

The Arlington Connection

Elizabeth Ochenrider, 101 years old, is one of the first in line for the AFAC Empty Bowls event.

Helping AFAC Feed The Hungry

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Benefits of Puppy Yoga

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Jake's, a Love Story

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PHOTO COURTESY NASA

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FEBRUARY 15-21, 2023

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NEWS

Bells of Netherlands Carillon Resume

What's that sound? The automatic bell feature on the Netherlands Carillon will resume since the National Park Service completed a rehabilitation of the carillon last year. Every day from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. visitors in Arlington Ridge Park will hear the chimes from the carillon every 15 minutes. Additionally, every day at 12 p.m. a musical medley of the United States armed forces anthems will be played and at 6 p.m., the Dutch national anthem (Wilhelmus) and the American nation-

al anthem (Star-Spangled Banner) will be played. The carillon stands as a symbol of the friendship between the countries of the United States and the Netherlands and was upgraded to a grand carillon status last year with the addition of three new bells. Stay tuned for a schedule of weekend evening concerts at the Netherlands Carillon occurring this summer.

Learn more about the history of the Netherlands Carillon: <https://www.nps.gov/gwmp/learn/historyculture/netherlandscarillon.htm>

"FLOURISHING AFTER 55"

Office of 55+ Programs
Department of Parks and Recreation
300 N. Park Dr.,
Arlington, VA 22203
703-228-4747

55+ Programs are in person at 55+ Centers, unless otherwise noted. A 55+ Pass is required to participate (starting at a \$20 annual fee). To join or register, go to registration.arlingtonva.us or call 703-228-4747.

Feb. 21, 6:30 p.m., Walter Reed 55+ Center. Presented by Virginia Cooperative Extension volunteers. Registration # 912400-08.
Performance of classic rock and roll legends with a folk twist including James Taylor, Gordon Lightfoot, Paul Simon, Tuesday, Feb. 21, 1:30 p.m. View on a screen via Zoom at Lubber Run 55+ Center, registration # 912400-42 or from home, registration # 912400-43. Presented by musician Carl Gold.
Genealogy 101, share information and tools, led by experienced genealogist Eileen Bogdanoff, Tuesday, Feb. 21, 11:30 a.m., Lubber Run 55+ Center. Registration # 912402-06.
Local history discussion group to meet Wednesday, Feb. 22, 1:30 p.m., Lubber Run 55+ Center. Registration # 912402-09.
Brain health as you age, what to expect and what's normal, presented by Kay Yong, Insight Memory Care, Wednesday, Feb. 22, 12 p.m., Arlington Mill 55+ Center. Registration # 912500-12.
Music apps, join tech guru Nick Englund and learn how to create playlists using different apps, Wednesday, Feb. 22, 11 a.m., Aurora Hills 55+ Center. Registration # 912403-09.
Line dance practice group for experienced and advanced line dancers, Wednesday, Feb. 22, 10 a.m., Arlington Mill 55+ Center. Drop-in.
Canasta, easy to learn card game, dedicated players available to teach, Wednesday, Feb. 22, 10 a.m., Walter Reed 55+ Center. Drop-in.
America's first black senators, Hiram Revels and Blanche K. Bruce, presented by historian Dan Holt, Thursday, Feb. 23, 1:30 p.m. View the presentation via Zoom at the Walter Reed 55+ Center, registration # 912899-08 or from home, registration # 912899-09.
Movie night, Thursday, Feb. 23, 6 p.m., Lubber Run 55+ Center, showing of "Elvis" (2022) (PG13). Registration # 912804-12.
Library of Virginia's Genealogy Series concludes with a presentation of photographs and other historical images, Thursday, Feb. 23, 2 p.m., virtual. Registration # 912400-39.
Open art studio for artists who work at their own pace, materials not provided, Thursday, Feb. 23, 1:30 p.m., Langston-Brown 55+ Center. Drop-in.

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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
Charlotte	4850	92	JEB STUART HWY	BLUESTONE CREEK	1/29/2023
Franklin	7987	792	LAUREL BLUFF RD/ROUTE 792	RENNET BAG CREEK	1/27/2023
Roanoke	14980	609	E. RURITAN RD/ROUTE 609	BR GLADE CREEK	1/27/2023
Washington	19206	859	GRASSY RIDGE RD	GREEN COVE CREEK	1/26/2023
Amelia	1267	636	LODOR RD	NIBBS CREEK	1/26/2023
Goochland	8603	600	ROCK CASTLE RD	BIG LICKINGHOLE CREEK	1/26/2023
Pulaski (M)	21267	611	ROUTE 0611	NS RAILWAY	1/17/2023
Charlotte	4943	658	WELSH TRACK RD	NS RAILWAY	1/14/2023
Botetourt	3537	T1003	2ND AVE/T1003	TINKER CREEK	1/10/2023
Brunswick	3583	46	CHRISTANNA HWY	NOTTOWAY RV (SPILLWAY)	1/9/2023
Washington	19058	640	BENHAMS RD	ABRAMS CREEK	1/4/2023
Dinwiddie	6049	623	SUTHERLAND RD	NAMOZINE CREEK	1/3/2023
Campbell	4326	705	COVERED BRIDGE RD	SENECA CREEK	1/1/2023

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.

LOVE STORY



Robin Rinearson on duty at Jake's.



Leanna and Kelly making some of the other non-ice cream sweets for sale at the shop.



Joe Rubenstein, getting ready to take the bus back to Arlington Career Center.

PHOTOS BY EDEN BROWN/THE CONNECTION



Chef Paul Badey with Meghan working the ice cream making equipment.

Jake's Ice Cream Shop is a Love Story

(It takes) a village called Jake's.

BY EDEN BROWN
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

Robin Rinearson would say this story is not about her, it's about the men and women who work at Jake's. But without her, there would be no Jake's Ice Cream parlor. Rinearson, with her silver hair pulled back and bright eyes surveying the shop, bustled around as she spoke. After 44 years as a successful optometrist, she could have just gone on cruises when she retired, but instead, decided to use her retirement nest egg to open an ice cream store. She wanted to employ kids and young adults who couldn't necessarily get work experience elsewhere because they were "differently abled," like her nephew, Jake, who has cerebral palsy. "It was all about Jake," she says. "He lost his job at ETron during the pandemic and couldn't find another. He missed working." So, knowing nothing about running an ice cream business, she invested about \$250,000 in equipment and start-up costs. Jake was there to start work the first day. Now that is love.

Even before she had a nephew with cerebral palsy, Rinearson was the kind of person who loved to take care of patients who needed special attention. Her postdoctoral study was in pediatrics and developmental optometry. Several of the young patients she took care of in her former practice came to work in the ice cream shop when she opened it.

You get great ice cream at Jake's, made on the premises, served with big smiles. The flavors and ingredients are real, not imitation. But there is something else going on there. Not only does Rinearson make it possible for her young employees to work and earn a wage, they also have something they don't have if they sit at home — a social life. They have something they might not have



Jake's ice cream cart which can make birthday parties and events special.

enjoyed in school — a sense of adding value and of doing something well.

The shop has gotten plenty of recognition. One Voice of America video features Adam, whose spastic quadriplegic cerebral palsy makes it very hard for him to do anything on his own. He is in a wheelchair. Rinearson hired him to be her greeter and social media manager. Greeting is an easy task — he loves people — but doing the computer work requires the use of voice commands exclusively since he can't use his hands. It takes him many voice commands to move the mouse along a grid to the right place. It's painstaking, but he loves it. It's time when he doesn't depend on others and he's good at it.

There are days when Rinearson can't quite believe how things have come together. When her employees were having trouble with some of the basic tasks of retail work, like making the correct change quickly, Poolsville High School offered a solution. The school's engineering classes wanted to design technology that can help differently



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Valentine's Day ice cream cakes are on offer at Jake's for the next few weeks.

abled people. They found Rinearson and asked her to make a list of what she needed. In addition to making change, she needed a way for employees to wrap and label cake pops: they now use a special device to remove the stickers from the backing to get the job done and a cash register app that helps them make change easily by showing the number of bills and coins in their proper denomination.

Arlington County Public Schools sends a bus with kids from its PEP (Program for Employment Preparedness) to Jake's to work from 9:45 to noon two days a week. They like giving their students work experience in the real world. They send a job coach from the Arlington Career Center named Joe Rubenstein who works with the three students during their time at Jake's. He teaches life skills, work skills, and perhaps most important, soft skills, like advocating for oneself, communication, imitating. Rubenstein worked for 21 years in APS as a teacher and four in his current job at the career center. He said hands down this is the best job he's had.

Rinearson hired a chef named Paul Badey who runs the kitchen and trains his employ-

ees on how to make ice cream, ice cream cakes, decorated cookies, pretzels and cake pops, ice cream cupcakes, and cocoa bombs. Badey said he loves working with his staff and considers them "easy" to manage compared to some of his previous jobs. For one thing, they don't drink alcohol, or do drugs; they don't come in comparing notes about who went out with whom, they have a lot of self-discipline, and they are loyal workers. His biggest challenge is to refocus his staff from the occasional distraction, but that is what keeps it fun.

One of his workers is Meghan, a cheery young woman who is excited to talk about her job. She went to McLean High School and is in a Fairfax County program for adults with disabilities. She has Down Syndrome. Meghan relates easily to people and loves having a job. She greets a mother who has brought her daughter with Down Syndrome into Jake's for ice cream. One of the benefits of Jake's is how parents with children with disabilities can come in for ice cream and "no one looks at them funny." They are able to relate to the servers and feel good about their community of like-minded people. Students in programs like PEP are able to see a future for themselves.

The hardest thing for young people like Meghan and her colleagues is finding paying jobs. The only other business that employs and pays differently-abled people coming out of the Arlington PEP is Nando's Peri Peri in Rosslyn. Some companies train students on unpaid internships, but once they have the skills, the newly trained young people are not offered jobs.

The second hardest thing is that you can only make so much money before the benefits available to people who are on SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance) or Medicaid waivers are discontinued. Adam cannot live on his own, and his parents get some assistance with physical therapy and equipment needed to enable him to stay healthy.

SEE JAKE'S, PAGE 5

ARLINGTON CONNECTION ♦ FEBRUARY 15-21, 2023 ♦ 3



April Sommer Clark, second grade teacher at Fleet Elementary School.



Jennifer Raymundo with her interpreter, Kaeleigh Green and assistant teacher Frecia Love with Narimane Melichk, an Arabic speaker.

Valentines with a Compliment for All

Second Graders.

BY SHIRLEY RUHE
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

It's a busy day in the second grade class at Fleet Elementary. April Sommer Clark's class is working on their "compliment" Valentine's Day cards.

Clark explains she has been doing this for 20 years for Valentine's Day. Each child writes a personal card to every other child in the classroom of 25 students. The card includes a compliment. "We are a response classroom school, and we use the CARES model which emphasizes character development, self regulation and positive characteristics."

The cards are made by Clark's mom in Hawaii and sent to the classroom to be filled with compliments. Clark says providing these cards makes her mom feel close to her. "My mom grew up in Appalachia and didn't have a lot so she values why we write compliments to each other."

Noah Olson is working on Rosa's card. "I think you are quiet in class. That is good." He says he only has nine more cards to go.

Musa Ali says he starts with his friends because it is easier to come up with a compliment. He is working on number #17. Narimane. "She is funny. She makes me laugh all the time. When she laughs, I start to laugh. I don't know why."

Dillon Galves seals his envelope and puts it on his stack of completed valentines. He starts working on Jennifer who he declares "on the playground and on the slide she is very fun." He says it was hard to think of all those compliments because he didn't want to give everyone the same thing.

Vivian Ambrose circles the room with a stack of completed valentines. She slips the



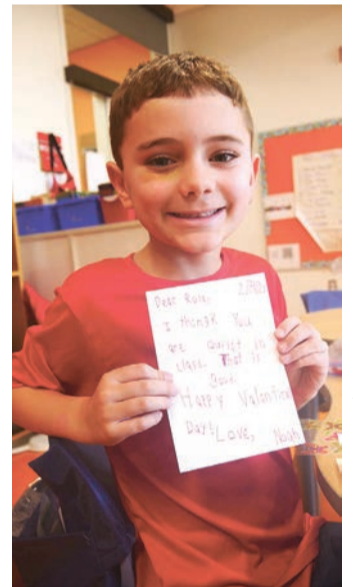
Briebella Mencho Ortega.



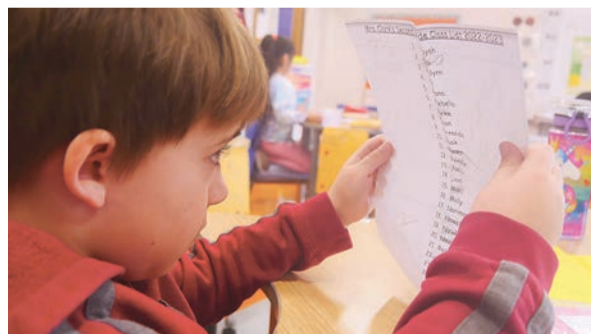
Musi Ali.



Vivian Ambrose.



Noah Olson.



James Uchno.

valentines into each student's large envelope at the end of their table. She says she has already completed her valentines. Vivian reflects that it was harder to find compliments "for people who aren't very nice to me. I think of what they like to do. But this was a good idea."

James Uchno grabs his pencil and starts

to write. He is working on Liam. "He is very nice; he is a good kid in class. And he likes soccer." James says he would play football if he had the choice. He says he has no idea what the other kids might write about him.

Briebella Mencho Ortega looks forward to opening the valentines. She sorts through her stack of cards with pictures of multi-colored horses, reptiles and hearts and holds up her favorite — a picture of a dove.

She said writing some of the cards was hard. Briebella is ready to write a compliment for Jennifer. "She can work with anyone."

Jennifer Raymundo, who is partially deaf, sits at a table with her interpreter Kaeleigh Green. Jennifer is also assisted by Frecia

Love, a teacher's assistant, who is assigned to her. Fleet Elementary has a program at the school for the 11 students who are deaf and hard of hearing. Narimane Melichk sits at the table with Jennifer, also working on her valentine cards. Narimane is from Algeria and speaks Arabic and is also helped by the teacher's assistant as needed.

Clark calls out, "Five minute warning." She explains this is a multi-day project where they work a little each day. Clark calls the students to bring the completed valentines her and to sit in a circle on the floor. "How did it go today? Let's talk about how it feels to write your valentines."

"Good," they agree.

Clark says, "People notice how you act in class. Words are important and we will work better together when we compliment each other. We will have a nicer classroom community."

PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUHE/THE CONNECTION

LOVE STORY

Jake's Ice Cream

FROM PAGE 3

But the Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) limit on wages limits his working hours. In 2021, workers who were disabled could earn up to \$1,310 per month and still qualify under the SGA limit. Because of discontinuing this sub minimum wage requirement, people who are disabled have to cut their hours or face losing their benefits. This may result in someone only being able to work 8 hours a week. Companies that might hire them for a part-time job and pay them more than that will find another employee who has no wage limitations that would decrease their available hours for work. If there is one message Rinearson would like to get out to the community it is: Change the law on this so more kids can be hired full time and do the excellent work they are capable of doing without losing the benefits they need.

Rinearson says she has had some support from Arlington County in more ways than the career center program. Board member Libby Garvey made introductions to JBG realty to help find a place in Arlington where she could open her sec-

ond ice cream business, and now, she is about to open a completely different business, Jake's Gourmet Popcorn, which will open next to Michael's in the shopping center at Seven Corners later this spring. She has also gotten help from the parents of the people who work at Jake's, like Lucia Claster, whose son, Harris, works at Jake's.

"Arlington PTAs have been awesome in supporting this place," said Rinearson. Although business has just barely broken even post-pandemic (masks are still worn inside) the shop suffers financially during the winter months. Rinearson offers ice cream cakes, seasonal cakes, catered events, and fun activities like "make your own flavor for your birthday," to try to attract customers when the weather turns cold.

Valentine's Day cakes, sweets, and cake pops are on offer now, and you can be sure Meghan will be handing them over with a huge smile.

To learn more about Jake's, see <https://www.sweetjakesicecream.com>

and to learn about the Arlington Career Center and PEP, see: <https://careercenter.apsva.us/programs/pep/>

BULLETIN BOARD

Submit civic/community announcements at ConnectionNews-papers.com/Calendar. Photos and artwork welcome. Deadline is Thursday at noon, at least two weeks before the event.

POLICE NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS TO COMMUNITY POLICE ACADEMY

The Arlington County Police Department is now accepting applications for the 27th Community Police Academy (CPA). The CPA is an educational program designed to strengthen communication and collaboration between police and the community they serve. The goal of the CPA is to increase participant's knowledge and understanding of how the Arlington County Police Department operates and its role in the community.

The CPA is an eight-week program beginning on Thursday, March 2. Classes will take place on Thursdays from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. at the Arlington County Courthouse (1425 N. Courthouse Road). One session will take place on a Saturday at an off-site location, outside of Arlington County. To receive a graduation certificate, participants must attend at least six sessions.

Interested applicants must be at least 18 years old and should live, work, attend school, or be

otherwise affiliated or engaged with Arlington community organizations. Due to the nature of the material covered in the CPA, a criminal history check will be conducted on each applicant. Prior arrests and/or convictions do not necessarily prohibit participation in the CPA and each applicant will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Class size is limited, and every effort will be made to maintain a balanced enrollment reflective of Arlington's diverse community. Online applications are due no later than Friday, February 17, 2022 at 5:00 p.m.

ARLINGTON ROTARY CLUB SCHOLARSHIPS

The Arlington Rotary Club (ARC) Education Fund offers scholarships for Arlington high school seniors planning to attend college in fall of 2023.

A \$10,000 four-year scholarship to attend any accredited college or university is available based on three criteria: academic record, community service, and financial need. It is paid in installments of \$1,250 per semester over four years.

Students who plan to earn a B.A. degree by attending Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC) for two years, followed by two years at a four year college or university through an

SEE BULLETIN, PAGE 6

Dr. Whyte's

New Book

Released February 14, 2023

TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR HEART DISEASE RISK

JOHN WHYTE, MD

Chief Medical Officer of WebMD



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Rolling the Dice on Casinos

Lawmakers to consider location of fifth and final casino.

BY MICHAEL LEE POPE
THE CONNECTION

The 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/THE CONNECTION

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 gaming 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 gavels 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

FROM PAGE 5

NVCC guaranteed admission agreement (GAA) also are eligible to apply. Details and application forms for the \$10,000 scholarship are available on the ARC website. www.arlingtonrotaryclub.org. Inquiries can sent to Tony Weaver scholarships@arlingtonrotaryclub.org. The application deadline is Friday March 31st at 5 p.m. ET. Arlington Rotary also awards \$8,000 in sti-

pends for students graduating from Arlington Community High School (ACHS) who plan to pursue an A.B. degree at NVCC. Selection is made in consultation with ACHS school counselors and its administration. Interested ACHS students should contact their school counselors for more information.

ARLINGTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE HAS NEW CHIEF DEPUTY
County Sheriff Jose Quiroz selected Tara John-

son as his Chief Deputy within the Sheriff's Office. She will be the first female Chief Deputy in Arlington's history. Chief Johnson was hired in August 2000 as a Deputy Sheriff after graduating from the University of Maryland, College Park. During her 22-year career, she has held many positions, including working in the detention center for 16 years as a Deputy Sheriff, then promoted to the ranks of Sergeant and later Lieutenant, being assigned to Alternative Programs and

Pretrial, promoted to Captain as the Internal Affairs Commander, and lastly promoted to the rank of Major as the Director of Administration. As Director of Administration, Chief Johnson has played a critical role in the Budget Section over the past four years. Due to her broad experience, commitment to the agency and those incarcerated, she is a wealth of knowledge and asset to the Sheriff's Office.

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OPINION

Budget Reveals Values and Priorities

BY SEN. ADAM P. EBBIN

Both bodies of the General Assembly reported a proposed budget a few days after the halfway point of our 46 day legislative session. While both budgets use the Governor's proposal as a jumping off point, often the outcomes are drastically different – especially in years of split government. A budget is a list of priorities, and it can tell a great deal about the values and priorities of its authors. Reviewing the proposed budgets from the House of Delegates, and State Senate, it is evident that these bodies have differing sets of priorities based around a central question of governing: should we invest in core public services or cut revenues?

From a 10,000 foot view, the difference between our two proposed budgets comes down to that – the House has chosen to align with the Governor's proposal of cutting more than \$1 billion in taxes, mainly for large corporations and Virginia's highest earners. The Senate proposal retains existing, already comparatively low, tax rates on those individuals and entities, and chooses instead to inject most of that \$1 billion into public education.

Still, there are some areas of agreement.

The two bodies are mostly in agreement on pay for state employees. Both amended budgets

include an additional two percent raise for state employees. This raise will be on top of a five percent raise that was approved last year, in an attempt to better keep up with inflation. However, there is disagreement on how to allocate bonuses to qualified public servants. The Senate's proposal is to send a \$1,000 dollar bonus to all state employees on Dec. 1, 2023, while the House's proposal is to give targeted bonuses to the state employees who work in departments and agencies with the highest employment vacancies. I believe it is important to give these bonuses to the broadest possible swath of public servants, and I will be advocating for this measure in the final budget.

The largest difference between the two proposed budgets is the total allocation for public education. In recent weeks it was uncovered that the Youngkin administration had miscalculated the amount of funds that it would be able to allocate to local school divisions because their calculations did not take into account the elimination of the state portion of the grocery tax, an action we took last year. The miscalculations shorted Virginia school districts approximately \$220 million. Both houses of the General Assembly sought to replace these finds. The House of



Sen. Adam P. Ebbin

Delegates has set aside just \$4.9 million to make up this funding. The Senate on the other hand, proposes \$58.1 million to help address the shortfall. This \$58.1 million would be enough to help school districts complete this fiscal year. Another component of the Senate's budget that is not in the House Budget is the removal of the cap on state funding of school support positions. This cap, put in place during the great recession, limits the amount of funding available for positions such as custodians, assistant superintendents, school nurses, and other support positions. By removing it, our school districts will be able to attract and retain critical staff who make our schools run better and improve our students' daily lives. The proposed Senate Budget includes over \$1 billion in direct aid to school divisions, over \$700 million more than the amount set aside by the House of Delegates. This critical investment in our children's education is a strong reminder of our commitment to ensuring a better future for all Virginians. In addition to our K-12 schools, the Senate Budget includes an additional twenty million dollar increase in funding for Pre-K, ensuring access to affordable early education – a key indicator of long term educa-

tional success. Finally, the Senate budget diverts all proposed additional funding from Governor Youngkin's "lab school" proposals, which have come to be seen by many as a backdoor to publicly funded charter schools. I am a firm believer that public funds should be spent on public education.

Additionally, the proposed Senate Budget includes an increase in funding for mental and behavioral health services. Our budget sets aside an additional \$8 million on top of what was introduced by the Governor to address the mental health crisis in Virginia. Providing greater access to mental healthcare, particularly for our youth, will help increase the quality of life for Virginians. Additionally, providing more funding for mental health professionals will ultimately take pressure off of law enforcement as police officers will not be in the position to be responding to mental health calls.

There are major differences between the two budgets both in terms of what is in the budget and on how much money should be dedicated to particular projects. In the coming weeks, members of the House and Senate money committees will work to alleviate the discrepancies and create a conference budget that can pass in the coming weeks.

It remains a privilege to serve the 30th District.

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. Thankful-

ly, 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 en-

SEE TURNING ADVOCACY, PAGE 10

Community Fills Up Empty Bowls

BY SHIRLEY RUHE
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

The Arlington community has filled the parking lot and lined the streets for the AFAC Empty Bowls event, back in person after a break for Covid. Charles Meng, Arlington Food Assistance Center CEO, says, "This is truly a community event that brings together families, volunteers, supporters."

A line forms out the door at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church on Sunday, Feb. 12 waiting to choose a hand crafted pottery bowl donated by local potters and fill it with soup. Some choose a paper bowl and others fill their new pottery bowl with soup. The diverse spread of soups includes everything from lentil and butternut squash to potato and Brunswick stew. The popular lobster bisque has just run out and the line stops mid table until the tureen has been refilled. A new Korean tofu soup has been added to the choices this year.

One of the first in line is 101-year-old Elizabeth Ochenrider with her daughter Lisa Purrington. Ochenrider navigates her walker carefully to the table lined with pottery bowls of all description. She carefully chooses a blue bowl swirled with decorations inside. "See how artistic." After a little thought she chooses the chicken noodle soup, and her daughter picks the lentil. Ochenrider says she has been coming to the Empty Bowls events for years. "I have a lot of these bowls."

Meanwhile at a table nearby, 2-year-old Iris Staley attends her first Empty Bowls event, also choosing chicken noodle soup and a large roll that she soaks in her bowl and stuffs in her mouth.

Spheres and the Community from George Mason University plays classic music from the stage at the end of the room.

Student volunteers circle the room picking up empty paper bowls, pouring water and assisting with clean up. Anna McLaughlin and Sophia Delaney are two of the student volunteers from H-B Woodlawn and represent the National Honor Society. McLaughlin says she has worked for AFAC doing other volunteer work like packing food. "I love to use my time to make other people happy."

Delaney says she grew up volunteering with her mom and always drops off food for AFAC. "It's very important in my family to do this for other people."

Meghan French is another volunteer who is there today because



Volunteers ladle out the popular lobster bisque at Empty Bowls Sunday, February 12.



AFAC CEO Charles Meng tells the group the number of families served per week hit a new peak in late January of 2,888.



Elizabeth Ochenrider, 101 years old, is one of the first in line for the AFAC Empty Bowls event.



Two-year-old Iris Staley finds a roll soaked in chicken noodle soup to be her favorite at Empty Bowls.



Anna McLaughlin and Sophia Delaney join a group of Honor Society students from H-B Woodlawn to volunteer at Empty Bowls.

PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUHE

a colleague asked for help. And she says she does a lot of volunteering with her daughter who is there today as well. "I love AFAC."

Meng says this is the eleventh

year for Empty Bowls. The event has become so popular they have had to add a second seating to accommodate another 200 people. Meng tells the group AFAC had

been serving about 2,000 families weekly but during Covid the number climbed to 2,468 families a week. And then the number climbed some more. "The last

week in January we hit a new peak of 2,888 families. We go up about 150 a month." Meng explained this year AFAC will hit 1.5 million served. "We do numbers in real time so I'll know who that person is, and we'll celebrate."

Meng says AFAC has served 68,000 families in the seven months since their fiscal year began. "At this rate we may well be serving 140,000 by the end of the year." Meng says there is lots of need in surrounding areas. AFAC has expanded to a small site in Falls Church and in the next couple of weeks will add a site in Alexandria with several new sites to come in Arlington as well. "We are committed to never turn anyone away. You, the donors have made this possible."

But he adds, "Arlington will always be our focus; this is where it all began."



Soup and music enliven a rainy day at the AFAC Empty Bowls community event February 12 at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church.

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OPINION

Turning Advocacy Into Action

FROM PAGE 7

sure 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.



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GROUNDHOG



Mae sits with her grandfather and watches carefully as her groundhog pokes over the rim of his paper cup burrow. He says he brought his kids to Gulf Branch Nature Center and Park when they were growing up and now he is bringing his grandchildren.



Charles colors his groundhog landscape for the outside of his craft burrow.

Grumpy Gulf Branch Groundhog Class

BY SHIRLEY RUHE
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

On Feb. 2 Punxsutawney Phil left his burrow in Gobbler's Knob in Pennsylvania. As the legend goes, since this legendary Groundhog saw his shadow, we're in for six more weeks of winter. He has been predicting the seasons since 1887. But as the records show, Phil's record has only been 40 percent accurate over the last 10 years.

This didn't stop the Grumpy Groundhog class at Gulf Branch Nature Center and Park Thursday afternoon. They made groundhog burrows out of paper cups and then took a hike through the park to identify the habitat, food and where the groundhog's predators would be waiting.

"So who knows another name for a groundhog? Barbara (Bobbi) Farley, the park naturalist, asks the group of 6-10 year olds arranged around two rectangular tables. Ben asks, "You mean the scientific name? I only know a few of those." Others volunteered woodchuck, marmot and beaver.

Farley explains a groundhog burrows underground and then comes to the surface. She explains the class will have a craft today where they can create the inside of the paper cup as the burrow and the outside as the landscape. Farley pulls out her phone and holds up a picture. "It looks like this. But you are the artist so it's your choice. You can create anything you want."

After liberal use of scotch tape, the small picture of a groundhog gets attached to a Popsicle stick and inserted into a hole in the bottom of a cup. Eyes focus as each of the groundhogs pops out of the hole and over the top of the cup.

"Now I've got some cool things to tell you about groundhogs before we take our hike." Farley holds up the pelt of a groundhog. "No, you can touch but not put your mouth on it ... no kissing." A small boy demonstrates an air kiss.

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PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUHE/THE CONNECTION



Barbara (Bobbi) Farley, the Park Naturalist, on loan from Long Branch Nature Center, teaches Grumpy Groundhog class.

She continues, "What makes a mammal a rodent is these teeth. These are plastic replicas but the real teeth are small but very strong. They never stop growing, like your fingernails.

"This is a real chewed-on log by a beaver," she says holding up a mostly missing tree trunk. "By chewing on things they keep their teeth sharp and short."

Farley explains groundhogs hibernate or go to sleep. "They store up body fat and sleep through the winter. Their heart rate is very slow. When you go to sleep everything slows down. You aren't using energy. Let's see. Now everyone put your hand on your heart and feel your heartbeat."

"I can't feel my heart."

"Me neither."

After assisting with an anatomy lesson Farley says, "Now let's do jumping jacks; everyone do 30. Now feel your heartbeat. See how fast it is. That's what happens when a groundhog wakes up."

The groundhog has definitely predicted winter in Arlington. It is cold but the kids run out the door with jackets half zipped and hats askew to chase down their own real life groundhog hiding behind a tree.

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You can't Make This Stuff Up



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

I had my first dream a few nights ago in which my recently deceased brother, Richard was front and center (actually, he was off to the side). He was standing in a non-descript room with our late mother standing off to his right and yours truly standing a similar distance to his left. He was wearing a button-down sweater with the bottom four or five buttons, buttoned. There was a diamond pattern alternating blue and khaki featured throughout his sweater. Also, he was wearing a white/beige cotton-type sheet underneath the sweater and light-colored pants to match. His sweater was form-fitting from its bottom to just over Richard's waist. There was no conversation and no touching.

He looked fabulous, svelte, and extremely fit. He had a big smile on his face and a crinkle in his eyes. He looked like a movie star. I remember thinking: "Wow. He looks great," and then looking across the room to where my mother was standing, and noticed she had a similar expression to what I was feeling, or at least that's what the dream made me think. Then this dream sequence was over. But not the dream.

Next, I was sitting in my car on the left side of the island/pumps at a service station, and again saw my brother - on the right side of the pump island. He was standing alongside a Volkswagen Rabbit-type convertible with its top down. He was wearing the same outfit and had the same big smile. He seemed to have an aura around him. He appeared - to me anyway, positively, absolutely alive and well, vigorous and super confident. Then the dream/my sleep ended. I woke up smiling, joyful that I had experienced this spiritual interaction with my brother, Richard. I knew we were very close and connected in so many ways. But I hadn't considered as to whether it would transfer somehow when one of us died. Quite frankly, even though he was the older brother, once I was diagnosed with a terminal form of lung cancer originally back in 2009 giving me a "13 month to two-year prognosis," Richard predeceasing me didn't seem likely. And since I never think of myself actually dying, I'm likewise never thinking about what I'm going to be doing after I die (up there, down there, Book of Judgment).

While I was viewing this dream, I was cognizant somehow that as soon as I woke up, I needed to write down what I had just dreamt. I remember deciding that writing about this dream as soon as I woke wasn't necessary. The dream was so important, how could I possibly forget about it. Well, I forgot about it for a couple of hours.

Then the substance of the dream reappeared in my conscious mind, and I immediately called Vanessa (Richard's widow) and shared with her what I have just shared with you. She was eager to hear any and all details and was quite happy (which of course is the wrong word, especially under the circumstances) to hear that I thought Richard looked so handsome, and so fit and healthy, a version of him neither of us had seen in the previous four or five months since he was first hospitalized.

Unfortunately, Vanessa had not yet had a Richard-centric dream. She was excited (again the wrong word, but I imagine you can appreciate the wide range of highs and lows one feels over time concerning the passing of a loved one/hugely significant presence in one's life) with the prospect of Richard getting into our respective subconscious. I think she felt encouraged by my dream experience vis-à-vis the possibility/expectation that soon she might be experiencing a similar connection.

I mean, if he's going to reach out/touch (hopefully literally, as my late father did to me a few weeks after his death) me, he's definitely going to reach out to Vanessa, his wife of 29 years. If anybody is worthy and deserving of a spiritual connection, it's Vanessa. She was a great wife, and he was a great husband. They had everything to live for and look forward to. Now alone, Vanessa is trying to find her footing. I'm hoping she sees Richard in a dream soon. I'm sure he would be an overall positive experience for her, as it has been for me. And if there's anything Vanessa and I could use right now - since Richard's death, is a positive experience.

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



Many Benefits of Combining Animals with Yoga

Yoga with kittens and puppies.

BY ASHLEY SIMPSON
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

**Downward Dog.
Upward Dog.
Cat-Cow.
Crow.**

There are so many yoga poses inspired by – and named after – animals. Still, you won't likely see dogs, cats or any furry or feathery creature doing yoga any time soon. However, you can come close to the experience by taking one of the Animal Welfare League of Arlington (AWLA)'s kitten or puppy yoga classes, which the organization has been hosting regularly since 2016.

As some of the AWLA's kittens and puppies await adoption, they attend kitten or puppy yoga classes as guests of honor. And while the young animals don't do yoga themselves, they do steal the proverbial show. During these classes, human yogis not only get the benefits of a workout taught by a seasoned certified yoga instructor, but they also enjoy the company of young cats or dogs who have free rein of the room.

"As the puppy yoga classes go on, the puppies mostly run around, jump in people's laps, play with each other, and fall asleep on people," Chelsea Jones, AWLA Senior Communications Specialist, said. "Kittens can be a little more diverse. Some get stuck in right away and go up to people for a cuddle, some want to play, and some take their time surveying the room before interacting with anyone."

These classes offer a win for every party involved. They not only warm up the hearts (and muscles) of animal lovers in the community, but they also serve as important fundraisers for the AWLA. All the while, these classes also provide excellent socialization opportunities for the participating young animals.

"The puppies and kittens sleep really hard after each of these events," Jones said.

All kitten and yoga puppy classes are taught by certified instructor Beth Wolfe, who was the one to approach the AWLA with the idea for this program back in 2016. She offered up her skills to the AWLA, and with her experience with both animals and yoga, it was an obvious 'yes' for the local animal welfare organization.

"I also teach goat yoga, and I used to work with a marsupial sanctuary," Wolfe said. "We did a lot of kangaroo yoga, so I know the benefits of combining animals with yoga well, and I love facilitating these classes."

Wolfe added that yoga practice that includes animals is very different from traditional yoga – and that both forms of practice offer tremendous benefits.

"Practicing yoga with animals is totally different from practicing yoga in a traditional vinyasa class," Wolfe said. "Rather than focusing on the traditional postures – asana – of yoga, I shift the focus to the yoga rasas, or 'energies,' which include love, humor, wonder, and calmness. I find that the 'animal therapy' aspect is beneficial for relieving stress. There is a lot of laughter and silliness at the animal classes, and everyone leaves with a big smile on their face."

These smiles don't come at the cost of the puppies' or kittens'



Beth Wolfe leads the kitten or puppy yoga classes, and is experienced in combining animals with yoga, even beyond kittens and puppies. @bethawolfe

health and safety, either; the AWLA is very intentional about choosing the right animals for these classes.

"There are a few factors that go into deciding when we have puppies or kittens that can attend yoga," Jones said. "They need to be at least six weeks old and able to be away from their mother for a few hours. They also must be up-to-date on their vaccines and healthy overall. No runny noses allowed! We also look for litters of social puppies and kittens who won't be scared by a crowd of people."

Jones added that it is usually between ten and 12 kittens who attend kitten yoga, and between seven and ten puppies for puppy yoga. AWLA also caps the classes at 25 people to avoid overwhelming the puppies and kittens.

Wolfe is also on her toes for ev-

ery kitten and puppy yoga class she teaches. She is always sensitive to the nature of the specific kittens and puppies when leading each class – ensuring that the classes complement the temperament of the young animals.

"The number of yoga poses we do varies depending on the energy of the animals," Wolfe said. "When they're sleepy or shy, we do more movement-based yoga, and when they're playful and cuddly, we focus our energy on being present with them. I always try to incorporate some easy 'feel good' stretches – mostly seated and prone. And of course, we always do animal related poses like cat, tiger, sphinx, puppy, down dog, and upward dog."

As Wolf doesn't always expect human yogis to always execute

perfect poses, the AWLA team doesn't expect perfect potty etiquette from the animals. They always come as prepared as possible for bathroom malfunctions.

"The kittens are almost always already litter-trained, so we make sure to have a few litter boxes around the room," Jones said. "It's a different story for puppies. They are too young to be house-trained, so we come prepared for accidents, which definitely happen. We have lots of paper towels, poop bags, and cleaning spray. We warn yogis about this and ask them not to bring yoga mats they are particularly attached to."

Still, these classes are worth putting up with potty accidents. Since their inception, both kitten and puppy yoga have been among the AWLA's most popular fundraising activities.

"Kitten yoga, and especially puppy yoga, is extremely popular," Jones said. "We almost always sell out for the classes we offer, and then for puppy yoga, there is usually a long waitlist."

Since the classes depend on the availability and health of kittens and puppies, the AWLA cannot establish a set-in-stone yoga schedule. While kitten yoga is typically held once or twice per month, puppy yoga happens less frequently because the "inventory" of the AWLA's healthy puppies isn't as reliable.

The classes are ticketed, with each slot costing \$40. Children must be over the age of 12 to attend.

In order to stay in the loop with these classes, which are held at the AWLA's facility, visit bethawolfe.com/events. Also, follow the Arlington Welfare League of Virginia on Facebook, or on Instagram under the handle @awlaarlington.