

THE CONNECTION

CENTRE VIEW ❖ Chantilly ❖ Great Falls ❖ Herndon ❖ McLean ❖ Oak Hill ❖ Oakton ❖ Reston ❖ Vienna

Chocolate for All In McLean

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Henry Peevy, 7 of McLean, holds his taste tickets at the McLean Chocolate Festival organized by the Rotary Club of McLean.

Reston Library, Housing Plan Falls Through

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Marking Local Black History

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LEGO Heaven Is Coming

PAGE 10

PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION
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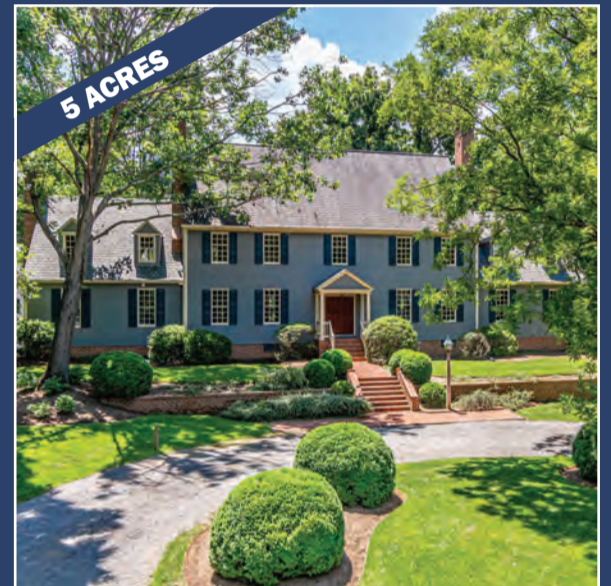
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SCREENSHOT VIA FAIRFAX COUNTY REDEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING AUTHORITY

A rendering of developer Foulger-Pratt's now defunct proposal for a new Reston Library with affordable units built on top.



PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

Image of Reston Regional Library taken Feb. 11, 2023. The library was a "flagship" facility when it opened 38 years ago in 1985

Foulger-Pratt Terminates Bowman Towne Court Agreement

Hits affordable housing hard. Still, some consider it fortuitous for a new Reston Regional Library.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Real-estate investment and developer firm, Foulger-Pratt notified the Fairfax County Redevelopment and Housing Authority (FCRHA) last week that it terminated its Bowman Towne Court - Executed Interim Agreement. The Interim Agreement, signed on Oct. 28, 2022, related to the proposed build and delivery of 350 new affordable units and a new Reston regional library located at the corner of Bowman Towne Drive and Town Center Parkway in Reston.

The termination letter came three and a half months after the agreement's execution and slightly over 15 months after the developer presented its unsolicited proposal under the PPEA, Public-Private Education Facilities and Infrastructure Act.

"The developer cited significantly higher construction costs and recent interest rate hikes as the primary reason for ending its agreement with the county," said Supervisor Walter Alcorn (D-Hunter Mill) on Feb. 8.

If the proposed project had ultimately been approved, the FCRHA would have leased the ground to Foulger-Pratt, which would design, construct, and operate the affordable housing community. Fairfax County would own and operate the public library. "Our pressing public needs have not changed, starting with a new regional library, a new shelter, updated and more affordable housing," Alcorn said.

Timeline Leading to Early Termination

Foulger-Pratt presented its Unsolicited Proposal per the Public-Private Education Facilities and Infrastructure Act (PPEA) on Oct. 27, 2021. It rendered a proposed design and build with financing considerations for the new Reston Regional Library, a multifamily/mixed-use development, and park-

ing built on two sites totaling 4.49 acres at the intersection of Bowman Towne Drive and Town Center Parkway.

On April 12, 2022, Alcorn presented, and the supervisors approved the transfer of property to FCRAH, for Bowman Towne Court Development. According to its terms, if "the FCRHA no longer pursues the project, the FCRHA will transfer ownership of the property back to the Board."

On May 16, 2022, Foulger-Pratt presented an Addendum to the Statement of Intent. Building A&B on the existing 2.89-acre property (0171-0003E) owned by FCRHA would comprise 192 units of affordable housing building on top of the library, parking included on site. Building C&D, on the second site, an approximately 1.6-acre board-owned lot adjacent to the 8.44-acre board-owned Reston Police Station parking lot, would comprise 158 units, residential parking, and replace at-grade police parking with 130 underground parking.

On Sept. 16, 2022, FCRHA kicked off the public engagement process for the potential affordable housing in Reston. At the time, FCRHA Chairman Melissa McKenna said, "The work is far from over, and this agreement would grant the authority to continue working through every detail — with community participation."

Conditions that Led Foulger-Pratt to Terminate

In its termination letter, developer Foulger-Pratt said two conditions had changed. First, the project's cost had increased by about 24 percent compared to its original estimates. In its 2021 Bowman Towne Court Redevelopment Unsolicited Proposal per the Public-Private Education Facilities and Infrastructure Act (PPEA), Foulger-Pratt said how the company brought the "advantage of financial strength through its resources and ability to attract outside

capital." The developer added, "You can count on our ingenuity to craft public/private partnerships."

Foulger-Pratt's May 16, 2022, addendum said its proposed financing plan was described thoroughly in its original submission. "We would propose to finance the development in two phases: Building 1, including 192 units, and Building 2, containing 258 units. Each building would be financed as a hybrid 9 percent + 4 percent LIHTC (Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program) to spread the subordinate financing request over multiple years."

The second condition that changed is that the 24 percent increase "would delay completion of the project." The agreement addressed early termination, and Foulger-Pratt was within its rights to do so. According to the terms of the agreement, the "Developer" had the right to terminate the agreement by Aug. 15, 2023, or at an earlier date "if the project was infeasible within the timeframe specified in the contract agreement."

Did Foulger-Pratt Plan To Deliver "a Shell" for the Library?

Supervisor Alcorn said that Foulger-Pratt's withdrawal of its unsolicited proposal provided "an opportunity for the public sector to define the redevelopment approach for this site better." He noted the construction of a new Reston Regional Library is delayed, and the existing library is at the end of its useful life. "A new building is urgently needed," Alcorn said. "The Fairfax County Public Library is reviewing its options,"

Eileen Evon, PR and Community Outreach Chair, Friends of Reston Regional Library (FRRL), provided a statement on behalf of FRRL. It said in part that the Foulger-Pratt proposal indicated that it did not prioritize the library: "Many members of the community agreed with this assessment ... Some have also described the plan as including "a new regional library." To the best of our understanding, this was not true. Their proposal included an empty space in a building—a

"shell," as it were ... The County — at taxpayer expense — would separately have to design, construct, equip, and fund a new regional library to be installed inside that space. We hope for more and better proposals in the future."

Alcorn said that plans for a new regional library had assumed a public-private partnership for over a decade. Voters approved \$10 million in general obligation bond funding in 2012.

Impact on Affordable Housing Goals

The agreement termination could impact the joint goal of the FCRHA and Fairfax County to create 10,000 units of affordable housing by the year 2034. There is a growing list of public-private partnership development projects currently under construction, such as The Residences at North Hill, One University, and Oakwood Senior Living, but the need remains high.

Foulger-Pratt Developing Affordable Housing Elsewhere

In the meantime, Foulger-Pratt announced on Oct. 17, 2022, that it broke ground on a \$101 million affordable housing project in Northeast D.C. On Sept. 2, 2022, Foulger-Pratt announced its 148-unit, all-affordable housing project on the edge of the H Street Corridor, the Paxton, had secured nearly \$90 million in new financing and started construction. "Nearly \$47M in tax-exempt bonds and \$42M in local and federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit equity, underwritten by the D.C. Housing Finance Agency ... The project also received a \$29M Housing Production Trust Fund loan from the D.C. Department of Housing and Community Development last year, bringing the total amount of public financing backing the project to \$118M."

Visit Fairfax County Procurement and Material Management to view county documents on the Bowman Towne Court Redevelopment. <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/procurement/ppea/bowman-towne-court-redevelopment>

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

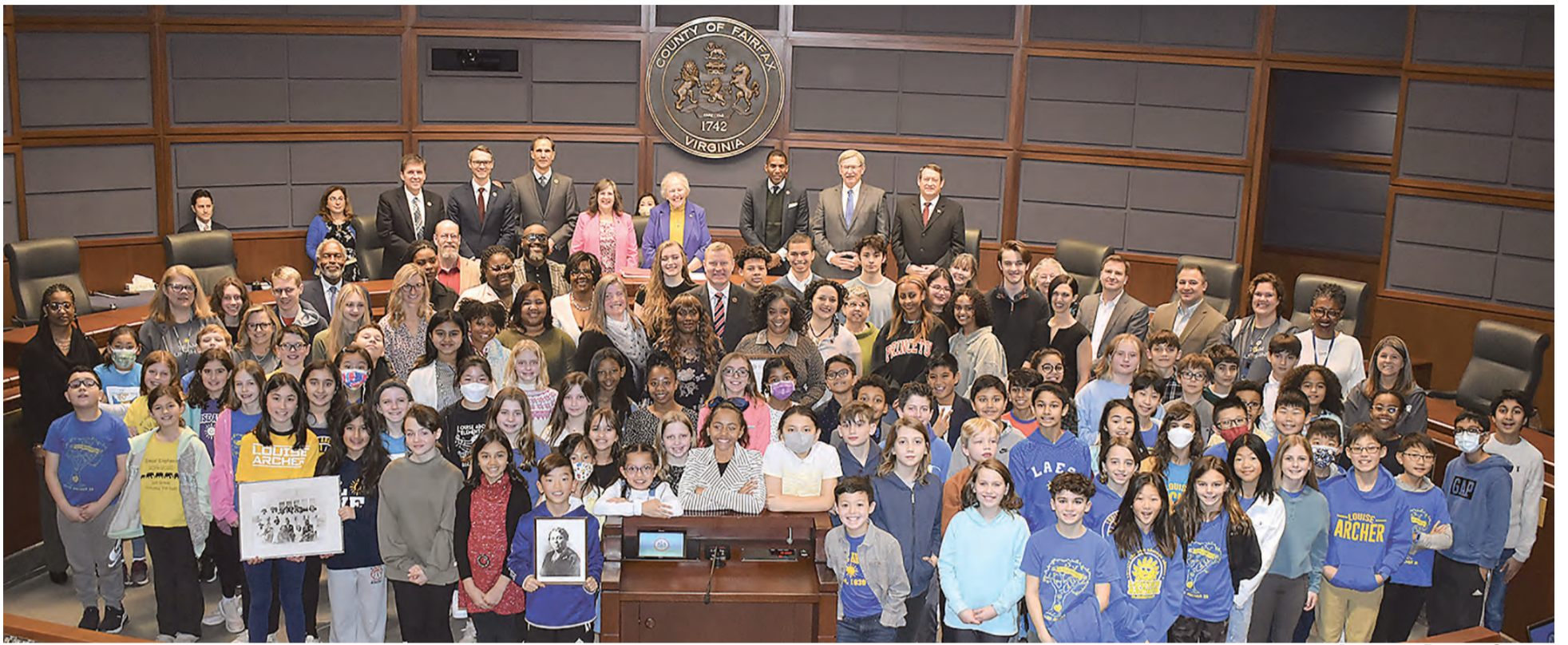


PHOTO BY FAIRFAX COUNTY

Students, teachers and others involved in the Historical Marker Project launched as part of the Black/African American Experience Project gather at the dais after the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors recognized them at its Feb. 7 meeting.

Six New African American Historical Markers

Students uncover seminal Black figures who transformed Fairfax County's history.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

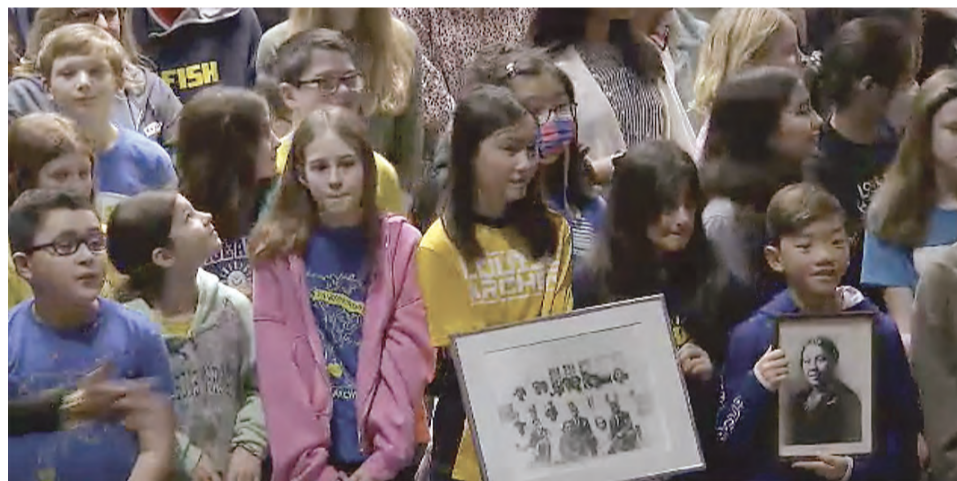
Could Fairfax County's students, as young as elementary school, from all walks of life, from every ethnicity, from every background, one day come together and become the historians who unearthed and shed light on the underrepresented, diverse and rich stories of the county's African-Americans and Blacks? In the embodiment of the Board of Supervisors One Fairfax policy, it happened recently.

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors announced at its February 7 meeting that its inaugural Black/African American Historical Markers Project, launched on February 1, 2022, has generated six new historical markers. The Fairfax County History Commission's historical marker review committee approved the six markers, no more than one marker per magisterial district.

"(The project) allow(s) new stories to be shared with our community," said Supervisor Dalia Palchick (D-Providence). She was reading a resolution requested by Chairman Jeffery C. McKay (D-At Large), Supervisor Kathy Smith (D-Sully), and herself to recognize the staff, students, teachers, and community members involved in the project.

A few moments earlier, McKay had welcomed all the children and anyone who was there in the auditorium of the Fairfax County Government Center for the proclamation to come down and gather in front of the dais where he and the supervisors sat. A quick, unofficial headcount totaled slightly over one hundred students, teachers, and others.

"My goodness, how many school buses



SCREENSHOT

Students assemble in front of the dais, some holding up photos of Black/African Americans who they researched for the Historical Marker Project.

did they have to take?" Vice chair Penny Gross could be heard through her live mic quietly commenting. "It should be part of 4th-grade civics."

On behalf of all residents of Fairfax County, Palchick congratulated and thanked the participants and supporters who made the inaugural Historical Marker Project a success. She called out "a special congratulations to the students whose work helped uncover these important stories from our history."

Palchick said that the goal of the project was "to reveal narratives and oral histories of the county's African American communities, whose history, culture and accomplishments in the county are underrepresented in its history books, lessons, and markers." Fairfax County's Neighborhood and Community Services collected oral histories from

residents to increase the visibility of Black/African American experiences in the county.

Supervisor Rodney Lusk (D-Franconia) said that the county wants to reflect on the contributions of all community members and that "we are all woven together." "This is information that we can share for future generations, and I think it's just so important," he said.

In a joint collaboration involving the Board of Supervisors, Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS), the History Commission, and Neighborhood and Community Services, numerous students, scout troops, and other groups submitted proposals for 53 individual and group markers.

Ramona Carroll of Neighborhood and Community Services (NCS) spoke on behalf of the group. "These youth have given us a history lesson and unearthed some

things about Fairfax County that maybe us, as adults, didn't know," She thanked the history commission partners who worked with NCS and gave them information the students and teachers needed to know to do the research.

According to McKay, the students' participation in the project helped the county "authentically and deeply engage with the contributions of our Black American community in the county."

The stories on the markers may shock some and make others think deeply about the county around them. Fairfax County Public Schools named and explained the six new markers:

These six markers are:

❖ **Louise Archer**, an educator, who supported numerous students over her time.

❖ **Lillian Blackwell**, who sued successfully to ban segregation of movie theaters and public schools.

❖ **Annie Harper**, who challenged the constitutionality of Virginia's poll tax.

❖ **Robert Gunnell**, a freedman who conveyed land for Gunnell's Chapel, a 19th century African American Methodist Church.

❖ **Colin Powell**, who was a long-time county resident, four-star general, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, founder of America's Promise and the first African American secretary of state. There is an elementary school named after him in Centreville.

SEE BLACK HISTORY, PAGE 14
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NEWS

'You Shouldn't Have Done This to Children'

School health aide pleads guilty; stole students' medication.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

A health aide at Greenbriar East Elementary pleaded guilty last week to one felony and two misdemeanors in connection with the theft of students' medications. Instead of giving them to the children as she was supposed to, Jennifer Carpenter, 46, of Chantilly, kept them for herself and swapped them for other types of pills.

Originally charged with 11 crimes – and indicted on all of them in July 2022 by a Fairfax County grand jury – she's since been getting treatment for her drug addiction. As a result, her attorney was able to make a plea agreement with the prosecution, enabling her to plead guilty to just three charges, with the rest to be dropped when she's sentenced.

"You understand that you're waiving your right to a jury trial?" asked Judge David Bernhard, last Monday, Feb. 6, in Circuit Court. "And do you fully understand the charges against you?" Carpenter responded yes to both questions.

During the school day, Carpenter – then employed by the county Health Department – was responsible for maintaining and administering the prescription medication kept at Greenbriar East Elementary School for several students requiring it. However, after a Health Department supervisor noticed a discrepancy in the amount of medication at the Chantilly school, police were notified. And on May 27,

2022, detectives with the Criminal Investigations Division began investigating.

"Detectives determined Carpenter was falsifying documentation on medication she gave students," said police. "They believe she was dispensing sugar placebo pills and/or over-the-counter medicine in place of the prescribed narcotics. Detectives believe Carpenter was keeping the scheduled narcotics, for personal use."

Some of these medications were narcotics – including Ritalin, Adderall, and Focalin – all commonly used to treat ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder). But because these drugs were diverted by Carpenter, the students were deprived of their medication aimed at improving their attention in class.

During the investigation, detectives identified seven students whose medicine was being abused. In court last week, Carpenter entered guilty pleas to felony possession of a controlled substance (Ritalin), as well as to the misdemeanor charges of contributing to the delinquency of a minor, plus unlawful dispensing of a different drug in place of a prescribed drug, without the permission of the person prescribing it.

Via further questioning of the defendant, Bernhard made sure Carpenter realized that, by pleading guilty, she could receive as much as 10 years in prison for the felony and another year or more

SEE HELPING, PAGE 15

Man Shot in Centreville; Two Suspects Arrested

The victim of a shooting last Friday in Centreville is recovering in the hospital, and Fairfax County police now have two suspects in custody in connection with this incident. Police said the victim is a 20-year-old male.

Around 1:23 p.m. on Feb. 10, police were called to the 5100 block of Woodmere Drive in response to a shooting there at the Westfield Village Apartments. Upon arrival, officers found an adult man with a gunshot wound to his upper body.

He was taken to the hospital with what initially were thought to be life-threatening injuries,

but were later downgraded to non-life-threatening. Following the shooting, police said two men wearing black hoodies were seen fleeing the scene of the crime.

According to police spokeswoman, Sgt. Tara Gerhard, "Detectives determined the victim came to the location to meet two males, when an altercation occurred. One of the males shot the victim and left." She noted, as well, that detectives "do not believe this is a random act." At press time, no further details about the alleged assailants, nor any charges against them, were available.

– BONNIE HOBBS




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Student speaker Jorge "Ricky" Reyes receives his diploma from Catherine Stone.



Student speaker Mariana Andreu gets the Citizenship Award from Tim McElroy.



Molly Flatley presents the Personal Achievement Award to Adelina Hernandez.

BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

Mountain View, Winter Graduation

'Your Mountain View family is proud of you'

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Before Mountain View High's winter graduation last week, Assistant Principal Kim Witeck addressed the students before they headed out into the world. She was speaking from the podium inside Centreville High's auditorium Monday, Feb. 6.

"As you graduate today, you have many feelings, including pride, excitement, relief and, perhaps, even a bit of sadness," she said. "But you share the common traits possessed by all Mountain View graduates – perseverance, grit, intelligence and drive. You're also resilient and strong."

Witeck then thanked all the parents, Mountain View teachers and staff, plus supportive community members who helped them reach this point. Following her, Acting Principal Catherine Stone acknowledged the Mountain View Foundation, which provides scholarship money for the grads, praising them for their "unwavering

support of this school."

"Graduation is a momentous occasion," she said. "When I was a little girl, my aunt gave me a set of books about values such as determination, kindness, humor and respect. The stories were told through the eyes of important people throughout history, and I loved them."

For example, said Stone, French scientist Louis Pasteur strongly believed that bacteria, or germs, existed and could cause diseases. He wanted to cure rabies; but since no one could see the virus that caused it, no one believed him about it.

SEE MOUNTAIN VIEW, PAGE 7



Miguel Alvarenga gets his diploma from Catherine Stone.



Grad Maryam Raza (with flowers) and her family (from left) brother Hamza, mom Umaira, brother Mohsin, sister Asmaa, and dad Amar.



Grad Caden Stephens with (from left) friend Thais Luz; mom Nathania Stephens; sister Luna, 3; brother William, 6; and friend Kooper Campiti.

Mountain View, Winter Graduation

FROM PAGE 6

However, she said, “After working hard and believing in himself, he found a cure for rabies and saved a little boy’s life.”

Likewise, she told the grads, “When you came to Mountain View, you might not have believed in yourself. You had several challenges, but you learned to set goals, be resilient and use your challenges as learning.

“But sometimes, pause and take a breath. Your family and the community you built here will always be here for you. It’s important to give love and respect – you get what you give. You’re important, valued and deserve success, and we want to help you continue on your journey. We’ll always be here for you. Congratulations on your graduation – your Mountain View family is proud of you.”

Next came the two student speakers, beginning with Jorge “Ricky” Reyes. One of six children, he was born in El Salvador but left his home at age 16. “I felt sad because it wasn’t easy to leave my parents and go far away,” he said. “But I was also happy because I would see my brother Jose again in the U.S.”

However, high school was difficult for him. “Everything was in a different language, and I didn’t even know how to ask for help,” said Reyes. “All I could say was, ‘I don’t know.’”

So he decided to change schools and come to Mountain View. “It gave me my first taste of leadership as head of the student council,” he said. “Mountain View showed us it’s not necessary to be the biggest and most well-known [student] in school, but to value family, love and respect [the school’s motto].”

Reyes then thanked his Mountain View teachers and staff for all their time and support, as well as his friends, parents, brother Jose and “my little brother Roberto who’ll stand here someday. It’s an honor for me to say, with great pride, ‘I’m finally graduating from Mountain View High School.’”

The second student speaker was Mariana Andreu. A self-described Army brat, she and her family moved from North Carolina to Colorado to California to Virginia. “I transferred to Mountain View in the middle of my junior year and got COVID for my 17th birthday,” she said. “Then my mom suddenly passed, but I know she’s watching over me



Diploma time: Ahmed Osman and Catherine Stone.

and cheering for me as I graduate today.”

Planning to attend Appalachian State University in North Carolina to study interior design, she said she’ll be “ready to roll with the punches. My new direction is both exciting and scary.”

Andreu thanked her mom for her support, plus her dad, “who’d get up early and tutor me. I’m proud to be your daughter.” Also expressing gratitude toward her friends and family at Mountain View, she said, “To every grad here tonight, we did it – we made it to graduation.”

Special awards were then given to two students chosen by the teachers.

❖ The Citizenship Award is presented to a student who’s helped build a positive school community. Giving it to Andreu, English teacher Tim McElroy said, “Her patience and kindness make everywhere she goes better.”

❖ The Personal Achievement Award goes to a student who succeeded academically and personally, despite having adult responsibilities, such as a job or a child. This honor, presented by special-education teacher Molly Flatley, went to Adelina Hernandez.

“The 2021 Adelina was shy and unsure of her place, and obstacles made her retreat inward,” explained Flatley. “But the 2023 Adelina is an excellent example of resilience. When she needed help, she asked for it, and she knows how to push through adversity. Now, she’s going to NOVA to pursue a career in physical therapy.”

Next came the awarding of diplomas, the tossing of caps into the air and the celebrating with family and friends, as Mountain View’s winter graduation became history.

BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

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General Assembly Session Nears Adjournment

BY DEL. KENNETH R. PLUM

With less than two weeks remaining on its scheduled adjournment sine die on Feb. 25, the General Assembly will be working overtime to resolve differences between the House and Senate on major issues, with reconciliation of differences on budget amendments being top on the list. Top on the list of budget amendment differences is the handling of the Governor's amendments to the existing budget. As the Commonwealth Institute summarized the issue, "the Governor's proposed budget amendments would let 245 corporations with taxable incomes over \$10 million pay a lower tax than a starting teacher

who makes \$42,500 a year or a health care support worker who makes \$31,400 a year." I along with other House Democrats voted against the Governor's amendments, but the Republican-controlled House included them in the budget. The Senate did not include them. Altogether the Governor proposed more than a billion dollars in tax cuts, none of which were accepted by the Senate. These cuts would take money away from critical funding needs in education, mental health, Medicaid, and public safety among others. A balanced budget must be presented before the Assembly's work is finished for the year.



Del. Ken Plum

In a major step forward for health care reform, a House bill is likely to pass this session that would carry a \$62 million dollar budget investment to ensure nursing homes are properly staffed with nurses and aides. The Senate defeated all abortion bans and restrictions. The House did not even put these bills on an agenda in order to protect their members who face close general elections from having a recorded vote on bills that would fail in the Senate regardless. The Senate passed a constitutional amendment that would put the right to reproductive freedom into the State Constitution, but it failed. In the House,

efforts to remove outdated language from the State Constitution failed. Along with other House Democrats, I voted against two bills targeting transgender youth that passed the House on a narrow vote. They are likely to be defeated in the Senate.

This session of the General Assembly may be among the least productive in recent history. With the Republican House majority taking their lead from a presidentially aspiring governor it is picking up on popular conservative positions.

Their efforts will be in vain as the Democratic majority in the Senate will stop their attempts to roll back progressive measures passed by the Democrats over the last two years.

Making Progress in Richmond

BY SEN. SCOTT SUROVELL

As the General Assembly completed its fourth week of work last week, I am pleased to report that the state Senate approved 29 of my 32 bills and sent them to the House of Delegates. The Senate voted for 19 unanimously and only one bill passed without any Republican votes.

I am carrying legislation on behalf of the Virginia Crime Commission that requires the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to issue an annual report showing the incidence of drunk driving (DWI) arrests for both drug and alcohol relative to numbers of officers and population densities. The bill also requires DMV to collect data on drug levels related to motor vehicle deaths and DWI arrests so that we can determine where to leverage our resources and make adjustments in the law.

We need this bill because most police officers report that incidents of "drugged driving" or driving under the influence of other drugs is rising. We also need to be better prepared to interdict high drivers as we move toward the retail sale of marijuana. A recent poll shows that 30 percent of Virginians think it is acceptable to drive after smoking marijuana, which is very dangerous.

The number of alcohol-related arrests has plummeted in Fairfax County and in the entire state, although alcohol-related collisions have not dropped by nearly the same amount. Much of this decline in prosecutions has to do with reduced emphasis on enforcement. I

hope that this bill will help educate us all on the dangers of driving under the influence of drugs and marijuana and help focus law enforcement.

Budgets Indicate Priorities

The Senate and House announced their proposed budgets last week. Here are some of the key differences. The Senate rejected all of Governor Youngkin's proposed \$1 billion in tax cuts. First, corporations should not pay a lower tax rate than people. Second, most of our programs have been historically underfunded and our excess revenues are being generated by inflationary pressures. Our police, fire, teachers and other government employees have not received raises that keep pace with inflation.

The proposed Senate budget provides \$300 million more for K-12 education than the House budget and includes a 2 percent teacher pay increase instead of the one-time merit bonus proposed by the Governor. We also allocated \$230 million to lift the cap on non-teaching support positions in schools such as guidance counselors, mental health counselors and nurses. Virginia has had 63,000 more students enrolled while employing 1,700 fewer support staff since that arbitrary cap was put in place in 2010. Our children especially need these services post-pandemic.

The Senate also eliminated the Governor and House's proposed increase in funding for so-called "lab



Sen. Scott Surovell

schools" and reallocated the funding to make up for the Governor's \$200 million error in school funds the state reported it was sending to localities. The Senate budget also allocates \$224 million more for financial aid than the Governor's budget and \$200 million more than the House budget. We also included a \$75 million payment towards our \$22 billion unfunded pension liability.

The Senate budget includes my request for \$600,000 to fund new staff to help us navigate our green energy transition and \$200,000 each for the Lorton Community Action Center and Ecumenical Community Helping Others in Springfield.

The budgets will now head to each chamber and a joint conference committee will resolve the differences. The most difficult discussion will revolve around tax cuts. We already cut \$4 billion in

taxes last year and our chamber does not believe that we should continue reducing our resources given our underfunded programs, continued economic uncertainty and our \$22 billion unfunded pension liability.

I have received hundreds of responses to my constituent survey. Only 10 percent of respondents want us to invest funds on widening roads as opposed to maintaining existing highways (48%) or investing in transit (19%). Eighty-two percent of respondents want to see reproductive choice as decided by the Roe v. Wade case codified in Virginia's Constitution. You can complete my survey at www.scottsuovell.org/survey.

This week, various House of Delegates committees will consider my bills. This will likely present new challenges given the partisan differences between the chambers. As always, please share your views and suggestions with me at scott@scottsuovell.org

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OPINION

Our Most Important Criminal Justice Reforms ... You Haven't Heard Of

BY STEVE DESCANO
FAIRFAX COUNTY COMMONWEALTH'S
ATTORNEY

As I round out my first term in office, I want to reflect on the reforms we've made to help keep Fairfax the safest community of its size while building a fair and just system. There's been extensive coverage of some of the issue-based policy reforms we've introduced (like ending cash bail and ceasing marijuana prosecution, among others), but structural reforms that impact the day-to-day business of the Office of the Commonwealth's Attorney are just as significant to the implementation of our justice system. These four internal, procedural reforms are an overlooked piece of the justice system that greatly impact individual lives and community safety.

One of the first changes we made was putting the office on the path to being the right size - doubling our staff from 40 to 80 to ensure that we could give appropriate attention to each case and seek the right outcome for the parties involved, instead of being forced to clear dockets at any cost. When I started as Commonwealth's Attorney, the office had been woefully under-resourced for half a century. While jurisdictions with similar populations of 1.1 million often have 200-300 attorneys, Fairfax County was only budgeted 34, and spent less per capita on the prosecutor's office than the next 10 most populous Virginia counties. Fortunately, when presented with this stark deficit, the Fairfax Board of Supervisors was extremely helpful in securing additional funding to help us on our path to being the right size. We were able to hire new staff to handle our county's case volume, giving our attorneys additional capacity to review evidence, meet their ethical obligations, and reach the right outcomes in each case.

With these extra resources, we were able to help fix previous "shortcuts" in the justice system, including the series of missteps by the prior administration that led to the wrongful incarceration of Elon Wilson, a DC firefighter who spent almost 2 years behind bars based on an illegal traffic stop. We overturned Wilson's conviction and got him home to his young son.

In addition to hiring a dozen more attorneys, we also specifically

ly focused on building a support team from scratch to help with our record-keeping and data program. Our administrative staff and paralegals digitize case information (every court date, motion, email, and more) and track it in our database, eProsecutor, which we implemented after inheriting an entirely paper office. These information-tracking systems substantially improve our record keeping and accuracy in the courtroom, and are also core to our leading data program, which we use to improve transparency and prosecutor decision-making.

Support staff play another critical role by fulfilling discovery orders, one of the most time-intensive -- but foundational -- pieces of preparing a case. Virginia updated its discovery statute in 2020, moving up the timeline and drastically increasing the amount of evidence prosecutors are required to turn over to defense before trial. In addition to the change in the law, as part of our commitment to justice, we continue to turn over more evidence than is required for cases in General District Court. This long-overdue change underpins a foundational value of our justice system by ensuring defendants have the time to prepare for what they'll face in court, but it does create a substantial, new, obligation on our office.

Fairfax County handles dozens of discovery orders a day for thousands of cases a year, and our paralegals collect, review, and prepare evidence that includes photo and video recordings, police reports and witness statements, forensic analysis and autopsies, text messages, emails, phone calls, and much more. Fairfax County also recently mandated the use of police body-worn-cameras (BWC) - thousands of hours of new footage that can be an essential tool for justice, but must be diligently reviewed and distributed. Though we aren't perfect, we have taken great strides to give our prosecutors the resources, support staff and systems to consistently meet comprehensive discovery requests for the first time.

My office has also made critical changes to the structure and hierarchy of our attorneys, creating specialized teams of attorneys for high priority issues, including sex crimes and gun violence, to better

SEE REFORMS, PAGE 18



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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.

MASTER BUILDERS



PHOTO COURTESY LEGO

Newly selected Mini Model Builders pose at LEGO Discovery Center D.C. construction site. Lucas Mikhail, Elena Freeman, Elizabeth Russia, Leila Alamo, Mason McKay.

LEGO Discovery Center Coming to Springfield

Entertainment for all ages, cafe planned.

BY SUSAN LAUME
THE CONNECTION

A new attraction for children is coming to Springfield this summer. LEGO Discovery Center D.C., is billed as “a highly interactive indoor LEGO play experience where families are free to play, explore, craft and laugh together.” LEGO will open the 32,000 square foot retail store in the lower food court area of Springfield Town Center. Though their individual blocks may be small, the planned center will be very large, taking over several former store spaces.

At the heart of the new center, in LEGO Mini World, guests will not only find familiar landmarks and scenes from the Washington, D.C. area and beyond, but also whimsical scenes from both reality and fantasy created from more than 1.5 million LEGO bricks.

Other features include a build-your-own Mini Figure experience; a 4D movie theater, where guests feel the wind, water and other effects during the show; and an Imagination Express Ride. The center will include a state-of-the-art LEGO Space digital experience, called “Space Mission.” Children and families can build their own space rocket out of LEGO bricks, digitally scan their build, and launch and fly it, dodging aliens and landing on other planets in the LEGO space solar system. On the dark Imagination Express train ride, families embark on an interactive adventure, using wand devices to collect points. A preschool-focused LEGO DUPLO area, filled with a dinosaur-themed carousel and slides, is planned to entertain younger children.

In preparation for opening, the Center selected six children from 125 applicants who shared a photo of their model build work

and described why they hoped to be selected as “Mini Model Builders” on the LEGO team. The children will guide the center by testing attractions and providing advice on the planned center elements to create the most enhanced experience for visitors from a kid’s point of view. They also will join the panel to select the site’s Master Model Builder. Their reward? Coveted behind-the-scenes previews, and early and free access to the Center for a year. The lucky six, who come from across the metro area, include Lucas Mikhail, age 10, Sterling; Elena Freeman, age 7, Alexandria; Elizabeth Russin, age 11, Vienna; Leila Alami, age 9, Ashburn; Mason McKay, age 8, D.C.; and Bryson Osborne, age 6, Burke.

When asked what his favorite thing is about playing with LEGO, Osborne answered, “I enjoy being able to break the pieces up and rebuild something new and cool.”

LEGO enthusiasts will find the center’s retail area stocked with kits, including exclusive sets not found in regular stores.

Beyond shopping and entertainment, there will be a cafe with quick serve food items and beverages. Although the center will not open for several more months, the public was invited to watch as 15 finalists competed for the single position of Master Model Builder at the site on Feb. 11. The competition, called the Brick Factor, will be judged by local personalities, including Washington Commanders alumni Tim Hightower, Fairfax County Franconia District Supervisor Rodney Lusk, Fairfax County 2022 Outstanding Elementary Teacher Essel Linton, and local media anchors and hosts, as well as the six Mini Master Builders. After several rounds of competition, the chosen Master Model Builder winner ultimately will be responsible for designing, building, removing, installing and repairing all models at the attraction - including the Mini World models of the Lincoln Memorial, Washington Monument, and White House.



Mini Master Builder Bryson Osborne of Burke, with one of his favorite LEGO characters in life size



LEGO holds its “Brick Factor” to select a Master Model Builder for the new Springfield Town Center location opening this summer



Children previously selected as Mini Master Builders questioned the competitors as part of their judging assignment along side adult judges



Mini Master Builder Lucas Mikhail, age 10, Sterling, speaks with contestant Ian during Round 1

Who Is the Master Model Builder?

Mini Master Builders help make the choice for the new LEGO Discovery Center.

BY SUSAN LAUME
THE CONNECTION

It’s a Peter Pan sort of job. One almost doesn’t have to grow up. Although being an adult is one of the requirements. Far from the usual job competition far from the usual job, the last stage of hiring consideration was held for candidates chasing this dream job of a lifetime before a crowd of interested well wishers at Springfield Town Center on Saturday. The job — Master Model Builder at the new LEGO Discovery Center Washington D.C., opening this summer at the mall.

Saturday’s competition, called the “Brick Factor” was the last step for 14 candidates vying for the position. They are the 14 selected, out of an initial 129 applicants, who

submitted a written application, a video of their LEGO build skills, and had a telephone interview before being invited to the Brick Factor. They came from around the metro area and from more distant states, including New Jersey, Michigan, Indiana, and the furthest, from Washington state. Some had shaky fingers, some were calm, as they assembled objects during two rounds of builds. A third, final round, determined the winner after judging by LEGO staff, local personalities, and the kids’ team of Mini Master Builders (see companion story)

During the judging, spectators and groups of supporters cheered for their favorites. Other spectators availed themselves of the opportunity to build their own creations ... without the hazard of stepping bare-footed on blocks

or having to return blocks to the toy box.

The winning candidate, making it through three rounds of building LEGO objects, sometimes while dancing, is Andrew Litterst. As chosen Master Model Builder, Litterst will be a key member of the team at LEGO Discovery Center with responsibility for designing, building, removing, installing and repairing all models at the attraction — including the Mini World models. He will also deliver creative workshops as part of the immersive experience designed to allow more family learning-through-play activities.

The LEGO Group was founded in Billund, Denmark in 1932 by Ole Kirk Kristiansen, its name derived from the two Danish words Leg Godt, which mean “Play Well.” Today, the LEGO Group remains a family-owned company headquartered in Billund. Its products are now sold in more than 130 countries worldwide.

PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION



Several of those attending the event were inspired to do their own builds amid a heaven of never ending LEGO pieces



Ken Warlick, Reston, lined up for a photo op with Lloyd, the Green Ninja, proving Lloyd’s appeal for those beyond childhood



Mini Master Builder Bryson Osborne, age 6 of Burke, lends a hand during the Round 2 Space theme build



Job applicants from across the country joined Alexander Allen, from Edgewater MD, seen with his shark completed in Round 1, in three rounds of job competition



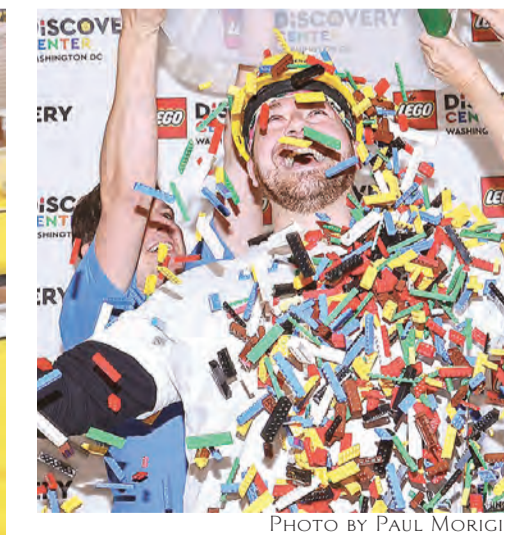
Groups of supporters were on hand with the public to cheer on their favorites and this team supported the ultimate winner



Mini Master Builder Bryson Osborne, age 6 of Burke, looks closely at Alexander’s spaceship build before making his evaluation during Round 2 judging



Competitors have children’s rapt attention as they explain how their ideas behind their builds



Andrew Litterst celebrates his selection as Master Model Builder amid a shower of LEGO pieces



The children line up to get their swim gear and supplies.



The newest little Sea Lion of the Alexandra Youth Swim Academy.



The swim lessons begin.

To Prevent Drowning in South Africa

McLean teen raises funds to deliver swim lessons in South Africa.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Sasha Madiba Minsky is a junior at The Potomac School in McLean who is passionate about helping others. Since 2020, he has been developing and expanding partnerships with various organizations, businesses and individuals to help fund swim lessons for children living in one of South Africa's poorest townships.

"There are so many drownings in South Africa, especially in the Alexandra area," Sasha said. "Their community is so connected that even one drowning has an impact." The raging Jukskei River runs through Alexandra's poorest areas. On Dec. 3, 2022, sixteen people drowned, including a three-month-old baby, when heavy rains caused flash flooding at the Jukskei River in Alexandra. They were participating in a baptism ceremony, according to News24.

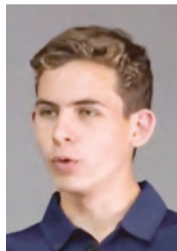
Drowning is among the main causes of death in South Africa. It claims four people, on average, every day, nearly 1,500 people annu-

ally. Nearly 30 percent of the victims are children under the age of 14. In South Africa, the drowning rate per 100,000 population for 2019 was 2.73. In the U.S., the rate was 1.1 per 100,000 population for 2019.

Even though Sasha's school is "very big on community service learning," as he put it, this is a very individual project. In 2020, Sasha embraced the challenge of how best to create a program that would teach Alexandra's children to swim. COVID-19 slowed the program's launch, but not the fire that burned within Sasha to keep going. His efforts and funding from the many partners he successfully approached in the United States and abroad helped make the Alexandra Youth Swim Academy a reality in 2023.

The ultimate goal of Sasha's swim program, he says, is to "drown proof" the children rather than teach them the four main swim strokes, butterfly, freestyle, breast, and backstroke.

"Alongside his father, Jeff Minsky, Sasha's relentless resolve and philanthropic spirit saw them raise more than \$20,000 in swimming kits that were awarded to 120 Afri-



Keynote speaker Sasha Minsky gives his remarks to the swimmers, coaches, and patrons.



Far right, Sasha Minsky of McLean feels relief as the swim equipment finally passes through customs in South Africa.

SCREENSHOTS VIA VIDEO BY JEFF MINSKY

US Drowning Statistics

In the US, an average of 3,500 to 4,000 people drown per year. That is an average of 10 fatal drownings per day.

Drowning is the leading cause of unintentional injury-related death for children ages 1-4.

African-American children ages 5 to 19 drown in swimming pools at rates 5.5 times higher than Caucasian children in the same age range.

Seventy-nine percent of children in households with incomes less than \$50,000 have few-to-no swimming skills.

Source: StopDrowningNow.org

ka Tikkun and AYSA beneficiaries," according to a statement by partner Afrika Tikkun.

Sasha and his father, Jeff Minsky, flew from Dulles International Airport to Tambo Airport in Johannesburg, South Africa, on the evening of Friday, Jan. 13. After getting the equipment through customs, Sasha literally hit the week ahead running. He competed in the Dis-Chem 21k marathon on

Sunday. Time and altitude differences made it difficult, but Sasha persevered.

On Monday, Sasha went on a tour of Alexandra Township in Johannesburg with BabaTwale, the swimming project's primary partner. After visiting the house Nelson Mandela lived in as a 22-year-old lawyer, Sasha went to see the Jukskei River, the site of so many drownings. He could see the shan-

ties crowded together in the floodplain. In the following days, Sasha went to the other partner sites, like King David Academy and Afrika Tikkun, which teach youth about agriculture and how to use farming for personal development. Other visits followed, beginning with his meeting with Anto Jordan, president of Aquatics Gauteng, a partner organization, leading to Sunday's launch day for the swim program.

This was the moment Sasha had planned, altered course during the pandemic, and brought to fruition. King David High School (Linkfield) granted the young children access to their pool for swimming lessons, coached by Aquatics Gauteng instructors every Sunday. As the event's keynote speaker, Sasha looked over the crowd. He highlighted the program and its partners, eventually leading to splashes in the pool and the start of lessons. "We're in our very beginner days when they're just learning how to swim in general," Sasha said.

As Marc Lubner, Afrika Tikkun Group CEO, said, "In a world increasingly focused on self-interests, leaders like Sasha and Jeff offer a different approach, the high road towards human togetherness. We would rather choose their way of outstanding service-driven leadership."

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The Jukskei River runs through Alexandra, South Africa's derelict areas.



Sasha Minsky stands beside the banner for the Alexandra Youth Swim Academy.

11th Annual McLean Chocolate Festival

Supports McLean Rotary's humanitarian efforts.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

The McLean Community Center turned chocolate town on Sunday, Jan. 29, for the Eleventh Annual McLean Chocolate Festival. Organized by the Rotary Club of McLean, the family-based event raises funds for local and international organizations, projects, and disaster relief while promoting the club and McLean businesses.

Former club president and event organizer John P. McEvilly of Mc-

Lean said the Chocolate Festival had 14 vendors this year, up from nine in 2022, when it raised \$24,000.

"We raise most of our money, either through sponsorships ... and ticket sales," McEvilly said. He hoped for \$28,000 or \$29,000 from Saturday's event.

McEvilly named Homestretch, Inc. in the club's ten 2023 recipient efforts. The organization gives local homeless families skills and knowledge to find permanent housing. McEvilly said, "Last year, we took ten homeless families off

the streets by buying beds."

Timber Lane ES in the Fairfax County Public Schools McLean pyramid is another 2023 recipient. The club has supported it before. "We read books to these children, and we give them each three books they can take home. For some of those kids, they receive their first books."

Alexandria's William and Lyuba Dixon admired one vendor's sweets resembling glossy marbles in the chocolate-filled community hall. The Dixons traded \$1 McLean Rotary Foundation taste tickets for

the sweets. McEvilly said the club gets 25 percent of ticket sales and vendors 75 percent.

The Peevy family of McLean, mom Crystal, and children Alice, 11, Jackson, 14, and Henry, 7, took their time browsing vendor tables. Jason Liu, 7, of Vienna, was nearby and undecided. This was Jason's and his mother Jing Tao's first festival experience.

McLean 4-year-old Kian Sodagari played Legos in the kid zone at the festival with 17-year-old volunteer Emi Curtis. She is a member of the TJ Keyettes Club,

a service group at Thomas Jefferson High School that supported the event. Face painting called McLean 6-year-old Mica Stadskev to volunteer Mia Bakal. Rotary International is sponsoring Bakal's Georgetown University exchange from Sarajevo, Bosnia. "We help host her for the program," said McEvilly.

In 2023, as part of the club's international projects, it funds humanitarian projects for Afghan and Ukrainian refugees. To learn more about the Rotary Club of McLean or make a donation, visit its website.



Henry Peevy, 7, of McLean, holds his string of \$1 taste tickets at the McLean Chocolate Festival organized by the Rotary Club of McLean and held Saturday, Jan. 29.



Alexandria's William and Lyuba Dixon look over a vendor's sweets in the chocolate-filled hall of the McLean Community Center.



Choices, choices at the McLean Chocolate Festival.



Jason Liu, 7, tries to decide what kind of ice cream to get with his taste tickets.



Kian Sodagari, 4 1/2, of McLean with volunteer Emi Curtis, 17, of the TJ Keyettes Club, a service group at Thomas Jefferson High School.



Mica Stadskev, 6 of McLean and volunteer face painter Mia Bakal, a Georgetown University student.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH



Chairman Jeffrey C. McKay (D-At Large)



Supervisor Dalia Palchik (D-Providence)



Supervisor Rodney L. Lusk (D-Franconia)

Six New African American Historical Markers

FROM PAGE 4

❖ **December 20, 1856: The 16**, which recognizes 16 enslaved individuals named in an 1856 property inventory for the land on which West Springfield High School now stands.

A four-member Fairfax County History Commission committee chose the six marker proposals from a group of 14 finalists selected by a committee of appointees from board offices, community organizations, and student representatives. Mary Lipsey worked with the Marker project/FCPS/African American marker content and winners. Lipsey is also one of three Commissioners, along with Barbara Naef and Phyllis Walker Ford, who helped design and launch the African American History Inventory database designed in conjunction with students from George Mason University's Capstone program in 2022.

"The idea for the project started as a way that students could learn more about Fairfax County local history. The emphasis of the project was to capture, preserve, and communicate the untold African American history and culture of our county," said Lipsey. Project leaders were ecstatic when there were over fifty submissions from students at

all age levels.

"The difficulty of the project is that there are no textbooks that include our county's African American history," Lipsey said. "What excited me most was that I too had the opportunity to learn more about the African American History of our county. I feel any day a young person is happy to learn and share history is a great day."

"We can't go back and change our history," said McKay. "But we certainly can learn from it and do better." He praised the History Commission for doing a remarkable job of getting young people involved.

Stephanie Duffield is a 4th-grade teacher at Haycock Elementary School. The historical marker project inspired her as a teacher because of the community it created in the school and the local community. She and fifth-grade teacher Patti Gray decided to finish the historical marker project as a buddy class. Their students' proposal on Gunnell's Chapel, about five miles from the school, earned a spot to become one of the six markers.

Noa Herzog, a fifth grader at Haycock Elementary School, said, "I hope this will make people want to visit Gunnell's Chapel and appreciate what a role it played in black

people's lives."

"The students in both of our classes paired up to research and submit their proposals," said Duffield. "It was powerful for the students to see how much history is right here in our community – it just needs to be uncovered. The project showed students how to become advocates for their communities, which I believe is so important."

Anne Marie Harris is a Louise Archer ES 4th grade teacher. On behalf of the teachers who submitted at their school, Harris said, "Last year, our fourth grade team of teachers saw the contest as a fantastic opportunity for our students to build research skills while learning more about our school's namesake as well as Virginia history. All four fourth grade classes worked to learn about Mrs. Louise Archer's impact on her community as a dedicated educator during the time of segregation; students read about and discussed the setbacks and challenges she faced and her determination to provide the very best she could for her students. We are so honored and proud to have her name and legacy formally recognized with a historic marker and to teach others about her."

The following individuals submitted the

winning proposals

Brian Heintz, Teacher-Applied History Class, West Springfield High School; Maggie Gowan, Teacher, West Springfield Elementary School; Sean Miller, South County High School; Stephanie Duffield and Patti Gray from Haycock Elementary; Alicia Hunter, Coordinator, Social Studies K-12, Fairfax County Public Schools; and Deborah March, Culture Responsive Pedagogy Specialist, Fairfax County Public Schools.

The 14 finalists out of the 53 entries for the Historical marker Project submissions

Maura Keaney- Island Creek Elementary in Alexandria; Caroline Fox, Girl Scout Troop 3686; Camille McCarthy, Nancy Hanson, Jennie Moonis; Caroline Fox; Niyat Asefaw; Meron Fikru, Delano Telford, Maddie Haag; Carissa Christensen; Janea Kinder, Josephine Springer, Jamaria Miles; Anne Marie Harris -Louise Archer ES in Vienna; Brian Heintz; Stephanie Duffield and Patti Gray-Haycock Elementary in Falls Church; and Keira Guthrie reported the Communications Aide for the Office of Chairman McKay.

For a more detailed description of each marker, visit <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/providence/sites/providence/files/assets/documents/board%20matters/bm%209-13%20historical%20markers.pdf>

Sully District Police Give Update

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

During last week's Citizens Advisory Committee meeting, Sully District Station commander Capt. Rachel Levy told residents what's been happening lately in their area.

"We're still plagued with larcenies from vehicles," she said last Wednesday, Feb. 8. "Thieves are stealing valuables left in cars in plain sight or taking them from unlocked vehicles." Also warning people not to leave their keys in their cars, she told them, "A new car with the keys inside was stolen this morning. Luckily, we were able to recover it nearby."

Meanwhile, in Centreville's Crofton Commons community, said Levy, there's recently been a series of vehicle fires in

the Flamborough Road area. She said they're being investigated by the Fairfax County Fire Marshal's Office.

Regarding incidents that fall under the domain of the Sully District police, she said residents here are in good hands. "The officers know people in this district so well that, when a crime happens, they often know who did it and can quickly make an arrest," said Levy. She said this was the case, for example, after a recent burglary of a laundromat where the suspect broke in and stole coins from the machines there.

MPO Sabrina Ruck, the station's crime prevention officer, also noted that "A catalytic-converter thief was arrested the other night, thanks to an alert member of the community. This person called us right away, and the thief was caught with several catalytic converters in his truck."

Ruck then advised residents about two, upcoming events for their benefit:

Car Seat Inspections, Feb. 23

Parents may get their children's car seats inspected on Thursday, Feb. 23, from 5-8:30 p.m., outside the Sully District Police Station. It's at 4900 Stonecroft Blvd. in Chantilly. Inspections are done on a first-come, first-served basis. Participants should install the child safety seat, themselves, so the inspection can be performed. The seat will be properly re-installed, if necessary, and parents will be taught how to install the seat properly, in the future. Everyone is eligible. Another car-seat inspection is scheduled for March 9, at the same place and time.

Catalytic Converter Etching, Feb. 25

Because of the continuing problem of thefts of catalytic converters from vehicles, G & C Tire and Auto Service will hold another free etching event. It's slated for Saturday, Feb. 25, from 10 a.m.-noon, at 14008 Willard Road in Chantilly. G&C will apply anti-theft labels to people's catalytic converters. These ultra-destruct labels are laser cut with a unique code and the URL of a secure, accredited database – the International Security Register (ISR).

They'll break into pieces if an attempt is made to remove them. And a fluid that etches into metal is applied to the labels so that, even if they are removed, the code and URL will remain clearly readable. This service will be offered on a first-come, first-served basis; no appointments are necessary.

'You Shouldn't Have Done This to Children'

FROM PAGE 5

for the misdemeanors, for a total of a possible 11 years behind bars. "And do you understand that I can run these sentences concurrently or consecutively?" he asked. "And that you're giving up your right to appeal?" Again, she replied affirmatively both times.

Bernhard also told Carpenter that he could impose an additional term of six months to three years' probation. He then asked Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Meredith Ralls if any agreement had been reached regarding possible restitution. She said the Commonwealth may ask for restitution at sentencing, but there was currently no agreement in that regard.

Defense attorney Bret Lee told the judge the state sentencing guidelines in this case recommend probation with no incarceration. However, Bernhard ensured that Carpenter knew those guidelines are discretionary and he could depart from them and give her a more severe punishment – yet she wouldn't be able to withdraw her guilty pleas because of it.

Bernhard asked her if she was entering her pleas "freely and voluntarily," and Carpenter said she

was. Ralls then presented details of the case against her, telling the judge that, from Jan. 2 through May 27, 2022, "The defendant engaged in replacing seven students' medications – including Ritalin and Adderall – with over-the-counter ones, such as antihistamines and Claritin."

Bernhard asked if any of the children sustained any lasting effects because of it. "Several students' treatment for behavioral problems was delayed and went untreated for months," replied Ralls. "For most of the students, the problems were ameliorated when the medications were resumed. But one parent said her child still has educational delays." The judge also asked the children's ages, and Ralls said they were 7 or 8 years old.

He wondered, as well, why these drugs weren't required to be in the possession of a nurse, rather than a health aide. "As a health aide, she was allowed to possess them, I believe, under the supervision of the school nurse," said Ralls.

Bernhard said he was surprised by that, adding, "It seems like a recipe for future problems."

However, Lee told him that,

since this incident, "There's been a school-system policy change regarding the dispensing of medications." He further advised the judge that "some mitigating evidence" would be presented at Carpenter's sentencing. "She's been receiving treatment and is in the Intensive Outpatient Program," said Lee. "She's been treated by the [Fairfax-Falls Church] Community Services Board for substance-abuse issues. She's done well and is staying clean and sober. And she's no longer working in education."

Although Carpenter had been employed by FCPS since October 2015, Ralls said it appears she made no transgressions until 2022. And Lee said the police investigation confirmed it.

Bernhard then officially accepted Carpenter's pleas and found her guilty of those three offenses. He ordered a pre-sentencing report on her be made and set sentencing for May 5.

"You wouldn't want to inflict this on your own children, so you shouldn't have done this to other people's children," he told Carpenter. "But you're doing what you're supposed to do now, regarding treatment. Keep up the good work."

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CALENDAR

NOW THRU APRIL 30

Score: Mixed Media Art. 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. At Workhouse Arts Center, 9518 Workhouse Way, Lorton. Score explores 20 years of the work of Virginia-based mixed media artist, Joan Dreyer. While developing her MFA thesis at Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia, PA, Joan began taking tools, techniques and imagery that have been historically considered "women's work" and transforming them into innovative, contemporary art that is responsive to the tone and tensions of our times. Created by combining fiber techniques with unexpected materials like X-rays, her work is a subtle art that asks questions about life, loss, symbolism, and the impact of war instead of providing one size fits all answers. The artist's work provides a space for the contemplation of life stages that we all encounter. The result is a body of work that allows for meaningful but also multiple interpretations by the viewer. Visit the website: <https://www.workhousearts.org/score-mixed-media>

MONTH OF FEBRUARY

Black History Month Lecture Series. At Sully Historic Site, 3650 Historic Sully Way, Chantilly. Black History Month is more than just a month-long observance at the Sully Historic Site. It's woven into the very history of the house and the people who lived there. In addition to the ongoing tours of the home and outbuildings, Sully Historic Site will welcome three guest speakers to the site during the month of February to share insightful and incredible stories honoring Black History Month.

Lunch and Learn: 18th Century Health Care from Two Perspectives Saturday, Feb. 18, 2023, 12:30 to 2:30 p.m.

Presenter: Tory Cabrera

If you prefer a more hands-on experience and conversation, bring your lunch and join Tory Cabrera for an informal talk that includes displays and a Q&A, as we compare the health care methods, medicines and healing traditions employed by both the enslaved and free communities in the Federal period. Enrollment in this activity is \$8 per person.

FEB. 2-23

Open Life Drawing. 6-9 p.m. At Workhouse Arts Center, 9518 Workhouse Way, Lorton. Life drawing and painting group, on the first four Thursdays of every month. Bring your own drawing and/or painting supplies- easel, stools, and tables are provided. The first four Thursdays of every month- on the fourth Thursday of the month the model will be clothed/costumed in long poses. Visit the website: <https://www.workhousearts.org/visual-arts-classes>

FEB. 3 TO MARCH 10

Mindfulness with Shilpi. 12-1 p.m. At Burke Centre Library, 5935 Freds Oak Road, Burke. Easily drop down and settle into a deep state of relaxation without resistance. Begin the upward spiral of your own healing journey by coming into resonance and connecting with that innermost sanctuary within, that has the keys to issues you may be dealing with. Get in touch with your internal GPS that can help you navigate your life without getting distracted or deviated

from your Path. Sponsored by the Friends of Burke Centre Library. Adults. Website: <https://librarycalendar.fairfaxcounty.gov/event/10035131>

FEB. 15-16

Lake Accotink Dredging Project Meeting. Feb. 15 at 7 p.m. Virtual and Feb. 16 at the cafeteria at Kings Glen Elementary School, 5401 Danbury Forest Drive in Springfield. The meetings will present an overview of the project, details on the impacts and costs of management options, and staff recommendations. Those planning to attend virtually can access the meeting at: <https://publicinput.com/TS53544> Participants also can call in at 855-925-2801, meeting code: 8809 A story map and additional background information on the project and the history of Lake Accotink are available at Lake Accotink Dredging.

THURSDAY/FEB. 16

Mayor and Chief at Your Service. 7:30 p.m. at Vienna Police Department Community Room, 215 Center Street, S, Vienna. Police Chief Jim Morris will provide an update on recent public safety concerns, including a rash of car break-ins and what residents can do to secure their property. Mayor Colbert and Chief Morris will also be available to discuss other issues and take questions from the community on any topic.

THURSDAY/FEB. 16

Brainwashed: Sex-Camera-Power with Filmmaker Nina Menkes. 6-7 p.m. Online. Join the first Visiting Filmmakers Series event of the semester. Nina Menkes will discuss her acclaimed new documentary, Brainwashed: Sex-Camera-Power. The film uses clips from movies made between 1896 and 2020 to examine the politics of shot design, specifically, the ways women are framed on screen that contribute to a persistent environment of sexism, discrimination, and violence. To register to attend this virtual event, go to https://gmu.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_3Mm2o_rSR-2zC4PwvyyiGA

FRIDAY/FEB. 17

(the) Unruly Theatre Project and the Herndon High School Improv Group. 7 p.m. At Arts Herndon, 750 Center Street, Herndon. Come enjoy a night of laughs on us! (the) Unruly Improv is The Alden's professional teen improv company dedicated to bringing comedic performances to the community.

SATURDAY/FEB. 18

All-American Girl Activity. 9-11 a.m. At Sully Historic Site, 3650 Historic Sully Way, Chantilly. Have your child pack a favorite doll, drink and snack, and visit Sully Historic Site for an All-American Girls story. They will explore the story of Addie, an African American girl during the 1800s. This journey to the past is for kids ages 5 to 9 and will include stories, games and crafts with "All-American Girls - Living Dolls." Call 703-437-1794.

SATURDAY/FEB. 18

Country Western Dance. 6-9:30 p.m. Accotink Universalist Unitarian Church, 10125 Lakehaven Ct., Burke. Northern Virginia Country Western Dance Association event. Open to all ages, singles, couples.



Brainwashed: Sex-Camera-Power with Filmmaker Nina Menkes will be shown on Thursday, Feb. 16, 2023.



Abbie Palmer will play Traditional Celtic Music at the Old Brogue Irish Pub on Sunday, Feb. 19, 2023.

DJ provides music. Smoke and Alcohol free. Bring your own refreshments. Couples and Line Dancing. Two lessons. Cost: \$15 non-members. Under 18 with paying adult: \$5. Visit the website: nvcwda.org

SATURDAY/FEB. 18

Doug Varone and Dancers. 8 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, Fairfax. Doug Varone and Dancers returns to the Center, bringing a program brimming with the vitality of highly charged choreography which also touches the human heart. The program will feature Somewhere

(2019), Short Story (2001), Nocturne (2017), and Double Octets (2021).

SUNDAY/FEB. 19

Model Trains Running. 1-4 p.m. At the Fairfax Station Railroad Museum, 11200 Fairfax Station Road, Fairfax Station. N Gauge (N-TRAK) model trains will be running at the Fairfax Station Railroad Museum. Admission: Museum members and ages 4 and under, free; ages 5-12, \$3; ages 13 and older, \$5, \$6 for special events. Seniors and military, active and retired, \$4. www.fairfax-station.org, www.facebook.com/FFXSRR, 703-425-9225.

com/FFXSRR, 703-425-9225.

SUNDAY/FEB. 19

Voctave. 4 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, Fairfax. Calling all Disney and Broadway fans! A cappella superstars, Voctave, will transform the Center for the Arts into The Corner of Broadway and Main Street in an "aca-awesome" treat for all ages. Featuring swoon-worthy arrangements from some of your favorites from Broadway musicals to Disney films!

SUNDAY/FEB. 19

Burke Historical Society. 3-4 p.m. At Pohick Regional Library, 6450 Sydenstricker Road, Burke. Dr. George McDaniel will speak on researching the history of Drayton Hall Plantation, SC, and finding ways for it to serve as a gathering place for the local community. Email: slawski_brian@yahoo.com

SUNDAY/FEB. 19

Lorton: Prison of Terror. 1-4 p.m. At Workhouse Arts Center, 9518 Workhouse Way, Lorton. This documentary explores the history of the Lorton Correctional Complex, the complicated and notorious prison that inhabited the buildings of the Workhouse Arts Center, and several buildings belonging to our neighbors. The filmmakers ask why Washington, D.C. built its prison in Virginia instead of within its own borders, and what made this prison and its inmates the most feared and most respected within the American prison system. Intended for mature audiences due to graphic/violent content; viewer discretion is advised. Visit the website:

<https://www.workhousearts.org/calendar/lorton-prison-of-terror-film-w5m4r>

SUNDAY/FEB. 19

"The 1619 Project - A New Origin Story." 2 p.m. Featuring Pulitzer Prize winner Nikole Hannah-Jones. At The Alden Theater, McLean Community Center, McLean. Free. Register for the waitlist on the Fairfax County Public Library website. Co-creator of the award-winning "The 1619 Project," Nikole Hannah-Jones is an investigative reporter who covers civil rights and racial injustice for The New York Times Magazine. She has been honored countless times, including as one of Time Magazine's 100 Most Influential People 2021, as the recipient of a MacArthur "Genius" grant, an NAACP Image Award and a Peabody Award.

SUNDAY/FEB. 19

Maple Syrup Boil Down. 11 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. At Colvin Run Mill, 10017 Colvin Run Road, Great Falls. Did you know maple trees store starch that converts to sugar and rises in the sap in late winter and early spring? Discover which trees produce sap and how to "tap" a tree. The cost is \$8 per person and reservations are required. Registration fees include a sample of maple syrup over cornbread made from Colvin Run cornmeal. Call 703-759-2771 or visit Colvin Run Mill.

SUNDAY/FEB. 19

Traditional Celtic Music. 4:30 and 6:30 p.m. At the Old Brogue Irish Pub, 760-C Walker Road, Great

SEE CALENDAR, PAGE 17

Cappies: McLean High School

McLean High School transported audiences into the 8-bit world of fearless princesses and noble heroes through their colorful performance of "Claudio Quest," as they journeyed through worlds to fight for the ideals they believed in, while also having some fun along the way.

This fairly unknown musical by Drew Fornarola and Marshall Paillet made its debut in 2010 in DC at the Capital Fringe Festival and later won six awards at the New York Musical Theatre Festival. It is a parody of the video game, Super Mario Bros, featuring two brothers, Claudio and Luis, who go on a quest to rescue Princess Poinsettia from the evil Bruiser's dungeon, getting some unexpected help from Princess Fish along the way.

The unique and creative characters each stood out with their bold make-up, colorful costumes, and distinct voices. Every member of the ensemble was present at all times and never hesitated to steal their moment as a dancing eggplant or have a full conversation with a wooden dinosaur. The bouncy sound effects and animated jumps encapsulated the video game aesthetic, and each character's precise movement tied the show together.

In particular, Fish, played by Miranda Simpson, was a bubbly, mustache-wearing feminist dressed in yellow, and Simpson brought the energy to the stage with her enthusiastic, spontaneous character. Supported by her love interest, Luis, played by Nathan Bass, the two of them conquered any obstacle along the way that attempted to separate them.

Other notable characters that stood out include the angry and emotional Bruiser, played by Idil Erdogan, whose comedic jokes and unrequited love story de-

manded attention in "Platypus Heart". Erdogan got help from Elgafink, played by Franny Hemsley, her hilarious therapist with a New York accent, whose advice not to kill people was greatly ignored. Audrey Link, who played Poinsettia, the over-dramatic, operatic princess, showed off her large vocal range when she sang "Poor Poor Me," while being pampered with tea and rose petals in a prison tower.

The entire show would not have come together without the impressive costumes, make-up, and set that immersed the audience in a video game. The costume team of Izzy Boon, Anushka Parashar, Jane Shanks, and Kyra Taube designed each character to have their own bold color that made them stand out and fully covered them from head to toe. From Poinsettia's cartoonishly crisp ball gown to Luis and Claudio's jumpsuits with matching Converses, each costume reflected the character. This goes the same for the make-up, done by Emery Graninger, Addie Harris, Maia Le, and Valentina Sedan, which matched the color for each character with graphic lines, sharp angles, and exquisite mustaches. Lastly, the sets, created by MHS set decoration, and MHS paint crews, pictured the world of Claudio Quest with the teenager's bedroom off to the side to show the parallels between the kids playing the game and the game characters themselves, allowing the small details within the painting and video game screens to tie the whole story together.

The bouncy characters and vibrant technical designs transformed Mclean High School's black box theater into a teenager's video game, through a heartwarming story of people testing societal norms and becoming themselves in Claudio Quest.

— SAMANTHA GROOMS, MERIDIAN HIGH SCHOOL

CALENDAR

FROM PAGE 16

Falls. Featuring Abbie Palmer and Agi Kovacs in a pub atmosphere by the fireside. Tickets must be purchased in advance at www.oldbrogue.com - \$21 general admission.

TUESDAY/FEB. 21

Gardening for Wildlife. 11 a.m. Alice Sturm, the Garden Program Manager at the Audubon Naturalist Society, will be the guest speaker at the Five Hills Garden Club of Vienna at Vienna Presbyterian Church, 124 Park Street, N.E. The community is invited to attend the program.

WEDNESDAY/FEB. 22

Tea 'n Painting. 2-3:30 p.m. At the Lake House, Reston. Are you looking for a fun way to express your creative side? Start your new year with a creative afternoon of tea and painting. Sip on your tea while creating a landscape painting along with a positive affirmation for the new year. At the end of class, you can take home your final masterpiece. All skill levels welcome.



Doug Varone and Dancers will appear at GMU Center for the Arts on Saturday, Feb. 18, 2023.

BULLETIN BOARD

SPEED CAMERA PILOT PROGRAM LAUNCHES FEB. 10

Slowing down drivers and improving traffic safety are the objectives of a new Speed Camera Pilot Program that will include the installation of photo monitoring devices (speed cameras) in eight school zones by Feb. 10. Data suggests that school zone speeding is prevalent and cameras are effective. In the five school zones surveyed last year, thousands of drivers exceeded the speed limit by more than 10 mph during the sample period.

Ultimately, it is expected that the Speed Camera Pilot Program will change driver behaviors to keep Fairfax County residents safe.

Speed Camera Locations:
Chesterbrook Elementary School:
Kirby Road near the school

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

(Dranesville District)
Irving Middle School: Old Keene Mill Road near the school (Braddock District)
Key Middle School: Franconia Road near the school (Franconia District)
London Towne Elementary School: Stone Road near the school (Sully District)
Sleepy Hollow Elementary School: Sleepy Hollow Road near the school (Mason District)
South County Middle School: Silverbrook Road near the school (Mt. Vernon District)
Terraset Elementary School: Soapstone Drive near the school (Hunter Mill District)
West Springfield High School: Rolling Road near the school (Springfield District)
An additional school zone speed camera near Oakton High School (Blake Lane near Sutton Road) and

a work zone speed camera at Route 28 (near Old Mill Road) are forthcoming.

VIENNA PARKING SURVEY OPEN THROUGH FEB. 28

Nearly 200 people have already responded to a survey about parking in Vienna, led by the Town's Department of Public Works and Economic Development offices. The survey is part of a study to explore Vienna's present-day and future parking needs in the Town's business district. Town leaders are encouraging all Vienna residents, visitors and businesses to take the survey to help ensure future parking plans are in line with community needs. The survey is available through the Town

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Announcements

Announcements

LTC John Robert Statz, Jr.



LTC John Robert Statz, Jr. (Bob), 83, passed away peacefully at his home in Great Falls, Virginia on February 7th, 2023 after a long battle with cancer. He was surrounded by his loving family and will be deeply missed by all who knew him.

Bob was born on November 23rd, 1939 in Worcester, Massachusetts to John and Ruth (Spotten). He attended the US Coast Guard Academy and graduated from Hofstra University in 1965, before completing a master's degree in Operations Research from Georgia Tech.

Bob was a highly decorated soldier and served honorably in the US Army for 20 years, achieving the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. He served two tours of duty in Vietnam and earned many awards for his service, including two Purple Hearts, a Bronze Star Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, Joint Service Commendation Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Army Service Ribbon, Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal, Combat Infantryman Badge, Expert Infantryman Badge, Ranger Tab, Parachutist Badge, and Joint Chief of Staff Identification Badge.

After retiring from the Army he had an incredible impact at the consulting firm, Booz Allen Hamilton. He created and led the War Gaming Practice that eventually grew to over 700 staff. He led teams responsible for many exciting and meaningful engagements, including negotiating rights to the Panama Canal, resolving security weaknesses for the Port Authority of New York, preventing HIV/AIDS in India and China, and advising the Pentagon leadership on developing the modern military. His most lasting impact was a product of his leadership and mentoring of his staff and colleagues. His legacy endures to this day with his former staff leading a large portion of the firm's business.

In his retirement, he enjoyed spending time with his family and running a small family business.

Bob is survived by his wife of 60 years, Serene (Verga), brothers Paul and Stephen, and seven children John, Matthew (Pia Agostini), Kimberly (James) Garner, Kristen (Alan) Shifflett, Kathleen, Luke (Sandra), and Karen (Robert) Nunn. He is also survived by his grandchildren Mark, Sarah, John and Katie; Ella, Lyra and Anaruby; Meghan, Madelyn, Mallory, Jack and Erin; Zachary, Caleb, Elijah, Grace and Emma; Charlie; Rowan; Noah, Jacob, Nathan, Johnny, Jason, and Josie; goddaughter Jennifer Schneider and her daughter Brooke. He was preceded death by his sons, Mark and Adam.

The family will receive friends at Adams Green Funeral Home in Herndon on Wednesday, February 15th from 5 to 8 pm, followed by a funeral at St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Church in Great Falls on Thursday, February 16th at 11am. An additional service and internment will occur at Arlington National Cemetery in the near future.

Bob will always be remembered for his unwavering love and devotion to his family, his bravery and service to his country, and his kindness and compassion will not be forgotten.

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Reforms

FROM PAGE 9

support our most vulnerable victims. With specialized attorneys, we've been able to work with police to lead the Commonwealth in pursuing ESOs (emergency substantial risk orders - red flag laws), and have won technical rulings that help prosecute child sex crimes. We've also hired specific managers and built oversight and training into our office culture, so for the first time, new prosecutors are learning constantly from experienced attorneys and senior management is directly aware of every case that passes through the office.

With the extra resources afforded to us by the county, we've been able to build an office that can devote necessary attention to the evidence in each case, prevent new injustices and overturn old ones, and give specialized support to victims. Internal office reforms certainly get less news coverage than flashy policy rollouts, but the regulations that govern how our office runs and prosecutes cases are just as important to keeping the community safe and pursuing justice for individual families.

BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 17

of Vienna website: www.viennava.gov. To request a paper copy, email Natalie.Monkou@viennava.gov or call 703-255-6338. The survey will be open through Feb. 28, 2023.

TOWN OF HERNDON ACCEPTING ARTS GRANT PROPOSALS

The Town of Herndon is accepting grant proposals up to \$4,500 through the Virginia Commission for the Arts (VCA) for projects to be implemented in FY 2024 as part of their Creative Communities Partnership Grant program. For information about this program and other grant opportunities, review the FY2024 Guidelines for Funding which are available at <https://vca.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/FY2024-Guidelines-for-Funding.pdf>

Nonprofit arts organizations incorporated in the Town of Herndon must meet general policy guidelines as published by the VCA. The Commission's FY2024 Guidelines for Funding and other resources are available on the website at www.arts.virginia.gov. Applicants should provide full documentation of projected budget, program planning, and a detailed description of the implementation of the project.

Organizations who intend to apply for grant funding must submit their proposals by 5:00 p.m. on Friday, February 17 to the Performing Arts Supervisor at the Town of Herndon Department of Parks and Recreation. Proposals may be mailed to Herndon Parks and Recreation Department, 777 Lynn Street, Herndon, VA 20170, hand delivered to the Herndon Community Center, 814 Ferndale Ave, Herndon, VA, 20170, or sent electronically to parksandrec@herndon-va.gov. Applicants are encouraged to confirm receipt by the department prior to the deadline.

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OPINION

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.

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Thank you to the hundreds of supporters who helped to keep all your Connection Newspapers alive throughout Alexandria, Fairfax County, Arlington County and Potomac, Md. along with affiliated websites and digital media. Now we need help again in 2022.

Each local newspaper's mission aspires to provide greater community service, and we do know that our communities are better off if we continue to publish. Last year's financial support from readers and supporters like you bridged the shortfall before Federal PPP funding arrived, and both made our survival possible. We now await a decision for a grant from Rebuild Virginia in early February that we hope will help us in 2022 and beyond. But we need help to survive the first quarter, always a brutal time for cash flow in weekly newspapers. Thank you.

Please, help save these historical papers. All gifts will be used to fund our printed newspapers and websites and to meet obligations to our loyal and patient employees, writers, contractors and suppliers.

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.

Connection Newspapers has been offering these local newspapers to residents for over 200 years. Countless residents have grown up with these papers covering significant moments in the lives of family and children, news, community events, school activities, and even pictures of your dogs and cats. Internet news and large national newspapers cannot provide the local connection or historical connection that local papers like Connection Newspapers and the Alexandria Gazette Packet provide. If your child, dog, mother, father, neighborhood, school has been featured, you understand the value of local community newspapers.

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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.



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