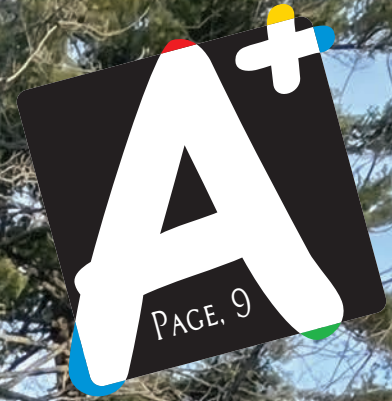


Great Falls CONNECTION



The United States Senate recently confirmed Great Falls native and Langley High School alum Elizabeth Moore Aubin as the United States Ambassador to Algeria.

PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

OPINION, PAGE 4 ♦ ENTERTAINMENT, PAGE 10 ♦ MORE EDUCATION, PAGE 16-7

GREAT FALLS GRANGE
PARK
FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY

From Saxon Editor To Ambassador

PAGE 3

Masks Still Required in FCPS

PAGE 6

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Great Falls Eagle Scout Candidate Tackles Invasive Plants at the Grange Park

Leads efforts, installs natives.

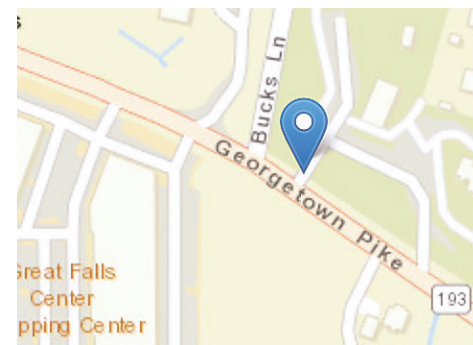
BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

On Saturday, Dec 18, Leo Chen of BSA Troop 55 Great Falls led an Eagle Scout project that involved removing invasive plant species from the Great Falls Grange Park's oak grove border and replacing the invasives with native plants. Invasive species are non-natives that have a detrimental effect on the environment. Chen and his fellow volunteer scouts worked on the project from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

According to Christopher E. Rich, site leader for the Great Falls Grange Park Invasive Management Area (IMA), before work began, Leo conducted a walk-through with ecologist Patricia Greenberg and reviewed the proposed work plan. She is the Invasive Management Area (IMA) Program Manager for the Natural Resources Branch of the Fairfax County Park Authority in Northern Virginia. Greenberg provides technical guid-



Front row, Tanya Ray, Jack Chen, Allison Tay, (Second row) Hongxia Yuan (mom), Jeff Ye (Troop 55B Scoutmaster), Chris Rich, Oliver Yung, Luke Yang, Leo Chen (Eagle Scout candidate) and Jerry Peters.



The Great Falls Grange Park is located off Georgetown Pike.

ance to 60 IMA site leaders responsible for managing invasive plant removal in Fairfax County parks. The Great Falls Grange Park is one of 420 parks located on more than 23,000 acres of land managed by the Park Authority.

Earth Sangha, volunteer-based ecological restoration nonprofit in Springfield, provided the native plants the scouts installed.

BSA Troop 55B is supported by its chartering organization, St. Francis Episcopal Church in Great Falls, Va. BSA Troop 55B and 55G are two independent scout troops—55B-boys and girls 55G-girls.

Make a Difference in Your Community!

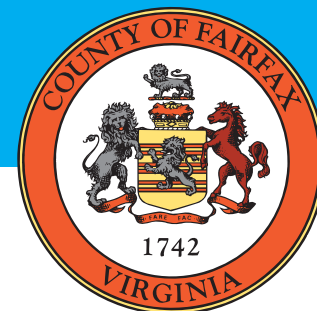
Run for a Seat on the McLean Community Center Governing Board

PUBLIC NOTICE OF ELECTION

MCLEAN COMMUNITY CENTER GOVERNING BOARD
SMALL DISTRICT 1A—DRANESVILLE
FAIRFAX COUNTY, VIRGINIA



McLean
Community
Center
The Center of It All



This **OFFICIAL NOTICE** of election to select members of the 2022-2023 Governing Board of the McLean Community Center (the Governing Board) is given to residents of Small District 1A—Dranesville, Fairfax County, Virginia (referred to as "Small District 1A"). The McLean Community Center (MCC) operates as a Special District Agency of the Fairfax County Government through a Memorandum of Understanding between the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and the Governing Board. On February 8, 1984, the Board of Supervisors approved the Memorandum of Understanding, which authorizes the election. MCC is funded by residents of Small District 1A in Greater McLean for their use through a real estate tax surcharge, the result of a 1970 Small District 1A bond referendum.

Early Voting (in person, online or by U.S. mail upon request) will be from March 16, through May 18, AND in-person voting will be available from 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on McLean Day (May 21, 2022) at Lewinsville Park.

Candidate Qualifications:

Each resident who lives within Small District 1A is eligible to run for a seat on the Governing Board within the appropriate category. If you need help determining whether you reside in Small District 1A, please contact MCC at **703-790-0123, TTY: 711**, or by email at elections@mcleancenter.org.

ADULTS: Candidates must be residents of Small District 1A and must be at least 18 years of age on or before May 21, 2022.

TEENS: Candidates must be 15, 16 or 17 years old on or before May 21, 2022, live within Small District 1A, and live in the boundary area for either Langley or McLean high schools. You **do not** have to attend either high school. You may attend another school, including one that is outside of Small District 1A, or you may be home schooled. You can only run for the seat representing the high school boundary area where you live.

Available Governing Board Seats and Terms:

Three (3) adult Governing Board seats will be filled through the election. The candidates who receive the three (3) highest numbers of votes will serve three-year terms on the Governing Board.

One (1) Governing Board youth seat representing the Langley High School boundary area will be filled for a one-year term.

One (1) Governing Board youth seat representing the McLean High School boundary area will be filled for a one-year term.

Candidate Petitions Requirements:

ADULTS: Must collect the signatures of ten (10) residents of Small District 1A who are 18 years old or older on or before May 21, 2022.

TEENS: Must collect the signatures of ten (10) residents of Small District 1A who are 15, 16 or 17 years old on or before May 21, 2022.

Candidate Packets containing a petition, instructions and all pertinent paperwork may be obtained at the McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Avenue, McLean, Virginia, 22101, **starting on Wednesday, Jan. 19**. Candidates must pick up and return their own petitions in person.

DEADLINE: Each resident seeking election to the Governing Board shall file a completed petition with MCC at the address shown below **by 5 p.m. on Friday, March 11, 2022:**

McLean Community Center
1234 Ingleside Ave.
McLean, VA 22101

For more information about the election, please call **703-790-0123, TTY: 711**, go to tinyurl.com/mclean-center-election, or email MCC at elections@mcleancenter.org.

Maria Foderaro-Guertin, Chair
Elections & Nominations Committee
McLean Community Center Governing Board

Great Falls Native Is U.S. Ambassador to Algeria

Langley journalism program gave her confidence for international affairs.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

The United States Senate confirmed Elizabeth Moore Aubin as the United States Ambassador to Algeria on Dec. 17. The Great Falls native, an alumna of Fairfax County Public Schools Langley High School Class of 1983, and career Foreign Service officer departs for her post in Algeria on Feb. 1. Ambassador Aubin served as Embassy Algiers' Deputy Chief from 2011 to 2014.

On Saturday morning, Jan. 15, the wind was blowing and the temperature was hovering at 23 degrees. Aubin met with this reporter for a COVID-19-distanced interview at a well-known local landmark, the Great Falls Grange on Georgetown Pike.

The interview is lightly edited for space and clarity.

Q: I understand a teacher's words inspired you and led you to a career in Foreign Service. Tell me more.

A: Paul McKendrick was my journalism teacher at Langley High School, and he saw something that I didn't know was there in me in terms of leadership and managing projects.

Q: What year were you in school?

A: I was in the class of 1983 at Langley High School. This was probably the spring of '82, and I didn't really have any clue there was a big world out there. Obviously, Langley has students that are very international and traveled, but I didn't really understand what skills or abilities I had and how that fit into the larger world. I knew I was very interested in international things, but I didn't actually know what that meant.

McKendrick took me aside and said, "You need to be the managing editor of the Saxon Scope." I was like, "what? I don't even know what that means." He talked to me about what was expected and why he thought I could do it. I had a great year being the managing editor. It showed me that I could manage interpersonal relations. I flourished in that role, and McKendrick helped me see that I had the leadership skills and abilities that could translate into something in life.

Q: Can you describe your foreign service career?

A: I got into the Foreign Service when I was 24 years old, about a year and a half out of school. I graduated from Barnard College of Columbia University in New York City and worked in New York. Then, I was working in D.C. I was going through the Foreign Service exam process, security clearance, all of that to be a Foreign Service officer because I still had this love for international things. I had taken French all four years of high school and all four years of university. I wanted to be able to use that in my life.

The minute they offered me a position; I



The United States Senate recently confirmed Great Falls native and Langley High School alum Elizabeth Moore Aubin as the United States Ambassador to Algeria.



High school yearbook photo of the Saxon Scope staff for the Langley High School Newspaper. "Sadly, my eyes are closed," says Ambassador Elizabeth Moore Aubin.

took it. I had just turned 24, and my first position in the Foreign Service was doing consulate work.

Everybody does visas and American citizen services. In many ways, that is the backbone of diplomacy because you have to learn how to make a judgment about someone. Do they meet the requirements under the law to get whatever kind of visa they're seeking? And you have to learn how to say no, really delicately.

You need to deal with Americans in all kinds of crisis situations. My first posting was in Curacao in the Dutch Antilles, the middle of the Caribbean Sea. You would think, oh, idyllic- the beach, the sun But a lot of people got themselves into trouble and not always on the island of Curacao. I was responsible for all six Dutch islands for consular services. That was Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao, Sint Eustatius, Sint Maarten, and

Saba. And Americans, unfortunately, had drowning accidents, motorcycle accidents, car accidents, all kinds of things that happened. People got themselves incarcerated because they were carrying drugs. You have to learn how to deal with urgent situations with distraught family members.

Within one week of being at a post, I had to call a family and tell them that their father had passed away. That's not something I think you can ever prepare a 24-year-old for doing.

I've had a great career in the Foreign Service, 32 years in March.

I've been in the Caribbean, in Rome, Italy and I was back here domestically working for the Secretary of State and Operation Center. I did the last two trips for Secretary of State Warren Christopher and 35 trips for Madeleine Albright.

I went to Hong Kong and then back to



Langley High School Graduation Day for Elizabeth Moore. The photo was taken on Minburn Street in Great Falls in 1983.

Washington again.

I was in Toronto on Sept. 11 that is how I met my husband. He was with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police as the tactical commander. Their team was there because they thought something could happen in Toronto potentially. He had grown up with parents in the Canadian International Development Agency, so he knew the whole international life. As we got to know each other, it was a great fit, and we got married. He became an American citizen and has come with me ever since.

I was in Brussels at our U.S. mission to NATO. I served in Tel Aviv, Israel, and I was in Algeria as the number two there from 2011 to 2014, eight years ago.

But it never dawned on me I would ever return to Algeria.

There's a neat story about that because while I'm not a big dream person, I had a dream about a month after I left that I'd left something important there in 2014.

In my dream, I went back to figure out what I could have left because something was bothering me. I walked into the residence I had on the ground floor, and the rooms were filled with people. I realized that what I'd had to leave were all these fantastic Algerians that I'd met, and I couldn't take them with me. I had to leave a piece of my heart there.

Now, eight years later, I get to go back and be reunited with these fantastic people and meet more Algerians. They are warm and hospitable, and kind. It was a country that impacted me.

We don't have a great understanding of each other. There are only 1500 Americans maybe who live in Algeria. We believe 50-to-60,000 Algerians live in the U.S. It's not like Western Europe or Latin America, where there's lots and lots of interaction.

Q: What do you hope to accomplish as Ambassador to Algeria?

A: I hope as ambassador to help increase the understanding between our two countries so that we can work together even more closely.

SEE LANGLEY JOURNALISM, PAGE 11

PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/CONNECTION NEWSPAPERS

A New Day in Richmond and Many Challenges

BY SEN. SCOTT SUROVELL

As the Virginia General Assembly begins its 2022 session, my 13th, I look forward to working with Gov. Glenn Youngkin, the new House of Delegates leadership and other legislators to reach a consensus on the best direction for our state.

While I did not support them, I attended Governor Youngkin's inauguration and swearing in, along with the swearing in of Lieutenant Governor Winsome Sears and Attorney General Jason Miyares.

Budgets Reflect Priorities

No matter what happens with other bills, one thing we are required to accomplish this session is to pass a budget. Thanks to federal pandemic funds, Virginia has significant excess revenues in our two-year budget cycle that ends on June 30, 2022. A little over half of those revenues will be appropriated to the "Rainy Day Fund" and to mandatory water quality improvement.

In the last session, we also reserved about \$1.5 billion of \$4.5 billion from the American Rescue

Plan Act in case we had a pandemic resurgence. We are limited to spending these funds on five categories of expenditures including water and sewer infrastructure and maintenance of outdoor assets. I am proposing to spend some of these

funds to (1) eliminate our state parks' \$225 million maintenance backlog, (2) install a public water line at Pohick Bay Regional Park to replace well service and water and sewer infrastructure, and (3) to construct permanent, outdoor restrooms at all Fairfax County public high schools.

The new two-year budget also projects significant new revenues. The Governor is proposing a series of ill-advised tax cuts. First, he proposes to cut our current two percent grocery tax that is dedicated solely to education and would cost Fairfax County Public Schools about \$80 million per year. The Governor also reiterated his call to suspend the \$0.08 per gallon gas tax increase enacted in 2021. His proposal would save the average Virginia driver about \$4 a month,



Surovell

but interrupt dozens of transportation projects currently planned.

My Bills

I am carrying around 27 bills. One creates a joint study to review the state's response to the COVID-19 pandemic across all levels of government so we can learn from our mistakes and improve our system going forward. I am also carrying legislation to study multi-family housing regulation to ensure that Virginia's inspection systems and condo association policies are sufficiently strong to avoid the types of collapse we saw in Florida or partial collapse that occurred at River Towers near Bellevue in Fairfax County in 2016.

The Biden Administration recently signed an agreement at the Edinburgh, Scotland, global summit to reduce methane emissions in the U.S. by 75 percent. Methane is 85 times more potent than carbon dioxide in trapping energy. I have a bill to incentivize Virginia's natural gas companies to capture loose methane from landfills or waste composting operations and

sell it to consumers to remove it from the atmosphere and curtail these greenhouse gasses that are warming the planet.

Cycling and pedestrian deaths have been increasing across the country, Virginia and our local community. At one point in 2020, three pedestrians were killed in Fairfax County one day. One major cause of these problems is that the infrastructure in our part of Northern Virginia was designed for vehicles and not pedestrians. While the legislature has provided significant new funding for transportation infrastructure, the focus has traditionally largely been for vehicle projects, with pedestrian or cycling improvements considered secondarily. I have introduced a bill to require a fixed percentage of funds to be devoted to pedestrian and cycling infrastructure going forward.

Virginia's Supreme Court significantly revised state legislative districts including the district I currently represent. I will discuss this in a future column.

If you have any feedback, please contact me at scott@scottsuovell.org and follow my work on Facebook and Twitter. It is an honor to serve as your state senator.

Peaceful Transfer of Power

BY DEL. KENNETH R. "KEN" PLUM

A joint session of the Virginia House of Delegates and State Senate met last Saturday for the purpose of inaugurating the 74th governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia. The event is steeped in tradition. As a member of the Inaugural Committee I was dressed in a formal morning suit of gray with tails. I led the Committee in escorting the Governor-elect from his hotel room to the Capitol and to the Inaugural Stand where he took the oath of office.

Absent from the entire proceeding was any debate of who won the election, any fraud or corruption that may have been committed, or whether the majority should resist giving up the power it held for the past two years. There was no "big lie"! There was a peaceful transfer of power.

At about 6-feet-6-inches tall the new governor is probably the tallest governor of Virginia since Thomas Jefferson held the position. He is new to public service having had a career in business. His position on many issues has not been clear as he had to maneuver past several

primary challengers and a strong general election opponent to win the governorship.

The courtesy extended to him as he assumed the office should not be mistaken as any intention on the part of legislators, including myself, to not exercise our responsibilities in the administration of good government.

Already any lack of clarity that may have existed on his position on issues is quickly being filled in with his actions. His early announcements of persons he intends to appoint to positions in government raise serious questions. His proposed appointment to be Secretary of Natural Resources raises concerns that I addressed last week that we are putting the fox in the chicken coop with a coal industry lobbyist heading natural resource agencies. Equally as concerning are his proposed appointments in the education agencies where the record of his major appointee seems to be mostly anti-public schools.

The new governor showed a lot of zeal as he announced in his



Plum

inaugural speech that he was going to start to work on day one by signing a number of executive orders. His work on Saturday afternoon after the Inaugural Ceremony made it clear that the next four years are going to be challenging ones. His

very first executive order "restores excellence in public education by ending the use of divisive concepts, including Critical Race Theory, in public education." No one has been able to show where CRT and these other divisive concepts are being taught in public schools, but

it certainly was effective partisan rhetoric in the last political campaign. Clearly there are concerns about public schools in the new administration as the new governor's call for more parental involvement in the education of their children got the greatest applause to his speech. His second executive order empowers parents to make decisions on whether their children wear masks at school even as new cases of Covid-19 infection soar.

The basics of democratic government require that there be a peaceful transfer of power. The continuation of democratic government requires that there be a vigorous debate of issues!

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BRIEF NEWS

Renew Dog License

Fairfax County asks: Did you get a pandemic pooch this past year?

Then you should know that every dog four months or older must be licensed with Fairfax County.

Get your annual dog license or renew it by Tuesday, Feb. 1. The fee is \$10 per dog, except for service dogs which are given licenses for free. <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/taxes/dog-license-information>

After you submit your license application or renewal, you'll be mailed a tag for your dog's collar.

If you are getting a license for the first time, you must provide a current rabies vaccination certificate. When renewing, proof of vaccination isn't required unless the certificate has expired.

If your dog is already licensed, you should have received a renewal notice in the mail in November from the Department of Tax Administration.

You can renew and pay online. There is a third-party service fee for e-check, credit and debit card payments online. <https://ffx-payments.virginiainteractive.org/Payments/Doglicense>

Check your renewal notice to find your dog's registration number and previous license number which you'll need to renew online. If you don't have this information handy or didn't get a renewal notice, contact the Department of Tax Administration at 703-222-8234, TTY 711, on weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/news/renew-or-get-your-2022-dog-license-feb-1>

Library Staff Shortages Require Hours Change

Because of the current surge in COVID-19 cases and a high number of vacancies among Fairfax County Public Library staff, all regional and community Fairfax County Public Library branches will be closed every Sunday and Monday beginning Sunday, Jan. 16 through April 1. Branches will open in keeping with their regularly scheduled hours Tuesday through Saturday.

Regional libraries will be open Tuesday and Wednesday 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Thursday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Community libraries will be open Tuesday 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Wednesday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

The Access Services branch located at the Fairfax County Government Center will maintain its usual hours Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library/branches/branch-locations-and-hours.

Fairfax County Public Libraries are always available online. Search digital offerings via Libby <https://research.fairfaxcounty.gov/c.php?g=756428&p=5423169>

Explore ten other ways to enjoy your local library from home. <https://research.fairfaxcounty.gov/unlimited/at-home>

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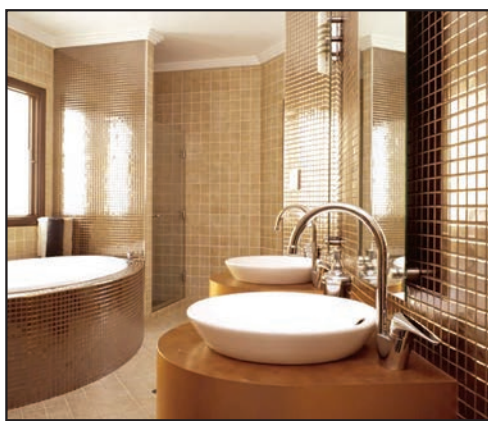
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FCPS Superintendent Releases FY 2023 Proposed Budget



Fairfax County School Board in session on Jan. 13, 2022.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Fairfax County Schools Superintendent Dr. Scott Brabrand released his Fiscal Year (FY) 2022-23 Proposed Budget on Thursday, Jan. 13, at the Fairfax County School Board Meeting. In total, 86 percent of the \$3.3 billion proposed operating budget for FY23 is allocated to instruction, according to the presentation.



Superintendent Scott Brabrand

“Tonight, I am delivering you a good news budget that will lead Fairfax County Public Schools out of this pandemic,” Brabrand said.

Brabrand described a budget that provides what its students need to learn, grow and flourish. He said FCPS will continue to pursue strong compensation for all of its 24,000 FCPS employees. The budget includes a 4 percent market scale adjustment for all employees and a step increase for eligible employees.

FCPS is one of the largest school divisions in the nation with a workforce of 24,392 full-time employees. With a projected enrollment of 177,570 students, FCPS serves students from 204 countries who speak more than 200 different languages at home. A total of 56,112 students are economically disadvantaged. FCPS also serves 26,828 special education students and 33,806 English learners.

Brabrand’s FY 2023 proposed budget’s expenditures and adjustments focus on three key areas, compensation, opportunity and access, and critical operational needs. Brabrand is requesting an additional \$112 million or about a 5.2 percent additional county transfer to equate to \$2.28 billion. State aid (\$621.4 million), sales tax (\$248.3 million), federal aid (47.1 million), beginning balance (\$21.9 million), City of Fairfax (\$51.2 million), and other (\$24.8 million) complete revenue sources.

Expenditures as itemized in the FY 2023 Proposed Operating Budget, compensation adjustments in the FY 2023 budget represent a net increase of over \$150 million. Over \$55 million is to provide an average step increase of 2.68 percent for eligible employees; \$8 million for health benefits; \$4.4 million for recurring substitute pay; and \$3.3 million for bus driver salaries. All FCPS transportation employees will receive a 2.3 percent increase at the beginning of the year.

Adjustments represent a decrease of \$300 million and 768 positions. The enrollment adjustments include savings of \$88.2 million and 917 positions. The

budget reflects the revised lower enrollment numbers.

Brabrand said that he had additional dollars to restore 33 positions to the staffing reserve and dollars for another 50 positions to the staffing reserve.

Opportunity and Access, the second main area of the budget, represented an increase of over \$68 million and 233 positions. Brabrand included funding in this budget of \$32 million to provide three additional professional development days.

“I have almost \$15 million to put a special education lead teacher full time in every single elementary school,” Brabrand said. “It is long overdue. This will ... allow our special education lead teachers to lead best practices and special education instruction and provide timely and tailored monitoring of special education in all of our elementary schools.”

There was also \$10 million for anticipated requirements from the Virginia General Assembly, given over 1,100 bills have been introduced. The county must monitor the unfunded mandates to be as prudent and fiscally responsible as possible.

The budget also provides, Brabrand said, nearly \$3 million and 26 positions to implement FCPS’ second of its third year plan for Advanced Academic Program Phase II.

It includes a full-time twice-exceptional (2e) specialist and 20 additional school-based positions so that 40 more elementary schools can have local level for advanced academic programs.

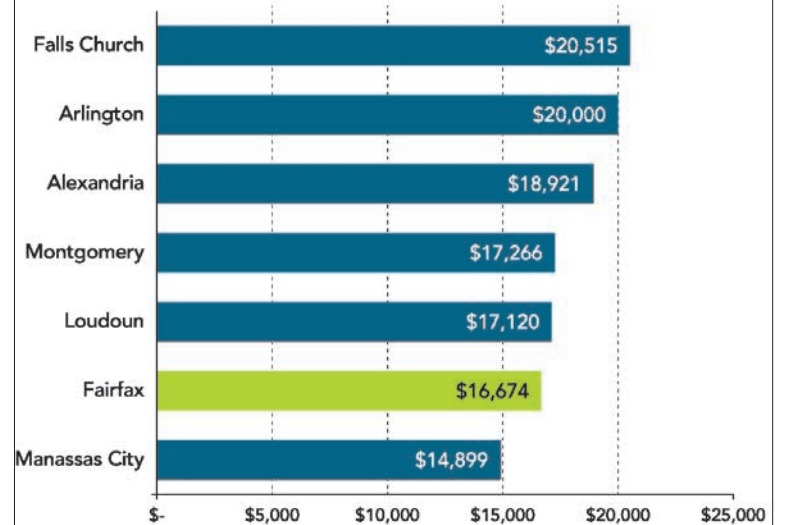
Critical Operational Needs is the third area which totaled \$13.6 million and 87 positions. Highlights include \$8 million for assistant principals and \$900,000 to extend high school assistant principal positions to 12 months. There is \$700,000 for 13 half middle school flexible office positions. They also have \$1.4 million to enhance the HR staffing support to respond to increased demands by the pandemic, \$0.9 million and five positions to provide cybersecurity upgrades, and \$300,000 for two additional planning positions to help with data analysis.

FCPS will continue to collaborate with the Board of Supervisors and County Executive during the county budget process.

A public hearing on the budget will be held on Jan. 24, and work sessions will be held in January and February by the Fairfax County School Board. On Feb. 24, the Board will vote on the FY23 Advertised Budget.

FCPS COST PER PUPIL

FY 2022 WABE Comparison to Other School Divisions^{1,2,3}



¹ Source: FY 2022 Washington Area Boards of Education (WABE) Guide.

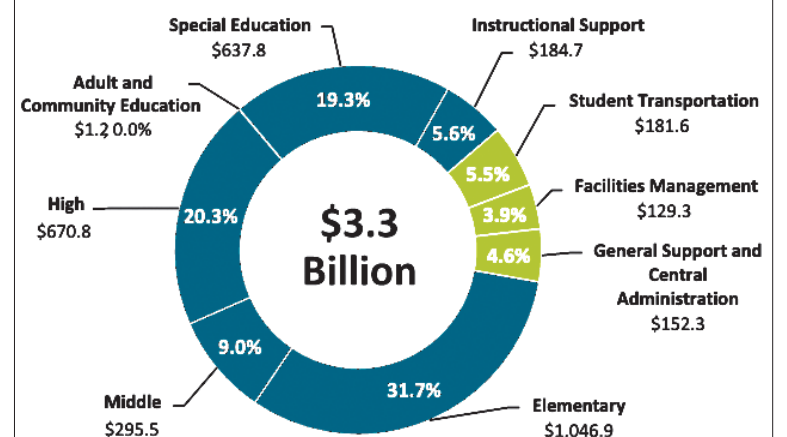
² Uniform formulas were developed by the WABE committee for consistency area wide. These numbers are comparable; however, the cost per pupil reported here may differ from that reported in individual districts’ budget documents or other reports.

³ Data not available at time of compilation for Prince George’s County, Prince William County, and Manassas Park City.

FCPS Cost per Pupil.

Where It Goes—Expenditures by Program*

FY 2023 Proposed School Operating Fund (\$ in millions)

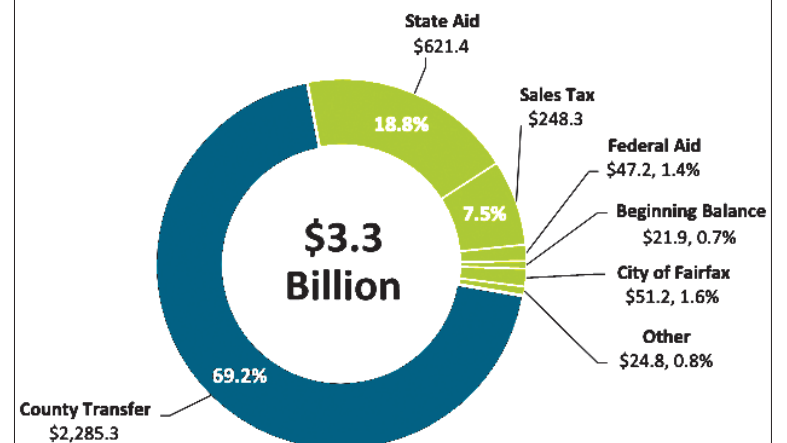


*Does not add due to rounding.

Expenditures by Program.

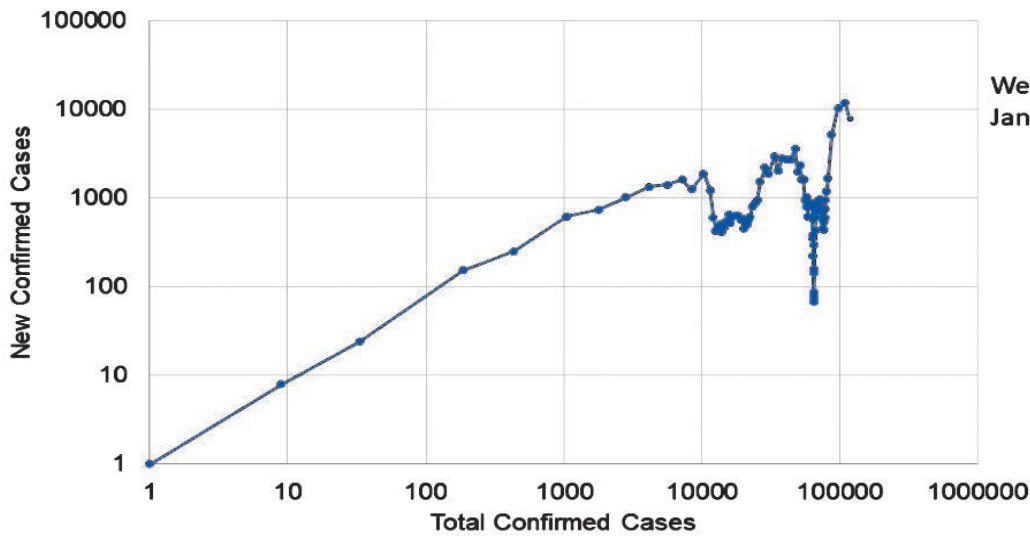
Where It Comes From—Revenue

FY 2023 Proposed School Operating Fund (\$ in millions)



Revenue Sources.

Current Week 2: (Jan 9 – Jan 15)



Week 1:
Jan 1 – Jan 8

SCREENSHOT FAIRFAX COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Covid-19 Case Data for Fairfax Health District, Trajectory of Cases for Fairfax County.

New Governor Revokes Mask Mandate for Schools

FCPS says masks requirement remains in effect.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION



Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin (R)

Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin (R) signed Executive Order Number Two on his Inauguration Day, Saturday, Jan. 15, to fulfill his promise “to empower Virginia parents in their children’s education and upbringing by allowing parents to make decisions on whether their child wears a mask in school.” The Order states that masks are not the only method to reduce transmission of COVID-19. It lists mitigation measures, including improvements to indoor air quality in school facilities.

Fairfax County Public Schools issued a reminder that its policy on wearing masks has not changed. FCPS would continue to follow recommendations from local and national experts instead, requiring all students and staff to wear masks, except at times and on occasions already designated in (eating). Arlington Public Schools and Alexandria City Public Schools also announced masks would stay on.

FCPS Superintendent Scott Brabrand sent a message to parents: “As we return to school after the holiday weekend, we want to let you know that FCPS will continue universal masking for all students and staff ... in alignment with CDC guidance. Our layered prevention strategies have proven effective in keeping transmission rates low in our schools. We know our students are best served by in-person instruction. Adhering to our layered prevention strategies, especially universal masking, keeps our schools open and safe places for students to learn.”

According to Virginia Senate Bill (SB) 1303 effective July 1, 2021, each school board is to offer in-person instruction to students enrolled in the local school division “in a manner in which it adheres, to the maximum extent practicable, to any currently applicable mitigation strategies ... to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 that have been provided by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.”

Fairfax Sen. Chap Petersen, co-author and lead Democratic sponsor of the bill to reopen schools, said: “The law gives flexibility to local School Boards to open schools in a safe way while reflecting the practice-



Masked students enter the FCPS’ Great Falls Elementary School.

cal realities of educating children. It does not require School Boards to follow any certain COVID protocols, such as mandatory masking for all children, nor does it preclude it.”

But Petersen added that schools should have a plan to phase out mandatory masking in the “next few weeks or months. Mandatory masking should not be a permanent feature of public education.”

John Cook, former member of the Board of Supervisors, said on Twitter: “If we are concerned about parents’ rights, do I have the right as a parent not to have the government compel my child to sit next to a maskless person all day?”

FCPS as of Jan. 14, 2022, reported 620 cases of COVID-19 for the month of January. That number might be lower than actual cases because schools were closed from Dec. 20, 2021 to Jan. 10, 2022 for winter break and then winter weather, according to an FCPS spokesman.

The Fairfax County COVID-19 Case Data for Fairfax Health District reported on Sunday, Jan. 16, the highest number of new confirmed COVID-19 cases to date, slightly over 10,000 for Week 1: Jan. 1-8 according to its Trajectory of Cases in the county.

FILE PHOTOS BY MERCIA HOBSON/CONNECTION NEWSPAPERS

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Parks = Innovation



Meadowlark Winter Walk of Lights in Vienna.

BY PAUL GILBERT
NOVA PARKS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

What words do you associate with “parks?” Maybe you thought of words like trees, trails, picnic-bench, and nature? What about innovation?

While innovation may not have been at the top of your list, maybe it should have been. With the pandemic, the public has gravitated to parks. Outdoors is the safest place to be around others and the best place to seek a mental and physical break from the nearly two years of COVID-related stress we have all felt.

Innovation ranks high in the values of NOVA Parks employees. And, during this time, NOVA Parks has been creating new and expanded ways to experience parks.

Trails:

NOVA Parks has over 100 miles of trails that have seen more use in the last two years than ever before. Everywhere there is parking for trail access, those lots have been full. The most popular trail in Virginia is the 45-mile long W&OD Trail. Before the pandemic, this trail saw over two million uses a year. Recently, many areas have seen two to four times the previous use. This year, NOVA Parks, the City of Falls Church, and the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority opened a new section of the trail that has two separate lanes, one for pedestrians and one for cyclists. This will soon be the national model for busy urban trails. Many low-impact building techniques were used or pioneered with this project.

Adventure:

Also, in the fall, NOVA Parks cut the ribbon on an all-new feature. Climb UPTon is the largest and

Climb UPTon is the largest and most challenging ropes course in the mid-Atlantic states and is located at Upton Hill Park in Arlington.



This year, NOVA Parks, the City of Falls Church, and the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority opened a new section of the W&OD Trail that has two separate lanes, one for pedestrians and one for cyclists.

most challenging ropes course in the mid-Atlantic states and is located at Upton Hill Park in Arlington. This innovative German technology has 90 challenging elements built into the three-story tower. Look for this new feature to reopen in mid-March.

Winter Lights:

Winters used to be a slow time for parks. Then 15 years ago, NOVA Parks created the first all-LED holiday light show in the region with

the Bull Run Festival of Lights in Centreville. This show has grown in popularity, and for the 2020 season, the show had twice the capacity, with two lanes going through the whole show. Around 70,000 vehicles packed with eager families have already made their way through the ever-expanding drive-through light show in 2021.

NOVA Parks created the Meadowlark Winter Walk of Lights in Vienna eight years ago. This show has also grown rapidly. Today we

see over 70,000 individuals enjoy this half-a-mile walk-through show that delights everyone. In 2020 the Volgenau Conservatory was added. This glasshouse allows people to enjoy a hot drink, souvenir, or something to eat.

In Alexandria, Cameron Run Ice & Lights offers both lights and an ice skating rink. This unique site just celebrated its 50,000th visitor since it first opened just three years ago.

Through reinvention, growth, and innovation, people in North-

ern Virginia have more varied park offerings than ever before to help us all have safe things to do during the pandemic. Parkland is more valued today by most people than ever before, and the range of things you can do in regional parks has grown to keep pace with demand. Many activities like golf, boating, and camping have seen new and sustained levels of interest as people look to get outside for both exercise and stress relief during this long pandemic.

Earning College Credit with Work Experience and Training

Program expansions makes college degree accessible and affordable for many.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

Now in the 17th year of his career in information technology (IT), Eric Hayes wants to work toward a college degree at Northern Virginia Community College. While he has taken a variety of on-the-job training courses, he believes that a formal education will lead to professional gains. Thanks to the expansion of a program in Virginia called Credits for Prior Learning Portal, Credits2Careers program, he and other adults can turn life work experiences into college credit.

"The hours of course study will help me continue to grow in my career field," he said. "Course work, group collaboration, and lectures are a part of the responsibility of being an active IT professional," he said. "You can easily get left behind if you do not keep your eyes and ears open. Constant change can be beneficial because it can quickly solve problems as well as streamline convoluted processes. With that being said, knowing about the change or even being a part of it is much more gratifying."

Adults who are interested in using work and life experience to earn credit at Northern Virginia Community College and other schools in the Virginia Community College System, can create an account on the Credits2Careers website (www.credits2careers.org) and list information such as

work experience, prior training, certificates or standardized tests. This information is evaluated by the organization's career advisors who will then let the prospective student know how many college credits they are eligible to receive.

"This initiative is predicated on serving the needs of all students from various backgrounds who have a wealth of knowledge and

Counts Initiative, provided the funding for the expansion. Professional development, workforce training, professional certifications, exams and standardized test are examples of the types of experiences that students use to earn college credit while taking fewer classes, says Carter

"By awarding credit for prior learning, students are able to avoid any redundancy in training and save crucial time and money," she said. "Research has shown that by awarding credit for prior learning, students are ultimately assisted in a meaningful, tangible way to accelerate their pathway to earning a degree or licensure leading directly to a well-paying career. Life is full of rich experiences that deserve to be recognized wherever they align to formal training outcomes."

This path to education is designed to create a level playing field for those who want to access higher education. "Credit for prior learning is one tool to ensure education is available to all, from students with

traditional backgrounds to those who have followed another path," said Emily Jones-Green, Virginia Community College System. "The greatest thing about education, knowledge, skills, and capabilities is that they are not confined to a formal classroom.

Having diverse life experiences enhances the classroom atmosphere and makes the fabric of our society and our workforce stronger."

"The greatest thing about education, knowledge, skills, and capabilities is that they are not confined to a formal classroom. Having diverse life experiences enhances the classroom atmosphere and makes the fabric of our society and our workforce stronger."

— Jenny Carter,
Director of Workforce Partnerships and
Projects, Virginia Community College System.

experience," said Jenny Carter, Director of Workforce Partnerships and Projects, Virginia Community College System. "Recognizing the expertise that is contained in a student's background is one way of honoring their past efforts and meeting them where they are in their educational journey, in the arc of their career, and most importantly, where they are in life."

A grant from the Lumina Foundation, as part of its All Learning

BULLETIN BOARD

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

JAN. 26-27

Preschool Open House. At FB Meekins Cooperative Preschool, 900 Maple Ave. East, Vienna. 1:30-3 p.m. (Last Tour at 2:45 p.m.) Learn about the Yellows (2s), Greens (older 2s/3s), Blues (older 3s/4s), Reds (pre-K), and Kindergarten pro-

grams. Take a tour and meet the teachers and current families. Have any application questions answered. Visit the website: www.fbmeekins.org.

THURSDAY/JAN. 27

Northern Virginia Cyber and IT Virtual Career Fair. 1-4 p.m. Microsoft, Amazon, General Dynamics, Leidos and Verisign are among dozens of companies that will participate in the Cyber + IT Career Fair that

SEE BULLETIN, PAGE 11

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

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

Please, help save these historical papers.

All gifts will be used to fund our printed newspapers and websites and to meet obligations to our loyal and patient employees, writers, contractors and suppliers.

The ongoing pandemic continues to crush many newspapers across the country, and our newspapers continue to be at risk.

The Northern Virginia area's best read and most trusted source for community news includes the Alexandria Gazette Packet, Mount Vernon Gazette and all Con-

nection Newspapers in the metropolitan region.

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

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

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

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ENTERTAINMENT

NOW THRU JAN. 30

Paint & Pen. 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. At Jo Ann Gallery Reston Community Center, Lake Anne, 1609 Washington Plaza N, Reston. Two Artists, One Show with paintings by Angie Magruder and drawings by Bob Biedrzycki. Visit the website: www.restoncommunitycenter.com

NOW THRU FEB. 19

New Art Exhibits. At McLean Project for the Arts, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Give and Take: Building Form (Emerson Gallery) will feature abstract wood sculpture by Emilie Benes Brzezinski, Rachel Rotenberg, Foon Sham, and Norma Schwartz, while the Atrium Gallery will feature Intersectional Painting: Works by Sheila Crider. Both exhibitions run through Feb. 19, 2022. Visit www.mpaart.org/ or call 703-790-1953 for gallery hours.

NOW THRU FEB. 12

Traveling While Black: Virtual Reality Experience. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. In "Traveling While Black VR," the immersion of 360° footage draws viewers into living history lessons told around a booth in Ben's Chili Bowl. The Washington, D.C. restaurant has been a mainstay of the African American community since 1958, bearing witness to significant Civil Rights milestones that are woven into the film in powerful snippets of footage. The Traveling While Black VR experience/film was directed by Academy Award-winning director Roger Ross Williams.



D'DAT Native American Fusion Music comes to the McLean Community Center on Sunday, Jan. 23, 2022.

JAN. 18-FEB. 1

Mah Jongg Lessons. 6:30-9:30 p.m. At Temple Rodef Shalom, 2100 Westmoreland Street, Falls Church. Mah Jongg beginner class, Jan. 18, 25 and Feb. 1 6:30-9:30 p.m. \$90. Send non-refundable check to WoTRS, Attention Iva Gresko, Temple Rodef Shalom, 2100 Westmorland St, Falls Church, VA 22023. Include email address, home address, and telephone numbers. Check is your registration. Enrollment limited. Masks required.

THURSDAY/JAN. 20

Performing Arts Documentary. 1 p.m.

At McLean Community Center, McLean. Learn a little about the performing arts through this one-hour (or so) documentary. Safety permitting, join Performing Arts Director Sarah Schallern Treff for a discussion after.

JAN. 21 TO FEB. 13

"Every Brilliant Thing." At NextStop Theatre, 269 Sunset Park Drive, Herndon. Guided by an unnamed narrator, the audience is drawn into the story of a young boy who tries to cure his mother's depression by creating a list of all the most wonderful things in the world. Visit www.NextStopTheatre.org.



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Senior Living, fourth week of every month.

Questions?

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Langley Journalism Teacher Gave Her Confidence for International Affairs

FROM PAGE 3

Algeria has strategic importance on NATO's Southern flank. They are very capable partners for regional stability and counterterrorism. The youth are fascinated with American culture and want to learn English. That's an opportunity I hope to make the most of when I'm there.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Ambassador Elizabeth Moore Aubin leaves for her post in Algeria on Feb. 1.

Q: In the last section, you gave a nod to what you're looking to do. Is there anything more?

A: There are residents of Great Falls who have business interests in Algeria. The other thing that I want to do is help American businesses who want to invest in Algeria's diversifying economy. Algeria is moving out of simply oil and gas extraction into much wider manufacturing and all kinds of other renewables. I've already met with a Great Falls-based business that has an investment in Algeria.

I will continue to help span the economic development and diversification across the continent as well as continue to create jobs right here in the United States because that's what diplomats should be doing. You need government advocacy to help the U.S. solution, to be given a level playing field.

Q: Are you able to give me the Yellow Page headline of this company? Is it agriculture?

A: Yes, it is agriculture which is interesting because Algeria used to be the breadbasket of the Roman Empire. There's enormous potential for agriculture in that country.

Q: When you land, and you set your foot on the soil, what is that immediate feeling going to be?

A: It's going to be exhilarating and exciting. And it's going to be a lot warmer than it is here right now. Algeria is on the Mediterranean, a much milder climate than we're experiencing in Virginia today. I leave on Feb. 1.

Q: Are you ready to go?

A: That is always tough. No matter how many times

I've moved in the Foreign Service, it's always hard to sort, put yourself in a couple of suitcases, most of your stuff in storage, take a few things with you, and just go. I've never found that to be an easy process.

Q: How long is the service assignment?

A: When you're an ambassador, you serve at the pleasure of the President. Normally for career officers, it's around three years.

Q: As you lift off flying out of Dulles International Airport, what will make tears come to your eyes when you look down?

A: I always leave family and friends behind. That's always sad and difficult. As I get older, those I'm leaving behind are also older. Time goes by quickly when your life is divided into two and three-year postings. You realize the things that you will miss, births, weddings, and deaths and all the events that happen in someone's life with whom you are close.

If you're not geographically present, you miss something from that.

active recreation areas, including tennis and basketball courts, playgrounds and trails to serve the community.

An initial development concept was presented at a virtual public meeting on May 24, 2021. Public comments about the plan were accepted until July 30, 2021, and the input received was used to develop a revised concept. The proposed facilities and improvements in the revised concept plan are responsive to the feedback received from the public and stakeholder groups. The meeting will include a question and comment session and instructions for participation will be provided on the webpage. A recording of the meeting and the presentation slides will be made available on the project webpage. Comments regarding the revised concept plan will be accepted until March 18, 2022 and can be sent to parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov.

For more information, visit the project webpage; or contact the Public Information Office at 703-324-8662 or via parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Haven of Northern Virginia Support Group. 703-941-7000, www.havenofnova.org or havenofnova@verizon.net.

Virginia Chronic Pain Support Group Meets from 1:30-3 p.m. the 2nd Wednesday of each month at Kaplan Center for Integrative Medicine, 6829 Elm St., Suite 300, McLean. Group leader, Jodi Brayton, LCSW. 703-532-4892.

BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 9

the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority (FCEDA) is presenting to build awareness of thousands of open tech jobs in Northern Virginia. Attendees do not need to live in Northern Virginia to interview with hiring companies. Candidates can register for free to attend the fair at www.workinnorthenvirginia.com/virtual-career-fairs/.

FRIDAY/JAN. 28

McLean Art Society Meeting. 10 a.m. to noon. Via Zoom. Allen Bentley, an expressionist local artist, will be the featured demonstrator at the meeting of the McLean Art Society. The art demonstration will start at 11 a.m. Mr. Bentley explains his work as energy, passion and rhythm, and he utilizes figures in motion, pushing, pulling and connecting. Guests wishing to be included should contact President Anna Katalina at annakatalina@aol.com.

WEDNESDAY/FEB. 16

McLean Central Park Development Concept Revision Meeting. 7 p.m. Online. You can watch the meeting at www.publicinput.com/McLeanCentralPark, or listen by calling 855-925-2801 and entering the access code 2881. Preregistration is optional and not required. McLean Central Park, located at 1468 Dolley Madison Blvd., is a 28-acre public park adjacent to the McLean Community Center and Dolley Madison Library. This popular park contains a variety of natural spaces and

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Immuno-Confused



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

I wouldn't say, as a cancer patient, that I'm immuno-compromised, as a CNN news report today, Dec. 24th, described us similarly-diagnosed individuals, but my wife certainly would. Nevertheless, as a cancer patient undergoing treatment, I do realize that I need to be vigilant, especially since I have pre-existing breathing issues because the thyroid cancer I have had long ago moved into my lungs. Moreover, to complicate matters more, the main side effect of the medicine that I'm taking daily to treat my thyroid cancer has as its main side effect: shortness of breath. Having read what I've just written, it sounds likely that if anybody is immuno-compromised, it's someone who has cancerous tumors in their lungs and whose treatment for said tumors has as its primary side effect: shortness of breath. A trifecta of trouble when one considers that covid adversely impacts one's ability to breathe.

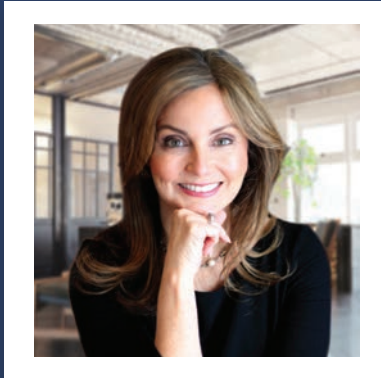
When covid first became a thing, my wife, Dina wouldn't let me out of the house. Even after we received our initial two vaccinations, Dina was still cautiously unoptimistic. I was allowed out of the house, but within very strict parameters. I wouldn't say I understand science/medicine, but even I could see the risks of exposure and the likely compounded problems it would present for a cancer patient like me whose lungs are already weakened by the presence of a dozen or more malignant papillary thyroid cancer tumors. And whose body has been negatively affected (I wouldn't say ravaged) by nearly 13 years of non-stop cancer treatment. Not exactly the most challenging host for a semi-incurable respiratory virus.

However, in the past three months or so since I've been boosted, I have returned to some of my pre-covid activities; in moderation, and always wearing a mask. I am out and about running errands as had been my area of responsibility previously. Now however, omicron has become the dominant variant/threat and presented a new level of concern even for fully vaccinated/boosted people like me. Though the side effects, hospitalizations and deaths seem statistically somewhat less than previous variants, still a cancer patient with pre-existing lung/breathing issues seems an attractive host. And not that the variant picks its targets, but its super transmissibility presents challenges/fears for those whose immune systems have already been weakened by years of toxic chemotherapy. As I describe myself, I think I might be the poster child for this disease. If anybody presents with the ideal/worst-case scenario, it's me. I can see the poster now: A picture of me with a black circle surrounding my chest with a black line diagonally across my torso.

Because, if there's anything I understand about my condition, it is that my weakest link is the area where the virus does its most initial damage: the lungs. And given that one's ability to breathe is kind of important, in whatever scheme of things/context one wants to consider, I should probably once again stay in the house and avoid all human contact (at least I would have five cats to keep me company). I mean, who's to say/know really, whether a lung cancer/thyroid patient like me could even survive the most modest of covid symptoms. Which, given my medical history, it's unlikely any symptoms I experienced could be described as moderate. I imagine if the virus found a home in my lungs, it might very well be, as they say in Boston: "Katie bar the door." There's probably no such thing as a moderate impact for a person with cancer/lung issues like me. In fact, if I want to be honest about my cancer/lung history, practically/prudently speaking, I should be disqualified from everything until further notice. I can't afford to take a chance/risk any exposure. I have very little margin for error. My life would be at stake, if I understand the warnings/susceptibility correctly concerning someone with my medical condition.

I suppose if I want to live my life moving forward, I'll have to utilize my sales background and pre-qualify any person with whom I'm possibly having contact/sharing space. I've survived/overcome an initial "terminal" diagnosis of stage IV non-small cell lung cancer with a "13 month to two-year" prognosis to be approaching my 13-year anniversary come the end of February 2022. Given all I've endured in the last 13 years since I felt pain in my left rib cage in late December 2008, it would be irresponsible and stupid for me to get careless and throw away all I've been gained. This is no time to throw caution to the wind. Quite the contrary.

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



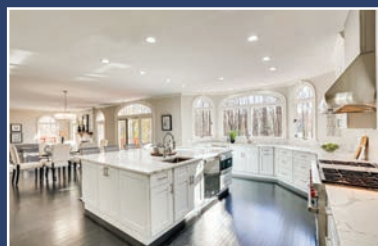
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10109 Squires Trail, Great Falls \$2,649,000

Nestled among 6.11 acres of serene woodland, down a quiet country lane, this all-brick estate offers 5 bedrooms and 5 bathrooms and luxury in every detail! Meticulously remodeled with \$500,000 in upgrades, this home boasts a flowing floorplan with 10' ceilings include a true chef's kitchen boasting an oversized island, 48" Viking range, two dishwashers, and stand-alone Sub Zero fridge and separate freezer, and open to a large casual dining space with wet bar, wine fridge, ice maker, and family room with wood burning fireplace and a wall of windows. The spacious great room surrounded with windows is the perfect spot for a media room, library, home office or music room. The upper-level private quarters offer the ultimate owner's bedroom suite featuring sitting room and massive dressing room/walk-in closet with island storage. 3 Bedrooms with walk-in closets and 2 bathrooms complete the upper level. The walk out lower level provides a plethora of entertaining possibilities. A club room with wet bar, recreation room with fireplace, 5th bedroom with full bathroom, and impressive exercise room with steam shower. The private exterior includes an expansive rear deck spanning the entire width of the home and is a perfect place for entertaining, and a large level yard - a great place for fun and games or a sparkling pool.

10200 Forest Lake Drive, Great Falls \$1,875,000

Welcome to Seven Gables ~ a custom designed, extraordinary Contemporary located in the heart of Great Falls. Sited on a gorgeous lot with carefully designed mature plantings, this stunning residence offers six bedrooms, 4 1/2 bathrooms, and multiple rooms/spaces for office use, study area, exercise room, etc. Sun-filled walls of windows bring the outside in and cathedral ceilings offer a dramatic design element throughout. The owners have remodeled the kitchen and bathrooms and created architect-designed additions over the years. There are multiple outdoor living areas for enjoying the lovely yard and gardens. Four garage bays plus extra garage spaces for storage and workbench. Located in one of Great Falls most desirable neighborhoods across from Riverbend Country Club, this property can now enjoy the adjacent walking trails in Rivermont. Both the welcoming and dramatic interior and the charming patios create a beautiful place to comfortably host guests and call home.

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Dianne Van Volkenburg donates a portion of each sale to the Embry Rucker Community Shelter

