

# Great Falls CONNECTION

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The darkness of space and its points of light, the stars, the planets, and galaxies are interests Dr. Jeffrey Kretsch of Great Falls shares with others. He is one of only three recipients of the 2021 Elly Doyle Park Service Award.

# SENIOR LIVING

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FCPD: "Thank you for your service, K9 Silas."

PHOTO BY FCPD

## FCPD K9 Silas Dies

Fairfax County Police Department posted the following announcement on its Facebook page: "We are saddened to announce the passing of K9 Silas on Saturday. K9 Silas and his brother, K9 Bolt, joined FCPD in 2013 as puppies and began serving the community after a year of training. In the fall of 2020, Silas was diagnosed with cancer. The prognosis was grim, even with radiation and chemotherapy. Silas responded

well to treatment and lived beyond the veterinarian's expectations. Silas worked through the pain and treatment, doing what he loved most - tracking critically missing persons.

On Saturday morning, Silas's journey with cancer came to an end. His handler knew he had run his last track and could do no more. We are grateful for the countless families he helped reunite and the smiles he brought to so many faces. Thank you for your service, K9 Silas."

# PUBLIC NOTICE

**In-Person Public Hearing on the McLean Community Center's FY2023 Budget**  
 (July 1, 2022-June 30, 2023)

**McLean Community Center Governing Board**  
**Wednesday, Sept. 22, 6:30 p.m.**

Residents who wish to speak at the Public Hearing are asked to call 703-790-0123, TTY: 711, to be placed on the speakers list. The draft budget proposal is available on the Center's website. Copies will be available at the Public Hearing.

Written comments may be delivered to the McLean Community Center (see address below) marked "Attention: Executive Director," or sent by email to [daniel.singh@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:daniel.singh@fairfaxcounty.gov). Written comments may be provided after the Public Hearing up through Monday, Oct. 25.

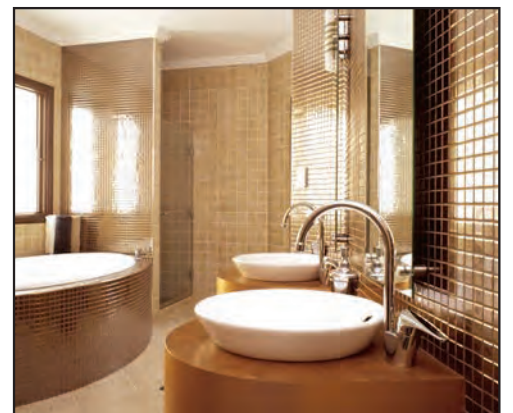


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# NEWS

## Schools Returning Strong to Uncharted Territories

**FCPS strives to stay ahead of delta enacting comprehensive prevention strategies to enable in-person learning 5-days a week.**

BY MERCIA HOBSON  
THE CONNECTION

**F**airfax County Public Schools opened the doors of its 198 school buildings for the first day of the 2021-22 school year on Monday, Aug. 23. The tenth-largest school division in the United States responded to the latest uptick in COVID-19 Community Levels of Transmission with additional layered prevention strategies to work together to keep everyone healthy. Like other public schools across the Commonwealth, FCPS was required under SB 1303 to provide five-day-a-week instruction as directed by Virginia Governor Ralph Northam.

In the weeks before school opened, new data challenged original plans, and policy responses gained greater stringency. Updated science showed delta different than other variants of the COVID-19 virus. It was more than twice as contagious as previous variants, could carry 1,000 times the viral load as those infected with the original virus, and acted differently. Delta produced the same high amount of virus in both unvaccinated and fully vaccinated people, according to the CDC in Delta Variant: What We Know About the Science.

The COVID-19 level of community transmission has continued to escalate in Fairfax County but, as of Aug. 22, remained in third highest of four levels, at “substantial.”

RECKONING how best to ensure a safe start for school on Aug. 23 and mindful of the COVID-19 Delta variant, the school division put in place layered prevention strategies at all schools with recommendations for masks, screening for illness, cleaning and disinfecting, ventilation, contact tracing, quarantining and such.

FCPS’ earlier mask “recommendation” request for everyone, regardless of vaccination status, soared to requirement status on July 26. “Universal masking is a critical factor in ensuring all students can return to our buildings, especially when social distancing is not possible and not all our students are eligible yet for vaccinations,” said Scott S. Brabrand, Superintendent in a message to the FCPS Community.

On Friday, Aug. 20, with new data emerging and delta the predominant strain in the U.S., Brabrand sent another announcement addressed to FCPS Families and the Community. In it, Brabrand said, all FCPS employees will be required to be vaccinated against COVID-19 by the end of October or submit to routine negative COVID-19 tests.

“The requirement will go into effect in October, with additional details being rolled out in the coming weeks,” Brabrand said. With part-time staff included, there are more than 37,000 employees in the school district, making FCPS the third-largest employer in the state.

Fairfax County School Board Member Karl Frisch (Providence) applauded the decision. In a statement, Frisch said, “This was the right decision.” He added that to keep students safe and schools running smoothly, it was “critical that everyone in our community who is eligible gets vaccinated.” “Not only our educators and school employees. That is how we will



PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

**Hundreds of Herndon Middle School families attended the Thursday afternoon Open House.**

**“Universal masking is a critical factor in ensuring all students can return to our buildings, especially when social distancing is not possible and not all our students are eligible yet for vaccinations.”**

— Scott S. Brabrand, Superintendent, FCPS

ultimately put this pandemic behind us,” Fritsch said.

“Low vaccination coverage in many communities is driving the current rapid and large surge in cases associated with the Delta variant, which also increases the chances that even more concerning variants could emerge,” stated an update by the CDC dated August 19.

In the meantime, FCPS Employee News announced that elementary schools are providing seating charts to minimize the number of potential close contacts when masks are removed.

THE NEW PREVENTION STRATEGY for elementary students is in place because, generally, these students are not yet age-eligible for the vaccine.

Protocols for Potential Temporary COVID-19 Closures are in place to ensure continuity of learning in the event health authorities require such to protect the health of students, staff, and the community. Different student support services are offered during closures and hinge on the in-person closure type from individual student(s), individual teacher, class, school, and division.

FCPS noted: “For the 2021-22 school year, FCPS will not be using county metrics or transmission rates to adjust operating status. All decisions regarding closure of schools will be made at the direction of the county and state health officials and/or an Executive Order.”

Find out more about appointments for COVID-19 vaccinations or nearby pop-up clinics through the Fairfax County Health Department’s website.

### VIEWPOINTS

## Great Falls Elementary: Celebrating Day One

PHOTOS BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

The Pittelkau children of Great Falls, Reed, 10, Nico, 9, and Tessa, 5, give a big hooray for their first day of the 2021-22 school year at Great Falls Elementary School.

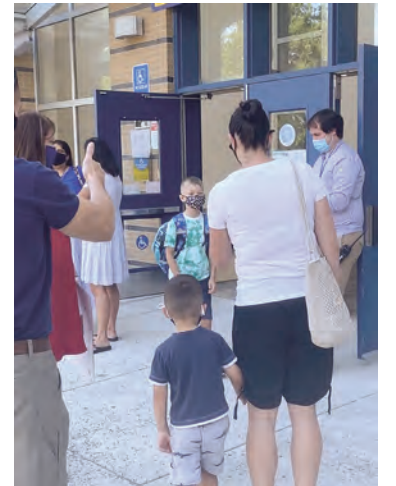
Tessa: I’m not worried about anything. I did the Bridge to Kindergarten with friends.

Nico: I’m a little hesitant because math will be in Japanese. I don’t think I will remember it.

Reed: I’m looking forward to seeing my friends and to history.



With his father Chris giving him a thumb up for encouragement, Aiden McLearn, 7, gives one last look back to his parents and brother Chris, 3, before walking in the doors of Great Falls Elementary School on the first day of the 2021-22 school year. Asked if he was worried about his son, Aiden, Scott said, “I’m more apprehensive that my wife [Katalin] will be upset.”



Demetri Walter, 9: I’m looking forward to doing math, meeting my teachers, and exploring my class. Pictured with his mother, Ava.



Zainab Ali, 9, (on the left) joins Sara Harper, Principal of Great Falls Elementary School, and his sister Aisha, 5, on their first day of school. Zainab: I’m curious what my teacher will look like and what I’ll learn about this year. I like history, the world.

Aisha: I like art.

Sara Harper, Principal: We are so excited to return all children, ‘Five Days a Week Strong.’ We have grown from 470 students at the end of last year to now we’re up to 534

students... I woke up this morning thinking we’ve waited for this for a year and a half, and we prepared for this day. It just feels like a brand new start. I think that it’s important to note, we never stopped caring about kids; we never stopped teaching and learning. But to have them in and to have them with us means so much. Time stopped a year ago, March 2019. Teachers are excited; the kids are excited. They want to get back to doing what we do best, teaching and learning.







## Childcare in Fairfax County: A Labor of Love

BY ELLISA BLAKE

*Ellisa Blake is Fairfax County School Aged Child Care head teacher and SEIU Virginia 512 union member.*



Ellisa Blake

As our Fairfax community is preparing to return to school in just a couple of weeks, we're also approaching a major opportunity to transform our county for the better. While the Board of Supervisors moves closer to passing a collective bargaining ordinance, workers are uniting in our union, SEIU Virginia 512, to ensure that the Board provides the meaningful rights necessary to strengthen workers' voices and improve resources. Like many county employees, I am pushing for the right to collectively bargain. My colleagues and I are in this fight because of our love for Fairfax families and our dedication to providing essential services.

My name is Ellisa Blake. Every day, I educate and care for the incredible children in Fairfax County. For more than two years, I've worked in the county's School Aged Child Care (SACC) program. I'm one of many county employees tasked with empowering local fam-

ilies through comprehensive support. Guiding developing humans can be messy and difficult. Still, my colleagues and I love our work and go the extra mile daily to help children play cooperatively and grow emotionally. Through original programming, we constantly seek ways to introduce our children to ideas and experiences that challenge them to solve problems, think outside the box, and create something exceptional. All this requires high levels of expertise, patience, and energy.

During the pandemic in 2020, we were among the very first to offer full-day programs in schools for working families. We took every measure to create the safest environment possible and we taught children proper disease prevention habits. We frequently adapted to new safety standards and changing circumstances. Supporting Re-

turn to School (SRS) teachers were pioneers in creating healthy and engaging classrooms in the midst of a pandemic. Because of our success, FCPS teachers were looking to the systems we had in place for guidance on how to create a safe learning environment when they returned to in-person school months later.

That's why it's troubling that so many in SACC and throughout the county workforce are overworked, overwhelmed, and struggling to get by. We face inadequate staffing levels, last-minute communication about county decisions, and insufficient wages. SACC teachers largely cannot afford to live in the communities they serve. Inexplicably, numerous SACC employees are categorized as "non-merit." This means that many essential caregivers in Fairfax County are denied health care, benefits, paid time off, and are forced into part-time work. Numerous qualified educators are forced out of the program because their position offers no reliable way for them to provide for themselves and their families.

Workers' rights and quality programs are intertwined. Data shows

that industries that unionize see significant improvement in the services they provide, and it's not hard to see why. When organizations support workers, workers are able to take care of themselves and their communities. And who deserves a higher standard of care than children -- our future community leaders? There's currently an empty seat at the decision-making table that needs to be occupied by employees working directly with the community. We must have a say in negotiating our wages, benefits, and working conditions. Our voice should be represented, especially in times of emergency. We know most intimately what is needed in our programs and for our families. Through collective bargaining, we could develop more comprehensive programs, minimize wasted resources, and support practical policy choices. We could attract the best applicants and retain our most qualified workers. SACC's unique before-and-after school program could be a nationwide example of exceptional, community-based childcare. It's time for us to elevate Fairfax County to new heights with strong collective bargaining.

## Changing Face of Virginia

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

The results of the 2020 U.S. Census remind us that the world around us changes in more ways than we might consciously detect or understand. That small sliver of the world known as Virginia has undergone many changes before and after receiving its name.

For many, the history of Virginia started with the English landing at Jamestown in 1607. Humans inhabited the land area of what is now known as Virginia for 15,000 to 20,000 years before the English arrived. Its first inhabitants probably crossed the glaciers at the now Bering Straits and made their way along the edges of the glaciers down river valleys and probably entered what is now Virginia in its southwestern area. Archaeological findings support this explanation of the settling of Virginia.

At the time English colonists arrived in the spring of 1607, Virginia was inhabited by the Powhatan Indians, who had a total population of about 13,000 to 14,000 with a rich history of culture and

traditions and a government of 30-some tribal groups. With aggressive English expansion throughout the state the number of Indians in Virginia was but a fraction of the number at its highest point and with the Racial Integrity Act of 1924 were eliminated from official statistics. Adding to the original settlers were thousands of enslaved Black persons who were brought here without their consent.

The census report released last week paints a different face for Virginia. The country passed two milestones on its way to becoming a majority-minority society in the coming decades: For the first time, the portion of white people dipped below 60 percent, slipping from 63.7 percent in 2010 to 57.8 percent in 2020. And the under-18 population is now majority people of color, at 52.7 percent.

Between the 2010 census and the new census, Virginia's population grew by 7.9 percent, slightly higher than the national growth rate of 7.4 percent. Virginia remains the 12th most populous state.



Fairfax County is now the second most racially diverse county in Virginia and is now a majority-minority population following Prince William County. While white residents remain the largest racial or ethnic group in the county, they are no longer the majority, making up 47.1 percent of the overall population with 542,001 residents — a drop of nearly 50,000 people from 2010, when the county's 590,622 white residents constituted 54.6 percent of its population. Compared to the rest of the United States, Fairfax County ranked 42nd out of 3,143 counties in the country on the racial and ethnic diversity index of

the 2020 Census.

This new face of Virginia as identified in census results will be redistricted at the federal, state and local levels. Virginia will retain eleven seats in the House of Representatives, but the boundaries of the districts will be redrawn by the General Assembly to reflect shifts in populations. Likewise, House of Delegates and State Senate seats will be drawn by a commission approved by the voters last year to reflect population shifts. That Commission has already been hard at work holding public hearings throughout the state. Local governments will redistrict themselves.

Even before official counts until today we can trace a different face for Virginia.

### Let Us Know Your View

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Botanist and ecologist Meghan M. McGinty, Ph.D. - right - and Winnie Frost, co-chair of the Great Falls Citizens Association Environmental & Parks Committee, take one last look at the designated site for the Free Native Plant Gardening Clinics.



PHOTOS BY MERCIA HOBSON/  
THE CONNECTION

## Free Native Plant Clinics Coming to Great Falls

Botanist and ecologist shares her knowledge.

BY MERCIA HOBSON  
THE CONNECTION

Local resident Meghan M. McGinty, Ph.D., Botanist and Owner of @cultivatnature is holding the series “Free Native Plant Gardening Clinics” on given Tuesday mornings for one hour each in September and October at the Great Falls Freedom Memorial. McGinty said she chose the site for the question-driven series because it overlooks the Meadow at Great Falls Library.

Planted in the bowl of a stormwater retention pond, the 10,000 square foot wildflower, and native grass garden does more for McGinty’s series than make a colorful backdrop with its continuous displays of flower-blooming and swaying grasses. The meadow offers evidence for many aspects of McGinty’s series that is open to the public.

The Meadow at Great Falls Library is a living example for the botanist and ecologist to flaunt what native plants do best. It creates more diverse habitats for wildlife, pollinators, and birds throughout the ebb and flow of all four seasons while reducing the amount of turfgrass that contributes little from an ecological perspective. Installed years ago, by the Great Falls Garden Club with the guiding support of Ron Tuttle, Fairfax County landscape architect, and Chris Mueller, an ecologist in charge of maintenance on-site, the garden meadow absorbs and acts as a filter for contaminants and slows down rainwater so less goes directly into streams.

The series of hour-long sessions are not presentations, according to McGinty. Instead, it is an opportunity for people to ask questions which will drive the conversation. “It’s really an opportunity for people to ask anything they want [about native gardening]... I’m making my brain available to be picked,” McGinty said. She added that while folks can bring plants and say, “Oh my God, what’s the matter with my sick leaves here, my whole tree is dying,” that is not my wheelhouse.” Instead, she will lead them to other resources.



The Meadow at Great Falls Library features wildflowers and native grasses.

“Tell me your slope, sun, soil, goals, and I can recommend certain plants. My other wheelhouse is, how do I get started converting my lawn into a native plant garden. I can help with that. I can do some troubleshooting as far as how to manage or cultivate certain species if they seem not to be doing what you expect...My other area of expertise is helping people get free plants from the plants they have by propagating,” said McGinty.

According to Winnie Frost, co-chair of the Great Falls Citizens Association Environmental & Parks Committee, they support the series. She recalled the Oct. 19, 2020, “Native Plants” discussion by McGinty presented by the Committee. “So many people got back to me how that one was one of their favorites,” said Frost.

The clinics are 11 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays, but not necessarily consecutive Tuesdays. The dates and location are Sept. 14 and 28 and Oct. 5, 19, and 26 at the Freedom Memorial in Great Falls, located behind the Great Falls Library at 9830 Georgetown Pike, Great Falls. While registration is not mandatory, nor is attendance at each session, McGinty requests people email her at cultivatnature@gmail.com to know how many to expect.

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Supporters of the walk-a-thon gather for a group photo.



(From left) Shyamali Roy Hauth, 1st Vice-Chair of Democratic Asian Americans of Virginia, Robert Rigby, a teacher at West Potomac High School and an advocate for the rights of LGBT+ students and teachers, and School Board Member Melanie Meren (Hunter Mill District).

# Overcoming Mental Health Stigma

## Suicide Walk-a-Thon brings awareness.

BY MERCIA HOBSON  
THE CONNECTION

The pandemic's psychological and socioeconomic fallout may be driving an accelerated trend in depressive symptoms and suicide ideation, attempts, and deaths in Fairfax County, reported experts in mental health at the "Fight Suicide" Walk-a-Thon at Lake Fairfax Park in Reston held Aug. 21. The need exists for the community to offer a hand to those who cannot ask for help or treatment.

Prolonged social distancing and self-isolation imposed by the pandemic are compounded by the daily burden of worries about family and self-employment, income falling, and Covid health and safety of loved ones. These concerns are raising the risk of mental health issues. Some individuals are at the breaking point into "darkness" and the "ultimate act," suicide, yet stigma and prejudice associated with reaching out for help stops them from doing so.

On Saturday, Aug. 21, the Family Counseling Center of Greater Washington located in Vienna hosted the "Fight Suicide" Walk-a-Thon. Partnered with the Fairfax Health Department, the event's purpose was to bring attention to mental health and the stigma that can be associated with it.

Daniel Park is the Executive Director of the Family Counseling Center of Greater Washington in Vienna. "Suicide is not a matter of personal concern. It is a matter of the community's responsibility," Park said. "This is why we must work together, especially for the Asian American community. It is not ready yet to speak about suicide because of stigma."

Cultural factors influence some Asian-Americans whether or not they seek access for behavioral or mental health concerns. Depending upon the individual's degree of acculturation, socioeconomic status, immigration status, and their given culture, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, et-



Gloria Addo-Ayensu, MD, MPH, is the Director of Health for Fairfax County.

cetera, these factors may influence whether individuals seek diagnosis and treatment or not.

Cindy Han, CEO of the Family Counseling Center of Greater Washington located in Vienna, said that the practice's primary purpose is to serve those with mental illnesses. It offers to counsel individuals experiencing life's serious challenges.

**THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC** crisis on suicidality appears related to the increase in mental health problems. Han said, "We have encountered many families who have lost their loved ones to suicide and families struggling with a family member contemplating suicide."

"A person dies by suicide every 11 minutes in the United States," said Han. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among teenagers, particularly many Korean teenagers who take their lives with suicide, according to Han.

Binbin Yang, Community Health Specialist with Fairfax County Health Department works with the Asian and Pacific Islander communities. "The American public is not aware that suicide is a national crisis," said Yang. "People seeking our mental health services have increased threefold since 2020 compared to 2019."

According to Yang, the impact of the pandemic is negatively compromising lives with



Daniel Park, Executive Director of the Family Counseling Center of Greater Washington in Vienna.

"anxiety, depression, and a sense of hopelessness." She said the purpose of the day's event was "to bring people from darkness out into the light."

Yang said, "Mental health is nothing to be ashamed of. It is no different than having any other bodily ailment that you go seek a specialist for a cure." Yang added that when people suffer, have challenges, they need to talk to others, so they do not go unnoticed.

"We want to be sure that it does not lead to the ultimate act. How devastating suicide is," Yang said.

Gloria Addo-Ayensu, MD, MPH, is the Director of Health for Fairfax County. She said that given the level of COVID transmission in the County and its isolation, people are not doing what they did previously. "When individuals have challenges with their mental health, isolation further exacerbates the problem... Silence fuels the stigma," said Addo-Ayensu.

School Board Member Melanie Meren (Hunter Mill District) said, "Mental health is just as important as physical health for our students and staff. This year we know that we must pay attention to the risk of suicide and listen to our students who are asking for help."

Robert Rigby is a teacher at West Potomac High School in Alexandria. He said that suicide touches LGBTQ+ students "very dearly." "I'm here to stand up for and represent all the students who are struggling and need someone to support them."

Shyamali Roy Hauth is the 1st Vice-Chair of Democratic Asian Americans of Virginia. According to Hauth, the Asian community needs to make sure they speak about suicide prevention. "Last week, we held a panel on mental health with the Democratic Asian Americans of Virginia...Speaking about mental illness, mental health, and suicide prevention is very important to our community."

**GRACE NOH, 17**, of Clifton, attended the walk-a-thon. According to Noh, the event was important to her because she knew people struggling with depression. "I thought this was a way to support them," she said.

Ester Lee, 17, of Centreville, said she saw a flier about the event and thought it a good way to connect. She, too, told of a friend who had been struggling with depression.

Sophia Yu, 13, of Springfield, came to the walk-a-thon with her mother. Sophia said what she learned that day was that someone in the United States dies by suicide every eleven minutes. Asked what she might do if she felt negatively overwhelmed, Sophia said, "I would talk to somebody, someone I was close to, if I felt sad or depressed."

Gabriel Yu, 11, of Springfield, said that he learned teenagers were "dying by suicide." "If I felt depressed, I would talk with my mom or dad."

Thomas Rayner's father died by suicide. While not a mental health expert but holding personal knowledge, Rayner said, "When people get into that space, they don't see any other alternatives. They don't think about the impact they have on people around them and their loved ones. It's not that they're selfish, but they just can't think of another way."

Anthem HealthKeepers Plus, one of the event sponsors, offers Medicaid and FAMIS (Family Access to Medical Insurance Security Plan, the Virginia health insurance program for children). Open enrollment runs through Aug. 31.





PHOTOS BY GARY PAN

Corn Hole Tournament Fundraiser was held at the Great Falls Village Centre.

## Corn Hole Tournament Held in Great Falls

The Rotaract Club of Great Falls conducted its first Corn Hole Tournament Fundraiser at the Great Falls Village Centre. The event raised more than \$1,000 for the benefit of Cornerstones of Reston. According to the club president, Wesley Pan, “this event was a great opportunity for the club to demonstrate ‘Service above Self’ and for the community to gather for fun and in support of those in need during these complex and difficult times.” The Rotaract Club of Great Falls is sponsored by the Rotary Club of Great Falls ([rotarygreatfallsva.org](http://rotarygreatfallsva.org)) and comprises college aged and young professional adults.

Cornerstones ([cornerstonesva.org](http://cornerstonesva.org)) strengthens our community and aid families living in crisis to rebuild their self-sufficiency, resiliency and hope.

— GARY PAN, PRESIDENT,  
ROTARY CLUB OF GREAT FALLS



The Rotaract Club of Great Falls is sponsored by the Rotary Club of Great Falls.



The event raised more than \$1,000 for the benefit of Cornerstones of Reston.

# Park Authority Honors Volunteers

Great Falls resident recipient of 2021 Elly Doyle Park Service Award.

BY MERCIA HOBSON  
THE CONNECTION

The Fairfax County Park Authority announced Aug. 18 that its Board named volunteer Dr. Jeffrey Kretsch of Great Falls one of three recipients of the 2021 Elly Doyle Park Service Awards. Kretsch was nominated for his outstanding service contributions, having logged more than 1,784 hours since 2012 as a volunteer on duty at Observatory Park at Turner Farm.

“Observatory Park at Turner Farm is an awesome community resource where local residents can participate in the science of astronomy in a very accessible way. On behalf of the entire Dranesville District, I congratulate Dr. Kretsch on receiving the Elly Doyle Park Service Award, and I thank him for his thousands of hours of work with the Analemma Society over the past decade.” said Supervisor John Foust (D-Dranesville). “Because of Dr. Kretsch and other volunteers at Observatory Park, many young people, and many not-so-young, have had the opportunity to develop a much deeper knowledge and appreciation for a vast portion of our universe,” Foust added.

According to Fairfax County Park Authority, a service contribution to the Park Authority involves giving time or expertise “for the advancement of recreational and/or educational opportunities or the protection of natural, cultural, or historic resources in Fairfax County.”

Kretsch is part of the Analemma Society, a nonprofit community organization developing Observatory Park at Turner Farm in conjunction with the Park Authority. The organization is devoted to promoting the study of Science through Astronomy.

“During the pandemic, he [Kretsch] helped the Park Authority transition to virtual programming and personally led virtual lectures and encouraged other volunteers to do the same. He also spent considerable time helping the Park Authority prepare an application to become an international Urban Dark



PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/  
THE CONNECTION

The darkness of space and its points of light, the stars, the planets, and galaxies are interests Dr. Jeffrey Kretsch of Great Falls shares with others. He is one of only three recipients of the 2021 Elly Doyle Park Service Award, winning the distinction for his service with the Analemma Society, which supports Observatory Park at Turner Farm operated by Fairfax County Park Authority.

Sky place,” according to a release by the Park Authority.

Kretsch and his team host Friday Night Public Viewing Sessions open 8-10 p.m. at Turner Farm. With the Roll-Top operational, Kretsch and other volunteers can help the public use the newly mounted telescopes. The public is invited to bring their telescopes and set them up outside the Roll-Top or use their own binoculars for observing.

The Park Authority Board is also honoring two other recipients of the 2021 Elly Doyle Park Service Awards. They are the volunteers from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints D.C. South Mission in Burke. They cleared an area at Lake Accotink Park in Springfield of invasive plant species and then planted native plants. The other awardee is Friends of Accotink Creek. The organization utilized various means to protect the watershed, educate future environmental stewards, and make positive changes in the natural world, including removing 1,500 bags of trash from the local watershed.

For more information visit the Fairfax County Park Authority website. A virtual award program is planned for November.





**Michael Trader**

“Ladies and Gentlemen! May I have your attention, please?! My name is Mike Trader and I will be your entertainment this evening so sit back and enjoy the show!” ....and what an entertainer he was! Singing, skating, dancing, giving a presentation, lecturing at church, making a sales pitch, harmonica, ukulele, his beloved banjo, and of course, his keyboard. If Mike had an audience, they were sure to be entertained.....and he was in his most natural and happiest place to be. Music and the stage (in whatever form it took.... even just a gathering of family) were his life blood. Even when his mind began to fade, his music was ever present. Words were lost but the notes remained. His fingers on the keyboard would still weave a beautiful musical tune. Turning on the

radio would still have him dancing a waltz. Of course, there were many other facets to Mike’s never boring life. Born in 1935 in Wisconsin (anyone up for some Leon’s frozen custard?) to Roy and Margaret, he grew up alongside his sister Joan and brother Barry. Living on the river, he became an expert swimmer. A skill that would later earn him a college scholarship (oh, the stories of fraternity life that he would tell!). He even went on to become an avid roller skater....both for competition and shows. Life and the Army eventually brought him to skating at the Tacoma Bowl in Tacoma, Washington....a skating rink that also happened to have been frequented by a particular brunette. Mike was absolutely smitten.... and who wouldn’t be...she was beautiful (and one heck of a skater, too)! The brunette, Jean, would later become his wife. Boy....what a love story they had! Over 60 years of marriage. They had five children....David (Midge), Gerry, John (who waited patiently in heaven to see his Dad again), Mark (Susan), and Kim (Randy). They also had five grandchildren....Theresa, Debbie, Michael (his namesake), Nicholas, and Anna. The years saw many adventures. Canoeing (ice on the gunnels make for a cold canoe race), kart racing (he won the first kart race ever run at Summit Point), hunting (gun and bow...every October up on Jack Mountain....and even out his bathroom window), and running a videography business after Mike retired from his many years in Washington, D.C. (a daily commute that Mike and Jean would make together on their motorcycle) with the Postal Service. Sadly, however, all shows must come to an end. On August 14th, 2021, with his family in the front row, Mike took his final bow and the curtain closed on a life that was lived to its fullest. Almost exactly two weeks (to the hour) prior, Jean went to be with our Lord....and theirs was not a solo act. True love is never parted forever.... and so Mike soon followed his beloved Jean. While we will miss him terribly, Mike and Jean are happily together again...this time, for eternity. As with all good actors, Mike’s timing was impeccable. His body was reunited with Jean’s on their 61st wedding anniversary....Friday, August 20th, 2021. There was a Funeral Mass that morning at St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Church, 1020 Springvale Rd., Great Falls, VA at 10 a.m. and a final curtain call at Arnon Cemetery in Great Falls immediately following. In lieu of flowers or applause (ok....maybe a few applause), Mike sure would love for a donation to be made to the Virginia Citizens Defense League, Inc. (vcld.org).

SENIOR LIVING

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY



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



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.



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

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 physical 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.

“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

“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 a 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 Fairfax: volunteerfairfax.org  
WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

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# Senior Olympics Profile Orienteering

## Which way is north again?

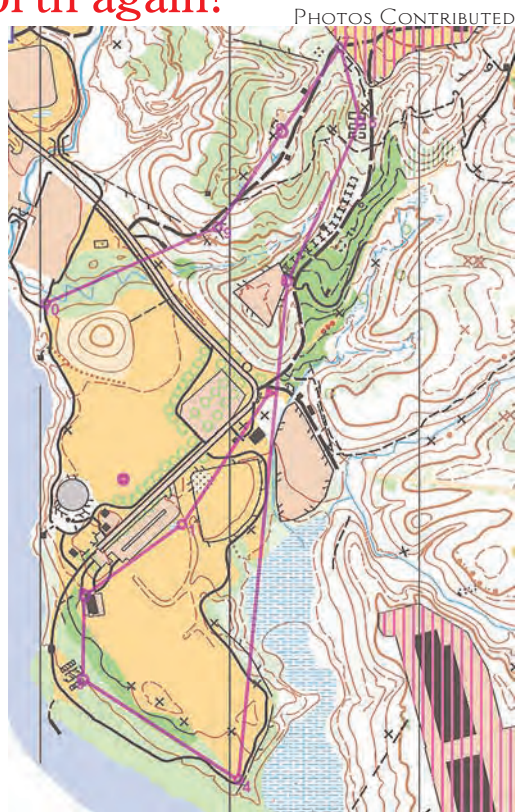
BY SHIRLEY RUHE

**G**rab 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 11:30 a.m.

**GOOD ESTIMATES** that it could take a be-



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

ginner “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.”



**Keg Good finishes the advanced orienteering competition in the NVSO.**

Sachs says, “This is a thinking 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](http://nvso.fusesport.com).

## BULLETIN BOARD

### SEPT. 14, 28

Great Falls resident and expert on native plant gardening Meghan McGinty, Ph.D., will be offering five free clinics in September and October at Freedom Memorial in Great Falls from 11 a.m. to 12 noon. Following are the dates: September 14 and 28 October 5, 19, and 26. If interested, please register at [CultivateNature@gmail.com](mailto:CultivateNature@gmail.com). The clinics will be held rain or shine, except for extreme weather. They will be casual, question-driven sessions. Meghan is a botanist with a Ph.D. in Ecology and Environmental Biology from Columbia University. In 2013, she and her husband purchased a five acre property in Great Falls where she has slowly been restoring native plants. In addition to planting native trees in a meadow to restore forest on her property, she also has removed lawn to establish a fenced native plant garden. The garden has thrived and is now home to

Submit civic/community announcements at [ConnectionNewspapers.com/Calendar](http://ConnectionNewspapers.com/Calendar). Photos and artwork welcome. Deadline is Thursday at noon, at least two weeks before the event.

butterflies and songbirds, skinks, toads, native insects, hawks and so much more.

Check out Meghan’s Instagram account @cultivatnature to follow the seasons of her garden and to pick up gardening tips and advice. EP members may remember Meghan’s Zoom presentation in October 2020.

### GIRLS ON THE RUN REGISTRATION

As students prepare to head back to school throughout Northern Virginia, many parents are looking for afterschool activities that not only encourage physical activity, but also provide a safe and structured space to build their child’s social-emotional toolbox. Children deserve to emerge from this crisis strong and hopeful, and at Girls on the Run we are prepared to nurture girls’ strength and resilience, so they can thrive in all aspects of their lives. GOTR NOVA will be returning to a 10-week curriculum and offering all in-person teams for

the Fall 2021 season. Currently, 66 sites throughout the Northern Virginia region are open for Fall 2021 registration through September 7, 2021. For more information about fall registration, visit [www.getnova.org](http://www.getnova.org).

### BUSINESS WOMEN’S GIVING CIRCLE 2021 GRANT CYCLE OPENS

The Community Foundation for Northern Virginia’s Business Women’s Giving Circle (BWGC) is opening its 2021 – 2022 grant cycle. Non-profit organizations and schools offering charitable or educational services in STEM, Leadership, Entrepreneurship, and Mentorship programs to girls and young women in Northern Virginia are eligible to apply. BWGC hopes to give out 3 to 5 grants for up to \$20,000 each. Since its launch in 2014, BWGC has awarded more than \$400,000 in grants that have impacted the lives of over 3,000 girls and young women in the region. The application period closes on Thursday,

September 23, at 5 p.m. To learn more and how to apply, visit the website: <https://www.cfnova.org/grants-and-scholarships/grants/giving-circle-grant-cycles/business-women-s-giving-circle>

### ONGOING

In-Person Worship Begins. 10:15 a.m. The Church of the Good Shepherd (United Methodist), 2351 Hunter Mill Road, Vienna. In-person worship services will resume with some restrictions. Details at: [https://faithconnector.s3.amazonaws.com/goodshepherdva/files/revise2\\_in\\_person\\_worship\\_begins\\_june\\_13.pdf](https://faithconnector.s3.amazonaws.com/goodshepherdva/files/revise2_in_person_worship_begins_june_13.pdf)

### TEXT FOR FOOD

No Kid Hungry Virginia encourages families to text FOOD or COMIDA to 877-877 to find free summer food sites organized by school districts and community organizations. Meal sites are offering a variety of distribution models to help safely connect students with meals and promote social distancing, including “Grab and Go” service and

food delivery along bus routes while passing out multiple days’ worth of meals at one-time.

### FRESHFARM MARKETS OPEN

Local FRESHFARM Markets are opened. Residents are encouraged to pre-order as much as possible, but grab-and-go and prepackaged options will be available for purchase at all of the markets listed below.

Saturday Markets  
Arlington, 8 a.m. - 12 p.m. -- N Courthouse Rd. and 14th St N, Arlington  
Oakton, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. -- 2854 Hunter Mill Rd., Oakton.  
Sunday Market  
Mosaic, 9 a.m - 2 p.m. -- 2910 District Ave., Fairfax

### COVID-19 TEXT MESSAGES IN SPANISH

As part of its efforts to provide coronavirus-related information and assistance in multiple languages, Fairfax County now provides COVID-19 text alerts in Spanish. To sign up, text FFXCOVIDESP to 888777.



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**Back to School**

If your child is entering 7th grade they must have the Meningitis, HPV, and Tdap vaccines in order to enroll. Talk to your doctor and vaccinate them now!

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**NEWS**

**Hunter Mill Road Over Colvin Run Bridge Replacement Underway**

Work is underway to replace the weight-restricted (ten tons) one-lane Hunter Mill Road (Route 674) bridge over Colvin Run to reduce congestion and improve operations and safety, according to the Virginia Department of Transportation.

The new bridge will have two lanes separated by a median/splitter island. The project also includes an improved trail crossing south of the bridge, landscaping in the median/splitter island, and abutments for a new trail bridge over Colvin Run (Fairfax County will construct the trail bridge in the future).

The existing bridge, built in 1974, averages 8,500 vehicles a day based on 2019 data.

The \$5.2 million project is financed with federal, state (including State of Good Repair funds used for bridges) and Fairfax County funding. The project is scheduled for completion in fall 2022.

During construction, Hunter Mill Road bridge traffic will be controlled by flaggers as needed. Lane closures on Hunter Mill Road are allowed according to the following weekly schedule:

- Monday through Thursday: 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
- Monday night through Thursday night: 9 p.m. to 5 a.m.
- Friday: 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- Friday night: 10 p.m. to 9 a.m.
- Saturday night: 9 p.m. to 9 a.m.
- Sunday night: 10 p.m. to 5 a.m.

Also during construction, intermittent closures of the trail that crosses Hunter Mill Road just south of the bridge may be needed.

For the most recent updates and to learn more, visit the VDOT project webpage.

Drivers, cyclists and pedestrians are reminded to use caution when traveling in active work zones. Be alert to new traffic patterns, limit distractions and follow detour route signage.

You can get real-time traffic, work zone and incident information online at [511virginia.org](http://511virginia.org), via the free mobile 511Virginia app, or by calling 511 in Virginia anywhere anytime.



# CALENDAR

## WOLF TRAP PERFORMANCES

At Wolf Trap Farm Park, McLean.  
September 3 -- Broadway in the Park  
September 14 -- Jason Isbell and the 400 Unit  
with special guest Waxahatchee  
September 22 -- Indigo Girls with special guest  
Ani DiFranco  
Visit [www.wolftrap.org](http://www.wolftrap.org) for tickets. By phone at  
877.WOLFTRAP

## NOW THRU SEPT. 5

"An Act of God." At NextStop Theatre Company  
in Herndon, 269 Sunset Park Drive, Herndon.  
The season opens with "An Act of God," a  
funny comedy in which God, along with his  
two "wingmen," answer some of the most  
pressing questions that have plagued man-  
kind since Creation. By David Javerbaum and  
directed by Tuyet Pham. Season subscriptions  
are available by calling the NextStop Box  
Office at 703-481-5930x0 or by visiting [www.nextstoptheatre.org](http://www.nextstoptheatre.org).

## WEDNESDAY/AUG. 25

Vienna Volunteer Fire Department Fundraiser.  
4-8 p.m. At Chipotle Mexican Grill, 213 Maple  
Ave. E, Vienna. The Vienna Volunteer Fire  
Department Auxiliary is having a fundraiser  
at Chipotle Mexican Grill. Show the press  
release, flyer, or smartphone release, or tell  
the cashier that you're supporting the cause  
to make sure that 33% of the proceeds will be  
donated to the Vienna Volunteer Fire Depart-  
ment Auxiliary. If you order online, use code  
HNMXWP8 before checkout in "promo" field.  
Funds raised go towards purchasing lifesaving  
equipment for the fire department.

## FRIDAY/AUG. 27

Friday Night Live. 6:30 p.m. At Herndon Town  
Green, Herndon. Popular free outdoor concert  
series returns to regular performances. This  
will be the 27th season for the concert series  
which is produced by the Herndon Chamber  
of Commerce.

### Schedule

Aug 27 -- All-Star Band;  
Sept 3 -- Shake the Room;  
Sept 10 -- keeton + 8 Track Jones;  
Sept 17 -- The Reflex;  
Sept 24 -- Screaming Mönkeys.

## AUG. 27-28

"Charmed Life." 8 p.m. At Boro Park at The Boro  
Tysons, 8350 Broad Street, Tysons. Presented  
by 1st Stage. This autobiographical solo per-  
formance tells not only Lori Brown Mirabal's  
own story, but also pays homage to famous  
entertainers including Oprah, Cab Calloway  
and Luciano Pavarotti who had a hand in her  
rise, and she salutes the Black women opera  
singers who paved the way. Visit [www.1st-stage.org](http://www.1st-stage.org).

## SATURDAY/AUG. 28

Eddie From Ohio. 7:30 to 9 p.m. At Arrowbrook  
Centre Park, 2351 Field Point Road, Herndon.  
Too energetic to be labeled just "folk," and  
not angry enough to be pegged "alternative,"  
Eddie from Ohio continues to defy description  
with a unique blend of vocals and acoustic  
instrumentation. Call 703-324-SHOW (7469)  
for any inclement weather updates.

## SATURDAY/AUG. 28

Community Yard Sale. 8 a.m. to noon. At Oak  
Marr Rec Center, 3200 Jermantown Road,  
Oakton. Do some shopping, make a little  
money and get fit all in the same place. Come  
to the Oak Marr Rec Center's Community Yard  
Sale on Saturday, Aug. 28, 2021 or Saturday,  
Sept. 25, 2021. Browse the goods for sale, set  
up a table of your own, and enjoy fitness class  
demonstrations. The cost to rent a 12-x-12  
space at the sale is \$25. Please bring your  
own tables. For more information about the  
sale, call the Rec Center at 703-281-6501.

## AUG. 28-29

"Making Opera Soup." At Boro Park at The Boro  
Tysons, 8350 Broad Street, Tysons. Presented  
by 1st Stage of Tysons. Opera singer Mirabal  
invokes the excitement and magic of opera  
in a performance for children and families.



The Indigo Girls will appear at Wolf Trap  
on Sept. 22, 2021.

Dates: August 28 at 3 p.m., August 29 at 11  
a.m. and 3 p.m. Visit [www.1ststage.org](http://www.1ststage.org).

## AUG. 28-29

VietFest. At Tysons Corner Center, Bloomingdale's  
Parking Lot. Saturday, August 28, 10 a.m. -  
10 p.m.; Sunday, August 29 11 a.m. - 8 p.m.  
Dive into Vietnamese culture, music, and  
activities for the whole family. Enjoy food,  
fun, and entertainment, including the Annual  
VietFest's Got Talent, Miss VietFest United  
States Pageant, Mr. VietFest Competition,  
and competitive eating contests. Visit [www.vietfest.com](http://www.vietfest.com).

## SUNDAY/AUG. 29

Concert on the Green. 6-8 p.m. At the Village  
Centre Green, behind the Old Brogue, Great  
Falls. Featuring Tender Polman. Sponsored  
The Old Brogue & Katie's Coffee House.

## FRIDAY/SEPT. 3

Broadway in the Park. 8 p.m. At Wolf Trap  
Farm Park. Presented by Signature Theatre  
and Wolf Trap. Celebrate the return of live  
musical theater with a joyous evening of  
Broadway's greatest hits under the stars.  
Starring Broadway's Renée Elise Goldsber-  
ry (Hamilton, The Color Purple) and Brian  
Stokes Mitchell (Ragtime, Man of La Mancha)  
and a cast of Signature favorites, enjoy tunes  
such as "Don't Rain on My Parade," "I Am  
What I Am," "The Schuyler Sisters," "You'll  
Never Walk Alone" and so much more. Visit  
<https://www.sigtheatre.org/events/202122/broadway-in-the-park/>

## RCC WELCOMES BACK PATRONS

Reston Community Center announces that  
several of its most popular Lifelong Learning  
programs will return to the schedule this fall.  
Registration and reservations are now open  
for both Reston and Non-Reston patrons to  
attend:

Bridge -- Intermediate and advanced players  
are invited to play Mondays at RCC Hunters  
Woods (10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.) and Tuesdays  
at RCC Lake Anne (10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.)  
Free, but registration is required.

Trips -- Take a day trip, and let RCC handle the  
driving, parking and other details. On the  
schedule this fall are the Museum of the Bible  
(September 16), the International Spy Museum  
(October 14) and a trip to Toby's Dinner  
Theatre to see Irving Berlin's White Christmas  
(November 17). Prices vary. Advance registra-  
tion is required.

American Mah Jongg -- Work on your game at  
RCC Hunters Woods Wednesdays (1:15 p.m. -  
3:45 p.m.) or Thursdays (9:30 a.m. - 12:00  
p.m.). Free, but registration is required.

RCC's formerly drop-in programs such as Bridge  
now require advance registration. To register,  
please ensure you have a myRCC account.  
Visit [www.restoncommunitycenter.com](http://www.restoncommunitycenter.com), or  
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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, espe-  
cially after 12-plus years of treatment and having  
taken over a dozen different types of chemother-  
apy, 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 what-  
ever 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/medi-  
cine 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. How-  
ever, 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 happen-  
ing, 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 pro-  
gression. 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 di-  
agnosis, especially one which started with a "13  
month to two year" prognosis, is fraught with  
many challenges and inconsistencies. Some-  
times, 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 Gen-  
eration" might say). But, on the contrary, my situ-  
ation is as serious as a heart attack, which fortu-  
nately 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  
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