

The Arlington Connection

SENIOR LIVING

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ACPD chief Andy Penn takes notes as he listens to Bill Braswell at Metro Diner on Aug. 20 at a neighborhood "Community Conversations with the Chief of Police."

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NEWS

Amazon Continues 'Right Now Needs Fund' with Additional \$1 Million

To help close the gap in basic-needs support for students and families in Northern Virginia

Launched last year to support 59 Northern Virginia schools during the pandemic, Amazon's "Right Now Needs Fund" gives students immediate access to clothing, hygiene products, and other basic supplies to help them focus on their studies.

Amazon will leverage the Fund to kick-start the 2021-22 academic year by giving away backpacks filled with thousands of essential back-to-school supplies to elementary and middle school students.

Amazon will continue its commitment to the Right Now Needs Fund in Northern Virginia for the upcoming academic year with an additional \$1 million investment to support students attending Arlington Public Schools, Alexandria City Public Schools, and Fairfax County Public Schools. The Fund, in partnership with Communities In Schools NOVA, helps remove barriers to learning and works to meet the basic needs of thousands of schoolchildren from underserved communities.

Launched in October 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Amazon Right Now Needs Fund in Northern Virginia was initially made available to students across all 41 Arlington Public Schools and Programs and all 18 Alexandria City Public Schools. In its first year, the Fund provided 8,500 students with immediate access to essential items.

This year, the Fund will continue to provide sup-

port for immediate needs like clothing, hygiene products, and school supplies to students in the region. Site coordinators with the nonprofit Communities In Schools NOVA will work with school social workers to distribute Amazon-provided supplies tailored to specific community needs. School social workers and site coordinators will also help support individual school students who could access the Fund for much-needed items throughout the year, from books to winter coats.

Support is provided through prepaid Amazon Vouchers, or Amazon Education Assistance Product Vouchers, which students can redeem online at their convenience.

The Fund will also be leveraged to provide educational community programs and events, including tech literacy workshops and career panels.

"Amazon is committed to ensuring children and families from historically underrepresented and underserved communities are supported, which is why we are renewing our Right Now Needs Fund in Northern Virginia," said Andrea Muscadin, head of Partnerships, Right Now Needs at Amazon.

"While we have already been able to support thousands of families in the Northern Virginia area, we recognize many families are facing unique challenges."

SEE AMAZON, PAGE 10

The annual Newcomers and Community Guides for each of our 8 communities with inside facts on what makes each community special, their secret places, the real power players, how to get involved and more.

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ACPD Listens to Local Concerns

BY SHIRLEY RUHE
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

Arlington County Police chief Andy Penn stands with his notepad in hand listening to the comments and concerns of Arlingtonians at “Community Conversations with the Chief of Police” Friday, Aug. 20. It is a rainy day, but the room at the Metro Diner is filled with police officers chatting at tables over giant bran muffins and cups of hot coffee.

“Overall today I’m getting positive comments,” Chief Penn says. He has had some input about speeding in certain areas. An information table along the windows is filling up with hand-written comments.

“We want to know when we are doing well and how we can improve.” He says they only have so many police officers so he “honestly believe the more we can share, the better law enforcement can be. You may see something that may not seem suspicious but by sharing information, we can work better.” He says they strive to make it better, whatever the “it” might be.

Deputy Chief of Community Engagement, Wayne Vincent, says they are holding these conversations all across Arlington. “Every community has their own concern. Right now in this part of north Arlington, it is about safety with the recent car burglaries. People ask me if they can leave their front door open.” But he says when he asks them if they feel safe, they say they do.

Corporal J.P. Montoya talks about the importance of engaging the Latino community more.



Corporal J.P. Montoya sits at the “Community Conversations with the Chief of Police” information table which offers brochures on sharing the roadway, as well as a comment box and the usual goodie bags.



Arlington County Police Department (ACPD) holds a neighborhood conversation with Arlingtonians Aug. 20.

“When something happens, a lot of Latinos don’t call the police because they are scared of police. A number of Latinos have come from countries where the police are corrupt, that people don’t trust them.” He says in south Arlington people are more affected by assaults. “The goal is to build up that trust, to try to engage them.”

Recruitment of Latino officers is not that easy, he says. Any negative event across the country ripples down to the local police department. “They equate ACPD with bad events somewhere else but we aren’t them.”

Chief Penn says he has set up a new unit that focuses all of their community efforts in the same di-



ACPD officers chat with local residents about community concerns.

rection. Throughout the year the community engagement efforts include events that fill the cruiser with school supplies, collect food for needy families and support a holiday toy drive. It’s all part of the

goal to build relationships between the community and police officers so they can work together.

He says his focus is on transparency, accountability, respect and communication.

PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUHE

Arlington Implements COVID-19 Vaccine Mandate for Employees

Arlington County Government and Arlington Public Schools (APS) will implement a COVID-19 vaccination mandate for employees. Effective Aug. 30, this policy will also apply to interns, volunteers, substitutes, and contractors.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), and the Arlington County Public Health Division, COVID-19 continues to pose a risk, especially to individuals who are not fully vaccinated. Therefore, certain safety measures remain necessary to

prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Vaccination continues to be the most effective way to significantly reduce the risk of serious illness, hospitalization and death, even with the Delta variant. This is part of a layered approach to keeping the community, as well as children under the age of 12, safe.

“Arlington County is requiring vaccinations for its employees because it’s the best way to keep people safe, especially as the region sees an increasing trend of COVID-19 cases,” said County Manager Mark Schwartz.

Serving Our Community

Arlington County and APS have

offered vaccines to all employees and continue to follow Virginia Department of Health guidance regarding vaccination. APS is committed to ensuring that Arlington schools open safely and remain open for student learning; and Arlington County has an obligation to ensure continuity of government and government services. This includes providing critical services for the social, emotional, physical, and mental wellbeing of the community. Reductions in critical government and educational services can have dramatic impacts on the health and wellbeing of our community.

“We are taking a layered approach to protect our community

and to ensure our schools remain open and safe for student learning,” said APS Superintendent Dr. Francisco Durán. “Mandatory staff vaccinations and our universal mask requirement are two of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and are vital ways we are working to keep our schools open and safe for all.”

Required Testing for Unvaccinated Employees

Unvaccinated individuals are at a greater risk of contracting and spreading COVID-19 within the workplace and to the public that depends on vital County services. County and APS employees will be

required to submit vaccine documentation to their respective agencies.

All unvaccinated employees will be required to be tested at least weekly for COVID-19 to limit the potential spread in the workforce and in the community. Testing will be provided at no cost to the employee.

Arlington’s overall vaccination rate for those 12 and older is 71.5 percent. Arlington encourages eligible residents to access no-cost, no-appointment vaccination and testing opportunities. More information is available at arlingtonva.us/COVID-19.

Hire an Immigrant Worker

County program opens new office on Columbia Pike

BY SHIRLEY RUHE
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

Shirlington Employment and Education Center (SEEC) celebrated the opening of their new office on Aug. 18. It was a long way from their first niche in the wall 21 years ago when the program was established by the County to assist day laborers in finding temporary employment.

Although the pick-up site for the workers remained stable at the pavilion on Four Mile Run, over time their office moved from a small space to a different crumbling space and finally a tent in a parking lot during COVID. Now they have a corner office with big windows, “the room with a view,” on the fourth floor of the Arlington Mill Community Center.

“It is a perfect place for us because many of the immigrant workers live right around here,” says Andres Tobar, executive director of SEEC, “and this building is the home for a number of other community services serving the same group of people we do.” The flow of information between organizations is very useful because

they can help each other out.

Tobar says the office is a center for connecting workers with potential employers, as well as providing a referral system for the workers themselves. They maintain a database on jobs, skill level and personal information as well as referrals to AFAC, Arlington Free Clinic and human resources.

The workers have a variety of skills from construction to lawn and gardening, to moving and painting. Also it is a place for the workers to go for a break if the weather is bad. The SEEC office staff also coordinates lunches during hard times and rent supplements during cold weather when jobs are scarce.

SEEC got caught up in the 4MR Redevelopment Project which eliminated the pavilion where the workers gathered to wait for jobs. But the much anticipated new office space was to be the Arlington Mill Community Center on Columbia Pike. Then COVID hit. The County gave them a new temporary space a few blocks away where the workers could gather outside to wait for a job. But moving to a new area was difficult for



PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUHE

Walter Tejada, who established the SEEC program 21 years ago and served on the Arlington County Board for 13 years, shares concerns about the immigrant community with Matt De Ferranti, current chair of the Arlington County Board.

the workers, and jobs were scarce.

Matt de Ferranti, Arlington County Board Chair, looking out the window at Columbia Pike, said that the neighborhood just up the hill is of the most concern to him. “We talk every month about how we can continue to support immigrants. We have to remember the Arlington values. It isn’t inevitable. There’s a lot left to do.”

Walter Tejada, who had the idea for SEEC 21 years ago, recalls the 150 men who used to line up on the street looking for a job, mostly coming from the lumber company nearby. Now that company is gone. The original concept of assistance to day laborers has broadened and mushroomed to include a green house cleaning education program for immigrant women and an eight-week business course for women who want to start their

own business.

“These are the same families who need help,” Tobar says.

Nancy White, Director of the Arlington Free Clinic, spoke of their collaboration with SEEC to offer space for the green house cleaning class as well as working together during COVID to share their supply of masks with the SEEC workers. “This is a good example of community collaboration, all working toward the same goals.”

Arlington County Board member Takis Tarankonis, who has worked with SEEC on the business development course for women, says people need skills to enable them to grow. “This has become a place of reference. We have to go back and see what worked and what didn’t.”

For further information: www.seecjobs.org



Andres Tobar, Executive Director of SEEC, says he came to spend a year as SEEC Executive Director in 2004 “and here I am.”

The
Arlington
Connection

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SENIOR LIVING



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY

Gardening and landscaping opportunities abound for seniors and retirees with a penchant for gardening.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY

Fairfax County Park Authority volunteers lead children's education programs at one of the county's history centers.

Volunteering Can Give Seniors Purpose

Seniors and retirees can stay active and have a positive impact on the community.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

Every Tuesday this summer, Esther Rosenberg has welcomed two elementary school-aged students into her Potomac, Md. home. When they arrive, she offers them a snack and a stack of books. During their visit, Rosenberg reads to them and listens as they read to her. The students are the children of her housekeeper. As a former elementary school teacher, she enjoys sharing her love of reading with them.

"My children are adults now and I'm retired," she said. "I don't want to be a full-time teacher any more, but I love helping children who might not have access to books or a chance to practice reading over the summer."

Opportunities abound for seniors and retirees who want to volunteer their time to a cause they support or an interest they'd like to pursue. From gardening and landscaping to assisting those with disabilities during swimming and water exercise classes, there are a myriad of ways to help others locally.

"Civic engagement not only benefits a community, but certainly brings value to those individuals who offer their service," said Lisa Fikes, of Volunteer Arlington. "For seniors, volunteering is a wonderful way to stay active physically and mentally as well as gain a renewed sense of self and purpose."

Those with green thumb and a passion for gardening, might find pleasure as volunteer gardeners. Local park authorities use volunteers to maintain the grounds of recreational centers. Retirees with an interest in physi-



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY

Seniors and retirees who enjoy fitness and aquatic pursuits might enjoy guiding those with disabilities during swimming and water exercise classes.

"For seniors, volunteering is a wonderful way to stay active physically and mentally as well as gain a renewed sense of self and purpose."

— Lisa Fikes, Volunteer Arlington

cal fitness or water sports can pursue their passion by serving as an aquatics assistant. Seniors who enjoy golf can volunteer their time to public courses by helping to maintain the course grounds and ensuring the timely start of play.

"Volunteering [allows for] meeting people with similar interests, being social and avoiding isolation," said Tammy Schwab, Education & Outreach Manager for the Fairfax County Park Authority's Resource Management Division. "Volunteers learn

new skills which keeps their brain active and contributes to mental health. [It] can also increase physical activity which is so important these days as it is easier and easier to just stay home."

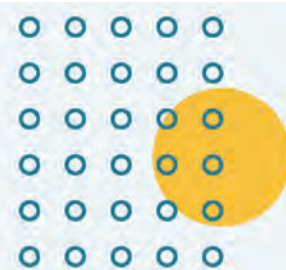
Seniors who want to offer services during a disaster or emergency situation or simply have a desire to improve healthcare in a local community can find fulfillment in serving in one of the area's Medical Reserve Corps (MRC). Arlington, Fairfax and Montgomery counties and the City of Alexandria each have an Medical Reserve Corps. Volunteers receive training in public health, emergency and terrorism response, disaster mental health, CPR and First Aid.

"If you are retired, the Fairfax MRC would greatly benefit from your wealth of wisdom and experience, whether you have worked in the healthcare field or just want to be a positive force in the community," said Paula Rosca, Fairfax MRC Program Coordinator. "By assisting in our vaccination clinics, teaching your neighbors about healthy living, or improving community emergency preparedness, your time will be well spent and much appreciated."

Rosenberg says that she benefits as much from the students she tutors as they do from her. "They bring me so much joy," she said. "They lift my spirits and give me a sense of purpose."

For more information:

Volunteer Arlington:
leadercenter.org



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
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* Binette, Joanne and Kerri Vasold. 2018 Home and Community Preferences: A National Survey of Adults Age 18-Plus. Washington, DC: AARP Research, August 2018.

SENIOR LIVING

Area Campgrounds Offer a Rustic Oasis Just Outside the Beltway

Various levels of camping varies from roughing it in tents, to RV sites with running water.

BY MIKE SALMON
THE CONNECTION

At a time when the travel and vacation industry took a hit from the pandemic, the few campgrounds in Northern Virginia stayed busy as people looked around for something to do within the COVID-19 restrictions.

There are several parks in the Fairfax County Park Authority system and Nova Parks where campers can sit around the campfire, telling ghost stories and roasting marshmallows, but still be a few miles from home.

"It was one of the few things you could do," said Nova Parks CEO Paul Gilbert. "It is an amazing alternative," he added.

At FCPA, there are campgrounds at Burke Lake Park and Lake Fairfax, and in Nova Parks, formerly the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, there are cabins, cottages and camping at Bull Run, Pohick Bay and Algonkian Regional Parks in the area.

AT POHICK BAY, Vanessa Ryan was in from California to camp with her family members in a big recreational vehicle-type camper. The camper was hooked up to water and electricity, and the campfire was the central gathering spot. Although campers at Pohick can only stay up to two weeks, their "Welcome to the Nelson's" sign was up.

"It's like saying 'this is us,' in a welcoming way," said Ryan. They were right up the hill from Pohick Bay, and if there were any fisherman amongst the campers, they could just go down the trail and cast their line in. Pohick Bay has catfish, bass, crappie and other game fish.

Ryan's son is a resident of Woodbridge, right across the Occoquan River, but to them, the campsite was a vacation. "Truly a treat for



This RV was from California.

me," said Ryan. She's not alone either. According to the numbers, the popularity of camping is soaring too at Nova Parks. In FY2020, there were 10,910 nights of camping vs 13,800 in FY2021, and a projected 15,000 in FY2022. "That is a huge uptick for one year," Gilbert said.

Pohick Bay Regional Park's family campground features 150 shaded sites -- 100 with electric 50/30-amp hookups and 50 tent sites. Pohick has three campgrounds: family campground, youth and non-electric which was for tent campers who are closer to "roughing it."

Burke Lake Campground is open daily beginning Friday, April 9. Last night to camp is Saturday, Oct. 30. Lake Fairfax camping is open March to November.

At Nova Parks, the variety of campsites available at Bull Run Campground are RV sites with electric only service, RV sites with full-service (which includes sewer, water and electric), rustic cabins and group camping areas. All campsites have a charcoal grill, fire ring and picnic table. There are two bathhouses in the campground that offer hot showers, sinks, toilets and laundry facilities. The camp store sells camping supplies, snacks, ice and firewood and is open daily from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Fees range from \$31 a night to \$55

a night.

At FCPA, the busiest season is fall, followed by spring. Summer sees regular RV visitation but the tent usage drops off due to the heat, they said.

Nearly eighty percent of FCPA campers are from the DMV area. The others are from just about anywhere in the country. The close proximity to the nation's capital makes Fairfax County a destination location for both RVs and tourists while they are in town.

Camp Culture and Nomadland

The camping culture may have gotten a boost from the recent movie hit "Nomadland." The plot is about a woman in her sixties embarking on a journey through the American West after losing everything in the recent recession, living as a van-dwelling modern-day nomad. Although the limit at Nova Parks campgrounds is two weeks, the folks in Nomadland find ways around stay-limits and other conventional rules. The movie, starring Frances McDormand, won three Oscars.

There is a two-week limit at FCPA too, but in the off season between Labor Day to Memorial Day, campers can stay the maximum of 28 consecutive nights.

One way to get free camping is to work at the campground as a

SEE AREA, PAGE 10

Senior Olympics Profile Orienteering

Which way is north again?

BY SHIRLEY RUHE

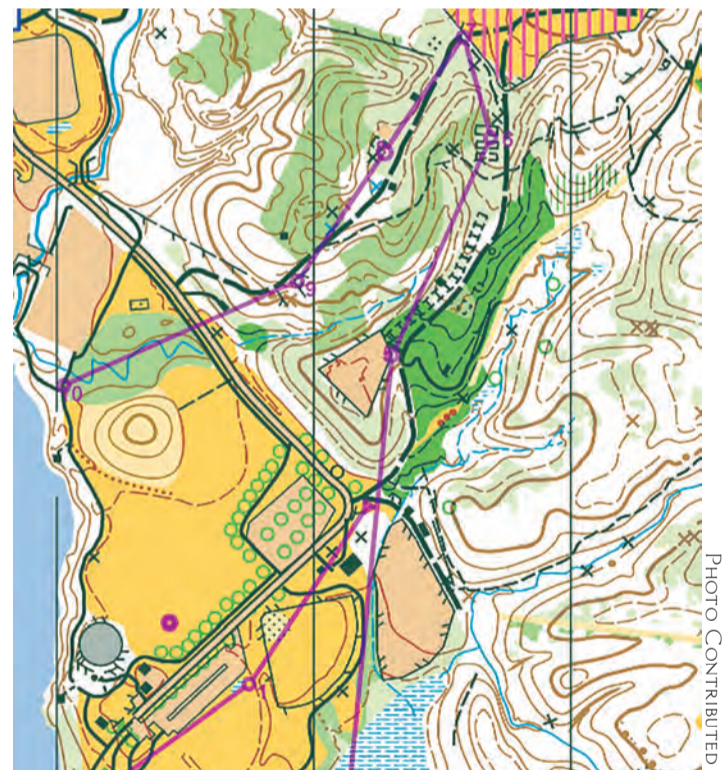
Grab a compass and detailed topographical map and head out over unfamiliar terrain to navigate a set course in the fastest time. Orienteering is a recent addition to the over fifty sports offered at Northern Virginia Senior Olympics (NVSO) this year, due to begin Sept. 19.

Keg Good from Woodbridge and Sid Sachs, who lives at Greenspring Senior Living, are co-directors of the orienteering event. They have been orienteering for decades and pushed to get it added to the list of NVSO sports in 2016 in order to get visibility for the sport. Sachs has been orienteering for 48 years. "My wife and I used to go orienteering with our 3-1/2-year-old." Good has been orienteering since 1997 when she was back in college and is a former USA National Team Member for Orienteering and has competed nationally.

Good says orienteering will be back at Lake Accotink in Springfield this year. "You don't want to have it at the same place every year because people will have memorized the terrain." This year's event will be held Sept. 19. Meet at McLaren Sargent Shelter at Lake Accotink Park to check in at 11-11:30 a.m.

GOOD ESTIMATES that it could take a beginner "who kind of knows a little" about 20 minutes to finish the course but it is more typically 60 minutes. An advanced competitor could finish in 40 minutes but more typically it would take 60-70 minutes. There will be no intermediate offered this year. NVSO works in conjunction with the Quantico Orienteering Club and this allows them to use the Club's detailed maps. "Otherwise it would be impossible for us to do it."

Sachs says, "This is a think-SEE SENIOR, PAGE 9



Topographical map at Occoquan Regional Park used for beginning orienteering competition in 2018 NVSO.

PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

"FLOURISHING AFTER 55"

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55+ Programs are virtual and outdoors. A 55+ Membership is

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Virtual & Outdoor Programs:

❖ Acoustic hour, live in the park with musician Carl Gold, Wednesday, Aug. 25, 1 p.m., Virginia Highlands Park, 1600 S. Hayes Street. Regis-

tration # 914802-11.

- ❖ Understanding probate, presented by Elder Law Attorney Edward Zetlin, Wednesday, Aug. 25, 11 a.m. Registration # 914400-27.
- ❖ Yarn creations shared with fellow crafty individuals, Wednesday, Aug. 25, 1 p.m., Langston-Brown 55+ Center, 2121 N. Culpeper Street.

Registration # 914703-19.

- ❖ Encore Learning, Fall course preview, Thursday, August 26, 10 a.m. Register online at www.EncoreLearning.net.
- ❖ General genealogy group discusses using newspapers in research, Thursday, Aug. 26, 3 p.m. Registration # 914400-08.

- ❖ Macular degeneration, symptoms, treatment options, Friday, Aug. 27, 1 p.m. Registration # 914500-13.
- ❖ Line dance in the park, easy for beginners, Friday, Aug. 27, 10 a.m., Virginia Highlands Plaza, 1600 S. Hayes Street. Registration # 914100-06.

SENIOR LIVING



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Keg Good finishes the advanced orienteering competition in the NVSO.

Senior Olympics

FROM PAGE 8

ing man's sport. You have to watch where you are all the time; it's for people with a visual mind." He adds, "You can take the whole family. Get your grandchildren away from the cell phone."

Sachs says he doesn't compete to win. "I compete against myself. I am 84 and have a bad knee so I'm slower and very careful. But it's an activity you can do for life."

Good says across senior Olympics events there are professionals in some jurisdictions that compete at the state and national level and others who are just entering for fun. NVSO is more recreational. She says she sometimes carries around NVSO flyers to give people information about the games because some people think they aren't good enough to compete. But she says the concept for NVSO is to get out and stay active and do something you love.

Good is also director of the 3K event this year. "It used to be a three-mile walk around a track and took a long time. People walked around and around and lost track of the laps. We got behind the schedule for the other events because of the massive amount of people."

And the competitors would stroll or run. "They didn't know how to power walk." She is hoping that moving the venue to Falls Church High School track and judging by power walk standards will make things smoother.

THE NVSO will be hosting its 39th competition from Sept. 19-30 at venues around the area. To be eligible participants must be 50 years old by Dec. 31, 2021 and live in the counties of Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, Prince William, Fauquier and the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax and Falls Church. To register by Sept. 5: nvso.fusesport.com.

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SCAN ME

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News

Area Campgrounds

FROM PAGE 8

camp host, and in FCPA, there is a three-month contract, and the host "provides services for the benefit of the campground," said Brad Jackson, the assistant park manager at Pohick.

It's a year-round effort with each camp host putting in a 16-20 hour week cleaning cabins, bathrooms, campsites and even manning the check-in counter in the office but then the site fee is waived, Jackson said. In Nomadland, the camp host job was one way they got by, and the other was working for Amazon.

At Lake Fairfax, Campground Hosts serve as a "live-in" host for a four week period, the park website said.

On occasion some campers may become a little loud after quiet hours. Generally the campground host resolves these behavioral situations, park officials said. Fairfax County Police support the campground operation with routine patrols through the Fairfax County parks.

Amazon Continues

FROM PAGE 2

es as students prepare to return to school in-person."

To begin the yearlong \$1 million investment for the 2021-22 school year, Amazon will donate new backpacks filled with thousands of essential school supplies to qualifying elementary and middle schools in Northern Virginia.

"These backpacks will help many students, some returning to school in-person for the first time since the pandemic began, start the year with supplies to help set them up for success," said Patrick Brennan, executive director of Communities In Schools NOVA.

Amazon employees will fill and deliver the backpacks to elementary and middle schools across the three districts before the school year begins.

"We know a strong foundation in education is essential to a child's success and are proud to partner with Communities In Schools NOVA," said Brian Huseman, Amazon's Vice President of Public Policy. "However, Amazon's contributions are just a small piece of the puzzle. ... In addition to partnering with organizations like Communities in Schools NOVA, we are also actively supporting policies at the federal and state level to address education as a top priority when it comes to the success of students and their families."

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PHOTO BY SHIRLEY RUHE

Things That Go Crash in the Night

A loud crash shook north Arlington on Sunday at about 9:30 p.m. Porch lights clicked on, and neighbors appeared at their doors with flashlights in hand, checking for damage. A large limb from a hundred-year-old hollowed out tree had crashed through the roof of a home, just barely missing the greenhouse in the backyard. No wind, no rain. The time had just come.



CONNECTION FILE PHOTO

A grant from the state will provide three EV school buses in Arlington.

Electric School Buses To Come to Arlington

Arlington Public Schools (APS), working collaboratively with the County's Department of Environmental Services (DES), will receive a \$795,000 grant from the state, to be spent on three fully electric buses (EV buses) that will replace three with diesel engines.

Funding for the grant comes from the Volkswagen (VW) Environmental Mitigation Trust, intended to provide the state with about \$93 million to mitigate the excess nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions caused by VW's use of illegal emissions testing defeat devices in certain VW diesel vehicles.

The EV vehicles, each with a capacity of some 65 passengers, will be equitably assigned to routes throughout Arlington.

Currently there are no EV buses in the APS fleet of 200. The vehicles slated for replacement each travel some 8,000 miles a year.

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The DES Equipment Bureau acquires and maintains all vehicles operated by the County government and APS.

The grant announcement was made Thursday by Governor Ralph Northam as part of a push to electrify government fleets across the Commonwealth. Two members of the APS transportation team Gladis Cruz-Zyoud and Glorismel "Mel" Chavez were in attendance in Richmond for the announcement.

Thursday's awards involve 19 school districts and a total of 83 diesel buses to be replaced by electric or propane types.

The County is currently assessing various EV school bus manufacturers and models for performance and safety characteristics and capacity for low-emissions transportation. Arlington is recognized as a leader in environmental sustainability efforts.

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"Enough Already"



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

As my late mother would have suggested after reading four consecutive weeks of Kenny's column being on the same subject: the second degree burns on my feet, I am finally moving on. Though my feet and mobility have not entirely returned to normal, I am nonetheless finished with this arc and am returning to my regular subject: cancer.

After being a cancer patient for so long now, it's easy to forget exactly what the side effects are for a particular medicine that you're presently taking versus one that you used to take. Granted, it's not rocket science, but it is confusing, especially after 12-plus years of treatment and having taken over a dozen different types of chemotherapy, targeted therapy, immunotherapy; most for lung cancer, some for thyroid cancer. Throw in that the patient (yours truly) is over age 65 and likely experienced a touch or two of "chemo brain" (a kind of memory loss brought on by chemotherapy) over the many years of treatment and before you can say alimta, avastin, tarceva and opdivo, you can't even distinguish one from the other. Considering these varying medicines kept you alive for a time, is a bit disconcerting at the least and really scary at the most. However, the bigger picture is that I'm still alive and whatever bumps and bruises I've experienced along the road, I'm still able to drive, if you know what I mean?

Nevertheless, it's important to stay current and aware of the likely side effects because not knowing/recalling them can lead to unnecessary and unhelpful worry: is this the cancer or some predictable side effect? Whatever makes this awareness/lack of awareness challenging is that the side effects vary from one treatment/medicine to the next and are not always consistent in their occurrence and/or intensity.

As an example, currently, I am experiencing shortness of breath. It is a side effect of lenvima, the thyroid cancer drug I'm taking daily. However, I haven't been as short of breath as I am now as I had been the previous few weeks. At least I know it's a side effect so I'm not freaking out. Still, is a side effect that was not happening, problematic, when nothing else (increased dosage) has happened? In fact, I've already had the dosage reduced twice from 24 mg to 10 mg primarily because I was too short of breath, and experienced a touch of dizziness/vertigo as well. The goal in deciding dosage, as I understand it/have been told, is to try and find the "sweet spot" where the minimal dosage results in the maximum benefit: controlled disease/no progression. And now, with my most recent cancer marker down to seven from a high of over 200 last year, the medicine certainly seems to be working. The dilemma is determining how much can the dosage be reduced before it allows the cancer to grow? My oncologist has always been concerned with quality of life so we've regularly adjusted doses depending on the results of lab work and my quarterly scans.

It seems silly to mess with success. And besides shortness of breath - to me, is a minor inconvenience considering the stakes. I just have to be aware and remind myself that a cancer diagnosis, especially one which started with a "13 month to two year" prognosis, is fraught with many challenges and inconsistencies. Sometimes, what's up is down and what's down is up. It's all very disorienting and if my life wasn't at risk, I might find this experience mildly amusing, even curious (as Data from "Star Trek: Next Generation" might say). But, on the contrary, my situation is as serious as a heart attack, which fortunately I've never suffered, thank God! I just hope if it does occur, I'll recognize the symptoms for what they are, rather than as a side effect of the medication I take for my thyroid cancer. What a mistake that would be. And I'd have no one to blame but myself. As a cancer patient, I have one key responsibility: pay attention to my body, and keep my eye on the ball.

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



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