

# THE CONNECTION

CENTREVIEW ❖ Chantilly ❖ Great Falls ❖ Herndon ❖ McLean ❖ Oak Hill ❖ Oakton ❖ Reston ❖ Vienna

## Children's & Teens' Connection 2024



Feng-Yu Chen, 6, Grade 1,  
Vienna, Family Portrait,  
tempera paint on paper,  
Colvin Run Elementary  
School, Vienna, Va.,  
Victoria Cho, art teacher.

ENTERTAINMENT, PAGE 21 ❖ CLASSIFIED, PAGE 22

DECEMBER 18-24, 2024

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**HAPPY HOLIDAYS  
and NEW YEAR!**

*Questions about the market? Call today!*

# CHILDREN'S & TEENS' CONNECTION 2024

The art and writing of local students is always a bright spot. We offer many thanks to the art teachers who guided these artists and compiled the art to appear here, and the English and Creative Writing teachers who inspired their students to write poetry, essays and short stories.

We heard from students who have partic-

ipated in this edition for many years, and from teachers who also have compiled their students' art over the years, and in some cases from different schools and even school systems. We have homeschool families who have also made the Children's & Teens Connection or Gazette an annual tradition.

Take some time to browse this edition, it

is full of gems.

You can find the other Children's and Teens' editions by going to <http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/PDFs/> and then scrolling down to Children's. Thanks for reading.

Now the Connection will be on a break until after the New Year, with the exact week

we'll be back to be determined by ad revenue and other factors, but likely Jan. 8 or 15.

In the meantime contact us, for advertising, contact [debfunk@@connectionnewspapers.com](mailto:debfunk@@connectionnewspapers.com) or [sales@connectionnewspapers.com](mailto:sales@connectionnewspapers.com). For content, contact me [mkimm@connectionnewspapers.com](mailto:mkimm@connectionnewspapers.com).

## Merry Christmas

**“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”**

The pages of the Connection, both paper and web, have been full of holiday spirit beginning before Thanksgiving. Amazing group and individual efforts to help the needy, holiday parades, Santa arriving by boat, Santa arriving by horse-drawn carriage, Santa arriving by fire engine, Santa arriving by motorcycle, tree lightings, Menorah lightings (coming soon), stories of giving, secular celebrations, religious celebrations. Shopping locally. Giving locally. It's been a holiday extravaganza.

Christmas is about the birth of Jesus Christ. Whether you believe the Christmas story literally or in spirit, you know it is the story of joy, hope and love, with the promise of redemption.

It is also about embracing the teachings of Jesus: to love thy neighbor as thyself; to help the needy; to feed the hungry and clothe the poor; to care for the sick; to invite

and welcome strangers; to treat others as you would have them treat you.

**Matthew 7:12:**

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

**Matthew 25:35-40:**

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe

you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

HERE IS the verse relating the birth of Jesus from the Bible, Luke 2: 4-19:

“And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David). To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

“And there were in the same country, shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring

you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

“And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, ‘Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.’ And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.”

Merry Christmas to you.

And Happy Holidays.

— MARY KIMM

[MKIMM@CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM](mailto:MKIMM@CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM)

### Sunrise Valley Elementary School Reston, Va

MARIA CLAESSEN  
ART TEACHER.



Saoirse McMillen, 8, 2nd grade, Reston, Virginia Landscape, paper collage



Bea Condron, 10, 5th grade, Reston, Under the Sea, paper collage



Sen. Scott Surovell (D-34), Senate Majority Leader



Virginia Attorney General Jason Miyares



Supervisor Pat Herrity (R-Springfield)



Chairman Jeff McKay



PUBLIC TRUST AND CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY  
Karol Escalante, director of Immigrant Community Affairs, Fairfax County



LINKEDIN.COM  
ACLU of Virginia Senior Immigrants' Rights Attorney Sophia Gregg



MERCIA HOBSON/  
THE CONNECTION (FILE PHOTO)  
Diane E. Burkley Alejandro, ACLU People Power

# What Could Mass Deportation Plans Mean Here?

## Local officials emphasize welcoming policies.

BY MERCIA HOBSON  
THE CONNECTION

Local, county and state elected officials, organizations, faith-based clergy and others across the United States, including those regionally in Virginia, are bracing for a possible surge in deportations of undocumented immigrants. Could it begin as early as Inauguration Day 2025, Jan. 20, when the incoming president will assume office?

On Sunday, Dec. 8, President-elect Trump said that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) would be “starting with the criminals.”

Jeff McKay, chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, said on Dec. 12, “Our Board will respond to anything the Trump Administration does that threatens the safety of our residents. Per my Board Matter of Nov.19, the County is currently exploring all options to defend our most vulnerable residents from potentially harmful initiatives by the Trump Administration, including the promised mass deportations. As I wrote in the Board Matter, while immigration enforcement targeting the small number of dangerous criminals is sensible, indiscriminate and widespread enforcement will, in fact, harm public safety through a reduction in cooperation with local law enforcement. Our Board recently adopted our federal Legislative Program, with new language as a result of the Board Matter that specifically addresses some of the concerns I’ve heard from our community regarding mass, indiscriminate deportations.”

Also on Dec. 12, Trump indicated that he could try to use the military and local law enforcement to carry out deportations, saying, “I will go up to the maximum level of what the law allows.” With that, a flurry of responses began across Northern Virginia.

On Dec. 12, Sen. Scott Surovell (D-34), Virginia Senate Majority Leader and attorney, said that the “arrest and deportation of undocumented immigrants is a federal issue.”

Surovell added that “one in four people who live in Fairfax County was born in another country.” Fairfax County’s diversity is a

strength, he said. “Immigrants move to Fairfax County due to its welcoming nature and the economic opportunities that exist here.”

Calling a locality a “sanctuary” amounts to political name calling. “State and local law enforcement do not play a role in deportation proceedings, are already suffering from major post-pandemic personnel shortages and do not have the bandwidth or even the jurisdiction to enforce federal law,” Surovell said. “It is also my understanding that local law enforcement regularly notifies federal immigration authorities if undocumented persons commit violent crimes or serious felonies.”

Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin announced that same day, Dec. 12, his “No Sanctuary Cities” budget proposal. It would require “local law enforcement, sheriffs and jail directors to fully comply with US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detainers and provide notification to ICE 48 hours prior to the release of an undocumented immigrant who commits a crime.

“Additionally, funding will be withheld from localities that purport to be ‘sanctuary’ cities or enact practices impeding cooperation with ICE.” [Source: Fact Sheet: Governor Glenn Youngkin Calls for No Sanctuary Cities]

“We must stop the cycle of violence and crime that is being enabled by some local governments,” Youngkin wrote. “Virginia is not a sanctuary state, and we must be clear that we will not allow localities to become ‘sanctuary cities.’ If local governments turn their backs on their citizens in order to pander to pro-illegal immigrant groups, we will cut off their funding.”

“The DCJS Director will be required to withhold 599 funding to those localities, and the Compensation Board will be required to withhold state funding to local and regional jails,” Youngkin’s proposal states.

The state legislature would have to approve Youngkin’s proposal.

Fairfax County, we are regularly reminded, is the safest jurisdiction of its size, notwithstanding (or perhaps in part because of) policies or the fact that one-in-four residents were born in another country.

Youngkin’s statement follows an earlier opinion issued by Virginia Attorney General



PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON (FILE PHOTO 2018)

U.S. Customs and Border Protection officer speaks with a Fairfax County resident.

Jason Miyares on Sept. 5, 2024, to the Sheriff of Bedford County, who asked whether a sheriff is “prohibited by law from cooperating with federal immigration authorities by notifying United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers, after receipt of an ICE-issued detainer related to an inmate into the sheriff’s custody, or the release of that inmate in order for ICE to attain custody of the inmate prior to or upon the release.”

Miyares writes, “It is my opinion that a sheriff is expressly authorized to cooperate with federal officials by providing them pre-release notification as requested by the detainer.”

Supervisor Pat Herrity (R-Springfield) heralded Youngkin’s announcement. “I applaud Governor Glenn Youngkin for his efforts to protect our communities from repeat, violent offenders. ... I opposed the Trust Policy from the beginning primarily because of its impact on public safety.”

The trust policy is designed to protect “the safety and security of all immigrant

residents,” as noted on the Fairfax County website.

“The Board of Supervisors passed the Trust Policy in 2021 to codify Fairfax County’s commitment to the safety and security of all immigrant residents. The Trust Policy contains specific standards to ensure that employees do not voluntarily cooperate with enforcement of federal immigration laws.” [https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/topics/immigrants-fairfax-county]

Fairfax County commits to protecting the rights of all residents regardless of their immigration or citizenship status, said Karol Escalante, director of Immigrant Community Affairs for Fairfax County. “I also guarantee that everyone has an equitable opportunity to participate in the county’s economic vitality. The trust policy ensures that immigrant residents can access county benefits and services knowing that the information they share will not be disclosed to Federal immigration officials,” said Escalante.

CHILDREN'S & TEENS CONNECTION



Munireh Aghdasi, 14, 9th grade, Fairfax, VA, digital art, Langley high school, "Searching"

2024 HERNDON WINTERMARKT



PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION  
The music and singing of Chasing Magic has guests at the 2024 Herndon Wintermarkt dancing in the street.

**THE CONNECTION**  
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# COMMUNITY NEWS



PHOTO BY MERCIA HOBSON/THE CONNECTION

The stall shopper at the 2024 Herndon WinterMarket will be hurrying home with her goodies.

## 2024 Herndon WinterMarket

### Community-organized event dusts the town with magic

BY MERCIA HOBSON  
THE CONNECTION

The 2024 Herndon WinterMarket had adults and children dancing in the street on Saturday, Dec. 14, as darkness fell in historic downtown Herndon.

The community-volunteer-organized event brought the magic atmosphere of a European Christmas market to over 10,000 people who gathered on Lynn Street from noon to 7 p.m.

Several things set the Herndon Winter-

Market apart from other local WinterMarkts, beginning with a no-charge entry.

Herndon WinterMarket showcased a diverse array of vendors, many with authentic European items, including hand-crafted wares, holiday decorations, delicacies, artwork, and pure indulgences.

Live entertainment featured German bands in traditional Bavarian garb, such as Alt Washingtonia Schuhplattler Verein, and holiday music by professionals, emerging artists, and local students.

Vendors sold small drinks of hot Glühwein, the German mulled wine traditionally served at stalls at Christmas markets across Germany and Austria to keep people warm as they shopped and socialized.

The 2024 Herndon WinterMarket, hosted by the Dulles Regional Chamber of Commerce in cooperation with the Town of Herndon, could not have happened without

# NoVa Families for Safe Streets Releases TRENDS Study

## VDOT's Traffic Records Electronic Data System

MERCIA HOBSON  
THE CONNECTION

Northern Virginia Families for Safe Streets released its inaugural study on VDOT's Traffic Records Electronic Data System (TRENDS) data of pedestrian and bike crashes in Fairfax, Alexandria, and Arlington.

"The total number of pedestrian and bike fatalities in Northern Virginia since Dec. 4, 2024, the year-to-date, is twice the total for all of 2023... From 2021 to July 2024, Fairfax has more than double the total number of ped / bike crashes than Arlington and Alexandria combined.

On a 100,000 per capita population basis, Arlington has twice as many casualties as Fairfax, and Alexandria has about 70 percent more than Fairfax, according to <https://novasafeststreets.org/fairfax-trends/>. Still,

On Wednesday evening, Dec. 4, Fairfax County police investigated their 20th pedestrian or cyclist fatality in Fairfax County, that of a 14-year-old girl who attended Lake Braddock Secondary School. She attempted to cross Old Keene Mill Road and walked into the westbound lanes, according to police reports. The driver of a Ford Fusion struck the pedestrian while traveling westbound on Old Keene Mill Road. The driver remained on the scene, and alcohol and speed do not appear to be factors in the crash for the driver.

NoVA FSS is asking residents to urge transportation and enforcement officials, as well as local and state elected officials, to implement "comprehensive and effective solutions. ... Making greater investment today in street calming design and technology such as automatic speed enforcement (speed cameras) will save lives tomorrow."



SCREENSHOT ACTIVEFAIRFAX TRANSPORTATION PLAN

## Fairfax County Updates Its ActiveFairfax Transportation Plan

Would you feel comfortable walking on any of these and others? Survey feedback and comments will be accepted through Dec. 20, 2024. Fairfax County is updating and combining its Bicycle Master Plan and Countywide Trails Plan into one: the ActiveFairfax Transportation Plan. Visit <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/transportation/bike-walk/activefairfax> to provide feedback on a very brief county survey; leave a comment using the Interactive Network Map; or call 703-890-5898, Project Code 7268 to leave a recorded message with your comments.

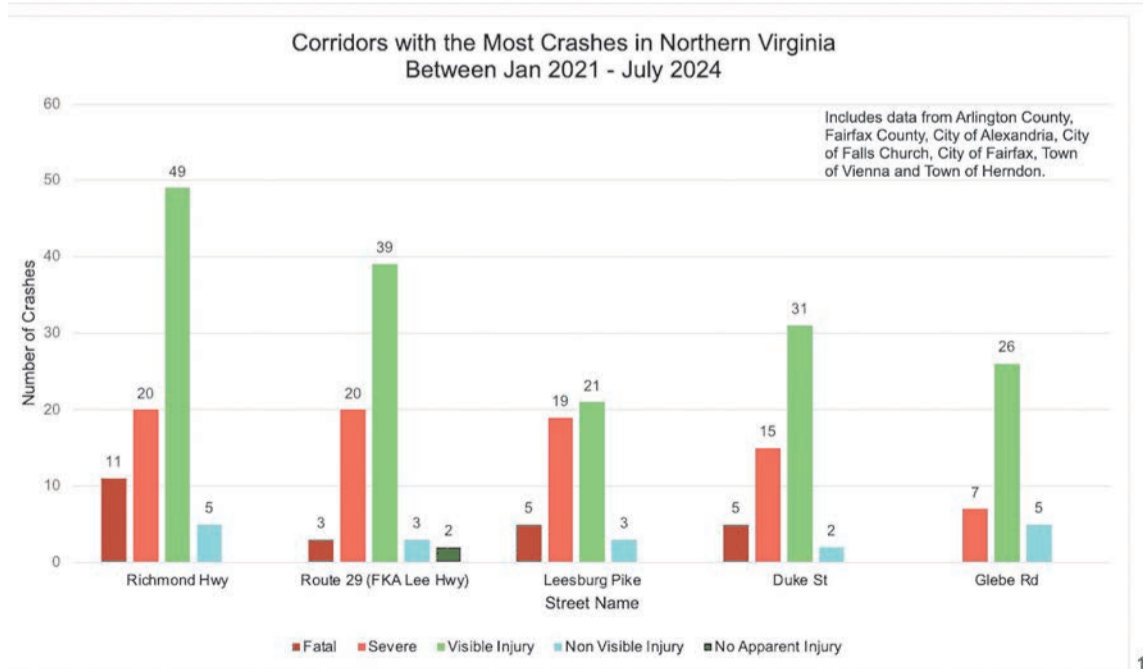
— MERCIA HOBSON

funding support from key sponsors Northwest Federal Credit Union-Platinum, Lidl-Gold, and others, as well as in-kind donations and volunteer member support from many local organizations, among them Arts Herndon.

Continue to enjoy the Herndon WinterMarket community feeling by visiting <https://herndonwintermarkt.com/kindercorner/>. There, you can hear stories read by community and public figures and browse craft

ideas and coloring pages.

Or listen to Chasing Magic at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TfMnIOeTM8w> to hear the local band that brought classic songs to the crowd and had them dancing in the street that evening, creating memories for all. "We love how the community comes together to make this a new Herndon family tradition and hope to see everyone next year," Keven Leblanc, event spokesperson and organizer, said.



SCREENSHOT NOVA FAMILIES FOR SAFE STREETS FAIRFAX

The total pedestrian and bike fatalities in Northern Virginia since year-to-date Dec. 4, 2024, are twice the total for all of 2023.



Herndon Town Councilmember Doneilla Scherff asked if the town adheres to Fairfax County's Trust Policy.



Martha-Helene Stapleton- "This is our neighborhood; we don't want to live in fear."



Lorena Brady- "Do all that it takes to protect our families regardless of where we come from."



Roberto advocates for the New Virginia Majority.



William Camponi- "Is this just virtue signaling?... We have a lot of red lights; they are immigration red lights."



Brandon Anderson- "There needs to be a clear line, and we need to have the moral courage to defend ourselves and our community and say, if you break the law, we will cooperate with ICE and we will deport you."

# Fear, Emotion Play Out in Herndon

Town's immigrant residents plead for protection; others counter, 'You break the law, you are deported.'

BY MERCIA HOBSON  
THE CONNECTION

Immigrants and others spoke out about safety and deportation at the Town of Herndon's public hearing. On Tuesday, Dec. 10, the Town of Herndon held its final 2024 public hearing. Forty-seven percent of the town's population reportedly are immigrants; some are living there legally, and others are not. The town has a police department, but the Fairfax County Sheriff's Office manages the town's interim detention center and oversees its operations. Suspects are transferred to the Fairfax County Detention Center.

Town residents, some members of the New Virginia Majority, testified in Spanish with an English translation; others spoke in English, saying they were concerned about

the incoming federal administration's impact on their migrant community. They advocated against local support for federal immigration enforcement, reiterated the need for the town's police department to avoid collaborating with ICE and for the department to protect all migrant families, and called for the town's council, staff, and police department to reaffirm their commitment to the Fairfax County Trust Policy.

Martha Helene Stapleton, organizer of a prayer vigil and community meeting held after the Nov 18 abduction and rape, voiced concerns about public safety. "Immigrants are reluctant to report crimes... We are all impacted if crimes go unreported and criminals prey on vulnerable communities... We don't want to live in fear," she said.

Lorena Brady testified, "This town government must implement solutions and

policies that will prevent extremism. ... The resolution should ... make explicit opposition to mass deportations and targeting of law-abiding neighbors and families specifically, ... oppose legislation that would mandate local governments to enforce federal immigration laws ... oppose legislation for executive branch efforts that focus limited immigration enforcement resources on deporting law-abiding immigrants, rather than on the small number who have committed violent crimes."

Roberto (no last name provided) said. "Students should ... not be worried about whether ICE will visit their home or school and take their parents away ... We are here to hold the Town of Herndon to the guidelines of the Fairfax County Trust Policy... Do not allow family separation or suffering just because of our migrant status."

Brandon Anderson countered saying, "We're a nation of immigrants, and we're also a nation of laws... The perpetrator of the sexual assault had committed one misdemeanor and two felonies before he went on to assault a woman in our community. He should have been deported. He was not, and he hurt someone. This is not an academic exercise. There needs to be a clear line, and we need to have the moral courage to defend ourselves and our community and say, "If you break the law, we will cooperate with ICE, and we will deport you."

Councilmember Doniella Scherff requested a confirmation statement from the Town Attorney, Lesa Yeatts: "As a town, we are already abiding by the Trust Policy that the county has adopted and that they're building on and going forward. Is that accurate?"

"I believe that is accurate in practice," Yeatts said.

In a vote of 6-0, the Town Council approved Resolution 24-G-72, affirming the Town of Herndon's commitment to creating a safe and welcoming community for all.

# What Could Mass Deportation Plans Mean Here?

FROM PAGE 4

According to the FAIRFAX COUNTY DRAFT RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES AND PRINCIPLES FOR THE 119 CONGRESS DECEMBER 3, 2024:

\* Oppose large-scale immigration enforcement actions that increase fear among all immigrants, leading to a reduction in trust and cooperation with localities, hindering law enforcement's ability to combat crime and keep the community safe, and diverting resources from focusing on the small number of undocumented immigrants who have committed violent crimes. Recognizing the criticality of this issue, the County has adopted the Public Trust and Confidentiality Policy, which increases cooperation and communication between immigrant populations and County agencies (including the Fairfax County Police Department)

Page 21-22: Immigration

❖ Oppose actions that would compromise the County's ability to deliver local government programs and services that benefit or protect the community as a whole.

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❖ Oppose legislation that would mandate local governments to enforce federal immigration laws, especially in the area of law enforcement.

❖ Oppose legislation or Executive Branch efforts that focus limited immigration enforcement resources on deporting law-abiding immigrants rather than on the small number who have committed violent crimes.

The ACLU of Virginia responded to the Youngkin administration's statements of Dec. 12. ACLU of Virginia Senior Immigrants' Rights Attorney Sophia Gregg released the following statement: "The Youngkin administration's proposal to force Virginia police to do the federal government's job at Virginians' expense doesn't stand a chance in a state with such a long history of valuing immigrants. With more than 1 million immigrants living in the Commonwealth today – more than 75 percent living here for longer than a decade – it's clear that Gov. Youngkin's proposal is simple fearmongering divorced from the reality of who Virginians are today. "We look forward to working with lawmakers during this year's legislative

session to keep Virginia one of the safest and most economically prosperous states in the country, a welcoming place for immigrants, and a home for us all."

In response to Governor Youngkin's budget proposal banning "sanctuary cities" in Virginia, CASA released the following statement from Luis Aguilar, Virginia Director:

"CASA stands firmly against Governor Glenn Youngkin's harmful budget proposal, which seeks to penalize Virginia cities and counties for fostering trust between the Commonwealth of Virginia and its diverse communities. This plan is misguided, threatening public safety. Having TRUST policies in place means community members, no matter what they look like or what country they are from, can feel safe reporting crimes to police, taking their children to school, and getting treated at a hospital. ... By targeting localities like Richmond and Fairfax, which have chosen to prioritize trust and public safety by not proactively cooperating with ICE, Governor Youngkin's proposal puts lives at risk. How can we expect anyone, immigrant or otherwise, to reach out to law en-

forcement in times of need when they fear deportation or discrimination? Trust is the foundation of any safe community..."

CASA member Nerbir shares, "For many years in Virginia we have fought to pass laws in favor of our immigrant community, such as driver's licenses in the Commonwealth and the TRUST policy in Fairfax County. However, with this proposal to end those programs, I feel unsafe and afraid knowing that I may be at risk of deportation, and that my family may be separated."

Diane E. Burkley Alejandro, a member of the Fairfax Virginia People Power Group, said, "Americans clearly want to fix the immigration system. Does that mean they support Trump's plans to use the military to indiscriminately round up immigrants and put them in detention (concentration?) camps, conduct raids on schools, hospitals and churches, separate children from their parents and deport immigrants without the due process the Constitution provides them? We don't think Americans support these actions, but time will tell. What I will say is that these actions are immoral and illegal."

# ALDRIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

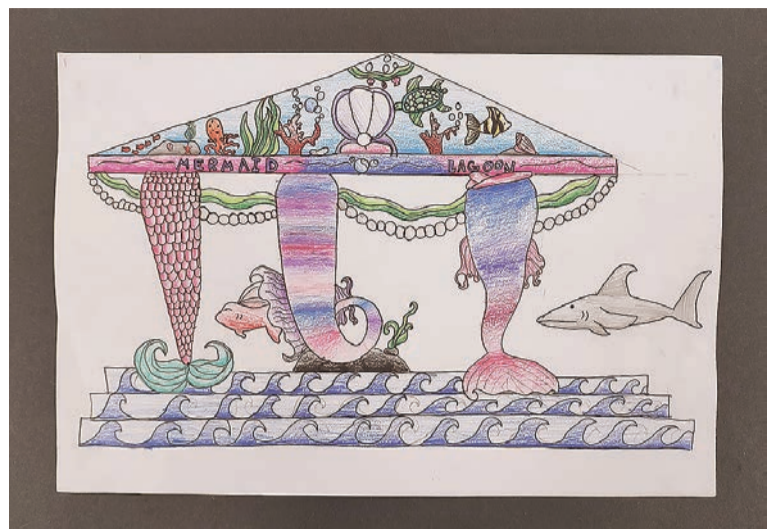
Reston VA

## My Happy Poem

By Allison Melara Vega



I love my teachers.  
 I love my life.  
 I am grateful for my family.  
 I am grateful for my school.  
 I am grateful for Mother Nature.  
 I am grateful for God.  
 I love my principal.  
 I love animals.

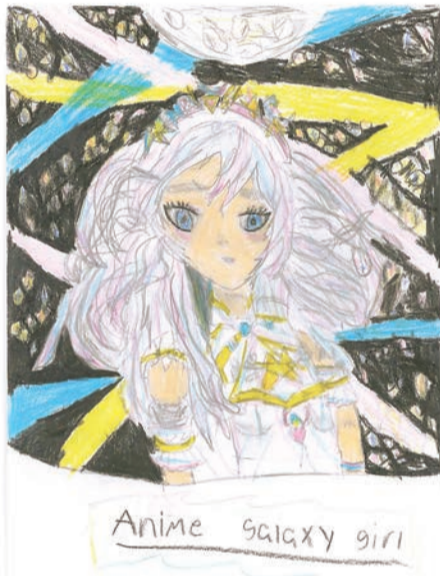


Viviana Scully Age 10 5th Grade Reston Aldrin ES Color Pencil Drawing Mr Baybrook

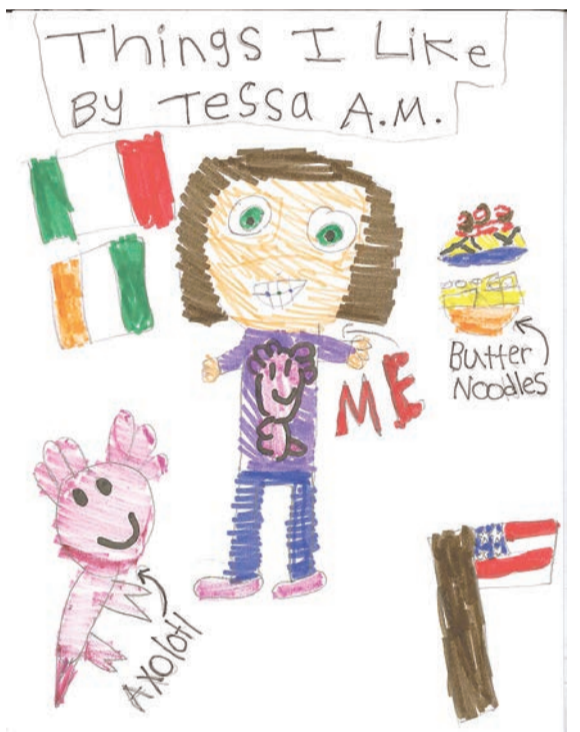
Allison Melara Vega, Age 9, Grade 4, Reston, Aldrin ES, My Happy Poem, Teacher Ochoa



Rowan Petross Age 9 4th Grade Reston Aldrin ES Wire Sculpture Mr Baybrook



Summer Hochstrasser, Age 9, Grade 4, Reston, Aldrin ES, Color Pencil Drawing, Ochoa



Tessa Mongin, Age 10, Grade 4, Reston, Aldrin ES, Color Pencil Drawing, Ochoa

## This Year I'll Find Him

ANANNYA CHAUDHARI  
 AGE 12, GRADE 6, MR. O'DAY

Christmas is here!  
 This year I know I'll find him.  
 I wake up at midnight  
 And look out the window.  
 Everything is snowy white.  
 I slowly creep down the stairs,  
 So quiet nobody could hear me.  
 And I hide and wait behind a fluffy chair.  
 I feel my eyes start to close,  
 But then I hear a soft jingle  
 Come from behind the decorated Christmas tree  
 And peek but all I see is  
 Blur of red and white  
 Escape through the narrow chimney.  
 All the sugar cookies have disappeared  
 And the glass of milk is gone.  
 I see many colorful gifts piled on top of each other.  
 In all of this rush I bump into the tree.  
 Clash! A glass ornament falls down and breaks.  
 "Who is it?" Mom yells out.  
 I dash for my room.  
 I act like nothing happened.  
 Maybe I'll catch him next year?

## The Meaning Of Christmas

AUBREY CHARLTON  
 AGE 11, GRADE 6, MR. O'DAY

When you were a little kid  
 you would look out the window on Christmas Eve,  
 excited by the fact that  
 when you wake up the next morning,  
 presents will be under the tree.

As you grow older  
 you look out the same window as before,  
 but realize that you don't have  
 that same electric feeling  
 as when you were young.

As you sit  
 warmed by the fireplace  
 you realize that Christmas isn't about the presents,  
 rather it is about  
 spending quality time with family,  
 friends and eating good food.

Everyone talks about what  
 has been going on in their lives  
 And how they've been doing.

As it gets dark  
 you say goodbye

to your friends and family  
 and you wish that the day could have lasted longer  
 and friends and family could have stayed longer  
 but then you realize that next year  
 you will see everyone again.

## Lighting up Christmas

BENJAMIN KAMP  
 AGE 11, GRADE 6, MR. O'DAY

It is getting cold and snowy bright on this Christmas Eve.  
 I'm getting told that we are going to the Reston, Virginia  
 holiday walk where there are lights mounted on these holiday-themed shapes.

There are lights of Santa Claus taking a bite of holiday cookies.

There is a light of Santa feeding a carrot to rudolph.  
 We are going to get food and I see my friends but I know  
 not to ask to join them.

because I don't want to leave my family on this very special night.

It's getting late, and I'm getting tired.  
 It's an easy walk right back to the comfort of home.

I climb into bed, hoping the big man will come.  
 I dream of getting the stuff I love, with the people I cherish  
 time with the most.



## ALDRIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

FROM PAGE 8

I wake up, and jump up to realize it is way too early.  
I want to go downstairs but I know that is wrong.  
I fall back to sleep. I wake up later and oh yay it is finally time.

I run around screaming, It's time! Hip, hip, hurray!"  
Everyone slowly but surely walks to me.  
My siblings and I assemble to the top step and sit down  
as my parents go to the bottom and my dad takes out his phone  
to take one million photos of my siblings and I.  
I was a bit worried that I got coal.  
As I walk to the tree I say, "Thank you, Santa."  
I rip open the wrapping and look inside oh my gosh it's a pogo stick I jumped in joy.  
I guess that's what Christmas is all about.

## A Heartwarming Christmas

BENJAMIN HAFSTAD  
AGE 11, GRADE 6, MR. O'DAY

Christmas.  
I'm sleeping in my brother's bed  
With my brother  
Because my grandma's at my house,  
In my bed.  
I wake up at 4:00 am.  
I wait and wait and wait  
Until my brother finally asks,  
"Are you awake?"  
I slowly start pestering him  
About why he took so long.  
Then we tip-toe  
To our parents room,  
Who ask why we are up so early.  
We respond at the same time saying  
"It's Christmas,"  
With a delightful tone.

They slowly get out of bed.  
My dad says he needs to check  
To see if Santa has come this year.  
We tell him we are old enough  
To find out for ourselves.  
We quickly and dramatically  
Stampede down the stairs,  
And look under the tree.

We see all of the presents,  
It floods our hearts with joy.  
Santa has come.  
We all settle on the couch,  
And call our family,  
Who couldn't come this year.  
We take turns opening presents  
All morning long.  
Until it nears the end at 10:00 am.  
My mom still has most of her gifts!  
She always waits till the end  
So she has the time to herself.  
She opens them and tells everyone  
How grateful she is that we are all together.

We say goodbye to our relatives over call,  
Thank them once again  
And try all of our presents.  
Whether they are pogo sticks or socks.

My dad is making pancakes,  
And we all enjoy the feast.  
Eggs, berries, smoked salmon, and pancakes.  
We talk about our presents,  
And what we thought.  
As we taste the warm, buttery pancakes.  
We realize it will be another year  
Until this warm, loving, experience.

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## TERRASET ELEMENTARY



Roseya Underhill, 11, Grade 6, Reston, Succulents, oil pastel on paper, Terraset Elementary School, Reston, Va., Anne Regan art teacher



Annabelle Marshall, 12, Grade 6, Reston, Succulent, oil pastel on paper, Terraset Elementary School, Reston, VA, Anne Regan art teacher



Lena Dennis, 12, Grade 6, Reston, Succulent, oil pastel on paper, Terraset Elementary School, Reston, VA, Anne Regan art teacher



Maggie Van Nuys, 11, Grade 6, Reston, Succulent, oil pastel on paper, Terraset Elementary School, Reston, VA, Anne Regan art teacher



Matthew Kardel, 11, Grade 6, Reston, Succulents, oil pastel on paper, Terraset Elementary School, Reston, VA, Anne Regan art teacher

## Snow Day

ELOISE PARK  
AGE 12, GRADE 6, MR. O'DAY

My best friend Hannah is at the door.  
My mom had my snow jacket all ready for me.  
She helps me put on my jacket while I start putting on my hat,

I put on my hat backwards  
Pulling it off but leaving friction in my hair.  
I pat down my hair getting Shocked each time.  
I put on one glove, Struggling to put on the other.  
I put the tip of my glove Between my teeth  
Pulling down on the glove To get it fully in my hand  
Leaving a taste of the laundry detergent  
On my tongue.

We leave my house and head to my backyard,  
We take a shortcut  
To what everybody calls it  
The big hill.  
We get there, With many kids already beating us.

I get on my sled  
Knees first,  
Waiting for Hannah to push me.  
She pushes me  
I feel the wind go through my hair,  
Squinting my eyes Because of the cold air.  
I was already sweating Because of having to walk up  
The big hill with a heavy sled.  
Hannah does the same as me,  
She goes on her knees.  
I push with a loud grunt,  
Hearing her scream with excitement.  
Hannah started complaining

About snow in her boots,  
So we start walking home.  
We are both exhausted,  
We arrived to my house  
And got settled and  
Feeling satisfied having the best snow day.

## A Perfect Christmas

HANA DZANO  
AGE 12, GRADE 6, MR. O'DAY

I slowly opened my eyes  
and saw my little sister  
running around my room.  
"Go back to bed," I moaned.  
"But it's Christmas!" she exclaimed.  
Slowly taking in what she said  
I realize what she was talking about  
and bolt down the stairs and  
fall flat on my face!  
"OW!" I exclaim.  
my little brother taunts me.  
"Ha ha!"  
I get up and make my way to the Christmas tree,  
to see that my baby sister  
is chewing on the presents.  
You have got to be kidding me.  
Well, at least mom made pancakes!  
I head to the kitchen and see...  
SCRAMBLED EGGS!?  
So much for a perfect Christmas.  
I am going back to bed.

SEE ALDRIN ES, PAGE 13

THE CONNECTION ❖ DECEMBER 18-24, 2024 ❖ 9

# CHILDREN'S ART



Madeleine Ahrens, 17, Junior, Vienna, Guiding Light, acrylic on canvas [Madison High School, Vienna, VA]



Ethan Osurman, 17, Junior, McLean, Autumn Will Soon Be Gone, medium format film photograph, Langley High School, McLean, VA, Kelly Mulligan, photography teacher, HS



Joseph Li, 14, Grade 9, McLean, Reflection of imperfection, color pencil, TJ high school, Alexandria, VA, Yan Sui, Art teacher



Laura Yang, 13, Grade 8, Oakton, Dancing Across The Star, acrylic on canvas. Sui Art Studio, Oakton, VA, Yan Sui, art teacher.



Aiden Law, 12, Grade 7, Great Falls, School: Cooper Middle School  
Artwork Name: Eco-Friendly Future Development



Isaac Law  
Mushroom Trampoline Park



Isaac Law  
Shadow Story

Isaac Law, 9, Grade 4, Great Falls, Great Falls Elementary School

He was *The Little Prince*, and he loved

**ART**

Once given an *Orange Notebook*, he began to create.

And with every pencil stroke, the notebook became *a spell book*

He had developed what they called

**A Habit of Art.**

Every day, he created *HEARTFELT ART*, letting his *Soul* spill out on paper

His favorite piece was his all-too-clever "*Artist depiction*", created of his crown and its twisted horror, its price, its burden. His hatred for his title bled into his art, influencing it.

The cruelty to royalty was **UPLIFTING**, more than any power could've been.

But at the end of the day, it was all

**FICTION**

It was *Almost Perfect*. But he had not been born to be an artist.

He was *The Little Prince*. Princes were meant to be immersed in

**Preparation for the Future**

He was on the **PATH TO THE** throne, and there was no escape.

In truth, it turned out that they were *Hardly Children*, but rather a **FANTASY** of perfection.

His father took his drawings from him. "This **Ends** here," he'd said.

"A ruler must be **Commanding**."

The **Countdown** began. He was forbidden from drawing.

**CASUALTY**

In the end, it was a **CASUALTY** of creativity.

He never did become a very good ruler.

Naba Farooqui, 16, Junior, Centreville, A Prince's Burden, poetry | Westfield High School, Chantilly, VA, Kimberly Watkins, Creative Writing Teacher, HS

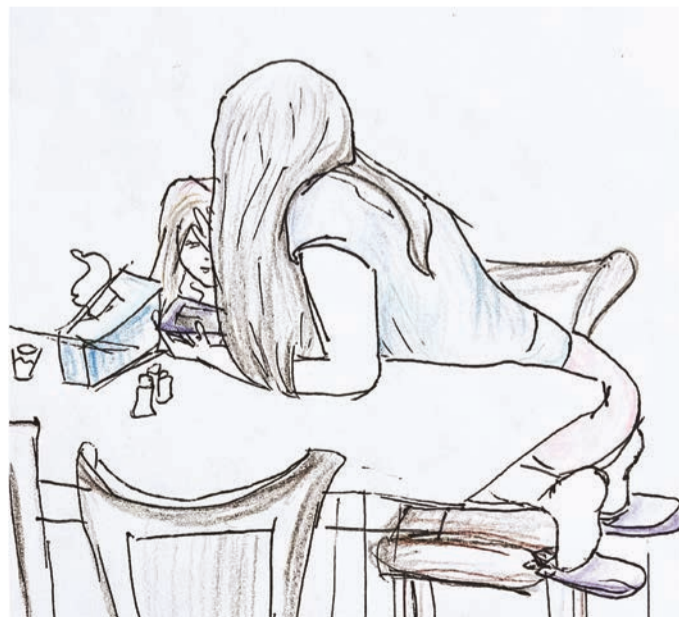
Angelina Lin, is 13 from Vienna. She loves to draw from her imaginations, observations and friends from her daily life. She has been participating in Children's Connection since Kindergarten.



Freedom by Angelina Lin



Printmaking by Angelina Lin



Girls Chat by Angelina Lin



## Public Notice

### Updated weight limits on Virginia bridges and culverts

In accord with state and federal law, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) has imposed new or changed existing weight restrictions and installed new signage indicating the updated weight restrictions on the following bridges and culverts (structures) in Virginia within the last 30 days.

Jurisdiction	Fed Struc Id	Route #	Route Name	Crossing	Posted Date
GRAYSON	8878	678	FOX CREEK ROAD	MIDDLE FOX CREEK	12/2/2024
GRAYSON	8755	58	HIGHLANDS PKWY	STREAM & CATTLE PASS	11/19/2024
LEE	10775	600	ROUTE 600	BLACKWATER CREEK	11/19/2024
BRUNSWICK	3662	613	GILLS BRIDGE ROAD	NOTTOWAY RIVER	11/14/2024
LEE	10759	70	ROUTE 70	POWELL RIVER	11/13/2024
BEDFORD	2798	680	MURRELLS GAP ROAD	SHEEP CREEK	11/13/2024

The list above is not a comprehensive list of all structures with weight restrictions in the Commonwealth but shows only structures that have new or changed weight restrictions within the last 30 days. The list contains only basic structure identification and location information and the date the new or changed weight restriction and signage became effective.

For a full listing of all bridge and culvert weight restrictions with detailed information about specific structures, including location data and actual weight limits, visit [vdot.virginia.gov](http://vdot.virginia.gov) and navigate to Traffic and Travel/For freight operators/Truck restrictions. This page references a posted structures report and a GIS map tool that contain detailed information about restricted structures in Virginia. To receive email notifications regarding new or updated weight restrictions for structures statewide, complete the sign-up form on the web page.

Notices regarding bridges and culverts with new or updated weight restrictions are published monthly by VDOT. For additional information or questions, please contact [haulingpermits@vdot.virginia.gov](mailto:haulingpermits@vdot.virginia.gov) or the Load Rating Program Manager, Manjil Devkota at 804-786-4064.

*The Virginia Department of Transportation is committed to ensuring that no person is excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any of its programs or activities on the basis of race, color, or national origin, as protected by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. If you need further information on VDOT's Title VI Program or special assistance for persons with disabilities or limited English proficiency, please contact the Virginia Department of Transportation's Title VI Program Specialist at 804-786-2730 or [corina.herrera@vdot.virginia.gov](mailto:corina.herrera@vdot.virginia.gov).*

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# JAMES MADISON HIGH SCHOOL



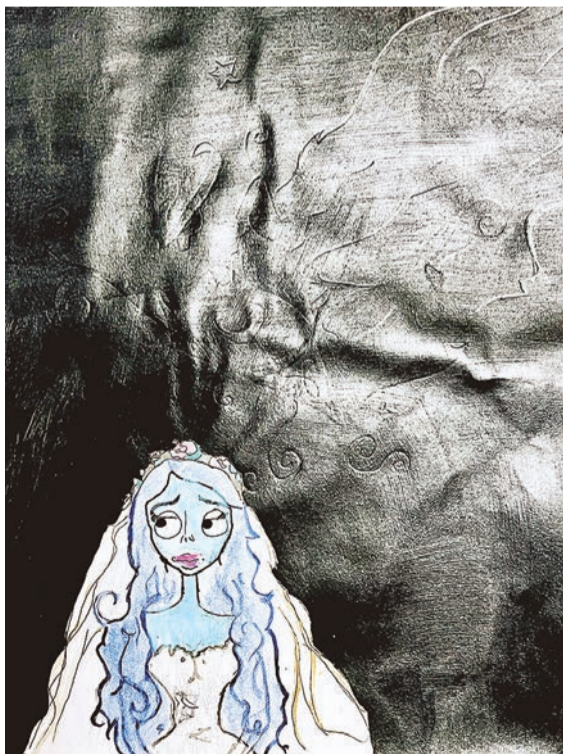
Kevin Kim, 15, Grade 10, Vienna, Peace, digital photo



Kevin Kim, 15, Grade 10, Vienna, Worm's Eye View, digital photo



Kevin Kim, 15, Grade 10, Vienna, Untitled, mixed media on canvas



Nancy Ramirez-Batres, 16, Grade 11, Vienna, Untitled 2, mixed media on paper

TEACHER: MARIELLE MARIANO



Kevin Kim, 15, Grade 10, Vienna, Lamp's For Lovers Album, mixed media on canvas



Kevin Kim, 15, Grade 10, Vienna, Lamp's Genso Album, mixed media on canvas



Nancy Ramirez-Batres, 16, Grade 11, Vienna, Untitled 1, mixed media on canvas



Aanvi Dinesh, 13, Grade 8, Carson middle school, Herndon VA  
Art teacher: Yanshun Sui  
Artwork: sketches of my friends



Hana Cho, 17, Grade 12, Vienna, Untitled, acrylic on canvas



Jaidyn Good, 17, Grade 11, Vienna, Untitled 1, graphite and colored pencil on paper



Jaelynn Golley, 16, Grade 11, Vienna, Cooper, digital photo

# HAYCOCK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

GRETCHEN PROCTOR,  
ART TEACHER



Erica Liao Grade 3



Clara Liang Grade 5



Keegan McMahon Grade 5



Ian Montemaggi Grade 6 (Proctor)



Samuel Weng Grade 1 (Proctor)



Zac Lee, 11, Grade 6, McLean, Geology Landform Layers Pizza  
Kent Gardens Elementary School, McLean, Va.

## “Who I am”, poetry

IHAN KANG, 11, GRADE 6, VIENNA,  
LOUISE ARCHER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, VIENNA,  
VA. ANITA SAHAI, HOMEROOM TEACHER, ES

Who I am  
They call me “young”  
Only budding never blooming  
They call me “slow”  
Only crawling never running  
They call me “ugly”  
Only hiding never shining  
They call me “stupid”  
Only playing never learning  
They call me “sad”  
Only frowning never grinning  
They call me “boring”  
Only brooding never joking

But  
They never know that  
I am energetic since I am “young”  
I am observant since I am “slow”  
I am approachable since I am “ugly”  
I am curious since I am “stupid”  
I am sympathetic since I am “sad”  
I am serious since I am “boring”

So

I lift moods for I am energetic  
I embrace surroundings for I am observant  
I make friends for I am approachable  
I invent miracles for I am curious  
I understand others for I am sympathetic  
I lead the world for I am serious  
I am special for who I am

## Musical Dialogues

SIYON (ALICE) KIM, 15, SOPHOMORE,  
MCLEAN,  
MUSICAL DIALOGUES, POETRY  
MCLEAN HIGH SCHOOL, MCLEAN, VA.  
DEREK REAGAN, ENGLISH TEACHER, HS

Grandma’s old music box  
Holds Grandpa’s face in flimsy locks  
Decades have already pulsed by  
Heartbeats come to a slow drag  
The opened music box unleashes  
Dialogues coated in a melody  
That Grandma may have savored too  
I sit in her attic  
Listening to the soothing rhythm  
Soon, I become the sole listener  
Of the old couple’s belated story

## ALDRIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

FROM PAGE 9

## Up to Bat

IVY KAPALKA

AGE 11, GRADE 6, MR. O'DAY

My team is down by three runs.  
The bases are loaded,  
and we have two outs.  
If any of us on the bases get out,  
it’s game over.

Crack!  
I run as soon as I hear  
the ball  
hit the bat.  
My coach is yelling,  
“GO, GO, GO!!”

My foot hits first base,  
then second,  
then third.  
A kick of dirt  
wafts into my nose  
as it drifts up in puffs of dust.

My heart is pounding.  
The opposing team is  
throwing the ball  
sloppily, aimlessly.  
I sprint to home plate,  
adrenaline pumping.

Uh oh,  
the catcher has the ball  
and is waiting to tag me,  
holding her glove out in the air.  
Then I realize,  
this catcher is new.  
She has no experience  
crouching down at the plate,  
tagging players out at home.

And at the last second,  
I slide right under her.  
I then look up at the umpire,  
waiting for him to make the call,

“SAFE!!”  
His arms swing out in a line  
as he calls the play,  
and we run back  
to the dugout, squealing.

SEE ALDRIN ES, PAGE 18

# LAKE ANNE ELEMENTARY

Reston, Va.

KRISTOFER J JOHNSON,  
ART TEACHER



Adriana Claros, Grade 2



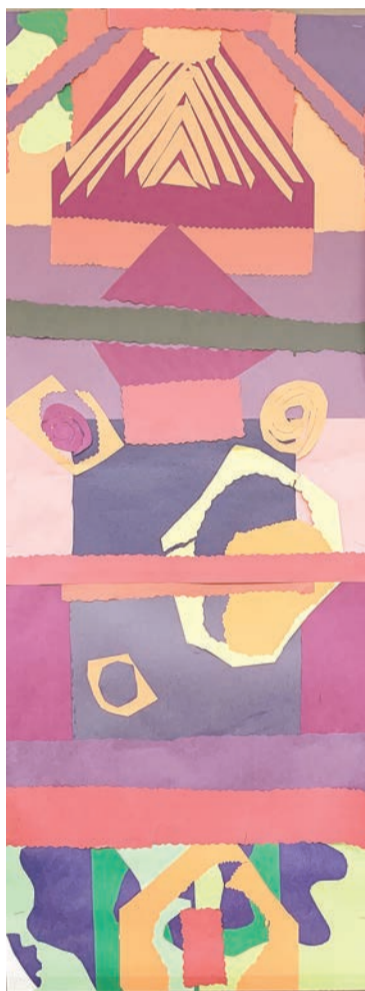
Ashley Mendrano, Grade 3



Maria Zuniga, Grade 6



Josie Capati, Grade 5



Mackenna Kalthof, Grade 5



Lia Alao, Grade 5



Mia Coleman 2, Grade 5

MRS. BOVENZI, COOPER MIDDLE SCHOOL WRITING

## Love for My Parents

ETHAN ZHANG  
7TH GRADE (12), MCLEAN, VIRGINIA

If I asked you to say one person you are grateful for, who would it be? Perhaps it is a close friend who you value dearly, or maybe a teacher that you appreciate. I don't know about you, but the first people that come to mind are my parents.

My parents are the ones who make sacrifices for me. It's important to recognize that no one can replace the role of a loving parent, so having caring parents is something I'm grateful for every day.

In a sense, a parent's life is centered around their child. They devote a large portion of their time to their children's various activities: driving them to school, cooking dinner for them, and helping them with anything they need. Our parents are willing to

do anything to ensure we are healthy and happy every day.

More importantly, our parents are there for us whenever we need it. This is what separates them from our friends; parents are the ones who comfort and take care of us in times of hardship.

No matter what our parents are doing, they're always willing to take time off to comfort us. When we are sick, our parents are the ones to sit at our bedside and give us medicine; when we are downcast, our parents are the ones to wrap us in a warm hug as we cry into their arms; when we are mad, our parents somehow always cheer us up again.

My parents will always be the most precious people in my life. Taking care of a child is not an easy task, and yet my parents manage to juggle it successfully with everything else in life. No matter what happens, my parents constantly make me feel special and

loved. I will always love my parents. Always.

## Good Advice

XINLIANG WANG  
14. GRADE 8, MCLEAN

Your parents probably give you a lot of advice about how to do good in school, do kind things, what not to do and more. My parents also give me a lot of advice.

Advice from my parents is sometimes very annoying, because sometimes parents keep repeating the same thing. For example, my parents always say, "Xinliang, remember to focus on school!" or "Xinliang, Don't play too many video games!", and it sometimes gets really annoying. But I would always say yes, even though my brain was like, "Oh my gosh I know..."

Even though advice from my parents can

get super annoying, I still listen to it, because I understand that my parents want me to be a successful person. I also understand the reason my parents keep saying these things is for my good..

But sometimes my parents give me really good advice, like a life lesson. For example, they explain to me how school is really important and would get me to a great college, or useful advice on how to get better grades. So I really listen to them, and they really help me. I appreciate the advice given from my parents.

From my parents' advice I learned valuable and helpful things, and an advice I would give to others is to always listen to your parents, learn from their good things, and leave the bad things behind. You parents love you more than anybody on earth,

SEE GOOD ADVICE, PAGE 15  
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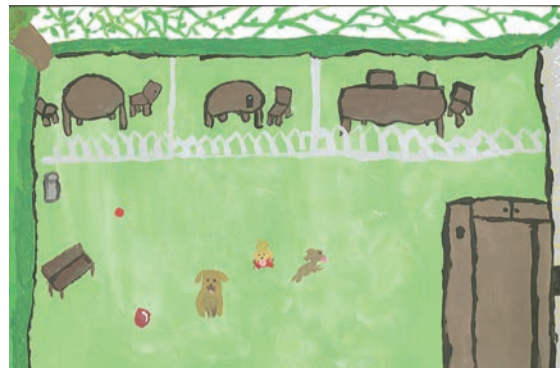
# ARMSTRONG ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Reston, VA

PAUL McCLEMENS  
ART TEACHER, ES



Davane Li, 16, Grade 11 (Junior), Vienna, Ten Years Till Tomorrow, digital mirrorless photograph | Langley High School, McLean, VA, Kelly Mulligan, photography teacher, HS



Alex Kosteva, 11, Grade 6, Reston, Land Development Proposal, tempera on paper



Eamon MacDonell, 10, Grade 4, Reston, Time Traveler, tempera on paper



Oliver Estrada-Londono, 15, Grade 10  
"Untitled"- pen/ink drawing  
Madison High School  
Teacher: Johanna Berzinski, HS



Jennah Villar, 10, Grade 5, Reston, Transformed Environment, tempera on paper



Kaitlyn Mara, 11, Grade 6, Reston, Land Development Proposal, tempera on paper



Sophie Westerman, 11, Grade 5, Reston, Transformed Environment, tempera on paper

## MRS. BOVENZI, COOPER MIDDLE SCHOOL WRITING

FROM PAGE 14

and they always want the best of you.

In conclusion, even though advice from parents can get really annoying or frustrating, they are still good advice that would help you in life. So remember when your parents give you advice to not ignore it, and learn to appreciate it. One day, you will be on your own with no help, so you will have to learn to handle things on your own.

## Stepping Onto the Court

ELLIE VROOM  
12 YEARS OLD, 7TH GRADE, GREAT FALLS

As soon as I step on the tennis court I feel  
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excited, scared, anxious, and contemplated. When I step onto the court, I feel like the whole world is against me. There is no one to rely on but myself. The intensity in players eyes during a match is something else. The discipline I develop from tennis is incomparable to any other sport.

I battle for hours, sprinting across the court, hitting the ball as hard as I can, just to hit into the net. I get small moments to catch my breath. Each time I lose my match, it feels like the end of the world, and quitting seems like the only logical option. It is a crushing feeling. But when I win, it is the best feeling ever. It makes me feel like I am reunited with my love for tennis. The way tennis forces me to grow both mentally and physically is extraordinary. It makes you become stronger and pushes your boundaries.

Tennis is more than just a game, it's a jour-

ney. It's a challenge, a passion, and a place for me to challenge myself till the end. As soon as I step onto the court, all I can hear from that point is the crisp sound of a ball meeting the racket.

## Food Brings People Together

ABBY LEE  
13 YEARS OLD, 7TH GRADE, GREAT FALLS

The Covid-19 lockdown turned the world upside down, creating invisible barriers between many people. Social connections were instantly severed, leaving millions in isolation. This made it extremely challenging for my family to meet our neighbors when we first moved in 2020.

It had been a long two months since we moved. Our neighbors still had remained under their anonymous mask, which had to change. On Valentine's Day of 2021, many sweet aromas swelled in the air of our house. My family and I baked delicious cookies, cupcakes, and many more treats for a Valentine's Day dessert basket for our neighbors.

New relationships sprouted that day. It created friendships that wouldn't have formed if we didn't give those baskets. It gave us an opportunity to get to know our neighbors and to get acquainted with each other.

Every Valentine's Day, we still bake treats for our neighbors, always looking forward to their delighted expression.

I am grateful for all of the friendships between my neighbors and my family. I am glad that the dessert baskets brought all of us together.



O Meara Nix, photography  
 Disfavor in the Eyes of God



O Meara Nix, photography  
 Warning For External Use Only



Emily Chung, Fallingleaf



Vanguri Pranathi, photography  
 All Eyes On Me



O Meara Nix, Scholastic7



O Meara Nix, photography  
 PERFECTLY IMPERFECT



Kenney Brian, photography  
 Change Is Good

## POEMS

ERIN KWON, 10, 5TH GRADE, CENTREVILLE,  
 GREENBRIAR WEST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, FAIRFAX, VA.  
 MRS. SCOTT, ENGLISH TEACHER

### Winter Never Go Away

Winter is fun all-day  
 Sledding, sliding, skiing, skating  
 Biting winds burn my face.  
 But beneath that bitterness,  
 Sweetness cheers up the world.  
 Holidays have come, what not to enjoy!  
 The scarfs Grandma made,  
 Finally out of the drawer to be worn.  
 The mittens I knit  
 The glorious mistakes.  
 I worked so hard on Bob the snowman,  
 Now waiting to be melted,  
 Why does winter have to go away?  
 Did someone tell it to leave?  
 Winter joy is leaving.  
 My allergies are coming,  
 Winter please stay,  
 Will you?

### My New Friend

I couldn't choose.  
 Fluffy, scaly, furry animals,  
 There were so many!  
 Chinchillas, cats, dogs, rabbits, fish, you name it.  
 I had finally convinced my dear parents,  
 But poor me forgot about what friend I would bring home.  
 What would it be?  
 A kitten's purr, soft and cozy,  
 Or a puppy's endless joy?  
 A statue-like lizard, a quiet companion in a glass box?  
 I imagined the sound of little feet  
 Pattering in my house, waiting for me  
 But which would be the perfect one to share my stories with?  
 The decision weighed like I was holding the pet store with one  
 pinky.  
 Would I be able to get my friend all the care it needed?  
 Would they be happy with me, their new family and friend?  
 I could see myself playing, laughing,  
 Sharing secrets with a pet who'd listen and understand,  
 But each one felt like a good match and interesting partner,  
 A path untraveled, a companion yet to be met.  
 So I stood there, heart full of hopes,  
 Not knowing which friend would fit me best,  
 I couldn't choose.  
 But  
 knowing, one would find me,  
 And I would know, it was meant to be with that one distinct  
 "Hiss."



# COLVIN RUN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Vienna

VICTORIA CHO,  
ART TEACHER



Benjamin Choi, 5, Kindergarten, Vienna, Winter Self-Portrait, mixed media (oil pastel, crayon, and relief printmaking on paper)



Lana Safa, 5, Kindergarten, Great Falls, Winter Self-Portrait, mixed media (oil pastel, crayon, and relief printmaking on paper)



Reese Orban, 6 Kindergarten, Great Falls, Imaginary Friend Collage, paper collage



Louisa Shirey, 6, Grade 1, Great Falls, Family Portrait, tempera paint on paper



Feng-Yu Chen, 6, Grade 1, Vienna, Family Portrait, tempera paint on paper



Lauren Ko, 10, Grade 4, Great Falls, Timeline Collage, paper collage



Jenny Erm, 11, Grade 6, Vienna, Dream Box, ceramics



## Passing Spirits

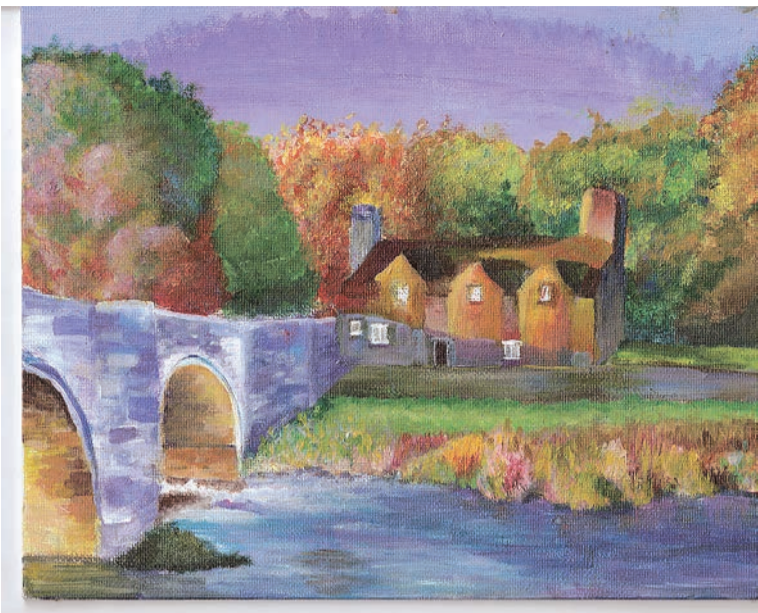
Alyssa Sun, 16, Junior, Herndon, Passing Spirits, photography  
Langley High School, McLean, VA,  
Kelly Mulligan, photography teacher

## Lost in the Algorithm

By VERITY OH, 15, SOPHOMORE, MCLEAN HIGH SCHOOL

Thecla Prentiss, English Teacher  
I wander through the flashy greetings  
Controversial headlines of the newest issues  
New recipes for the creamiest pesto pasta  
I click in, lured into the labyrinth  
An endless array of content appears before me  
Beckoning me to scroll, swipe, and search  
The rush of dopamine overflows  
And the sweet craving invites me  
Without hesitation, I walk deeper  
The concept of time dissolves into oblivion  
Unaware of a separation from the entrance  
Without any trace of an entry or exit  
I am forever lost inside of the algorithm

# CHILDREN'S & TEENS ART



Rachel Cao, 14, Grade 8 at Luther Jackson Middle School, Vienna, Farm Lodge, acrylic on canvas, Yan's Art Studio, Oakton, VA, Yanshun Sui, art teacher



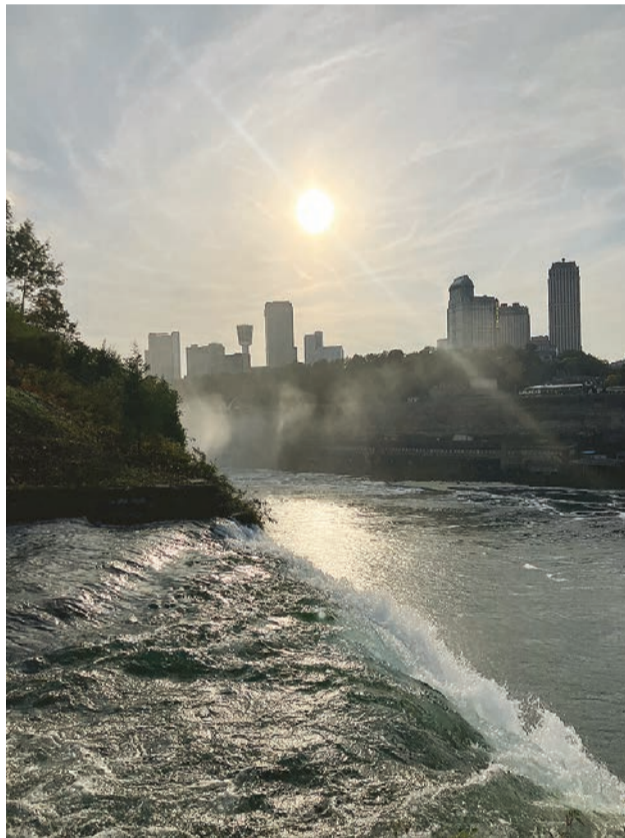
Rachel Cao, 14, Grade 8, Vienna, Self Portrait, Pastel on paper, Yan's Art Studio, Oakton, VA, Yanshun Sui, art teacher



Rachel Cao, 14, Grade 8, Vienna, Poker cards, Marker on paper, Yan's Art Studio, Oakton, VA, Yanshun Sui, art teacher



Marissa Lin, 14, Grade 9, George C Marshall High School, Vienna. "Other fisher," Watercolor Artwork. Yanshun Sui Studio, Vienna



Areli Peralta, 14, Grade 9, Vienna, Niagara Falls, photograph, James Madison High School, Vienna, Va.



Evelyn Kim, 16, Grade 11, Vienna, Sunday Tea, acrylic paint, James Madison High School, Vienna, VA, Sangmin Kim, art teacher Erae Art Studio

## ALDRIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

FROM PAGE 5

My other teammates spit out their taco flavor sunflower seeds and run over to hug me and the other players who were at the bases.

The audience was roaring with excitement. We have won the game, and the championship. After all those practices, and years of softball we have done it.

We line up,

dirt covering our pants, and chalk all brushed away on the ground below us.

My team and I hold out our hands as we said "Good game, good game..." But this time, with more enthusiasm than ever.

After high fiving everyone We stood back on the foul line, lined up again.

The umpire and the coaches

give a speech. Our team giggles when the opposing team's coach talks in an annoyed tone.

I beam as our coach hands us our shining trophies, engraved with the words: Winner of the Softball Championships.

And on the ride home I know, that I am definitely getting Chick-fil-A that day.

SEE ALDRIN ES, PAGE 22

## Yet Another Lie

JASON KIM, 15, SOPHOMORE, DUNN LORING MARSHALL HIGH SCHOOL, FALLS CHURCH, VA

The slope of trickery steepens  
And the cliffs of mockery rise  
The ground begins to close  
Trapping me under  
As the promises shatter  
The boulders I dropped  
On trusting shoulders  
Come crashing down  
A squish is felt  
As cement of delusion pours in  
Sinking, I whimper  
"I'm sorry?"

# CHILDREN'S ARTWORK



Art: Remembering 2024

Artists: Elizabeth Symanski, 14, Grade 9; Katherine Symanski, 12, Grade 6;  
Alexander Symanski, 8, Grade 2; Victoria Grace Symanski, 6, Grade 1

Watercolor on Måla.

School: Homeschool

Location: Great Falls, VA

Teachers: James and Andréa Symanski (MS, MBA, MA)



Kyler Liang, 13, Grade 8, McLean, Stroll Mongolian Grassland, Photography

## Despite

LAUREN KIM, 14, GRADE 8, MCLEAN,  
LONGFELLOW MIDDLE SCHOOL, FALLS CHURCH, VA,  
MOON CHANG, ENGLISH TEACHER

History rolls through the bones of the earth  
Echoing in the spaces long forgotten  
Carved names on the flesh of the world  
Filled with weapons and blood  
Old cities burned to the ground  
People turned into dust  
The past marred by the scars of cruelty  
Violence woven into souls  
Taught to hate difference and  
Fear the unknown and new  
Yet against the fortress of bigotry  
There is resilience  
We stand together as one and march on  
To bring justice for the powerless  
To deny the forces of evil that try to ruin lives  
We learn to embrace ourselves and  
Become stronger  
We have time to try and  
Accept who we are  
To love ourselves  
Despite our flaws.

## Hope

DOWON LEE, 13, GRADE 8, OAKTON,  
LUTHER JACKSON MIDDLE SCHOOL, FALLS CHURCH, VA  
JAN CRAIKER, ENGLISH TEACHER, MS

*"Writing about Hope was truly an enjoyable experience, and I hope my words can inspire a sense of unity among readers."*

Life runs to the future  
But is only understood through the past  
Glance upon the forest of yesterday  
That outlines the flawed  
Yet inimitable  
Figure called humanity  
Chip away the irregularity  
Smooth out the inconformity  
What remains may seem  
As Pandora's box  
But inside lies  
A gleam resembling a sunrise  
Pry open a memory  
And welcome  
Hope



Ethan Jiang, 6, Grade 1, McLean, "Autumn Zoo", Sui Art Studio, Vienna, VA, Yan Sui, Art Teacher

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Rylee Liang, 11, Grade 6, McLean, Butterfly Love, Painting



Rylee Liang, 11, Grade 6, McLean, Blue Oasis, Ceramic

# TIMBER LANE ELEMENTARY

Falls Church, VA

## Art Teacher - Mrs. Baumgartner



Amelia Saxton, Kindergarten,  
Pumpkin Patch Painting



Grant Bacus, 2nd grade, Fall Landscape Painting



Diyansh Dhamala, 1st grade,  
Winter Tree Painting



Hudson Winfrey, 1st grade,  
Winter Tree Painting



Elliot Texeira, 3rd grade,  
Self Portrait



Clara Baumgartner, 3rd grade,  
Self Portrait



Keiry Romero Lemus, 6th grade,  
Abstract Portrait Painting



Adam Fanueli, 4th grade,  
Scarecrow Drawing



Rian Minnick, 1st grade, Fall Leaves, watercolor resist



Jordi Duarte Varela, 5th grade Oil Pastel Still-life Drawing



Elinor Ehn, 5th grade Oil Pastel Still-life Drawing

## Art Teacher - Mrs. Shabman



Maddie DiMuzio, 3rd grade,  
Butterfly Mola Collage



Mila Del Pozo Cao, 3rd grade,  
Butterfly Mola Collage



Matheo Hernandez, 4th grade, Name Art

# ENTERTAINMENT



Saxophonist Lil' Maceo will be featured in "It's a Jazzy Christmas!" on Dec. 21, 2024 at the McLean Community Center.

## FREE HOLIDAY LYFT RIDES

A local nonprofit organization announced that free safe rides will be offered to would-be drunk drivers throughout the Washington-metropolitan area during this holiday season. Offered by the Washington Regional Alcohol Program (WRAP), the 2024 Holiday SoberRide program will be in operation nightly from 10:00 p.m. until 4:00 a.m. from Friday, December 13, 2024 until Wednesday, January 1, 2025 as a way to keep local roads safe from impaired drivers. Each evening during this six-hour period, area residents ages 21 and older celebrating with alcohol may download the Lyft app to their phones then enter the SoberRide code in the app's 'Payment' tab (under the 'Add Lyft Pass' option) to receive their no-cost (up to \$15) safe transportation home. WRAP's separate 2024 Holiday SoberRide promo codes will be posted at 9:00 p.m. on December 13, 20 and 31 on [www.SoberRide.com](http://www.SoberRide.com).

## THROUGH JAN. 12, 2025

**10th Annual Glass International.** At Workhouse Arts Center, Vulcan Gallery, 9518 workhouse Way, Lorton. Workhouse Arts Center is proud to present the 10th Annual Glass International, an exhibition highlighting the depth and breadth of contemporary functional and sculptural glass art. In celebration of Workhouse Arts' 10th year exhibiting glass from artists throughout the United States, in 2024, they opened eligibility to include artists working internationally.

## NOW THRU JAN. 12

**Pieces of Us by HKS181 Exhibit.** At Workhouse Arts Center, Muse Gallery, W-16, Lorton. The Workhouse Arts Center is delighted to showcase Pieces of Us by HKS181, a deeply thought-provoking exhibition that examines the essential elements of growth and life that shape our existence. Through a unique blend of symbolism and urban artistry, Pieces of Us examines how sight, scent, and vision can trigger memories and evoke profound emotional connections. The works draw inspiration from the natural world, comparing the process of birds building nests to our human tendency to collect and preserve memories, emotions, and experiences. The use of decaying wood symbolizes the passage of time, encouraging viewers to reflect on its significance, while the incorporation of birdhouses prompts introspection about what we gather to create spaces we feel



A Holiday Celtic Concert will be held on Sunday, Dec. 22, 2024 at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Burke.

connected enough to call home. Visit [www.workhousearts.org](http://www.workhousearts.org).

## VIENNA HOLIDAY GUIDE

The Vienna Business Association (VBA) is hosting a Vienna Holiday Guide for local business and nonprofit promotions through Jan 1, 2025. You will find events, promotions and fundraisers for many local organizations. Organizations are encouraged to add their promotions for holidays, Small Business Saturday and the Church Street Stroll. You can view it online or download it here: <https://viennabusiness.org/vienna-holiday-guide>

## THRU JAN. 12, 2025

**Winter Lantern Festival.** At Tysons Corner Center, 8025 Galleria Drive, McLean. Thursdays to Sundays, 5-9:30 p.m. The Winter Lantern Festival is a must-see display of electrifying lights made from more than 1,000 handmade Chinese lanterns. Guests will enter and wander through a wonderland of light and color inspired by Chinese myths, legends, and zodiacs. Attractions will include a bounce house, sugar paintings, dino ride, interactive light swings, see-saws, tunnels, and many majestic creatures. Guests can also enjoy live entertainment by the Zigong Acrobatic Troupe, a new treat for this year, along with food, drinks and gifts.

## THROUGH DEC. 30

**LEGO Holiday Bricktacular.** At LEGO Site, 6563 Springfield Mall, Suite 12004, Springfield. Families can enjoy a winter wonderland of activities, festive decorations, large Santa Mini Figure and more. A dedicated area in the attraction will inspire guests with various heart designs and inspire families to build a LEGO heart. Additional holiday experiences include the Mini World Washington, D.C. Winter Wonderland takeover featuring holiday scenes, Letters to Master Model Builder and meet and greet

with a new Gingerbread Costume Character.

## HOLIDAY ON THE FARM AT FRYING PAN FARM PARK

Celebrate the holidays with an evening of wagon rides, animal interactions and visits with Santa. Enjoy food, indoor activities, and cozy campfires. Dec. 20-21, 4:30-7:30 p.m., \$15 in advance, \$20 at the door.

## WINTER WONDERLAND AT BURKE LAKE PARK

Climb aboard the Holiday Express for a train ride, spin on the Carollers Carousel, play Gingerbread Man Golf and savor s'mores by the fire. Meet Santa, sip hot chocolate and enjoy the season's warmth. Weekends: Dec. 21-22, 11 a.m.-5 p.m., \$15 in advance, \$20 at the door.

## DEC. 7 TO JAN. 12, 2025

**Disney's The Hunchback of Notre Dame.** Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m.; Sundays at 2 p.m. At Workhouse Arts Center, Lorton. The Hunchback of Notre Dame is based on the Victor Hugo novel with songs from the Disney animated feature. Set in 15th-century Paris, the musical tells the story of Quasimodo, the deformed bell-ringer who longs to be in the outside world. Held captive by his devious caretaker, the archdeacon Dom Claude Frollo, he escapes for the day, only to be treated cruelly by all but the beautiful Romani woman, Esmeralda. Quasimodo isn't the only one captivated by her free spirit, though – the handsome Captain Phoebus and Frollo are equally enthralled. As the three vie for her attention, Frollo embarks on a mission to destroy the Roma – and it's up to Quasimodo to save them all.

**SANTA IS COMING TO ANGELIKA MOSAIC** Santa is lighting up the lobby at the



The Light Up McLean: Holiday House Decorating Contest runs Dec. 23, 2024 to January 5, 2025.

Angelika Film Center this season with his annual visit to the Mosaic District. Guests are invited to bring their children and have family photos taken with Santa. Moviegoers are also invited to get comfy cozy at Angelika Mosaic this season with the return of popular signature holiday showcases and new releases lighting up the big screen.

Santa at Angelika Mosaic: Friday, Dec. 20, Saturday, Dec. 21, Sunday, Dec. 22, and Monday, Dec. 23 – 11 a.m. – 8 p.m.; Tuesday, Dec. 24 – 11 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Pajama Party:  
• "Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas" – Dec. 21 and Dec. 22 at 10 a.m.  
• "Love Actually" – Dec. 18 at 7 p.m.

## DEC. 12-29

**"Laughs in Spanish."** At 1st Stage, McLean. Step into the vibrant world of Miami's Wynwood arts district with a joyous and downright hilarious snapshot of Cuban and Colombian-American culture. As Art Basel approaches, Mariana, the director of a swanky modern art gallery, faces a serious dilemma: her showroom has become an active crime scene. Part crime-comedy, part mother-daughter story, this play follows Mariana and her eccentric squad including her larger-than-life mother, a film and television star determined to save the show. Tickets can be purchased online at [www.1ststage.org](http://www.1ststage.org) or by calling the 1st Stage box office at 703-854-1856.

## DEC. 13-29

**Aurora's Winter Circus Adventure.** At Dulles Town Center, 21100 Dulles Town Circle, Suite 234, Dulles. Featuring world class artists from all over the globe, Aurora's Winter Circus Adventure will immerse your family into the holiday spirit while keeping you on the edge of your seat. The 90-minute extravaganza includes performances in aerial artistry, FMX stunt cyclists, tight-wire dances, comedians, and more, all made complete with a dazzling award-winning set and lighting design. Visit the website,

[WinterCircusAdventure.com](http://WinterCircusAdventure.com), or call the ticket hotline, (941) 870-7444.

## NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE MARINE CORPS CELEBRATES THE HOLIDAYS

The National Museum of the Marine Corps is hosting a Holiday Film Series – "Mickey's Magical Christmas: Snowed in at the House of Mouse": Dec. 22 at 1:30 p.m.

## WEDNESDAY/DEC. 18

**Senior Movie Day, "The Fabulous Four."** 10 a.m. Movie Theater at Reston Town Center, Reston. Sponsored by the Reston Association. Coffee, donuts and OJ are provided and door prizes are distributed prior to the movie. Free for 55-plus; registration is not required. Just show up.

## WEDNESDAY/DEC. 18

**"Tokyo Godfathers."** 6:30 p.m. At the McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Shown in Japanese with English subtitles. In modern-day Tokyo, three homeless people's lives are changed forever when they discover a baby girl at a garbage dump on Christmas Eve. As the New Year fast approaches, these three forgotten members of society band together to solve the mystery of the abandoned child and the fate of her parents. A heartbreaking, hilarious and highly original adult anime for the holidays. Rated PG-13; 92 minutes.

## THURSDAY/DEC. 19

**Matthew Bourne's "Nutcracker!"** 1 p.m. At the McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Matthew Bourne's delicious "Nutcracker!" is like no other, adored by critics and audiences alike. With family-sized helpings of Bourne's trademark wit, pathos and magical fantasy, this filmed stage production is a scrumptious treat, influenced by the lavish Hollywood musicals of the 1930s. Not Rated; 87 minutes.

SEE ENTERTAINMENT, PAGE 23

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**Employment**

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**ALDRIN ES**

FROM PAGE 18

**If Just for a  
Moment On  
New Year's Eve**

KAI SINGER  
AGE 11, GRADE 6, MR. O'DAY

After a special  
holiday dinner out,  
and hot cocoa downed  
on the freezing steps outside  
that seem to sink  
through my coat  
and get their cold message  
right to my bones,

I go to bed.

I know  
that when I awaken the next  
morning  
it will be  
the next year.  
I will gaze over  
to my slumbering sister  
in her bed.  
It will seem  
just the same,  
and yet  
it will all be different.

But

if I awaken  
in the middle  
of the night,

I won't know

what year it is.  
Is the year it was yesterday  
past or present?  
I'll ask myself  
strangely  
as I edge into sleep.  
The feeling that comes with that  
previous revelation  
is incredibly  
odd and delicious.  
On any other day,  
at any other time,  
I would be  
incredibly certain  
of my answer.

But no,

the year is not certain,  
and so  
I slip into sleep with a grin  
and am incredibly pleased  
with this  
simple oddity.

In the midst  
of the dark,  
in my room so full  
of night,

If just for a moment.

# ENTERTAINMENT



McLean Community Center Celebrating 50 Years

The McLean Community Center celebrates its 50th Anniversary on Saturday, Jan. 4, 2025 in McLean.

FROM PAGE 21

## FRIDAY/DEC. 20

### American Red Cross Blood Drive.

9 a.m.-3 p.m. At the McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. McLean Community Center is helping the American Red Cross with diverse blood donations! It is urgent for donors of all ethnicities to support patients in need. Join us and support the community with your lifesaving blood donation. Please call 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767) or visit RedCrossBlood.org and enter: "McLeanCC" to schedule an appointment.

## SATURDAY/DEC. 21

"It's a Jazzy Christmas!" 7 p.m. At the McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. "Spectacular." "Amazing." "Even better than expected." With comments like this about last year's "Jazzy Christmas," not bringing it back would be like finding a lump of coal in your stocking. Saxophonist Lil' Maceo, gospel violinist Eric Taylor and the rest of the gang join the stellar house band for an evening that will hit your holidays out of the park.

## SUNDAY/DEC. 22

**Battle of Dranesville Remembrance.** 7 p.m. At Dranesville Church of the Brethren, 11500 Leesburg Pike, Herndon. On Dec. 20, 1861, Confederate forces under J.E.B. Stuart clashed with Union troops under E.O.C. Ord near the intersection of the Georgetown Pike and Route 7. The two-hour battle, fought just five days before Christmas, was the first Union victory in the east. The Brethren, like the Quakers and Mennonites, are a historic peace church. Every year on the Sunday closest to the day of the battle, they hold a special service, honoring those who fell and praying for peace. They will have light refreshments and a small display of artifacts from the battle afterwards. For more information, call John Waggoner at 703-216-7036.

## SUNDAY/DEC. 22

**Holiday Celtic Concert.** 4-5:15 p.m. At St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, 6509 Sydenstricker Road, Burke. The annual seasonal celebration with Karen Ashbrook, joined by multi-instrumentalist Paul Oorts, fiddler Andrea Hoag and vocalist Eileen

Estes. These four internationally-known performers have crafted a delightful program of Celtic songs and tunes to celebrate Christmas, winter and the New Year. The program has a wide selection of traditional and contemporary airs, jigs, and reels from Ireland, Scotland, the Isle of Man and Brittany. All donations from this concert will go to the local charities FACETS and ECHO. Visit the website: [www.standrews.net](http://www.standrews.net)

## LIGHT UP MCLEAN:

### HOLIDAY HOUSE DECORATING CONTEST.

**Contest Voting Runs Dec. 23, 2024-Jan. 5, 2025.** The Light Up McLean Holiday Decorating Competition gives residents an opportunity to show off their homes in all their holiday splendor. Sign up to participate and then have friends and family vote for the best house in three categories:

**Best Overall:** An exceptionally attractive, unique and complete design that utilizes space and resources well.

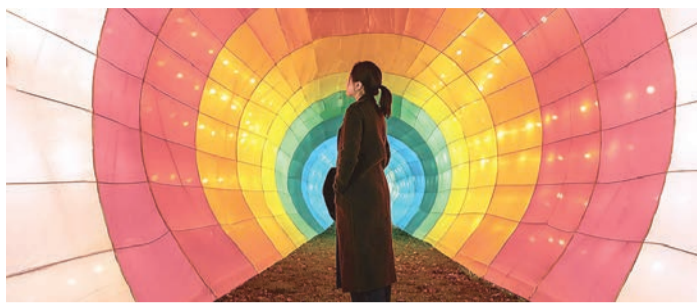
**Most Creative/Original:** An exceptional use of creative ideas and lots of originality is evident in the design.

**Best Holiday Theme:** Utilizes eye-catching decorations that clearly communicate a fully conceptualized theme.

For more detailed information and to vote, visit [oldfirehouse.org](http://oldfirehouse.org).

## SATURDAY/JAN. 4

**MCC 50th Anniversary.** 7 p.m. At The Alden Theatre, McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. The Governing Board and staff of the McLean Community Center (MCC) are inviting patrons to a special kickoff celebration for the center's 50th Anniversary. The event is free; however, patrons are asked to R.S.V.P. by sending an email to [feedback@mcleancenter.org](mailto:feedback@mcleancenter.org). The event starts a yearlong celebration, which includes the installation of two public art projects, a tree planting, and a large, communitywide festival in October. McLean Historian and former MCC Board member Carole Herrick will present a history talk highlighting the community efforts that brought about the creation of the center and its early history. A premiere showing of the center's newly created 50th Anniversary Commemorative Video and a celebratory



The Winter Lantern Festival takes place thru Jan. 12, 2025 at Tysons Corner Center in McLean.

reception will follow. Visit [mcleancenter.org](http://mcleancenter.org).

## WEDNESDAY/JAN. 8

### Hands-Only CPR. 6:30-7:30 p.m.

At the McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. McLean Volunteer Fire Department sponsored by MCA. Hands-only CPR is a simplified form of CPR that focuses on chest compressions without rescue breaths. It is recommended for use by people who witness an adult suddenly collapse in an out-of-hospital setting. Hands-only CPR increases the likelihood of surviving cardiac arrest by maintaining blood flow to vital organs.

## JAN. 10-11

### 45th International Saxophone Symposium.

At GMU's Harris Theatre, Fairfax. Friday, January 10 at 12 p.m.; Saturday, January 11 at 9 a.m. Free and non-ticketed

## SUNDAY/JAN. 12

### Chamber Music. 2 p.m.

At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Featuring Junwen Liang, on piano. Originally from Nanning, China, Junwen Liang is already making his mark on the classical music scene. He has concertized at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie and the Academy of Music in Philadelphia, won more competitions that we can begin to list and all while he has been pursuing his Performance Certificate at Peabody.

## SATURDAY/JAN. 18

### Collage Dance Company: "RISE Project."

7 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Part of the

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day Celebration. Dr. King's powerful "Mountaintop Speech," which was delivered the day before he died, is the backdrop for this full-length neoclassical ballet. As we commemorate nearly 60 years since his passing, the work is both a reflection of what we have overcome and envisions where we go from here. Student dancers enrolled in MCC's dance program, led by Art in Motion, will have a guest role in this performance!

## JAN. 24-26

### Jurassic Quest.

At Dulles Expo Center, 4320 Chantilly Shopping Center, Chantilly. Hours: Friday, Jan 24: Noon-6 p.m.; Saturday, Jan 25: 9 a.m.-6 p.m.; and Sunday, Jan 26: 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Jurassic Quest provides unforgettable adventure, transporting families through 165 million years of the Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous periods to roam among true-to-life versions of the creatures that once ruled the Earth. Loved by millions, Jurassic Quest is filled with the most hands-on activities, educational and fun event for families of all ages.

## SATURDAY/FEB. 1

### Kiwanis Polar Dip. 2 p.m.

At Lake Anne Village Plaza, Reston. The Kiwanis Club of Tysons is hosting its annual Kiwanis Polar Dip to raise money for organizations that benefit youth. The goal of the Kiwanis Polar Dip is to raise \$30,000 for Food for Neighbors and a variety of Kiwanis Youth Programs in the Fairfax County area. A portion will also benefit Camp Sunshine, a retreat for children with life-threatening illnesses and their families. Visit [kiwanispolarip.org](http://kiwanispolarip.org).

## This Time The Cookie Didn't Crumble



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Not that you all want/need to hear about my life or that what goes on (what I eat is the subject of this column) in it is of particular importance. Hardly. In fact, it's doubtful that any of it is relevant in your lives. But most of us eat food everyday and think of food every minute (you mean some of you don't?). Nevertheless, I thought I'd share a slice of my life that "plated" itself today. First, a little context:

We went away for the weekend to have turkey and fixin's with our oldest friends. They live in Ocean City, MD (Berlin, actually) so when we visit them it's for a couple of days. As I often joke about our stay - since it's Ocean City, it's "a two-night minimum" (per the typical hotel policy). This time, we stayed three nights. Given that Thanksgiving was/is on a Thursday, our friends who are still working, amazingly had both Friday and Saturday off so it made for a more sociable/available stay. Usually, their work schedules interfere. However, on this occasion, it did not so we were invited/stayed a bit longer than we otherwise would.

Since we were going away for three days and nights, it made little sense to stock/replenish our refrigerator/pantry with edibles and "drinkables." And when we got home Saturday afternoon (after arriving in Berlin Wednesday late afternoon) after enduring and semi unexpected delay crossing the Bay Bridge, the four hours-plus home sort of took the stuffing out of us and the last thing we wanted to do when we got home was to go back out to the supermarket/for dinner. "As such," to quote my 10th grade Western Traditions' teacher Mr. Roberts, we were not high, but we were certainly dry. The cupboard wasn't exactly bare but hardly was it or the refrigerator up to its usual standards. Therefore, to simplify our transition back to normalcy, we simply got "Take away" as the Brits say and decided to call it a night after we ate dinner and watched a movie.

Waking up in our own bed on Sunday morning, however, did nothing for our household/dietary needs. Most of which is my fault since I'm the shopper in the family. And later that Sunday, after not watching the Redskins/Commanders for three hours, whatever I did, oddly enough, had nothing to do with food and drink. And as of Monday real time, as I write this, I'm still stuck in neutral and the house is still empty, comparatively speaking.

Having provided three-fourths of this column as context I now finally segue to the point. Since I haven't gone shopping means that I haven't bought any chocolate. And that's a problem not just for me, but for millions of other people worldwide who crave it as much as I do, so I'm certainly not alone in this admission/predicament. A predicament of my own lack of doing so I have no one to blame but myself. And as I was contemplating my situation, thinking about where I might have/hid (Dina doesn't need to know everything) some chocolate in the house, I was reviewing - in my mind, all the locations in the house where I might have stored/hidden the object of my desire. Then I "double-downed" by going around the house opening drawers and cabinets to confirm and sure enough, I came up empty handed. Disappointed by my search, I sat back down in my office chair and thought of an odd/uncharacteristic place where only recently had I used as a new hideout. I then looked down to the right and pulled open my desk drawer and thought: "Wouldn't that be great/funny if there was some chocolate in this drawer that I completely forgot?" Forgot about because this drawer is too obvious/convenient a location and one that's hardly hidden at all so I would temp fate by using it. Well, at a loss/need for chocolate and only partially desperate, I opened the drawer and guess what? Paydirt! A half-full box of fudge-covered Oreos. "How'd that box get there?" I sort of thought (Knowing full well I was responsible; just in this instance, a tad forgetful.) Six cookies. What a reward for my poor planning. "I can't go on like this," I thought. I must go shopping. I can't rely on this kind of random good luck. I know it's said that even blind squirrel finds a nut. But it says nothing about the squirrel being stupid and ill-prepared.

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

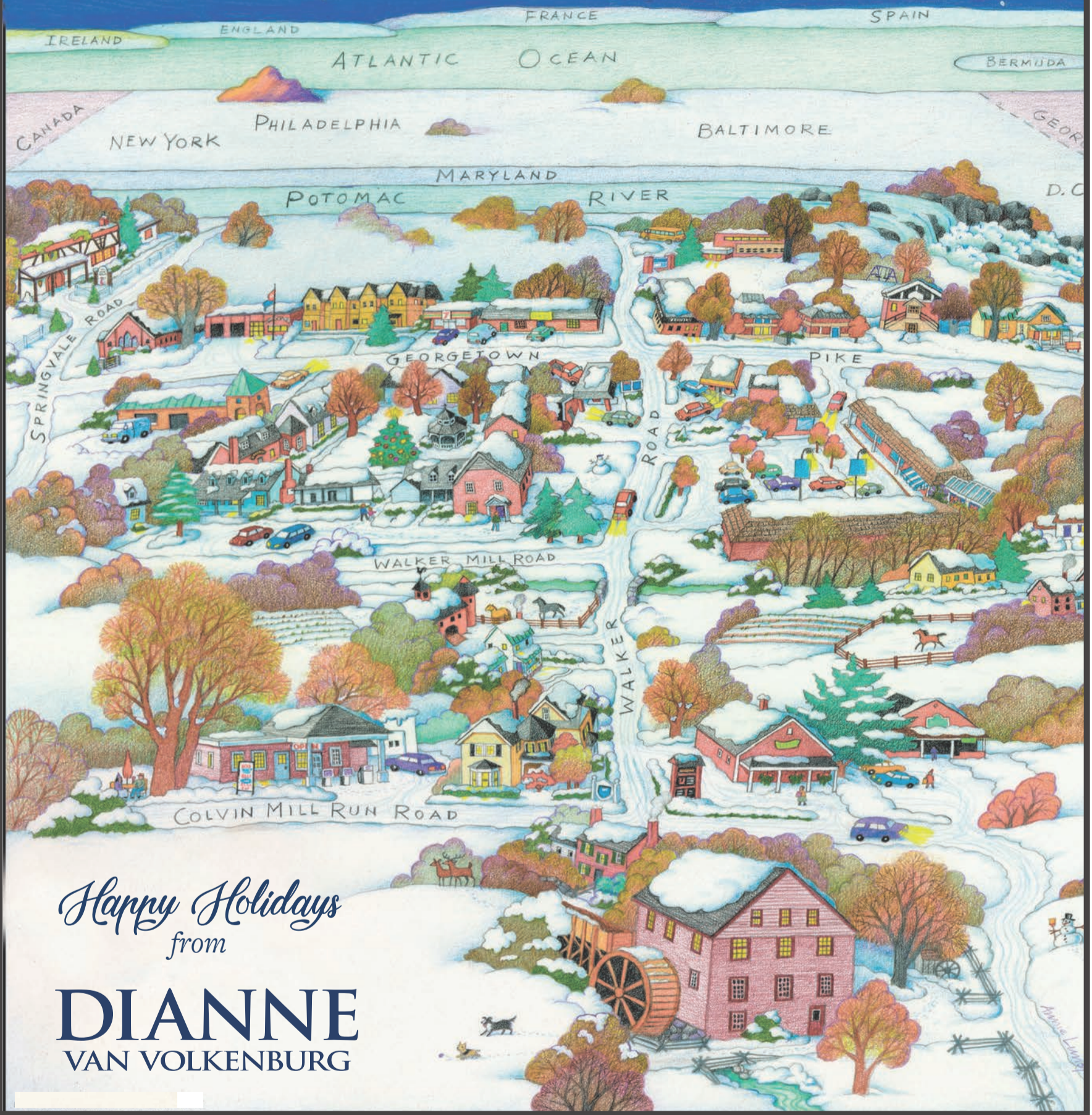
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