

Alexandria Gazette Packet

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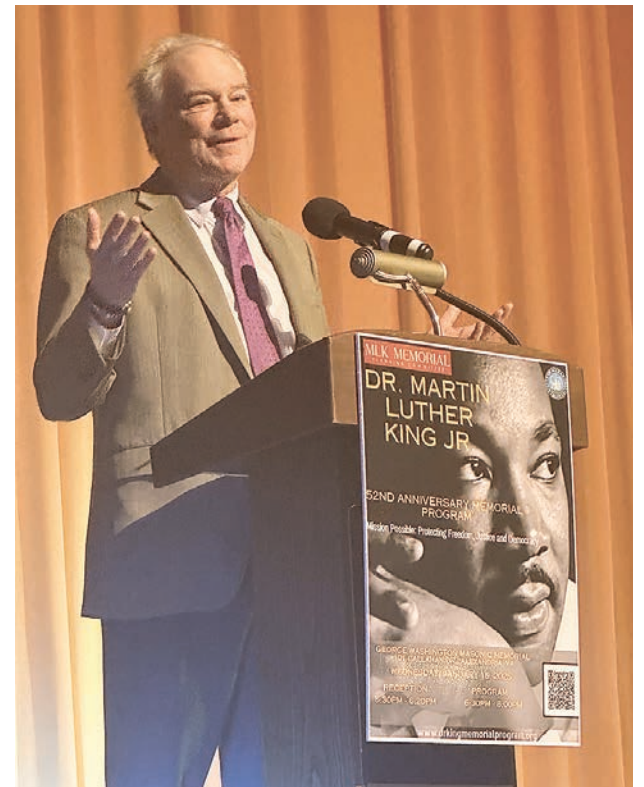
JANUARY 23, 2025



Stella Cisney sings "It's a Wonderful World" as part of the 52nd annual tribute to Martin Luther King Jr. Jan. 15 at the George Washington Masonic National Memorial.



Lisa Grant portrays Mahalia Jackson at the tribute to Martin Luther King Jr. Jan. 15 at the George Washington Masonic Memorial.



Sen. Tim Kaine gives remarks at the tribute to Civil Rights icon Martin Luther King Jr. Jan 15 at the George Washington Masonic National Memorial.

PHOTOS BY JANET BARNETT/GAZETTE PACKET

'I Have a Dream' Honoring the legacy of Civil Rights icon Martin Luther King Jr.

BY JEANNE THEISMANN
GAZETTE PACKET

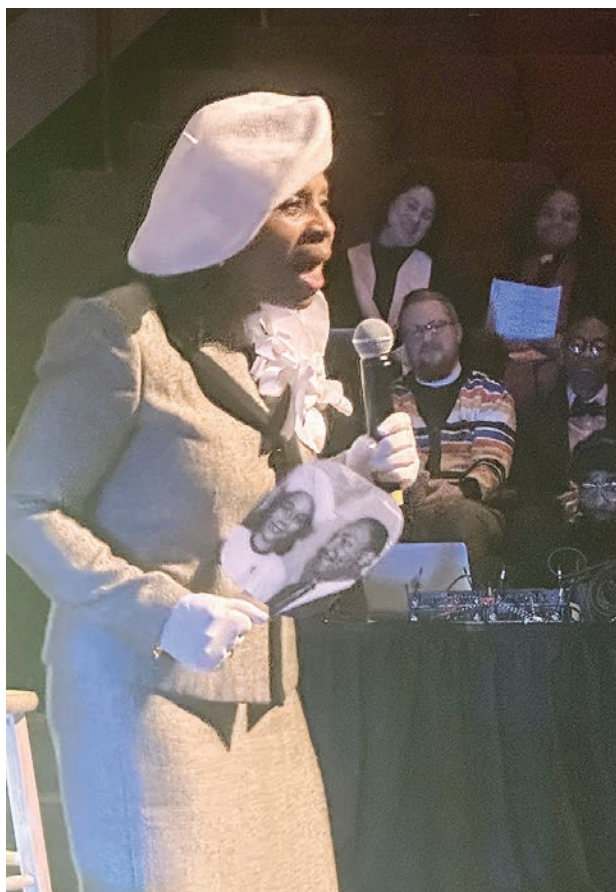
The City of Alexandria paid tribute to the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. in the 52nd annual commemorative program honoring the late Civil Rights icon Jan. 15 at the George Washington Masonic National Memorial.

"Our mission is clear," said Mayor Alya Gaskins on what would have been King's 96th birthday. "Dr. King told us years ago that the mission before us is for each of us to work together, to work collectively and to work for a more just, equitable and inclusive society."

First started in 1973 and hosted by Alexandria's Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Planning Committee, the program celebrated 52 years of honoring King. The event began a decade before President Ronald Reagan signed a bill in 1983 recognizing the birthday of the Civil Rights icon as a national holiday.

With a theme of "Mission Possible: Protecting Freedom, Justice and Democracy," the program opened with the traditional Procession of Faiths by clergy repre-

SEE 'I HAVE A DREAM', PAGE 4



Alexandria Library executive director Rose Dawson portrays Coretta Scott-King speaking on the climate of justice Jan. 15 at the George Washington Masonic Memorial.



"Lift Every Voice and Sing" is performed by Louise Phillips-Hardy and Vaughn Ambrose Jan. 15 at the George Washington Masonic Memorial.

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\$3,000,000



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511 Queen Street*
\$2,845,000



523 Duke Street
\$1,955,000



526 North Pitt Street
\$2,200,000



211 Duke Street
\$2,100,000



411 Prince Street
\$2,439,000



734 Fords Landing Way*
\$1,850,000



622 South Lee Street
\$1,800,000



201 Cameron Street
\$1,548,000



702 Prince Street
\$1,663,000



307 North Washington Street*
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714 South Pitt Street
\$1,325,913



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OBITUARY

Nancy Van Gulick Cooper Dies at 78

**Celebration
of life set
for Jan. 25.**

BY JEANNE THEISMANN
GAZETTE PACKET

Nancy Van Gulick Cooper, a longtime Alexandria resident and community humanitarian, died Dec. 14, 2024, at her home in Oxford, Md., following a year-long battle with cancer. She was 78.

Van Gulick Cooper was born March 15, 1946, to Millie and Hugo Phillips and raised in Baltimore. She graduated from George Washington University and lived abroad in France prior to settling in Alexandria. She worked for and with the Peace Corps and the American Red Cross before founding Seniors Living Well.

A devout Christian, Van Gulick Cooper became a member of the Old Presbyterian Meeting House in 1985. She served there in many capacities, including as elder, teacher, mentor and choir member.

"Nancy was just a wonderful friend and devoted to doing good work in the community, said Senior Services of Alexandria executive director Mary Lee Anderson, who first met Van Gulick Cooper through the Meeting House. "It still doesn't seem real – she was so active and vibrant."

In 2012, Van Gulick Cooper married Gerry Cooper, a fellow Meeting House congregant and longtime SSA board member. Together they dedicated many hours to serving the community through programs such as Meals on Wheels and supporting Friends of Guest House.

Van Gulick Cooper was a leader in the Rotary Club of Alexandria, committed to advancing Rotary's international peace-building efforts. She established the Nancy and Gerry Cooper Water Projects Endowment to ensure funding for future water projects around the world.

"Nancy was as inspirational a character as I have ever met," said Alexandria Rotary Club president Jim Carmalt. "Her legacy of service and unwavering dedication to our club and the Alexandria community have touched countless lives. Her contributions were too numerous to count, and her spirit of service above self will continue to inspire us all."

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Longtime Alexandria resident Nancy Van Gulick Cooper died Dec. 14, 2024, at the age of 78.

Van Gulick Cooper was instrumental in starting Rotary's regional Walk for Water, raising more than \$30,000 last year even as she battled cancer. Carmalt noted that the walk has now been renamed the Nancy Van Gulick Walk for Water in her honor.

Van Gulick Cooper began working with the Fund for Alexandria's Child in the 1970s and was an emergency placement foster mother and promoter of character education.

Music and singing were early passions for Van Gulick Cooper and she was a proud member of the Phoenix Choir of Baltimore during her high school years. She enjoyed traveling, entertaining, and spending time with family, particularly relishing her role as host for her family's traditional Christmas cookie bake.

"She had one hell of a year fighting cancer, a fight which I'm glad is finished for her sake," said her nephew Robert Phillips. "The pain of her loss was never going to be easy and though that Saturday I held her hand for the last time, she was at peace, surrounded by her family on the weekend she loved most – the Phillips Cookie Bake. She lived her life beautifully, and leaves behind a legacy of inspiring others to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God."

Van Gulick Cooper is survived by her husband Gerry Cooper; her brother Russ Phillips (Charlotte); her sister-in-law Carol Phillips; three nieces, Suzannah Baum, Katy Phillips, and Holly George; three nephews Hank Phillips, Robert Phillips, and Bay Phillips; five grandnieces and two grandnephews; and countless cousins including Debbie O'Neill, Carol Wallyn, and Suzie Mason. She was preceded in death by her brother Roger Phillips. She is also survived by



Nancy Van Gulick Cooper, third from left, was a longtime supporter of Senior Services of Alexandria.

the Cooper family: Steve Cooper (Donna) and Dan Cooper (Iris), and many Cooper grandchildren, especially Kaiya Cooper.

An interment service took place Jan. 4 at the Church of the Holy Trinity in Oxford. A Celebration of

Life will be held Jan. 25 at 11 a.m. at the Old Presbyterian Meeting House, 321 South Fairfax Street, with a reception to follow. In lieu of flowers, please consider supporting the Nancy and Gerry Cooper Water Projects Endowment [ID

E21485]; The Rotary Foundation, 14280 Collections Center Drive, Chicago, IL 60693 USA.

"Nancy was a very special woman," Anderson said. "She was such a force of nature and her loss is just immeasurable."

Dr. F.J. Pepper

**Memorial
service set
for Jan. 26.**

A memorial service for Dr. Franklin Jay Pepper, husband of former City Council member and vice mayor Del Pepper, will be held Jan. 26, 2025, from 4-6 p.m. at Everly-Wheatley Funeral Home and Crematory, 1500 W. Braddock Road, in Alexandria.

Pepper died Jan. 6 at his West End home following a long illness. He was 89.

Known as F.J., Pepper was a prominent psychiatrist born March 21, 1935, in Omaha, Nebraska. He married Del Pepper in 1966 and moved to Alexan-



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

A memorial service for Dr. F.J. Pepper will be held Jan. 26 from 4-6 p.m. at Everly-Wheatley Funeral Home.

dria in 1968.

A past department chief of psychiatry at Inova Alexandria Hos-

pital, Pepper served in the U.S. Army Medical Corps from 1966-68. He was a battalion surgeon in Vietnam and was awarded a Bronze Star-"M", Combat Medical Badge, Air Medal.

Pepper is survived by his wife of 58 years, Del Pepper, son Murphy Pepper, daughter-in-law Soo Pepper, and five grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held Sunday, Jan. 26, 2025, from 4-6 p.m. at Everly-Wheatley Funeral Home and Crematory, 1500 W Braddock Rd., Alexandria, VA 22302. A private interment will take place later at the Ivy Hill Cemetery. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Alzheimer's Association.

—JEANNE THEISMANN



WINTER 2025

**Skating at Ice & Lights:
The Winter Village at Cameron Run**
JANUARY 1 - FEBRUARY 23
(Weekends and holidays beginning Jan. 6)

Alexandria Restaurant Week
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21st Annual Alexandria Boutique Warehouse Sale
FEBRUARY 1 - 2

NSO at Mount Vernon
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FEBRUARY 15

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FEBRUARY 16

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MARCH 1



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News

PHOTOS BY JANET BARNETT/GAZETTE PACKET



Jackson Caesar performs "Still I Rise" Jan. 15 at the George Washington Masonic Memorial.



Mayor Alyia Gaskins speaks about the significance of the 52nd tribute to Martin Luther King Jr. Jan. 15 at the George Washington Masonic Memorial.

'I Have a Dream'

FROM PAGE 1

sending Alexandria's faith community. Jackson Caesar performed "Still I Rise/A Change is Gonna Come" with Rev. Robin Anderson of Commonwealth Baptist Church offering the invocation.

Sen. Tim Kaine, recalling that he was 10 years old when King was assassinated, spoke of the inspiration of King's words that continues today.

"What is so worthy to commemorate every year about King is his writing," Kaine said. "His preaching and advocacy was so broad that in different moments in life there's always something that he said that matches

up with the moment."

MLK planning committee member Rosa Byrd was chair of the program which recognized Lawrence Robinson for more than 50 years of service on the committee. Both are Living Legends of Alexandria for their significant contributions to the community.

"This will be my last year on the committee," said Robinson, 94, and one of the original members of the planning committee in 1973. "There was no federal holiday back then but we just had to make sure that people didn't forget who King was and what he did."

Added Byrd, "We will keep this dream alive."



Rosa Byrd and Rev. Professor Quardrios Driskell Jan. 15 at the George Washington Masonic Memorial.

Inauguration Day Celebration

Republicans, a small minority when it comes to voters in the City of Alexandria, celebrated the inauguration of Donald Trump as president at a Republican Committee of Alexandria party Jan. 20 at the Old Dominion Boat Club.

“We’re having a wonderful night tonight,” said Chris Howell, chair of the Republican Committee of Alexandria. “We are celebrating the election of Donald Trump as president and the return of the Republican party to power in Congress. It’s a great night to be together as Republicans in the City of Alexandria.”

www.alxgop.org

— JEANNE THEISMANN

“We’re having a wonderful night together as Republicans in the City of Alexandria.”

— Chris Howell, Republican Committee of Alexandria chair



Inauguration Day was celebrated by a group of Republican Committee members Jan. 20 at the Old Dominion Boat Club. Enjoying the festivities are September Secrist, former City Councilman Frank Fannon, Jerome Bryant, Marisa Kurtz and Nicholas Kurtz.

PHOTO BY JANET BARNETT/GAZETTE PACKET

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OBITUARY

Oscar Mecklin Johnson, 89

Oscar Mecklin Johnson, a former senior Capitol Hill journalist and chief adviser to members of Congress who drafted historic legislation, including Title IX, died of natural causes on Jan. 7, 2025, at his Arlington, Va. home with his family. He was 89.

Johnson was born on Aug. 10, 1935, in Tallahassee, Fla. to Oscar Martin Johnson and Janie Mecklin Johnson. He grew up in Green Cove Springs, Fla., although he spent several years in Alexandria while his father served as chief-of-staff to U.S. Senator Claude Pepper. In Alexandria he attended Matthew Maury Elementary School, before graduating in 1953 from Clay High School in Green Cove Springs.

He moved back to Alexandria in 1968 where he and his wife Mary Jo Adams raised their four children.

He attended Florida State University, where he was editor-in-chief of the Florida Flambeau, the school's student newspaper.



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE JOHNSON FAMILY.

Oscar Mecklin Johnson was the editor of the Florida Flambeau in 1956 and 1957 while attending Florida State University.

per. He graduated in 1957 with a bachelor's degree in journalism.

Johnson worked for the Atlanta Constitution as a beat reporter covering DeKalb County, Ga. There, he covered the high-profile, national

story of a beloved dog enthusiast turned criminal known as Mrs. Gray. His articles were republished by newspapers across the country, from Tulsa, Okla. to Los Angeles.

Johnson left the Atlanta Consti-



Oscar Johnson with his daughter Margaret Johnson in an undated family photo.

tution to serve in the U.S. Army, with a counterintelligence assignment in Korea and later in Washington, D.C. While in Korea, he enjoyed traveling to Japan.

Returning to journalism follow-

ing his military service, Johnson worked in Washington as a senior editor of Roll Call, a newspaper covering Capitol Hill. He was among the publication's first seven

SEE OSCAR MECKLIN, PAGE 14

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SJ 249	SENATE OF VIRGINIA Privileges and Elections	3:18 PM																					
SJ 249: Constitutional amendment; marriage between two adult persons, etc., (first reference).																							
Patron: Adam P. Ebbin																							
Motion: Report																							
YEAS: 10 NAYS: 4 ABS: 0																							
<table border="0"> <tr> <td>Carroll Foy</td><td>Nay</td><td>Mulchi</td></tr> <tr> <td>Deeds</td><td>Yea</td><td>Perry</td></tr> <tr> <td>DeSteph</td><td>Nay</td><td>Roem</td></tr> <tr> <td>Diggs</td><td>Yea</td><td>Rouse</td></tr> <tr> <td>Durant</td><td>Yea</td><td>Salim</td></tr> <tr> <td>Ebbin</td><td>Nay</td><td>Sturtevant</td></tr> <tr> <td>Hackworth</td><td>Nay</td><td>VanValkenburg</td></tr> </table>			Carroll Foy	Nay	Mulchi	Deeds	Yea	Perry	DeSteph	Nay	Roem	Diggs	Yea	Rouse	Durant	Yea	Salim	Ebbin	Nay	Sturtevant	Hackworth	Nay	VanValkenburg
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Ebbin	Nay	Sturtevant																					
Hackworth	Nay	VanValkenburg																					

The Privileges and Elections Committee Vote on my Constitutional Amendment Guaranteeing Marriage Equality.

My 2025 Legislative Updates

BY SEN. ADAM EBBIN

Our first full week in session started off with a flurry of snowflakes and bills. The Virginia Senate Privileges and Elections Committee reported out my Marriage Equality Constitutional Amendment with bipartisan support (SJ 249).

I continue in my role as chair of the first Virginia Senate Committee on General Laws and Technology, with over a hundred bills to consider during this 2025 session. My bills include SB 1042, which would make it easier to become a Certified Public Accountant and SB 1043 which would ensure sixty days notice when a landlord does not renew a tenant's lease. Both reported out of the committee. On Friday, the Senate Courts of Justice Committee recommended passage of SB 880- a ban on the public carrying of assault weapons and SB 881, regarding restrictions on 'ghost guns.'

On Monday, Jan. 20, we had a productive day of bills. The Virginia Committee on Justice considered SB 1053, addressing deepfake fraud and SB 1060 which would allow for the confiscation of tobacco and vapes possessed by minors. Also on Monday, the Virginia Committee of Commerce and Labor considered SB 1056, which would increase weekly unemployment maximum benefits and SB 1057, which would raise the limits for unemployment compensation when working a part time job. We also considered SB 1280 in the Gaming Subcommittee of the General Laws Committee. This bill would ensure the posting of the problem gambling help line in places where gambling occurs.

Full Legislative Agenda

With the support of my two staffers and three interns from Virginia Commonwealth University and the University of Richmond, we are running full speed ahead with a full legislative agenda.

First is SB 249, a Constitutional Amendment protecting marriage equality. We are also seeking to amend the Virginia Human Rights Act, SB 1052, to ensure that companies regardless of size, do not discriminate in employment. Next is SB 881, which would ban ghost guns. SB 880 would ban carrying assault weapons in public.

SB 1060 would allow for the confiscation



Sen. Ebbin

of tobacco and vapes possessed by minors. We are also working on SB 1053 addressing deepfake fraud. SB 1042 would make it easier to become a Certified Public Accountant. SB 879 would help tradespeople get a Career and Technical Education teaching license.

In SB 1043, we are working on more notice to tenants when their lease is not renewed by the landlord. SB 1054 requires the Virginia Cannabis Control Authority to draft regulations for retail cannabis sales. SB 1283 would ban privately run state prisons. We are also working on requiring data center operators to provide more information when applying for siting.

SB 1056 and SB 1057 would increase unemployment benefits. SB 1058 would make it easier for schools to provide solar power to the grid. Providing post-release job placement services to returning citizens is the goal of SB 877. SB 1280 would promote the state's gambling help line.

SB 1051 would allow for the annual inspections of animal boarding facilities. We are working on transparency regarding the use of deepfakes and technology. I am also working on increasing the penalty for hitting a vulnerable road user in a crosswalk.

Constituent Visits

We had many productive discussions with constituents last week.

I had a good meeting with Virginia community health leaders, including Dr. Basim Khan, who leads Neighborhood Health Services, to discuss continued healthcare access in medically underserved communities. Serving over 400,000 patients in 2023, Virginia's health centers provide high-quality, comprehensive primary care for 1 in every 21 Virginians.

I was glad to have met with local constituent activists from Students Demand Action and Moms Demand Action for their lobby day. We are working this session to do more to address gun violence.

I also met with the American Association

SEE EBBIN, PAGE 11



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BONNIE HOBBS/THE GAZETTE

Martha Wescoat-Andes and dad Jim Wescoat with his Quilt of Valor.



BONNIE HOBBS/THE GAZETTE

From left, Martha Wescoat-Andes photographs her dad receiving his quilt from Madonna Rabatin.

Local Marine Veteran Receives Quilt of Valor

Jim Wescoat, 103, is honored before friends and family.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE GAZETTE

Jim Wescoat was born on Dec. 7, 1921, in Atlantic City, N.J. Exactly 20 years later, after Pearl Harbor was bombed on Dec. 7, 1941, he joined the Marine Corps.

Now 103, he's the only Marine WWII veteran living at The Woodlands, a retirement community in Fairfax. And on Jan. 10, he received a patriotic quilt there from the Quilts of Valor Foundation (QOV), which makes quilts for military veterans.

"He's given a lot to his country, and we believe he's most deserving of this award," said Madonna Rabatin, the foundation's Virginia coordinator. "It's an expression of gratitude from a grateful nation."

She was among the women who together made his quilt. And her sister, Toni Rabatin, also with the foundation, explained its origin and purpose. A national organization, it was founded in 2003 by a Blue Star mom, Catherine Roberts.

"With a son deployed in Iraq as a gunner atop a Humvee, she had a vision of a post-deployed warrior in the middle of the night, struggling with his war demons,

while sitting on his bed, wrapped in a quilt," said Toni Rabatin. "The quilt not only comforted the soldier but warded off the demons. [Thus], Quilts of Valor was founded with the message, 'Quilts Equal Healing.'"

"The foundation's mission is to cover active-duty service members and veterans touched by war with comforting and healing Quilts of Valor," she continued. "While many bear the physical scars of battle, many others have been [affected] in less-visible ways by conflicts past and present." Then, addressing Wescoat directly, she said they'd come to honor "your service, sacrifice and commitment to our Constitution. We're indebted and thankful to you for taking the oath to defend our freedom."

Since its inception, Quilts of Valor has garnered more than 11,000 volunteer quiltmakers and awarded more than 400,000 quilts worldwide. Rabatin said each quilt is created with love, care and gratitude. And she told Wescoat, "Your Quilt of Valor comes from the hearts of many thankful women and men. Through this quilt, you'll forever be in our hearts."

Noting that a quilt has three layers, she said the top features



PHOTO COURTESY OF
MARTHA WESCOAT-ANDES

Jim Wescoat in his 20s, as a WWII Marine.

many colors, shapes and fabrics representing the many communities and individuals in the organization. The batting – the filling in the center – provides warmth. "It represents our hope that this quilt will bring warmth, comfort, peace and healing to you who receive it," said Rabatin. "The backing is the strength supporting the other layers and represents the recipient's strength and the support of your family, our community and our nation. And each stitch hold-



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARTHA WESCOAT-ANDES

The Wescoats on their wedding day, June 30, 1951.

ing the layers together represents love, gratitude and, sometimes, the tears of the maker."

Then, as her sister Madonna wrapped Wescoat's quilt around him, Rabatin said, "With our deepest appreciation, we say, 'Thank you for your service and welcome home.'"

Next, fellow Woodlands resident Ron Gallier read a poem he'd written about Wescoat, calling him "Woodlands' pride and joy and every resident's friend. It's not to his

age that I raise my glass, but to his incomparable touch of class."

All the residents were gathered for the ceremony, and the guests included one of Wescoat's daughters, Martha Wescoat-Andes of Fairfax. With her beaming proudly beside him, he told everyone, "This is incredible. I am so very, very thankful. The thoughtfulness and effort you put into this is outstanding and very much appreciated."

"I must tell you, though – in the

SEE JIM WESCOAT, PAGE 9
WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

Jim Wescoat, 103, Is Honored

FROM PAGE 8

service, I got more than I gave. I was a high-school dropout when I enlisted in the Marine Corps. In the military, I acquired a little bit of self-confidence. And when I got out [in 1945], I went back to high school and they said, 'Yeah, we remember you, but we'll try it again.' They said if I did all my courses, they'd give me a diploma – the lack of which cost me dearly during my service."

Besides being grateful to finally obtain his diploma, Wescoat said he was also thankful for that experience because, while on campus, he met "the gal who became my wife, the mother of my four children and my wonderful inspiration every day, still today. I appreciate all that's been done for me and helped me, but I can't find the words, except to say, thank you and God bless."

A pianist then played the Marine Corps Hymn, and Army Col. (ret.) Jim Miller, also a resident, spoke about Wescoat. He said Wescoat served aboard the USS Denver during WWII.

"As the Marines landed and took the Japanese islands, one by one, and Guadalcanal, the Navy provided an armada of ships – including the Denver – that shelled these islands before the Marines landed," explained Miller. "I was a little boy then. But Jim [Wescoat] was a fighter, and I'm awful proud of him. Jim, thank you so much for your service, and I'm so happy you're here with us

and we can be friends."

After the ceremony, Wescoat and his daughter told the Connection further details about his life. On the Denver, he said, he was a buck sergeant directing the ship's 40-millimeter, anti-aircraft guns. He operated the equipment that lined them up to shoot at the enemy.

But his ship was eventually torpedoed. "I was in the boiler room, and we were in Japanese waters and vulnerable," said Wescoat. "They could have sunk us but didn't. We were towed back to Guadalcanal and then to the States for repairs and then returned to the war."

He left the Marines in November 1945, two months after the war ended. And while getting his high-school diploma, he met his future wife, Bonna – then a college student – when she returned to the school to visit a former mentor, who introduced them. He later attended UVA on the GI Bill, graduating around 1950 with a degree in engineering.

Wescoat then worked for Esso, Hess and Mobil in their oil refineries. "I was a safety and security inspector and went to all the refineries around the world that Mobil had," he said. Afterward, he was with Mobil for decades as an engineer.

Along the way, he and Bonna married and had four children – Jim, Bonna, Martha and Andy – raising them in both Texas and New Jersey. After the children were grown, Mobil

moved its headquarters to Fairfax in the late 1980s, so the Wescoats spent the next 30 years in Oakton. They eventually had eight grandchildren and one great-grandchild and were married for more than 70 years until Bonna died, two years ago, at age 93.

After retiring from Mobil, Wescoat served his community as a volunteer. In Fairfax City, he helped the homeless by working for several years in The Lamb Center's kitchen. And at Waple's Mill Elementary in Oakton, he taught children how to build bridges out of cardboard during recess.

He's also remained close with his family members. "He's important to everyone in our family and is very much in touch with his grandchildren," said Wescoat-Andes. "He and my mother were a team, and he's a central figure in our family." Re what she believes contributed to his longevity, she replied, "He's a good and thoughtful person, led a good life and did good things for people."

As for her dad's Quilt of Valor, she said, "It's such an honor. I quilt, so I know the amount of work and effort that goes into it." Pleased with the ceremony at The Woodlands – which included a luncheon and cake – Wescoat-Andes said, "The Marines and other military veterans here have a strong community, which he really enjoys. They get together and support each other. And The Woodlands put on a beautiful event today –



BONNIE HOBBS/THE GAZETTE

WWII Marine veteran Jim Wescoat wearing his Quilt of Valor.

they really celebrate their residents."

"I've lived here about six years," said Wescoat. "It's a nice place with friendly staff and residents. I also like the concerts and other entertainment we have here." Regarding the quilt, he said, "So many people are much more deserving than I am, in terms of their contribution to the war effort."

Still, he was happy to be recognized with such a special ceremony. "I'm overwhelmed," said Wescoat. "It was a wonderful effort by some very thoughtful people, and I'll treasure the memories and the quilt."



Jim Sullivan nominated Wescoat to receive his Quilt of Valor. To make a nomination, go to <https://www.qovf.org/nominations-awards/>.

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NEWS



PHOTO AMY SWINDELL

Alexandria Sportsman's Club president Ryan Fannon, left, poses with the ASC Athletes of the Month Jan. 15 at the Old Dominion Boat Club.

Pictured with Fannon are, from left: Colleen Breslin, Youth Recreation, basketball; Ben Edmonds, Episcopal HS, basketball; Campbell Shelby, Episcopal HS, tennis; Princess Ako-jenu, Episcopal HS, basketball; Amirah Anderson, Bishop Ireton HS, basketball; Riley Jacobs, St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School, basketball; Ripp Kodi, Bishop Ireton HS, basketball; Tarik Sesay, Alexandria City HS, basketball; Victoria Patrick, Alexandria City HS, basketball; and Naheema Goin, St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School, basketball.

ASC Honors Student-Athletes

High school basketball coaches featured in roundtable.

BY JEANNE THEISMANN
GAZETTE PACKET

Student-athletes from across the city were honored as Athletes of the Month by the Alexandria Sportsman's Club on Jan. 15 at the Old Dominion Boat Club. The organization's monthly

meeting featured eight varsity basketball coaches representing girls and boys teams from all four city high schools for a coaches round table. Participants shared their insight on coaching high school students, the value of participat-

SEE ASC HONORS, PAGE 11

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PHOTO BY JANET BARNETT/GAZETTE PACKET

High school varsity basketball coaches participated in a roundtable Jan. 15 at the Old Dominion Boat Club.

Pictured back row from left: Dwayne Bryant, Bishop Ireton HS, boys basketball; Tyrone Sally, Alexandria City HS, boys basketball; Katrina Reed, Episcopal HS, girls basketball; Calvin Crenshaw, St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School, girls basketball; Ariel Gonzalez, Alexandria City HS, girls basketball. Front row, from left: Jim Fitzpatrick, Episcopal HS, boys basketball; Kesha Walton, Bishop Ireton HS, girls basketball; André Hunter, St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School, boys basketball.

WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

News

Erg Sprints: Largest Indoor Rowing Championship in U.S.

On Saturday, Feb. 1, 2025, Alexandria City High School will host Erg Sprints, the largest and longest running indoor rowing championship in America. “Erg” is short for “ergometer,” an indoor rowing machine.

WHO: 1500+ rowers from across Virginia and the country, including high school and college students, elite athletes, amateur athletes, young kids, parents racing against their children, and master rowers.

WHAT: Erg Sprints is the country’s largest and longest-running indoor rowing competition. It is rooted in the storied history of Alexandria City’s crew program, a training ground for top athletes and Olympians. First held in 1986, the day-long event features approximately 1,500 athletes competing on 140 ergs that are set up on the race floor inside the ACHS gym. The athletes have ranged in

ages from under 10 to over 80, and have included some of the top high school, club, and collegiate rowers in the country and the world.

Participants must register by Jan. 24. Registration is currently open to the public on Regatta Central.

WHEN: The event itself takes place on Saturday, Feb. 1, 2025 from 7am-3pm. Register by Jan. 24

WHERE: Alexandria City High School - 3330 King St, Alexandria VA, 22302

WHY: This is an exciting, inspiring event with strong personal stories, great visuals and natural sound. Erg Sprints 2025 features the 2,000 meter events, 1/2 marathon and marathon, 20-minute junior and 30-minute open/masters rows, 500m sprints, relays, parent/child and kids races. As of 2023, Erg Sprints also features a C2 Triathlon, featuring bike, ski, and row. Find the full list of events on RegattaCentral.

ASC Honors Student-Athletes

FROM PAGE 10

ing in multiple sports, and how competition engages players and makes high school athletics fun for schools and community.

ASC president Ryan Fannon led the presentation of honors to 10 student-athletes for their academic and athletic accomplishments.

Honored as Student-Athletes of the Month were: Colleen Breslin, Youth Recreation, basketball; Ben Edmonds, Episcopal High School, basketball; Campbell Shelby, Episcopal High School, tennis; Princess Akojenu, Episcopal High School, basketball; Amirah Anderson, Bishop Ireton High School, basketball; Riley Jacobs, St. Stephen’s & St. Agnes School, basketball; Ripp Kodi, Bishop Ireton High School, basketball; Tarik Sesay, Alexandria City High School, basketball; Victoria Patrick, Alexandria City High

School, basketball; and Naheema Goin, St. Stephen’s & St. Agnes School, basketball.

The varsity high school basketball coaches participating in the roundtable included: Dwayne Bryant, Bishop Ireton High School, boys basketball; Tyrone Sally, Alexandria City High School, boys basketball; Katrina Reed, Episcopal High School, girls basketball; Calvin Crenshaw, St. Stephen’s & St. Agnes School, girls basketball; Ariel Gonzalez, Alexandria City High School, girls basketball; Jim Fitzpatrick, Episcopal High School, boys basketball; Kesha Walton, Bishop Ireton High School, girls basketball; and André Hunter, St. Stephen’s & St. Agnes School, boys basketball.

For more information on the Alexandria Sportsman’s Club, visit www.alexandriavasports.org.

My 2025 Legislative Updates

FROM PAGE 7

of University Women of Virginia. I appreciate their advocacy and for coming to visit me in Richmond, advancing gender equity in the Commonwealth.

I met with the Virginia Society of Public Accountants for their CPA Assembly Day. I am thankful for all the work CPAs perform and will continue to work with them in the future.

Upcoming Town Hall Meeting

I’ll be hosting a town hall meeting on Saturday, Jan. 25 at 10 am. Please join us at the Minnie Howard Campus of Alexandria City High School, 3775 W Braddock Rd, Alexandria, VA, 22303. Also attending will be Delegates Bennett-Parker, Herring and Lopez. Sign up here to attend.

Thanks for the continued opportunity to serve.

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Coming up on February 13th:
Guest Artist Series featuring percussionist Ji Su Jung!

VDOT
Virginia Department of Transportation

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
DINWIDDIE	6050	624	HILLS DRIVE	WHITE OAK CREEK	1/3/2025
DINWIDDIE	6025	613	SQUIRREL LEVEL ROAD	HATCHERS RUN	1/2/2025
POWHATAN	13837	603	ROCKY FORD ROAD	BRANCH ROCKY FORD CREEK	12/17/2024
WYTHE	19757	681	BRUSHY MOUNTAIN ROAD	BR REED CREEK	12/10/2024

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 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 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.

Something Rotten! JR ACCT musical runs through Jan. 26.

BY JEANNE THEISMANN
GAZETTE PACKET

For anyone who has ever wondered about the beginnings of musical theater, look no further for the answer than *Something Rotten! JR*, a musical comedy playing now through Jan. 26 at Aldersgate Church Community Theater.

Set in the 1590s, *Something Rotten! JR* is adapted from the Broadway hit that Time Out New York hailed as the funniest musical comedy in at least 400 years. The play follows brothers Nick and Nigel Bottom, who are desperate to write a hit play but are stuck in the shadow of that Renaissance rock star known as The Bard. When a fortune teller predicts that the future of theatre involves singing, dancing and acting at the same time, Nick and Nigel set out to write the world's very first musical.

"I have always loved *Something Rotten* and was so excited when I found out that they were making a junior version so we could do it as a youth production," said director Julia St. Pierre. "The music is amazing, and the comedic elements ring true for



PHOTO BY HOWARD SOROOS

The ACCT production of *Something Rotten! JR* runs through Jan. 26 at Aldersgate Church Community Theater, 1301 Collingwood Road, Alexandria, VA 22308. For tickets or more information visit www.acctonline.org.

"The show introduces participants and audiences to Shakespearean themes and characters in a humorous, approachable way."

—ACCT producer Carolina Chirhart

all ages. It is truly a throwback to the classic musicals with big musical numbers and hilarious characters."

The outrageous, crowd-pleasing musical farce *Something Rotten* was created by

Grammy Award-winning songwriter Wayne Kirkpatrick, and successful screenwriters Karey Kirkpatrick and John O'Farrell. Audiences and critics praised the show, which received several Best Musical nominations.

"*Something Rotten Jr.* is a comedic, family-friendly musical that mixes historical references with modern humor, making it enjoyable for both younger au-

diences and adults," said producer Carolina Chirhart. "Its playful tone and parody of Shakespeare and Broadway culture can attract theatergoers who enjoy clever storytelling and witty dialogue."

The ACCT production features a talented cast of area youth in a hilarious mash-up of 16th-century Shakespeare and 21st-century Broadway.

Sammie Weinstein tackles the part of Nos-tradamus.

"I have been given the opportunity to play a real person that has been reimagined for *Something Rotten Jr.*," Weinstein said. "I play the renaissance soothsayer, Nostradamus. Although, in this version he is changed to be his niece Nancy, yet the powers remain. Her powers, questionable at best, help the protagonist to create the very first musical."

Eliza Froemke, in her first post-COVID role, plays Bea.

"My character, Bea, is definitely a very fun one to play," Froemke said. "She's sassy and super motivated, which lands her in some situations that I've had such a good time getting to bring alive onstage. Bea has been a dream role of mine for a long time and I

hope I do her justice."

The show is under the musical direction of Cathey Manley and features an upbeat, traditional Broadway style score. Choreography by Michelle Koros is showcased in energizing dance numbers like "A Musical" and "We See the Light."

"The show introduces participants and audiences to Shakespearean themes and characters in a humorous, approachable way," Chirhart said. "The Jr. version is adapted to suit younger performers and audiences, with simplified language, shorter runtime, and adjustments for appropriateness while retaining the essence of the original production. Everyone in the family will enjoy this show."

Something Rotten! JR is playing Jan. 17-26 at Aldersgate Church Community Theater, 1301 Collingwood Road, Alexandria, VA 22308. For tickets or more information visit www.acctonline.org.

Commanders Watch Parties Planned For the NFC Championship on Sunday

Football fans can still cheer in unison at spots around the area.

BY MIKE SALMON
GAZETTE PACKET

When the Washington Commanders meet the Philadelphia Eagles in the NFC championship game on Sunday, there's nothing like being at a crowded bar, cheering your team on with a cold one in hand. Sure, it could be loud but fun to many and in southern Fairfax County there's plenty of spots to watch this landmark game.

Things start off at 1 p.m. on Sunday at the Verizon store in Springfield Pla-

za where they are having the "Commanders Official Verizon Pep Rally with mascot Major Teddy, the Commanders dance team and other legends.

There are a nearly infinite number of options for seeing the game, the first time the Washington football team has been in the NFC Championship game in more than 30 years.

Crystal City Sports Pub, 529 23rd Street, Arlington

With over 200 television screens including a big screen, fans will catch every minute of the action at this Arlington location. Appe-

tizers are \$7.99 and beer specials throughout the afternoon.

Kalypso's Sports Tavern, 1617 Washington Plaza North, Reston

Fans will enjoy free barbecue wings with entrees.

Glory Days, 9459 Lorton Market Street, Lorton

The televisions will be tuned in and the fans cheering to their regularly priced beers and food. The real fun begins on Super Bowl Sunday where there is a \$35 entry fee to a party that includes drinks, food and more.

❖ **NFC CHAMPIONSHIP:**
Washington Commanders vs Philadelphia Eagles
Sunday, Jan. 26 at 3 pm

❖ **AFC CHAMPIONSHIP:**
Kansas City Chiefs vs Buffalo Bills
Sunday, Jan. 26 at 6:30 pm

"We have one every year," said the host.

Burtons, Kingstowne, 6452A Old Beulah St, Alexandria

Six televisions will be on behind the bar tuned to sports, and the Super Bowl, if requested.

Chili's Grill & Bar, 6601 Richmond Highway, Alexandria

Football fans are expected as usual for the Sunday afternoon festivities.

Theismann's Restaurant, 1800A Diagonal Rd, Alexandria, VA 22314

ENTERTAINMENT

JAN. 1 - FEB. 23, 2025

Ice & Lights at Cameron Run offers daytime ice skating on weekends/holidays throughout January and February.

JAN. 3 TO FEB. 1

“Visual Humor.” At Del Ray Artisans Gallery, 2704 Mount Vernon Ave., Alexandria. A lighthearted art exhibit that explores how humor sparks the imagination. Opening Reception on Friday, January 3, 7-9 p.m. to meet curator Dr Erica Hughes and the artists. Gallery hours are Thursdays 12-6 p.m., Fridays 12-9 p.m., Saturdays and Sundays 12-6 p.m. Details at Del-RayArtisans.org/exhibits

JAN. 16 TO FEB. 23

Eclipse: An Athenaeum Sculpture Invitational. At The Athenaeum, 201 Prince Street, Alexandria. Artist Talk: Sunday, February 23, 2 p.m. Curated by Alison Sigethy, Eclipse is an all sculpture show examining light and shadow, liminal space, and the passage of time. Every artist brings a unique perspective to their work. Pairing sculptures by different artists amplifies that perspective. Sometimes those perspectives sing in harmony, sometimes they debate. In either case, the experience of each individual work is heightened by the art it is paired with.

WEDNESDAY/JAN. 22

Special Virtual Event: How the Northeast Became an Acela Corridor. 7 p.m. via Zoom. Sponsored by the Alexandria Historical Society. Join David Alff, author of The Northeast Corridor: The Trains, the People, the History, the Region, for an engaging discussion about the transformative history of one of the most iconic rail systems in the United States. Alff will explore how the Northeast’s geography, culture, and politics shaped the creation of the train tracks and how this infrastructure came to define the region from Washington, D.C., to Boston. To attend, email AlexandriaHistoricalSociety@gmail.com with the subject line “Register for Jan 22nd.” Visit AlexandriaHistoricalSociety.org.

THURSDAY, JAN. 23

Art, Wine & Cheese. 6-7:30 p.m. At the Nepenthes Gallery, 7918 Ft. Hunt Rd., Alexandria. Featuring Winter Solstice Exhibit: Six Local Artists. The opening event will be Thursday January 23 and will feature original works by six local artists: Celia Chadwick, Lesley Clarke, Todd Key, Camille Kouyoumdjian, Nancy Ramsey, and Lori Welch.

THURSDAY/JAN. 23

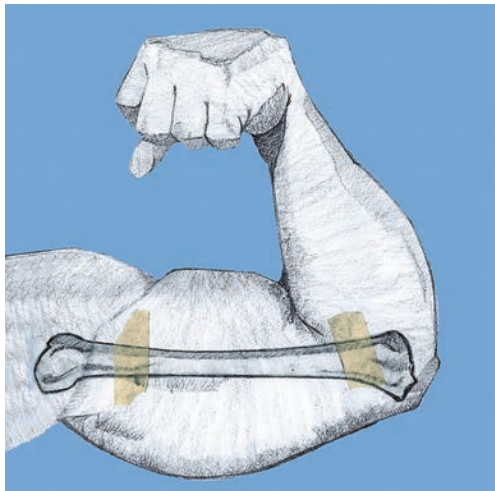
The Chamber ALX’s January After Hours. 5:30-7:00 p.m. At BeeLiner Diner, Alexandria. Don’t miss the first After Hours of the year at BeeLiner Diner! Join them at the reigning Rising Star Business of the Year for drinks, bites, and networking, then stay for Bingo.

JAN. 25-26

Auditions for “Much Ado About Nothing.” Jan. 25 from 1-5 p.m. and Jan. 26 from 5-9 p.m. At The Little Theatre of Alexandria, 600 Wolfe St, Alexandria, VA 22314

THURSDAY/JAN. 30

Coffee & Connections. 8:30-9:30 a.m. At Wegmans Carlyle, Alexandria.



Del Ray Artisans Gallery in Alexandria presents “Visual Humor” from Jan. 3 to Feb. 1, 2025.



Eclipse: An Athenaeum Sculpture Invitational can be seen now through Feb. 23, 2025 at The Athenaeum in Alexandria.

The Chamber ALX’s Professional Women’s Network January Coffee & Connections. Kick off the new year by networking with the best and brightest women (and men) from around the region at the first Professional Women’s Network Coffee & Connections of 2025.

THURSDAY, JAN. 30

Art, Wine & Cheese. 6-7:30 p.m. At the Nepenthes Gallery, 7918 Ft. Hunt Rd., Alexandria. Featuring Mehran Rashidfarokhy: Post-Impressionist Paintings. He was born in Tehran and spent his childhood in Iran. He moved to Munich as a young teen where he received the foundation of his fine art training in the studios of his uncles, Anoush (1924-1989) and Madjid (1942-2020), both well-known professional artists. Mehran sold his first painting in the U.S. in 1988 to the Middleton Gallery in Annapolis, MD and this marked the beginning of his career as a professional artist. Mehran’s work includes a variety of impressionist and post-impressionist landscapes, cityscapes and coastal scenes; classic and contemporary floral and still life paintings; and modern abstract pieces. He has exhibited and sold his work in galleries throughout the United States and Europe.

THURSDAY/JAN. 30

The Chamber ALX’s Professional Women’s Network January Coffee & Connections. 8:30-9:30 a.m. At Wegmans Carlyle, Alexandria. Presented by MainStreet Bank. Kick off the new year by networking with the best and brightest women (and



The 21st Annual Alexandria Boutique Warehouse Sale takes place on Feb. 1-2, 2025 throughout Old Town Alexandria.

men) from around the region at the first Professional Women’s Network Coffee & Connections of 2025! This quarter we will hear from Wegmans Bakery Manager Frances Carlson who will share her journey.

ALEXANDRIA RESTAURANT WEEK
Alexandria Restaurant Week returns January 31 to February 9, 2025. For 10 days and two weekends, nearly 100 restaurants will offer a \$30, \$40 or \$50 prix fixe dinner for one. Plus, find special fast casual offers.

https://visitalexandria.com/restaurants/restaurant-week/?mc_cid=6333e6a5dc&mc_eid=c8aed55232

SATURDAY/FEB. 1

Indoor Rowing Championships. 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. Alexandria City High School will host “Erg Sprints,” the largest and longest running indoor rowing championship in America. It is rooted in the storied history of Alexandria City’s crew program, a training ground for top athletes and Olympians. First held in 1986, the day-long event features approximately 1,500 athletes competing on 140 ergs that are set up on the race floor inside the ACHS gym. The athletes have ranged in ages from under 10 to over 80, and have included some of the top high school, club, and collegiate rowers in the country and the world.

FEB. 1-2

21st Annual Alexandria Boutique Warehouse Sale. Throughout Old Town Alexandria. With over 40 independent businesses participating from Alexandria and the surrounding region, shoppers can explore a variety of shopping experiences in stores, pop-up tents, open retail spaces, and select side streets along King Street. Shoppers can also discover incredible deals on indie brands, clothing, shoes, jewelry, home furnishings, and

more. Participating shoppers can download a sale map ahead of time to plan their shopping routes and highlight must-visit spots. QR code stations will also be available at participating businesses and pop-up tents to help locate shopping destinations easily. The sale map will be released the week of the event. For more information, visit AlexandriaWarehouseSale.com.

Feb. 7 to March 1

The “MeWOW: Fabulous Felines” exhibit. At Del Ray Artisans Gallery, 2704 Mount Vernon Ave., Alexandria. Celebrate the mysterious and fascinating world of cats with “feline forward” artwork. Opening Reception on Friday, February 7, 7-9 p.m. Gallery hours are Thursdays 12-6pm, Fridays 12-9pm, Saturdays & Sundays 12-6pm. Details at DelRayArtisans.org/exhibits

FEB. 8-MARCH 1

Roald Dahl’s Matilda The Musical. At the Little Theatre of Alexandria, 600 Wolfe Street, Alexandria. Thursdays to Saturdays at 8 p.m.; Sundays at 2 p.m. Matilda Wormwood is an exceptionally gifted child with an extraordinary love of books, an incredibly vivid imagination, and just plain rotten luck in the parental department. Along with her friends and her teacher, Miss Honey, Matilda stands up for justice against the headmistress (appropriately dubbed “The Trunchbull”) and other adults who “can’t be bothered with the affairs of “wretched, filthy children.”

SATURDAY/FEB. 15

George Washington Birthday Parade. 2-4 p.m. At 300 King Street, Alexandria. Thousands of spectators will line the streets of Old Town Alexandria to cheer on the oldest and largest George Washington Birthday Parade in the country! This year’s parade theme is George Washington: America’s Commander-in-Chief, marking the 250th anniversary of the start of the Revolutionary War and founding of the United States

Army. The Parade Grand Marshal will be Lieutenant General Heidi J. Hoyle, Deputy Chief of Staff of the United States Army. The parade features drum corps, color guards, bands, community and fraternal organizations, youth groups, local merchants, city dignitaries, and, of course, General Washington and Martha Washington.

SATURDAY/FEB. 15

Alexandria Symphony Orchestra. 7:30 p.m. At Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall, Alexandria. Featuring James Ross who plays and conducts Mozart & Schubert. Alexandria Symphony, James Ross, Conductor and Horn Soloist; Lee Hinkle, Marimba; Mozart Horn Concerto No. 2; Kevin Puts Marimba Concerto; Schubert Symphony No. 9, “The Great C Major.”

SUNDAY/FEB. 16

Alexandria Symphony Orchestra. 3 p.m. At George Washington Masonic National Memorial. Featuring James Ross who plays and conducts Mozart & Schubert. Alexandria Symphony, James Ross, Conductor and Horn Soloist; Lee Hinkle, Marimba; Mozart Horn Concerto No. 2; Kevin Puts Marimba Concerto; Schubert Symphony No. 9, “The Great C Major.”

FRIDAY/FEB. 21

The Thirteen: To The Field of Stars. At 7:30 p.m. At Virginia Theological Seminary, Immanuel Chapel, 3651 Deanery Dr. Alexandria. The Thirteen returns to the mystical Camino de Santiago de Compostela – Camino of St. James of the Field of Stars – with two works that explore transfiguration: David Lang’s Pulitzer Prize-winning the little match girl passion and Gabriel Jackson’s 2011 To the Field of Stars.

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

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Obituary

Susan Catherine Dodd, 94, of Chancellor's Village, Fredericksburg, VA (but born and raised in Alexandria, VA), died Thursday, January 17, 2025. She is survived by her children, Sandra Walker of Richmond and Daniel Dodd (wife Susan) of Fredericksburg; granddaughter Erinn Dilday (husband Bryan), great-grandchildren Corinne and Cohan of Chesterfield, and grandson John Chorovich (wife Sara) and great-grandchild Elodie of Burke.

She was predeceased by her husband of 62 years, Alvin "O'Boy" Dodd in 2010 (retired Alexandria Police Detective); parents George and Georgie; and brother Jack.

A service will be held at Everly-Wheatley Funeral Home, 1500 W. Braddock Rd., Alexandria on Friday, January 24 at 11:00 am with interment at Mount Comfort Cemetery, 6600 South Kings Highway, Alexandria at 12:00 pm.

Obituary

Franklin Jay Pepper, prominent psychiatrist and husband of former Alexandria City Council member and Vice Mayor Del Pepper, died Jan. 6 at his West End home following a long illness. He was 89.

Known as F.J., Pepper was born March 21, 1935, in Omaha, Nebraska. He was the eldest of four children: brothers Maurice Jr. and John (predeceased) and a sister, Sara Epstein, born to Dr. Maurice L. Pepper and Ramona Slosburg Pepper.

Pepper attended the University of Nebraska, earning a B.A. in 1954 and M.S. in 1958. He graduated from the University of Nebraska College of Medicine, Omaha, in 1965. He spent more than 60 years as a practicing physician in the Washington DC area following his move to Alexandria in 1968.

Pepper served in the U.S. Army Medical Corps, Captain, from 1966-68. He was a battalion surgeon in Vietnam and was awarded a Bronze Star "M", Combat Medical Badge, Air Medal.

F.J. was a member of multiple organizations that include The Alexandria and Virginia Democratic Committees. He was also a lifetime member and honoree of the NAACP. F.J. could name 28 Masonic bodies of which he was or had been a member. He was formerly the President of the Nebraska University Phi Delta Theta. Pepper is survived by his wife of 58 years, Del Pepper, son Murphy Pepper, daughter-in-law Soo Pepper, and five grandchildren: Katherine (Katie), Judah, Elizabeth, Macsen, and Mary.

A memorial service will be held Sunday, January 26, 2025, from 4-6 p.m. at Everly-Wheatley Funeral Home & Crematory, 1500 W Braddock Rd., Alexandria, VA 22302. A private interment will take place later at the Ivy Hill Cemetery. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Alzheimer's Association.

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JAN. 31, FEB. 1 & 2

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OBITUARY

Oscar Mecklin Johnson, 89

FROM PAGE 6

employees and wrote about the inner workings of Congress, causing stir with stories on topics like gender inequalities on the Hill. It was at Roll Call that he met Mary Jo Adams. They married in 1968, moved back to Alexandria — where they raised four children — and later divorced.

Following in his father's footsteps, Johnson served as a legislative assistant to U.S. Rep. Claude Pepper of Florida. Later, he was chief-of-staff to U.S. Rep. Patsy Mink of Hawaii, and thereafter a legislative assistant to U.S. Rep. Dante Fascell of Florida. Johnson played a key role in drafting and passing numerous bills, including Title IX and the Women's Educational Equity Act. In 1972, he helped lead Mink's presidential bid.

After his career on the Hill, Johnson pursued other passions, including renovating townhouses and writing and publishing newsletters on issues of importance to him. In 2000, he retired to Florida and lived in the Tampa Bay area before moving back to Alexandria in 2022 and Arlington in 2023.

Johnson had an extensive lexicon that served him well in his years of writing. He loved song lyrics and musicals, and couldn't resist singing along to "South Pacific" whenever he had the chance. He enjoyed sports, in particular the Tampa Bay Rays; politics; and, as he aged, natural health. As a boy, he loved catching crabs in the St. Johns River and swimming in his hometown's natural springs swimming pool. As a young man in the Army, he developed a lasting love of photography, later capturing scenes from his six-month U.S. and Mexico beach-tour honeymoon and time in Acapulco, Mexico. He took pride in thoughtfully selecting gifts for his children and grandchildren, and he found joy watching sunsets on Florida's Gulf coast, eating ice cream and relaxing in his chair.

He is survived by two sons, Patrick and Christopher (Joy); two daughters, Margaret and Elizabeth (Brett); his brother Carl (Susan); nieces Donna Harkness and Lizzy Johnson; nephew Roy Harkness; and grandchildren Matt, Jacqueline, James, Hugh, Byron, Alexander and Josephine. He is predeceased by his nephew, Mike, and his sister, Janie. His daughter Margaret was his favorite.

Helping Hearts Dance

Seniors take the stage in dance recital.

BY JEANNE THEISMANN
GAZETTE PACKET

Helping Hearts Dance with Seniors, an 8-week movement program, culminated with a dance recital performance Nov. 21, 2024, at the Nannie J. Lee Recreation Center.

A component of Helping Hearts Through the Arts, Helping Hearts Dance volunteer dancers work with seniors, who learn dance movements while seated in chairs.

"Helping Hearts Dance has been working with seniors with Alexandria Day Services," said volunteer Rachel Goldberg. "We've been doing a seated dance program for two months and will open our show with the dance the seniors have prepared."

Founded in 2013, the mission of Helping Hearts Through the Arts is to inspire life-long movement and foster a love of the arts through dance programs, live musical performances, and movement activities. Performances are geared toward reaching senior communities throughout the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan area.

The City of Alexandria awarded a Fiscal Year 2025 grant to support HHA's Helping Hearts Dance with Seniors project with the Alexandria Adult Day Services.

The dancers, aged 40 to over 75, demonstrate that high-quality dance performance is possible at all ages. Performances include a variety of styles of dance including tap, musical theater, modern, ballet and contemporary dance.

"A big thank you goes to the City of Alexandria for the program grant," said Helping Hearts Dance founder Sue Skadden. "We are thrilled to be here."

For more information on Helping Hearts Through the Arts, visit www.helpingheartsthroughthearts.com.



PHOTOS BY JANET BARNETT/GAZETTE PACKET

Led by their instructor, seniors perform a chair dance recital with Helping Hearts Dance Nov. 21, 2024, at the Nannie J. Lee Recreation Center.



Volunteer dancers with Helping Hearts Dance perform Nov. 21, 2024, at the Nannie J. Lee Recreation Center.



Seniors perform a chair dance recital as part of the performance by Helping Hearts Dance Nov. 21, 2024, at the Nannie J. Lee Recreation Center.

End of an Era



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Sitting at my desk at home with my golden retriever Burton lying at my feet, unwrapping Christmas-colors-wrapped milk Chocolate Hershey's Kisses, I feel compelled to make an admission (not that any of you should care): I don't like Mars M&Ms anymore. And considering I've been eating them my entire life, Mars is losing one of their best customers.

To put this loss in some context, though it's impossible to quantify; let's just say for the sake of this column, I've consumed over a million M&Ms. Almost exclusively the plain M&Ms until the "peanut butter (orange bag) came along. Peanut M&Ms despite their lofty position atop various "most eaten candies" lists never appealed to me. Neither did any of the newer varieties which have appeared on the shelves over the last decade or two except the mint M&Ms. Whenever I see that green bag, I'm buyin'. Delicious but hard to find for some reason. To summarize then the percentages eaten over the years: 97% plain, 2.5% peanut butter, .5% mint. (As the peanut butter and mint flavors are somewhat new creations, comparatively speaking, their newness is reflected in these percentages.)

As to the reason for this rather drastic change in my candy consumption, I can't really remember the "Oh no"-moment when I took a handful, which had not melted in my hand, and tossed them into my mouth where they indeed melted (after I had crunched them all down to more eatable size). Nevertheless, me and my tastebuds have come to the same conclusion: our love affair with M&Ms was over. Though I finished whatever bag I had started, we parted as friends. Never again will I eat M&Ms unless there are extenuating circumstances ("extenuations" you might call them) as in the M&Ms are in plain sight, within arm's length and relatively unguarded. But my days as an intentional buyer are over.

I've had a similar falling out, though not nearly as definitive/life changing, with 3 Musketeers and Milky Way bars. For years, make that decades/half centuries even, these two bars were my go-to preferences (along with the M&Ms); now they're merely memories of a recent past. Unlike my M&M stoppage for which I had no specific event, I do indeed have one sort of, for the end of my similar love affair for 3 Musketeers/Milky Way bars. It was Halloween a few years back. Naturally, I had prepared a bowl of snack-size candies for the year's lucky participants: 3 Musketeers, Milky Way and Snickers. But few trick-or-treaters showed that year, so I was left with an ample-sized bowl brimming with chocolate goodies. And needless to say, or I wouldn't be writing this column, I overwhelmed their defenses and over the next few days (not weeks), rapidly (not slowly) and surely, I emptied that bowl. By week's end, the bowl was a shell of its former holiday self. I wouldn't say I was proud of myself, but other than my brother who could have accomplished what I did? (This was a rhetorical question. Those that know me, know the answer: no one.) To invoke Curly Howard of The Three Stooges: "I seen my duty and I done it." However, my overeating had a consequence that overindulging often has: swearing off of the presumptive cause. For me, it was most definitely the 3 Musketeers and Milky Way snack/fun size bars originally meant for the neighborhood kids. In lieu thereof, I picked up the slack and haven't had a 3 Musketeers or Milky Way bar since. Added to the M&M loss, Mars must be feeling the pinch. One that a smaller company might not have survived.

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

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