

Mount Vernon Gazette

MOUNT VERNON'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER • A CONNECTION NEWSPAPER

AUGUST 12, 2021



One-year-old Kai McCone Cortina behind the wheel in the police SUV.



On National Night Out in Mount Vernon, children flock to the badge stickers that are handed out.



The family dog had to see what was going on.

National Night Out: Camaraderie Fills the Streets

Dogs, barbecue and desserts highlight the annual event.

BY MIKE SALMON
THE CONNECTION

At 1 a.m. the night before, Mount Vernon resident Todd Cary threw three pork shoulders on his kama-do grill that “looks like a big green egg,” Cary said. The grill that has made him famous on his block where they gathered for National Night Out, and this year he had a secret ingredient too. “Something I read on-line said to add Dr. Pepper,” he said, and it seemed to do the trick as the whole block came out for this annual gathering, joined by Fairfax County Police officers from the Mount Vernon District.

“He’s been waiting a year for this,” said Todd’s wife Nancy Suska.

The barbecue feast at the Surrey at the Potomac neighborhood was one of several gatherings around the Mount Vernon area for this annual event that brings the police officers into the neighborhoods to share some good will on all sides. Police bring the patrol truck, police badge stickers and even let the children turn on the flashing lights.

Last year, this event was cancelled because of the pandemic. With the nice weather on Tuesday, it was outdoors and some folks wore masks.

“Last year, we really missed it,” said Suska.

Over in Mount Vernon Manor, Dasha Leary organized their event, and it was highlight-



Got to have the homemade dessert to cap off the meal.

ed by two big dogs running around with the children and the parents.

“This is a street we just about shut down and break out the barbecues,” her husband said.

NNO 2021

National Night Out began in 1984 when Matt Peskin, founder and executive director of National Association of Town Watch, introduced it in Philadelphia as a way to break down the boundaries between law enforcement and the community. Peskin started promoting the sense of community with a newsletter, and as he met with community leaders, the first gathering was born to replace the newsletter. The first annual National Night Out involved 2.5 million neighbors across 400 communities in 23 states.

This year, it was described this year as “America’s Night Out Against Crime,” it said on the FCPD website. It was designated as an annual neighborhood-based crime and drug prevention event and an opportunity to show neighborhood spirit and strengthen partnerships with local police.



The barbecue sandwiches at National Night Out are a hit with the squad from Mount Vernon.



The Mount Vernon officers say “cheese.”

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FCPS Priority One: Get Eligible Students Vaccinated

Expansion of school COVID-19 vaccination clinics underway.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE GAZETTE

The level of community transmission of COVID-19 in Fairfax County is increasing again. It entered the “substantial” category, the second to the highest level on Tuesday, Aug. 2, following an upward trend reported by the CDC. The same week, Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) continued vaccinating eligible students at school-based clinics under a public-private partnership.

During a media event on Wednesday, Aug. 3, while visiting one of the clinics, Superintendent Dr. Scott Brabrand announced that FCPS wants to be ready to roll to get eligible children vaccinated during the school day with parent permission. There are 83,000 students under the age of 12 entering school buildings for in-person learning on Aug. 23, according to Brabrand. Because of their ages, the students are not yet eligible for the vaccine.

Fairfax County Public Schools, in partnership with the County’s Health Department, hosted free school-based COVID-19 vaccination clinics for adolescents 12 years of age and older at three school clinic sites, Herndon Elementary on Wednesday, Aug. 4, Justice High School in Falls Church on Thursday, Aug. 5, and Liberty Middle School in Clifton on Friday, Aug. 6.

ON WEDNESDAY, Brabrand visited Herndon Elementary School to see firsthand the public health initiative underway. According to Brabrand, the division finished the last school year, getting almost 5,000 students their first COVID-19 vaccine dose. The division plans to have additional clinics up running this fall under a public-private partnership.

“[Currently], we are at 75 percent in Fairfax County Public Schools of 12 to 17-year-olds to have their first dose. Now, we want to get that number even higher, so we have school vaccination clinics this week at multiple schools, and we want to continue,” Brabrand said.

“The solution to this pandemic, to make sure all schools return in this county five days in person, is the vaccination of all of our eligible students. Right now, it’s all of our 12-years-olds and up. We are preparing and working very closely to have more school vaccination clinics this fall at, at least 40 locations,” Brabrand added.

According to Brabrand, as the eligibility age for vaccination goes lower and lower, the division will be able to vaccinate thousands more children “to have a year that is as close to normal as possible.”

“Vaccination is part of the solution,” said Brabrand.

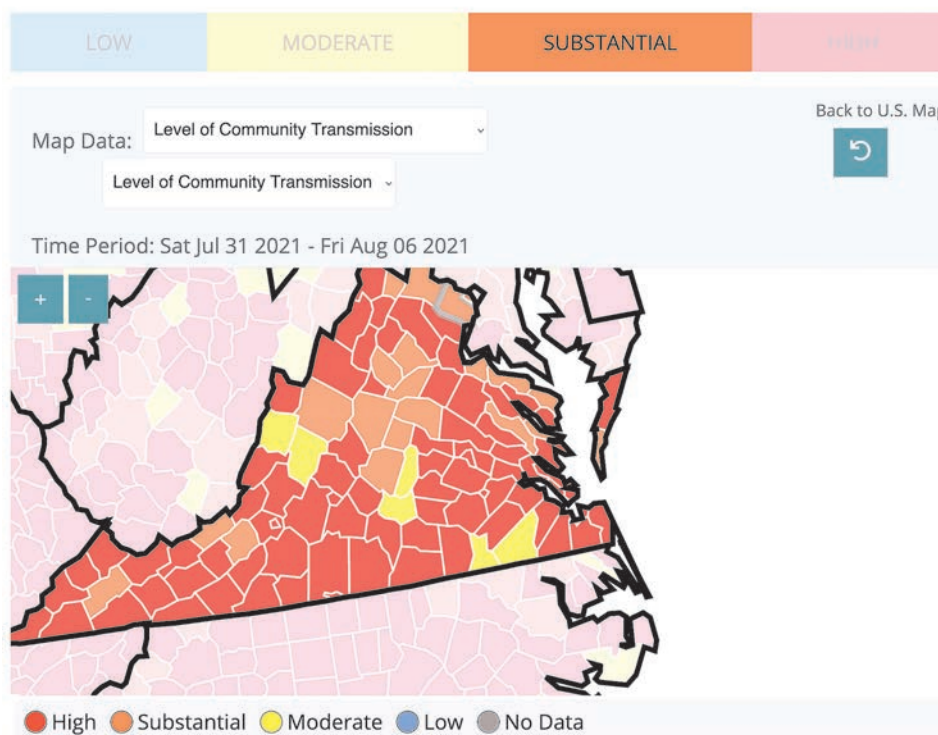
Students accompanied by their parents

(From left) Renee Gorman, Kimberlin Jimenez, 13, Scott Brabrand, Superintendent Fairfax County Public Schools, Hansel Molina, and Jeimmy Molina take a congratulatory photo after Kimberlin and Jeimmy receive their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

PHOTO BY
MERCIA HOBSON/
THE GAZETTE



Level of Community Transmission in Fairfax County, Virginia



The Level of Community Transmission in Fairfax County, Virginia escalates into ‘substantial.’

and guardians continued to enter the school to take advantage of the COVID-19 vaccine opportunity. Maycoll (last name withheld), 12, sat in the large room with others in the process of getting their vaccination. Maycoll said he would be attending Herndon Middle School in a couple of weeks. After receiving his immunization, Maycoll said, “It didn’t hurt, just a little pinch. I relaxed my arm.”

Rising freshman at Herndon High School, Kimberley Jimenez, 13, of Herndon, was about to exit the school clinic after receiving her vaccine. “I feel safe now because I got the vaccine [but], I will leave my mask on because others may not be vaccinated, and this is my first dose.”

According to Brabrand, like many other

schools in Northern Virginia, Fairfax County Public Schools is starting the school year 2021-22 with universal masking to counteract the Delta variant and reassure staff, students, parents, and the community that the division is committed to safe learning in school buildings.

BRABRAND said FCPS wanted to be very clear about social distancing. “Ninety-nine point five percent of our students are returning in person. Social distancing is not going to be possible in all of our schools and classrooms, and we’re not going to build a false expectation to our community.” He said where schools and classrooms could have additional capacity and additional distancing; social distancing would be possible.



MERCIA HOBSON/THE GAZETTE

Maycoll (last name withheld), 12, a Fairfax County student receives his COVID-19 vaccine at a school vaccination site.

Instead, schools are focused on layered mitigation strategies in line with the CDC—universal masking, upgrades to ventilation systems, and continued sanitation and hygiene efforts practiced well.

In addition, there would be professional monitoring sourced outside of FCPS. “We’ll continue to have safety teams coming in, an outside company similar to the one that Loudoun County used, to continue to make sure that our staff is following all the safety procedures to keep schools safe,” said Brabrand.

He added that contact tracing would continue to be done because “the more contact tracing support we have, the quicker we can turn around having kids who may be paused at home, so they can get back in the classroom.”

Brabrand said to make immunization of their children easy for parents and guardians who give their permission; it will be provided within the confines of the school day, even for the youngest children. “So, we’re super excited about that. We really want to model for the rest of the country, vaccinate. We need to move away from the battles. Everybody needs to have kids back in school. Once they’re back in school, we’ve got to make it seamless and easy to get everyone vaccinated, including our students and including our youngest students in elementary school.”

According to Brabrand, FCPS is working on a protocol where parents can give permission and not physically be present with their children when the vaccine is given in school. However, FCPS knows some parents will want to be there, and they are working out the details.

Jeimmy Molina, 13, on her way to Herndon Middle School, received her vaccination. In an interview, Jeimmy answered what she would tell those with vaccine hesitancy. “To my friends and family, I’d say that I did it, and I encourage you to do it too.”

Historic Federal Infrastructure Bill

Many benefits coming to Virginia.

BY DELEGATE PAUL KRIZEK

Exciting news came from our nation's capital this week as the bipartisan \$1 trillion Infrastructure Bill, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021, is poised for final passage in Congress. This once-in-a-generation piece of legislation will invest \$550 billion in new infrastructure spending across the nation and will create tens of thousands of jobs here in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Senators Warner and Kaine, who worked tirelessly on this legislation, as well as the White House, released exciting data on how this legislation will deliver for Virginia.

This legislative package appropriates \$110 billion for roads and bridges, \$66 billion for rail, and \$39 billion for public transit spread across the country. Of this funding, Virginia can expect to receive over the next five years \$7 billion for highway programs and \$537 million for bridge repairs and replacement, which could be used to fund long-awaited and much-needed projects across the Commonwealth. Here in Northern Virginia, the funding could be used towards projects like the Route 1 widening in Fairfax and Prince William counties which will soon be underway, and the possible extension of the future Fairfax County bus rapid transit line (BRT) into Prince William, which the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) is currently studying. Other Northern Virginia projects that could potentially



receive funding include the replacement of the American Legion Bridge and the I-495 Express extension from the bridge to the Dulles Toll Road, as well as the replacement of Long Bridge that will allow for future expansion of the Virginia Railway Express (VRE) and Amtrak rail service.

Here in Virginia, as I'm sure you know first hand, 577 bridges and over 2,124 miles of highway are rated in poor condition.

Since 2011, commute times have increased by 7.7 percent in Virginia and on average, each driver pays \$517 per year in costs from driving on roads in need of repair. Over the next five years, under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Virginia would expect to receive \$7 billion for federal-aid highway apportioned programs and \$537 million for bridge replacement and repairs. Virginia also has the opportunity to compete for the \$12.5 billion Bridge Investment Program for economically significant bridges and nearly \$16 billion of national funding in the bill dedicated for major projects that will deliver substantial economic benefits to communities.

On average, Virginians who take public transportation spend an extra 72.2 percent of their time commuting, and non-White households are 1.6 times more likely to commute using public transportation. Ten percent of trains and other transit vehicles in Virginia are past their useful life.

Based on formula funding alone, Virginia would expect to receive \$1.2 billion over five

years to improve public transportation options across the Commonwealth.

Perhaps most importantly for us in Northern Virginia, the legislation commits \$150 million annually over the next eight years for Metro's capital improvements, a renewal of the funding agreement between the federal government, Virginia, the District of Columbia, and Maryland.

The bill will also invest \$7.5 billion across the country to build a network of electric vehicle chargers to facilitate long-distance travel and provide convenient charging options and address the climate crisis. Virginia would receive \$106 million over the next five years to support the expansion of an EV charging network in the state. Virginia will also have the opportunity to apply for a portion of the \$2.5 billion in grant funding dedicated to EV charging in the bill.

In addition to our recent landmark investments in broadband expansion here at home, under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Virginia will receive a minimum allocation of \$100 million to help provide broadband coverage across the state, including providing access to the at least 233,000 Virginians who currently lack it. And, under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, 1,908,000 or 23 percent of Virginians will be eligible for the Affordability Connectivity Benefit, which will help low-income families afford internet access.

A big thanks is due to our two Senators, Mark Warner and Tim Kaine, and to President Biden, for their hard work to pass this historic legislation that will make life far better for Virginians and create a generation of good union jobs, economic growth, and improved healthy sustainable transportation options for all of us.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Gum Springs Has Adequate Affordable Housing

Gum Springs welcomes the underprivileged; particularly since it had once been identified by Fairfax County as a poverty-stricken area for years. Gum Springs removed that stigma and improved living conditions and housing stock by filing suit against Fairfax County to obtain basic services such as paved roads and sewer services and implementing a Neighborhood Improvement Program and Conservation Plan along with a Redevelopment Plan. Gum Springs is what you see today — a vibrant diverse community that is home to residents, who are highly educated, many with advanced degrees.

Fairfax County has embarked on a journey to portray Gum Springs as a low-income community to become the largest landlord in Gum Springs through an option to purchase property at 7835 Richmond Highway.

Gum Springs is not opposed to senior housing or a homeless shelter.

Gum Springs is opposed to Fair-

fax County constantly targeting Gum Springs for such housing. Gum Springs has an adequate mixture of affordable housing than any other community in the Mount Vernon District.

Three such housing complexes for the underprivileged in Gum Springs are:

- ❖ 108-public housing units (Westford) owned by Fairfax County making it the largest public housing complex in Fairfax County;

- ❖ 60-affordable senior housing units (Gum Springs Glen) owned by Fairfax County; and

- ❖ 209-affordable units for low-income families (Spring Garden Apartments), privately owned.

- ❖ Seven other Fairfax County owned public or subsidized housing properties are within walking distance of Gum Springs: 1) Murraygate, 2) Audubon, 3) Creekside, 4) Stony Brook; 5) Woodley Hills Estate Mobile Home Park; 6) Carydale Village; and 7) Mount Vernon House, a 130-unit complex for af-

fordable senior housing.

Fairfax County should not own any additional property in Gum Springs. It needs to better manage the properties it currently owns

and convert Westford into its Move to Work program.

Queenie Cox
Gum Springs

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A Connection Newspaper



State Legislature Decides on Funds, Addresses Needs

BY SEN. SCOTT SUROVELL



On Aug. 10, the General Assembly completed work in a special session to appropriate federal pandemic funds and elect judges.

In March, President Joe Biden signed the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). ARPA brought \$4.3 billion in unexpected funds to Virginia but required it to be invested in specific areas such as water, sewer and broadband infrastructure to respond to the COVID-19 emergency, address pandemic impacts and provide government services suffering from revenue reductions because of the pandemic. Unlike other counties, Fairfax County received \$222 million in direct ARPA funding with similar requirements.

Here is how we voted to invest most of these funds:

- ❖ \$700 million to build "last-mile" broadband and close Virginia's digital divide over the next three years;
- ❖ \$862 million for Virginia's Unemployment Trust Fund which was depleted. Without our action, it would have been forced to assess major unemployment insurance premium increases on small businesses;
- ❖ \$73.6 million to upgrade the Virginia Employment Commission's systems to improve responses to unemployment claims;
- ❖ \$250 million for school heating, ventilation and air conditioning upgrades if localities match those

funds; localities that are traditionally charged with funding 100% of school construction costs in Virginia.

\$411 million for wastewater treatment infrastructure, including \$125 million for the Alexandria, Richmond and Lynchburg combined sewers which currently dump billions of gallons of untreated sewage into the Potomac and James rivers.

❖ \$25 million for the Virginia state park maintenance backlog. I had hoped to address a statewide \$275 million backlog so we can complete work at Stafford County's Widewater State Park. I will continue to press for this in the Governor's next budget.

❖ \$111 million in financial aid for low-income Virginia college students;

❖ An historic \$250 million investment in our stressed mental health system;

❖ \$120 million for consumer utility assistance;

❖ New funds for supportive housing, substance abuse treatment and community crisis systems;

❖ \$5,000 bonuses for all Virginia State Police (VSP) and state Capitol Police officers and \$3,000 bonuses for deputy sheriffs and correctional officers around the state. We also funded bonuses to alleviate salary compression in the VSP and \$5,000 recruitment bonuses with \$2,000 recruitment relocation grants.

SEE COMMENTARY, PAGE 9

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Snakeheads Are Thriving in Area Waters

By Glenda C. Booth
Mount Vernon Gazette

They lurk in the murky, sluggish shallows, their elongated bodies and splotchy, brown skin camouflaged in the shoreline's woody detritus and dense vegetation. With gaping mouths and sharp, canine-type teeth, they snatch and devour any unsuspecting prey that happens by. They are invasive northern snakehead fish (*Channa argus*). They hit hard and fight hard, say anglers who relish the challenge. Think of a writhing snake up to 35 inches long on the end of your fishing line.

Virginia ichthyologist John Odenkirk and his Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources team are probing Potomac River tributaries -- Little Hunting Creek, Dogue Creek, Aquia Creek and Pohick Creek -- and Belmont Bay and Gunston Cove, to get snakehead population estimates, sampling research he began in 2004. His team buzzes around in a 17-foot aluminum jon boat and "electrofishes" with a metal, spider-like device that dangles off the bow and shoots pulses into the water.

The electrical current temporarily stuns all fish within six-to-eight feet, which causes the exposed fish to float around aimlessly for about 20 seconds. Then the team scoops up the snakeheads with a net, not always effortlessly.

"The snakehead is the hardest fish to shock," Odenkirk explains. They are strong and belligerent and they recover quickly.

The team attaches tags to some in hopes of eventually recapturing tagged fish to collect data on the fish's lifespan, migration, growth, spawning success and diet.

Odenkirk records his catch rate, number of fish caught per hour of electrofishing. In Little Hunting Creek, the catch rate peaked in 2012 and 2013 when he caught 11.5 a hour. It's been declining since and this year, they are catching six snakeheads an hour there. This catch rate is typical of other area waterways as well, he says. But while the catch rate may have dropped since 2013, snakeheads

are here "for the foreseeable future," he says.

Snakeheads have made it as far inland as Huntley Meadows Park. Snakeheads and other fish travel up and down the streams that connect to the Potomac River. Karen Sheffield, the park's manager, says that occasionally, people want to fish in the park, but she stresses that fishing is not allowed there. "Touching, capturing and removing species from the park is prohibited," she says.

The snakehead's super-aggressive reputation has attracted eager anglers from as far away as England, Japan and Africa, says Mount Vernon resident Steve Chaconas who runs National Bass Guide Service. "I see snakeheads quite frequently," he says, "but catching them is a different story as angling skills need to be up to the challenge. They put up a fierce fight."

SEE SNAKEHEADS, PAGE 7

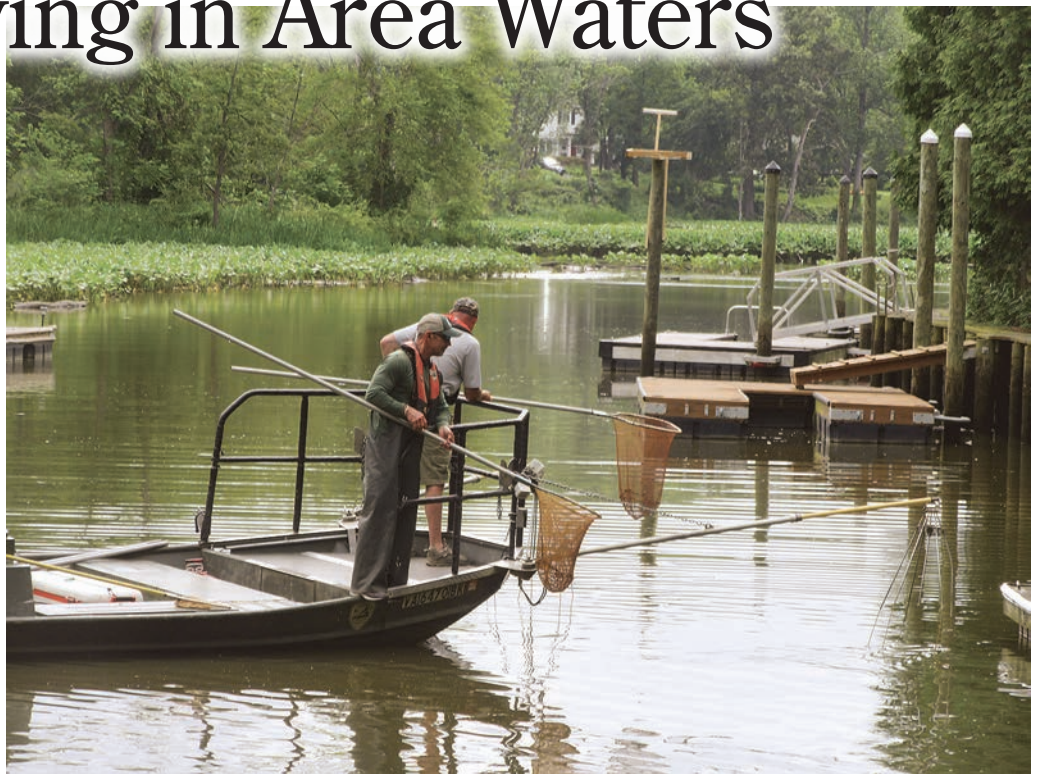


PHOTO BY GLENDA BOOTH

The team scoops up stunned snakeheads for study.

Snakeheads taste like a tender pork chop, some say.



PHOTO BY GLENDA BOOTH

Odenkirk shows the snakehead's mouth and teeth.



PHOTO BY GLENDA BOOTH

John Odenkirk and team at the Wessynton community dock.



PHOTO BY GLENDA BOOTH

The electrofishing device, a boom and anode array used on Little Hunting Creek and other waterways. The Potomac River is in the background.



PHOTO BY GLENDA BOOTH

Team members measure the caught snakeheads.



PHOTO BY GLENDA BOOTH

Tagging snakeheads



PHOTO BY JACK EYLER

A snakehead's mouth.

Snakeheads Are Thriving in Area Waters

FROM PAGE 6

How Did They Get Here?

Snakeheads are native to Asia. Ecologists generally view invasive or exotic species as problematic because many can outcompete native species, disrupt native biological communities and degrade natural ecosystems.

It's unclear how northern snakeheads got to metropolitan Washington-area waters, but experts speculate that aquarists may have released them when the fish outgrew home tanks, or someone may have intentionally introduced them for food. They have a muscular texture, don't flake and taste like a tender pork chop, some say.

The first, widely-reported snakehead surfaced in the news in 2002 when one was found in a Crofton, Md., pond. Tall tales viralized across the media, hyperbolic reports claiming that the fish could attack people, eat pets and walk on land. These exaggerated claims led to nicknames like "Frankenfish" and "Fishzilla."

Northern Snakeheads were discovered in Virginia in 2004 and can be found in the Potomac River almost anywhere, according to the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, from above Great Falls downstream to Chesapeake Bay.

Survivors

Because they can survive in both fresh and saltwater and tolerate polluted, poorly oxygenated water, they have a competitive advantage over many other fish. Females can lay 30,000 to 50,000 eggs.

Snakeheads are opportunistic, voracious eaters. Odenkirk has found 16 fish species, crayfish and frogs in their stomachs. "They'll even eat their own young," he says. "If it's hungry, it will eat it."

The current world record for a snakehead caught was a snakehead shot with a bow and arrow in 2018 in a Potomac tributary, Mattawoman Creek, in Charles County, Md. It was 35 inches long and weighed 19.9 pounds.

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Impacts

When snakeheads were first discovered in area waters, some worried that they might adversely affect the Potomac's renowned large-mouth bass fishery because snakeheads and this bass species have the same prey base at certain times of the year. But Odenkirk has not confirmed any negative impacts on large-mouth bass from his 20 years of data for the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers.

Snakeheads find banded killifish a favored prey. George Mason University data show an increase in banded killifish after the snakeheads arrived, so Odenkirk has concluded that snakeheads' impact on the fish he's studied is not significant. He is not aware of studies of snakehead impact on amphibian or invertebrate populations, such as frogs, crayfish and aquatic insects.

The Future

Snakeheads will expand their range and colonize new waters on their own and through human intervention, Odenkirk predicts. They will be all over the U.S. eventually, he says. Their population numbers seem to peak and then decline and stabilize. "That's what's happening in the Mount Vernon area because they are expanding their range," he explains.

"They are here to stay."

Snakehead Rules

If you catch a snakehead and want to possess it, kill it (by removing the head, gutting it or separating the gill arches from the body), and contact the Department of Wildlife Resources at 804-367-2925. It is illegal to own a live northern snakehead in Virginia without a permit. Visit <https://dwr.virginia.gov/fishing/snakehead/>.

For a Robert Field video, "Fishing for Invasive Northern Snakehead Field Trips Virginia," visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HdWNN3HVGQ>.

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NEWS

Itching to Know Cause of Local Phenomenon

Possible invasion of
the oak leaf itch mite.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE GAZETTE

People in Northern Virginia may reconsider where they enjoy the outdoors. A mite so tiny the naked eye cannot see it may insert her tiny stylets and secrete saliva into residents and suck their fluids. Its bite packs such a punch for some its after-effects cause sleepless nights and visits to physicians.

Reports popped up in Northern Virginia in late July and early August, neighborhood social media posts seeking cause and relief for what appeared to be an outbreak of human pruritic dermatitis, itchy rashes, and lesions from bites, possibly from the oak leaf itch mite. How to get rid of the pests? The Arlington Facebook group, "Arlington Neighbors Helping Each Other Through COVID-19," recorded nearly 300 posts on the matter by Aug. 10. The discussion appeared in other local online groups as well.

Some entomologists and scientists say that the source of mysterious bites may be the anthropeid, the oak leaf itch mite, *Pyemotes herfsi*. The eight-legged parasite could be giving humans and pets a "mite shower" as the invisible pests fall from flagging pin oak tree branches or crawl onto them, sight unseen as they garden or sit in the grass.

Other Virginia entomologists and scientists say the cause has yet to be scientifically qualified. The biter's identity is not supported in the area by a sample, the gold confirmation standard. The oak leaf itch mite, *Pyemotes herfsi*, was confirmed when a sample was submitted to the Insect Diagnostic Lab at Kansas State University in 2014, after that region experienced similar experiences, according to ksal.com.

On Monday, Aug. 9, Eric Day, Department of Entomology, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, and State University said, "This is not a mite we have received in the lab...They [the oak leaf tree mite] are often associated with insect galls. Midges [any small two-winged fly] make the gall, a protective structure for them to live in." The mites feed on midge larva inside the galls.

"This is very interesting," wrote Lori Chamberlain, Virginia Department of Forestry, in an email to the Connection the same day. "Unfortunately...there has not been a sample submitted to the Virginia Tech Insect Identification Lab this year."

Photos of the apparent bites, like the ones taken Aug. 7 on the arms of two Herndon residents, John Pilcicki, a wildlife biologist at DOD, and Heather, showed areas approximately two centimeters in diameter, with a central vesicle, pustule- or blister-like swelling.

IN A RANDOM SAMPLE of ten individuals in Herndon over two days, six reported near



PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE GAZETTE

Oak trees with branch dieback, "flagging," possibly harboring oak leaf itch mites as they feed on cicada eggs and larvae.

word-for-word complaints. The bites, similar to scores of ones posted and described online, occurred mainly on the Herndon residents' necks, shoulders, upper torsos, arms, and hands, although they were described elsewhere on the body as well.

Based on complaints, a pattern of similar descriptions emerged: extremely itchy, painful welts, and extended redness, with symptoms lasting 7 to 14 days. Some of Heather's bites were on her hand. She had been gardening and did not see or feel anything until the next day. According to the CDC, persons bitten by *Pyemotes herfsi*, the oak leaf itch mite, generally do not recall being bitten but feel an itchy discomfort (which can be intense) beginning 10 to 16 hours afterward, and lasting up to 14 days.

Kirsten Burls, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech Virginia State University, said, "I've never heard anybody suggest a way to obtain the actual insect identification. They're too small ... My advice to individuals about this phenomenon [is] to say, 'This too will pass.'"

People should just be vigilant and rule out other possibilities. She ran through other pests whose bites also cause raised red areas but noted the differences. "Ticks, there's generally a tip ... People are aware of when they are bitten by mosquitos ... Bed bugs are harder to spot but do result in finding evidence ... Chiggers are active this time of year, but it is not a big problem in a metropolitan area."

During the summer of 2007, a bite rash outbreak occurred in the western suburbs of Chicago, reported U.S. Pharmacist. They, too, were not only dealing with the mysterious bites but the return of swarms of cicadas, like Northern Virginia.

SEE INVASION, PAGE 10

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COMMENTARY

State Legislature Decides on Funds, Addresses Needs

FROM PAGE 5

- ❖ \$3 million to improve access to early voting;
- ❖ \$4 million for gun violence prevention programs;
- ❖ We also retained \$1.1 billion of ARPA funds to appropriate in 2022 contingent upon Delta variant progress.

We also passed an amendment requiring the Department of Motor Vehicles to open for in-person service within 30 days.

We also worked to reform Virginia's judicial appellate system. Prior to our action, Virginia was the only state in America that did not provide a right of appeal to litigants in either criminal or civil cases. In 2020, I carried a resolution directing the Judicial Council of Virginia to study the issue and that group recommended a change. I worked with Senate Judiciary Chairman Sen. John Edwards to draft the legislation which passed during the regular session.

The study recommended that the legislature elect six new judges to handle the case volume generated by creating a right of appeal. Because of two retirements among existing judges, we had to elect eight new members to the Court. After a six-month vetting process by nine bar associations that considered 82 applicants, our caucuses vetted candidates and elected eight new members to the Court of Appeals of Virginia.

Four new judges will come from Northern Virginia. This is a welcome development because previously our region had only one member, but we have over 32% of Virginia's population. The Court of Appeals has never had a judge from Arlington or Alexandria. There were no judges on the existing court who lived west of Richmond. We elected one judge from Charlottesville and one from Roanoke. Four new judges are African-Americans and four are women. The existing court had only one minority member and three women.

The new judges represent a diversity of legal expertise, practice areas, life experiences and perspectives and eight judges have not been elected since the Court was created in 1985. Our action was truly historic and will greatly bolster our judicial system and how it operates.

It is an honor to serve you. Please share your views with me at scott@scotturovell.org.

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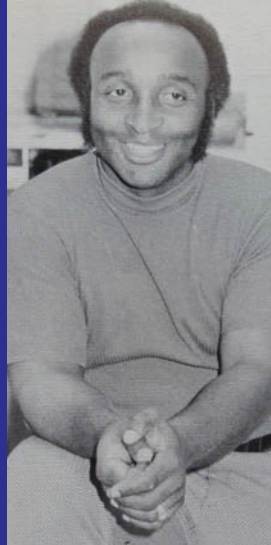
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Sole Survivor

By KENNETH B. LOURIE



It's been nearly three weeks since "the burning," and I'm here to say - while sitting down with my left foot elevated, that I am approximately 75% the man I used to be pre-July 17 around 2 pm central standard time. I can now walk, mostly on my right foot, but always with the help and security of my new best friend: the walker. I am no longer housebound or bedridden. Though I still cannot drive for fear of ripping off the brand new skin which has appeared on the balls of my feet (especially the progress on my right/driving foot), healing from the inside out; I am free however to be a passenger, and load myself onto the backseat of our SUV and extend my legs across the entire seat to minimize any discomfort. The pain is very manageable, but on occasion I have taken a few of the percocets that had been prescribed for pain. The relief was hardly immediate and the pill size was moderate so I don't see myself getting addicted (percocet is OxyContin). In fact, the size pill I was prescribed barely dulled the pain; most of which has subsided anyway. (And when I was in severe pain in Texas, the physician's assistant prescribed tylenol with codeine. It did nothing. It wasn't even worth the co-pay. Perhaps a physician's assistant, without a doctor present, couldn't prescribe a narcotic, especially one that has addictive qualities. Presumably, it was for my own protection. At that point however, I didn't need protection. I needed pain relief.)

After seeing a physician's assistant in Galveston, an Emergency Room doctor in Gaithersburg, two Podiatrists in Kensington and my Internal Medicine doctor in Silver Spring, I have been set free-ish. None of these doctors felt the need to see me again. The healing of my feet has progressed far enough that the threat of infection has passed so I am now on my own, sort of. I (my wife, Dina, actually) am to continue dressing my wounds for one to two weeks (depending on which foot) and use our own judgment about when to discontinue the treatment. It appears as if I have survived the ordeal, mostly.

And though there were times at the beginning when the pain was excruciating, and times in the middle when the pain was bearable; at the end, in a week or two, I will be forever grateful that my condition did not deteriorate due to infection, blistering or nerve damage. As it happened, "the burning" was simply the unintended consequence of the damage 11-plus years of chemotherapy has done to my body, inside and out. Because of the neuropathy in my feet (thankfully, there isn't any neuropathy in my hands or other extremities), I can never, because physically I can't, walk barefoot. And because of that pre-existing condition, the bottoms of my feet are as soft as a baby's behind. With no calluses formed on my feet to protect me, I'm kind of a standing duck out there. I found out the soft way how hard it is for me to walk across hot pavement.

And the shoeless choice I made was a choice I, like millions of others who've gone to the beach, made quite casually. I was simply doing something - walking barefoot, that came naturally and historically, as in I've done it a hundred times, especially having walked across hot sand. Not anymore. As a long-time cancer patient, generally speaking, I'm aware of many of the dos and don'ts and what trouble to avoid, but never had I considered that my lung/thyroid cancer treatment might cause a problem potentially, on the soles of my feet if I walked barefoot at the beach. I know I'm supposed to avoid the sun (I'll be the one sitting under a beach umbrella with a hat on my head, sunglasses on my face and covered head to toe, with towels and a tearshirt), but nobody ever advised me that I shouldn't go to the beach. Before "the burning," I would have thought I was an experienced enough cancer patient that I knew what situations might be harmful to my health. Apparently not. It seems as if I haven't quite learned all my lessons, yet.

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

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News

Invasion Suspected

FROM PAGE 6

According to the Illinois Natural History Survey report, Entomologist Ed Zaborski deduced a connection between the bites and the cicadas' return. Zaborski believed the bites came from the Pyemotes (itch mites) appearing to feed on the cicada eggs. In 2004, Kansas reported a significant infestation of the oak leaf itch mite and Nebraska in 2005 when the mites fed on midge larva inside galls on pin oak trees.

"Weather associated with spring cold fronts or human or animal migration patterns may have carried the Pyemotes [itch mites] to Illinois from neighboring states, such as Kansas and Nebraska," cited the report.

Dr. Raymond Cloyd, Department of Entomology Kansas State University said in Extension Entomology Oak Leaf Itch Mite that for "the first time in Kansas ... the oak leaf itch mite has been a problem in successive years (2015 and 2016), which is likely associated with the mild winters we have experienced."

Adria Bordas is the Unit Coordinator Senior Extension Agent-Horticulture Virginia Cooperative Extension Fairfax County Office. She said that although they had volunteers report bites, itching rash, "We don't have anyone who has submitted a sample because they [the suspected mites] are microscopic...No one can say for definite that this is what it is ... However, as far back as 2004, when we had the 17 year Brood X, there have been reports that these [mites] might tend to brew up a little bit more in population and nuisance."

While Northern Virginia has a large oak tree population, Bordas said the mites might not just be in oak trees. "I would say not just in oaks, though probably oaks in general."

If the culprit is verified in the region as the oak tree itch mite, it makes a sci-fi horror story. Invisible, fully mature male and female alien invaders emerge from an ovisac at the end of their mother's hugely swelling abdomen, then mate. The males die, but the fertilized females with 200 to 300 eggs are laser-focused to eat and seek out their prey. They enter their home sight unseen through minute openings. The female invaders inject their prey with a potent neurotoxin and sa-liva mixture capable of paralyzing victims 166,000 times their size. The saliva liquifies the prey's tissue, so the females can feed on their fluids, nourishing their progeny to adulthood in one week when they emerge. Dispersed via the wind, they can drop onto humans.

THE OAK LEAF ITCH MITE is a tiny red-dish-tan parasite with a shiny exoskeleton and four pairs of legs. It is invisible to the naked eye. According to Raymond A. Cloyd, an entomology professor at Kansas State, "The oak leaf itch mite has one of the high-est rates of population increase ... Millions can be produced in a very short time."



PHOTO BY ERIC ERBE/USDA AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICE, BUGWOOD.ORG

A close-up of an itch mite.

Cloyd reported the oak leaf itch mite was first detected in the Midwest in 2004. It was responsible for the 2014 and 2017 widespread itching bites. "A single female can produce between 200 and 300 eggs," according to Cloyd in Oak Leaf Itch Mite. Cloyd said that the oak leaf itch mite is thought to be exclusive to pin oak trees.

Although the oak leaf itch mite typically preys on midge eggs from the tiny two-winged flies commonly called "no-see-ums" that target pin oaks, the mites may not be as specific a feeder as previously thought. Instead of feeding solely on midge eggs in the pin oak trees, the mites might also be devouring the massive numbers of cicada eggs left behind by the region's 2021 Brood X invasion, according to John Dudzinsky, Community Forester and Society of Municipal Arborists Virginia Liaison.

The bountiful cicada eggs deposited by the female Brood X cicadas over several weeks in May and June into slits of healthy and now flagging pin oak branches, among other trees, make easy feeding for the female mites to nourish their progeny.

Because of the vast, possibly unprecedented quantities of cicada eggs in Northern Virginia, the mites' seven-day life cycle, and the number of offspring produced by each mite, the oak leaf itch mite population may be exploding this year.

"Of course, oak leaf itch mites don't fly," Dudzinsky said. "The wind will catch them. They can even fit through the mesh of screens. They're extremely tiny, 1/125 of an inch," he said.

"Whatever is happening right now seems to be the same year as the cicadas," Day said, "I think it is a case of two and two together — make five."

Prevention and Elimination

There are very few strategies to prevent oak leaf itch mite bites. Dudzinsky said to minimize exposure to oak trees, especially pin oaks. Do not sit under them. If you are picking up leaves or fallen flagging branches from the cicadas [or working near them], wear long rubber gloves, a long-sleeved shirt, hat, pants, and socks pulled up and over pant cuffs.

Bordas, who works outside in four to five-hour stretches, understands how hard it is to dress with mite-protection when temperatures soar. She recommended wearing a shirt pretreated with DEET at a 30 percent level, no higher, and wearing it over a regular shirt to avoid skin exposure. "I put that on over a lighter shirt," Bordas said. She added not to spray the skin of older adults with DEET because their skin is thinner, likewise for children.

"Be cognizant of when you come indoors, immediately take a shower... and wash clothes in hot water," Bordas said.

Controlling the mites at their source may be impossible. There is nothing to treat mites on the trees "because the mites themselves are inside the galls," according to Bordas.

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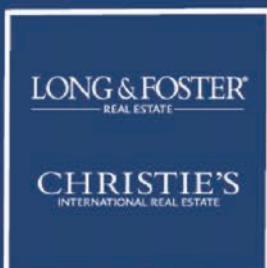
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- ★★★★★ Responsiveness
- ★★★★★ Negotiation Skills

"Chris White and his great team not only lived up to their very lofty reputation as 'the best real estate agents in the Alexandria area', they also went way beyond the usual guidance and support services we were expecting. With patience, knowledge, efficiency, and some very well-timed humor, we were led through the enormously arduous and stressful task of clearing, repairing, and selling our childhood home of 53 years after the sudden passing of our mother. Somehow, Chris was able to transform this difficult process into a rich and pleasurable journey. We almost hated to see it come to end, except for the fact that in the end, our house sold for much more than our list price and was only on the market for 3 days before receiving a record number of offers. We are so glad we put our faith in Chris from start to finish, and that we followed his excellent guidance to turn our dreaded nightmare into a total business success and unforgettably positive experience." —Elizabeth



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