

# Mount Vernon Gazette

MOUNT VERNON'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER • A CONNECTION NEWSPAPER

FEBRUARY 9, 2023



Christine Duffy holds a few of the socks with hearts at Top It Off.



The Valentine's display at Top It Off.

PHOTOS BY MIKE SALMON/CONNECTION

## Valentine's Day Is Short on Planning Ahead

Last minute Valentine's orders are par for the course in Mount Vernon.

BY MIKE SALMON  
THE GAZETTE

Every Valentine's Day in Mount Vernon, there are those that wait until the last minute before getting that dozen red roses, chocolates or the special pink keepsake covered in red hearts. When the calendar flips to Feb. 14 though, business owners and flower designers are ready.

"Those last hours, everybody's in here, they're all men," said Christine Duffy, the sales rep at the Top It Off outlet in the Hollin Hall Shopping Center. "Lot's of last minute shopping," she said.

Top It Off has a Valentine's Day display consisting of items \$15 and less for those last minute shoppers. There are jewelry items, socks with hearts, hoodies and more that are perfect for the occasion. The shopping has begun in early February, but she's expecting a mad rush on the last two days.

A couple of doors down at the Hollin Hall Pastry Shop, they are taking orders for their Heart Shaped Cake, (\$28) or the Valentine Pastry Box, (\$25), and then there's the special cookie pack for less than \$5 that the pastry chef, Amparo Sorto makes by hand. "People like bears and hearts," she said. When they sell out, Sorto is ready to make more on the last day. "I always try



Orders continue to pour in for the heart cakes at Hollin Hall Pastry Shop.



The cooler at The Virginia Florist will get much fuller as Valentine's approaches.

to accommodate," she said.

It's all about roses in The Virginia Florist up in the Belle View Shopping Center. Owner Kevin Green knows the routine and has two boxes full of orders to be picked up on the final days. The Feb. 13 box has a few orders but the February 14 box is full, and he expects it to pour over as the big day approaches. "Men are creatures of the last minute," he said.

He's expecting the first 2,000 red-rose delivery on Thursday, Feb. 9, followed by a second delivery of a few thousand on Feb. 10 and 11. The roses have to sit a day or so outside the cooler to start blooming.

On Valentine's Day, he will have six drivers in six different trucks going out as far as Bethesda and Chevy Chase to make deliveries. "It will be fun," he said. There is a big demand in the law offices up in that area he said, and since Valentine's is falling on a weekday, that is a big part of his orders. If it fell on a weekend day or a snow day, the demand wouldn't

be as big. In the last few years, COVID had a big impact but this year will be different, he predicted. "It's probably the first good year coming out of COVID," he added.

Alan Severson is one of the delivery drivers and he's done it before, so he knows what to expect. It will be all flowers and smiles, he predicts. "Generally a congenial group," he said.



Amparo Sorto and her bears with hearts at Hollin Hall Pastry Shop.





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# Rolling the Dice on Casinos

**Lawmakers to consider location of fifth and final casino.**

BY MICHAEL LEE POPE  
GAZETTE

**T**he MGM casino that dominates the skyline across the river from Old Town Alexandria could be a sign of things to come in Virginia. When Democrats seized control of the General Assembly in 2019, one of their legislative priorities was the Virginia Casino Act, which allows for five casinos in Virginia. Four of them have already opened or will open soon.

But where will the fifth and final casino be located? That's a million-dollar question at the Capitol, where Petersburg and Richmond are fighting with each other to persuade lawmakers to allow them to hold a referendum.

"It's likely to be a brawl," said state Sen. Janet Howell (D-32). "It's likely to have every lobbyist in Richmond involved." Howell, from Fairfax County is chairwoman of the Senate Finance Committee.

Lobbyists of every stripe packed the committee room for the initial discussion this year, when lawmakers are poised to make a decision about which city should be allowed to hold a referendum. Voters in Richmond have already rejected a casino once, giving Petersburg a strong argument to lawmakers that they deserve a shot for voters to weigh in. Some have argued that lawmakers could choose to allow a casino in both places, although state Sen. Joe Morrissey (D-16) says the problem with two casinos is that neither will strike it rich.

"No fancy hotel, no music venue. There won't be a show for Springsteen to come to or any oth-



PHOTO BY MICHAEL LEE POPE/GAZETTE

**The MGM casino that dominates the skyline across the Potomac River may be a sign of things to come in Virginia, which already has four casinos and is currently debating the location for a fifth.**

er artist," said Morrissey. "It'll be a pedestrian vanilla casino both in Richmond and in Petersburg."

Last week, the Senate Finance Committee rejected Morrissey's bill as some senators expressed a preference for Richmond to have a second referendum before Petersburg can hold a first referendum. Over in the House of Delegates, thought, Del. Tim Taylor (R-63) passed the House and is now under consideration in the Senate.

"This bill is not about partisanship," said Del. Kim Taylor (R-63). "This bill is about our collective ability to put politics aside and support a project that will uplift a community that has been overlooked and struggling for decades."

Because senators have already rejected a version of Taylor's bill, several potential outcomes are possible. They could change the bill to allow Richmond to have a

second referendum or they could allow a casino for both Richmond and Petersburg. In the meantime, lobbyists on both sides are invoicing for overtime.

"A thing I don't like in this bill is that there is a restriction on Richmond going forward until Petersburg gets to go first. I don't like that, and I wish that wasn't in the bill," said Del. Mark Sickles (D-43). "The other body has defeated this bill, so its passage over there is highly questionable. And so therefore my vote in favor of this today is to keep this process going to find a way to serve both cities."

**MANY PEOPLE** view casinos with suspicion, describing the industry as a predatory threat to low-income people who don't understand that the house usually wins. One of the people who testified against allowing Petersburg to hold a referendum was Belinda Baugh, a

pastor in Petersburg who worries that gambling harms vulnerable people. She says it's obvious any time you see people at one of the machines in gas stations or horse tracks.

"They take their last \$25 trying to turn it into \$500 and then they are knocking on the church's doors or they are knocking on the doors of the nonprofit organizations and asking us to help them," said Baugh. "I'm asking you to please reconsider and rethink."

Del. Paul Krizek (D-44) has introduced a bill that would set up a Problem Gambling Treatment and Support Advisory Committee at the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services. Krizek says the idea is to reduce the adverse effects of problem gambling.

"In just the last few years, we have considerably expanded gambling in the commonwealth with the

recent opening of temporary casinos, sports betting, historical horse racing machines, online Lottery and much more," said Krizek. "As more gaming opportunities are legalized and expanded in Virginia, we must prioritize protecting Virginians from gambling addiction, especially young people."

He wants to see one in Petersburg now that voters in Richmond have rejected a casino in a referendum. But Richmond City Councilwoman Kristen Nye says that's not the end of the story.

"Legislation regarding Petersburg having a referendum I think should be delayed until Richmond has an opportunity to have a second referendum."

Lawmakers will be placing their bets when the General Assembly gavel into session later this month.

In recent years, Virginia has slowly allowed more and more legal gambling. Now the state may be about to move into uncharted territory with as many as four casinos that could be up and running by 2025.

This week, lawmakers received a new report detailing how multiple casinos might eat into each other's profits, especially if they are close. Sen. Lionel Spruill is a Democrat from Chesapeake who asked Tracey Smith at the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission about what would happen to a Petersburg casino if another casino were to open in Richmond.

"Without Richmond, Petersburg would be on a larger scale. So I'm trying to figure out why we would want to downscale the Petersburg market?"

"Senator, that is probably a policy call. Both Richmond and Petersburg would have smaller casinos in the combination scenario than if they were to have their own casino and not another one in that market."

Lawmakers are going to need to strike a balance between casino interests that want to make money and local governments that are eager for the new tax revenue.

## BULLETIN BOARD

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

### FOSTER PARENTS NEEDED

Interested in becoming a foster parent? There is always a need for caring foster parents

looking to open their homes to foster youth. Get in touch to learn more. Visit [fcsvanow@gmail.com](mailto:fcsvanow@gmail.com) or [www.FCSVA.org](http://www.FCSVA.org). Or call 703-817-9890.

### LOOKING FOR SOFTBALL PLAYERS

The Golden Girls of Northern Virginia, a senior women's softball league, is looking for players. Any woman over the age of 40 is en-

couraged to join. All skill levels are welcome. They play most Wednesday evenings and Saturday mornings in Vienna from May-July and September-October. For more information, visit the web site [www.goldengirls.org](http://www.goldengirls.org).

### VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

STEM VOLUNTEERS. The American Association

for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) needs scientists, engineers, mathematicians, and physicians to assist K-12 STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) teachers in the Northern Virginia Area, during the 2016-17 school year. In the 2015-16 school year, the num-

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## Because My Dad Secured His Gun ...

### Turning advocacy into action celebrating 10-Years of Moms Demand Action

BY KATIE FOX  
MOMS DEMAND ACTION VOLUNTEER

Communities in Virginia and across the country are reeling from a devastating start to the year with the recent back-to-back mass shootings in California, and earlier in the month learning that a six-year-old obtained access to a gun, shot, and seriously wounded his teacher. We are devastated and exhausted from hearing time and time again about another shooting. I know the power that common sense gun safety laws have in protecting our communities — and I know first-hand that securely storing a firearm can be the difference between a bad day and a deadly one.

When I was struggling with depression, there were moments where I was in crisis. Thankfully, my father paid attention to securely storing his gun, and a hard moment for me never turned into a deadly one. I was fortunate enough to get help, and eventually created a future for myself. Now I am an advocate who can educate parents and lawmakers on the importance of securing firearms. But, tragically, my dear friend from high school, Sam, did not have the same experience that I did — he had access to a gun and he died by

firearm suicide in 2006.

We grew up in a community where guns are a part of our culture, but the importance of securing them was never a subject of conversation — and I knew that needed to change. Each year, as Virginia mourns the people taken from us at Virginia Tech, I also revisit the trauma of losing my friend and wonder if he would still be alive today if the gun he accessed was properly secured.

Moms Demand Action and the Everytown Survivor Network have given me a space to grapple with my trauma from gun violence, to stand shoulder to shoulder with people across the nation fighting for secure storage and other life saving gun safety laws and to build awareness among community members about common-sense solutions that can prevent the tragedies that happened with my friend and the shooting in Newport News. I have found a collective power in this movement, and am honored to share in the celebration of 10 years of life-saving work by Moms Demand Action this year. I am inspired by how far we have come but I am also reminded of my own experiences being raised by responsible gun owners and am compelled to acknowledge the work that we must continue to do to keep our communities safe.

Since 2020, our volunteers in Virginia have secured major wins for gun safety including background checks on all gun sales and prohibiting guns in sensitive locations like Capitol Square and polling places. Our volunteers have also worked to give local governments the power to decide if they want to prohibit guns in government buildings and at permitted events. As of now, 17 localities covering 2.8 million Virginians have enacted such ordinances — ordinances which could have helped to prevent the armed extremist attack in Charlottesville in 2017. Our volunteers have also worked with schools across Virginia to ensure students and their families are educated about the importance of secure storage — I don't want any family to have to experience what my friend's family went through. Knowing firearms are properly secured has the power to remove the "what ifs" that so many, including myself, ask ourselves every day.

As legislators gather for this session, Moms Demand Action volunteers are ready to work with lawmakers to pass and implement life-saving gun safety laws, such as expanding the scope of our existing secure storage laws to prevent children from accessing firearms.

Last month we held our annual Advocacy Day. More than

250 Moms Demand Action and Students Demand Action volunteers from as far away as Franklin County joined Shannon Watts, the founder of Moms Demand Action, at the state capital in Richmond to encourage lawmakers to pass gun safety laws that will protect our communities and save lives.

We've spent a decade building political power from within, serving as a boot camp for the next generation of gun sense candidates. Advocacy Day was just a glimpse of the strength of our movement, and I am proud that because my dad knew how to properly secure his gun, I am able to be a part of a national organization that is committed to working hand in hand with leaders at all levels to ensure that families come home safely at night. Our work is not done — but we have the conviction and courage to press on because we believe that we can live in a world without gun violence.

*If you or someone you know is in crisis, please call or text 988, or visit 988lifeline.org/chat to chat with a counselor from the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, previously known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline provides 24/7, free, and confidential support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress anywhere in the U.S.*

## Halfway Home

BY DEL. PAUL KRIZEK

We've hit the halfway point of session, or crossover week, here in Richmond. Crossover is when all the bills introduced by the House must be sent to the Senate for consideration, and vice versa. If a bill is not heard by its chamber of origin before the crossover deadline, it automatically fails. Because of the strict deadline, the Monday and Tuesday ahead of crossover consist of long floor session days of constant voting to move legislation along. In past years, we have had floor sessions beginning at 10 a.m. and lasting until after midnight!

I thought this was a good opportunity to share the status of the legislation I introduced this session on behalf of my constituents:

Three of my bills are up for their third read on Tuesday. If the

House votes favorably on them, they will head over to the Senate:

❖ HB 1465 is a critical bill creating the Problem Gambling Treatment and Support Advisory Committee to enable collaboration and long-term relationship building among prevention and treatment providers and operators of legal gaming in the Commonwealth in efforts to combat problem gambling.

❖ HB 1987 is a cleanup bill of the charitable gaming legislative package that Senator Reeves and I passed last year. This bill reinstates the ability of licensed veterans' service organizations and charitable fraternal organizations (like the VFW and Moose Lodges) from selling paper-pull tabs at the state and regional conventions of their organizations.



Krizek

❖ HB 1998 directs the Secretaries of Natural and Historic Resources, Agriculture and Forestry, and Administration to coordinate the development of strategic actions state agencies should take to prioritize the use of plant species native to the Commonwealth. The state has a duty to set a standard of controlling invasive plants and prioritizing native species.

Four others have already passed out of the House and are awaiting consideration by the Senate:

❖ HB 1993 passed the House unanimously 100-0. This is a good government bill, which streamlines fire marshal training by allowing fire marshals with prior or current law enforcement certification a partial exemption from the

basic law enforcement courses included in the Virginia Fire Marshal Academy.

❖ HB 1995 passed the House by a vote of 98-2. This bill extends the amount of time school divisions, vendors, and police departments have to issue tickets for illegally passing a stopped school bus from 10 days to 30 business days. As local governments struggle with staffing shortages, some localities have increasingly found it difficult to investigate and process a ticket in such a short amount of time.

❖ HB 1997 passed out of committee nearly unanimously, by a vote of 20 to 1. It requires any operator of Historical Horse Racing (HHR) machines capable of hosting a live Thoroughbred racing day to annually hold one racing day, with no less than eight races, for every one hundred HHR machines they operate. The goal of the bill is

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# Crossover, 29 for 31 So Far

BY SEN. SCOTT SUROVELL

**T**he middle of the General Assembly session is called “Crossover” – the day that each chamber must complete work on all bills originating in each chamber before starting work on bills that have “crossed over” from the other Chamber.

I introduced thirty-one pieces of legislation and twenty-nine appear to be on track to cross to the House of Delegates where passage will be much more difficult. I was disappointed that my bill to turn the VA529 Plan’s \$1.4 billion actuarial surplus into an endowment for Pell-eligible students failed, but no competing bills passed and both chambers appear poised to set up committees to further study the issue over the coming year to see if we can develop a consensus approach.

Many constituents have reached out to me after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down *Roe v. Wade* in the Dobbs case about doing more to protect women’s right to reproductive healthcare. The Senate Privileges and Elections Committee reported a Senator Jennifer McClellan’s proposed amendment to the Constitution of Virginia that would put women’s right to reproductive healthcare on track to be placed on the ballot for ratification by voters into the Constitution of Virginia.

The Senate Judiciary Committee also reported out my legislation which would protect Virginia’s doctors and women assisting with abortion care or contraception from extradition to states such as Alabama who have pledged to prosecute women. My legislation also would allow Virginia women to sue any company who sold information regarding their reproductive information to any third party. Many women keep information regarding their menstrual cycles on phone apps and location data kept by phones can be used to track who has travelled to and from various locations such as abortion clinics. My legislation was sent to the floor on a party-line vote.

In 2020, I passed legislation that authorized companies to sell shared solar or community solar in Dominion’s service territory which I thought would be very useful in our community. If you have lots of sun and own your roof, you can put solar panels on your roof and reduce your electric bill to nearly zero, but if you live in a community with lots of trees, do not own your roof, or live in a community with a homeowners’ association that prohibits solar panels, you cannot generate your own power.

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Shared solar allows homeowners to purchase a portion of output from a specific smaller solar project and then net the output of those panels against your home electricity bill. The solar industry and incumbent monopolies have continued to fight about what homeowners should pay to support existing electrical infrastructure and other costs associated with electricity production. One of my bills requires the State Corporation Commission to consider the benefits of solar energy such as climate change, health benefits, and infrastructure upgrades in connection with determining that amount. In addition, I am carrying legislation to authorize a shared solar program in the territory for Appalachian Power which is in Southwest Virginia.

On Nov. 17, 2017, Bijan Ghaisar was shot and killed at the corner of Fort Hunt Road and Alexandria Avenue. He was unarmed and chased down by the police after leaving a traffic collision where he was struck from behind. After



Surovell

the Trump Administration’s Department of Justice refused to prosecute the two police officers who shot him, the Fairfax County Commonwealth’s Attorney’s Office attempted to prosecute him. The prosecution was removed to Federal Court and Attorney General Mark Herring joined in the prosecution. After Attorney General Jason Miyares was elected, he voluntarily dismissed the prosecution during its appeal without ever taking input from Mr. Ghaisar’s parents who qualify as victims under the Virginia Crime Victims Act. My legislation to make clear that the law applies to the Attorney General has passed so far without any opposition.

Finally, the chambers announced their respective budget amendments this weekend and I will discuss that next week. I have also received over 300 responses to my constituent survey which you can complete at [www.scottsurovell.org/survey](http://www.scottsurovell.org/survey). As always, if you have any feedback, you can reach me at [scott@scottsurovell.org](mailto:scott@scottsurovell.org)

## Mount Vernon District 36th Annual Town Meeting

Mount Vernon District Supervisor Dan Storck will host the 36th Annual Town Meeting.

Saturday, Feb. 11, 2023

7:45 a.m. – Exhibit Hall Open

9:30 a.m. - Speakers, Audience Q&A’s and Virtual Tour

Noon – 1:30 p.m. – Taste of Mount Vernon

Mount Vernon High School, Entrance 4, 8515 Old Mt Vernon Road, Alexandria, VA 22309 and Virtual Live Stream

Supervisor Dan Storck invites all to join him for the 36th Annual Town Meeting. Attendees will have the opportunity to meet and question community leaders, as well as be inspired to engage in the Mount Vernon community. Highlights include an Exhibit Hall with over 50 community groups and county agencies, audience question and answer sessions and a “virtual tour” with Supervisor Dan Storck.

Additional speakers include Board of Supervisors Chairman Jeffrey C. McKay, County Executive Bryan Hill, County Police Chief Kevin Davis, Mount Vernon District School Board Member Karen Corbett Sanders, Fairfax County Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Michelle Reid, Special Guest Congressman Gerry Connolly and remarks by Congressman Don Beyer. More than 300 attendees are anticipated at this major annual event.

Join us to find out why We Are The One!

The Mount Vernon Children’s Business Fair will be joining the Town Meeting with young entrepreneurs showing off their very own start-up businesses and displaying their wares from 9 a.m. – noon at this one-day marketplace. Back this year is the Taste of Mount Vernon featuring tastings from our local restaurants. #MVTownMeeting

The Town Meeting will also be live streamed on [fairfaxcounty.gov/cable](http://fairfaxcounty.gov/cable), Channel 16, Cox HD 1016, YouTube ([https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCN2VlKbuPbOJeR\\_B39GX0\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCN2VlKbuPbOJeR_B39GX0_w)) and Facebook Live (<https://www.facebook.com/SupervisorDanStorck/>).

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# State Legislators Advance Bills to Deter Invasive Plants

**“Prevention is the first line of defense against invasive species.”**

— National Invasive Species Council

By GLENDA C. BOOTH  
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

Virginia has between 300 and 350 documented invasive plants, but only 14 on what is called the state’s “noxious weeds list.” Two northern Virginia legislators, Delegates David Bulova and Paul Krizek, have introduced bills, now moving through the General Assembly, to strengthen the law and slow invasive plants’ spread.

Invasive plants are plants introduced intentionally or accidentally by people into a region into which they did not evolve. Many are harmful to natural resources, humans and the economy. Invasives typically grow and spread rapidly and produce seeds prolifically.

“Plants are considered invasive if they spread out of control, dominating the local environment and crowding out native plants,” wrote Kathy Reshetiloff with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “Because these plants have been introduced into an environment in which they did not evolve, there are no natural predators, parasites or other controls to keep them in check.”

Common invasive plants in Northern Virginia include English ivy, running bamboo, Bradford pear trees, tree-of-heaven, oriental bittersweet, privet, porcelain berry and stilt grass. The National Park Service estimates that many Virginia parks and preserves typically have between 25 and 34 percent invasive plants. Invasive plants are present in over 100 million U.S. acres, an area around the size of California, states a Fairfax County Park Authority brochure titled “Invasive Backyard Plants.”

## Why Natives?

“Native plants have co-evolved with wildlife for many years, resulting in unique relationships between insects, birds and other animals,” explains Virginia’s Agriculture Department website. The Plant NOVA Natives website concurs: “A plant is native to our environment if it evolved within the local food web and has the intricate relationships with animals and other plants that this implies.”

Once native plants are established, many can reduce maintenance costs, pollution and water use. They can also help reverse



English ivy, highly invasive, for sale at the Hybla Valley Home Depot on Feb. 4.

declines in insects, birds and other wildlife. Virginia’s Wildlife Action Plan states that there are 883 species critically imperiled or in decline. “Habitat loss is the single greatest challenge impacting these species,” the plan says. The world has lost more than one-quarter of its land-dwelling insects in the last 30 years, a trend some call an “insect apocalypse,” reported Science magazine in 2020. The decline in insects is related to the decline in

any invasive plant.

Del. Paul Krizek’s bill, HB 1998, approved by the House Agriculture Committee, directs state agencies to prioritize native plant species and to take steps like identifying state properties for native plantings and preparing guidance to rehabilitate state properties degraded by invasive species.

Krizek, who represents Mount Vernon, argues that the state owns many large properties, from pris-



The English ivy’s pot was labeled “Tropical Foliage.”



The company American Beauties offers some native plants labeled as such, like this one for butterfly weed, and lists benefits of natives on the label’s back.

There are two keys to halting the spread of invasive plants: prevent their introduction and control those that are here, Chris Ludwig, told a state invasive plants workgroup in 2021. He is the former chief biologist for Virginia’s natural heritage program.

Current Virginia laws allow the sale of most invasive plants. In December, Trader Joe’s in Old Town Alexandria was selling English ivy. On February 4, Home Depot in Hybla Valley was selling English ivy and labeling it “Tropical Foliage.”

A University of Massachusetts study found, “61 percent of 1,285 plant species identified as invasives in the U.S. remain available through the plant trade, including 50 percent of state-regulated species and 20 federal noxious weeds, with vendors in all the lower 48 states,” according to the December 2021 American Gardener magazine. The same survey found that 1,330 nurseries, garden centers and online retailers are offering hundreds of invasive plants as ornamental garden plants.

The Department of Conservation and Recreation list of 90 species has no regulatory authority. The Agriculture Department’s listing



Invasive porcelain berry vines have beautiful berries that birds eat and spread.

English ivy completely covers this tree on Sherwood Hall Lane.

PHOTOS BY  
GLENDA BOOTH



Austen Ballard tackled a very mature invasive bittersweet plant in Dyke Marsh.



Friends of Dyke Marsh volunteers remove many trash bags full of invasive stiltgrass from the preserve.

process is cumbersome, bill advocates maintain, and current law allows “commercially viable” invasive plants to be sold.

Since in many instances, retailers and customers do not know which plants are invasive, providing information will help them make better choices. Bulova’s bill requires companies that install signs to inform their customers if plants are invasive.

Legislative measures to require

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plant labels at point of sale have failed to gain traction. In 2022, the legislature did approve Krizek’s bill requiring the Virginia Department of Agriculture to prepare information for plant retailers that explains the value of native plants and the harm of invasive plants. That information is here [https://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/pdf/Invasive%20Species%20Brochure\\_Tifold\\_122722.pdf](https://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/pdf/Invasive%20Species%20Brochure_Tifold_122722.pdf).

Krizek’s original 2022 bill re-

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quired the Agriculture Department to develop a model label for plant sales and a model sign for retail vendors explaining native plants’ value and invasive plants’ harm.

“The Virginia Native Plant Society (VNPS) is grateful to Delegates Bulova and Krizek for their bills encouraging the use of native plants and prohibiting the use of invasive plants by state agencies,” commented Nancy Vehrs, president of VNPS. “We must do all that we can



Invasive bamboo like this stand on Collingwood Road forms monocultures and overwhelms other plants.



Invasive porcelain berry vines can overwhelm and effectively smother native vegetation.

to combat invasive species while we still have a fighting chance.”

The Virginia Agribusiness Council’s website states that the organization “supports the funding of programs and resources to aid in the research and eradication of invasive pests, plants and diseases.” The group opposes “the labeling of widely used and economical-

The Virginia Nursery and Land-

scape Association did not respond to our request for comments on the bills before press time.

Industry In a 2021 workgroup created by the General Assembly to curb invasive plants, most commercial industry representatives resisted changing Virginia’s current laws.

the labeling of widely used and economical-

ly important plant forage species and ornamental plants as ‘invasive’ or ‘noxious’ without reasonable science-based evidence of their invasive status and the potential economic impact of both the eradication and/or control of such species by appropriate state body or agency and the economic impact of controls on the growth and sale of ‘noxious weeds.’”



# Federal Property Up For Sale in Franconia

Past soil contaminations may require extensive efforts.

BY MIKE SALMON  
THE GAZETTE

A former federal government building and 10.5-acre piece of land recently went up for sale, and the former residents of the 110,000 square-foot building were part of the Defense Nuclear Agency, so it has occupied this spot on Telegraph Road without much fanfare.

The signs indicate it is owned by the General Services Administration and the first step to selling it is through a formalized auction on Feb 8. The price starts at \$2,000,000, the website said.

On the official report, the property is called the "Hybla Valley Federal Office Building," although it is not really in Hybla Valley, which is closer to Richmond High-

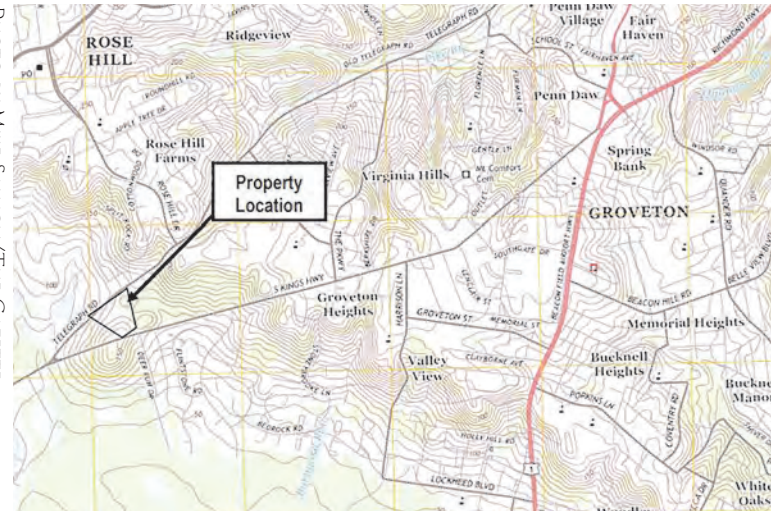


It's described as "Prime Development" in this part of the Franconia District.

way. According to the report, there was "the discovery of a release of petroleum products during sub-surface investigations." This was connected with operations at the site. "Based on historical information available for the Property, a 12,000-gallon underground storage tank used for heating oil was previously abandoned in place, a 4,000-gallon underground storage tank for heating oil was removed from the property, and a 2,000-gallon underground storage tank, likely for diesel fuel, was also removed from the property in 1994," the report stated.

The property is surrounded by parkland owned by the Fairfax County Park Authority, including Greendale Golf Course to the northwest, Lee District Park to the east, and Huntley Meadows Park and Resource Management Area to the south, it said. The staff at the golf course across the street saw the signs which first went up earlier this winter, but they don't know much about it.

With all these tanks and fuel storage in the past, is there any danger to the surrounding homeowners that live about two blocks away on the other side of Tele-



It's near a local intersection known as "the forks."

graph Road or the golfers at Greendale, or the natural environment at Huntley Meadows? It is addressed in the report. "Based on this qualitative risk analysis and the results of the receptor survey, there do not appear to be any current or future impacts to human or environmental receptors as a result of the release of petroleum at the Property. The residual contamination in soil at 20 feet BGS at the Property will be expected to degrade and natu-

rally attenuate over time," it read.

To ensure land doesn't go right from sale to development without some oversight, Fairfax County has a section called the Site Development and Inspections Division of Land Development Services that ensures all county, state and federal regulations are met for development. For more information on this program, go to <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/landdevelopment/site-development>.

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# Nepenthe Features Mount Vernon

**T**he special exhibit on Mount Vernon at Nepenthe Gallery will last for six weeks at Nepenthe and here is the line-up for the next five ART+WNE+CHEESE events

**Feb. 9:** Important Paintings from Mount Vernon. Adam Erby, Curator at Mount Vernon, and Patty Owens, Nepenthe Curator, will present a lecture on selected significant paintings from Mount Vernon.

**Feb. 16:** White Historic Art. Painters and Historians, Pamela Patrick White and Bryant White of White Historic Art will discuss several of their original, historical American 18th century-based paintings and the stories and context behind them.

Their presentation will include several of their original works on loan for this exhibit by local private collectors.

**Feb. 23:** Interesting Facts about Mount Vernon and Whiskey Tasting.

Steve Bashore, Distiller, Miller and Historian at Mount Vernon's



Don Francisco's fife music added to the atmosphere at Nepenthe for the opening of the new exhibit on Mount Vernon. Nepenthe Curator Patty Owens gave a wonderful introduction to Thomas Scully and his portrait of George Washington which is currently on special loan to the gallery.

Grist Mill, will lead guests through a Whiskey Tasting and describe the process that still takes place today at Mount Vernon. Jim Woods, History Interpreter at Mount Vernon, will share stories and information about George Washington's home and property.

**March 2:** Scenes from Mount Vernon. Alexandria based watercolorist and juried artist, Gwendolyn ("Gwen") Bragg, is an art instructor at the Workhouse Art Center in Lorton; she previously taught at the Art League School in Alexandria for 32 years. Gwen will

display and discuss many of her exquisite watercolor paintings of Mount Vernon.

**March 9:** Embroidery of Nelly Custis Lewis. Woodlawn & Pope-Leighey House staff and their volunteer corps, Nelly's Needlers, will

be on hand to discuss the embroidery of Eleanor ("Nelly") Custis Lewis, who was raised at Mount Vernon, later lived at Woodlawn, and learned many of her expert needlework skills from her cherished grandmother, Martha Washington.



Patty Owens, Nepenthe's Curator; Don Francisco, Fifer and History Interpreter from Mount Vernon estate; and Carrie Garland, Nepenthe's owner.

## CALENDAR

Now thru Feb. 26  
Heartfelt Art Exhibition. At Van Landingham Gallery, Torpedo Factory Art Center, 105 North Union Street, Alexandria. The Torpedo Factory Artists' Association's (TFAA) Van Landingham Gallery presents Heartfelt, a juried membership show featuring artworks that embody emotions such as love, empathy, and endearment. The following artists are participating: Diana Papazian, Samantha Shelton, Guido Zanni, Veronica Barker-Barzel, Laura Fall, Hernan Murno, Abol Bahadori, Karine Sapondjian, Pauline Siple, and Jon Kandel. Artworks include original hand pulled prints, original paintings, multimedia works, photography, ceramics, and sculpture. Additionally, the gallery offers small gifts, art cards, block-printed totes and tee shirts, and jewelry and unframed works by Jennifer Brewer Stone, Rebecca Mcneely, and Tara Barr.

**NOW THRU APRIL 3**  
NOVA Plein Air Art Exhibit. At River Farm, 7931 East Blvd. Drive, Alexandria. Nova Plein Air Artists (NPPA) will be presenting "Celebrations of the Land, Inspired by River Farm," an art exhibit of over 50 paintings inspired by nature. Opening reception on Sunday, Jan. 22 at 1 - 3 p.m. Additional receptions will be held from 1 - 3 p.m. on February 12 and March 12. Many of the paintings were created onsite at River Farm, and all are available to purchase. Receptions are free and open to the public.



The Heartfelt Art Exhibition opens at the Van Landingham Gallery at the Torpedo Factory in Alexandria.

**NOW THRU MARCH 15**  
"Mount Vernon" At Nepenthe Gallery. Hollin Hall Shopping Center, 7918 Fort Hunt Road, Alexandria. Nepenthe Gallery, in partnership with Mount Vernon estate and Woodlawn mansion, presents a special "Mount Vernon" exhibit from February 1st through March 15th. This exhibit has been organized in conjunction with Mount Vernon's national birthday celebration of George Washington and Woodlawn's 60th Annual Needlepoint Show. Woodlawn was once part of George Washington's original extensive Mount Vernon estate. This "Mount Vernon" exhibit will showcase an important work by Thomas Sully - his 19th century "Athenaeum Portrait of George Washington." Other original works by Pamela Patrick White, Bryant White, Gwen Bragg, Debbie Darte, and Renée C. Gage will be included and for sale, as well as several original works by Pamela and Bryant White that will be on loan by local collectors for display in the exhibit. There will also be giclée prints available for sale of important works from the Mount Vernon estate collection.

Nepenthe will host six Thursday night "ART+WINE+CHEESE" events related to this exhibit:

February 9th: Important Paintings from Mount Vernon. Adam Erby, Curator at Mount Vernon, and Patty Owens, Nepenthe Curator, will present a lecture on selected significant paintings from Mount Vernon.

February 16th: White Historic Art. Painters and Historians, Pamela

Patrick White and Bryant White, of White Historic Art will discuss several of their original, historical American 18th century-based paintings and the stories and context behind them. Their presentation will include several of their original works on loan for this exhibit by private collectors Janice and Dick Crosby, and Neysa and Dan Chandler.

February 23rd: Interesting facts about Mt. Vernon and Whiskey Tasting. Steve Bashore, Distiller, Miller and Historian, will lead guests through a Whiskey Tasting and describe the process that still takes place today at Mt. Vernon. Jim Woods, historical interpreter at Mount Vernon, will share stories and information about George Washington's home and property.

March 2nd: Scenes from Mount Vernon. Alexandria based watercolorist and juried artist, Gwendolyn ("Gwen") Bragg, is an art instructor at both the Art League School in Alexandria and the Workhouse Art Center in Lorton. Gwen will display and discuss many of her watercolor paintings from Mount Vernon.

March 9th: Nelly's Needlers Needlework Group. Established in 1975 to help preserve Woodlawn, the group was named after Martha Washington's granddaughter, Eleanor ("Nelly") Parke Custis, who was raised at Mount Vernon, later lived at Woodlawn, and learned her needlework skills from her cherished grandmother. Nelly's Needlers will be at Nepenthe Gallery to display works from their

SEE CALENDAR, PAGE 10



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## CALENDAR

FROM PAGE 9

60th Annual Needlepoint Show and discuss their organization and needlepointing as an art form.

**NOW THRU FEB. 25**

"The Unseen" Exhibit. At Del Ray Artisans gallery in the Colasanto Center, 2704 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria. "The Unseen" exhibit reveals what we typically cannot see: what is hidden, microscopic, imagined, or dreamed. Join the artists for the opening reception: Friday, Feb 3, 2023 from 7-9 p.m. Gallery hours are Thursdays 12-6 p.m., Fridays 12-9 p.m., Saturdays and Sundays 12-6 p.m. The gallery is closed the last Sunday of the month (February 26, 2023). Visit <https://delrayartisans.org/exhibits/#event=unseen>

**OUR FACES IN FILM SERIES**

All month long for Black History Month, Charles Beatley Central Library will show films featuring African American lead characters. Join for great films and snacks. At the Charles E. Beatley, Jr., Central Library, 5005 Duke Street, Alexandria.

February 10, 2023, from 2 to 4:30 p.m.: "The Wiz"

February 14, 2023, from 6 to 7:45 p.m.: "Rodgers and Hammerstein's Cinderella"

February 17, 2023, from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m.: "Soul"

February 24, 2023, from 2 to 4:30 p.m.: "Harriet"

Admission: Free. Call 703-746-1702. Visit [alexlibraryva.org](http://alexlibraryva.org)

**SATURDAY/FEB. 11**

Creative Book Club. 10 a.m. to noon. At Del Ray Artisans gallery in the Colasanto Center, 2704 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria. The Creative Book Club discusses readings to help you stay inspired and motivated for your creative practice. The first book for 2023 is "The Secret Lives of Color" by Kassia St. Clair. Visit <https://delrayartisans.org/programs/book-club/>

**SATURDAY/FEB. 11**

Salon at the Statehouse. 6:30-10 p.m. At 415 Prince Street Alexandria. Enjoy a warm evening of conversation and festivities on a cold winter's night at the historic home of NVFAA board member Ashley Wilson and her husband George. Enjoy drinks, dinner, and a talk by John H. Sprinkle, Jr. Ph.D., Adjunct Associate Professor, Maryland School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation who will discuss Restoration and Reconstruction: Virginians lay the Foundation for a Post-Slavery Commonwealth.

**SATURDAY/FEB. 11**

Manumission Tour Company Black History Bus Tour. 10 to 11:30 a.m. and 12 to 1:30 p.m. Tour meets at the Alexandria Black History Museum, 902 Wythe Street, Alexandria. Ride with Manumission Tour Company on a 90-minute guided bus tour to visit various African American historic sites in Alexandria. You will hear stories of both enslaved and free African Americans prior to the Civil War as well as understand the stories behind some of Alexandria's most well-known African American historic sites. Sites will include the Alexandria National Cemetery, Alfred Street Baptist Church, Shiloh Baptist Church, Church Alley, the African American Heritage Park, the Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery, Barrett Library and more. Visit [manumissiontours.com](http://manumissiontours.com)

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## OPINION

# Halfway Home

FROM PAGE 4

to promote a healthy and successful equine racing industry in Virginia.

❖ HJ 548 passed the House unanimously 97-0. This bicameral and bipartisan effort establishes a joint subcommittee to study the feasibility of establishing the Virginia Gaming Commission to regulate and oversee all forms of gaming in the Commonwealth. With gambling rapidly expanding in the Commonwealth, a central gaming agency can focus on gaming regulation as a core mission, as well as facilitate problem gambling prevention and treatment.

Other measures I introduced this year failed and will not move forward for consideration this year:

❖ HB 1578 was recently mentioned in my Martin Luther King Jr. Day article. This bill aimed to support manufactured park home residents by offering a tax credit to owners of manufactured home parks to incentivize selling to nonprofit organizations or resident associations. Unfortunately, this legislation failed to report from Finance Subcommittee #1 by a vote of 4-4.

❖ HB 1975 sought to establish a tax benefit for all Foreign Service members aged 60 or older. Foreign service is indeed analogous to service in the United States military, and these members are often assigned to dangerous and difficult overseas assignments in support of U.S. national security. This bill was tabled by a vote of 5-3.

❖ HB 1977 was a request by my constituents living in the Tauxemont community to waive the expiration of the community's groundwater withdrawal permit for at least five years (and after the halting of commercial or industrial withdrawals like golf courses). This narrowly drafted bill prioritized human consumption over recreational or aesthetic purposes. While this bill failed 4-5 in the subcommittee, I am pursuing budget language to assist Tauxemont in transferring over to an alternative water source.

❖ HB 2001 was passed by and not heard by the General Laws committee. This bill aimed to increase transparency and promote responsible drinking by requiring alcohol by volume content to be listed on beverage menus.

❖ HB 2003 was laid on the table and failed by a vote of 5-3 in Commerce and Energy Subcommittee #4. The bill, also a constituent request, sought to require any

employer with 50 or more employees, including employees of the Commonwealth, to provide annual interactive training and education regarding sexual harassment and workplace discrimination.

❖ HB 2004 creates a policy of tribal consultation with state agencies and Virginia's federally recognized tribal nations on projects that have tribal implications. Unfortunately, this legislative priority of the tribal nations was not granted a hearing by the Agriculture Chesapeake and Natural Resources committee this year.

❖ HB 2475 was, sadly, laid on the table by a vote of 5-3 in Courts of Justice sub #1. An idea brought to me by a constituent who is a Southern Baptist pastor, this bill aimed to expand the offense of sexual battery to include sexual abuse of an adult witness under the spiritual care of a clergy member or similar functionary of a religious organization who is in a position of trust or authority over the witness.

❖ HJ 518 was laid on the table by the Rules committee on a party-line vote. This measure would have designated March as Problem Gambling Awareness Month.

Sunday was "budget day" when the House and Senate released their respective budget packages. Later this week, as we move past crossover, I will publish highlights from each chamber's budget and discuss the fate of my amendments. Thursday is the day the budgets will be voted upon by each chamber. Next week, both the House and Senate will appoint budget conferees who will meet to iron out the slight differences between these two budget bills. Once they have reached a consensus, the General Assembly will vote to adopt a budget to send to the Governor for consideration. In the weeks ahead, I will visit Senate subcommittees and committees to present my legislation there.

It has been wonderful to see so many of you who have traveled to Richmond to visit me in my office this session. Thank you, also, to all of you who have called or written to me to express your opinions on legislation filed by my colleagues. Your advocacy always informs my voting decisions. To continue staying up to date on my legislation as it moves through the process throughout session, make sure to visit [www.lis.virginia.gov](http://www.lis.virginia.gov). As always, it is an honor to serve as your Delegate in Richmond.

## BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 3

bers of STEM volunteers in Northern Virginia were: Fairfax County - 40, Arlington - 20, and Alexandria - one. Details of the collaboration are worked out between the teacher and the volunteer, and may involve giving demonstrations, assisting in lab experiments, lecturing on special topics, assisting with homework, etc. The hours are flexible, and volunteers attend a one-day training in September before being assigned to schools. To see how volunteers are assisting their teachers, view the video clips at [www.seniorscientist.org](http://www.seniorscientist.org). To volunteer, contact [donaldrea@aol.com](mailto:donaldrea@aol.com). Assistance League of Northern Virginia is an all-volunteer non-profit organization that feeds, clothes and provides reading assistance and books to children in need. Assis-

tance League's programs touch the lives of hundreds of children in Fairfax and Prince William Counties and the City of Alexandria. There are many volunteer opportunities for community members to contribute to helping those in need. To learn more, email [info@alnv.org](mailto:info@alnv.org), or visit [www.alnv.org](http://www.alnv.org). United Community (formerly UCM), 7511 Fordson Road, Alexandria, seeks volunteers for Food Pantry assistance, Early Learning Center teacher aides, basic needs counselors, youth tutors and mentors, office administration/data entry, and community outreach. Flexible hours and schedules. Opportunities for all ages to serve, including community service hours. More info at [ucmagency.org/](http://ucmagency.org/) volunteer-opportunities or email [volunteer@ucmagency.org](mailto:volunteer@ucmagency.org).

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The ongoing pandemic continues to crush many newspapers across the country, and our newspapers continue to be at risk. The Northern Virginia area's best read and most trusted source for community news includes the Alexandria Gazette Packet, Mount Vernon Gazette and all Connection Newspapers in the metropolitan region.

The pandemic has hit small businesses hard, which in turn has reduced advertising revenue that keeps these local newspapers alive to provide hyper local news to residents. It feels like no small miracle to be looking forward into 2022.

The pandemic has been a bear, financially and otherwise. Revenue plummeted at the beginning in 2020. Some beloved advertisers have stayed the course supporting us throughout, and many more have done what they can. In the fall of 2021 we saw the return of some advertising for events and Grand Openings, but now omicron clouds the horizon in so many ways. Revenue still remains short of expenses despite our greatly curtailed costs.

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## Handing Me All The Way Down



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

I am almost exactly five years younger than my recently deceased brother, Richard. In addition, we are of similar height and weight, mostly, with similar shape and size. As such, I have been the recipient of hand-me-down clothes from my older brother my entire life, especially blue jeans. Richard bought clothes regularly (as became clear after Vanessa asked me to look through his closets and bureaus and to take whatever I wanted), but I had no idea as to its cumulative content. Now I do.

About a month or so after my brother's death on Dec. 3rd, Vanessa asked if I could come over to look through Richard's clothes (and shoes, sneakers, and the like) as she was trying to reorganize her life – and space at home, to begin the excruciating process of living forward while still mourning my brother's somewhat expected passing. She wasn't insistent at all that I visit for this purpose, it was more about her wanting to do something for me and then donating what was left to charity, especially the seasonal stuff, to make something positive from Richard's death. Living alone now in the house they bought together at the beginning of their marriage, 29 years ago, has caused Vanessa to have many sleepless nights ever since. (Not to mention the fact that when she saw Richard on the floor that early morning on Dec. 3rd in front of his bed (where he had been sleeping since he came home from the rehab facility (to not disturb Vanessa too much), she called 911 and with the operator's instruction, performed CPR on my brother. Can you imagine? And oh, by the way, it was in this room, Richard's room, where I spent that Sunday trying on his clothes.

A few Sundays ago, Dina and I went over to Richard and Vanessa's house with the expressed purpose of younger brother "KB" sorting through his older brother Richard's clothes and taking home anything, I wanted – which we did. Not without mixed ('mixed' only begins to describe the range of emotions I experienced trying on Richard's clothes) feelings. The finality of my brother's death being chief among them. Surrounded by his stuff, sitting in his dressing room, sifting through his bureaus, opening his closets, and of course trying on his things, was as joyless as you can imagine. Talk about benefiting from someone's misfortune: not good or the least bit rewarding.

It took me approximately two hours to sort through multiple closets and bureaus, cabinets in his bedroom suite, clothes and shoe racks, tie, and belt racks, to complete the task at hand (and this task wasn't entirely completed as I didn't even go through his spring and summer stuff). I came home with four trash-bags full: sport coats, dress slacks, and blue jeans – in multiple colors, corduroy pants, sneakers and casual and dress shoes, sweatpants, belts, a few casual shirts, two leather jackets, a cashmere overcoat, and three pairs of winter gloves. It was a haul of epic proportions. The only problem? The reason for this haul: my brother's premature death.

I've worn my brother's hand-me-downs my whole life – and I'm 68. However, Richard had been alive for all those 68 years. The hand-me-downs I will be wearing now, I will be doing so because my brother is dead. A little different.

It took me a week before I wore anything that I had taken home that Sunday: a pair of black jeans and some New Balance sneakers. To say I was hesitant to step into his shoes – literally, would be an understatement. I was extremely uncomfortable and nervous, sort of like I was walking over his grave. I couldn't wait to get home and take off his clothes and put my own clothes back on.

Certainly, I'm grateful for the significant upgrade to my wardrobe (Dina is particularly pleased). My wardrobe has been the bane of our marriage). But the cost, not in dollars, but what makes sense, is way too much. I don't need the clothes. I need my brother. Sooner or later, I'll have to buck up and start making more of an effort to wear some of his clothes. Perhaps, after enough time since his death has passed, I'll draw some comfort from walking in his shoes, cinching one of his belts, or relaxing in one of the three pairs of sweatpants I took, as but a few examples. For the moment however, "There's no joy in Mudville," only sadness.

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





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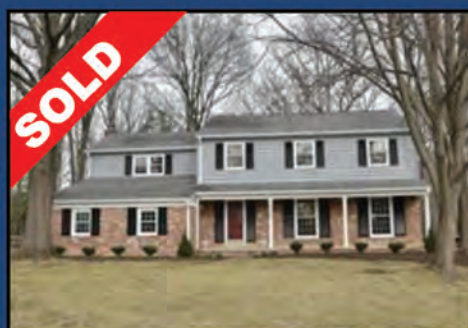
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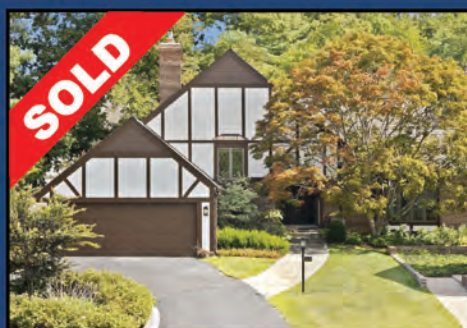
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