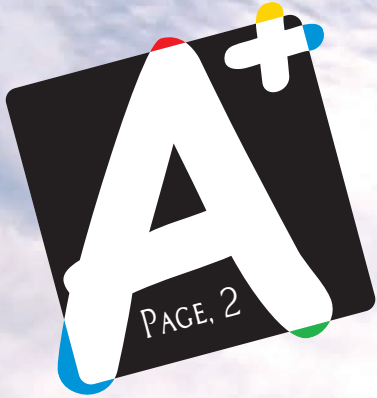


# Great Falls CONNECTION



The Roll-Top at Observatory Park on Turner Farm in Great Falls (2015).  
“The observatory has an Orientation Room used for educational programs,” according to the website.

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PHOTO BY JEFFERY KRETSCH



# Universities Measure Heat Disparities in Virginia

**Marymount professor and student join 'Heat Watch' effort to measure heat disparities in Virginia.**

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL  
THE CONNECTION

**E**nduring dangerously high temperatures, Marymount University student Bader Hakami and biology professor Susan Agolini spent a day working as community scientists. The collected data that will help locate northern Virginia's heat islands, urban areas that experience higher temperatures than suburban neighborhoods.

Volunteers from Northern Virginia, including students, faculty and representatives from EcoAction Arlington and the Virginia Department of Forestry, recorded air temperatures and humidity using handheld thermal sensors. Their work was part of the Virginia Foundation for Independent Colleges' (VFIC) Heat Watch project.

"The information that we gather can better inform policymakers and urban planners as they allocate funding for green spaces and invest in urban designs that can minimize the heat islands," said Susan Agolini, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Biology, Marymount University.

More than 20 students, faculty and volunteers from northern Virginia joined the project as part of their commitment to protecting the environment.

"I participated in 'Heat Watch' because I wanted to give back to the community," said Bader Hakami, a nursing student at Marymount. "I learned how the heat-mapping process is conducted and most importantly how the information might be put to good use for the environment."

July 2021 was the world's hot-



PHOTO COURTESY OF ECOACTION ARLINGTON

As part of the Virginia Foundation for Independent Colleges' Heat Watch project, EcoAction Arlington volunteers (from left) Marissa O'Neill and Aisha Husain joined Executive Director Elenor Hodges, holding sensor devices that measure ground level heat.

**"Information that we gather can better inform policymakers and urban planners as they allocate funding for green spaces and invest in urban designs that can minimize the heat islands."**

— Susan Agolini, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Biology,  
Marymount University

test month ever recorded, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Centers for Environmental Information. 'Heat Watch' was conducted on July 15.

Previous VFIC collections have revealed temperature differences as significant as 16 degrees between the coolest and hottest areas. Heat islands are often found in low-income communities, says Agolini.

Poor housing conditions includ-

ing lack of air conditioning and small living spaces put these communities in danger of heat-related illnesses and deaths.

"Being aware of these heat islands can also help health care providers and advocates know which areas, and therefore populations, are going to be most susceptible to heat-related health issues," she said.

Angelino estimates that the group will be able to identify heat island within the next eight weeks.

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# The Best Shot: Vax Up!

County families and educators discuss COVID-19 School Year 2021-22.

BY MERCIA HOBSON  
THE CONNECTION

The first day of the much anticipated, in-person return to school for SY2021-22 looms for many families, friends, and educators in Fairfax County's independent, public and home-based education systems. The question of whether to mask up or not is now off the table given State Health Commissioner, M. Norman Oliver, MD, MA pursuant to §§ 32.1-13 and 32.1-20 of the Code of Virginia, issued a mandate in the form of public health order. He cited that the public health emergency due to COVID-19 continued to exist and required all individuals aged two and older to wear masks when indoors at public and private K-12 schools to inhibit the spread of the virus, as recommended and described by the CDC. Exceptions were noted in the Order.

Educators can now focus on student mental health, learning loss, credit recovery, and achievement gap mitigation, but only if learning does not unhinge due to COVID-19. Virginia Department of Health stated on its website, "Vaccination is the most important public health action to end the pandemic."

The Connection opened a discussion about the vaccine and education to those who walk the front line, educators, families, and alumni, to gain their insights while balancing comments with data and science.

**RETIRED FCPS TEACHER** Ron Goad urged others to get vaccinated. He was "appalled to know" some of his friends were vaccine-hesitant or refused to get it. He hoped that COVID vaccines for students would be the crucial panacea to keep schools open as the virus bears down in a fourth wave forecasted to increase in Fairfax County by the CDC.

Goad recalled the Salk polio vaccine[1955], developed with March of Dimes funding. "I was just a little boy. My parents were very smart; they didn't question science. I remember seeing a sign on the back of a hearse that said, 'Get your shot or choose your plot...' I think we've been too cordial and polite to allow foolishness to have a voice."

Karen F. (last name withheld upon request) is a retired FCPS teacher too. Like Goad, she recalled the Polio vaccine. "I was a tiny girl when Polio vaccines were required of all. I know my parents were married happier knowing I was not going to get Polio. Our freedoms come with responsibilities as well as rights. Given the threat of this pandemic, I think our responsibility to each other is greater than our individual rights just



Returning Strong and Staying Strong-Fairfax County Public School students. Source: Return to School - Safety | Fairfax County Public Schools.

## Vaccinations in Fairfax County, Virginia How Do I Find a COVID-19 Vaccine?

### People Vaccinated

Total	662,033	590,435
% of Total Population	57.7%	51.5%
Population ≥ 12 Years of Age	659,097	588,517
% of Population ≥ 12 Years of Age	67.8%	60.5%
Population ≥ 18 Years of Age	600,077	538,771
% of Population ≥ 18 Years of Age	68.1%	61.2%
Population ≥ 65 Years of Age	111,287	100,742
% of Population ≥ 65 Years of Age	69.4%	62.8%

See more information on what these data mean.

## Percent of Virginia's fully vaccinated recipients with valid county of residence: 51.3%

States with lower percentages for valid county of residence should be interpreted with caution.

### At Least One Dose

Total	662,033	590,435
% of Total Population	57.7%	51.5%
Population ≥ 12 Years of Age	659,097	588,517
% of Population ≥ 12 Years of Age	67.8%	60.5%
Population ≥ 18 Years of Age	600,077	538,771
% of Population ≥ 18 Years of Age	68.1%	61.2%
Population ≥ 65 Years of Age	111,287	100,742
% of Population ≥ 65 Years of Age	69.4%	62.8%

### Fully Vaccinated

Total	662,033	590,435
% of Total Population	57.7%	51.5%
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% of Population ≥ 65 Years of Age	69.4%	62.8%

CDC | Data as of: August 13, 2021 6:00am ET. Posted: Friday, August 13, 2021 4:36 PM ET

CDC has capped the percent of population coverage metrics at 99.9%. These metrics could be greater than 99.9% for multiple reasons, including census denominator data not including all individuals that currently reside in the county (e.g., part time residents) or potential data reporting errors. Estimates may change as new data are made available.

Vaccination rates in Fairfax County as of Aug. 13, 2021. Source: CDC COVID Data Tracker

now."

Karen does not see the vaccine as an option. She has imagined the past two years through teachers' eyes. "As a friend of many FCPS students' parents, I have seen their struggles, too. I think I can get behind the plans for students to be vaccinated as a requirement," she said.

FCPS alumnus K. H. (name withheld upon request) is an uncle to students preschool to high school-aged, across the learning spectrum from homeschool, to private school to public school. K.H. said that he trusted the effectiveness of vaccines, that they would protect him and others against COVID-19 breakthrough as he works in Fairfax County. However, he held concern for his nieces, nephews, and all those students under 12 years of age. "I am concerned about the potential for outbreaks among children too young to get it [the vaccine], and if schools will be able to effectively control the spread while still giving children a worthwhile edu-

cation," he said.

As the Delta and Lambda variants infect quicker and burn through the lungs faster, questions arise about the vaccine effectiveness. A preprint study found that the Pfizer vaccine during the Minnesota Delta variant prevalence in July 2021 showed a "more pronounced reduction in effectiveness" at 42 percent effective in the Mayo Clinic Health System. However, further evaluation in dosing and vaccine composition was warranted, the study said.

One person who responded sees COVID in a brutal light. She is a COVID-19 ground zero case, infected in March 2020. Taralyn Tharp Kohler of Reston, parent of a high school and college student, is "still experiencing long hauler symptoms including no taste and smell for over a year and a half."

"I do not wish on anyone what I've experienced. I want to trust that the vaccines will provide protection against Covid-19 and variants. My family has been vaccinated,

and we are committed to continuing to do our part to stay safe and help others around us in this pandemic," Kohler said.

**QUESTIONS** have been raised about actions by wealthier countries, like the U.S. stockpiling vaccines and wondering if they are doing enough globally to vaccinate individuals in poorer countries. Mamta Murthi, World Bank's Vice President for Human Development, said Aug. 3 from her Washington D.C. home in a podcast,

"The situation that we see right now is absolutely unacceptable because a large part of the world remains unvaccinated, and this is a danger for all of us... We could be in a situation where the pandemic is prolonged... We also run the danger of the emergence of mutations as the pandemic is prolonged and the virus circulates amongst newer populations. And this means that we are all at danger of being victim to a new mutation that actually escapes the immunity that is being provided by vaccines."

Source: Mamta Murthi (@MamtaMurthi) / Twitter.

Finally, there is the question about additional FDA-approved and emergency use drugs for those who get COVID, no matter if they were unvaccinated or the virus broke through. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved only one drug treatment for COVID-19, the antiviral drug Veklury (remdesivir) for adults and certain pediatric patients with COVID-19 who are sick enough to need hospitalization. The FDA also issued Emergency Use Authorizations for several monoclonal antibody treatments for COVID-19 to treat mild or moderate COVID-19 in adults and pediatric patients, among them REGEN-COV for adults and pediatric patients, according to FDA U.S. Food & Drug Administration.

Abdul Rashid Abdullah of Herndon said that parents should be vaccinated in addition to their children if they wished to send their children to school. "You have to push for the entire household to be vaccinated; otherwise, breakthrough infections can and will occur. We have to get totally ahead of this virus. We either are all out Patriots and love our country, our children, and our communities and are ready to do whatever is necessary to protect them or not," he said. As a U.S. Army Veteran, Abdullah took his oath seriously when he said he would protect against 'All enemies', both foreign and domestic. "And this virus is yet another enemy. Just like the ignorance that we're combating regarding it," he said.

No matter the type of schooling students in Fairfax County attend, public, independent, home-based, and other, at the beginning of SY2021-22 remember: "We are a community connected. Stay strong. This too will pass."





PHOTO BY JEFFERY KRETSCH

“The observatory has an Orientation Room used for educational programs. An Observation Room includes three telescopes with room for a fourth as private funding becomes available. The observatory features a retractable roof that rolls over the top of a fixed roof that covers the Orientation Room,” according to the website.



PHOTO BY MARY KIMM

A clear night sky offers those who look through the telescope a view of the stars, constellations, and planets the naked eye cannot see alone.

# Powering up Dark Skies

GFCFA and Fairfax County plan to protect against light pollution.

BY MERCIA HOBSON  
THE CONNECTION

Great Falls Citizens Association (GFCFA) has been working for several years with Zoning in Fairfax County and with the district's Fairfax County Supervisor John Foust (D- Dranesville) concerning regulations on outdoor lighting provisions.

This past Feb. 11, with GFCFA's urging, Foust amended a motion during a County Board of Supervisors Meeting to review additional zoning provisions to protect dark skies around astronomical facilities be included in the Zoning Amendment Work Program either as part of a green initiative or a stand-alone amendment. Foust added a friendly amendment to place it on the Program's Priority One List. The motion carried.

AT GFCFA's SUGGESTION, a Dark Sky Preserve Amendment to the Zoning Ordinance is being developed by the Fairfax County zoning office. The amendment includes a one-half-mile radius around the Turner Farm Observatory Park open to view the stars at 925 Walker Road in Great Falls. Documents for an Urban Night Sky Place application are also underway, according to Winnie Frost, co-chair of the Environment & Parks Committee (EP) at GFCFA. “These two initiatives, if supported, will create a dark sky reserve in our community for learning about astronomy and how our night skies are important,” Frost said.

“On July 12, members of GFCFA's Environment and Parks Committee (EP) met with county officials and the Analemma Society at Observatory Park on Turner Farm to discuss



PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

The Roll-Top at Observatory Park on Turner Farm in Great Falls. “The observatory has an Orientation Room used for educational programs,” according to the website.

protecting the dark sky around the Observatory,” according to Frost. Fairfax County Park Authority holds the deed to the property. It is preparing a nomination for the area as International Dark-Sky Association [IDA] status.

Jeffery Kretsch is an amateur astronomer with the local astronomical nonprofit the Analemma Society, based at the Observatory Park. He said that the importance of the dark skies to Observatory Park at Turner Farm was obvious, “...an improved ability to present astronomical objects like other galaxies to the public.”

However, light pollution is increasing there. Outdoor lighting can be poorly targeted. It can spill into the sky rather than on areas people want to be illuminated, or it can be overly bright. On Monday, Aug. 16, 2021, Kretsch said in an email to the Connection that the main thing he sees in the Dark Skies initiative is educating the

public about the impacts of light pollution on things like health and wildlife as well as astronomy.

“Smarter means of lighting can provide both better health and safety while protecting wildlife and improving our observing prospects,” Kretsch said. “A partnership with the International Dark Skies Association will provide greater knowledge for doing this,” he said.

“Artificial light at night has revolutionized the way people live and work outdoors, but it has come at a price,” said Frost.

“When used indiscriminately, outdoor lighting can disrupt wildlife, impact human health, waste money, and energy, contribute to climate change, and block our view of the universe.

The good news is that the artificial lighting at night is fixable with using proper lighting fixtures that face down to the ground where it's needed, versus up to the sky,” she said.



PHOTO BY JEFFERY KRETSCH

A child sees the stars, bright planets, and constellations through the lens of the telescope.

THE ANALEMMA SOCIETY was formed in 1998 dedicated to supporting the adaptive reuse of an old Nike missile building and site located on farmland in Great Falls deeded to the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) by the Department of Interior in 1999. The Society planned to reuse the structure and site for another purpose, to develop what it is today, Observatory Park at Turner Farm Park.

In 2019, Kretsch wrote “The Making of the Turner Farm Observatory,” featured in Sun & Telescope. In one of Kretsch's last lines in the story, he says, “...The site is no longer as dark as it was once, thanks to local population growth.”

Learn more about how light pollution wastes resources, how to conserve energy and use night lights efficiently at the Analemma Society website at

<https://www.facebook.com/Analemma-Society-123715211042795>

## Great Falls CONNECTION

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A floating patchwork quilt of boats cruising across Lake Anne.

## Pedaling and Paddling The Reservoir

Savoring the last unofficial days of summer on Lake Anne in Reston.

BY MERCIA HOBSON  
CONNECTION NEWSPAPERS

Water lovers made their way to docks at Lake Anne Plaza in Reston for one more summer Sunday, paddling and pedaling on the tree-lined reservoir. The Tekle family Tadd, Kalkidan, and daughter Eliana, 6, and Jonathan, 5, cruised in

the comfort of a four-person pedal boat. They merrily floated here and there, dropped their hands in the water, then explored a bit more on the quiet lake. No motors or speed demons here. They waved to passersby looking very content with enough space for four to stretch out and lounge. Asked why this, why today, Tadd called out, "For the enjoyment. And before school starts."



PHOTOS BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

The Tekle family on Lake Anne in Reston wave goodbye to summer.

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**THURSDAY/AUG. 19**  
American Red Cross Blood Drive. 9 a.m.-3 p.m. McLean Community Center is helping the American Red Cross with Diverse Blood Donations. It is urgent for donors of all ethnicities to support patients in need. Help support the community with your lifesaving blood donation. All donors will receive a \$10 Amazon Gift Card via email. For an appointment, visit [www.redcross-blood.org](http://www.redcross-blood.org) and enter sponsor word: HEARTOFGOLD, or call 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767). Eligibility Questions? Call 1-866-236-3276.

**CONSTRUCTION BEGINS ON BICYCLE PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE**  
Work is underway to build a bicycle and pedestrian bridge and shared-use path in the vicinity of Route 123 and I-495 (Capital Beltway) to improve bicycle and pedestrian safety and connectivity in the Tysons area, according to the Virginia Department of Transportation. The new bicycle and pedestrian bridge over I-495 will be built along with a 10-foot-wide shared-use path from Tysons One Place and Fashion Boulevard to Old Meadow Road and Provincial Drive via the bridge. Surveying and clearing work is scheduled to occur over the next few weeks. The \$12.3 million project is financed with federal, state and local funding. The project is scheduled for completion in summer 2022.

**FREE CYBER TRAINING**  
The Virginia Cyber Skills Academies (VCSA) is a state-sponsored training program for NOVA residents financially impacted by COVID-19 that provides free cyber training to residents ready to start or boost a career in cyber. VCSA was recently launched to help current cybersecurity professionals with upskilling and those wanting to enter the sought after cybersecurity field with reskilling. The program is only open to citizens who are stationed in or permanent residents of Northern Virginia and is only funded for this year, so applicants should apply as soon as possible. Applicants can earn certifications from the SANS Institute, a highly regarded and well-recognized cybersecurity learning platform. Visit the VCSA website at [www.vacyberskills.com](http://www.vacyberskills.com).

**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/revised2\\_in\\_person\\_worship\\_begins\\_june\\_13.pdf](https://faithconnector.s3.amazonaws.com/goodshepherdva/files/revised2_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.

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# CALENDAR

## NOW THRU AUG. 29

At Water's Edge. 12-5 p.m. At Reston Art Gallery and Studios, 11400 Washington Plaza W at Lake Anne, Reston. Sandra Dovberg's show of paintings and Cnidarian wall sculptures is a unique focus on where land meets water. Open on weekends through August 29. The show is open on weekends through August 14-15, 21-22, and 28-29. Meet the artist. She'll be in the gallery from 2 - 4 p.m. on August 21 and 29. Visit the website: [www.restonartgallery.com](http://www.restonartgallery.com).

## AUG. 18-22

Tysons Library Booksale. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. At Tysons Pimmit Regional Library, 7584 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church. Large selection of books and media for all ages and interests. Proceeds benefit the Tysons-Pimmit Regional Library and related activities. Visit the website: <https://booksalefinder.com/VA.html#X2291>

## WOLF TRAP PERFORMANCES

At Wolf Trap Farm Park, McLean.  
August 19 – Train with special guest Vertical Horizon  
August 20 – Harry Connick Jr. and his Band  
August 22 – Yacht Rock Revue

<cal1>Thursday/Aug. 19

<cal2>Bull Dog Barbecue. 4-8:30 p.m. At Westfield High School in Chantilly. To welcome Westfield High School students and their families back to school, they are hosting the annual Bull Dog Barbecue and Back to School Night. Back to School will start the event followed by live performances, sign up for clubs, learn more about activities, food trucks and food vendors and much more. Teacher and administrative staff will be available to answer your questions. This event is only for Westfield High School students and their families. Contact Luann Hoyseth at 703-488-3895.

## FRIDAY/AUG. 20

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 20 -- JunkFood;

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. 20-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 mankind 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).

## AUG. 21-29

"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. Dates: August 21 at 11 a.m. and 3 p.m., August 22 at 11 a.m. and 3 p.m., August 28 at 3 p.m., August 29 at 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. Visit [www.1ststage.org](http://www.1ststage.org).

## SATURDAY/AUG. 21

Tinner Music Festival. 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. At Cherry Hill Park, 300 Park Ave., Falls Church. Tinner Hill Music Festival will have great music, fun activities, food, and beverages. Headliners: BB King Blues Band, Bonerama and The Legendary Wailers featuring Julian "Junior" Marvin. Cost: \$35.

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Harry Connick Jr. will appear at Wolf Trap on Aug. 20, 2021.

## SUNDAY/AUG. 22

Concert on the Green. 6-8 p.m. At the Village Centre Green, behind the Old Brogue, Great Falls. Featuring Diamond Alley. Sponsored by AOG Wealth Management.

## 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 Department Auxiliary. If you order online, use code HNMXP8 before checkout in "promo" field. Funds raised go towards purchasing lifesaving equipment for the fire department.

## 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 performance 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.

## 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).

## 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.

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## Hopping and Hoping



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

As I approach my four-week anniversary of "the burning," I do so with cautious optimism that one day soon, I'll be walking upright once again and doing so without the assistance of my walker. No more leaning over at the waist to grab the walker's waist-high grab bars. No more pulling/pushing myself up as I try to gain leverage in order to balance my weight so as not to fall backwards or to the side. And finally, once standing, no more hopping on my right foot as I favor the left; the location where the podiatrist pointed to and said at our last appointment: "You can see where that is ground zero;" meaning, the worst of the burn. And four weeks later, 'ground zero' is still ultra sensitive and not bearing too much weight. The emergency room doctor had said the healing will "likely take weeks, not months." And four-plus weeks into my recovery, I would say her assessment/prediction was spot on. But I'm not there yet. I'm somewhat better than I have been, but I'm still not ready to solo. Although I did drive for the first time yesterday. It was no problem (my driving foot is my right foot so pressing on the pedals was not the least bit painful. However, if there had been a clutch involved, I wouldn't have been up to driving). Still, success, and a feeling of independence once again.

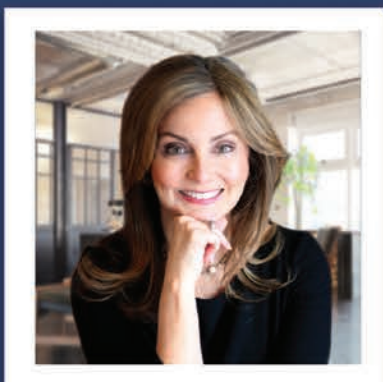
Fortunately, the clown shoes that the local emergency room provided finally are proving to be useful. The strappy, cushiony, black, open-toe sandals with the thick white soles I'm now wearing all day were designed to give the foot breathing room along with some support. However, in the early weeks following "the burning," when I placed my foot in the sandal, the insole felt rough as if it were tearing up the bottoms of my feet, exactly where the second degree burns had occurred. Since it seemed like it was hindering my recovery, I rarely wore them and instead put on thick socks (over the bandages lined with medication) and walked around on the heels of my feet while attempting to keep the balls of my feet (where the burns were) elevated and off the floor. It enabled me to mostly get around, but now, being able to wear the sandals, I'm much more ambulatory.

And so it finally feels as if the worm has turned, as they say. The sole on my right foot is exhibiting all the proper signs of new skin having formed and is a few days away, according to my nurse-wife, Dina (who has been bandaging my feet up to three times daily since "the burning") of returning to its pre-burned status. As such, I am nearly able to put all my weight on my right foot as necessary as I continue to favor the "ground-zero" left foot. However, if I ever inadvertently place my full weight on my left foot, I am transported emotionally back to July 17 when I first stepped on that hot pavement. I don't exactly see stars, but I certainly feel pain until I lift up that left foot and start to hop on my right. Oh, what a relief that is, as I attempt to retrieve my bearings and find some place to sit, immediately.

That being said, I am most definitely on the mend. Getting on my feet, still with the aid of my walker, doesn't conjure the same fear and loathing and pain as it once did. Urges to visit the bathroom are no longer delayed as much as possible. Nor are they fraught with anxiety and exasperation concerning the effort required to make the short walk to water the closet, especially in the middle of the night when the house is dark. But today, I can just about see the future (and a return to normal/independence) which may include a visit to close friends who live in Ocean City, Maryland, a k a the beach. And when I do, I'll certainly be upright and walking normally, but I won't ever be barefoot, inside or out. I can't take any chances. As slow as my recovery has been, I don't suppose its pace has anything to do with my underlying medical condition: thyroid cancer. Nevertheless, I don't see any benefit to stressing my immune system anymore than is absolutely necessary. It already has more than enough to do attempting to keep the cancer in check.

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





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