

Mount Vernon Gazette

MOUNT VERNON'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER • A CONNECTION NEWSPAPER

MARCH 21, 2024

PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME/MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE



Governor Glenn Youngkin and First Lady Suzanne Youngkin at Mount Vernon Estate to present the Spirit of Virginia Award



First Lady Suzanne Youngkin speaks at the award ceremony, with First Regent Margaret Nichols and president and CEO Douglas Bradburn

Mount Vernon Ladies Receive Spirit of Virginia Award

Governor and First Lady make presentation.

BY SUSAN LAUME
MOUNT VERNON GAZETTE

History is filled with the accomplishments and good works of a multitude of determined women. March is Women's History Month.

Since 1859, one women's group, the Mount Vernon Ladies Association has cared for first U.S. President George Washington's Mount Vernon estate, the grounds, and important archival papers. On March 15, they were once again recognized for their successful restoration, preservation and management efforts over 160 years, this time by Virginia Governor and First Lady Glenn and Suzanne Youngkin. On Friday, the Youngkin's presentation of the "Spirit of Virginia Award" honored the Ladies work in celebration of Women's History Month.

"The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association commitment to preservation has provided an unmatched opportunity for Virginians to learn about George Washington's legacy and the Commonwealth's history," said Gov. Glenn Youngkin. "In rescuing America's most historic home and pioneering the preservation space, the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association embodies what it means to uplift the spirit of Virginia, and we thank them for their past and ongoing efforts."

In making the award, First Lady Suzanne Youngkin recognized the Association as the first national historic preservation organization, and oldest women's patriotic society in the United States. She noted that the orga-



PHOTO COURTESY MT VERNON LADIES ASSOCIATION

In 1870, members of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association pose for a photograph near the east front of the Mount Vernon Mansion. Left to right, standing: Mrs. Barry, Vice Regent for Illinois; Mrs. Walker, Vice Regent for North Carolina; Mrs. Washington, Vice Regent for West Virginia; Mrs. Halsted, Vice Regent for New Jersey; Mrs. Emory, Vice Regent for District of Columbia; Mrs. Chace, Vice Regent for Rhode Island. Left to right seated: Mrs. Mitchell, Vice Regent for Wisconsin; Mrs. Brooks, Vice Regent for New York; Mrs. Sweat, Vice Regent for Maine; Miss Cunningham; Regent; Mrs. Comegys, Vice Regent for Delaware; Mrs. Eve, Vice Regent for Georgia.

nization was formed and the purchase made at a time "when women could not vote or own property in their own name." The First Lady noted that the day of this presentation, of the first of six awards to be given in 2024,

is particularly significant. It marks the 116th anniversary of when the last private owner of the estate, John Augustine Washington III, agreed to the sale to preserve the estate and prevent its sale to land speculators.

First Lady Youngkin shared the historic anecdote that during a 1853 nighttime steam boat journey on the Potomac, passing the deteriorating mansion, the captain sounded the ship's bells in salute. The founder's mother, on that boat, seeing the mansion later commented to her daughter:

"If the men of America have seen fit to allow the home of its most respected hero to go to ruin, why can't the women of America band together to save it?"

The Spirit of Virginia Award recognizes unique qualities and standout achievements across the Commonwealth and salutes Virginians for their uncommon contributions in private industries, education, culture, the arts, and philanthropy. The idea for the award came to the Youngkin's during COVID and their campaign for the governorship, as a means to celebrate the resiliency of Virginia citizens. The Governor and Mrs. Youngkin will present five more Spirit of Virginia Awards in 2024, and all recipients will be recognized during a holiday reception at the Virginia Executive Mansion to take place at the end of the year.

Accepting the Spirit award for the Association, Margaret Harman Nichols, the 23rd, First Regent said, "We are honored to be the first recipient of the 2024 Spirit of Virginia Award. The Association's legacy of stewardship began with our trailblazing founder, Ann Pamela Cunningham, and has continued for the last 166 years uninterrupted. It is fitting that the home of the man who was first in

SEE MOUNT VERNON LADIES, PAGE 6

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Janet Caterson Price 703.622.5984
www.JanetPriceHomes.com

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Old Town | \$1,845,000

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Ann Duff 703.965.8700
www.AnnDuff.com

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Rosemont | \$1,250,000

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Nancy Herrman is a dedicated invasive plant warrior.



Rick Johnston is not intimidated by a thick patch of vines.



Gunnar Lucko wants to recruit others to help control ivy on the parkway's trees.

Saving the Parkway's Trees

National Park Service forests are at risk of failure in the national capital region and beyond.

By GLENDA C. BOOTH
THE GAZETTEV

In just two hours, four Friends of Dyke Marsh volunteers rescued around 55 trees from invasive English ivy on Saturday, March 16. Ivy vines snake up many trees on the George Washington Memorial Parkway, attach to the bark and put trees at risk.

In an area between Park Terrace Drive and the parkway, just south of Tulane Drive, the volunteers cut a two- to three-foot "window" around the circumference of the trees to separate the vine from its roots. Eventually, the vines will dry out and die.

English ivy, brought to North America by English settlers, is one of the most invasive and destructive plants in the region. It creates a monoculture that has minimal habitat value, gives little support to native insects and other wildlife and destroys biodiversity. It forms a dense mat that smothers and outcompetes native plants for sunlight, water and nutrients. It blocks sunlight from the tree's bark and leaves and holds moisture that leads to rot. The vines' weight can help topple a tree in heavy wind or snow.

"While most people who buy English ivy have the best of intentions when they purchase it, what they might not know is that it often escapes into natural spaces and the dense monoculture it forms is really harmful to the environment," said Mireya Storzaker, the parkway's natural resource specialist. Nevertheless, retailers sell it.

Youngkin Vetoed Bill

Del. Paul Krizek, Mount Vernon, introduced a bill, HB1167, in the recent General Assembly, to allow localities to ban the sale of English ivy. The bill passed in the House of Delegates 54-45, and passed in the Senate



Ivy's flowers turn into berries that birds disperse and spread the plant.

21 to 18. But on March 14, Gov. Glenn Youngkin vetoed the bill.

His veto statement said, "While the intent to regulate invasive species is praiseworthy, this bill proposes a prohibition on a single species, potentially establishing a precedent for banning other legal plant species in the future. Such a precedent could sow confusion and inconsistency in regulations statewide. The prospect of a patchwork of laws requires small business owners and garden enthusiasts to navigate complex legal landscapes. The most effective approach to addressing this issue is education and allowing the market to determine what is best for Virginians."

But there is more at stake than what's available at the garden store.

Delegate Krizek responded, "I am very disappointed that the Governor saw fit to not just veto this bipartisan legislation but to make it one of his first vetoes. This bill would not have stopped English ivy but it would have allowed local governments to have the option to ban its sale and thus educate people about its harm to the environment as one of the worst invasive plants still being sold. It takes down full-grown trees and harbors rats and mosquitoes."

Another bill, SB306, introduced by Del-

egate Holly Seibold and Senator Saddam Salim would require retailers to post signs indicating that plants are invasive. Youngkin has until April 8 to act.

Virginia's Natural Heritage Program has so far confirmed 90 invasive plants in the state (<https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/document/nh-invasive-plant-list-2023.pdf>).

GWM Parkway Is a National Park

When the Parkway was planned, designers envisioned a unique roadway to preserve and enhance the Potomac River valley, to keep both banks of the river in public ownership and to create a grand gateway to the home of first U.S. President George Washington, Mount Vernon, at the road's southern terminus. They integrated the road's design with the undulating terrain following natural contours and winding in gentle curves, featured natural areas, scenic vistas, some forested areas and some grassy areas.

Forests Are in Trouble

Studies of National Park Service forests concluded that forests in almost all of NPS's 39 eastern parks are at risk due to invasive plants and overabundant white-tailed deer browsing (April 2023) (<https://doi.org/10.1002/eap.2837>).

National park forests in the eastern U.S., including the George Washington Memorial Parkway's forests, are regenerating at low levels. In 90 percent of Washington, D.C.-area parks, the tree regenerating rates are so low that researchers anticipate widespread forest loss in the next few decades. Threats

English ivy is one of the most invasive and destructive plants in the region.

include invasive insects and plants, deer browse and climate change.

Healthy forests sustain themselves when seedlings and saplings fill a gap in the canopy after a tree dies. NPS uses a measurement called a "stocking index." NPS says, "A park is considered to have healthy regeneration if the stocking index shows that 67 percent of its forest plots are adequately stocked with seedlings and small saplings. Since monitoring began, no [National Capital Region] park has reached 67 percent or even exceeded 30 percent. For the GWM Parkway south of the Potomac Gorge, only eight percent of plots are adequately stocked," concluded the report.

"Threatened by large populations of hungry white-tailed deer, invasive plant crowding and other factors, seedlings struggle to grow into saplings that can eventually replace canopy trees," the study asserts. "Over time, these stressors can reduce tree species diversity and density, negatively impacting forests and the plants and animals that rely on them."

It takes many years for seedlings to grow into saplings and saplings to grow into young trees. In cooperation with Virginia Tech foresters, GWMP is developing a plan for managing its forests, including both natural forests and planted trees.

Friends of Dyke Marsh volunteers work twice a month to control invasive plants. Sign up at www.fodm.org. People can also help by not planting and controlling invasive plants on private property. Invasive plants escape into forests with seeds spread by birds, wind, shoes and other methods.

2023 (updated 1/14/2024)			
Crash Location	Number of Crashes Involving Pedestrians	Pedestrian Fatalities	Pedestrian Serious Injuries
Alexandria	48	0	6 (12.5%)
Arlington County	109	1 (0.9%)	17 (15.6%)
City of Fairfax	12	0	5 (41.7%)
Falls Church	12	0	6 (50.0%)
Fairfax County	233	10 (4.3%)	57 (24.5%)

SCREENSHOT NOVA SAFE STREETS

[HTTPS://NOVASAFESTREETS.ORG/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2024/01/2023-KSI-SUMMARY.PDF](https://novasafestreeets.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2023-KSI-SUMMARY.PDF)

NOVA Safe Streets reports ten pedestrian fatalities in 2023 (updated Jan. 14, 2024) for Fairfax County, with 233 crashes involving pedestrians resulting in 57 pedestrians sustaining serious injuries.

2023 (updated 1/14/2024)			
Crash Location	Number of Crashes Involving Bicyclists	Bicyclist Fatalities	Bicyclist Serious Injuries
Alexandria	8	0	1 (12.5%)
Arlington County	52	0	2 (3.8%)
City of Fairfax	5	0	1 (20.0%)
Falls Church	5	0	1 (20.0%)
Fairfax County	74	0	10 (13.5%)
Total	144	0	15 (10.8%)

SCREENSHOT NOVA SAFE STREETS

In 2023 (updated Jan. 1, 2024), Fairfax County had zero bicyclist fatalities and 74 crashes involving bicycles.

Are Pedestrians And Bicyclists Safe?

Crashes involving pedestrians have been increasing over the last three years, up from 144 in 2021 to 191 in 2022 to 233 in 2023.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE GAZETTE

Part of an ongoing series.

The Fairfax County Police Department (FCPD) Public Affairs Bureau posted on March 12, 2024, “Pedestrian fatalities saw a significant decline in 2023.” FCPD reported nine pedestrian fatalities in 2023, compared to 24 in 2022, based on “data collected by the crash reconstruction unit.”

The department recently issued its Year End 2023 Crime Report that covers Jan. 1-Dec. 31, 2023. Insights include those findings in its “key highlights for traffic safety initiatives and fatal crashes.”

Virginia’s state-of-the-art comprehensive Traffic Records Electronic Data System, TRENDS, maintained by the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles, holds Fairfax County data, including the towns of Clifton, Herndon, and Vienna. TRENDS’ data concurs that pedestrian fatalities in Fairfax County decreased when comparing data from 2023 to 2022.

FCPD transitioned to TRENDS from January through May 2017. The Department of Motor Vehicles maintains the official record of all reportable crashes occurring within the Commonwealth and is responsible for disseminating these reports.

Yet FCPD’s records do not always agree with those of TRENDS. For instance, TRENDS reports that in 2023 (updated 1/14/2024), there were 10 pedestrian fatalities in Fairfax

County. FCPD currently reports nine pedestrian fatalities for 2023. For 2022, TRENDS reported 32 pedestrian crash fatalities, while FCPD reported 24 pedestrian fatalities.

The accuracy of pedestrian and cyclist safety statistics and whether they are publicly transparent influences residents’ and leadership’s perception of Fairfax County’s safety and needs. TRENDS’ current crash findings involving pedestrians and cyclists on streets, roads, highways, and parking lots maintained by state, county, or municipal funds throughout Fairfax County paint a somewhat different picture from the one FCPD presents.

Specific to Fairfax County, the 2023 Safe Streets Report, which uses TRENDS, reports that total crashes involving pedestrians have been increasing over the last three years, up from 144 in 2021 to 191 in 2022 to 233 in 2023. Additionally, according to TRENDS data in 2023, Fairfax County experienced an increase in serious pedestrian injuries — 57 serious pedestrian injuries in 2023 compared to 53 in 2022. FCPD did not draw attention to these statistics in its 2023 Crime Report and insights for traffic safety initiatives and fatal crashes.

FCPD also did not provide in its posted 2023 Crime Report and Insights elements of crash data relative to “key highlights for traffic safety initiatives and fatal collisions,” such as whether the collision killed a pedestrian or bicyclist, whether speeding was involved, whether the driver or the person killed by the driver was impaired by alcohol or drugs, or whether the driver was distract-

FATAL CRASHES		
	2022	2023
Driver Fatalities	12	11
Passenger Fatalities	4	4
Motorcycle Fatalities	5	5
Pedestrian Fatalities	24	9
Total Fatalities	45	29

DATA COLLECTED BY THE CRASH RECONSTRUCTION UNIT

[Source: FCPD
<https://fcpdnews.files.wordpress.com/2024/03/fcpd-countywide-crime-summary-q4-2023.pdf>]

SCREENSHOT NOVA SAFE STREETS

Note FCPD records Fatal Crashes in 2022 as 24 Pedestrian Fatalities and nine in 2023.



SCREENSHOT

Bruce Wright

tion-free.

FCPD’s Fatal Crashes Table, provided in the 2023 Crime Report, compares only two elements of crash data: the type of participants (driver, passenger, motorcyclist, pedestrian) and the years 2022 and 2023.

As for bicyclists, the 2023 Safe Streets Report using TRENDS data presented better news for bicyclists: no fatalities during 2023. Safe Street’s report also cited a decrease in crashes involving bicyclists sustaining serious injuries — 10 in 2023 compared to 14 in 2022.

“The caveat is that only the worst bike crashes get reported if there’s \$1500 in damages or serious injury,” said the Fairfax

Alliance for Better Bicycling founder Bruce Wright. “Minor crashes are not reported to the DMV, and many others are not reported to the police,” he added.

“Those numbers are unacceptable, and I don’t think police are doing enough to keep pedestrians and bicyclists safe. Speeding is out of control. Police have limited resources, and the Virginia state legislature has limited the use of speed cameras,” Wright said. Wright adds that Fairfax police do not issue speeding citations when motorists travel less than ten mph over the speed limit. “Motorists expect to be able to travel at those speeds without consequences.”

In May 2023, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and Fairfax County reduced the speed limit along the crash-prone 7-mile stretch of Richmond Highway, also known as Route 1, between Mount Vernon and the Capital Beltway, south of the City of Alexandria, to “optimize safety and operations for pedestrians, bicyclists, drivers, and transit users,” according to the departments.

Nonetheless, a hit-and-run crash claimed the life of Eder Machado Aleman, 36, of Fairfax, who was attempting to cross Richmond Highway “outside of the crosswalk,”

SEE PEDESTRIAN SAFETY, PAGE 7
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OPINION

Breaking Down Virginia's Gaming Landscape

Balancing expansion with responsibility.

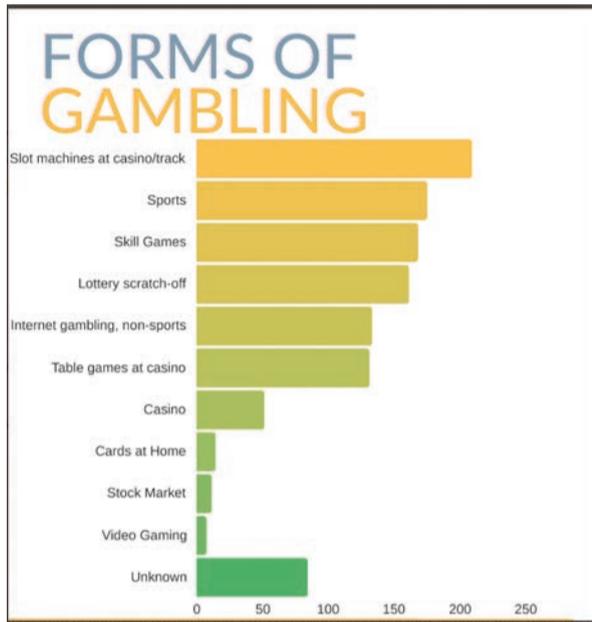
BY DELEGATE PAUL KRIZEK

In recent years, Virginia has witnessed a significant expansion in its gaming industry. From sports betting and online lottery to casinos, historic horse racing machines, and live events, the landscape has evolved, offering new avenues for entertainment, revenue generation, and charitable contributions. However, amid this growth, there's an emerging concern that deserves our attention: the rise of gambling addiction.

The soon-to-be-legalized skill games will be turned on again come July 1 in a convenience store near you, despite my opposition, unless the Governor vetoes or amends the legislation. While gaming expansion has undoubtedly brought economic benefits, job opportunities, and support for charitable causes, it has also opened the door to a surge in gambling addiction.

In fact, according to the recently released 2023 annual report from the Virginia Council on Problem Gambling (VCPG), skill games rank as the third most common form of gambling callers to the VCPG helpline report that they struggle with, after slot machines at casinos and racetracks and sports betting. Even with the pending legalization legislation, skill games remain one of the riskiest forms of gambling, as unlike gaming machines in casinos, race tracks, Rosie's Gaming Emporiums, and qualified social organizations, they are placed in largely uncontrolled environments in our communities where there is dubious age verification, no reliable self-exclusion program or security requirements to protect players and the businesses that will host them. In addition, while in the current bill ABC licensed locations and truck stops are limited in the number of machines that can be in any one location, other establishments have no limit whatsoever. Perhaps most egregiously, unlike with other expansions of gaming in the Commonwealth, like the Lottery, casinos, and Rosie's Gaming emporiums, voters will not have the opportunity to opt-in to allow skill games in their communities. As a result, for this and many other reasons, I did not agree to sign the conference report on the bill to legalize skill games that was sent to the Governor.

According to statistics, approximately 2-3% of US adults, or 4-6 million people, grapple with problem gambling. Unlike substance abuse disorders, gambling addiction manifests as an impulse-control disorder, compelling individuals to gamble compulsively despite adverse consequences on their lives and relationships. As gambling opportunities have expanded and changed in recent years, so too have the demographics of the most impacted Virginians. While gambling disorder can affect people of all ages, ethnicities, races, and genders, historically, callers to the gambling helpline tended to be older men who were placing bets in person. These days, callers tend to be



Most common forms of gambling reported by helpline callers (VCPG)

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NEWS DEPARTMENT:
gazette@connectionnewspapers.com

Mary Kimm
Editor and Publisher
mkimm@connectionnewspapers.com

Jeanne Theismann
jtheismann@connectionnewspapers.com
@TheismannMedia

Mercia Hobson
Staff Reporter
mhobson@connectionnewspapers.com

Mike Salmon
Contributing Writer
msalmon@connectionnewspapers.com

Ken Moore, Glenda Booth
Contributing Writers

ADVERTISING:
For advertising information
sales@connectionnewspapers.com
703-778-9431

Debbie Funk
Display Advertising/National Sales
703-778-9444
debfunk@connectionnewspapers.com



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APRIL 20

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MAY 17-19

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MAY 19

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Mount Vernon Ladies Receive Spirit of Virginia Award

FROM PAGE 1

war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen, was rescued by the women who were first in preservation.” Nichols said of the women, “Long before women’s rights and environmental groups, the Association was breaking ground, creating the emergence of the national preservation movement. They led the movement in a country then on the brink of civil war.” All their work was accomplished as a not-for-profit organization, without taking government funding.

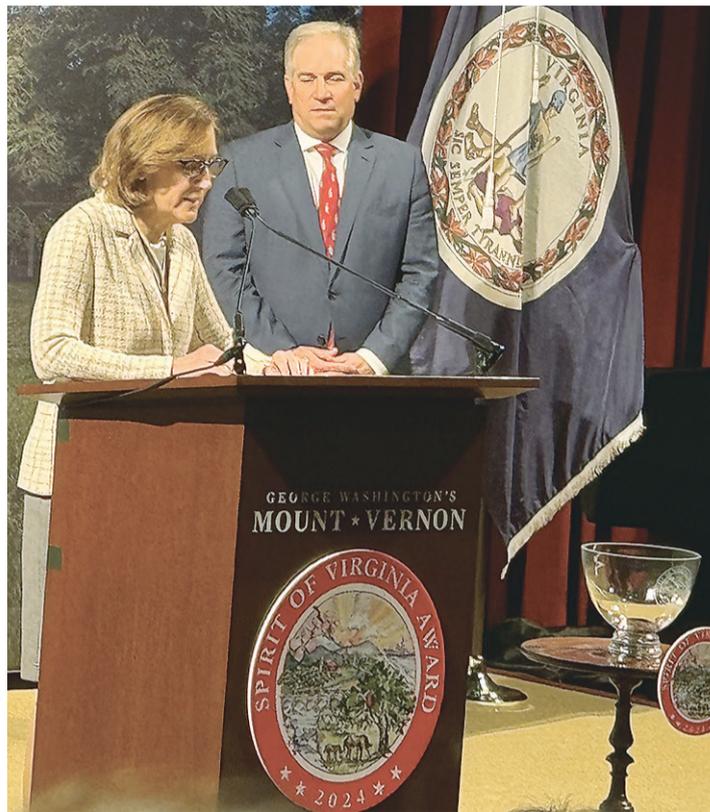
Every homeowner will identify with the need for constant upkeep on a home. The President’s estate is not different. Mount Vernon has twelve original buildings on its grounds that are exposed to weather and more than a million visitors a year. The Mount Vernon Ladies Association describes its current restoration projects underway, to include major work on the mansion, and work on the Smokehouse. The mansion restoration is a major effort to protect the original building fabric and structural integrity. The work area is fenced off on the north side of the mansion, and the New Room is not now included in the home tour; the cellar also is part of the work area. The Smokehouse work now underway includes repair of siding boards on its east and north elevations. Sealing the Smokehouse exterior will protect the building’s framing, which includes some of the few surviving original sills on the estate.

Looking back into history, in 1853, after hearing news that the estate was in extreme disrepair, Mount Vernon Ladies Association founder Ann Pamela Cunningham determined that it be restored. Cunningham challenged women across the country to save the Washington’s home. She formed the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, convincing Washington’s heir and last private owner to sell the mansion and 200 acres. The price was \$200,000, the equivalent of about \$5.7 million today. The ladies mounted a fundraising campaign, encouraging the establishment of regional clubs, selling portraits of Washington, holding concerts, dramatic readings, plays, tableaux, fairs, and festivals, including a strawberry feast in Georgia, and lectures by famous orators of the day. Their efforts were so effective that by June 1860 they were able to pay off the entire purchase price and take possession of the estate.

The National Women’s History Alliance, founded in 1980 is a non-profit educational organization, committed to ensuring women’s history becomes mainstream, realizing “women’s history remains largely absent from school history curricula and the media.” They successfully lobbied Congress to designate March as National Women’s History Month, now celebrated across the country.

The National Women’s History Month’s theme for 2024 celebrates “Women Who Advocate for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.” The theme recognizes women throughout the country who understand that, for a positive future, we need to eliminate bias and discrimination entirely from our lives and institutions.

For more on Mount Vernon or to participate in its on-going preservation, see mountvernon.org.



First regent Margaret Harman Nichols accepts the Spirit of Virginia Award with President and CEO Douglas Bradburn

“In rescuing America’s most historic home and pioneering the preservation space, the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association embodies what it means to uplift the spirit of Virginia.”

— Gov. Glenn Youngkin

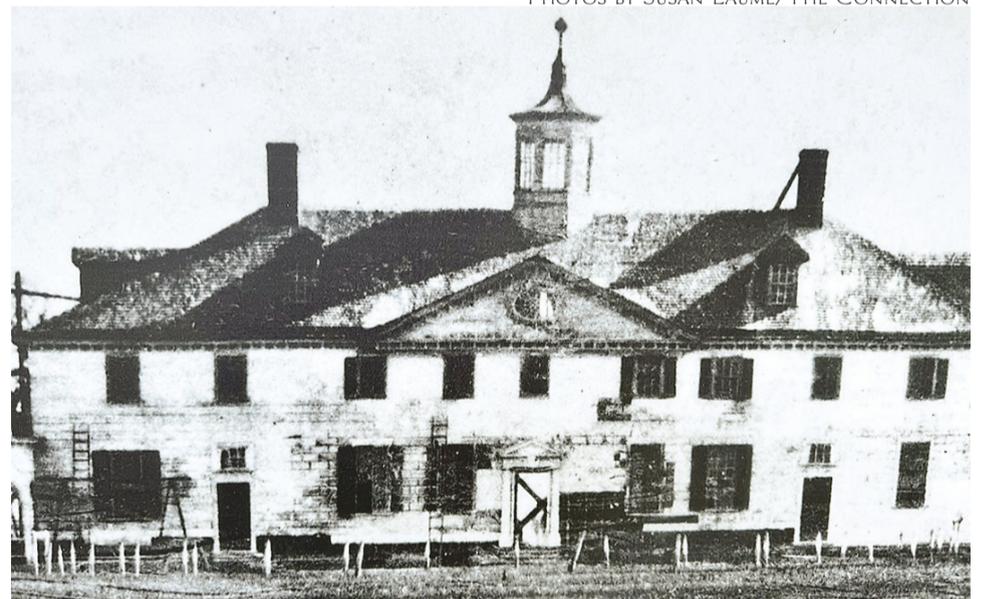


23rd Regent Margaret Harman Nichols, with the members badge worn while on the estate, poses with Virginia First Lady Suzanne S. Youngkin, before a representation of the house that was home to the first First Lady, Martha Washington, until her death in May 1802

PHOTOS BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION



The Spirit of Virginia award



Mount Vernon (rear) at its low state in 1858, before restoration



Mount Vernon (rear side) with north side fencing protecting current restoration of structural foundation.



Modern craftsman meticulously remove old paint layers as part of current restoration project for the mansion.

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Pedestrians And Bicyclists Safety

FROM PAGE 4

the Fairfax County Police Department posted on Oct. 7, 2023.

In the past, Fairfax County's pedestrian and bicyclist safety initiatives focused on altering road users' behavior and encouraging responsible parties.

In contrast, Vision Zero's Safe System approach considers how the people who design, build, and manage the transportation network, including VDOT, can prioritize the lives and health of users.

The responsibility for enhancing pedestrians' and bicyclists' safety is shared. It is not limited to drivers and cyclists complying with traffic and highway laws, not being under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or not paying attention. Modifications and infrastructure construction are needed to accommodate pedestrians, cyclists and drivers safely.

Kenneth Comer, chairman at large of the county Trails, Sidewalks, and Bikeways Committee, wrote in a letter on July 5, 2022, to Jeffrey C. McKay, chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, citing increasing urgency for pedestrian and bicyclist safety issues especially along the Route 1 corridor.

From Jan. 1 through March 14 of this year, drivers traveling on roads within Fairfax County have fatally crashed into four pedestrians.

A Feb. 15 pedestrian crash at Route 1 and Huntington Avenue in Belle Haven marked the county's first fatal pedestrian collision of the year. An adult man was crossing Richmond Highway outside a crosswalk when a northbound 2006 Toyota Camry struck him. He was pronounced dead at the scene, according to Fairfax Police.

The second, third, and fourth fatal pedestrian crashes in 2024 occurred in three separate collisions on Sunday, March 10.

The first deadly collision on March 10 occurred just after midnight that Sunday in Hybla Valley and involved a stolen Sonata, according to Fairfax County Police. An officer reportedly saw the stolen car on Buckman Road, near Russell Road. When the police approached, the motorist drove away, and "officers did not pursue." Fifteen minutes later, an officer saw the stolen vehicle speeding along Janna Lee Avenue. The driver sideswiped an occupied vehicle, crashed into a dumpster, and exited the vehicle and fled. "Officers then found a struck pedestrian in the grass nearby. James Johnson, 63, of Hybla Valley, was taken to the hospital, where he succumbed to his injuries. Officers saturated the area but were unable to locate the driver," police said.



SCREENSHOT [HTTPS://TWITTER.COM/CHIEFKDAVIS](https://twitter.com/CHIEFKDAVIS)

In 2023, FCPD motors and patrol officers participated in a High Visibility Enforcement to slow down drivers and not have them drive distracted.

March 10's second fatal pedestrian collision occurred at 3:39 a.m. on the shoulder of 495's westbound lanes just east of Exit 176 where a person appeared to be changing a vehicle's tire, according to Virginia State Police. The driver of a passing truck struck the pedestrian, who died at the scene.

Less than 15 minutes later, troopers encountered a woman in the eastbound lanes of the same area of I-495 near Exit 176. A 2005 Honda Accord, heading eastbound in the right center lane on I-495, "was unable to avoid striking a female pedestrian who had stepped into traffic," the VSP said in an update on Tuesday, March 12. The woman, Vanessa Schwartz, 35, of Alexandria, died at the scene of the crash. The crash remains under investigation, with the assistance of the Virginia State Police Crash Reconstruction Team.

Even one death is not acceptable. In 2023, for the first time since the City of Alexandria's Vision Zero goal of eliminating roadway deaths and severe injuries was adopted in 2017, the city ended the year with zero fatalities. The program webpage provides more information on the city's Vision Zero Program. Additional resources include the Vision Zero Action Plan, the Vision Zero Fiscal Year 2024 Annual Work Plan, and the Vision Zero Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2023.

Fairfax County Police responded to questions about traffic safety statistics with a statement: "Our 2023 crime report includes all the data relating to fatal crashes that occurred and were investigated by FCPD. The reason there is a difference between the TREDs numbers and ours is that they do not make that distinction with jurisdiction, so the numbers can vary."

"The FCPD works hard all year long implementing traffic safety initiatives, public awareness, and safety tips through our social media platforms, Traffic Safety Division, and Crime Prevention Unit."

The Fairfax County Police Department and Virginia State Police will launch the Road Shark campaign for 2024. Road Shark is a high-visibility and coordinated enforcement and education effort to deter aggressive driving, reduce crashes, and change driving behavior, enhancing traffic safety on the roadways of Fairfax County. Last year, nearly 25,000 citations and warnings were issued over four waves

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Rotary

The Rotary Club of Mount Vernon, VA

The Mount Vernon Rotary Club, in 2021, initiated the "You Make a Difference Award" to support community service by organizations in the Mount Vernon area.

Specifically, the purpose of the Mount Vernon Rotary "You Make A Difference" Award is to:

- 1) Recognize individuals and organizations who supportservice to others
- 2) Support community service within the Mount Vernon areaThis local support is consistent with the Rotary International Motto: "Service Above Self."

A single award and associated grant of \$1000 will be presented once a year. The goal is to recognize a single individual who sustains community service and to contribute financial support to keep that service continuing.

Nominations will be accepted until noon on Friday, March 29, 2024. To receive a nomination form or more information, email MVRotaryVA@gmail.com

Rotary is where neighbors, friends, and problem-solvers share ideas, join leaders, and take action to create lasting change. Visit www.rotary.org for more information.

The Rotary Club of Mount Vernon meets via Zoom on Wednesday evening from 6:30 to 7:30. To request an invitation link email mikej1013@verizon.net

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2024
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OPINION

Women's History Month With Team MVD

BY SUPERVISOR DAN STORCK

In celebration of Women's History Month, it's a pleasure to introduce the dedicated members of Team MVD who tirelessly serve our community. Team MVD includes Christine Morin, Camela Speer, Nicholas Rinehart, Peyton Smith, Maddie Alvarado, Cassidy Donaghy and our extraordinary volunteer, Shirley Short. With a significant portion of our team comprised of talented women, there's no better time to spotlight them.

Christine Morin has been my dedicated Chief of Staff, team leader and Economic Development Specialist since I was elected Supervisor and has been with the office for 15 years. Christine brings great experience, passion and smarts as an outstanding advocate for the Mount Vernon District, particularly her Lorton home community. Christine has played a pivotal role in various initiatives including the revitalization of Original MVHS, the Workhouse Arts Center and Liberty Lorton. Her community leadership extends to crucial projects like the construction of South County Middle School and Laurel Hill Elementary School; she also worked closely with staff in the development of the new Lorton Community Center,

Police Station and Animal Shelter. Christine is a leader within the County staff and is the only female Chief of Staff amongst the Board of Supervisors. She loves her family time and cheering on the Virginia Tech Hokies and Washington Capitals.

Camela Speer, Deputy Chief of Staff, specializing in Communications and the Environment has been an integral part of our team for six years. Camela brings relentless energy and dedication to her role. She ensures our office remains dynamic and proactive and our community informed about County activities. Her profound passion and expertise in environmental matters have been indispensable in our County's leadership as we strive to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. She is the inspiration behind our annual Environment Expo, motivating our community, young and old, to care about our planet. Camela is an avid traveler, always eager to share her adventures and wanderlust spirit.

Maddie Alvarado, (formerly Carcamo-Reyes) our Office Manager and bilingual Health and Human Services Liaison, is the first smiling face you will see when you visit, always happy to assist you. Maddie joined the team in January 2022. She has a knack for helping others and is completing a bache-



The Mount Vernon District Team.

lor's degree in health services at George Mason University. Last year, Maddie spearheaded our Back-to-School Community Day which brought in over 1,000 residents and helped get students ready for the upcoming school year. Maddie loves to read and volunteers most of her free time teaching dance and serving on the leadership team at her church.

Cassidy Donaghy makes sure you know and see what's happening in the District as she manages Communications, Events and Community Outreach. She is the newest to the team and started August 2022. Cassidy handles all our social media accounts, compiles the information for the newsletters and handles community outreach initiatives such as citizen awards and our Little Food Pantry. You can see Cassidy with her clipboard leading all our events, making sure everything is running smoothly. Make sure to stop by our upcoming Ides of Bark Dog Festival on March 24 at Grist Mill Park to see her in action. In her spare time Cassidy loves to sing

and is a member of the Alexandria Singers.

Shirley Short is our super volunteer and Lady Fairfax 2023. Shirley is a retired Fairfax County Firefighter and has been volunteering with the MVD office for about two decades. Shirley is such a light and you will see her at most of our events. If you have the chance to stop by the Mount Vernon Governmental Center you will see our beautifully kept information center which is all coordinated by Shirley. She is a vital part of our team and we wouldn't be able to do all that we do without her amazing support. Shirley also supports the Mount Vernon Springfield Chamber of Commerce and loves RV trips and tending to her blooming garden.

Learn more about all our staff, <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/mountvernon/mount-vernon-district-staff>. We invite you to stop by our office anytime Monday-Friday from 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m. and Thursdays until 7 p.m. if you need assistance or just want to say hi. Team MVD is working for you!

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Senior Living, fourth week of every month.

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ENTERTAINMENT

NOW THRU APRIL 15

Exhibit: "Searching for Truth in the Garden" at Freedom House Museum. At Freedom House Museum, 1315 Duke Street, Alexandria. Gonzaga High School's groundbreaking research on slavery, "Searching for Truth in the Garden," found new life at the Freedom House Museum. The traveling exhibition, on view through April 15, 2024, delves into the life of Gabriel, a teenager enslaved at Washington Seminary (now Gonzaga) in 1829. Gabriel's story offers a poignant lens through which to examine the complexities of slavery and its lasting impact.

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/>

NOW THRU MARCH 31

Christine Ruksenas-Burton Exhibit. At The Athenaeum, Alexandria. Christine Ruksenas-Burton's body of work is composed of hard-edge color field linear abstractions, a style rooted in a movement that began in New York City in the 1940s and pioneered by Mark Rothko, Josef Albers, Carmen Herrera, Fanny Sanin, Barnett Newman, Ellsworth Kelly and Clyfford Still.

NOW THRU APRIL 7

Seen Better Times Exhibition. At Multiple Exposures Gallery, The Torpedo Factory Art Center, 105 N Union Street, Studio 312, Alexandria. MEG is pleased to announce Seen Better Times, a new fine art photography exhibition juried by Michael Borek. The exhibition features 24 images that depict scenes that have "seen better days." Juror Michael Borek says the images he chose from the 14 included photographers go behind the surface of obvious decay and "invite viewers to use their imaginations to finish the hint of a story that is sketched out, but unfinished." Exhibition Artists: Soomin Ham, Eric Johnson, Irina Lawton, Sandy LeBrun-Evans, Matt Leedham, Francine B. Livaditis, Maureen Minehan, David Myers, Van Pulley, Sarah Hood Salomon, Alan Sislen, Tom Sliter and Fred Zafran.

MARCH 1-30

March Luck. At Van Landingham Gallery, Torpedo Factory Art Center, Alexandria. March Luck explores the serendipitous forces that drive artistic expression. Join us to reflect on the role of luck in shaping both art and life in the Van Landingham Gallery. The Torpedo Factory Artists' Association presents a group exhibition including jewelry, paintings, photography, mixed media work, hand pulled prints, and more during the month of March.

MARCH 1-31

Woodlawn Needlework Show. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. At Woodlawn Plantation.

Every Wednesday and Friday at 2:30pm in March - Special Tours of 61st Anniversary Woodlawn Needlework Show (Fee: \$18, includes Needlework Show Admission)

Join the special tour for a brief history of Woodlawn while discovering the unique stories behind many pieces of the Needlework Show as a Woodlawn guide and Nelly's Needlers expert lead visitors through the house.

Monday March 25th, and Wednesday March 27th

at 3:30pm - Beginners Needlework Techniques (Fee: \$25 per class or \$65 for all three, includes Needlework Show Admission and supplies)

Join members of Nelly's Needlers to learn the basics of three fundamental needlework techniques; counted cross-stitch, canvaswork (needlepoint), and surface embroidery.

March 25 - cross-stitch towel

March 27 - embroidered hat

Virtual Programs

(All virtual programs are free, with a suggested donation to support Woodlawn & Pope-Leighey House)

Saturday, March 23rd at 4:00pm ET -What Linens Know with Ruth Tabancay

Enjoy a fascinating virtual presentation by multi-disciplinary artist Ruth Tabancay as she discusses "What Linens Know" on exhibit at the Woodlawn Needlework Show. Ruth's exhibit is a unique spin on this year's theme, "Needlework in Everyday Life" as she examines the uses of vintage linens in everyday living and embroiders a lasting memory of the remains.

MARCH 1-30

"The Power of Two" Exhibit. At Del Ray Artisans gallery, 2704 Mount Vernon Ave., Alexandria. Features art that showcases two related items in one piece of art; for example, two-of-a-kind, complementary items, double-exposures, duos, twins, or multiple generations. "Double your pleasure, double your fun." Opening Reception: Friday, March 1, 7-9 p.m. Open Thursdays 12-6 p.m., Fridays 12-9 p.m., Saturdays & Sundays 12-6 p.m. (Closed Sunday, March 31). Details: DelRayArtisans.org/exhibits

MARCH 5 THRU APRIL 28

Mosaics by Nina Tisara and Photographs by Steven Halperson. At Green Spring Gardens, 4601 Green Spring Road, Alexandria. The Opening Reception is Sunday, March 10, 1-3 p.m. The mother-son team had worked together at Tisara Photography in Old Town for three decades. Steven now manages the Alexandria portrait studio as well as creating painterly photographic images and unique etched copper art. Nina creates intricate mosaics of unglazed porcelain tile which are widely exhibited and collected. Their work may also be seen by appointment at Serenity Place Gallery, Nina's in-home gallery.

BEGINNING MARCH 20

Water Taxi to The Wharf to See Cherry Blossoms. Departs from



March Luck can be seen at Van Landingham Gallery at the Torpedo Factory in Alexandria during the month of March.

the Alexandria Marina, 1 Cameron St., Alexandria. Cruise from Old Town Alexandria to Washington, D.C., to enjoy the famous cherry blossoms. City Cruises Potomac Water Taxi offers a 25-minute direct water taxi from Old Town to The Wharf in D.C. From the dock at The Wharf, it is a 10-minute walk to the cherry blossoms at the Tidal Basin. The water taxi docks at the Transit Pier, 950 Wharf St. SW, near the Tidal Basin, the National Mall, Hains Point and a Capital Bikeshare station.

THURSDAY/MARCH 21

2024 General Assembly Breakfast. 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. At The Hilton Alexandria Old Town, 1767 King Street, Alexandria. Join in a timely conversation with our General Assembly delegation where they will discuss the 2024 session and the opportunities and challenges currently facing the Commonwealth. Sen. Adam Ebbin and Del. Elizabeth Bennett-Parker will attend.

FRIDAY/MARCH 22

The Four Seasons with Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 5. At 7:30 p.m. At St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 228 South Pitt Street, Alexandria. With Alexandria Symphony conductor James Ross.

MARCH 16 THRU APRIL 21

Cherry Blossom Cruises with City Cruises. Departs from the Alexandria Marina, 1 Cameron St., Alexandria. Traverse the Potomac River from Old Town Alexandria and cruise past the cherry blossoms in Washington, D.C. on the Monuments Sightseeing Cruise from

City Cruises. View and listen to the history of the iconic monuments, memorials and bridges as the D.C. region awakens to spring. See beautiful cherry blossom trees as you glide past the Tidal Basin and head onward to Georgetown. The cruise is 45 minutes one-way and approximately 90 minutes roundtrip. Riders also have the option to explore Georgetown and return on a later boat. City Cruises is a proud sponsor of the National Cherry Blossom Festival.

MARCH 23 TO APRIL 14

Pink Torpedoes: Cherry Blossom Art in An Old Munitions Factory. At Torpedo Factory Art Center, 105 N Union St., Alexandria. Explore all three floors of Torpedo Factory Art Center, home to the nation's largest collection of working artists' open studios under one roof, to view a building-wide exhibition of art inspired by the iconic cherry blossoms. Participating artists will exhibit one or more unique artworks in their studio or gallery. Each artist will explore their interpretations of the cherry blossoms—culturally, colorfully and viscerally—and visitors will discover new ways of thinking about the region's seasonal pink event. Visitors will receive a "Pink Torpedoes" building map with locations of the artwork to discover. Each studio artist in the Art Center is selected by art experts and rank among the best in the region. Artists work in front of the visitor and discuss their work on view. Visitors may shop for one-of-a-kind art inspired by the cherry blossoms, plus more. Can't visit the exhibition? A select exhibition of artwork will be on view at torp

SUNDAY/MARCH 24

Cherry Blossom Candle-Making with The Burning Wic. 3-5 p.m. At Shop Made in VA, 1121 King Street, Alexandria. Immerse yourself in the delicate beauty of cherry blossoms during this enchanting class with The Burning Wic. Craft your own candle in a stunning Rose Gold Mercury Tumbler, infusing it with the soft allure of cherry blossoms, and the candle will captivate during the day and radiate warmth at night. This unique class not only includes an 11 oz. candle but also a car diffuser, ensuring you can carry the essence of cherry blossoms wherever you go. Come for a magical experience, creating a shimmering masterpiece that adds a touch of spring inspired by the fleeting beauty of cherry blossoms to both your space and travels.

SUNDAY/MARCH 24

Ides of Bark Dog Festival. 1-4 p.m. At Grist Mill Park, 4710 Mt. Vernon Memorial Highway, Alexandria. The day features treats from local canine businesses, playtime in the dog park, pet care and delicious food from local Mount Vernon District business, Chalkboard Wings & BBQ. The Festival is a paw-sitively wonderful way to connect with our community, meet new friends (4-legged and 2-legged) and enjoy a day in the park.

Activities:

Meet & Greet with the FCPD K9

Section in the field: 2:00 p.m.

PetTech demos: 1:30, 2:30, 3:30 p.m.

THURSDAY/MARCH 28

Jane Franklin Dance Presents Prime. 7 p.m. At The Athenaeum, 201 Prince Street, Alexandria. Prime journeys through the visual art of exhibiting artist Christine Ruksenas-Burton whose "paintings are conversations of colors inspired by her homeland (Australia) as well as modern art, minimalism, modernist architecture, and design." Jane Franklin's work positions solo dancers in conversation with color, duets in conjunction with line, and trios in hard edge abstractions of color and mood.

MARCH 29-30

The Art of Acting. At The Art Loft, 119 S. Fairfax Street, Loft Floor, Alexandria. Dates: March 29, from 6-8 p.m., and March 30, from 4-6 p.m. The Art Loft's first workshop will be "The Art of Acting: Theatre Tools for Everyday Life" by Pablo Andrade. In this 2-day workshop, New York-based, Award-Winning Actor, Director and Producer, Pablo Andrade will be teaching us useful acting techniques that can be applicable to our professional and personal lives. For both actors and non-actors. Contact: info@ncocreative.com, 202-798-2505, ncocreative.com

SATURDAY/APRIL 6

Used Book Sale: 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. at Sherwood Regional Library, 2501 Sherwood Hall Lane, Alexandria. Selection of over 20,000 gently used children's books, fiction, history, biography, home and garden, cooking, crafts, sports, religion, travel, CDs, DVDs, and more. Un

SEE ENTERTAINMENT, PAGE 11

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Past issues of
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BULLETIN

Submit civic/community announcements at 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 or 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. To volunteer, contact donaldrea@aol.com.

Assistance League of Northern Virginia is an all-volunteer non-profit organization that feeds, clothes and provides reading assistance and books to children in need. 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, or visit 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 or email volunteer@ucmagency.org.

Volunteer Adult Mentors Needed. Help assist the Department of Family Services' BeFriendA-Child mentoring program. The mentors provide opportunities for companionship, guidance and support to children who have been abused and neglected, or who are at risk of abuse and neglect. Contact Ibrahim Khalil (Ibrahim.khalil@fairfaxcounty.gov) at 703-324-4547.

Operation Paws for Homes, a Virginia based 501(c)(3) organization seeks volunteers, especially to foster dogs. See www.ophrescue.org for information and all volunteer opportunities.

Line Dance Instructor needed for the Gum Springs Senior Program once a week on either Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. Volunteer Solutions, call 703-324-5406, TTY 711.

ENTERTAINMENT

FROM PAGE 9

less specially priced, \$1 for hard backs and large paperbacks, and 25 cents for mass market paperbacks. Visit <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library/branches/friends-of-sherwood-regional>.

APRIL 12-13

2024 Spring Garden Market at River Farm.

9 a.m. to 3 p.m. At 7931 E. Boulevard Dr., Alexandria. Celebrate the start of gardening season with the American Horticultural Society's annual Spring Garden Market at River Farm. This much-anticipated outdoor event, one of River Farm's largest and most popular fundraisers, brings together plant, seed and garden accessory retailers, nature-focused artists and authors, gardening experts, food vendors, and fun for the whole family. Proceeds from the Spring Garden Market directly contribute to the maintenance, beautification and preservation of River Farm, headquarters of the AHS since 1973. Entrance to the Spring Garden Market may be purchased online beginning in March at www.ahsgardening.org/springgardenmarket2024.



The 2024 Spring Garden Market at River Farm takes place April 12-13, 2024.

Spring Gardens. Advance tickets are \$55 online at www.vagardenweek.org and may be purchased tour day at the Alexandria Visitor's Center located at 221 King Street. The Garden Club of Virginia's (GCV) eight-day statewide tour from April 20 to 27 includes 170 private properties throughout Virginia. The Old Town Alexandria tour is hosted by the GCV's two local garden clubs, Hunting Creek Garden Club and Garden Club of Alexandria. For more information, visit www.vagardenweek.org

SATURDAY, APRIL 20

Third Annual ALX Dog Walk.

8 a.m. to 11 a.m. A 2-mile dog walk and celebration is back in Old Town Alexandria. Walkers meet at Oronoco Bay Park in Alexandria for an unforgettable experience. Walk and spread awareness about the importance of plastic-free and sustainable living. It's time to educate the community and make a positive impact. Pre-event registration check-in on Wednesday April 17th, from 12 pm to 7 pm to check-in and collect your sustainable Goodie Bag,

t-shirt and doggie bandana, treat, and more. Register now! www.alxdogwalk.com/register

THE BIRCHMERE

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

MARCH

Fri. 22: Who's Bad – The Ultimate Michael Jackson Exp. \$39.50 (Resched from 1/26). SOLD OUT!
Sat. 23: Oleta Adams. \$45.00
Sun. 24: Honoring Teddy Pendergrass, with Gladys Knight & Eddie Hendricks Tributes. \$39.50
Wed. 27: The Zombies w/ Wendy Colonna. \$59.50
Thu. 28: Marty Stuart & His Fabulous Superlatives w/ Wyatt Ellis. \$76.00. SOLD OUT!
Fri. 29: Johnnie Steele & The Steele4Real Band. \$35.00
Sat. 30: Raul Malo (of The Mavericks) with Seth Walker. \$49.50. SOLD OUT!

OPINION

Breaking Down Virginia's Gaming Landscape

FROM PAGE 5

18-25-year-old men who do much of their gambling online. This is alarming, as young people are at an increased risk; data shows the earlier someone starts gambling, the more likely they are to develop a gambling addiction.

Left untreated, gambling addiction can wreak havoc on various aspects of an individual's life, including family dynamics, work performance, and financial stability. Alarmingly, those struggling with gambling addiction are twice as likely to die by suicide compared to individuals grappling with other common addictions.

Despite these sobering realities, there is hope. Problem gambling is treatable, and effective interventions exist to mitigate its harmful effects. In Virginia, the Virginia Council on Problem Gambling has been at the forefront of promoting responsible gambling practices, offering education, support, and treatment resources to those in need.

The Virginia Council on Problem Gambling operates a confidential and toll-free www.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

helpline (1-888-532-3500) available 24/7, witnessing a notable increase in calls, underscoring the growing demand for assistance. The helpline received a total of 10,608 calls in 2023, a remarkable 973% increase from 2019. Callers who are asking for treatment have spiked 200%. According to Dr. Carolyn Hawley, President of VCPG, people with gambling addiction generally seek help at low rates: just 5% nationwide end up in treatment. However, Virginians who reach out to the helpline are receiving treatment with a clinician at a rate of 29%, and of those who are then referred to the Virginia Partnership for Gaming and Health, 70% are meeting with treatment providers and 75% are meeting with a peer recovery specialist. As we navigate Virginia's evolving gaming landscape, it's incumbent upon us to acknowledge and address the public health ramifications associated with gambling addiction.

March marks the 21st year of National Problem Gambling Awareness Month, and the second year of its observance in Virginia as a permanent fixture in our public health

calendar. Last year, my legislation was enacted to establish the Problem Gambling Treatment and Support Advisory Committee, fostering collaboration between prevention and treatment providers and gaming operators to combat problem gambling. Also actively underway is the Joint Subcommittee to study the feasibility of establishing the Virginia Gaming Commission, created by my 2022 legislation, and on which I serve as the Vice Chair. One of the key areas of study is how a single agency overseeing gaming in the Commonwealth might have a more focused and coordinated approach to problem gambling prevention and treatment.

As we embrace a gaming-friendly future for the Commonwealth, let us remain vigilant in safeguarding the well-being of our residents and addressing the challenges posed by problem gambling.

If you or someone you know is struggling with gambling addiction, know that help is available. Visit www.vcpg.net to access online chat support or reach out to the confidential helpline at 1-888-532-3500 for assistance.

Not Great News



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

"Not Great News." What kind of a moron am I? "Why," as Curly of The Three Stooges asked years ago in a typical two-reeler, "is there more than one kind?" If you've been following along recently (reading my column regularly), you might recall that I'm in a bit ('bit'! Isn't that the understatement of the year?) of trouble. After reviewing, my most recent scan, some tumors grew, some remained stable. In addition, my regular monthly lab work showed some kidney function at disappointing levels (another understatement). As a result, both my oncologist and nephrologist are beginning to use the dreaded "d" word: dialysis in our conversations/emails. And so, the prospect of kidney failure and dialysis loom large as the possibility of spending multiple hours a day, multiple days a week hooked up to a machine that will function as my kidneys moves ever closer to becoming my reality. 'Not great news' for sure. In fact, one might describe it as the worst possible news (considering my medical circumstances).

To be honest, I don't yet have the details. Never had I been told that dialysis was inevitable (given the side effects of the anti-cancer medicine I have been taking for three-plus years). What I have been told in the last two days by both my oncologist and nephrologist (kidney doctor) is fairly discouraging (yet another understatement). The likelihood that I'll be moving off this slippery slope and into a Barcalounger (at the dialysis center), a fear I've been compartmentalizing for years, may very well be in the offing. It seems the only straw that would suspend/re-think this treatment is if my thyroid cancer tumors began growing and moving and causing all sorts of complications. Since I'm presently not taking any anti-cancer medicine due to the adverse side effect to the kidneys, this seems likely. Inevitable? One more prediction the doctors can't/won't make.

And so, my body/organs, left to their own medical devices, have succumbed quicker to the cancer than they otherwise had. In this situation, no medicine means no luck. Even with my wife hanging horseshoes right-side-up (so the luck doesn't run out) at the horse barn she frequents, it may be that after 15 years of being my oncologist's "third miracle," the tide or the worm, depending on your preference, has turned. And turning in an unfavorable direction.

But so, what? I'll approach this next phase of my cancer journey as I have with all the others. I will remain positive about the negative. Throughout my years of treatment, I have often surprised my oncologist by my much-better-than-anticipated reaction to whatever he was prescribing.

Moreover, I've lived so much longer than the experts - who provide the figurative handbook of AMA-approved steps and procedures, expect their patients diagnosed with non-small cell lung cancer stage IV to live. Having exceeded my original "13 months to two-years" prognosis by over a decade, the standard steps sort of don't apply to me/haven't applied to me for many years. The "Hippocratic oath," (do no harm), has been invoked a time or two by my oncologist as I was no longer the norm, and so a lot of my treatment was common sense type measures/don't make the patient worse. And we all succeed beyond any of our wildest dreams to the point where I am now still living into year 16.

I can understand - and imagine, how certain medical treatment/protocols aren't necessarily suitable for long-term exposure, especially when you're diagnosed with cancer. As such, your orientation becomes more short term.

The present matters most. What happens in 15 years? The doctors are more concerned about what happened today and tomorrow. Considering how the patient's body will react to non-stop chemotherapy - while living so much longer than doctor's training and experience would have led them to believe, is sort out of the doctor's purview. By surviving so long, I may have become my own worst enemy (sort of outkicked my punt coverage, if you know football!). As for the medical side of it, certain organs aren't/weren't structured to endure so much chemotherapy. And because I am still an active patient, up until recently, having been on chemotherapy, targeted therapy and so forth for 15 years nonstop, I can speak from experience. And when I was asked regularly by my oncologist if I wanted to take a break from treatment, I always said "No." I was too afraid of what the cancer might do if left untreated. Well, I sure am going to find out now. Unfortunately, due to the kidney complication, I might never be able to re-start my cancer medicine. If that happens/continues and I'm off my thyroid cancer medicine for an extended period, I will be grateful for the extra time that I've earned, but I wouldn't bet the over. Having stage IV papillary thyroid cancer is bad enough, especially after having been treated for non-small cell lung cancer, also stage IV, for 10 years previously. I can't say it's totally been fun while it lasted. Nor will I say how much fun it's going to be living forward, given these recent complications. Nevertheless, it (life) has always beaten the alternative: death. With no guarantees, especially with respect to cancer treatment, one must be open to a maybe. I have been, and I still am. No maybes about it.

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



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