

Great Falls CONNECTION

WELLBEING

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(From left) Andy Wilson, Matt Palmisano, Nancy Wilson, Savannah Zanic, and Abigail Stephenson at the Great Falls Freedom Memorial before the start of the unofficial Memorial Day Observance 2021.

Memorial Day 2021 at the Great Falls Freedom Memorial

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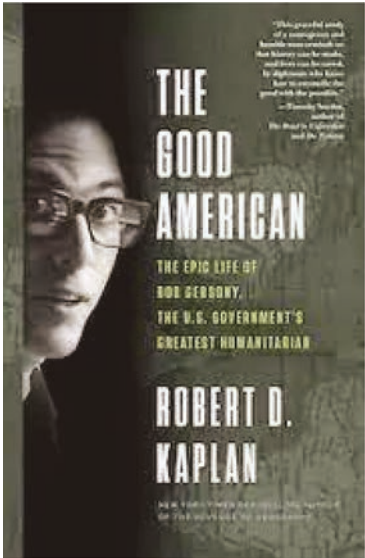
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News

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED



Bob Gersony in Great Falls circa 2020

The Good American is Also a Neighbor

Great Falls resident featured in new book.

BY MARY KELLY



Cindy with her Aunt Missy, Great Falls circa 2015

The Good American: The Epic Life of Bob Gersony, a new book by well-known author Robert Kaplan, reads like a thriller. But to the reluctant subject of the book, the title is something of a misnomer. Bob Gersony, a 20-year resident of Great Falls, says the book is not about him, but about the 8,200 people who he interviewed over his 40+ years working in distressed areas of the world including Serbia, Rwanda, Somalia, and Nicaragua and the dedicated UN, US, and other relief workers with whom he worked.

How Gersony, a Vietnam veteran and former commodities trader, ended up spending seven years in the beautiful colonial city of Antigua, Guatemala and opening a language school, still in business 40 years later, is its own adventure. He returned to Guatemala after a massive earthquake in February 1976. While aid organizations had responded, as they always do, with donations of clothes and food, Gersony, who by this time spoke fluent Spanish, took a more logical approach; he traveled to the site of the landslide to talk with victims of the disaster. They had food and clothes, he found, and their harvest had been good. What they really needed were the materials to rebuild their homes. With OXFAM (a British charity) money, he arranged for sheet iron to be imported at much reduced costs. Rather than simply receiving handouts, the local people were able to use their harvest proceeds to buy the

materials to rebuild their homes. He used this straightforward approach in neighboring El Salvador – creating jobs, including building cobble-stoned streets that are still in use today. A consistent theme for Bob is the dignity of work in contrast to creating a never-ending dependence on foreign aid.

BOB'S WORK in Latin America caught the eye of a senior State Department officer who believed in the same approach – talking to people one-on-one to understand their situations rather than making blind decisions for them from an office in Washington. His life was hardly glamorous. He spent long weeks in the field, sleeping on dirt floors with his local interpreters and drivers, for whom he had the highest regard. Bob got into the habit of eating a single meal a day, a meal that could occasionally include local delicacies like camel liver.

In 1988 Bob met Cindy Davis, who had spent many years in disaster relief and who agreed to help Bob collate his findings from interviews in refugee camps in Mozambique. The Gersonys' relationship grew through mutual re-

SEE GERSONY, PAGE 10

WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

Democrats Decide

Voters to determine direction of party in June 8 primary.

BY MICHAEL LEE POPE
THE CONNECTION

The June 8 primary will determine the direction of the Democratic Party in Virginia at a critical time, when the commonwealth is emerging from the pandemic and trying to recast itself as something other than a party in opposition to former President Donald Trump. Opposition to the former president helped Democrats claim the trifecta — all three statewide offices, the House of Delegates and the state Senate. Now they'll be facing a Republican ticket that has racial diversity, gender diversity and geographic diversity.

"We have the momentum, energy, and grassroots organization to send good, solid Republicans to Richmond," said Rich Anderson, chairman of the Republican Party of Virginia. "And we're going to fight harder than ever to ensure we do just that."

Democrats head into Election Day likely to nominate white males from Northern Virginia as governor and attorney general, while the election for lieutenant governor remains wide open. Voters could end up selecting a Democratic ticket that is three white males from Northern Virginia. That's one of the reasons why Gov. Ralph Northam attempted to tip the scales by endorsing Del. Hala Ayala (D-51) for Lieutenant Governor, a Democrat from Prince William County who identifies as an Afro-Latina-Lebanese-Irish woman. Campaign finance records show she's struggled to raise as much money as Del. Sam Rasoul (D-11) or Del. Mark Levine (D-45).

"Establishment Democrats clearly think that Hala Ayala is going to be the better candidate in the general election," said Quentin Kidd, a political science professor at Christopher Newport University. "But that doesn't mean that she would be, and that doesn't mean that she'll win the Democratic primary."

AT THE TOP of the ticket is the race for governor. Former Gov. Terry McAuliffe has an outsized lead in the polls and the fundraising, although it's extremely rare for a former governor to decide to seek a non-consecutive term. It hasn't been done since 1973, when former Gov. Mills Godwin was elected to a second non-consecutive term after a four-year absence from the Executive Mansion. In his first term, Godwin was a Democrat. But eight years later, he switched parties and became a Republican during a time when both parties were experiencing an identity crisis.

"I was moved to run [again] because I love this state," Godwin said in 1973 during a campaign speech in Southwest Virginia. "And I don't want the liberal left to take over



PHOTO BY MICHAEL LEE POPE/THE CONNECTION

Voters will be selecting Democratic nominees for governor, lieutenant governor and attorney general in the June 8 primary.

On the Ballot GOVERNOR



Terry McAuliffe



Jennifer McClellan



Jennifer Carroll Foy



Lee Carter



Justin Fairfax

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

Hala Ayala

Sam Rasoul

Andria McClellan

Sean Perryman

Mark Levine

Xavier Warren

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Jay Jones

Mark Herring

More Election Coverage

<http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/news/2021/may/20/convention-done-primary-ahead/>

<http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/news/2021/apr/15/running-second-command/>

stop," said Del. Kathy Tran (D-42). "As a delegate, I've seen the difference between legislators who lead when the going gets tough and those who don't. Jenn McClellan is a leader who lifts up all Virginians."

THE RACE FOR lieutenant governor is the race that will determine the missing third of the statewide Democratic ticket. Sam Rasoul has raised and spent more money than any other candidate, a notable achievement considering he refuses to take money from special interest PACs or lobbyists. During a televised debate on WJLA last week, anchor Dave Lucas asked if Rasoul believed he could represent Virginians of all faiths. The televised question caused a firestorm because Rasoul is Muslim, and the question employed anti-Muslim tropes.

"Sadly, this isn't what Virginians are wanting to hear about," said Rasoul. "They're wanting to hear about how we're going to improve access to their health care, about broadband issues, how we are going to safely get kids back in school."

WJLA eventually apologized, calling the

question "inappropriate and disrespectful." Meanwhile, Rasoul picked up new endorsements and gained a ton of free publicity. But he wasn't the only candidate to seize on a moment from the WJLA debate. When the candidates were asked if critical race theory should be taught in Virginia classrooms, former Fairfax NAACP president Sean Perryman seized the moment to explain that the law-school concept wasn't being taught in K-12 classrooms.

"Critical race theory is not even being taught in our schools," said Perryman. "It's a Republican dog whistle where anything they disagree with is critical race theory."

ATTORNEY GENERAL Mark Herring is the only statewide incumbent seeking reelection. He's being challenged by Del. Jay Jones (D-89). Herring was the town attorney in Lovettsville and served on the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors before being elected to the state Senate in a 2006 special election after Attorney General Bob McDonnell appointed Sen. Bill Mims (R-33) chief deputy attorney general.

Herring was elected attorney general in 2013, and he's now seeking a third term in office. During his time as attorney general, he created a new Office of Civil Rights as well as a new conviction integrity unit and a new worker protection unit while also reorganizing the consumer protection section. He opposed Virginia's ban on gay marriage, fought against Trump's Muslim ban, and overruled Republican gerrymandering in the United States Supreme Court.

"I've transformed the job into a progressive powerhouse," said Herring. "I have proven that I can win even the biggest fights."

Jones was first elected in 2017, part of the first Democratic wave that began the transformation of the House of Delegates. Since that time, he's been seen as a rising star in the party. Jones says it's time to hand the office to the next generation, and as an African-American man he says he would be able to bring his lived experience into conversations about criminal justice reform and equity. During a televised debate, he avoided answering questions about a bill he introduced that would have allowed predatory lenders to charge 350 percent interest — a point of distinction that provides contrast with Herring, who worked with lawmakers to pass the Fairness in Lending Act. Jones never withdrew his bill which died in committee, although he ended up voting for the bill that Herring supported.

"The attorney general knows that he and I supported the exact same bill," said Jones. "I was happy to work with Delegate Bagby, the chair of the Legislative Black Caucus, who has endorsed my campaign."

Principle Above Partisanship

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



COMMENTARY

Virginia lost two of its finest citizens last week: former United States Senator John Warner who died at age 94 and former member of the Virginia House of Delegates Dick Hobson who died at 89 years old. Both were heavily engaged in partisan politics—Warner as a Republican and Hobson as a Democrat. Both may have been best known, however, for the times they rose above their party labels to assert principles over partisanship.

Senator John Warner had the dignified look and the resounding voice of a person in power. He had a very admirable career in the U.S. military in both the Navy and the Marines and served later in civilian life as Secretary of the Navy. For more than 30 years he served in the United States Senate where he was a recognized expert in military affairs. He was elected to represent the Commonwealth at a time when Southern Democrats dominated politics

in the state. Some attribute his first election to his second wife, Elizabeth Taylor, but he continued to be elected after their divorce based on his unassailable performance in office.

My dealings with Senator Warner were never very direct, but as a member of the Northern Virginia delegation I recognized, as did the Democratic majority in the General Assembly and Democratic governors, that Senator Warner was the go-to person on Capitol Hill if the state needed federal assistance.

Mark Warner took on John Warner in an election of "Mark not John" but was unsuccessful. Mark had to wait for John's retirement before winning the seat with Senator Warner's endorsement. Senator Warner, the Republican, was known in his retirement days for endorsing Democrats for president including Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden. He loved the Senate and his country, and he never let partisanship get ahead of that loyalty.

Delegate Richard "Dick" Hobson served in

the Virginia House of Delegates for two terms retiring in 1979. He was in his second and final term when I first came to the House of Delegates in 1978. I felt a particular kinship to him because both of us coming from Northern Virginia as progressive Democrats felt ourselves at odds with many of the politics and priorities of the more conservative Democrats who dominated the House. A key element of the then-declining "Byrd Machine" that dominated Virginia politics for decades was the role of circuit court judges in keeping the machine in power. As a progressive freshman in the House, I planned to change that political abuse that was a violation of the separation of powers. Dick Hobson was the only other delegate who was willing to sign as a copatron on my bill to provide for the merit selection of judges. He went with me to provide moral support for my first appearance before the powerful Rules Committee that defeated my bill within minutes as not having merit.

Like John Warner, Dick Hobson put principles of democracy and good government ahead of partisanship, and Virginia is better for the leadership of both of them!

Fighting Both anti-Semitism and Oppression

BY LEAH HARRIS

TAKING EXCEPTION

On the May 13 Eid holiday, Abrar Omeish, at-large member of the Fairfax County School Board, Tweeted: "Hurts my heart to celebrate while Israel kills Palestinians & desecrates the Holy Land right now," she wrote. "Apartheid & colonization were wrong yesterday and will be today, here and there. May justice + truth prevail."

There has been a disturbing community backlash in response. A spokesperson for the Fairfax GOP smeared her as "deeply anti-Semitic." And on May 19 the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) of Greater Washington rescinded its plans to honor Ms. Omeish due to the content of her Tweet. JCRC's announcement shames and punishes Ms. Omeish for her views, saying that she "disenfranchised the thousands of Jewish families in her district."

As the Jewish parent of a child in FCPS, JCRC does not speak for me. By conflating the state of Israel with all Jewish people everywhere, groups like JCRC and the Fairfax GOP are en-

gaging in a well-worn tactic: to paint any critique of Israeli state violence as an expression of anti-Semitism. Such allegations are designed to "cancel" anyone who speaks out for Palestinian human rights, and to deflect from the actual substance of their criticism.

For example, Ms. Omeish's use of the word "apartheid" in her Tweet is completely aligned with the assessment of the Israeli human rights group B'tselem, which wrote in a recent report: "The Israeli regime enacts in all the territory it controls (Israeli sovereign territory, East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip) an apartheid regime. One organizing principle lies at the base of a wide array of Israeli policies: advancing and perpetuating the supremacy of one group – Jews – over another – Palestinians." Human Rights Watch also agrees that Israel's policies amount to apartheid. And Israel is currently under a U.N. inquiry for possible war crimes following its latest offensive on Gaza, which left 67 Palestinian children dead.

Ms. Omeish's detractors allege that by criticizing Israel, she cannot represent all students. I strongly reject this destructive reasoning, as well as simplistic "you're either with us or against us" arguments. As she herself reiterated in her speech at the May 20 meeting of the Fairfax County School Board, it is possible to "fight both anti-Semitism and oppression against the Palestinians ... at the same time."

I am deeply concerned by the insinuation of some community members and groups that School Board members should remain silent on matters of social injustice. In the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who led the resistance to apartheid in South Africa: "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor."

My family couldn't be prouder to have Ms. Omeish representing us on the School Board. She has continued to express a good-faith commitment to work with all faith leaders to improve the well-being of all students in Fairfax County. I can't say the same for those trying to discredit her and suppress healthy discussion.

Meeting on Striping Changes in Hunter Mill, Providence and Dranesville Districts

The Fairfax County Department of Transportation (FCDOT) will host a virtual meeting on additional striping changes proposed for the Hunter Mill, Providence and Dranesville Districts as part of the 2021 Paving and Restriping Program. The meeting will be held in coordination with the Virginia Department of Transportation on Tuesday, June 8, 2021 at 6.30 p.m.

Join the Online Meeting or Call in By Phone

To attend the meeting, Thursday, June

8, 6:30 pm, you may join online or call in by phone.

Join the meeting online

Join by phone: 1-844-621-3956; Access Code: 173 502 1483

First time WebEx user? See our Virtual Meeting Instructions

The meeting will feature a formal presentation followed by time for questions, feedback and comments. For residents who cannot attend the meetings in person, a video recording of the event along with the meeting presen-

tation will be available on the paving and restriping webpage, and feedback may be submitted online. Comments will be due on June 22, 2021.

Overall, the paving and restriping program improves hundreds of roads in Fairfax County each year through maintenance and repaving. At the same time, state and county agencies coordinate restriping efforts to address safety issues for motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians through the creation of bike lanes, parking lanes, crosswalks and more.

For more information, visit the Fairfax County 2021 Paving and Restriping Program: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/transportation/2021-paving-and-restriping>.

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OPINION

I Became a Better Mother When I Stopped Trying To Do It All Myself

BY MEGAN MANCILLAS

Nearly five years ago, when my ex-husband and I separated, I felt the same way I suspect a lot of mothers do. I thought our children should live with me full-time, not only because I gave birth to them, but also because I had been their primary caretaker for most of their lives.

After staying home with them for over 12 years, it felt like an insult for my ex to then ask for them half of the time — after all, I felt I had made sacrifices to stay home so they wouldn't be in the care of strangers. I came up with all of the usual excuses: Who will do their hair? He's working full-time, how will he get them to and from school on time? My youngest is only four, she shouldn't be away from her mother for so long!

Still, in an effort to avoid the adversarial and expensive court route, I sat down and looked at his proposed schedule on paper, followed by reading every article or study I could get my hands on regarding shared parenting. The evidence was overwhelming.

Across the board, children have better outcomes when their parents have a shared parenting schedule, even in high-conflict cases.

My "come to Jesus" moment happened when I admitted to myself that all of my objections to shared parenting were based on my own fears. It wasn't that they didn't love their dad or that he wasn't a good father — he was. It was more that I had been a stay at home mother for twelve years, and it had almost become my identity.

I was afraid of the loss of control, particularly in the middle of a divorce, when you feel as though nothing is controllable. I was afraid of who I would become if my children were gone half the time — it felt like a lot of responsibility to suddenly be forced to figure out what to do with my time when they weren't there. I was afraid of other peoples' expectations of me.

I was afraid to go back to school and re-enter the workforce. And even though my plan was always to go back to school once my youngest was in kindergarten, I now felt immense pressure to provide.

Despite knowing that there was all this scientific evidence that pointed to shared parenting being best for children, agreeing to it still didn't feel easy. It was a choice to release all of my fears and expectations and take the first step without seeing the whole staircase. I was not confident, but it was what I had to do, and little did I know, that one choice would set the tone for all of my other life choices moving forward.

As an added bonus, the very thing that was proven to be best for my kids also ended up being personally liberating for me.

I went back to school. I started volunteering. I had a social life. I found a job I enjoyed. I became a better mother, because I wasn't trying to do it all myself. The time I spent with my kids became even more precious; I was less stressed, less tired, more attentive, and more in tune with their needs.

Although my divorce was contentious, it was a first step toward re-building trust, toward working together as a team, and toward giving our children all the benefits of living with both parents. It was a quicker path to less animosity, less discord, and less resentment; not just because of the circumstances surrounding the divorce, but because we were now both sharing the responsibility of raising our children.

Nearly five years later, my children are thriving. They got through our divorce relatively unscathed, which is something I know we're both really proud of. And guess what? My ex-husband learned how to do their hair.

Megan Mancillas is a Court Appointed Special Advocate and a member of the Executive Committee of the Virginia Affiliate of the National Parents Organization. She is from Centreville.

BULLETIN BOARD

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

FRIDAY/JUNE 4

Pride month at MCC kicks off with a free open mic event at 7 p.m. on Friday, June 4, on the rear plaza with the Pride display. Local LGBTQ+ teens, their allies and family members are invited to share their uplifting words and art. MCC is providing a performance area for open mic performances, sidewalk chalk and other art supplies, a selfie station with the Progress Pride flag, refreshments and dance music. Guest artists can sign up ahead of time here: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MCC_2021Pride or sign up for Open Mic slots beginning at 7 p.m. on the day of the event onsite. Call MCC at 703-790-0123, TTY: 711 or visit www.mcleancenter.org.

SUNDAY/JUNE 6

Concerts on the Green. The Life Support Band. 6-8 p.m. At the Village Centre Green, Behind the Old Brogue, Great Falls. Join in a free, live concert every Sunday in June and then mid-August through the end of September. Pack up the kids, a blanket and your lawn chairs...bring dinner or pick it up at wonderful local restaurants. You are sure to see a neighbor or two. Sponsored by Roz Drayer, The Roz Drayer Team, TTR Sotheby's International Realty.

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Fairfax Dems Clash with Supervisors

Demand firing of FCPD Chief Kevin Davis.

By Mercia Hobson
The Connection

The Fairfax County Democratic Committee (FCDC) called on the Board of Supervisors ("Board") on May 25 to terminate Kevin Davis's employment as Chief of the Fairfax County Police Department. In its three-point Resolution, FCDC called on the ten-member Board, nine of whom are Democrats, to reopen the search for a new chief and implement a transparent hiring process. FCDC advocated that the Board use a "racial equity decision-making framework and a community screening committee comparable to the one used in Fairfax County's 2013 police chief search."

"The mission of the Fairfax County Democratic Committee, with over 1,000 members and an even larger network of volunteers is to advance and maintain the election of Democrats to public office here," said FCDC Chair Bryan Graham at a Press Conference the day after the Resolution's release.

"We have worked hard to elect the nine Democrats to the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors... But it is also our responsibility as the party to promote Democratic values," Graham said.

THE BOARD appointed Davis on April 23, and he assumed the position on May 3. According to FCDC's Resolution, Davis was afforded the opportunity to address concerns about policing incidents in his career on May 6, [at the County's Community Input Session]. He did not. Instead, Davis "diverted" in his explanations.

Graham said, "In the survey conducted in hiring the new police chief, Fairfax County residents raised community trust as the most important issue. To hire a candidate with any racially-charged use of force incident in their past is not starting from a foundation on which trust can be built." The Resolution cited four incidents regarding Chief Davis's professional policing history.

Two occurred in the 1990s, one in 1993 and the other in 1999. Each ended with court judgments against Davis [Prince George's County Police Department]. The other two incidents occurred during Davis's last two years in a police position [Commissioner-Baltimore Police Department]. In 2016, Davis authorized secret drone surveillance of the people of the City of Baltimore. In 2017, Davis imposed a six-day lockdown of a neighborhood after an African American Baltimore detective was killed by a bullet from his service weapon the day before he was to testify to a federal grand jury regarding corruption in the Baltimore police force.

Graham said, "A year and a day after the murder of George Floyd, we should not need to remind our elected officials that as Democrats, we believe we need to overhaul the criminal justice system from top to bottom. Police brutality is a stain on the soul of our nation."

"Therefore, in the context of the events of the last year and this moment, the Fair-



Kelly Hebron is Chair of the Fairfax Democratic Black Caucus within FCDC.



Fairfax County Democratic Committee Chair Bryan Graham calls on the Board of Supervisors on Wednesday, May 26, to terminate Chief Davis's employment.



Leaders in the Fairfax County Democratic Committee stand behind FCDC Chair Bryan Graham and call for the County Board of Supervisors to terminate the police chief's employment.

"A year and a day after the murder of George Floyd, we should not need to remind our elected officials that as Democrats, we believe we need to overhaul the criminal justice system from top to bottom. Police brutality is a stain on the soul of our nation."

— FCDC Chair Bryan Graham

fax County Democratic Committee does not trust that Chief Davis is the right person to lead our police force," said Graham.

Kelly Hebron is Chair of the Fairfax Democratic Black Caucus within FCDC. She said at the Press Conference that the caucus was driven to act and hold the elected Supervisors accountable "to ensure the reduction and prevention of racially motivated violence against its diverse residents during po-

lice encounters."

"Transparency is the first step toward fairness and trust...We can do better in Fairfax County," said Hebron.

Rev. Dr. Vernon C. Walton, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, Vienna, stood with Rev. Dr. Denise Wilson, President, Baptist Ministers Conference of Northern Virginia, and Rev. Dr. Augustus Henderson, Northern Virginia Baptist Association Moderator. Walton

said he was pleased to stand in solidarity with the FCDC Caucus to support its Resolution.

"I believe it providential that the committee would take such a bold, progressive vote on the anniversary of the death of George Floyd...Many of our elected officials, those of whom supported this candidate [Davis]... held signs...kneeled in solidarity...pledged their commitment to police reform," said Walton.

According to Walton, he heard County Supervisors say, 'If only I had known... I've heard them say that you matter, Black and Brown constituency matters. What you haven't said publicly is he [Davis] is the wrong choice. While many of you have said it privately, you have not said it publicly... Despite all that you knew and despite all of you are aware of, you forged ahead. And now you asked a community of people who have been profiled for years to give him an opportunity.'

"I asked you today, Supervisors, how costly will the mistake have to be, or you're willing to admit that this was not the best decision," said Walton.

CANDIDATE for Virginia H-34, Jennifer Adeli stood in solidarity with those assembled at the May 26 Press Conference. Afterward, she said, "I was proud to vote in favor of this Resolution...and stand with FCDC and members of the FCDC Black caucus today. Every elected leader, or candidate asking the community to trust them to lead, should have an opinion on this vital issue. We need a Chief who reflects our values and the community and starts off their tenure with a clean slate. Davis does not meet those basic requirements."

A spokesperson for the office of Chairman Jeffrey C. McKay (D-At Large) Fairfax County Board of Supervisors said, "We have no comment."

Instead, she attached the May 20 open letter from the nine Democratic members of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors -- Jeff McKay-Chairman of the Board of Supervisors; Rodney Lusk-Chairman of the Public Safety Committee, Lee District Supervisor; Penny Gross-Chairman of the Personnel Committee, Mason District Supervisor; James Walkinshaw-Braddock District Supervisor; John Foust-Dranesville District Supervisor; Walter Alcorn-Hunter Mill District Supervisor; Dan Storck-Mount Vernon District Supervisor; Dalia Palchik-Providence District Supervisor; and Kathy Smith-Sully District Supervisor -- sent to the members of the Fairfax County Democratic Committee.

The letter from the Democratic Supervisors to the members of FCDC read in part, "The police chief is hired by the Board of Supervisors, serves at our pleasure, and as such, his performance will be evaluated regularly. He is well aware of our expectation that he deliver smart and meaningful reforms that benefit all in our community... Chief Davis has already been talking and most importantly, listening, to members of our community. He has his line of communication open to any community member who wishes to speak with him."



PHOTOS BY CHAYA NEJAR PHOTOGRAPHY. COURTESY OF BRACHA GOETZ

Bracha Goetz, author of the book, "Searching for God in the Garbage", believes that the pandemic offered an opportunity to reconnect with one's faith. Here, she is reading to grandchildren.

Faith Sustained Many During COVID-19 Crisis

How a belief in a higher power helped some people cope with pandemic.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

As she experienced the emotions and uncertainty around the coronavirus pandemic, Bracha Goetz turned to the tenets of her faith. As an Orthodox Jew, following the guidelines set forth in the Torah were already part of her daily life. As the outlook on COVID-19 begins to look more optimistic, Goetz says that she can reflect on the ways in which her faith helped safeguard her mental and emotional wellbeing.

"The basis of Judaism is gratitude, and gratitude is essential for enjoying life, said Goetz, a Maryland based author of the book "Searching for God in the Garbage." "When going through a difficult time, focusing on being grateful for just one thing can help to uplift us."

Like Goetz, more than a third of Americans say that the COVID-19 crisis strengthened their faith in a higher power and offered lessons from God, according to a report by Pew Research Center. Practicing those beliefs during a crisis can help support mental and emotional health and wellbeing.

"Religious faith or belief in a higher power gives personal meaning, explanations for world events. They may help us make sense of suffering and distress from our experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic," said Jerome Short, Ph.D. Associate Professor of Psychology at George Mason University. "Belonging to a faith community can offer support from other members and reassuring rituals that soothe our distress."

The presence of a higher power can help believers feel that they are not alone, says Brian Flanagan, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Theology at Marymount University. WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM



Bracha Goetz says that gratitude is the basis of her faith and has sustained her during the coronavirus pandemic.

sity and author of the book, "Stumbling in Holiness: Sin and Sanctity in the Church." "Christianity teaches us about a God who is present, even in the worst of circumstances," he said. "But Christianity also proclaims a God who never abandons creation, and is present in our suffering in a way similar to that of a mother who suffers when her child is sick or hurting."

"Faith for me means trusting in a God who is close and not distant, and in a certain sense is closest to us when we most need divine comfort," continued Flanagan.

Belief in a higher power has long been linked to improved physical and mental health, such as a recent study by the Mayo Clinic. "Religious and spiritual practices are associated with greater life satisfaction, less anxiety and depression, and longer life," said Short.

The increase in the practicing of faith that occurred during the COVID-19 crisis offers religious leaders an opportunity to sustain that momentum. "We all got a huge push forward spiritually, as we have stopped taking so many things for granted that we may not have appreciated before," said Goetz. "Now that we have seen how many of the precious blessings in our lives can be gone in a moment, we have become more grateful people."



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People gather at the Great Falls Freedom Memorial for an unofficial Memorial Day Observance 2021.



Doris and Dick Leadbetter of Great Falls

Memorial Day 2021 at the Great Falls Freedom Memorial

Citizens honor U.S. Armed Forces Members who died in battle or as a result of their wounds.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Local citizens gathered at the Great Falls Freedom Memorial at 11 o'clock the morning of Memorial Day 2021. They came together to honor and mourn the 1.2 million members of the military who died in battle or as a result of wounds they sustained on duty while serving in the United States Armed Forces. "We don't celebrate Memorial Day. We commemorate because it's a very somber, serious holiday," said Andy Wilson, president of the Friends of the Great Falls Freedom Memorial and a retired Army Ranger officer.

Asked what the topic of his remarks would be at the day's observance, Wilson said he would lead the informal remembrance and talk about why people wear poppies to honor the United States war dead and why the poem, "In Flanders Fields," written in 1915 by John McCrae, had become so important on Memorial Day.

According to Wilson, in the poem written during

World War I, Canadian physician Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae finishes 17 days of battle as the battalion surgeon. Wilson said, "You can imagine the horrendous, horrific stuff he was going through in those 17 days." Wilson continues describing events as they unfold in the poem. McCrae takes a break. Sitting down, he observes the

dous, horrific stuff he was going through in those 17 days." Wilson continues describing events as they unfold in the poem. McCrae takes a break. Sitting down, he observes the

battlefield, the destruction, and death. "In a crevice of a rock, he sees a red flower, a poppy. As he looks around, there are more of those red flowers. He asks how these red flowers can exist in this death and destruction, these beautiful flowers? Well, it was a poppy, and that became to symbolize rebirth," said Wilson. "I'll read the poem slowly, in a way that people can understand," he said. Now, many Americans wear a poppy on Memorial Day as a sign of respect.

Dick Leadbetter of Great Falls, Army (R) summed up what so many assembled that morning said when asked why they came. "I'm here to remember all the people who have fallen in defense of our country," he said. His wife Doris added, "I came to remember all the people, relatives, and friends who gave their lives for our country."

Bon Newhall said, "I am a veteran in the Army. I served in Germany during Vietnam, and I am a member of the Freedom Memorial Board. I feel strongly that our country continues to honor those who gave everything for the freedoms we have."

Glenn Youngkin, the Republican nominee in the 2021 Virginia race for governor, quoted words said in a wartime speech made by the British prime minister Winston Churchill on August 20, 1940: "Never was so much owed by so many to so few."



Bob Newhall of Great Falls



Glenn Youngkin of Great Falls, the Republican nominee in Virginia's race for governor, and his wife, Suzanne.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

2021 TOPSoccer players, coaches, and buddies of the Great Falls Reston Soccer Club U.S. Youth Soccer.

Falling in Love with 'The Beautiful Game'

Local teen coaches young players with disabilities.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

For more than a year, Aeshan Kapil, 16, of Herndon volunteered as a TOPSoccer coach for the Great Falls Reston Soccer Club, U.S. Youth Soccer. He shared his passion for soccer in the program for young athletes with disabilities. Without the opportunity afforded by TOPSoccer, the youth aged 6 through 18 years old might not have discovered and fallen in love with the sport nicknamed "the beautiful game."

Coach Aeshan said, "I got interested in TOPSoccer because I loved soccer as a kid." Aeshan is a sophomore at St. Paul VI Catholic High School in Chantilly. Initially, he served as a volunteer Buddy to support players in the program. After that, Aeshan received a promotion to Head Coach of Great Falls Reston TOPSoccer.

The allure of soccer calls athletes of all abilities. Soccer, or "football" as it is called internationally, is a simple game. A ball is all players need; no expensive equipment is necessary. The game cracks socio-economic, ethnic, and national boundaries. Soccer needs no common language or extreme physical prowess to be enjoyed by players regardless of ability levels.

Aeshan said at his first practice as a head coach for TOPSoccer, he felt intimidated, not knowing what to expect, what to do, and unsure if he understood the ability levels of his players. "I had no idea what I was doing as head coach. No idea of what drills the players liked, who they were, and their capabilities."

When COVID hit, Aeshan improvised. He created a ZOOM soccer program where everyone turned on their cameras. He demonstrated the drills, one by one, such as passing off a wall. Next, he performed the exercise with them for thirty seconds, stopped, rested, repeated, and move to the next drill.

THIS YEAR, TOP Soccer Great Falls Reston registered a record number of players. "We have 26 kids this year, whereas, in the past, we've had only eight through 10," he said. Holding the program at Lake Fairfax Park in Reston this year, all volunteers wore masks and maintained social distancing as best as possible. Masking for players was optional.

Aeshan said, unlike his first year as a coach when he saw a player's disability first, "sad but true," in his second season as coach, the disability was secondary. Program participants were not disabled players but players with disabilities. The disability is secondary. "[I] don't see them as different," Aeshan said.

The best part about the program for Coach Aeshan, he said, was offering the youth and teen players the opportunity to play the game, love the game, and watch his kids grow in skills and teamwork.

As the spring season wound down, the players' parents shared a few comments about Coach Aeshan and TOPSoccer. "You were well organized, and it was a great opportunity for the kids," said Chirs Gibson of Oakton. "You are very kind," said Eddie (last name withheld) of McLean. "My two absolutely love it, and it brings them a lot of joy and exercise," said Margaret Johnston of Arlington.

"I keep flipping through the pictures- I just love them. And yet, I feel such a sentimental sadness that the season is coming to an end. This has been such an incredible experience for [my son], and we are so grateful for everything you've all done to give [him] a moment of fun and normalcy in the otherwise trying time," said Melissa Sergio of Arlington.

EVERY TIME players scored a goal, every time they dribbled through cones, Aeshan said the players' smiles on their faces touched him. "I feel blessed," he said. But what mattered most to Aeshan, he said, was what he saw happening after his kids missed a goal. "[At first], they're genuinely, genuinely upset. But then they're okay because we are going to work together. We're going to score another one. That's a real, real privilege to watch them do that. I think that's the best part of the whole program," Aeshan said.

Here's What's Happening at MCC!

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 MCC LGBTQ+ Pride Month Exhibition
June 1-30


MCC LGBTQ+ Pride Month

 Teen Open Mic Night!
Friday, June 4, 7 p.m.
(Rain Date: Saturday, June 5)

Upcoming Classes

 Weigh to Go Series
June 7-July 12
Free; registration is required.


MCC Governing Board

 June Meeting (via Zoom)
Wednesday, June 9, 7:30 p.m.
ZOOM Meeting ID: 864 083 24210
Password: 362336

Blood Donations Needed

 American Red Cross Blood Drive
Friday, June 11, 9 a.m.-2 p.m.
Sign up: www.redcrossblood.org

Closing Notice

 Juneteenth Holiday
Friday, June 18

Life is Better with Books

 Virtual Book Club
Saturday, June 26, 5 p.m.
Free; registration is required.



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BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 5

MONDAY/JUNE 7

Grange Property Plan Meeting, 7 p.m.

At The Grange, Great Falls. The Plan focuses on improving the health of all trees on the property and restoring natural forest processes and understory plants in the oak grove behind the Grange. Great Falls resident and forest expert Jerry Peters has agreed to provide an overview of the plan and an update on the County's implementation of it. EP member Chris Rich will also speak to the urgent need to develop a plan to remove invasive plants to ensure success of the Plan.

Gersony

FROM PAGE 5

spect and a willingness to tolerate extended periods of hardship, including spending the winter in Sarajevo in an unheated apartment where they never took their socks or coats off. The tale of Cindy's kidnapping in Nicaragua in 1996 is related in the book (and is still on YouTube): when friends ask why they have never heard of it, Cindy notes that it isn't something that often comes up in conversation. For his part, Bob wishes the book included more about Cindy's significant work at his side.

THE GERSONYS married in 1992 and moved to Great Falls in 2001 following the birth of their triplets. While Bob continued to work overseas until just a few years ago and today maintains his low profile, Cindy is well known in the Great Falls community. Currently on the Board of the Friends of River Bend, she was also active at Great Falls Elementary and other Fairfax County schools her children attended, and was a mainstay of Great Falls Boy Scout Troop 673 for a decade. With her triplets now in college, Cindy travels the states instead of the world to check off some of the few remaining states (e.g., N. Dakota) she has not yet visited. Always looking for new challenges, during the pandemic, Cindy walked the 43-mile Gerry Connally trail across Fairfax and then the 63-mile C&O canal from Harpers Ferry to Georgetown.

"The Good American: The Epic Life of Bob Gersony" should appeal to anyone with an interest in geopolitics and foreign affairs or who wants to know more about real life in the world's hotspots, where sometimes what you thought was a cat in the night turns out not to be a cat. The Gersonys have made several presentations to small groups and with covid restrictions being lifted, they hope to do more. There have been a number of reviews in national newspapers, including the Washington Post and the Wall Street Journal, as well as several podcasts. "The Good American" is available through the Fairfax County Library and various online book sellers.

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CALENDAR

FREE SUMMER CONCERTS IN RESTON

Reston Community Center is pleased to announce that free summer concerts will return to venues around Reston beginning in June. Lunchtime with the Arts at Mason – Thursdays in June, Reston Town Square Park. 12:30-1:30 p.m.
Take a Break – Thursdays, 7 p.m. – 9 p.m., Lake Anne Plaza
Summerbration Fab Fridays – 7 – 9 p.m., Reston Station
Family Fun Entertainment Series – Saturdays, 10 a.m. – 10:45 a.m., Reston Town Square Park
Sunday Art in the Park with the Shenandoah Conservatory – Sundays, 7 p.m. – 8 p.m., Reston Town Square Park

OUR SPECIAL HARBOR OPENS

The Fairfax County Park Authority's Our Special Harbor spray park is now opened. This fully accessible Chesapeake-Bay-themed spray-ground has water features such as a spraying osprey nest, Chessie the sea serpent, misting sunflowers and a lighthouse. The beach area allows for quieter play with softer bubblers and interactive water tables while the computerized water maze and dumping crab basket provide more lively activity. Located at Lee District Park at 6601 Telegraph Road, Franconia. Visit <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/recenter/lee-district/family-recreation-area>.

GOLF CAMPS

Join the nationwide resurgence of the classic, lifelong game of golf. Laurel Hill Golf Club and Twin Lakes Golf Course are offering weeklong summer camps taught by professionals from The Eisman Golf Academy. Junior golfers ages 8-14 will learn and improve on golf fundamentals in a fun environment. Class sizes are limited for personalized instruction and camp includes on-course play. Also included are swag bags, hat, games and prizes. Camps will take place at Laurel Hill June 14-18 and July 12-16, 2021; and at Twin Lakes on June 21-25, July 19-23, and Aug. 9-13, 2021. All camps run from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. To register, visit the Junior Golf Fairfax website.

Laurel Hill Golf Club is located at 8701 Laurel Hill Crest Drive in Lorton. Twin Lakes Golf Course is located at 6201 Union Mill Road in Clifton.

SATURDAY/JUNE 5

Taste of Springfield. 12 to 5 p.m. At Springfield Town Center, 6500 Springfield Mall, Springfield. Enjoy local dishes that are guaranteed to delight, live music, and entertainment for the whole family. Taste of Springfield Festival showcases some of the best eateries Fairfax has to offer while bringing the community together. Local vendors include Two Smooth Dudes Food Truck, Uncle Fred's BBQ, Sit Means Sit Dog Training and many more. Tasting tickets will be on sale at the event or in advance via springfieldtowncenter.com/events.

SUNDAY/JUNE 6

U-2: Still Essential. 2-3 p.m. On Zoom. Sponsored by the Cold War Museum, 1734 Farm Station Road, Warrenton. You Need to See What's Happening in That Hot Spot. But the Bad Guys Know When the Satellites Are Coming Over. Who You Going to Call? It's still the U-2. Visit the website: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/still-essential-the-enduring-legacy-of-the-u-2-tickets-146513940139>

TUESDAY/JUNE 8

"Duck Harbor" Web Series. 8 p.m. Episode Two. Sponsored by 1st Stage in Tysons Corner. Duck Harbor is a web series about a long-distance love in later life. The piece is brought to audiences through a creative series of short scenes in which the actors, just like the characters, are meeting for the first time. Audiences will get to experience the magic of the theater and the excitement of new love between these two lonely hearts reaching out from charming small towns on opposite sides of the country. Every week, each of the two actors, who live on opposite coasts, will be given only their half of the script and will

experience the other side of the story with a sincere and genuine freshness, "on stage," in front of our audience. Performances will take place every Tuesday, beginning on June 1 and ending on August 17. Get your tickets today at www.1ststage.org.

JUNE 8 TO JULY 4

Paintings by Rich Moore. At the Loft Gallery, 33 Mill Street, Second Floor, Occoquan. "The skies proclaim the work of His hands." Psalm 19:1 showcases the artistry of versatile landscape oil painter, Rich Moore as he endeavors to reveal a unique glimpse into the magnificence and wonder of the "handiwork of God." Gallery Hours: Tuesday-Friday, 11 a.m.-4 p.m.; Saturday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; and Sunday, Noon-5 p.m. Online Facebook Live Artist's Reception: Friday, June 11, 2021 7:00 pm <https://www.facebook.com/loftgalleryocquan>.

THURSDAY/JUNE 10

Courtney King. 7-9 p.m. At Jammin Java, 227 Maple Ave. E, Vienna. King's 4-piece rock band will play songs from her latest release, Feel Good Swiller, as well as works she co-wrote from her St. Louis band, Slow Down Scarlett. King, a classically trained flutist from Chicago, always infuses flute into her performances utilizing guitar pedals and a style similar to that of Jethro Tull.

THURSDAY/JUNE 10

Searching for Sully's Enslaved. 7-9 p.m. Zoom. Sully is much more complex than simply the home of the Lee family. Join author Beth Sansbury as she discusses her book, Searching for Sully's Enslaved. Contact PaulHancq@aol.com to register. Visit the website: <https://www.historiccentrevilleva.org/historic-centreville-society/>

SUMMERFEST AT TYSONS CORNER CENTER

Tysons Corner Center announced its line-up of this season's socially distant happenings. 'SummerFest 2021,' which kicked off this month and will run through October 2021, is filled with six months of activations and events, such as live music, art, fitness, festivals, and more.

Movie Nights, in partnership with AMC Theatre Tysons Corner

First Saturday, Monthly at Sundown
Bingo Night - presented by DC Fray and Barrel and Bushel

Third Thursday Monthly, 6 - 8 p.m.

Art on the Plaza

Final Thursday, Monthly -- Join Tysons Corner Center, Barrel & Bushel, and AR Workshop for a monthly crafting event. Each event will feature seasonal art projects along with applicable retailer pop-ups and an extended happy hour.

The Plaza Live

Thursday-Sunday Weekly starting May 6; 4-7 p.m., Thursday & Friday;

2-7 p.m. Saturday & Sunday. Each week on The Plaza the center will welcome local musicians to perform as well as other live entertainment such as caricature and balloon artists, face painters, etc.

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Nearly Nicked



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Recently, I made the mistake of clicking on an email from an unfamiliar sender. It said "Membership Renewed," as in money had been spent by yours truly. But I hadn't spent any money renewing a membership that I knew of, and there is, I imagine, the axis on which some phishing scams are turning: By peeking your instinct to know where and what one's money is doing. Maybe I forgot something? Maybe my wife, Dina, paid for something and forgot to mention it? Maybe, maybe, maybe - so I clicked. The email looked as if it had been sent by "Geek Squad" with whom I have a service contract so I called to inquire further about this 'paid membership.'

The conversation began innocently enough. They confirmed my membership and seemed to have my pertinent data as well so I continued. When I couldn't recall this money being spent - and they couldn't tell me the last four numbers of the account which had been debited, I grew cautious, as I had been down this road once before. Nevertheless, I persisted. Since I had "Geeks" (or whomever, unbeknownst to me) on the phone, I figured I'd ask if they could fix a computer problem (no volume) and asked if the repair was covered by my service contract. They assured me that it was. And so, I gave them access to my computer so they could address the problem remotely. After computer fits and starts, and curious delays, they confessed that they were unable to fix the problem. So, and here it is, the hook: since they were unable to fix my computer, they wanted to refund me the 'membership' fee. That was excruciatingly familiar so I knew it was time to exit stage right.

What had happened to me previously is that I didn't get out soon enough. I didn't know then what I know now so I agreed to the refund and gave them the last four of my account, and sure enough they electronically deposited the money into my checking account (or so it appeared. I later learned that no actual money had ever been transferred). However, they made a mistake, they said. They deposited \$3,000 instead of \$300. They apologized profusely at their mistake and requested that I pay them back \$3,000, which I thought was odd; why not just withdraw the money the same way they deposited it? They said they couldn't and I needed to pay them back. When I refused to follow their directions on how to pay them back (again, since they couldn't withdraw the money/stop payment, whatever), by getting cash and then going to a Western Union office and sending it back that way, I knew I was hooked. Then they threatened to disable my computer unless I paid them back exactly as I had been instructed. Then they erased all the icons on my desktop as a last attempt to coerce me to pay up. At this point, it had been nearly two hours since I made first contact, and I could see/feel where the conversation was going, so I risked it and hung up. Sure enough, my computer was wiped clean and locked. I couldn't access anything. The next day, I called Best Buy and explained the problem and how it had happened. They suggested I bring in my computer tower for an analysis. Within a day, they had identified the problem and offered a solution. They could unlock my computer, no problem, but the computer would have to be reset to the way it was when I first bought it. It wasn't a total disaster as most data was retrievable. As "The Three Stooges" would have said: "It wasn't a total loss."

This recent caller was once again leading me down the garden path. A path which would have ended at a rabbit hole into which me and money would have disappeared. The caller tried desperately to keep me on the line. I said I was at work and had to go. I told him I didn't expect the call to last so long and I promised to call him back. He had access to my computer - remotely, so I was afraid he could cause similar computer trouble as had happened before under eerily similar circumstances. He confirmed - so he thought, that I had his phone number and so I hung up, cautiously optimistic that I hadn't earned his wrath. I never called him back but for the next four hours, he called me back several times, a number from Los Angeles. I never answered, obviously. If I had I might not be pleased with myself.

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



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