

The Arlington Connection

HEATHER JACKSON/COURTESY URBANARIA

FLOURISHING AFTER 55, PAGE 7 ♦ CLASSIFIEDS, PAGE 6

100th Anniversary of Tomb of Unknown Soldier

POWERFUL, PAGE 5

Vote Nov. 2
ELECTION, PAGE 3

PokeyPotPie,
Unlikely Influencer
ARPEIS, PAGE 4

From filming of "UNKNOWN" cast on location at World War II Memorial

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Public Notice

Updated weight limits on Virginia bridges and culverts

In accord with state and federal law, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) has imposed new or changed existing weight restrictions and installed new signage indicating the updated weight restrictions on the following bridges and culverts (structures) in Virginia within the last 30 days.

Jurisdiction	Fed Struc Id	Route #	Route Name	Crossing	Posted Date
GRAYSON	8891	687	ROCKHOUSE RD.	ROCK CREEK	9/28/2021
MONTGOMERY	12293	669	PATTERSON DR./ROUTE 669	BOTTOM CREEK	9/28/2021
BOTETOURT	3136	0F054	FRONTAGE RD. F054	PURGATORY CREEK	9/23/2021
MONTGOMERY	12271	643	YELL SULPH RD./ROUTE 643	MILL BRANCH	9/23/2021
BEDFORD	2754	644	LANGFORD MILL/ROUTE 644	NORTH OTTER CREEK	9/21/2021
SCOTT	16694	622	SINKS RD.	COX BRANCH	9/21/2021
ROANOKE	15082	696	APPLE GROVE LANE/ROUTE 696	BACK CREEK	9/15/2021
ROANOKE (M)	21650	0	ROUTE 0000	LICK RUN	9/15/2021
CHARLOTTE	4890	618	TURNIP CREEK RD.	TURNIP CREEK	9/13/2021
RICHMOND (M)	21280	0	BELLEVUE AVE.	ROUTE I-95	9/2/2021

The list above is not a comprehensive list of all structures with weight restrictions in the Commonwealth, but shows only structures that have new or changed weight restrictions within the last 30 days. The list contains only basic structure identification and location information and the date the new or changed weight restriction and signage became effective.

For a full listing of all bridge and culvert weight restrictions with detailed information about specific structures, including location data and actual weight limits, visit <https://www.virginiadot.org> and navigate to Info Center/Trucking Resources. This page references a posted structures report and a GIS map tool that contain detailed information about restricted structures in Virginia. To receive email notifications regarding new or updated weight restrictions for structures statewide, complete the sign-up form on the web page.

Notices regarding bridges and culverts with new or updated weight restrictions are published monthly by VDOT. For additional information or questions, please contact, haulingpermits@vdot.virginia.gov.

The Virginia Department of Transportation is committed to ensuring that no person is excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any of its programs or activities on the basis of race, color, or national origin, as protected by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. If you need further information on VDOT's Title VI Program or special assistance for persons with disabilities or limited English proficiency, please contact the Virginia Department of Transportation's Title VI Program Specialist at 804-786-2730.

Powerful Unknown

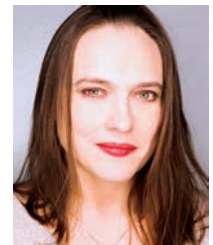
Musical tribute commemorating 100th Anniversary of founding of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, with UrbanArias and Wolf Trap.

By DAVID SIEGEL
THE CONNECTION

Over 116,000 American troops perished during World War I. Many unknown. One unknown has a final resting place at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. November 11, 2021 is the centenary of the Tomb. As part of events surrounding the centenary of the Tomb there will be the streaming film "UNKNOWN." It is a commission by Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts, Northern Virginia's UrbanArias, and opera companies throughout America.



Shawn E. Okpeh, composer, "UNKNOWN"



Kristine McIntyre, director "UNKNOWN"

"UNKNOWN" is not just an Arlington story, or even a story for the Washington region. It is a national story, one that connects with every American who has served or known someone who has served in our armed forces," said Anne-Carolyn Bird, Executive Director, UrbanArias. The "UNKNOWN" will explore the ideas of war, honor, and memory through the eyes of soldiers, family members, and Tomb Guards. It will feature footage captured at The Barns of Wolf Trap, and dramatic footage filmed at locations in Northern Virginia.

SEE POWERFUL, PAGE 5

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Virginia at a Crossroads

BY MICHAEL LEE POPE
THE CONNECTION

Voters to determine
direction of state
government.

Two years ago, Democrats seized control of the General Assembly for the first time in a generation. Now Republicans are hoping this is their moment to “Take Back Virginia,” the name of a recent rally in support of the GOP statewide ticket that featured a call-in appearance from former President Donald Trump, who used the opportunity to repeat baseless claims about widespread election fraud.

Ultimately, the decision about all 100 seats in the House of Delegates and all three statewide offices will be in the hands of voters on Tuesday, Nov. 2, and it’s a decision that is likely to be driven by turnout.

Republicans do well in Virginia when turnout is low. The last time Republicans won statewide election back in 2009, turnout was only 40 percent. Democrats, on the other hand, tend to do well when turnout is high. When Democrat Ralph Northam beat Republican Ed Gillespie four years ago, voters set records for participation in an odd-year election that had 48 percent turnout. Former Gov. Terry McAuliffe beat Republican Ken Cuccinelli with 43 percent of the vote, although his margin of victory was significantly smaller.

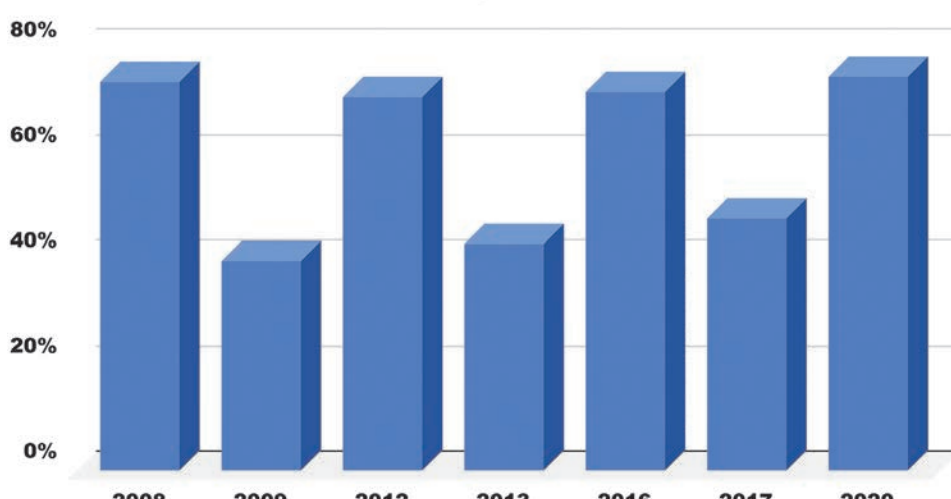
McAuliffe is attempting to do something very rare in Virginia politics: return to the Executive Mansion. Virginia is the only state in the country to have a four-year term limit, a constitutional prohibition on governors running for reelection. Only one former governor has ever been elected twice: Mills Godwin, who ran as an old-school Democrat in the 1960s and then as a Southern Strategy Republican in the 1970s. Back in the 19th century, William “Extra Billy” Smith also had two nonconsecutive terms, once appointed to the job before the Civil War and then a second term elected by voters during the war.

Now McAuliffe is hoping to pull off a similar trick, returning for a second term as governor in a Virginia that has seen a massive shift since he left office in 2018.

“Now you have a Democratic controlled legislature,” said Mark Rozell, dean of the Schar School of Policy and Government. “And the Democratic Party has moved to the move progressive side of the political spectrum.”

His opponent in the race is Republican

Turnout in Virginia Elections



Glenn Youngkin
Republican candidate for governor
raised: \$7.7 million

top contributors
\$6 million from the Republican Governors Association
\$250,000 from Thomas Saunders III of Saunders Karp & Co
\$225,000 from Haulover Creek Development Co of Richmond
\$210,000 from Richard Baxter Gilliam of Keswick, Va.
\$200,000 from Walter Curt of Power Monitors Inc.



Terry McAuliffe
Democratic candidate for governor
raised: \$44.5 million

top contributors
\$5.6 million from DGA Action
\$750,000 from Mid-Atlantic Laborers' Political Education Fund
\$600,000 from AFSCME
\$500,000 from Priorities USA
\$500,000 from Virginia League of Conservation Voters



Princess Blanding
Liberation Party candidate running for governor
raised: \$30,000

top contributors
\$8,000 from Realtor Chrischa Ives of Sandbridge Realty
\$1,100 from Charles Peters of Water View, Va.
\$1,050 from Anthony Castellano of Angus Dentistry
\$1,050 from Landon Shroder of Virginia Commonwealth University
\$1,000 from Matt Smith of MSE Properties in Henrico



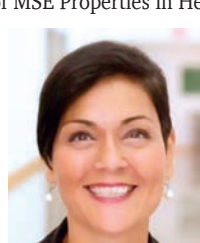
Winsome Sears
Republican candidate for lieutenant governor
raised: \$2 million

top contributors
\$125,000 from the Republican State Leadership Committee
\$32,500 from Black America's PAC
\$25,000 from Richard Baxter Gilliam of Keswick, Va.
\$25,000 from Haulover Creek Development Co of Richmond
\$25,000 from the Virginia Citizens Defense League



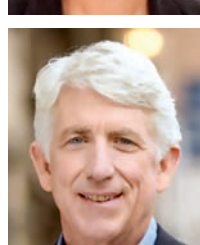
Jason Miyares
Republican candidate for attorney general
raised: \$3.3 million

top contributors
\$500,000 from the Republican Attorneys General Association
\$105,000 from Richard Baxter Gilliam of Keswick, Va.
\$100,000 from Dominion Energy
\$94,500 from Miyares for Delegate
\$55,000 from Haulover Creek Development Co of Richmond



Hala Ayala
Democratic candidate for lieutenant governor
raised: \$4 million

top contributors
\$250,000 from the Democratic Lieutenant Governors Association
\$200,000 from Everytown for Gun Safety
\$165,000 from Dominion Energy
\$160,000 from Emily's List
\$150,000 from Planned Parenthood



Mark Herring
Democratic candidate for attorney general
raised: \$6.3 million

top contributors
\$1 million from the Democratic Attorneys General Association
\$200,000 from Everytown for Gun Safety
\$110,000 from Ronald Abramson of Buchanan Ingersoll
\$100,000 from Planned Parenthood Action Fund
\$100,000 from SEIU Committee on Political Education

Glenn Youngkin, a private equity executive who is a former CEO of the Carlyle Group. On the campaign trail, he's repeatedly refused to take a position on the assault weapons ban or the ultrasound requirement. When a

reporter for the Associated Press started asking about Youngkin's policy positions in a recent interview, his campaign aides abruptly cut off the interview. So voters are heading into Election Day without much detail about

what he would do if elected.

“The problem is he’s running against a guy who is a former governor who knows the policy issues inside and out in many ways, who’s taken very clear positions on a lot of policy issues,” said Quentin Kidd, dean of the College of Social Sciences at Christopher Newport University. “The contrast is a liability for Youngkin.”

The final days of the campaign have seen McAuliffe trying to emphasize Trump, and Youngkin trying to capitalize on the culture war over schools. Trump once again endorsed Youngkin at that “Take Back Virginia” rally in Glen Allen, which featured a Pledge of Allegiance to a flag carried at the Jan. 6 insurrection. The Youngkin campaign is trying to walk a tightrope of appealing to the MAGA crowd while also not alienating suburban voters they’ll need to win. While Democrats campaigned with President Joe Biden, former President Barack Obama and Vice President Kamala Harris, the Republican ticket has taken a different approach.

“It could be that Youngkin doesn’t feel like his election is in much trouble,” said Jatia Wrighten, political science professor at Virginia Commonwealth University. “He feels pretty confident and comfortable with this backing of Trump as enough to put him over the finish line.”

While McAuliffe has been spending millions of dollars on TV ads tying Youngkin to Trump, the Youngkin campaign has been trying to ride the wave of outrage over controversies surrounding public education. Many parents are angry about what they call “critical race theory” being taught in Virginia classrooms, even though it’s a law school concept that is not taught in Virginia classrooms.

Youngkin says he’ll ban the law school theory from ever being taught in public school classrooms. He also criticized McAuliffe for vetoing a bill inspired by parents who were upset that Toni Morrison’s Pulitzer-prize-winning book “Beloved” was being taught in Fairfax County schools.

“Surveys demonstrate a pretty high level of support for performance of the school boards in the covid crisis at least,” said Stephen Farnsworth, director of the Center for Leadership and Media

Studies at the University of Mary Washington. “That suggests that this really is more about activating the base rather than reaching to moderate voters not engaged otherwise in the gubernatorial campaign.”

Instagram Influencer Saving Cats

A globally influential 'cat corner of the Internet.'

By ASHLEY SIMPSON
THE CONNECTION

Instagram – the ubiquitous social media platform – has given rise to Internet celebrities and influencers. Not every social media influencer is in it for self-promotion and profit, though. In fact, with more than 160,000 followers hailing from places all over the world, local resident Jen Boger leverages her Instagram account, @pokeypotpie, to improve life for cats on a global scale.

From the handle @pokeypotpie, Jen posts on behalf of what she has dubbed “The Playschool for Wayward Kittens,” the rotation of cats that she and her husband, Ian, foster in their home. Jen and Ian typically foster a few cats at a time, and until they are adopted, they are all regularly featured on the very popular @pokeypotpie Instagram feed along with their ever popular resident cats.

“Instagram has been amazing,” Jen said. “I started the account a really long time ago specifically to post pictures of my cat, Pokey (whose nickname is Pokey Pot Pie), so the page is named after him ... It was originally a place for me to post photos and updates about him and it has continued to be a page for me to post cat-related content. Now, it features my five resident cats, who are all foster fails. And then the other cats you see are all the cats I foster,” through Lost Dog and Cat Rescue Foundation.

Boger also works with City Kitties DC @citykittiesdc and helps with a group in Chincoteague periodically.

While fostering cats and kittens with special needs might seem like a full time job, Jen and her husband Ian have full time jobs too. Jen is an attorney and Ian is a doctor.

On the @pokeypotpie page, you will find adorable images and videos of all Jen Boger’s current cat residents and fosters, many with disabilities. Jen has been the cat intake coordinator at the Arlington-based LDCRF for six years, and the cats she likes to bring home are those who need a little extra help.

“We foster a lot of special needs cases,” Jen said. “I try to reserve space in the house for cats with medical needs; I’m a sucker for



Pokey himself.



Hagrid, a starring resident cat with @pokeypotpie.



Boop and Bop.



Poppy, Petunia and Peggy, kitten fosters with Jen Boger of @pokeypotpie. The three kittens have eye defects.

medical cases, like when a cat has had a leg removed, eyes removed. I love any blind cat ... as anyone will tell you, once you have a blind cat, you’ll always have one.”

And what Boger does for these cats by fostering and promoting them on her Instagram feed is life-changing for them, whether or not they have special needs.



She has found that “good PR” has been incredible in landing so many of these cats in fantastic forever homes.

“Cats who we foster definitely get adopted more quickly because of their presence on Instagram,” Jen said. “There’s nothing better about any of our fosters than the other cats with [Lost Dog and Cat Rescue Foundation], either. They just have better PR, so people get more insight into them. They get to see the cat come into the house and observe how he or she progresses and grows. So, if you’re going to choose between that kitten and one on another rescue website, you’re going to pick the one you know better.”

@Pokeypotpie has also become far more than an avenue for getting foster cats into forever homes.

“The account brings attention to the cats, to the rescue, and so much more,” Jen said. “I use Instagram for education and advocacy – about the importance of fostering cats, adopting them, and spay/

neuter. These messages are reaching people all over the world.”

When Jen started this Instagram account, a big following was certainly not the goal. But then, a @pokeypotpie post caught the attention of so many people that one of her cats went viral. And, then it happened again, and again, and again ...

“The focus was never on big numbers, but instead local followers, because that is where adoptions come from,” Jen, who has to date fostered 175 cats, said. “But then, what tends to happen is, when the cat community finds something particularly cute or endearing, a bigger account will pick it up, and that always brings in more followers. We’ve gotten the attention of some big rescue communities, and we have had certain cats go viral.”

It all started taking off in 2018, when Pokey himself made Internet waves after a video featuring him landed on The Dodo, a popular website that showcases particularly heart-warming and extraordinary animal stories.

Then there was the dramatic and determined Wilford, a 28-pound cat whose story was told by People.com and a host of other media outlets.

“Wilford got attention all over the world,” Jen recalled. “He’s definitely the one that went the biggest [no pun intended]. He seemed to be everywhere for a while – he was even on morning shows. We have followers in France who told us they saw him on their local news.”

Pokey and Wilford are not the only @pokeypotpie stars who became viral sensations, either. Still, the Bogers have never been, and will never be, on Instagram for fame or fortune.

Especially these days, when logging onto the Internet and plugging into social media often brings reminders of all that is wrong in the world, Jen relishes the ability to push out some positivity by way of @pokeypotpie.

“It’s a really cool corner of the internet,” Boger said. “It’s a feel-good place where you’re not looking at someone who is trying to tell you how to feel – it’s cute cats surrounded by a good message about how to make the world a better place for the cats around them. People all over seem to enjoy it. We have followers in Australia, France, the Netherlands, and so many more places that we love to connect with.”

To learn more about the Playschool of Wayward Kittens, follow Jen and her gang on Instagram, @pokeypotpie.

Powerful Unknown

FROM PAGE 2

This special online presentation commemorates the centennial of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers. The presentation is set in the Barns at Wolf Trap and locations throughout Northern Virginia. Featured performers are baritones Michael Mayes and Schyler Vargas and mezzo-soprano Taylor Raven, accompanied by members of the Inscape Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Robert Wood.

Kristine McIntyre, who directs "UNKNOWN" said the presentation "allows a deep exploration of critical questions: What of the warrior who does not return? How do we as a society honor that sacrifice and what does it mean? World War I was a turning point for the United States as a nation, and the Tomb represents a reckoning with our new destiny."

"UNKNOWN" includes songs from WWI and the Great American Songbook as well the premiere of the dramatic song cycle titled "UNKNOWN" composed by award-winning Shawn E. Okpebholo with po-

ems by Marcus Amaker. The music ranges from solemn, sacred, and soulful, to waltzes, Latin styles and into military cadence.

For composer Okpebholo, "UNKNOWN" is expansive in its presentation and outlook. "UNKNOWN is not just a White American story. 'Unknown' looks like America. It reflects musically the diversity of those who served in the war. Those who fought and died."

"I want to leave the audience moved...This is America's story," added Okpebholo. "I intentionally incorporated diverse musical styles, textures, sonorities, and colors to musically bring to life the powerful themes of services, sacrifice, waiting, home, death, and hope."

The haunting poems by Marcus Amaker aim at piercing hearts and minds with phrasings such as; "I am one of many warriors willing to fight for a country that promises freedom" and "Layers of remembrance hover over us like clouds"

And fitting for unknown dead; "If death has a sound, then I am now its echo."

Where and When:

In collaboration with Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts, Northern Virginia's UrbanArias premieres streaming performances of "UNKNOWN" from Tuesday, Nov 11, 2021 to Nov 18, 2021. Tickets: Free with registration at www.urbanarias.org.

The film will stream at the Wolf Trap web site www.wolftrap.org and UrbanArias at www.urbanarias.org. Note: UrbanArias will donate 50% of all donations made at the time of registration to the scholarship programs of "The Society of the Honor Guard of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier." For history about the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers go to www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/Explore/Tomb-of-the-Unknown-Soldier



Mezzo-soprano Taylor Raven, at UrbanArias at Barns of Wolf Trap.

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From filming of "UNKNOWN" cast on location at World War II Memorial.

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Employment

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Employment

SENIOR MANAGERS - LOGISTICS
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Employment

SENIOR MANAGERS, SALES ORGANIZATION
(Arlington, VA): Responsible for the professional and personnel development of their staff within the department. Commutes between stores, regional offices, and/or distribution centers less than 25% of the time. Overnight domestic and intl' travel less than 25% of the time. Resumes to: Lidl US, LLC, Marie Petremann, Sr Manager - Global Mobility & Immigration, 3500 South Clark Street, Arlington, VA 22202. Job #SA226547.

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THE CONNECTION NEWSPAPERS

Richard Joseph McGeehan Jr.

Richard Joseph McGeehan Jr. was born on June 15, 1937 to Richard Joseph McGeehan and Evelyn Marie Turley McGeehan in Rochester, Penn. He grew up in Midland (PA) where he attended Presentation Catholic School and Lincoln High School.



He attended college at the Jesuit institutions St. Vincent College (Latrobe, PA) and Wheeling (WV) College intermixed with stints working at the Crucible Steel Mill in Midland.

Following his graduation from Wheeling, Richard moved to northern Virginia, ultimately settling in Arlington. He worked for the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Export Control for 34 years until his re-

tirement in 2000. During his employment in the civil service, he received multiple awards and commendations for superior performance of his official duties.

Throughout his life, Richard remained a supporter of catholic charities including the Salesian and Franciscan Missions. He also served as an usher and CCD teacher at St. Agnes.

He doted on his human and canine grandchildren, enjoyed reading, solving crossword puzzles, watching British comedies on public television.

Richard departed this life on Oct. 10, 2021 at the age of 84. He is survived by Patricia McGeehan, his wife of 53 years; four sons: Christopher, Jonathan (Cristina), Colin, and Timothy (Kristi); and three grandchildren: Aidan, Cole, and Erin. He is also survived by his brothers William and James and sisters Evelyn and Mary Jane. He was predeceased by his parents Richard McGeehan and Evelyn McGeehan and by his brother Edwin Keith.

FLOURISHING AFTER 55

55+ Programs are virtual and outdoors. A 55+ Membership is required to participate (\$20 annual fee). To join or register, go to registration.arlingtonva.us or call 703-228-4747.

55+ Programs

Movies and Critics group to review and discuss, "Cruella," Thursday, Oct. 28, 1 p.m., Arlington Mill 55+ Center, 909 S. Dinwiddie Street. Registration # 911704-2.

Prague, one of the world's most haunted cities, Thursday, Oct. 28, 1 p.m., Langston-Brown 55+ Center, 2121 N. Culpeper Street. Presented by Michele Patrick, author of "Haunted Prague: Stories of Spirits, Sorcerers and Supernatural." Registration # 911400-29.

Virtual tour of the new Lucy Burns museum, led by director Laura McKie, Arlington Mill 55+ Center, 909 S. Dinwiddie Street, Thursday, Oct. 28, 1:30 p.m., registration # 911400-35 also view from home at 1:30 p.m., registration # 911400-36.

Social art swap, create a piece onsite or bring a finished piece, trade and network with other artists, Thursday, Oct. 28, 10:30 a.m., Arlington Mill 55+ Center, 909 S. Dinwiddie Street. Registration # 911300-4.

Virtual painting projects with community arts programmers, Thursday, Oct. 28, 10 a.m. Registration # 911301-16.

Rubber stampers workshop, suitable for experienced card crafters familiar with die-cut and embossing machines, Thursday, Oct. 28, 11:30 a.m. Newcomers welcome. Drop-in, no need to register.

Sudoku games, share techniques and skills, Thursday, Oct. 28, 2 p.m. Registration # 911601-7. Also 1:30 p.m., Lubber Run 55+ Center, 300 N. Park Drive. Drop-in, no need to register.

The Sunshine Gang musicians will entertain Friday, Oct. 29, 1 -3 p.m., Arlington Mill 55+ Center, 909 S. Dinwiddie Street. Drop-in, no need to register.

Learn how to ride the ART bus, where it goes and when, Monday, Nov. 1, 11a.m., Arlington Mill 55+ Center. Presented in English and Spanish. Registration # 911404-3.

Aurora Hills book club members to discuss "The Boys in the Boat" by Daniel James Brown, Monday, Nov. 1, 11:30 a.m., Aurora Hills 55+ Center, 735 S. 18th Street. Drop-in; no need to register.

Current events discussion, local and world news, informal, Monday, Nov. 1, 10 a.m., Arlington Mill 55+ Center. Registration # 911402-15.

Learn to play Mexican Train Dominoes, easy to learn, Monday, Nov. 1, 1:30 p.m., Arlington Mill 55+ Center, 909 S. Dinwiddie Street. Drop-in, no need to register.

Travel tips online, how to save money, Monday, Nov. 1, 1 p.m., Arlington Mill 55+ Center, Registration # 911400-37.

55+ Book Club members will discuss "Orange is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison" by Piper Kerman, Tuesday, Nov. 2, 1:30 p.m., Langston-Brown 55+ Center, 2121 N. Culpeper Street. Drop-in; no need to register.

Rock music legends who hit it big with only one song, Tuesday, Nov. 2, 1:30 p.m. Registration # 911400-10.

55+ Travel Guru Fran Deluca to share experiences in Cuba, Wednesday, Nov. 3, 1:30 p.m., Aurora Hills 55+ Center. Registration # 911400-38.

Getting a home ready to sell, step-by-step tips, Wednesday, Nov. 3, 1 p.m., Langston-Brown 55+ Center. Registration #911404-5.

Local history discussion to focus on Lee Heights Shopping Center, Wednesday, Nov. 3, 1:30 p.m., Lubber Run 55+ Center, 300 N. Park Drive. Drop-in; no need to register.

Travel trivia, Thursday, Nov. 4, 11a.m. Registration # 911601-3

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"No, Thank You"



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Really? I'm being polite to an artificially-intelligent computer now? Why, exactly? Do I risk cancelling my transaction if I'm not courteous and respectful when I sign off? This ludicrous thought crossed my eyes the other day when I was transacting some after-hours banking business through my bank's ATM. I put in my debit card, waited for the machine to click/read my details, and then proceeded to conduct my business. Though I was shown multiple/options/buttons to press to advise the computer what I needed to do, I was only making a deposit. "Yes," I was asked, the amount entered is correct. "Yes," I'm selecting my checking account. "Yes," I'd like a receipt with the check image. "Yes," I'd like a paper receipt, not one texted to my cell phone or emailed to the email address on file. Finally, after confirming all these details and completing my transaction, I was asked - via the computer screen, if I wanted another transaction. It's at this exact nearly-final moment at the ATM when I got the inspiration for this column.

If indeed I was finished with my ATM banking business, I needed to sign off (thereby freeing up the machine for the next person). However, signing off was not simply a "yes" or "no" answer. There was of course a box for me to press to end this process. The words in these boxes were my answer as provided by the computer. The box said: "No, Thank You." That's when it hit me. By pressing this box - and tacitly agreeing to its sentiment, I was being forced - indirectly, into being polite to an inanimate object, whether that object was being artificially intelligent or perhaps simply programmed to be insufferably presumptuous. Either way, I felt my humanity compromised as if I had just made the ultimate sacrifice: my independence. I wasn't a man anymore. I was a machine.

Do you mean to say that there's honor-among-thieves-type of courtesy between computer users and the computers themselves? Am I supposed to treat my fellow computer like my fellow man? Like it has feelings? And if I somehow fail to interact with my computer in the proper form/tone/inflexion/manner, could I suffer negative consequences for my oversight? What are we talking about here? The movies? The future? Real life? I just wanted to make a deposit through my bank's ATM. I didn't want to start a relationship and I certainly didn't expect to inadvertently incur the wrath of some computer network last night that might now target me as some kind of virus (I've had all my vaccinations, even my booster). In fact, I'm simply a depositor. I'm not a threat. And I definitely don't want to have to pass muster with a computer chip. Can I speak to someone real, PLEASE? Of course not. It's after hours. I guess I'll have to come back tomorrow. But as it turned out 'tomorrow' is a Saturday and the branch is no longer open on Saturdays. If I have any further business to conduct, it will have to be through the ATM. Great. Can you say vicious cycle?

But if I am to believe the computer programmers, the computers are incapable of being vicious. They're simply calculating, without being calculating. They're not being "Hal" from "2001: Space Odyssey." There's no ulterior motivation. They're not making my life miserable because they can. They're tools, like a doorstop, except they're excellent with numbers. They are simply following instructions/programs, very detailed ones for sure, but nothing more. I don't have to worry about them - aside from their computations, do I? And if I don't have to worry about them then why do I have to be nice to them, considerate to them as if they had feelings? I'm the one with feelings. You should be more concerned with being nice to me, not me being nice to computers. It used to be said that "Talk is cheap," now it's computer code that's cheap. Obviously, in today's world, computers are essential, but never more than the customers. We may not always be right but our opinions always matter.

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

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