - and reintegrate back into society (depending upon where you live), but it seems premature and irresponsible to risk being stupid when in another two weeks, I could be smart.

My wife, Dina, also recently shot, has been very smart all along, especially as it concerns my actual standing in the world. (Moreover, she has no plans to step out until she receives her second shot.) Belonging in the special comorbidity group; presumably, a 66-year old with cancer/weakened immune system, I presented a very appealing target for the virus. I mean, my immune system is already compromised and with occasional breathing problems side-effected by my thyroid cancer medication, I was potentially easy pickins. As such, Dina refused to give me passage out of our house. Victor Laszlo had a better chance of leaving Casablanca than I did of leaving Burtonsville.

But soon it appears I will have my own "letters of transit." However, Dina has already informed me that I won't be returning to my former errand-running ways. She intends to continue ordering food online from the grocery store - and then drive to pick it up contact-less in their parking lot. Actually, I might be allowed to go that far since I'd be remaining in the car and still wearing a mask while popping the trunk and keeping my distance as the groceries are loaded into the boot. We'll see; we're still negotiating. But definitely not until I receive my second shot. In the interim, I imagine our lives will change very little. Thanks to the vaccine though, there is hope that once again, I'll be able to interact with people, places and things.

But return I shall and relieved I will be. However, having lung cancer, and/or thyroid cancer which has metastasized to the lungs, in the midst of a pandemic with a virus that often locates in the lungs and creates breathing/pulmonary problems - even with the two shots, is still as scary and risky as it gets, especially if you're of a certain age as I am. In two weeks, I'll have received my booster shot, and I'll have a lot less to worry about, thankfully. And for a cancer patient still undergoing treatment with a less than a "normal" life expectancy anticipated, being fully vaccinated is as good as it gets. And I suppose I can live with that, live being the operative word.

Having cancer, irrespective of the type, your diagnosis/prognosis, is pretty damn difficult. It impacts every facet of your life. The thought (your reality) is never far from your conscious mind. And once you become a member of this less than exclusive club (more every day, unfortunately), a club that nobody wants to join, there are more risks to your life than you ever imagined, and many more for which you have absolutely no awareness. Having an external complication, like a virus, with variants that seem to spread rapidly; which have now infected over 30,000,000 Americans, and an infection for which there's no specific cure, and seems to have its greatest negative impact on people exactly like me (age and disease) is about as foreboding as it could possibly be. And with no place to hide, other than in your own home - with no visitors allowed, a precaution most recommended (to invoke the syntax of Hercule Poirot, "the greatest detective in the world") has made many of us impatient and perhaps a bit tense. I can, as many healthcare professionals have said, almost see the light. Hopefully, it will be July 4th of this year as the President has suggested and not July 4th of next year.

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



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