

# Mount Vernon Gazette

MOUNT VERNON'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER • A CONNECTION NEWSPAPER

JANUARY 25, 2024

## Wait Staff in Hybla Valley Features Sunny the Robot

BY MIKE SALMON  
THE GAZETTE

**T**he Denny's in Hybla Valley has been there for years and served its share of the late-night party crowd on the way home from the bar, but now Denny's has a robot that doesn't get tired at 3 a.m.

Introducing "Sunny," the robotic wait staffer that is always on the ball as long as the internal battery is all charged up. Local resident Angie Trijo recently came into the Hybla Valley Denny's with her mother for a bite to eat. The robot serving tables was a surprise. "I saw our server place the plates on it and I told my mom, 'I think a robot is about to bring us lunch!' I thought it was pretty cool, because I'd never seen such a thing," she said. The food was hot and the order was accurate so score one for the robot.

These robots at Denny's are made by Bear Robotics, based in California and Texas, and are models called "Servi," and "Servi Mini." Bear Robotics specializes in hospitality robots and works with restaurants, hotels, sports arenas and senior living facilities, their information said. The folks at Bear



Sunny serves them sunny side up at Denny's in Hybla Valley.

don't look at it as taking jobs from real people, but with a robot nearby the "staff always had a helping hand when they need it," they said on the promo video.

Vanessa Sink, Sr. Director of Media Relations at the National Restaurant Association, sees the robot as an extra hand too. When the wait staff is taking orders, interact-

ing with the customers or socializing, the robot is there with the food on the shelves or retrieving orders, making things easier.

Robots could appear to be taking away jobs from actual people but the National Restaurant Association doesn't see it that way. "The goal for tech is not to replace people, but to get tech to take on the tasks that take up time, freeing industry professionals to focus on their core purpose: delivering a great customer experience," they said in their association publication. "The right technology integrations can help us enhance that customer experience, improve operational efficiencies, and manage risks," the NRA said.

According to the latest State of the Restaurant Industry Report, 62% of restaurant operators said their restaurant can't support customer demand with the number of staffers they currently have on hand and 79% of operators had jobs open that were tough to fill. To support the workers they have and to find efficiencies, operators are looking to technology. More than half of adults (54%) like the amount of technology they find in restaurants, said the NRA. Surprisingly, that's 58% of boomers, while

48% for Gen Z adults think there could be even more technology in restaurants.

No data was offered about whether patrons tip differently when they are served in part by a robot.

Trijo hopes that the robot doesn't put people out of work and looks at the bigger picture surrounding the concerns with artificial intelligence. "It's kind of scary to see the direction in which our world heading," she said.

### Diversity at Denny's

Denny's has 1,649 restaurants across the world and 148 of those restaurants are outside the U.S. In 2013 and 2014 Latino Magazine named Denny's among "Top 100 Companies providing the most opportunities for Latinos" and in 2006-2007, they were named one of the "Best 40 Companies for Diversity," Denny's information said.

Fortune Magazine continually ranks Denny's at the top of its survey of "America's 50 Best Companies for Minorities." Denny's ranked No. 2 in 1998; No. 6 in 1999; No. 1 in 2000 and 2001 and No. 3 in 2002, 2003. The survey is conducted among 1,200 U.S. companies.

## January Is Firefighter Cancer Awareness Month

Prevention, detection, badge-to-badge support, and data gathering.

BY MERCIA HOBSON  
THE CONNECTION

**B**urning structures collapsing and trapping firefighters, wildfires killing hotshot crews and similar tragedies grab the public's attention. But a more significant threat is lurking, taking firefighter lives — the health effects of firefighter exposure to combustion byproducts of burning materials, including carcinogens.

The impact on health can occur in everything firefighters do, from the knockdown when the fire is controlled and the overhaul when the structure is examined for potential areas that could reignite to their return to the station where particulate matter is carried in on gear, equip-

ment, and bodies. In the course of their work, firefighters are frequently exposed to a variety of agents classified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) of the World Health Organization as known or probable human carcinogens.

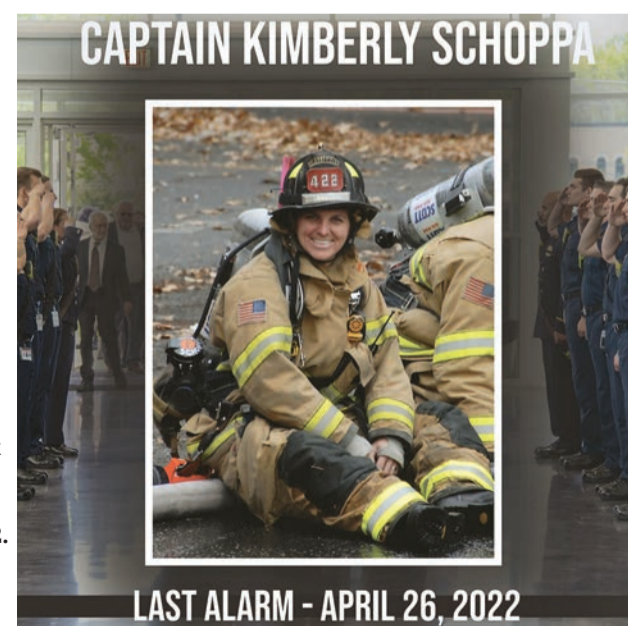
Robert Young is the president of Fairfax County Professional Firefighters and Paramedics, International Association of Firefighters (IAFF) Local 2068. According to Young, the hazardous synthetic chemicals known as PFAS, or polyfluoroalkyl compounds, are released when firefighters douse blazes. Firefighters are exposed to toxic chemicals in the burning furnishings and building materials. They come into contact with the chemicals by breathing them in, getting them on their skin

or in their eyes, or ingesting them. "They're even found in the gear we wear to protect ourselves," Young said.

Minimizing carcinogen exposure is crucial. Fairfax County and other departments encourage firefighters "to shower within the hour" to reduce exposure to carcinogens and potential carcinogens. Young said that the Fairfax County Fire Department and Local 2068 focus on decontam-

SEE JANUARY AS, PAGE 6

**Captain Kimberly Schoppa, Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Local IAFF 2068, died of service-related cancer (ovarian) on April 26, 2022. Her name was added to the IAFF's Fallen Firefighter Memorial at Pikes Peak in Colorado in 2023.**



FAIRFAX COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE DEPARTMENT 2022 ANNUAL REPORT

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OPEN SUN 1/28, 2-4 PM



### Bishop's Crest | \$1,549,000

Originally a model home, it shows with custom features including gorgeous flooring & lighting, copious trimwork, oversized windows, and exquisite curb appeal. 5 bedrooms, 4.5 baths, finished lower level with second kitchen & bedroom suite. 1409 Dade Ln  
**Tracy Dunn 571.212.3658**  
[www.tracybdunn.com](http://www.tracybdunn.com)

OPEN SUN 1/28, 2-4 PM



### Old Town | \$1,439,000

Large room sizes like you're not used to in Old Town! This mint-condition brick townhome is in a superior locale near Lee Street Park & the Potomac River. There are four finished levels – 2,350 SF – and off-street parking. An outstanding value. No HOA! 604 S Lee St  
**Janet Catterson Price 703.622.5984**  
[www.JanetPriceHomes.com](http://www.JanetPriceHomes.com)

OPEN SAT 1/27 & SUN 1/28, 1-3 PM



### Old Town/Parker Gray | \$1,250,000

This amazing free-standing home features both a prime location and a detached 2-car garage! Built c.1870, the home offers historic details with modern updates by award-winning architects. Private back yard and guest room/office above garage. 325 N Patrick Street  
**Lauren Bishop 202.361.5079**  
[www.LaurenBishopHomes.com](http://www.LaurenBishopHomes.com)

OPEN SAT 1/27 & SUN 1/28, 12-2 PM



### Mount Vernon | \$675,000

Detached ranch/rambler is ready for a new owner! Tucked away on a quiet street, this 4-bedroom, 3-bath home offers renovated bathrooms, fresh flooring, a screened-in porch and more, all sitting on a huge lot with a sprawling, flat back yard! 8536 Mount Zephyr Dr  
**Jillian Hogan Homes 703.951.7655**  
[www.JillianHoganHomes.com](http://www.JillianHoganHomes.com)

OPEN SUN 1/28, 1-4 PM



### Potomac Landing | \$550,000

Beautiful 2-bedroom, 2-bath condo in The Preston literally across the street from the new VA Tech Campus. Almost 1,200 SF, with open floor plan, tall ceilings, and hardwood floors. A delightful balcony opens on to E. Reed. One garage space. 181 E Reed Ave #108  
**Crouch Realty Group 703.244.4024**  
[www.CrouchRealtyGroup.com](http://www.CrouchRealtyGroup.com)



### Alexandria | \$550,000

Delightful 3-bedroom, 1.5-bath ranch on a spacious 1/2 acre lot! Driveway parking. Galley kitchen with exposed bricks. Light-filled, generously-sized dining and sitting area. Living room features gas fireplace and overlooks the large, flat backyard. 8309 Orville St  
**Jen Walker 703.675.1566**  
[www.JenWalker.com](http://www.JenWalker.com)

OPEN SUN 1/28, 2-4 PM



### Arlington \$1,149,000

Elegant 3-level, 4-bedroom, 3.5-bath townhome with an elevator! Spacious entry foyer, living room with fireplace & French doors to brick patio, formal dining room, and updated kitchen with breakfast area. Grand primary suite with sumptuous bath. 2411 S Queen Street

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OPEN SUN 1/28, 1-3 PM



### Powhatan Place \$874,900

Light-filled 3 bedroom, 2.5 bath end-unit townhome. Kitchen boasts stainless appliances and granite countertops. Living room with fireplace leads to back deck. Primary bedroom with en-suite bath. Entry level rec room, half-bath, & access to the backyard patio. 925 Rolfe Place

**Jen Walker 703.675.1566**  
[www.JenWalker.com](http://www.JenWalker.com)

OPEN SAT 1/27 & SUN 1/28, 1-3 PM



### Del Ray \$719,900

2 bedroom, 2 full bath townhome with landscaped/hardscaped front and back yards. Gleaming hardwood flooring. Updated kitchen boasts island, granite countertops, and stainless-steel appliances. Finished lower level with updated bath. Fenced in backyard. 532 Duncan Ave

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## MVHS To Perform 'Tales of Anansi'

The perfect show to help kick off celebration of African-American History Month.

BY GABI CONVERY  
MVHS CLASS OF 2025

The theater students at Mount Vernon High School will put on the world premiere of the play "Tales of Anansi," written by Prentiss Matthews III. This children's play, inspired by African folk tales, follows a tiny spider from Africa who is sneaky and causes mischief, but also has important lessons about friendship and honesty.

"Tales of Anansi" is a two-story show that is very interactive. The first story, "How Anansi Became the God of Stories," follows Anansi the spider (Jam Edwards) and her best friend Aso (Christine Mayen-Franco) through an adventure to get the Book of ALL Stories from the Sky God Nyame (Samantha Vroman). They travel throughout Africa and hunt down four of the

most interesting creatures in the land to bring to Nyame to trade her for her book. If they can bring her the four creatures, they get to be the new God of stories.

The second story, "Anansi meets a Yumboe Fairy," is a tale that follows Anansi as she gets into some trouble and now has to help Yemi the Yumbw Fairy (Christine Mayen-Franco) collect food for the Moonlight Festival.

Behind the scenes of this show, the crew has been hard at work to make this show come to life. They've also had to make up for lost snow days, and have been using every spare minute to build and paint the set and get costumes ready. This is the perfect show to help kick off your celebration of African-American History Month.

"Tales of Anansi" will be performed at Mount Vernon High School's Andrew Lee Pauley The-



Anansi cast and crew at Mount Vernon High School.

atre (aka the Little Theatre, door 4, across from the football field) on Feb. 2 at 7 p.m. and Feb. 3 at

11 a.m. and 3 p.m.. Tickets can be purchased at the door and online at mvhstheatrearts.com.

Mount Vernon High School, 8515 Old Mount Vernon Road, Alexandria VA 22309.

## FCPS Proposed Six-Year Capital Improvement Plan

Climate change, gerrymandering, and inequitable funding discussed.

BY MERCIA HOBSON  
THE CONNECTION

The newly elected Fairfax County School Board heard public testimony on the proposed Fiscal Year 2025-29 Capital Improvement Program Thursday evening, Jan. 18. Ryan L. McElveen, school board member at-large, and Robyn A. Lady, Dranesville District representative, served as meeting managers. McElveen said if anyone wishes to provide additional feedback to the board before they vote on the CIP, which is scheduled for Feb. 8, to do so by sending comments to communityparticipation@fcps.edu

The school board heard from eight of the ten registered speakers, each having two minutes.

Samad Quraishi, a member of the 2025 class at George C. Marshall High School in Falls Church, testified as a student representative of the Voters Initiative. Quraishi urged the board to prioritize sustainability and infrastructure



The Fairfax County School Board, from left, Mateo Dunne, Mount Vernon; Melanie K. Meren, vice chair, Hunter Mill; Ryan McElveen, At-Large; Ilryong Moon, At-Large; Ricardy Anderson, Mason; Karl Frisch, chair, Providence; Robyn Lady Dranesville; Kyle McDaniel, At-Large; Seema Dixit, Sully; Sandy Anderson, Springfield; Marcia St. John-Cunning, Franconia; and Rachna Sizemore Heizer, Braddock.

renovations in the CIP and continue collaboration with students. "Climate change cannot be underscored enough, and as the impact on the next generation of students grows, it's imperative that FCPS fund programs like this one."

Robin Olsen, team lead of Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions, acknowledged that the CIP for FY 2025-29 includes the central components that are making progress on the Joint Environmental Task Force, or "JET," such as energy-saving performance contracting, the expansion of Get2Green, an FCPS

environmental stewardship program, and the launch of an electric school bus fleet. Olsen pressed the school board for a more coordinated plan among the various school system elements to meet the JET mandates outlined in the CIP. "Budget targets for carbon reduction are substantial and require a change in the way FCPS does business," Olsen said.

Robert "Bob" Jordan spoke for the Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions. Jordan emphasized to school board members the importance of addressing funding limitations for

energy efficiency upgrades to meet climate goals. He said the CIP only applies to new school construction and renovations, greatly limiting progress toward meeting energy mandates.

For instance, "many electrical energy and management goals for HVAC systems in FCPS are past their useful lives. ... They can and should be replaced with much more energy-efficient systems. These upgrades will generate substantial savings in energy costs," Jordan said.

Jordan proposed several fund-

ing solutions to meet the energy efficiency and renewable energy mandates by 2040. They include "aggressive use of the Inflation Reduction Act Tax Credits, rebates of up to 40 percent of the eligible cost for global energy projects, and contracts with energy efficiency companies that can receive substantial tax deductions and pass the savings on to FCPS." He proposed that FACS meet with school board members to discuss this in greater detail.

Melissa Morrison, a parent with a student at Herndon Middle School and a PTA board member, spoke out about gerrymandering, overcrowding, and inequitable funding in the county schools. She said affluent homeowners and developers requested students be bused to Cooper Middle School and Langley High School rather than attend Herndon Middle School. Cooper and Langley are in McLean. According to Morrison, the result is lopsided demographics at Herndon Middle School, with economically disadvantaged students accounting for 55 percent and English learners accounting for 32 percent. "Thirty-six percent and 62 percent, respectively, above the next closest middle school." Morrison testified that the boundaries have not been redrawn "in over two to three decades."

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## Investing in Public Safety

By SENATOR ADAM EBBIN

Legislators, the public, and lobbyists alike are starting to get the hang of the new General Assembly building, and legislation is now flowing through the committee process. While we have only been in Richmond a few weeks, it feels like we have been here for much longer.

Last Wednesday, I took the gavel of the Public Safety Subcommittee for the first time. Over the course of the next month, the Senate Finance Committee will be working to report the Senate's Budget to the full body for its consideration.

Under the leadership of Democrats in the General Assembly, over the last four years, minimum salaries for state level public safety officers increased \$10,769 on average for entry level positions and \$19,918 on average for the highest ranked positions. This includes correctional staff at the Department of Corrections (DOC) and Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), Virginia State Police (VSP) of-

icers, and also deputy sheriffs and regional jails officers.

Between 2021 and 2023, we also provided significant bonuses for law enforcement and public safety officers. That included \$4,000 for DOC and DJJ correctional staff, and \$3,000 for deputy sheriffs and regional jail officers. We also provided \$5,000 bonuses for VSP officers, as well as up to \$2,000 for relocation expenses, and bonuses of between 2.0 and 8.0 percent of an officer's salary. All of these were in addition to normal bonuses provided by agencies within their existing operating budgets.

As the new Chairman of the Public Safety Subcommittee of Senate Finance, I look forward to continuing that track record of investment to keep Virginia communities safe.

**THIS PAST SUNDAY**, I hosted a Town Hall at Alexandria City High School along with Delegates Charniele Herring, Alfonso Lopez, and Adele McClure. Special thanks to Virginia public radio journalist Michael Lee Pope for moderating our discussion.

We fielded numerous questions about the proposal to relocate the Washington Capitals and Washington Wizards to an arena in Potomac Yard, including project financing, the potential transportation impact along the Rt. 1 Corridor, and other quality-of-life issues. For more information about the proposed arena project, please visit [www.MonumentalALX.com](http://www.MonumentalALX.com)

In addition to discussing the Monumental proposal, we answered questions on an array of other topics, including the proposal to build a casino on the Silver Line Metro corridor in Fairfax County, gun violence prevention, and abortion access.

Thank you again to everyone who came out; for those who are still looking to provide community input, you are still able to fill out my constituent survey, which can be found at [adamebbin.com/survey](http://adamebbin.com/survey)

It is my continued honor to represent the people of the 39th Senate District.

My legislative email address is [SenatorEbbin@senate.virginia.gov](mailto:SenatorEbbin@senate.virginia.gov). You can also reach us at our new Richmond phone number 804-698-7539.

## Bills, Bills, Bills

By DELEGATE PAUL KRIZEK

We are in the midst of the second full week of session down here in Richmond, and our work is picking up quickly! As I reported in last week's column, I am now on nine subcommittees, and serve as the Chairman of three subcommittees: Campaign Finance in Privileges & Elections, ABC & Gaming in General Laws, and Transportation & Public Safety in Appropriations.

The Speaker and his staff have nearly completed referring the almost 1,600 pieces of legislation introduced by me and my colleagues in the House, and subcommittee dockets are full this week.

Today I began the day bright and early at 7 a.m., chairing the Campaign Finance subcommittee where we heard several introduced bills related to campaign donations and reporting requirements. After I adjourned that meeting at 7:30 a.m., I hurried down the hall to the Natural Resources subcommittee on which I sit, where I also had two bills up for a hearing.

This week alone, I had four other bills come up for their first hearing, all of which left subcommittee on unanimous votes. Part of my solar energy bill package, HB 198 directs the Department of Energy to produce a report on the benefits and full potential of solar energy in the Commonwealth. HB 522 empowers the ABC Board of Directors to modernize its online advertising regulations. HB 526 reduces the registration fee for charitable organizations

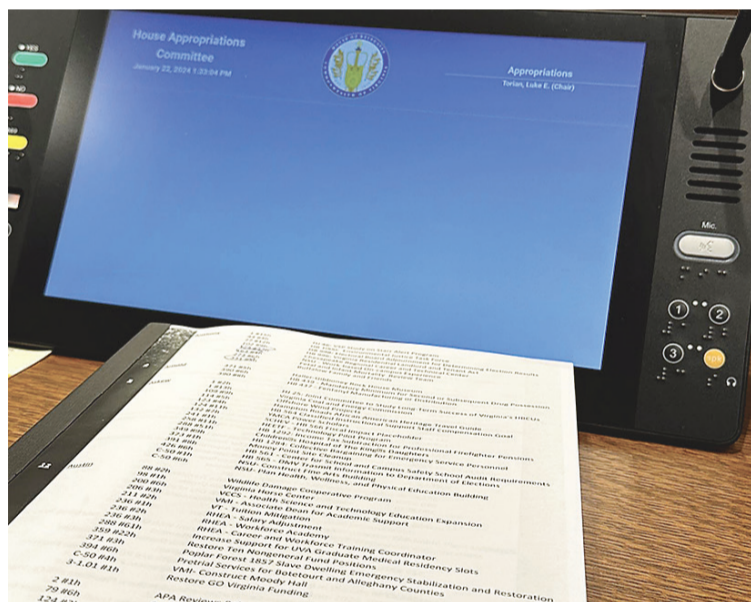
in the Commonwealth. HB 1349 streamlines the process for obtaining an ABC license for performing arts centers. I predict that by this week's end, I will present more than half of my 24 pieces of legislation before subcommittee.

Be sure to visit the Legislative Information System to learn more about legislation my colleagues and I have introduced: <https://lis.virginia.gov>.

As we approach "crossover" on Feb. 13, subcommittee dockets and House floor sessions will grow ever longer. "Crossover" is the day by which all House bills must be voted on and sent to the Senate, and vice versa.

In addition to bills, work has already begun on the House Budget. On Monday, Appropriations members like me heard testimony from all other Delegates on their three priority budget amendment proposals. This presentation is a unique opportunity to hear about budgetary items that will benefit Virginians in all corners of the Commonwealth. Over the next few weeks, I look forward to sharing more of the budget items I requested that will impact the 16th District. I invite you to visit the Virginia State Budget website if you are interested in viewing all budget amendments requested by General Assembly members: <https://budget.lis.virginia.gov/>.

As you know, I also meet daily with dozens of advocacy groups and constituents who visit Richmond to speak to me about their positions on legislation important



View of my desk during the Appropriations Committee hearing on Member Budget Amendments

to them. I rely on constituents sharing their thoughts on bills to inform how I plan to vote on these issues. Please contact my office if you want to visit me in the new

General Assembly Building during this year's session. We are happy to arrange a meeting and an opportunity to sit in the House Gallery to watch a Floor Session.

### Submit a Letter to the Editor

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WWW.FCPS.EDU/CAPITAL-IMPROVEMENT-PROGRAM

Hybla Valley Elementary School celebrated the completion of its capital improvement project on May 22, 2023. The project by Fairfax County Public Schools “was identified according to the Renovation Queue, approved in 2009.” The project ranked 33 of 63 schools in the queue; was completed in the spring of 2023 and funded by the 2017 and 2019 bonds, according to FCPS.

## FCPS Proposed Six-Year Capital Improvement Plan

FROM PAGE 3

Morrison questioned why Armstrong Elementary School in Reston should receive a \$40 million renovation when it is projected to be at 44 percent capacity and meet or exceed its academic metrics.

“It’s a case of the haves and have-nots in the CIP and boundary lines are where FCPS needs to start treating all schools more equitably.”

David Conover, representing the Great Falls Citizen Association, said that the county is responsible for providing a proposed CIP in a more timely manner in the future. Conover requested “more transparency in the development of the renovation queue to gain a better understanding of how facilities are selected for renovation and the range and relative importance of the criteria driving those renovation decisions.”

According to Jo Doumbia, vice chair of the Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions, the CIP needs to specify what schools identified in the report will undergo either modifications of buildings or renovations. They should specifically indicate energy efficiency and all clean energy standards.

Patty Karchner said she is the parent of a twice-exceptional student. Twice-exceptional students are intellectually gifted individuals who have learning disabilities. Some may be over sensitive to stimuli. She discussed the importance of supporting sensory-friendly design in county schools at all levels during construction and renovation. According to Karchner, FCPS currently needs a consistent method of providing alternative environments to the cafeteria.

“The cafeteria, holy moly ... Have you been in the cafeteria recently? It is loud — the noises. There are smells, there are commotions, and it should be a fun break for



FCPS SUPERINTENDENT WEEKLY REFLECTIONS  
Michelle Reid, Ed.D., superintendent Fairfax County Public Schools visits with students.

students, but it is overwhelming for some of our students.”

Karchner said there are county schools with students eating in libraries. “There are kids eating in the hallways, outdoor courtyards, and classrooms if they can find a teacher who will let them in the classroom or in the main office. ... We need a plan to sort this out.”

What is Fairfax County Public Schools Capital Improvement Program (CIP)? In her “Superintendent’s Weekly Reflections,” dated Jan. 22, 2024, by Dr. Michell Reid, she said that on Thursday evening at Luther Jackson Middle School, there was a public hearing for the Capital Improvement Plan. “Funded through taxpayer-approved bond referendums, the CIP is how we strategically build and renovate facilities across our 199 schools and centers. Through this work, our students can learn and grow in safe, healthy, up-to-date buildings.”

Visit FCPS Capital Improvement Program (CIP) to learn more.



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JANUARY 19-28

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# January Is Firefighter Cancer Awareness Month



PHOTO / LINKEDIN

Ray Lankin, CEO of United Diagnostic Services, LLC.

FROM PAGE 1

ination, containment, including removing gear to minimize contamination and decontaminating and bagging their self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) for professional cleaning. All firefighters now have two turnout gear sets.

Fairfax firefighters are not wearing their gear as frequently as they have in the past to reduce exposure. Firefighters can determine the level of protection they require based on the information provided at the time of dispatch. “Fire in a house? We definitely put it on,” Young said.

At the 2023 IAFF Fallen Firefighter Memorial Ceremony, nearly 66 percent of the names added to the wall between Jan. 1, 2021, and Dec. 31, 2022, were those who died from occupational cancers — pancreatic, throat and ovarian.

“Cancer caused 70 percent of the line-of-duty deaths for career firefighters in 2016. Firefighters have a 9 percent higher risk of being diagnosed with cancer than the general U.S. population. Firefighters have a 14 percent higher risk of dying from cancer than the general U.S. population,” according to the nonprofit Firefighter Cancer Support Network.

According to IAFF in “Global Health Organization Links Fire Fighting and Occupational Cancer,” the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), the cancer agency of the World Health Organization, re-evaluated firefighting reporting in 2022. It stated, “For decades, the IARC had



Robert Young, president of IAFF Local 2068.

## Cancer and Firefighters

In 2023 in Virginia, 57 firefighters were diagnosed with cancer; 16 in Fairfax County, one as young as 28, and some retirees. The average age of a firefighter dying of cancer last year was 57 years old. In Virginia, we had seven firefighters die of cancer, two from the City of Alexandria.

— Steve Weissman, Virginia state director, Firefighter Cancer Support Network

classified firefighter occupational exposures as Group 2B, meaning the exposures were possibly carcinogenic. The new classification, Group 1 — carcinogenic to humans, now puts firefighting on a par with tobacco and benzene.” A summary of the final evaluations is published online in “The Lancet Oncology.”

When these protective ensembles become readily available, I hope to see the fire service as a whole transition away from the gear that is laden with these car-

SEE JANUARY AS, PAGE 11



FIREFIGHTERS FOR HEALTH

Ryan McGill, master technician for Fairfax County Fire and Rescue, serves as director for IAFF Local 2068 and chairman of the Firefighter Cancer Reduction Committee.



FIREFIGHTERS FOR HEALTH

Steve Weissman, junior state director for the Firefighter Cancer Support Network.



FAIRFAX COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE DEPARTMENT 2022 ANNUAL REPORT

Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department responded to 120,433 incidents in 2022, many with off-gassing of PFAS or polyfluoroalkyl substances and other substances classified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) of the World Health Organization as known or probable human carcinogens.



FAIRFAX COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE DEPARTMENT 2022 ANNUAL REPORT

January is Firefighter Cancer Awareness Month.

# New Mount Vernon School Board Member Lays Out His Plan

BY MIKE SALMON  
THE GAZETTE



Mateo Dunne

**M**ateo Dunne is the new Mount Vernon District representative on the Fairfax County School Board, elected to take the seat of long time board member Karen Corbett Sanders, who retired in late 2023. He moved to the Mount Vernon District 20 years ago so that his three children could attend Fort Hunt ES, Sandburg MS, and West Potomac HS in Mount Vernon.

The Mount Vernon District includes the Mount Vernon HS, South County HS, and West Potomac HS pyramids. He's ready to take on the efforts needed for this pyramid and has a plan in mind that includes emphasis on academic excellence, school safety and security, mental and behavioral health support, workforce compensation, and fiscal responsibility.

"I will visit and meet with parents at every school in my district, so I can listen and learn about their concerns and priorities," he said. "I want to ensure every public school in the Mount Vernon District is providing our children with a world-class education."

In his career as an attorney, Dunne represented clients in litigation before international tribunals, Federal courts, and regulatory agencies. Around Mount Vernon, he has also served as the Vice President of the Stratford Landing Citizens Association for

several years. Previously, he served as Vice President of Advocacy for the Fairfax County Council PTA and 1st Vice President for the Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations.

In 2015, Dunne became involved in education advocacy when school officials were looking to eliminate high school sports, performing arts and language immersion in order to address a \$100 million budget deficit.

"I co-led the campaign to save these programs, which are essential to student success inside and outside the classroom," he said. He organized a rally at the Fairfax County Government Center with students, parents, educators, and community members which made an impact, he felt. The Board of Supervisors increased the FCPS budget by \$88 million in 2015 to save these programs from elimination.

His term on the board will go from Jan. 1, 2024-Dec. 31, 2027.

## BULLETIN BOARD

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

### FOSTER PARENTS NEEDED

Interested in becoming a foster parent? There is always a need for caring foster parents looking to open their homes to foster youth. Get in touch to learn more. Visit [fcsvanow@gmail.com](mailto:fcsvanow@gmail.com) or [www.FCSVA.org](http://www.FCSVA.org). Or call 703-817-9890.

### VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

**STEM VOLUNTEERS.** The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) needs scientists, engineers, mathematicians, and physicians to assist K-12 STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) teachers in the Northern Virginia Area, during

the 2016-17 school year. In the 2015-16 school year, the numbers of STEM volunteers in Northern Virginia were: Fairfax County - 40, Arlington - 20, and Alexandria - one. Details of the collaboration are worked out between the teacher and the volunteer, and may involve giving demonstrations, assisting in lab experiments, lecturing on special topics, assisting with homework, etc. The hours are flexible, and volunteers attend a one-day training in September before being assigned to schools. To see how volunteers are assisting their teachers, view the video clips at [www.seniorscientist.org](http://www.seniorscientist.org). To volunteer, contact [donaldrea@aol.com](mailto:donaldrea@aol.com).

Assistance League of Northern Virginia is an all-volunteer non-profit organization

SEE BULLETIN, PAGE 10

# MOUNT VERNON

## 37th Annual Mount Vernon Town Meeting

Join us in person or virtually to learn more about why we are "The One"!

**Saturday, February 10, 2024**

**7:45 a.m. – Exhibit Hall Open**

**9:30 a.m. – Speakers, Q&A's and Virtual Tour**

**12:15 p.m. – Taste of Mount Vernon**

**Mount Vernon High School**

**8515 Old Mount Vernon Road**

**Mount Vernon, VA 22309**

**Live on Channel 16, Facebook**

**More details: [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/mountvernon](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/mountvernon)**

**Join Supervisor Dan Storck for the 37th Annual Town Meeting! Meet your Supervisor and many County, state and federal leaders. Have your questions answered, learn about issues important to you, connect with County agencies and service providers and mingle with your neighbors. The highlight of the morning will be taking a "virtual tour" of the changing Mount Vernon District from Lorton to Huntington.**

**Speakers:** Board of Supervisors Chairman **Jeff McKay**, County Executive **Bryan Hill**, Mount Vernon District School Board Member **Mateo Dunne**, **Special Guest Congressman Gerry Connolly** and other community leaders.

**For more information**, call the Mount Vernon District Office at 703-780-7518, TTY 711, visit the office at 2511 Parkers Lane, or send your questions/comments to [mtvernon@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:mtvernon@fairfaxcounty.gov).

♿ To request reasonable ADA accommodations or language translation services, call the Mount Vernon District Office, 703-780-7518 or TTY 711 on or before 2/3/24.

MTVERNON@FAIRFAXCOUNTY.GOV

WWW.FAIRFAXCOUNTY.GOV/MOUNTVERNON

Connect with TEAM MVD and your Mount Vernon neighbors at the 37th Annual Town Meeting! #ConnectMVD

## RICHMOND HIGHWAY Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)

### OPEN HOUSE

## Wednesday, January 31, 2024

» **When:** 6:30-9 PM (stop by anytime - there is no presentation)

» **Where:** Bryant High School (2709 Popkins Ln)

**Fairfax County is implementing a bus rapid transit (BRT) system** along North Kings Highway and Richmond Highway from Huntington Metrorail Station to Fort Belvoir.

**Stop by the open house** to talk to County staff and review a summary of work completed and decisions made related to the Richmond Highway Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project.

**Free on-site childcare and shuttle transportation** to the meeting (from Gum Springs and Hybla Valley Community Centers) are available. Please email Fairfax County Neighborhood and Community Services at [ncscrcregion1@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:ncscrcregion1@fairfaxcounty.gov) to request these services.

In case of inclement weather, please check the website the day of the meeting for confirmation. Fairfax County Department of Transportation (FCDOT) ensures nondiscrimination in all programs and activities in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If you need this information in an alternate format or language, contact FCDOT at 703-877-5600, TTY 711.

www.connectionnewspapers.com/Calendar

[fairfaxcounty.gov/transportation/richmond-hwy-brt](http://fairfaxcounty.gov/transportation/richmond-hwy-brt)

[fairfaxcounty.gov/alerts](http://fairfaxcounty.gov/alerts) ("Richmond Highway BRT Project Updates")

The Richmond Highway BRT project is funded in part by the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority.

  
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## SENIOR LIVING

### Preserve Access to Telehealth For Seniors with Medicare

Current flexibilities will end on Dec. 31 unless the Biden administration and Congress take action.

U.S. Sen. Mark R. Warner (D-VA) joined U.S. Sens. Brian Schatz (D-HI) and bipartisan, bicameral lawmakers to urge the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to work with Congress to ensure Medicare beneficiaries maintain access to telehealth. Current pandemic-era flexibilities will expire on Dec. 31, 2024 without further action, forcing seniors to adapt to new care routines. In a letter to HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra, the lawmakers underscored the urgent need to make pandemic-era telehealth flexibilities permanent.

"We urge you to work with Congress to ensure that all Medicare beneficiaries have permanent access to telehealth services before the temporary waivers expire on Dec. 31, 2024," the lawmakers wrote. "Enacting permanent telehealth legislation will require collaboration between HHS and Congress in the year ahead. We urge you to communicate to Congress and the public the authorities, appropriations, resources, and other supports needed to achieve this goal."

"Telehealth is a cost-effective way to improve access to care, especially for rural and underserved communities," the lawmakers con-

tinued. "Telehealth also allows patients to choose a medical provider that best suits their personal medical needs. Medicare beneficiaries have come to rely on expanded access to telehealth and are satisfied with the care they have received."

Sen. Warner has consistently led efforts to expand telehealth accessibility. He is an original co-sponsor and a tireless advocate for the Creating Opportunities Now for Necessary and Effective Care Technologies (CONNECT) for Health Act, legislation that would expand coverage of telehealth services through Medicare and make permanent COVID-19 telehealth flexibilities. He has also introduced bipartisan legislation to increase access to telehealth services for individuals with substance use disorder and repeatedly pushed on the DEA to institute long-term flexibilities for the prescription of controlled substances via telehealth.

Joining Sens. Warner and Schatz in sending the letter were U.S. Sens. Roger Wicker (R-MS), Ben Cardin (D-MD), John Thune (R-SD), and Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS), and U.S. Representatives Mike Thompson (D-CA-04), David Schweikert (R-AZ-01), Doris Matsui (D-CA-07), and Bill Johnson (R-OH-06).

### Tight Knit Circle of Friends

Women gather each week to create and connect.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL  
THE CONNECTION

The soft click-clack of knitting needles is barely audible over the chatter that fills the library of Margaret Overcash's McLean home. She and three of her oldest friends have gathered for their weekly knitting session.

"We knit, but it's mostly social. Sort of way to staying connected," she said.

They meet each Wednesday to stitch and chat. Over the years they've knitted blankets, scarves and sweaters, some for charity and

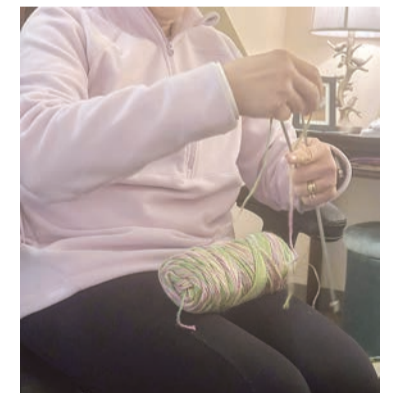


PHOTO COURTESY OF MARGARET OVERCASH  
A knitting enthusiast, Margaret Overcash shares her love of the art with her friends.

others for gifts.

The woman began knitting as a group about 10 years ago when Overcash took a community college knitting course on a whim. She gained a love for the art form and wanted to share it with her friends.

SEE WOMEN GATHER, PAGE 11  
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# ENTERTAINMENT



Alexandria Restaurant Week is Jan. 19 to 28, 2024 at restaurants in Alexandria.

The “Visible Touch: A Look at Texture” can be seen Feb. 2-24, 2024 at Del Ray Artisans Gallery.

## WEDNESDAYS THROUGH SATURDAYS

**Tours Aboard Tall Ship Providence and Sen. John Warner Maritime Heritage Center.** 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. At Alexandria’s Waterfront Park, 1A Prince Street, Alexandria. Guests of all ages are recruited into the Continental Navy aboard Tall Ship Providence with legendary Captain John Paul Jones. Recruits are assigned jobs on the ship, learn where they will work and live, how to load a cannon, etc... Tours conclude in the Naval History Theatre with a film about the ship. The Heritage center is a floating museum on the Alexandria waterfront. Visit <https://tallshipprovidence.org/>

## JAN. 5-27, 2024

**“Visions of Resilience: Art for Climate Justice” exhibit.** At Del Ray Artisans, 2704 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria, in partnership with the Changing Planet Justice Foundation, raises awareness about climate change and its impact on marginalized communities. By conveying issues through the universal language of image, we encourage action towards a just,

climate-friendly future. Reception: Friday, January 5, 7-9 p.m. Open Thursdays 12-6 p.m., Fridays 12-9 p.m., Saturdays and Sundays 12-6 p.m. (closed January 28). [DelRay-Artisans.org/exhibits](http://DelRay-Artisans.org/exhibits)

## JAN. 11 TO FEB. 18

**A Delicate Balance Sculpture.** At the Athenaeum, Alexandria. Curated by Jackie Hoysted and produced by Veronica Szalus, A Delicate Balance is an all-sculpture show that explores the idea of achieving equilibrium. Perhaps more than ever, today we have a greater awareness of how everything operates in such a delicate balance - be it ecosystems, politics, relationships or personal well-being. We must navigate life without tipping too much in one direction so that we can strive for harmony, but at times something radical is required to achieve it.

## JAN. 19-28

**Alexandria Restaurant Week.** For 10 days and two weekends, more than 70 restaurants in Alexandria will offer a \$30, \$40 or \$50 in-person dinner for one during Alexandria Restaurant Week,

January 19 to 28, 2024. Special menus are available in-person at participating restaurants throughout Alexandria’s neighborhoods, including Old Town, Del Ray, Carlyle, Eisenhower and the West End. The revised three-tiered pricing structure reflects feedback from Alexandria Restaurant Week participants following the 2023 summer promotion.

## FEB. 2-24

**The “Visible Touch: A Look at Texture” exhibit features art that explores texture through physical form or visual illusion.** Visitors will be allowed to touch some of the art (pieces are marked). Enjoy the visual and the tactile experience! View at Del Ray Artisans Gallery, 2704 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria VA. Opening Reception: Friday, February 2, 7-9 p.m. Open Thursdays 12-6 p.m., Fridays 12-9 p.m., Saturdays & Sundays 12-6 p.m. (Closed February 25). [DelRay-Artisans.org/exhibits](http://DelRay-Artisans.org/exhibits)

## SATURDAY/FEB. 3

**Sherlock Holmes and the Case of the Missing Maestro.** 3 p.m. At George Washington Masonic Memorial, 101 Callahan Drive, Alexandria. When the orchestra is ready to begin their concert and

suddenly discover the Maestro is nowhere to be found they begin to panic. Thankfully the world’s greatest detective is available and agrees to take the case. All the musicians are suspects and thus Sherlock Holmes must investigate each of the instrument families to deduce who is behind the mystery. With Enrico Lopez-Yanez, Guest Conductor.

## FRIDAY/FEB. 9

**The Thirteen Presents “Path of Miracles.”** 7:30 p.m. At St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, 8009 Ft. Hunt Road, Alexandria. In Path of Miracles, British composer Joby Talbot takes the listener on a musical journey on the mystical Camino de Santiago de Compostela. The contemplative progression of the Camino is built into the structure of the work, with the four movements of the work titled after the four main posts along the Camino. Talbot incorporates various medieval texts in many languages and musical styles as diverse as those of Taiwanese Bunun people and medieval chant. Paired with projected images of the cosmos by renowned Italian virtual designer Camilla Tassi, The Thirteen’s performances of Path of Miracles promise to be replete with beauty and wonder.

## SATURDAY/FEB. 10

**37th Annual Mount Vernon Town Meeting.** At Mount Vernon High School, 8515 Old Mount Vernon Road. Times: 7:45 a.m. to 9:25 a.m. - Exhibit Hall Open; 9:30 a.m. to noon - Program: Speakers, Audience Q&A and Virtual Tour; Noon to 1:30 p.m. - Taste of Mount Vernon.

## FEB. 10-11

**Alexandria Symphony Announces ASO at 80 Project**  
Saturday, February 10, 2024 at 7:30 p.m. at Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center;  
Sunday, February 11, 2024 at 3:00 p.m. at George Washington Masonic Memorial.  
Four original pieces, commissioned in honor of the 80th anniversary of the Alexandria Symphony Orchestra (ASO), will be presented as part of the ASO at 80 Project. Led by Music Director James Ross, the commissions will premiere throughout the 2023-2024 season as introductions to four of the five performances.

On February 10 and 11, 2024, the program entitled “Do Not Go Gentle” opens with Milad Yousufi’s Aurora, drawn from his experience as an Afghan refugee and inspired by a

SEE ENTERTAINMENT, PAGE 10

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## Announcements

### Estate Sale

**January 27 & 28, 8AM to 4PM**  
3117 Waterside Lane,  
Alexandria 22309

Details & Pics at [Estatesales.net](http://Estatesales.net).  
Solid Wood Furniture (Ethan Allen,  
Crescent, Bassett), grandfather clock;  
Minton, Z S & C, & J. Haviland china;  
lamps, bunkbed, quilted items, wall  
art, Singer, Baskets, Yarn, flutes, area  
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## ENTERTAINMENT

FROM PAGE 9

poem dedicated to his mother. His works express both his pride in his country of birth and his longing to return. Visit [www.alexsym.org](http://www.alexsym.org).

### THE BIRCHMERE

At 3701 Mount Vernon Ave., Alexandria. All shows are at 7:30 p.m., unless otherwise noted. Tickets available at [Ticketmaster.com](http://Ticketmaster.com). Contact The Birchmere at 703-549-7500 or [www.Birchmere.com](http://www.Birchmere.com).

### JANUARY

Wed. 24: Herman's Hermits starring Peter Noone \$55.00  
Fri. 26: Who's Bad - The Ultimate Michael Jackson Experience \$39.50  
Sat. 27: Dar Williams with The Nields \$45.00 SOLD OUT!  
Sun. 28: Forever Tina - A Tribute to the Queen of Rock N' Roll \$39.50

### FEBRUARY

Fri. 2: Will Downing \$79.50  
Sat. 3: Will Downing \$79.50 SOLD OUT!  
Tue. 6: Rosanne Cash: ReInventing The Wheel 1993-2023 with John Leventhal and Band \$79.50  
Wed. 7: Rosanne Cash: ReInventing The Wheel 1993-2023 with John Leventhal and Band \$79.50  
Thu. 8: Aaron Watson w/ Jenna Paulette \$29.50  
Fri. 9: Dave Hollister \$55.00 SOLD OUT!  
Wed. 14: Kevin Ross \$65.00  
Thu. 15: The Amy Winehouse Celebration: back to BLACK \$29.50  
Fri. 16: NRBQ \$45.00  
Sat. 17: The Dramatics featuring L.J. Reynolds \$59.50  
Sun. 18: Neil Diamond Tribute starring DAVID CARLIN KING and The Gold Diamond Band \$45.00  
Thu. 22: Corey Smith Band w/ Jeb Gipson - All Standing in the Flex Stage! Doors 6pm \$35.00  
Fri. 23: TWEET \$45.00  
Sat. 24: Tarsha Fitzgerald Presents DEVOTION: An Earth Wind & Fire Experience \$39.50  
Sun. 25: Daryl Davis Presents: Thanks For The Memories 2023! \$39.50  
Wed. 28: Sara Evans \$69.50 2nd Night Added!  
Thu. 29: Sara Evans \$69.50 SOLD OUT!

## BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 7

that feeds, clothes and provides reading assistance and books to children in need. Assistance League's programs touch the lives of hundreds of children in Fairfax and Prince William Counties and the City of Alexandria. There are many volunteer opportunities for community members to contribute to helping those in need. To learn more, email [info@alnv.org](mailto:info@alnv.org), or visit [www.alnv.org](http://www.alnv.org).  
United Community (formerly UCM), 7511 Fordson Road, Alexandria, seeks volunteers for Food Pantry assistance, Early Learning Center teacher aides, basic needs counselors, youth tutors and mentors, office administration/data entry, and community outreach. Flexible hours and schedules. Opportunities for all ages to serve, including community service hours. More info at [ucmagency.org/volunteer-opportunities](http://ucmagency.org/volunteer-opportunities) or email [volunteer@ucmagency.org](mailto:volunteer@ucmagency.org).  
Operation Paws for Homes, a Virginia based 501(c)(3) organization seeks volunteers, especially to foster dogs. See [www.ophrescue.org](http://www.ophrescue.org) for information and all volunteer opportunities.

# January as Firefighter Cancer Awareness Month

FROM PAGE 6

cinogens to something that is going to not only protect us from the products of combustion but also protect us from this gear that is also contributing to the occurrence of cancer in the fire profession,” Young said.

Medical screening is vital because the sooner cancers are detected, the better the overall outcome. In January 2023, the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department (FCFRD) was awarded the Federal Emergency Management Agency Assistance to Firefighters Grant \$450,000 to provide ultrasound diagnostic scan screenings.

The scans encompass an echocardiogram, carotid doppler, abdominal aorta, thyroid, liver, gallbladder, spleen, bladder, and kidney scans, as well as testicular scans for men and exterior pelvic scans for women. It allows for the early detection of cancer and other health conditions. All current firefighters and those who have retired within the last five years are eligible for free cancer detection scans.

Steve Weissman is currently serving as the Virginia state director for the Firefighter Cancer Support Network. Wiseman said they ensure that when members are diagnosed, they don't fight that fight alone. Support is there if the firefighter wants it. Weissman retired as a deputy fire chief with the Stafford County Fire and Rescue Department and started his career with the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department.

Diagnosed in 2016 with prostate cancer through early detection, Weissman said he turned to the Firefighter Cancer Support Network for assistance. “Lo and behold, I'm part of the group that grabbed me, brought me, and supported me. Now I'm giving back.” Weissman said that numbers put things in perspective, and not all firefighters diagnosed with cancer reach out to them because “it's personal.”



FAIRFAX COUNTY FIRE/RESCUE @FFXFIRERESCUE

**Over 80 #FCFRD members gathered at Inova Fairfax Hospital to support Tech Chris Welch (FS40, Fairfax Center, B-shift), who is having his thyroid removed after cancer was detected through FCFRD's Ultrasound Diagnostic Scan Program.**

“So last year [2023] in Virginia, we had 57 firefighters diagnosed with cancer, 16 for Fairfax County, one as young as 28, and some retirees. The average age of a firefighter dying of cancer last year was 57 years old,” Weissman said. “In Virginia, we had seven firefighters die of cancer, two from the City of Alexandria.”

The Fallen Firefighter Memorial is in the shadow of Pikes Peak in Colorado Springs. It honors the sacrifices made by IAFF members who died in the line of duty. Among the names added in July of 2023, the wall bears the inscription “Kimberly A. Schoppa, IAFF Local 2068, Fairfax County, VA, 04/22/2022.” The fatal injury cause, according to the IAFF, is “contact or exposure.” Schoppa died of ovarian cancer at 49.

Ryan McGill is a master technician for Fairfax County Fire and Rescue. He serves as director for IAFF Local 2068, chairman of the Firefighter Cancer Reduction Committee, and is on the board of directors for the Virginia Professional Firefighters Charitable Foundation. McGill urges current and former career and volunteer firefighters to take the

foundation's survey.

The purpose of the survey is to generate data to identify the number of Virginia firefighters with cancer, the types of cancers they have, and ways to mitigate cancer risk among Virginia's firefighters. The data provided will also help with legislative initiatives to reduce exposures, provide early detection screenings, and fund firefighter cancer research.

McGill said Local 2068 did an internal survey. “[It was] the first in the state to conduct a survey of their membership to determine the scope of cancer,” McGill said. “We had about 457 people take our survey, and we have 96 people reporting having cancer,” McGill said. “It's a big number — active and retired members. However, in many recent cases, they were caught early through ultrasound screenings.”

Through legislation, more compensable cancers are covered. During the last legislative session, thyroid cancer screening was added. “Virginia Professional Firefighters are bringing forward legislation this session, in 2024, to ensure that every firefighter career or volunteer can get early detection cancer screening,” McGill said.

McGill said they are working with the Inova Schar Cancer Institute, to greet their members on their cancer journey as they arrive for surgery.

Ray Lankin, CEO of United Diagnostic Services, LLC, said in an email that, in addition to the direct exposure risks, lifestyle factors can potentially undermine the effectiveness of protective gear and decontamination procedures. According to Lankin, promoting a healthy lifestyle in fire departments, including regular exercise and a balanced diet, is essential to reducing firefighter cancer risk. Educational programs addressing lifestyle factors are crucial to comprehensive cancer prevention efforts in the firefighting community and beyond.

## A Bit More to Say



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

To dive deeper into my Kenny-with-cancer dilemma, it's quite possible that my future treatment, or lack thereof, will come down to whether I restart my cancer treatment and irreparably harm my kidneys (leading to dialysis) or don't restart my cancer medicine and subsequently don't damage my kidneys/don't need dialysis but as a consequence, the cancer tumors grow unmedicated which leads to predictable complications that don't end well for me.

This damned if I do, damned if I don't situation reminds me of a long ago Three Stooges episode titled “Restless Knights (1935), a period-type story about a time in British history. The Stooges got in trouble for something and were sentenced to death. As they stood in a front of a firing squad, Curly asked if there was another way to die. The man in charge said he could be burned at the stake or hung. Larry asks Curly how he'd like to die. Curly says: “I'd rather be burned at the stake.” Larry asks “Why?” Curly replies: “A hot stake is better than a cold chop.” And Curly laughs, sort of proud of his reasoning. When I consider my cancer verses kidney dialysis choice, I'm not the least bit amused (except as I remember this exchange between Larry and Curly).

Unfortunately, my two options are not mutually exclusive. They could happen simultaneously if the lack of a clear alternative/plan “B” exists. Which if I were to hazard a guess, is not an uncommon outcome for a cancer patient when the side effects of the treatment overwhelm the body's the body's immune system and party, so to speak comes to an end. A ‘party’ which, for me anyhow, has been going on for nearly 15 years, to my oncologist's surprise. He of the original; “13 month to two years” prognosis offered up during the original Team Lourie meeting in late Feb. 2009.

And to invoke the late Maurice Chevalier, “I remember it well.” It was, after all New Year's Day in 2009 when my symptoms, which had manifested a few days earlier with pain in my left ribcage migrating to my right, got the best of me. On that day, I had difficulty catching my breath/breathing (inhaling in particular) and when getting up off the couch became similarly difficult, I realized that a trip to the Emergency Room was necessary. (On a holiday no less, but that's how much abnormal pain I was experiencing.) At the time, I never imagined that this initial visit would lead to a stage IV non-small cell lung cancer diagnosis eight weeks or so later. That's when we all met my oncologist for the first time and heard my “terminal” prognosis. Out of the blue is how I describe it. But after the hearing the oncologist read the reports from all the various doctors (pulmonologist, thoracic surgeon, general surgeon – to include the biopsy, and pathologist) I had visited in the previous two months since that initial Emergency Room visit, I was perplexed as to how and why a lifelong non-smoker in otherwise perfect health, with no cancer history in my immediate family, could be so diagnosed at age 54 and a half.

But that was then, this is now (age 69). An age when I don't believe I have as many lives left as I did then. Though I think I've taken cancer's best shot – and lived 14+ years to write about it, I've been worried/anticipated this doomsday-type scenario when the complication of side effects might lead to the problem I've written about today. Not that I'm describing/feeling that this recent turn of health events/side effect trouble as some sort of self-fulfilling inevitability, nevertheless; I'm not particularly surprised, more grateful that it took so long to get it here. I can't really say I feel as Lou Gehrig felt on his “luckiest man on the face of the earth” farewell at Yankee stadium, but I have lived to see the Red Sox win two more World Series since I was diagnosed and if I had known then that I'd outlive my prognosis by – 13 years, I might have thought I was the luckiest man. Given that non-small cell lung cancer stage IV was my original diagnosis, the leading cause of cancer deaths by far; in fact, as many deaths as the next three cancer groups combined, (breast, prostate and colon) to have survived – for any reason has been a miracle. You won't hear any complaints from me.

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

## Smell the Flowers st Nepenthe

Thursday, Jan. 25 Nepenthe Gallery is teaming up with Hunting Creek Garden Club and The Garden Club of Alexandria to host two fun events at

the gallery — a live floral demonstration by award-winning floral designer Laura Francis at 11 am; and later that day, our ART+WINE+CHEESE event from 6 to

7:30pm featuring stunning floral designs created by garden club members, each inspired by a chosen piece of Nepenthe artwork.

## Women Gather Each Week to Create and Connect

FROM PAGE 8

“She's pretty persuasive and she's always been sort of like a social activities director for us, so if she suggested it, we'd try it,” said Sarah Young.

Currently, they are knitting caps for women undergoing chemotherapy for breast cancer.

“We've made baby blankets for teen mothers, and then sometimes we've knit blankets for each other's grandchildren,” said Fran Conley who is expecting her first great-grandchild in May.

The women have been friends for nearly 50 years. They met as young stay-at-home

mothers, bonding over the need for companionship and support. Together they've celebrated milestones and supported each other through challenges.

“Between us we've had marriages, divorce, college graduations, first grandchildren, happiness, sadness and you name it, and always come together and circled the wagons around each other,” said Joanie Bridges.

Each woman brings her own talent to the group. Fran has an eye for fashion, Joanie has a good memory and keeps up with dates and Sarah says that she has a nose for juicy gossip and keeps the group informed.

“I keep the group entertained and Joanie makes sure that we remember each other's birthdays and Sarah is the fashionista who always knits the prettiest things because she can blend together color combinations tastefully,” said Young.

Maintaining friends and social connections is important to aging well. According to one study, people with strong connections to family and friends have a 50% greater chance of outliving those with fewer social ties, as cited by Aetna.

Loneliness has been linked to a higher risk of cognitive decline, dementia and depression.



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