

THE CONNECTION

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

Isha Gaye and graduating daughter Zaydah Rahman at Mountain View High School's winter graduation Feb. 13.



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BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

Casino Bill Is Dead for Now

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Locals Mourned In Plane Crash

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'Your Dreams Are Worth Fighting For'

PAGE 10



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1313 Merrie Ridge Rd
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Curious what your home is worth? Call to chat with JD and Ed today!

Royal Flush for Opponents of ‘Casino Bill’

Virginia Senate Bill 982 dead for 2025.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

The controversial Virginia Senate Bill 982, the so-called Fairfax Casino Bill introduced by Senate Majority Leader Scott Surovell, died late Wednesday afternoon after House leadership moved it between House committees for consideration. The Virginia House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Agriculture, and Natural Resources agreed to “Pass the Bill By for the Day.”

Surovell introduced Senate Bill 982, with the bill passing 24-16 in the Senate on Tuesday, Feb. 4. “When I read the paper about how much money Maryland was going to suck out of our commonwealth to pay for their schools — in both Maryland and [Prince George’s] County, I thought it was offensive, and I thought that we need to do something,” Surovell said. Maryland is home to MGM National Harbor Hotel and Casino, directly across the Potomac River from Alexandria.

If Virginia SB982 had passed the House and won Gov. Glenn Youngkin’s approval, it would have allowed Fairfax County to hold a local referendum for voters to decide whether Fairfax County would be added to the list as the fifth eligible host locality as described in part in Article 2, §58.1-4101 E.: “limited to a proposed site for a casino gaming establishment in Tysons located within one-quarter of a mile of an existing station on the Metro Silver Line, part of a coordinated mixed-use project development consisting of no less than 1.5 million square feet, within two miles of a regional enclosed mall containing not less than 1.5 million square feet of gross building area, and outside of the Interstate 495 Beltway.”

“Oh, what a happy day leading up to Valentine’s,” posted Sen. Jennifer Boysko (D-

38) at 5:19 p.m. on Feb. 12. “SB982, the Casino Bill, has died in a House Appropriations Subcommittee.”

Supervisor Walter Alcorn (D-Hunter Mill), serving on the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and passionate opponent of SB982, posted on X at 6:54 p.m., “What a wonderful gift, and thanks for your show of love this afternoon speaking out against the casino!”

The Great Falls Citizens Association released its newsletter, titled “House Subcommittee Action Halts Progress of Tysons Casino Bill,” at 6 p.m. According to the GFC, the Chairman, David Bulova, commented, “Today’s meeting was the subcommittee’s last meeting of the session.” “Therefore, the casino bill may be left in committee.”

GFC thanked Fairfax County Board Supervisor Jimmy Bierman (D-Dranesville) for his strong opposition to the bill and added

“What a wonderful gift, and thanks for your show of love this afternoon speaking out against the casino.”

— Supervisor Walter Alcorn
(D-Hunter Mill)

that its Special Committee on Legislative Action and the Land Use & Zoning Committee will continue to monitor the casino issue and any new initiatives that may develop.

Lynne Mulston, spokesperson for the No Fairfax Casino Coalition, expressed her gratitude to all the elected officials who opposed the bill in the GFC newsletter. “We extend



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Members of the No Fairfax Coalition traveled multiple times to Richmond, a two-and-a-half-hour trip each way, to inform legislators of their position and why.

“We’re going to keep talking about it.”

— Sen. Scott Surovell

our deepest gratitude to Senator Jennifer Boysko, whose bold, decisive leadership led the opposition to this casino bill. Of significance, we acknowledge the thousands of Fairfax County residents who signed petitions opposing the bill, wrote members of the General Assembly, donated to the fight, planted yard signs, attended our rallies, and traveled numerous times to Richmond in order to voice opposition,” Mulston said.

Mulston added that SB982 followed the failed effort by Sen. Dave Marsden (D-Burke). “So, it is likely to resurrect itself in another piece of legislation in the future.”

During the 2024 General Assembly session, a Virginia Senate subcommittee voted

“SB982 the ‘Casino Bill’ has died in a House Appropriations Subcommittee.”

— Va. Sen. Jennifer Boysko

to “continue” Marsden’s Senate Bill 675, so a more in-depth analysis of the potential casino could be conducted. In January 2023, Marsden introduced Senate Bill 1543, which would have amended state law to allow a casino to be built in any locality with a population of more than 1 million and operating under an urban county executive form of government. Marsden’s bill was withdrawn before the vote.

“We’re going to keep talking about it,” Surovell said after Wednesday’s vote.

‘Harsh Penalty’ Slams Senator

Boysko loses leadership positions after opposing Senate majority leader’s ‘casino bill.’

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Virginia State Senator Jennifer Boysko (D-38) has been disciplined for speaking out against Senate Bill 982, Fairfax Casino bill. Boysko lost her positions as a budget conferee, chair of the Senate Transportation Committee, and member of the Rules Committee. Senate Majority Leader Scott A. Surovell (D-34) is the chief patron of Senate Bill 982.

“To lose those leadership positions was a harsh penalty. But I do not regret standing up for our community,” Boysko said in her online bulletin Friday evening, Feb. 14. “Thousands of people have worked together to defeat the casino legislation, and

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I am proud to have led that effort. Sometimes, even members of the same party do not think as one. We must continue to work together to fight for our values.” Boysko testified against Surovell’s bill in a House subcommittee meant to pave the way for the casino gaming establishment.

SB982 died in a House Appropriations subcommittee on Wednesday, Feb. 12, “passed by for the day.” It would have authorized Fairfax County Board of Supervisors the right to call a referendum and for local voters to decide whether they wanted Fairfax County to be an eligible host locality for a casino establishment in Virginia. The bill slated a specific area in Tysons for the casino gaming establishment. Comstock Holding Cos. is pushing for the project de-

velopment; however, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors would, as the next step in following the process, issue a Request for Proposals and choose a plan before putting it to voters.

Boysko said, “I’ve heard from many friends far and near over the past few days.” Boysko added that she is “very proud” of her work in the positions from which she was removed and proud to have led the effort against the casino proposed for the Tyson’s area.

Sen. Stella Pekarsky (D-36), Sen. Lamont Bagby (D-14), and Sen. Todd Pillion (R-6) co-sponsored SB-982.

According to Boysko, there are rumors that a bill leading to a casino could be brought back. “I will continue to fight against all efforts to bring a casino to or near District 38. Please continue to let your legislators know how you feel,” she said in her bulletin.

“To lose those leadership positions was a harsh penalty. But I do not regret standing up for our community.”

— Sen. Jennifer B. Boysko (D-38)

Surovell released a statement on X on Feb. 12, as patron of SB982 for the Tysons Entertainment District passed by for the day in the House Appropriations Committee. “With the Trump administration moving aggressively to eliminate jobs in Northern Virginia,” Surovell said he was disappointed that the bill did not advance “to bring thousands of union jobs to Fairfax County.” With thousands of federal jobs already lost and more economic harm on the horizon, Surovell said he looked forward to continued work with his partners on the Fairfax Delegation to the General Assembly and local Board of Supervisors to bring forward supportive policies “that offer relief and support for our citizens.”

Highlights of Fairfax County Proposed FY 2026 Budget

More challenging than COVID year budgets.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Fairfax County Executive Bryan Hill presented his proposed FY 2026 Advertised Budget Plan on Tuesday. Hill suggested a 1.5-cent real estate tax rate increase to \$1.14 per \$100 assessed value. That would generate \$50.9 million, bringing the average homeowner's increase to slightly over \$638.

Hill suggested a 3 percent prepared food and beverage tax that, if in effect January 2026, would generate net revenue of \$48.1 million over six months. "That could be invested in county priorities or a portion of which could eliminate the need for a real estate tax rate increase in this budget," said Hill.

Hill noted that the county's commercial/industrial percentage of the total real estate assessment base decreased from 15.58 percent in FY 2025 to 14.80 percent in FY 2026. He said responsible budgeting is about balance, and his proposed budget included equal growth for county disbursements and transfers to Fairfax County Public Schools, with a growth rate of just under four-and-a-half percent. Hill acknowledged the proposed budget did not fully fund the superintendent's requested operating transfer. "A

"We have included employee compensation consistent with what our metrics show and consistent with what we know is necessary to retain the best and brightest employees."

— Jeff McKay, chairman,
Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

tight budget brings difficult choices, and one of the most challenging this year is funding the support of our schools. The superintendent's proposed budget includes a \$268 million increase in school operating transfer, or about 10.4 percent slightly less than the amount discussed at our November forecast meeting. This transfer request exceeds last year's \$254 million requests, which was the largest dollar increase request in county history," Hill said.

How to Provide Input on the FY 2026 Budget

- Email FY26Budget@publicinput.com
- By Phone call 703-890-5898, code 7574
- On February 24, Online and Text options will be available at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/budget/fy-2026-feedback
- Testify at a budget public hearing in person, by video or phone. Sign up at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/bosclerk/speakers-form. Call the Clerk to the Board's Office at (703) 324-3151 (TTY 711) or email clerktothebos@fairfaxcounty.gov for more information.
- Attend a Budget Town Hall in your district. Times and details available at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/budget/fy-2026-budget-town-hall-meetings

The complete FY 2026 Advertised Budget Plan and the FY 2026-FY 2030 Capital Improvement Program are available online at:

www.fairfaxcounty.gov/budget

COUNTY EXECUTIVE'S PRESENTATION ON THE FY 2026 ADVERTISED BUDGET 19

SCREENSHOT/ SOURCE: FAIRFAX COUNTY CHANNEL 16

How to provide input to the budget

Hill's proposed budget focused on compensation for county employees. It fully funded the county's collective bargaining agreements with IAFF Local 2068: Fairfax County Professional Fire Fighters and the Fairfax County Chapter of the Southern States Police Benevolent Association and provided a full compensation package for non-represented employees.

However, given the moderate revenue growth projected, the advertised budget did

"A tight budget brings difficult choices, and one of the most challenging this year is funding the support of our schools."

— Fairfax County Executive
Bryan Hill

SEE PROPOSED BUDGET, PAGE 11

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The Home Stretch

BY SEN. ADAM EBBIN



As we approach the conclusion of the 2025 legislative session, I am working to bring a number of my bills over the finish line. This week I wanted to discuss a few pieces of legislation that many of you have written to me about.

with stakeholders from the Department of Taxation, the Alcoholic Beverage Control Authority, and representatives from convenience stores to come to a solution. Inspections are an important tool in deterring sales, but can end up costing as much as \$174 per location between ABC agent overtime pay, youth working with law enforcement on these buys, and transportation costs.

This bill would allow localities to waive certain zoning restrictions, reduce administrative fees, and expedite site plan approvals for non-profit-led housing projects. By cutting through bureaucratic red tape, we are helping to create a pathway for trusted nonprofit organizations to provide quality, affordable housing for families in need. To ensure long-term affordability, the bill also requires that housing developed under these provisions remains affordable for at least 15 years.

By empowering nonprofits and local governments to work together, we can create real solutions to Virginia's housing crisis—ensuring that families and individuals have access to safe and stable housing for years to come.

Protecting Veterans from Exploitation

SB 1222 was introduced by Senator Bryce Reeves (R-Orange) and myself. Under this legislation, charges would be capped for veterans who use private application services in seeking to upgrade their VA benefits. The bill would also ensure transparency by requiring that veterans receive clear disclosures about their rights before agreeing to any services. This piece of legislation would have introduced new protections against fraud and financial exploitation targeting veterans by prohibiting the use of overseas call centers and solicitation of vets during the benefits application process.

This legislation was a bipartisan effort. Unfortunately the bill did not pass in the House Rules committee, which ended its consideration for this session. I look forward to continuing to work on these protections next year.

Prescription Drug Affordability

Finally, Delegate Karrie Delaney (D-Fairfax) has introduced HB 1724, which would establish the Prescription Drug Affordability Board to bring stakeholders together to lower the cost of prescription drugs here in the Commonwealth. This board would conduct a review of the affordability of these drugs and make recommendations to bring down costs by limiting drug payment amounts involving state regulated programs, and would require nonprofit organizations contracted by the Department of Health to provide more transparency on prescription drug pricing to the board. I cosponsored this bill in previous years. Virginians at large agree the cost of prescription drugs are too high.

Thanks for the continued opportunity to serve,

Adam P. Ebbin

Green Economy

Energy and a green economy for Virginia's future is a hot topic that comes up in the General Assembly. My bill on solar interconnection fees, SB 1058, deals with the costs of connecting new solar facilities to the electric grid. Recently, Alexandria Public High School's new Minnie Howard Campus and the new Douglas MacArthur Elementary School faced unexpected costs of \$1.3 million and \$105,000 respectively to integrate their new solar installations with the electrical grid due to associated infrastructure upgrade costs assessed by Dominion Energy. My bill would require the State Corporation Commission to establish a cost sharing program for required system upgrades to interconnect new solar facilities. By spreading interconnection upgrade costs among all new solar installations connected to a particular substation, smaller projects, like those being built by Alexandria City Public Schools, can proceed while still contributing to maintain and upgrade the system. Delegate Kathy Tran (D-Fairfax) has worked hard on the House version of the bill, HB 2266.

Delegate Rip Sullivan (D-Fairfax) brought us HB 1791, another bill that would help our green economy. This bill creates the Electric Vehicle Rural Infrastructure Program and Fund, which would allow developers who install electric vehicle charging stations in rural areas to apply for a state grant. We have a growing number of electric vehicles, and easier drives to our state parks and other rural attractions help promote access and protect our environment.

Reducing Underage Vaping and Tobacco Use

One of the bills requiring the most legwork this session has been my bill, SB 1060, which aims to reduce underage vaping and tobacco use. Delegate Patrick Hope (D-Arlington) is sponsoring the House counterpart, HB 1946. Both bills would allow the confiscation of tobacco and vape products from underage persons and would increase random inspections to prevent sales to minors. My office has worked

Most Email

The bill I received the most email on this session was Senator Scott Surovell's (D-Fairfax) SB 982, which would have allowed the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors to hold a referendum regarding the proposed Tyson's Corner Casino. More than four hundred of my constituents emailed me sharing concerns with this piece of legislation.

I spoke against and voted against SB 982. It was not requested by Fairfax County's Board of Supervisors, and further, the licensing fee and tax revenue split was not favorable to the county. SB 982 also would not have allowed the county to conduct an independent assessment of where the most appropriate site for the casino and accompanying conference center, entertainment center, and hotel would be located.

Expanding Fair Elections with Ranked Choice Voting

As we continue working to improve our democracy, I am happy to support SB 1009, sponsored by Senator Saddam Salim (D-Fairfax), a bill that allows elections for any local governing body to be conducted by Ranked Choice Voting (RCV), ensuring that our electoral system more accurately reflects the will of the voters.

Ranked choice voting allows voters to rank candidates in order of preference, rather than being forced to choose just one. If no candidate secures a majority outright, the system eliminates the lowest-performing candidate, reallocating votes based on next-ranked preferences until a winner emerges. This ensures that the winning candidate has broad support and reduces the risk of "spoiler" candidates splitting the vote.

Supporting Affordable Housing

I was happy to support HB 2153 introduced by Delegate Betsy Carr (D-Richmond), a bill that empowers nonprofit organizations to expand access to affordable housing.

Thanks for Reporting About Important Program

To the editor:

What a great article and beautifully written. Thank you. On behalf of the American Cancer Society, we appreciate Mike Salmon and his reporting. This is such a valuable and important program to get the word out about to the community! Darlene is a shining example.

Vivienne Stearns-Elliott
American Cancer Society
Northeast Region

Submit a Letter to the Editor

To submit a letter to the editor, email editors@connectionnewspapers.com or via the following form <http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/contact/letter/>

Ideally, letters will be original, about local issues and less than 300 words. Please submit letters by noon Friday before publication week, although letters received on Mondays can be considered. Letters must include your first and last name, home address and a phone number. Letters are routinely edited for libel, length, grammar, good taste and accuracy.

Your name and town will be published with your letter, other personal information will not be shared. If you are a student, your school name, age and grade will also be published.

COMMUNITY NEWS AT A GLANCE

Mental Health Hotlines

**Stress Crisis: Need someone to talk to?
Low-cost options.**

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Some local individuals support the new administration's actions. For others, ongoing shock and awe, compounded by feelings of powerlessness and uncertainty, are at an all-time high, leaving them chronically stressed.

Many factors contribute to stress, each impacting different sets of community members. For federal employees, it is the ongoing mass layoffs and firings at various federal agencies. The immigrant community fears deportation, family separations and an uncertain future. The LGBTQIA2S+ communities fear losing freedoms to express their identities. Black, Indigenous and other people of color face racism. Four U.S. aviation accidents have occurred since Inauguration Day — Jan. 29, Arlington, Va.; Jan. 31, Philadelphia; Feb. 6, Alaska; and Feb. 10, Arizona (plus Toronto Feb. 17) — raising concerns about flying for some, while at the same time, hundreds of FAA employees are fired despite the crashes. Most people can handle small doses of stress, but chronic stress risks individuals' health.

"A body under constant stress is like an engine that's continuously being revved," the Cleveland Clinic reports. Low-cost mental health resources are available. For life-threatening and medical emergencies, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

❖ National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (988)—Dial 988 for free, confidential, 24/7 support from trained counselors. You can also text 988 or Crisis Chat at <https://chat.988lifeline.org/>. Website: 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. LGBTQ youth who contact the 988 Lifeline via phone, text, or chat between 3 p.m. and 2 a.m. ET daily can connect with a specially trained, LGBTQ-competent counselor by phone 24/7 and via text and chat.

❖ Fairfax County's CSB Emergency and Mobile Crisis Units number is 703-573-5679. You can call staff at 703-383-8500 or just come in, without an appointment, to the CSB Merrifield Center at 8221 Willow Oaks Corporate Drive in Fairfax. Call center and walk-in hours are Monday through Friday, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

SEE MENTAL HEALTH, PAGE 19

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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
POWHATAN	13851	621	COSBY ROAD	GADDES CREEK	1/22/2025
FRANKLIN	7916	705	CHESTNUT HILL R705	PIGG RIVER	1/22/2025

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.

Make a Difference in McLean!

Run for a seat on the McLean Community Center's all-volunteer governing board!

We're looking for residents of Small District 1A—Dranesville, who wish to serve their community by playing a lead role in helping to carry out MCC's mission.

Candidate Petition Packets will be available starting **Tuesday, Feb. 18, at 9 a.m.** Completed packets must be returned by **Monday, March 17, at 5 p.m.**

1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean VA 22101 // mcleancenter.org
703-790-0123, TTY: 711 // elections@mcleancenter.org



Remembering Local Victims of Jan. 29 Plane Crash

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION

Fairfax County residents Franco Aparicio, 14 of Dunn Loring, Washington Figure Skating Club member and Fairfax County Public School student, and his father, Luciano (Lucho) Aparicio, and Franco's coach, Inna Volyanskaya, of Oakton, died Jan. 29, when American Airlines Flight 5342 collided midair with U.S. Army helicopter over the Potomac River near Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport.

The aircraft went down in the frigid Potomac River, breaking into multiple pieces. There were 64 passengers aboard the plane and three Army soldiers in the helicopter, according to officials.

"There were no survivors," Sen. Jerry Moran (R-KS) said Thursday, Feb. 6, during remarks on the Senate floor. He and Sen. Roger Marshall (R-KS), Virginia's Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine spoke in support of a Senate resolution to commemorate the victims of the fatal plane-helicopter crash in Washington, DC, and honor the first responders.

Many of the victims were returning home to Northern Virginia from a national figure skating development camp in Wichita, Kansas.

"The collision is the deadliest America has witnessed in nearly 25 years, and I am heartbroken at the loss of life and the pain experienced by family, friends and loved ones of the victims," Moran said.

Sergey Korovin, coach of the Skating Club of Northern Virginia, said in an interview with News4 that he did not doubt that Aparicio would have become an Olympian: "He was like flying on the ice. He could stay on the ice for like two hours straight."

The Skater Spotlight of the Washington Figure Skating Club, "Remembering the Lives We Lost," published Feb. 2, 2025, described Franco as "a gracious, hard-working skater whose smile would light up the ice and who pursued excellence in everything he did."

"Franco was an athlete making his way up the ranks. He placed fourth at the 2025 Eastern Sectional Singles Final and first at the National Qualifying Series events in Austin and the Middle Atlantic Championships. This was his second year earning a spot at the national developmental camp," reported The Skater Spotlight of the Washington Figure Skating Club.

The U.S. Figure Skating Club reported that Volyanskaya, 59, became a coach in 2002. "[Inna Volyanskaya] impacted the lives of many skaters, and her influence

on them will carry on," the Club said in a statement.

Volyanskaya was a pair skater who competed for the Soviet Union and won six international medals with Valery Spiridonov, including gold at the 1982 Nebelhorn Trophy. She played Ariel in Disney on Ice's "The Little Mermaid." Volyanskaya lived in Oakton.



SCREENSHOT/ SOURCE: U.S. FIGURE SKATING
Inna Volyanskaya, who coached members of the Washington Figure Skating Club at the Ashburn Ice House, died in the Jan. 29 plane crash.



SCREENSHOT/ SOURCE: LINKEDIN
Luciano (Lucho) Aparicio of Dunn Loring, Franco's father and M&A vice president at The AES Corporation, died in the Jan. 29 plane crash.

Inna Volyanskaya "impacted the lives of many skaters, and her influence on them will carry on."

— U.S. Figure Skating

Franco's father, Luciano Aparicio, was an accountant specializing in the energy sector and vice president of AES Corporation, a multinational power company.

"This is a time we must hold one another a bit closer," said Dr. Michelle Reid, superintendent of Fairfax County Public Schools.

The Skating Club of Northern Virginia and Washington Figure Skating Club issued a statement on Instagram saying the two organizations remain "deeply committed" to supporting their skaters, their families, and the wider figure skating community.

"This heartbreaking accident has shaken the local skating community in Virginia, Maryland, and D.C.— as well as in Boston and across the nation," the statement reads.

One week after the tragedy, the community continued mourning on Wednesday evening, Feb. 5. Residents and elected officials gathered at a vigil to remember all the DC crash victims who died in the midair collision outside Reagan National. Rep. Don Beyer (D-Arlington) led the vigil, and several other elected officials spoke, including U.S. Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Va.) and Alexandria Mayor Alyia Gaskins.

they and Monumental Sports and Entertainment, Entertainment Gang, will host a star-studded live ice-skating tribute, "Legacy on Ice," to honor the victims of the mid-air collision.

"Legacy on Ice will honor the 67 lives lost and raise funds to support victims' families and the first responders and aviation professionals who worked tirelessly in the aftermath of the tragedy. All proceeds will be collected by the Monumental Sports & Entertainment Foundation and equally distributed to the U.S. Figure Skating Family Support Fund, Greater Washington Community Foundation's "DCA Together Relief Fund," and DC Fire & EMS Foundation," according to the release.

"As we begin to heal from this devastating loss, we look forward to honoring the enduring memories of these athletes, coaches, and family members who represented the best of the figure skating community," said U.S. Figure Skating interim CEO Samuel Auxier. "We can think of no better way of celebrating their legacies than through the sport they loved." The event will be March 2 from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.



SCREENSHOT/ SOURCE: U.S. FIGURE SKATING
Franco Aparicio, 14, of Dunn Loring, a member of the Washington Figure Skating Club, died in the Jan. 29 plane crash.

"Franco was an athlete making his way up the ranks. . . . This was his second year earning a spot at the national developmental camp."

— Washington Figure Skating Club

On Thursday, Feb. 6, the U.S. Senate considered and agreed to a resolution honoring the memory of the victims,

Sen. Mark Warner said, "In these moments of tragedy, there are moments of grace and heroic actions. . . . People drop everything, and literally there were first responders from 40 different jurisdictions."

Referencing Psalm 90, Sen. Kaine said, "All of our lives are temporal; all of our lives are mortal. . . . One of the most powerful bits of wisdom that we gain from that knowledge is the realization that we have to bind together in good times, yes, but especially in bad times. We have to join the community to help those who are suffering."

Inna Volyanskaya is survived by her husband, Jeremy Brent Wilson; daughter, Masha Spiridonova; stepson, Keagan Eduardo Wilson; father, Vitaly Volyansky; mother, Larisa Volyanskaya; sister, Olga Raskatov; brother-in-law, Artem Raskatov; niece, Angelina Stapelmann; nephew-in-law, Niclas Stapelmann; and nephew, Alan Raskatov.

Franco Aparicio and his father, Luciano are survived by mother and wife, Barbara and daughters and sisters, Isabella and Antonella," according to Meal Train for Supporting the Aparicio Family in Their Time of Loss.

COMMUNITY NEWS AT A GLANCE

The 2025 Chief vs. Chief Adoption Bowl

— MERCIA HOBSON



SCREENSHOT SOURCE: FACEBOOK

Sunday, Feb. 9, was the last day of the 2025 Chief vs. Chief Adoption Bowl held at the Fairfax County Animal Shelter Michael R. Frey Campus and Fairfax County Animal Shelter Lorton Campus. Chief Kevin Davis scored five adoptions; Chief Butler three. The shelters waived all adoption fees for dogs weighing 45 pounds or more from Thursday, February 6, through Sunday, February 9. Ultimately, what mattered wasn't which chief had the winning score but that eight dogs crossed the welcome mats to their new homes.



SCREENSHOT/ SOURCE: INSTAGRAM

Team Davis scored the win at the 2025 Chief vs. Chief Adoption Bowl.



SCREENSHOT SOURCE: FACEBOOK

One of many dogs at the shelters, 45 pounds or more, up for adoption.

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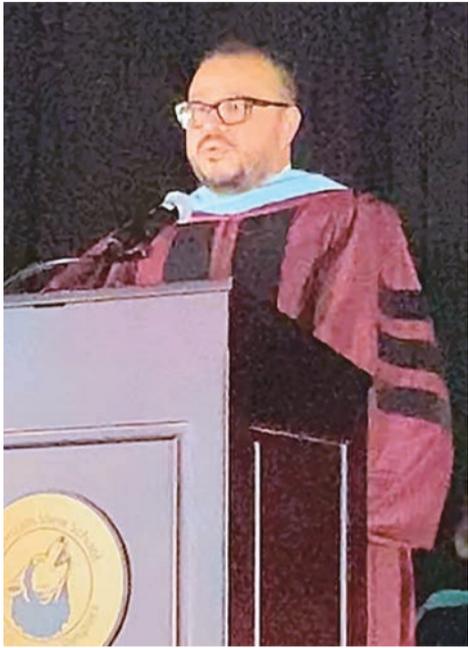
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‘Your Dreams Are Worth Fighting For’

Mountain View High celebrates its winter graduation.

PHOTOS BY BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION



Chief of Schools Geovanny Ponce

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Erin Whatley is in her first year as Mountain View High’s principal, and she’s already learned what an exceptional place it is. It was evident in her speech during the school’s winter graduation Thursday, Feb. 13.

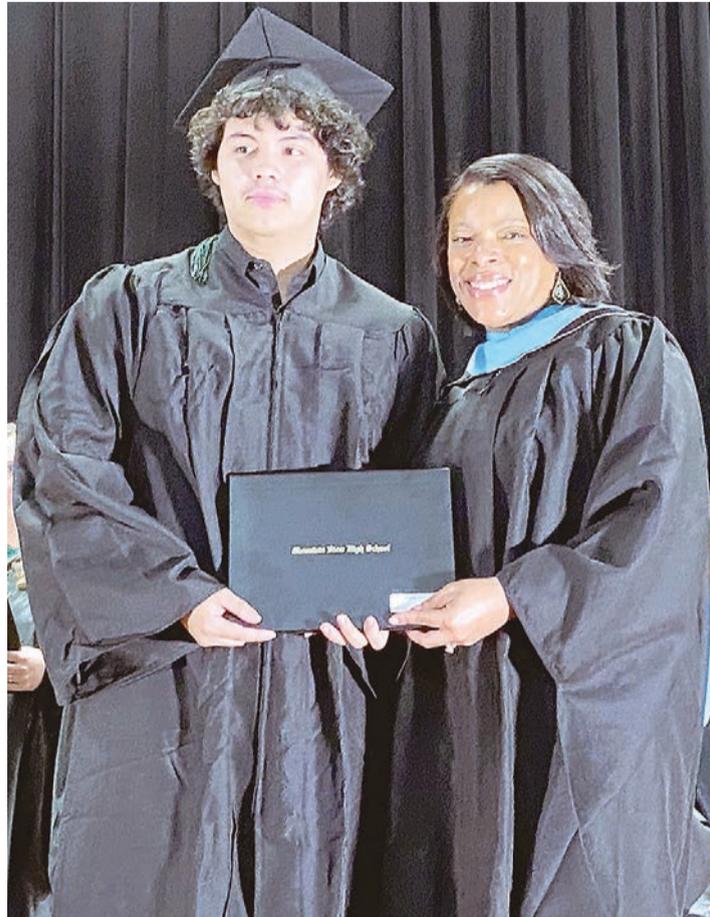
“To my graduating seniors, we have made it,” she said. “And I say ‘we’ because this journey wasn’t just yours. It belongs to your teachers who helped you when you needed an extra push, your family and friends who supported and showed up for you, and everyone who helped you get through the hard days.

“And let’s be honest – there were hard days. Days when showing up felt impossible, days when your goals felt unattainable, days when you thought, ‘Is it even worth it?’ But here you are – proof that it was.”

As their new principal, said Whatley, “How proud I am to be standing here with you today. I may be new to this school; but in the last semester, I’ve seen firsthand the grit, determination and heart that makes this graduating class truly special. Alternative high school isn’t always the path people expect. But if there’s one thing I know about this class, it’s that we don’t do things just because they’re expected. We pick the road that works for us – the road that leads to growth and to here, today.”

Mountain View is mainly comprised of students who’ve had to overcome significant hurdles and burdens in their lives. Many came from other countries and didn’t initially speak English. Others faced personal challenges or had to work full time to survive while attending classes.

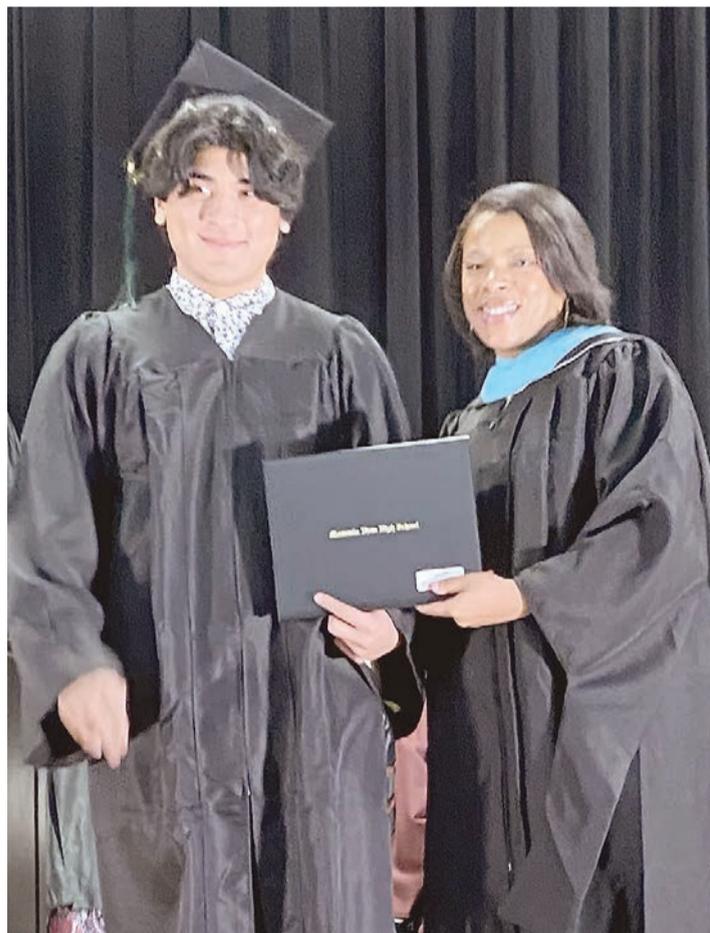
It’s no wonder then that Whatley told them they’ve redefined what success looks like. “Some of you worked jobs while finishing school,” she said. “Some overcame struggles most people couldn’t even imagine. And some of you had to believe in yourselves when no one else did. That’s not just



Oberon Alvarenga-Veliz and Erin Whatley.



Muhammad Butt with Principal Erin Whatley.



Esteban Flores-Ortiz and Erin Whatley.



Zainab Kaira gets her diploma from Erin Whatley.

education – that’s resilience. That is life experience, and that is the power that’ll drive you forward.”

Whatley then urged the graduating seniors to “take that same drive and apply it

to whatever comes next, whether it’s college, working, starting a business or figuring things out, one step at a time. This journey you’re on is yours. The world isn’t asking you to fit in; it’s waiting for you to show up

exactly as you are.

“Success isn’t just a diploma; it’s the courage to keep moving forward – to keep

From Difficult Circumstances To Graduation Day

Two Mountain View students share their stories.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

A highlight of every Mountain View graduation is when two or three students share their personal stories of the obstacles they've overcome to receive their diplomas – or even obtain an education at all. “These stories – representative of the stories of so many other students – help explain what drives the Mountain View staff to come to school every day and work so hard with and for these students,” said Assistant Principal Kim Witeck. “Every day, we hear and experience their sense of resilience and determination.”

Julia DeVera

“We were asked to speak about our journeys, so imagine you're in kindergarten, about to have story time. I hope the book I'm about to read helps you



BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION
Julia DeVera

understand what led me to Mountain View. It's called, 'My Hair Went on Vacation,' by Paula Quinn.

“I woke up one morning, quick out of bed, to find curls on my pillow, instead of my head. I felt so confused by this weird situation; my hair wasn't in its usual location. Oh where, oh where, did my lovely hair go? Deep in Africa? Atop Kilimanjaro? Could it be in Spain, the Alps or even Peru? Is it splashing with dolphins or in Timbuktu?”

“At school, the kids pointed and stared. They all said, 'Look at that girl with no hair.' I cried as I hid my bald head under my shirt. Their words stung and my feelings were hurt. I remembered mom's words, 'Smile, say hello and don't hide.' Now when kids point and ask for an explanation, I smile and say, 'My hair went on vacation.' My dad said

they're just curious. But to me, that's unfair. It hurts when these kids point, snicker and glare. My mom says to always be kind and show grace – show them a bald girl with a smile on her face.”

SEE STUDENTS SHARE STORIES, PAGE 12

Top Awards Presented to Mountain View Students

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

During Mountain View's winter graduation, special awards were presented to three deserving students chosen by the teachers.

* The Citizenship Award is given to a student who's helped build a positive school community. ESOL teacher Lora Bates presented it to Ayush Tyagi. A student in her English Language Development class last year, he completed a Global Citizenship project on his home country of India and its massive water problems.

“He had almost perfect attendance all school year, made As every quarter, was a curious learner and was always willing to help others,” said Bates. “This year, he ventured into writing for the Mountain View Mirror, our online newspaper, and has grown into an even more mature young man, working to help his family.”

“He's a great model of a Mountain View Timberwolf and I know he'll be successful in college. He's very deserving of this honor, and we'll miss him next year. But I'm happy to present the Citizenship Award to Ayush Tyagi.”



BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION
Erin Whatley with Milton Mateo and his Faculty Excellence Award.

❖ The Personal Achievement Award goes to a student who succeeded academically and personally, despite having adult responsibilities, such as a job or a child. Receiving it was Julia Sheridan. “Unfortunately, she's under the weather tonight, so I'm hoping she's watching online,” said special-ed teacher Molly Flatley. “Julia represents all those students who don't fit into an arbitrary timeline.”

SEE TOP AWARDS, PAGE 13

Fairfax County Proposed FY 2026 Budget

FROM PAGE 4

not include major investments in many county priorities.

Hill proposed a 2 percent increase to the transient occupancy (hotel) tax to mitigate further increases to the real estate tax rate. That would bring the rate from four to six percent and generate just over \$13 million, a 6 percent rate that aligns with many jurisdictions in the area. “Half of this additional revenue is mandated for tourism promotion and has been held in balance pending discussions on its use. The remaining half can be utilized as general fund revenue and can be applied to balance the budget,” Hill said. He noted that the state offers counties few revenue-generating options. Real estate tax is Fairfax County's primary revenue source.

Hill proposed dedicating an additional quarter penny of the real estate tax rate, or \$8.5 million, for affordable housing to support the county's goal of reaching 10,000 new affordable homes by 2034.

This budget marks Hill's eighth as county executive. He said it had “been one of the most difficult ones” that he had to deal with, more so than during COVID when federal dollars came to the rescue. Hill said his 2026 Advertised Budget was set against “great uncertainty for our region, as the new presidential administration has begun taking actions to significantly reshape the federal government. ... Fairfax County is home to more than 50,000 federal workers, and even more workers are connected to businesses contracted with the federal government,” Hill said.

Hill said they are seeing workers being laid off or furloughed and that the broader economic impacts of some of the president's actions, particularly concerning policies like tariffs, have yet to be realized. “It will be imperative for us to continually monitor actions at the federal level to determine if any updates to our revenue or expenditure projections are

SEE BUDGET, PAGE 18

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Jackie Sorto with Principal Erin Whatley.



Andrew Luerssen, his diploma and Principal Whatley.



Zaydah Rahman, her diploma and Principal Whatley.

PHOTOS BY BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION



Nazir Myree and Erin Whatley.

Mountain View High Winter Graduation

FROM PAGE 10

proving to yourself that you're capable of more than you once believed. And I have no doubt that every single one of you will do just that."

Saying 2025 has shown that the world is changing, Whatley told the grads, "Now, more than ever, we need innovative thinkers. We need this generation's ability to think freely so that you can teach us and generations to come. And with what you've accomplished here today, know that we need you. Congratulations, Class of 2025. You didn't just take a different path, you paved your own – and that is something worth celebrating."

Taking the podium next was guest speaker Geovanny Ponce, FCPS chief of schools. And his own story was one with which many of the students could identify.

"Before I became Dr. Ponce and took this role, I was born in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, in a very poor family," he said. "No food, no shoes, no dad. In 1998, I moved to the United States with just a backpack. I was trying to learn English, which has been really hard; it still is."

"It's been 27 years now, and I'm here in front of you. I was a young immigrant, stepping into a new country with new rules and

regulations. And today, I feel I am new again. I'm trying to figure out how I'm going to support families and the community at large."

Still, he said, "I've had to navigate discrimination in so many ways, especially when I moved from a different country trying to learn the language. As soon as someone heard my accent, the first thing many people [thought] was, 'You don't have an education.'"

But Ponce told Mountain View's grads that they're "set for greatness. You're receiving one of the best educations that you could. I'd say Fairfax County [Public Schools] is number one in the country. And you should be happy that you have such a wonderful faculty. I've been here several times and I've engaged with almost every one of your teachers, and they're doing their very best."

"I'm so proud of what you've accomplished," he continued. "Like many of you, I know what it means to work hard – to face challenges and to push forward, even when the road isn't easy. I also know the power of education. When I was in fourth grade, my teacher told me that probably I shouldn't go to school anymore because, in a third-world country, there's no legal obligation for families to send children to school. But here in the United States, we're so blessed that you have freedom and that you've

received an education."

Furthermore, said Ponce, "I'm emotional right now because I see some of you and I see myself when I moved to a different country. You're younger than I was then, and you have more opportunities than I did. I want you to make sure you keep pushing. Remember, people looking for obstacles can't find opportunities. Education opened doors for me; it'll open them also for you."

"Graduation is not the end – it's a new beginning. Whether you're heading to college, starting a career, joining the military

or exploring other options, remember this: Because of Fairfax County Public Schools, you're ready for your future. The education you received here, the lessons you learned and the challenges you overcame have prepared you for what is next."

Lastly, Ponce told them, "As you move forward, believe in yourself, stay focused and lift others up as you climb. There's nothing better than to help others. And never forget that your dreams are worth fighting for. Congratulations – we can't wait to see what you accomplish next."

Students Share Stories

FROM PAGE 11

"I received this book at the 2024 National Alopecia Areata Conference from the author – the mother of the girl who this book is based on. I remember flipping through its pages in my hotel room that night and sobbing."

"At 11, I was diagnosed with alopecia areata, an autoimmune disease that attacks the hair follicles, causing varied types of hair loss. Now at age 17, I've completely lost my hair four different times. This book brought light to an experience I knew all too well. High school was rough for me. My hair was either growing back or on its way out again. When I didn't have hair, I received insults in passing. They ranged from, 'Nice haircut,' to blatantly pointing and laughing."

"My hair would return just long enough for the remarks to stop. Shortly thereafter, it would fall out again. Year to year, it was my breaking point. I'd become severely depressed and overwhelmed with the constant change in my appearance. I went from having the reputation of a devoted student to being a chronically absent student who couldn't get out of bed in the morning."

"As I was filling out the paperwork for my transfer to Mountain View, I felt like alopecia had taken everything from me. I was embarrassed to admit that I'd let something as in-

significant as hair take over my life. Though my transfer felt like a last resort, attending Mountain View quickly proved to be the best decision I've ever made."

"Mountain View has made me feel more at home in less than a year, than any school ever has. The staff here will have an everlasting impact on how I view education. They taught me there's no shame in taking a different path, whether it's in your school career or anything else you wish to pursue. You don't have to follow what everyone else is doing. I went from thinking I was going to fail junior year to graduating early."

"I plan to attend VCU Arts in the fall, pursuing a degree in art education. Eventually, when I have a classroom of my own, I hope to pass on the same kindness and compassion the staff here has shown me. In the meantime, I'll continue being a legislative liaison for the National Alopecia Areata Foundation, where I schedule meetings with local legislators to advocate for the Safe Step Act and the Durable Medical Equipment Act [both dealing with health-insurance coverage]."

"I'll also use my personal experience to educate the public on mental-health issues that people with hair loss and other chronic illnesses experience. I'm in training to be a



Twin grads Christopher and Julia DeVera (center) with their relatives. From left, in front are grandfather Lorenzo DeVera, Aunt Lauren DeVera, cousin Danielle Thomas, Aunt Michelle Thomas, parents Karen and Pat DeVera, and grandmother Vivian DeVera.

MOUNTAIN VIEW HIGH

Winter Graduation

PHOTOS BY BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION



From left are grad Jackie Sorto, boyfriend Mateo Sorto, his niece Hailie, 7, and Jackie's former math teacher at Langley High, Tyler Dean.



From left are Isha Gaye and daughter Zaydah Rahman.



BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

Erin Whately with Ayush Tyagi and his Citizenship Award.

Top Awards

FROM PAGE 11

"She's a model for all of us who face daily challenges – not with recognition or fanfare – but with a quiet, steadfast courage. She's the very definition of perseverance. Congratulations, Julia."

❖ The Faculty Excellence Award is given to the student achieving the greatest academic and personal success, despite significant obstacles. Jenelle Lee, college and career specialist, gave it to Milton Mateo. "He's constantly amazing his teachers with his optimistic demeanor, resilience and community involvement," said Lee. "Despite significant adversity, he main-

tained a 3.5 GPA while working nearly 40 hours/week throughout his high-school career.

"He not only earned top grades in his classes – passing his SOLs on his first attempt – but also actively participated in school activities and was a considerate classmate and friend. His positive impact was felt by the entire faculty. Milton's dedication to his education while learning English shone through his consistent presence, creative thinking and commitment to excellence. He plans to attend Northern Virginia Community College for business administration and has a bright future ahead."

From Difficult Circumstances To Graduation Day

FROM PAGE 12

youth mentor so I can become a role model to the kids this book represents. My family is forever grateful for Mountain View. After today, I'll be the fourth kid in my family to graduate from this school, including my twin brother, who'll walk with me today.

"Although my school career is nontraditional, I'm immensely proud to be a part of this distinct group of students. To my fellow graduates, I'm in awe of your resilience. I'm so grateful we crossed paths."

DeVera then thanked counselor Michael Todd for all his help, plus her siblings and parents – especially her mom "for never letting me give up on myself. You're my hero."

Milton Mateo

"As I stand here today, I can't help but think about the first day I walked into these hallways, nervous, unsure, but full of possibility. Today, I look back and see how far I've come, and I'm filled with gratitude and pride. My



BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

Milton Mateo

journey hasn't been perfect, but it's been full of surprises and challenges. And for that, I'm so thankful.

"I was born in Honduras in 2002 and, when I was a baby, my mother made a difficult decision to leave me in a hotel room without telling my dad. When he came back from work, he searched until he found me. From that moment, my dad entrusted me to my grandmother – an incredible woman who raised me with strength and love, preparing me for the next journey ahead.

"Over time, my family grew smaller. Today, I only have my dad. We don't communicate much but, despite the challenges, I hold onto the good memories. I'll never forget going to school in Honduras – waking up, getting ready, without breakfast or money for food. There were moments when I didn't want to go to school. I felt discouraged by my circumstances and even by some teachers.

"But everything changed with one phone call. My father told me, 'Milton, we are going to the U.S.' Leaving Honduras meant

leaving my education behind because we couldn't afford it. At that time, I worked for less than \$3/day, using the money for school supplies and basic needs. But even with both of us working, it wasn't enough."

"The journey to this country was long and difficult. We traveled for two months from Honduras to Mexico. It was physically and emotionally exhausting. And I'll never forget riding in a small cargo truck with 100 people, barely able to breathe, praying for courage and strength. There were many crying babies.

"That was the first truck. After that, we took a huge, doublewide trailer truck with A/C, like frozen chickens, for three days and three nights. The only food we were given was a pack of cookies and some juice.

"When I arrived at Mountain View, I walked through the hallways with hope and uncertainty. What I found here was a family. Mountain View welcomed me with open arms, giving me the tools to learn and grow and fit [in]. This is a great moment. To every teacher and staff member here, your patience, determination and hard work inspired me. You've shown us that, no matter our circumstances, education can change our lives. I am forever grateful for your support; thank you.

"At Mountain View, I've learned skills that I'll carry with me for the rest of my life. In

my time here, I even made new friends, like Ayush [Tyagi], Julia [DeVera] and all of you guys – a gift that I'll treasure. Now I'm 22 years old and I'm so proud of myself."

"My dream is to help our community and to be an example that's positive. I worked full time while I finished high school. I want to go to college and be the first in my family to attend. By doing this, I hope to start my own business, not just for myself, but to give back to family and community. Life taught me to listen to other people and grow from my mistakes."

Mateo then thanked his friend Rafael for being such a special friend to him. "I feel so blessed to know you," he said. "Thank you for being my best support. You're someone I deeply respect and admire. You've been more than a friend to me; you've been my family. I've grown so much because of this, and I continue to learn from your strength and wisdom every day."

"My fellow graduates, life is beautiful, full of challenges and surprises. But in the end, we must be thankful for everything. New opportunities and challenges await you; but with patience and determination, you can overcome anything. Remember you have the power to shape your future and achieve your dreams. Congratulations to each and every one of you; I'm so proud of all of us."

Bamboo: Food for Some, Problem for Many

National Zoo pandas enjoying area's plants.

BY SUSAN LAUME
THE CONNECTION

If you were a famous Giant Panda celebrity, Bao Li or Qing Bao, newly in residence at the National Zoo, who would be your best friend in Fairfax County? That might be Patricia Greenberg, an ecologist and manager of the Park Authority's newly formed Invasive Plant Management Program. As such, she is the person who could be described as having the keys to the bamboo kingdom, in charge of bamboo management and control.

Just as everyone knows Winnie the Pooh loves hunny, everyone knows the favorite food of adorable black and white panda bears is bamboo. It makes up about 99 percent of what they eat. Bamboo is low in nutritional value, so pandas need to eat a lot of it. They spend 10-16 hours per day doing just that. According to the World Wildlife Fund, pandas also sometimes forage on farmland and eat eggs, small animals, pumpkin, kidney beans, domestic pig food, and herbs, vines, shrubs and trees in small amounts. But bamboo is their go-to meal. They can be expected to eat 26-84 pounds per day. That's a lot of bamboo. Being far removed from their native Southwest China mountain habitat, where in the Washington Metro area to find the fresh bamboo varieties they find tasty?

In Fairfax County, Greenberg's job centers on knowing where bamboo is growing on public lands. The new section she manages was created after the county enacted its bamboo ordinance, which went into effect on Jan. 1, 2023. With about 25,000 of the 31,000 county-owned acres, the Park Authority has a big responsibility when it comes to bamboo management. They estimate bamboo encompasses at least 250 known acres, at 190 sites here.

Greenberg's mission is to eliminate the

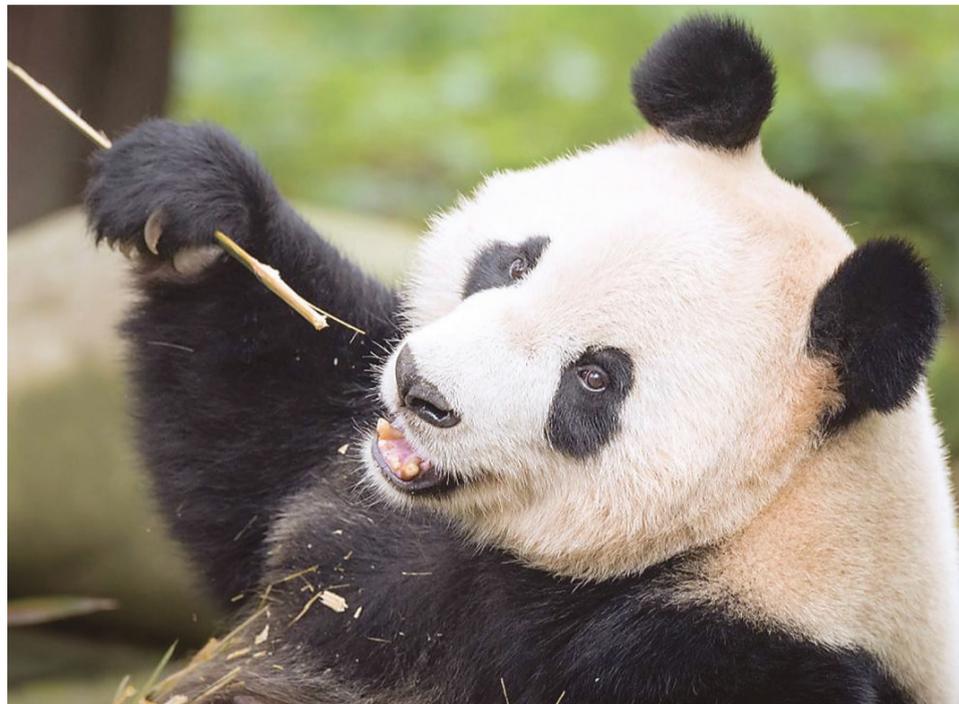


PHOTO FROM WWF.ORG

Black and white Giant Pandas have celebrity status among the world's animals

fast growing, spreading plant from parkland; to comply with the bamboo ordinance. And, of course, to protect native trees and other plants which are out-competed by the invasive bamboo. Removal could take 15 years, at an estimated cost of \$9.25 million. She is now engaged in mapping and prioritizing the patches for removal. She is ranking the sites to determine where to start the huge, multi-year effort. Patches are ranked on factors such as, accessibility, size of patch and plants; proximity to active homeowner treatment sites, or sensitive or rare resources, or other invasive management projects; and social-political factors. As patch evaluation efforts continue, contractors are beginning use of lethal methods to remove the plants at a handful of sites.

National Zoo Needs Fresh Bamboo

On the other side of the hate/love bamboo relationship, keepers at the Zoo are in

need of a regular fresh bamboo source, and Fairfax County has a lot of the invasive plant material. As non-native plants, bamboo has a way of standing out against other plants in the landscape. Zoo employees noticed plants growing in a corner of Huntley Meadows Park, along the Dogue Creek in Alexandria. They sought, and were granted, a park use permit to harvest it. Cutting bamboo stalks from the approximately 1.5 acres, multiple times per week, helps to satisfy the appetites of their panda charges. Since other zoo animals enjoy the fibrous plant as well, the zoo's use permit, good through the end of 2025, may help to nourish other zoo residents as well.

Greenberg says, "It's a big help to us, getting the material removed from the site." Her thoughts are echoed by FCPA executive director, Jai Cole, who adds, "As an ecologist by trade, I'm very interested in sustainable solutions to achieve positive outcomes for

Fairfax County Running Bamboo Ordinance

A bamboo owner must not allow running bamboo to spread from the bamboo owner's property to any public right-of-way or any adjoining property not owned by the bamboo owner.

A bamboo owner must contain the running bamboo to keep it from spreading onto any public right-of-way or adjoining property not owned by the bamboo owner.

If a bamboo owner fails to comply with a Notice of Violation, each day that running bamboo remains un-contained may result in a civil penalty of \$50, up to a maximum of \$2,000 in a 12-month period."

our environment. I'm excited for the potential that this relationship could have for helping us dispose of unwanted bamboo and providing essential nutrition for the ever-popular pandas at the National Zoo."

There are many species of bamboo, and growing conditions are a factor in considering optimal sites for harvesting bamboo as panda food. FCPA planning director, Torsha Bhattacharya, hopes the pandas like the taste of our Fairfax County bamboo, seeing an opportunity to scale up the partnership. She calls it, "a two-for: we eradicate the bamboo and it becomes food for the pandas."

Growing bamboo is not illegal in Fairfax County, but it must be controlled within an individual's property. That control has proved a growing problem for homeowners, HOAs and faith communities. For a summary on dealing with running bamboo, see

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/topics/sites/topics/files/assets/documents/pdf/bamboo%20one%20pager%20translations/running%20bamboo%20one%20pager%20-%20final.pdf>

Penalties for Porch Pirates

Mail theft expected to rise to felony in Virginia.

BY SUSAN LAUME
THE CONNECTION

Have you gone to your porch to collect a package after receiving a virtual delivery notice, only to find the item nowhere in sight? The number of packages stolen after home delivery is now so common that the term "porch pirate," slang term for package theft, is well known to all.

With the rise and ease of e-commerce shopping, consumers also have made it easier for package thieves. Packages left outside at the delivery address provide easy access to anyone. Those with nefarious intent may target areas with high deliveries, or are even

known to follow a delivery truck, reaching packages before the intended addressees. Front door surveillance cameras are in prevalent use as a deterrent. Rising thefts also are leading delivery services and customers to seek alternate delivery options, such as: package lockers, or using alternate addresses or setting delivery times when someone is available to receive the packages.

Del. Vivian Watts (D-14) and Sen. Saddam Salim (D-37) sponsored near identical bills in their respective legislative bodies in this session of the General Assembly in response to constituents' frustration with the growing problem. Watts was particularly concerned with rising check theft. She says,

"Mail theft has significantly increased with over half of altered checks being re-written for over \$14,000. The bank account number and routing information also can be sold to syndicates who will use them in identity theft."

Mail theft, or receipt of stolen mail, is a serious crime under federal law. Depending upon the gravity of the crime, according to 18 U.S. Code § 1708, those found guilty of mail theft face the possibility of fines up to \$250,000 and imprisonment for up to five years, or both. Watts shares that having a State law augments law enforcement powers. "Giving all law enforcement the power to go after this criminal activity will be much more effective than depending on a small



PHOTO BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION

Neighborhood porches are popular spots for package deliveries and thefts

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SEE PORCH PIRATES, PAGE 15

Decline in Federal Workers Will Hurt Real Estate

By Mercia Hobson
CONNECTION NEWSPAPERS

Reducing Fairfax County's and Virginia's federal workforce would further depress the declining commercial real estate market in Northern Virginia.

Fairfax County's decline in the commercial real estate market significantly impacts its revenue along with "rising employee compensation costs," reports Fairfax County Government News.

The county's 2026 Budget Forecast,

published on Nov. 27, 2024, states, "Non-residential property values are expected to fall by 1.3 percent, marking two consecutive years of declines driven by high office vacancies and rising operational costs."

"Rising costs and limited revenue growth drive [a] projected \$292.7 million shortfall," for Fairfax County.

According to the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority, businesses in Fairfax County receive \$38 billion in federal contracts, accounting for 5 percent of all federal procurement contracts.

"Any reduction in federal presence in our county will cause a major impact on the commercial real estate market," Jeff McKay (D), chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, said in his Nov. 2024 board matter, "Review of County Regulations Regarding Incoming Presidential Administration," referencing the commercial real estate market that was already expected to fall by 1.3 percent.

McKay added that they had to "prepare to address the potential impacts of the new administration" locally. McKay presented the board matter with James

Walkinshaw (D-Braddock). "The President-Elect has re-committed to his goal of dismantl[ing] government bureaucracy, and among the many policy changes that he plans to make in service of this goal are several that could have a significant impact on our community. Those include "a proposed drastic reduction in the federal workforce and the replacement of non-partisan civil servants with those deemed 'loyal,'" McKay read.

The board matter directed staff to evaluate the potential impacts of the new president on local policies.

Is Help On The Way?

Thousands of federal employees and contractors fired or furloughed; more in the works.

By Mercia Hobson
THE CONNECTION

Fairfax County has more than 50,000 federal employees, according to the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority. Virginia's two U.S. Senators, Tim Kaine (D) and Mark Warner (D), represent residents in Fairfax County and the rest of the Commonwealth.

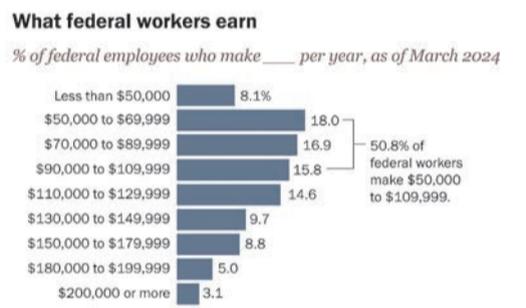
Fear and uncertainty threaded throughout the Fairfax County federal workforce after an unexpected email with the subject line "Fork in the Road" arrived in their employee email inboxes on Jan. 28, as it reportedly did nationwide for over 2 million federal employees. The offer was to keep their job, align with new reforms, work in the office, or type Resign in the subject line and hit send. Employees were offered eight months of pay and benefits while on leave if they did so.

Reading an open letter to federal workers that he shared on the Senate floor on Tuesday, Feb. 4, Kaine told the federal employees that he understood things are tough.

"The Trump Administration has made plain that it wants to kick you around — by blocking your ability to administer federal resources, censoring your free speech, locking you out of your work buildings," Kaine said.

He cautioned, "Donald Trump has no authority to offer you a resignation buy-out. Don't trust a guy with a long history of stiffing contractors by taking him up on a sham deal he won't follow through on." The full text of the letter is available at <https://www.kaine.senate.gov/press-releases/video-kaine-issues-open-letter-to-federal-workers-urging-strength-promising-support>.

The Pew Research Center reports that the average annual pay across the federal workforce is \$106,382. Half of all federal workers reportedly make between \$50,000 and \$109,999 annually.



SOURCE: THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER

What federal workers earn

Warner said on Facebook that "people are starting to understand what's at stake." "More people are standing up and speaking out. I hope that will ultimately creep into some of my Republican friends . . . We're in the fight, and at the end of the day, we're going to come out okay," Warner said.

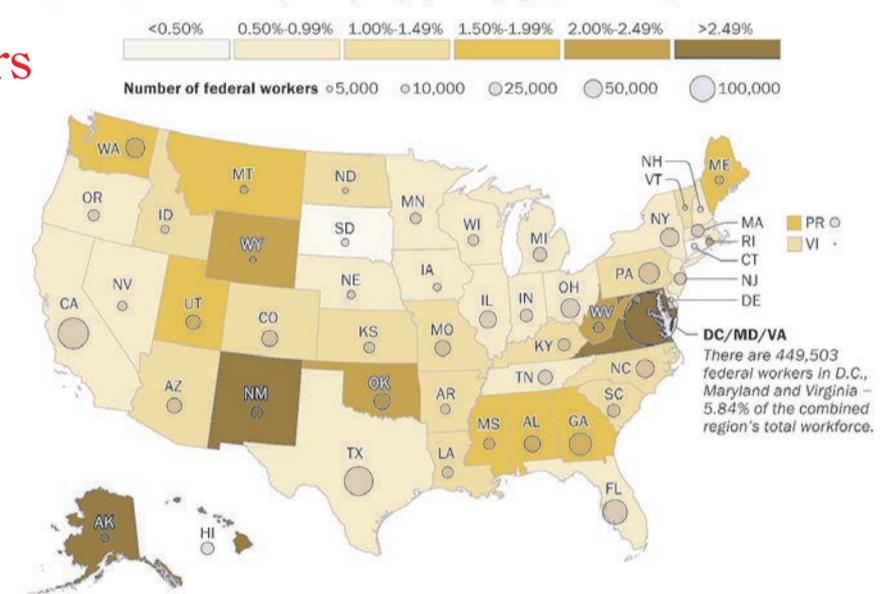
On Thursday, Feb. 6, U.S. District Judge George O'Toole Jr. temporarily suspended the Office of Personnel Management's federal worker buyout offer deadline. Federal workers had until Monday, Feb. 10, at 11:59 p.m. to decide whether to resign with pay through the end of September, OPM said in a social media post.

The National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association (NARFE) reports, "Though the executive order issued recently claims to prevent politically motivated dismissals, without strong protections in place, these assurances remain empty. The lack of enforceable safeguards leaves federal employees vulnerable to politically motivated actions that could threaten their careers and the effectiveness of our government."

NARFE instructs people to contact their legislators and urge them to support the Saving the Civil Service Act, H.R. 492/S.134. "This important legislation would block the return of Schedule F, safeguarding the merit-based principles that have long been the foundation of a professional, nonpartisan federal workforce," NARFE says.

Where federal workers have the largest presence

Federal civilian workers as % of all nonfarm payroll employees, March 2024



Note: For security reasons, OPM masks location information for employees of the FBI, DEA, BATF, Secret Service and Mint. Employees of those agencies who work in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area are all reported as working in D.C. Location information is suppressed in the personnel database for employees of those agencies who work elsewhere — nearly 270,000 all told. In addition to the totals above, 3,215 federal employees work in Guam; 642 in other U.S. territories; and 30,811 in foreign countries. Work location for 6,524 federal employees is listed as "unspecified."

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of data from Office of Personnel Management (federal workers) and Bureau of Labor Statistics (nonfarm payroll employment).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

SOURCE: THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Where federal agents have the largest presence

Porch Pirates

FROM PAGE 14

number of federal law enforcement officers. In addition, since "mail theft" under federal law has always included stealing packages, this new state law also applies to stealing any package delivered your home or left for you in the apartment lobby. This includes any on-line orders or direct deliveries from retailers."

Both bills passed with near unanimous bipartisan support in their respective bodies. They can be expected to go to the governor's desk for signature after being combined into a single bill, and passed by the full General Assembly later this month. The bill language would add a new section to Virginia Code §18.2-110.1 to create the category of "mail theft" to the list of State crimes. Mail is defined in the section in its broadest terms. Theft of mail

would include "any letter, postal card, parcel, package, bag or other material along with its contents." That means that check theft, as mail content, is covered.

The Code makes fraudulent interference with mail a State Class 6 felony. Mail theft would join a host of other named crimes in the Code at various levels of penalties, from Class 1 to 4 misdemeanors, and Class 1 to 6 felonies. The highest level of seriousness being Class 1, and the lowest Class 4 or 6. Examples of listed crimes in Virginia include: unauthorized use of dairy milk cases or crates — a Class 4 misdemeanor; removing a shopping cart from store premises — a Class 3 misdemeanor; altering a price tag on a product to defraud the seller — either petit or grand larceny, depending upon the article's value. Mail theft would be on a par with receipt of a stolen firearm — a Class 6 felony; participation in an organized retail theft ring is a Class 3 felony.

ENTERTAINMENT



A Navy Saxophone Quartet Concert will be held on Sunday, Feb. 23, 2025 at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Burke.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH 2025 IN FAIRFAX COUNTY

Carter G. Woodson Lecture – Multiple Branches and Virtual – Thursday, Feb. 20. Learn about Carter G. Woodson, called 'The Father of Black History Month' by some, in this presentation from Dr. Lopez Matthews Jr., State Archivist and Public Records Administrator for the District of Columbia.

Gather With Glory: An Afternoon with Author Glory Edim – Tysons-Pimmit Regional Library – Sunday, Feb. 23. Join the award-winning author of "Gather Me: A Memoir in Praise of the Books that Saved Me" and founder of the reading network Well-Read Black Girl for a presentation about her work followed by a book signing.

Enslaved Lives and the Legacy of Slavery – Historic Huntley, Feb. 27. Join a historian for a tour of Huntley that examines the relationship of the Mason family to slavery and recovers insights into the lives of the Humphrey family and other enslaved people whose labor maintained Mason wealth and social status.

Remembering Metilda: An Enslaved Child at the Mill – Colvin Run Mill, Feb. 22. Come learn about Metilda, an enslaved 14-year old girl who came to live at Colvin Run Mill. Discuss her life at the mill and the house. Examine what history tells us about the lives of enslaved children, their work, and their families.

Paths of Freedom Seekers – Ellanor C. Lawrence Park, Feb. 23. Listen to stories of African Americans who were forced to live and work on this farm. Reflect on individuals' stories of resistance and survival. Learn how enslaved communities and freedom seekers have forged a path of resiliency throughout American history.

PLANT A TREE

The McLean Trees Foundation, Neighborhood Trees Program, wants to help you plant a native tree in your yard. Don't know how to plant a tree but want to support the environmental health of your community? Want your family to have the experience of planting a tree? If you live in

McLean, Virginia, the McLean Trees Foundation (MTF) (a local nonprofit) will help you select an appropriate native tree for your property, deliver the tree to your yard, help you plant it, provide information on maintenance, and even check back with you a few months after planting to see how your tree is doing. If you are interested in participating in this terrific program to boost our native tree canopy in McLean, please visit our website at <https://www.mcleantreesfoundation.org/neighborhood-tree-program> and submit your application! A modest fee of \$100 is assessed to cover the costs of the program (limit one 6-7 foot tree in 15 gallon container per household). We have a separate program for those who are interested in spearheading a community tree planting campaign in their neighborhood. MTF's Tree Champion program makes it easy to help your neighbors plant more trees! For more information, visit the website at <https://www.mcleantreesfoundation.org/tree-champions-program>.

NOW THRU MARCH 23
Workhouse Arts Center Unveils (un) Endangered Species: Re-imagined Places by Andi Cullins.
At Workhouse Arts Center, 9518 Workhouse Way, Lorton, Bldg. W3 Theater.

CITY OF FAIRFAX EVENTS

Friday Monday, 10:30 to 11:15 a.m.
This is a free program perfect for preschoolers, but children of all ages are welcome at the Stacy C. Sherwood Center, 3740 Blenheim Blvd., Fairfax. For more information, visit the website at <https://www.fairfaxva.gov/government/parks-recreation/cultural-arts> or contact Megan DuBois at 703.273.6097/ Megan.DuBois@fairfaxva.gov.

The Bonita Lestina Old Town Hall Performance Series is now in its 35th Season! 8 p.m. at the Stacy C. Sherwood Center, 3740 Blenheim Blvd., Fairfax. For more information, visit the website at <https://www.fairfaxva.gov/government/parks-recreation/cultural-arts> or

contact Megan DuBois at 703.273.6097/ Megan.DuBois@fairfaxva.gov.

SCHEDULE
February 28 – Mason Jazz Vocal Night
March 14 – Baltimore Composers Forum "Intersegmental 38"
March 28 – Dr. John "JJ" Mitchell, Organ Recital (held at Truro Anglican Church, Fairfax)
April 11 – Bobby J and the Hot Lanes

ARTScreen Free Film Series celebrating the Arts at the Stacy C. Sherwood Center, 3740 Blenheim Blvd, Fairfax. Doors open at 6:30; Film begins at 7 pm. FREE admission includes popcorn, candy and refreshments. For more information, visit the website at <https://www.fairfaxva.gov/government/parks-recreation/cultural-arts> or contact Megan DuBois at 703.273.6097/ Megan.DuBois@fairfaxva.gov.

SCHEDULE
February 21 "Amazing Grace" (Celebrating Black History Month)
March 7 "Field of Dreams"

2025 CITY OF FAIRFAX BLACK HISTORY MONTH EVENTS

Feb 20 – Black History Month Lecture: Carter G. Woodson Streamlined Live; City of Fairfax Regional Library, 2 – 3 p.m. Adults 18+;
Feb 21 – ARTScreen Presents: "Amazing Grace" Aretha Franklin Documentary; Sherwood Center, 7 p.m.;
Feb 22 – Alison Crockett Presents "The Evolution of Jazz;" City of Fairfax Regional Library, 11 a.m. (Adults and Teens);
Feb 22 – The Civil War Defenses of Washington, D.C. and the Role of the United States Colored Troops; Historic Blenheim, 2 p.m.;
Feb 22 – Illustrator Talk: Tequitia Andrews; City of Fairfax Regional Library; 2:30 – 3:30 p.m. Age 7 – 12;

BLACK HISTORY MONTH WITH THE FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK

MASON JAZZ VOCAL NIGHT

FRIDAY, FEB 28
8 PM

SHERWOOD CENTER
3740 BLENHEIM BLVD.
FAIRFAX



BONITA LESTINA OLD TOWN HALL
PERFORMANCE SERIES

CELEBRATING OUR 35TH SEASON!

FREE ADMISSION
DOORS OPEN AT 7:30 PM

Watch the Mason Jazz Vocal Night on Feb. 28, 2025 at the Bonita Lestina Old Town Hall Performance Series in Fairfax.

AUTHORITY

Embark on a journey of cultural richness and historical significance during Black History Month with engaging programs in Fairfax County parks. Join in honoring and exploring the vibrant tapestry of Black heritage through interactive events, programs, exhibits and offerings for all ages. Programs include:
Enslaved Lives and the Legacy of Slavery, Historic Huntley, Feb. 27, 1-2 p.m., \$12
Paths of Freedom Seekers, Ellanor C. Lawrence Park, Feb. 23, 3-4 p.m., \$8
Remembering Metilda- An Enslaved Child at the Mill, Colvin Run Mill, Feb. 22, 1-2 p.m., \$9

FEB. 4 TO MARCH 2

Exhibition: The Creative Quest: Three Generations of Intuitive Painting. At Reston Community Center's Jo Ann Rose Gallery, 1609-A Washington Plaza North Reston. Featuring 30 works by intuitive painter Judith Forst and many of her students, and their students. Inspired by the teachings of Michele Cassou who founded the Painting Experience in San Francisco, CA, Reston resident Judith Forst transformed her traditional painting practice from an academic based approach to one focused on painting without inhibition. Focusing on the process rather than a product or desired result led to a freedom of expression and the discovery of a compelling authentic voice. Ms. Forst began sharing this technique in her home studio in 2001, and dozens of local artists have been exposed to this innovative practice. A selection of Judith's paintings will be featured

along with works by 17 other intuitive painters.

WEDNESDAY/FEB. 19

Journey Within: Self-Discovery Book Club (Virtual). 6:00-7:30 p.m. At Reston Library, Reston. Literary discussion that focuses on a character's personal growth and how it relates to our own. Led by life coach Shabnam Curtis. At this month's meeting we'll discuss Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine by Gail Honeyman. Visit Journey Within: Self-Discovery Book Club - Fairfax Library Calendar - Library Home

FRIDAY/FEB. 21

Black History Month Celebration. 5 p.m. At Fairfax County Government Center, 12000 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax. Join your neighbors for an evening at the Government Center to celebrate Black History Month. This year's theme is "Building on a Legacy." Enjoy local performances, interactive activities, enlightening discussion and light refreshments.

FEB. 21-23

Capital Remodel & Garden Show. At the Dulles Expo Center, Chantilly. More than 250 companies will showcase the latest products and services in home remodeling, renovation, home décor, landscape and garden design. Local and regional landscape companies will have feature gardens throughout the show. An ongoing schedule of home remodeling and landscape experts conducting seminars will be carried out during the three-day event. Appearing at the event will be Mika and Brian Kleinschmidt

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ENTERTAINMENT



The traditional celtic music group IONA will perform on Sunday, March 2, 2025 at the Old Brogue Irish Pub in Great Falls.

whose HGTV show, "100 Day Dream Home", presents them the challenge of creating, building and completely personalizing a home from the ground-up for their clients in just 100 days. Hours are 10 a.m. until 9 p.m. Friday, Feb 21 and Saturday Feb 22 and from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m., Sunday Feb 25. Tickets may be purchased at: www.capitalremodelandgarden.com

FEB. 21-22

Bill Blagg: Magic & Illusion. Friday at 7 p.m.; Saturday at 4 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. For all ages. This action-packed spectacular is filled with mind-blowing magic and jaw-dropping illusions that will have you rubbing your eyes in disbelief. Over 90 minutes of interactive magic.

SATURDAY/FEB. 22

Ron Kowalski Real Estate Group's Monopoly Tournament. 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. At Moose Lodge, 9612 Fernedge Lane, Lorton. To benefit the Lorton Community Action Center. They'll play 3 timed rounds of Monopoly - those with the most assets advance. Players of any / all skill levels are encouraged to play. Cash prizes: 1st-\$500; 2nd-\$250; 3rd-\$100. Trophies & door prizes too! Continental breakfast will be provided by South County Cares Church and lunch will be catered by Antonnelli's Pizza & Subs. The registration fee is \$35 in advance/online; \$50 at the door. Ages 8+. A flyer is attached.

SUNDAY/FEB. 23

Burke Historical Society Meeting. 3-4:30 p.m. At Pohick Regional Library, 6450 Sydenstricker Road, Burke. Larrie D. Ferreiro, professor at George Mason University, will speak on his 2016 Pulitzer finalist book, *Brothers at Arms: American Independence and the Men of France and Spain Who Saved It*.

SUNDAY/FEB. 23

Barron Ryan, Piano. 2 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. For all

ages. Award-winning pianist Barron Ryan grew up in a musical household filled with the sounds of artists ranging from Mozart to Michael Jackson. In "Classic Meets Cool," he features some of the greatest piano music ever made---groovy classical works, renditions of great jazz and pop tunes and original compositions. He combines them all into a musical adventure that's vintage yet fresh, historical yet hip, classic yet cool.

SUNDAY/FEB. 23

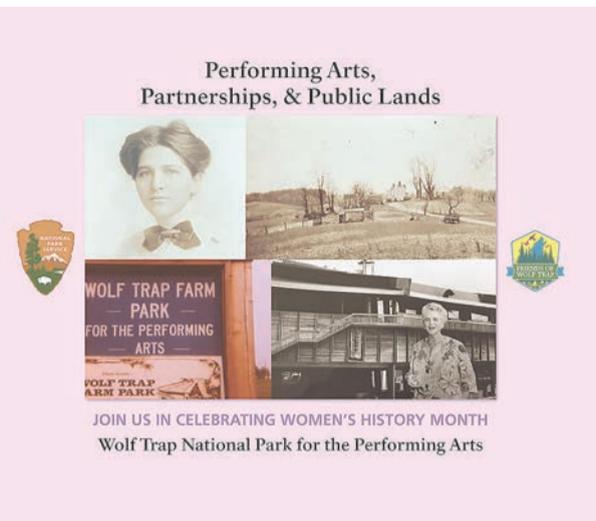
Traditional Celtic Music. 4:30 and 6:30 p.m. At the Old Brogue Pub, 760-C Walker Road, Great Falls. Featuring Ayreheart with Ronn McFarlane on lute, Will Morris on fretless bass, violin and colascione, and Mattias Rucht on percussion who are joined by singer-songwriter Heather Aubry Lloyd on vocals and guitar. Tickets must be purchased in advance at <https://oldbrogue.com/winter-celtic-concert-2025> - \$21 general admission. A season ticket for all 6 concerts is available for \$110. For info: www.oldbrogue.com or call the Old Brogue at 703-759-3309.

SUNDAY/FEB. 23

Navy Saxophone Quartet Concert. 4-5:15 p.m. At St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, 6509 Sydenstricker Road, Burke. The U.S. Navy Band Saxophone Quartet features musicians Jonathan Yanik, Patrick Martin, David Babich and Dana Booher. The ensemble regularly performs public recitals in the Washington, D.C. area and plays music in many different styles, ranging from standard concert saxophone quartet numbers to contemporary and jazz, tailoring the musical selections to a wide range of audiences. Visit the website: www.standrews.net

WEDNESDAY/FEB. 26

Senior Movie Day. 10 a.m. At Movie Theater at Reston Town Center. Featuring "It Ends With Us." Reston Association presents Senior Movie Day. Join them on the fourth Wednesday of each month. Coffee, donuts and OJ are provided, and



Celebrate Women's History Month with Wolf Trap's founder Catherine Filene Shouse on Sunday, March 2, 2025 at Wolf Trap National Park for Performing Arts.

door prizes are distributed prior to the movie. Free for 55-plus.

SATURDAY, MARCH 1

Appraisal Roadshow.

10:45 a.m. to 12 p.m. At Reston Association Headquarters. Bring one personal item—such

as jewelry, coins, a timepiece, artwork, or other heirlooms—and an appraisal expert will provide insights on its value and what you can do with your treasure, while also educating the group.

SATURDAY/MARCH 1

Kodo One Earth Tour 2025: Warabe.

8 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, Fairfax. Experience the "primal power and bravura beauty of Kodo" when Japan's premier ensemble of taiko drummers returns to the Center for the Arts with its exuberant rhythms and energy.

SUNDAY/MARCH 2

Angélique Kidjo. 7 p.m. At GMU Center for the Arts, Fairfax. Five-time Grammy Award winner Angélique Kidjo brings her powerhouse voice, electrifying stage presence, and joyous music to the Center for the Arts.

SUNDAY/MARCH 2

Honoring Catherine Filene Shouse.

1-3 p.m. At Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts, 1551 Trap Rd., Vienna. Celebrate Women's History Month as we honor Wolf Trap's founder and leading lady, Catherine Filene Shouse; a woman far ahead of her time, with a vision of a performing arts venue nestled in the natural beauty surrounding her family farm. Stay for a backstage tour of the Filene Center. Event will be inside, but dress in layers as parts of the backstage are open to the elements. Free parking. No cost. RSVP through <http://www.eventbrite.com> (search: Wolf Trap).

SUNDAY/MARCH 2

Traditional Celtic Music. 4:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. At the Old Brogue Irish Pub, 60-C Walker Road, Great Falls. Featuring IONA. Tickets must be purchased in advance at <https://oldbrogue.com/winter-celtic-concert-2025> - \$21 general admission.

TUESDAY/MARCH 4

Mardi Gras Celebration. 12-2 pm. At Vienna Community Center, 120 Cherry St., SE, Vienna. The Shep-

herd's Center of Northern Virginia is hosting a Mardi Gras Celebration. Admission includes a New Orleans inspired gumbo lunch and "King" cupcakes for dessert. Proceeds go to The Shepherd's Center of Northern Virginia (SCNOVA) and their mission to improve the lives of the older adults in Vienna, Oakton, Reston, Herndon, Dunn Loring, Great Falls, and Merrifield, Virginia areas that they serve. The price is \$20 per ticket, and this includes lunch and entertainment. Call 703-281-0538 or visit www.scnova.org > Events > Special Events to register today while tickets are available.

MARCH 6-9

Tyson's Library Quarterly Book & Media Sale.

At 7584 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church. Thursday, 6 March, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.; Friday, 7 March, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.; Saturday, 8 March, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.; Sunday, 9 March, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.: Bag sale. \$10 for a full grocery sack or half price if less. Large selection of books and media for all ages and interests. Visit the website: <https://www.tysonslibraryfriends.org/>

MARCH 7-16

Vienna Restaurant Week. At restaurants throughout Vienna. Diners can indulge in everything from fine dining to fast-casual favorites. Whether you choose to dine in, order delivery, or pick up takeout, enjoy exclusive discounts, prix fixe menus, and à la carte specials crafted just for the occasion. Sponsored by the Town of Vienna Economic Development Department, this initiative not only highlights the incredible chefs and eateries throughout Vienna but also drives foot traffic, boosts local businesses, and enhances the town's visibility as a dining destination. Visit exploreviennava.com/restaurantweek

MARCH 7-9 & 14-16

"Steal Away." At The Theatre at Seneca Ridge Middle School in Sterling. Sterling Playmakers will perform Ramona King's "Steal Away" as part of the Women's History Month celebration. This comedic and dramatic play is set during the Great Depression and explores the unexpected and outrageous idea of a group of black church ladies who decide to rob a bank to support funding scholarships for education. Time: Fridays and Saturday at 7:30 p.m., Sundays at 2:00 p.m. Tickets: www.sterlingplaymakers.org/tickets

2025 FAIRFAX COUNTY TEEN

JOB FAIRS

Supervisor Pat Herrity will host teen job fairs and career-building workshops:

Saturday March 8th, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. (with final workshops ending at 1:30 p.m.) at West Springfield High School.

Saturday March 15th, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. (with final workshops ending at 1:30 p.m.) at Chantilly High School.

These fairs focus on students and young job seekers looking for a variety of employment opportunities; full time, after-school, seasonal positions, internship opportunities, and volunteer positions. Students of all ages are encouraged to attend, but most opportunities will be geared toward students ages 16-18. They will also host resume and career building workshops during the fairs with our Chamber of Commerce partners.

MARCH 8 TO APRIL 6

Workhouse Arts Center Presents

Clyde's by Lynn Nottage. At Workhouse Arts Center, 9518 Workhouse Way, Lorton, Bldg. W3 Theater. At a truck stop sandwich shop, a group of formerly incarcerated kitchen staff get a second chance at life. Under the oppressive rule of their tough-as-nails boss, they find purpose, redemption, and even inspiration in their quest to craft the perfect sandwich. This witty and uplifting play explores themes of resilience, reinvention, and the power of dreams as these five characters navigate life's twists and turns as returning citizens.

SUNDAY/MARCH 9

Aurora Dance Fest 2025. 5 p.m.

At Capital One Hall. Featuring a vibrant evening of dance performances hosted by Gin Dance Company and featuring works by 10 companies and 16 talented choreographers. This event promises to be a delightful mix of contemporary ballet, modern dance, and the fiery passion of Flamenco from Southern Spain.

MARCH 13-30

"Hang." At 1st Stage, 1524 Spring Hill Road Tysons. Times: Thursdays at 7:30 p.m., Fridays at 7:30 p.m., Saturdays at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., and Sundays at 2 p.m. One crime. One room. Three people. A woman's unspeakable decision as the criminal's fate hangs in the balance. Set in a haunting world where every word is a revelation and every silence speaks volumes, this electrifying production will take you on a journey through the complexities of justice and human nature.

MARCH 14-16

Super Pet Expo. At Dulles Expo Center, Chantilly.

Attend a Pet Influencer Panel with Brian Benson & Magnus the Therapy Dog (6.8M followers), Amber Aquart & Whiskey Toller (1.1M followers), Chris Equale and Hammy the Corgi (16.8M followers) and Jessica Hatch with Gone to the Snow Dogs (6M followers). They'll learn how these pets went from being ordinary to ones with a worldwide audience.

Meet animal communicator Raven Noel who will explain what their pet is really thinking and show how to speak with a pet.

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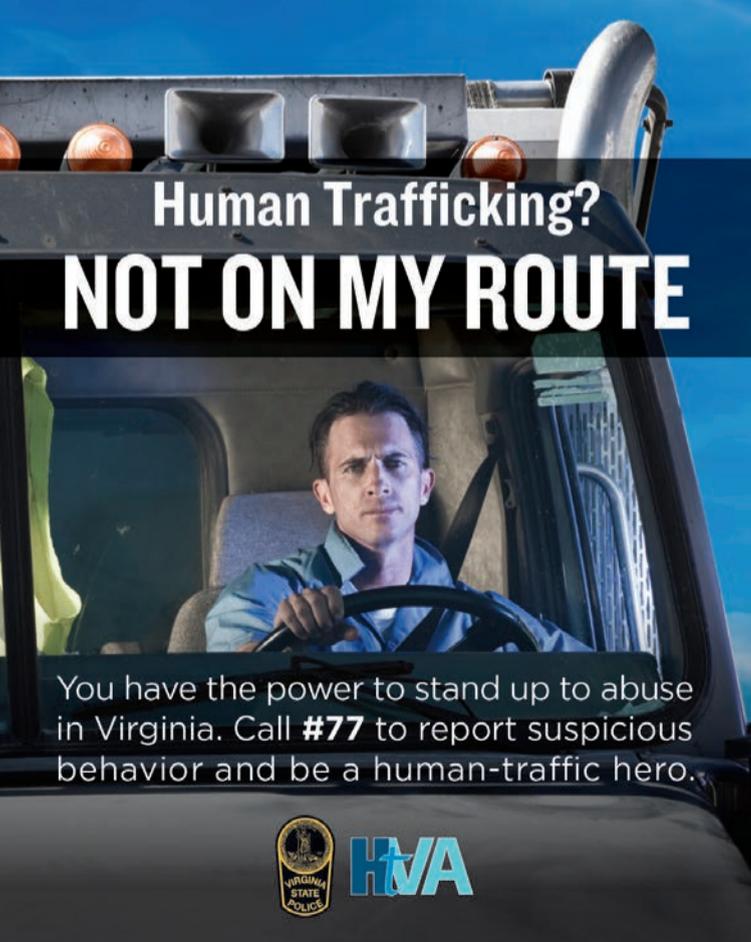
*Includes labor and product; bathtub, shower or walk-in tub and wall surround. This promotion cannot be combined with any other offer. Other restrictions may apply. This offer expires 3/31/25. Each dealership is independently owned and operated. **Third party financing is available for those customers who qualify/ Participating dealers only. See your dealer for details. ©2024 BCI.



Brown v. Board of Education
SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE

ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS
THROUGH APRIL 11, 2025

The Brown v. Board of Education Scholarship Program was established by the General Assembly to provide educational opportunities for persons who were denied an education in Virginia between 1954 and 1964 due to the closing of the public schools during Massive Resistance. The scholarship is now available to those individuals and to their descendants. The program is open to eligible applicants for the 2025–2026 school year. For applications and information on eligibility, visit:
BROWNSCHOLARSHIP.VIRGINIA.GOV



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You have the power to stand up to abuse in Virginia. Call **#77** to report suspicious behavior and be a human-traffic hero.



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Obituary



Paul Timothy Coffey (of North Myrtle Beach) passed away Monday, February 10, 2025. Tim was born March 13, 1939 in Zanesville, Ohio to parents Paul & Dorthea Coffey.

Funeral services will be held at St Stephen's Episcopal Church in North Myrtle Beach on Sunday, February 23rd at 2pm.

Tim is survived by his wife Ruth Ellen Coffey; Sister-in-law Susan Brigham (Mark); sister-in-law Mary Miller (Kip); Nieces Courtney Hobart West, Heather Miller Touzel (Kris), & Jennifer Anne Decker (Bryan); Great Nieces and nephews Olivia West, Wyatt Decker, Jackson West, Bailey Anderson, Max Anderson & Scarlett Decker.

Tim was active for many years with The Rotary Club, Lab Rescue, Tennis (USTA League), St Stephen's Episcopal Church & loved watching sports. Tim graduated from The Ohio State University & received his MBA from Xavier University. Tim served as State Supervisor of Marketing Education and DECA advisor for South Carolina Department of Education for more than 12 years, during which time he was elected to the national DECA Board of Directors. He retired from DECA's National Office as Director of Corporate Development. Upon retirement, Tim was awarded Honorary Life Membership, DECA's highest award, and he was the first former DECA student to be so honored.

He was preceded in death by his parents Paul & Dorthea Coffey; his brother Pat Coffey and many beloved Lab dogs.

In lieu of flowers please donate to DECA Scholarship Foundation in Memory of Tim Coffey. Address: DECA Inc., 1908 Association Drive, Reston, VA 20191.

CALENDAR

			1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9
11	12	13	14	15	16
18	19	20	21	22	23
25	26	27	28	29	30
					31

Let us know about an upcoming event

connectionnewspapers.com/Calendar

Employment

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OPINION

Budget

FROM PAGE 11

necessary," he said.

Hill's budget included \$60 million in reductions, with 208 merit positions eliminated. Hill acknowledged that while the proposal focused on pay and benefits for county employees, other adjustments proved necessary, such as those "to address inflation, debt service obligations, state and federal mandates, new facilities and information technology needs."

Hill reiterated that the state does not fully meet its obligation for funding Fairfax County Schools according to a 2023 study by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC). Fairfax County makes up for state funding shortfalls with additional local funding.

Jeff McKay, chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, clarified after Hill's presentation that every impacted merit employee would be offered another opportunity within the county. "That's one of the reasons for the proposed one-and-a-half cent tax increase. We have included employee compensation consistent with what our metrics show and consistent with what we know is necessary to retain the best and brightest employees."

"Clearly that is not what's happening across the river," said McKay. "As I mentioned earlier, this is going to have a significant, and you acknowledge significant, impact on our budget moving forward."

"The way you treat your employees says a lot about your organization."

BULLETIN BOARD

Submit civic/community announcements at ConnectionNews-papers.com/Calendar. Photos and artwork welcome. Deadline is Thursday at noon, at least two weeks before the event. Or via email calendar@connectionnewspapers.com

VOLUNTEER FOR MCLEAN GOVERNING BOARD

Adults and teens who reside in Dranesville District 1-A and who are looking for opportunities to serve their community are invited to run for seats on the McLean Community Center's 2025-2026 Governing Board. The 11-member volunteer board provides oversight to the center through policy guidance, strategic planning and financial stewardship. McLean Community Center (MCC), a special agency of Fairfax County Government whose facilities include the Robert Ames Alden Theatre ("The Alden") and The Old Firehouse Center (OFC), is located at 1234 Ingleside Ave.

Key Election Dates:
Tuesday, Feb. 18: Candidate Petition Packets are available for pickup at MCC.

SEE BULLETIN, PAGE 19
WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

Stress Crisis: Need Someone to Talk to?

FROM PAGE 7

❖ Domestic and Sexual Violence 24-Hour Hotline at 703-360-7273 for resources and information about domestic or sexual violence. Hotline Advocates are able to help. Through the language line services, advocates can access over 140 languages. <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/familyservices/domestic-sexual-violence/24-hour-hotline>

❖ VeteransCrisisLine.net provides 24/7 confidential crisis support for veterans and their loved ones. Call 988, press 1, text 838255, or chat online.

❖ LGBT National Hotline—serves callers of all ages, offering peer counseling, information, and local resources. 888-843-4564 - hours: Monday-Friday, 2-11 p.m. ET; Saturday and Sunday, noon-5 p.m. ET. <https://lgbthotline.org/>

❖ Trans Lifeline—Trans Lifeline's Hotline is a peer support service run by trans people for trans and questioning callers. It offers direct emotional and financial support to trans people in crisis. 877-565-8860 Hours: Monday through Friday, 1 p.m.-9 p.m. Eastern.

❖ The National Sexual Assault Telephone Hotline is 800-656-HOPE (4673). Helping Survivors Advocacy Center — Information & Support for Survivors: <https://helpingsurvivors.org/>

❖ Domestic/Partner Violence Hotlines: 800-799-7233 — ndvh.org

❖ Doorways for Women and Families: 24-Hour Domestic and Sexual Violence Hotline 703-237-0881

What happens to a body under stress? Stress caused by a perceived threat prompts the adrenal glands to release a surge of hormones; among them, adrenaline makes the heart beat faster, raises blood pressure, and releases cortisol. This changes immune sys-

988 SUICIDE AND CRISIS LIFELINE
 For Urgent Mental Health-Related Distress
 Call: 703-527-4077 (Regional Crisis Call Center)
 9-8-8 (Learn more about 988)
 Or, Text "CONNECT" to 855-11

911 EMERGENCY RESPONSE
 For Life or Property Threatening Emergency
 Ask for a Crisis Intervention trained officer

CSB EMERGENCY SERVICES
 For Emergency Mental Health Services
 24/7 Walk-in Services Available
 Call: 703-573-5679 TTY 711
 Come to the Sharon Bulova Center for Community Health

SCREENSHOT SOURCE: FAIRFAX COUNTY

"The Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board (CSB) provides lifesaving services for people experiencing mental health concerns, substance misuse and/or developmental disabilities. Our vision is that everyone in our community has the support needed to live a healthy, fulfilling life."

tem responses and suppresses the digestive, reproductive, and growth processes. The long-term activation of the stress response system and too much exposure to cortisol and other stress hormones can disrupt almost all the body's processes, according to the Mayo Clinic. Stress causes health prob-

lems such as anxiety, depression, headaches, muscle tension and pain; digestive issues, sleep problems, memory problems, eating challenges, as well as heart disease, heart attack, high blood pressure, and stroke.

— MERCIA HOBSON

Fairfax County Held \$400 Million Bond Sale

Low interest rates fund key county projects.

BY MERCIA HOBSON
THE CONNECTION



SOURCE: FAIRFAX COUNTY
Christina C. Jackson,
chief financial officer
of Fairfax County

Fairfax County announced in early February it successfully held a \$400 million general obligation bond sale and secured "a competitive interest rate of 3.57 percent, significantly lower than the national average of 4.28 percent for similar bonds," reports Fairfax County News. The county's triple-A bond rating helped it secure the rate.

Proceeds will fund key projects, including \$230 million for schools, \$55 million for public safety, \$44 million for transportation, \$25 million for parks and park facilities, \$25 million for human services and community development facilities, and \$21 million for libraries. "This bond sale allows us to maintain investments in critical infrastructure and services that support our community," said Christina C. Jackson, chief financial officer.

It's All Relative



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

As you regular readers may have gleaned from reading this column over the years, I had great parents and was raised in a wonderful and nurturing environment which enabled my brother, Richard, and I to go on and live productive lives. However, there was one element missing from our upbringing (more so for me since I was five years younger than my brother): grandparents. Oh, they were there all right (except for my maternal grandmother who had died a few months after I was born), but only during my childhood, not my adolescence and certainly not my adulthood as they all had died long before. As a result, I have fleeting memories of my two grandfathers (Hyman and Jacob) and one grandmother (Bessie), most of which involve visits to nursing homes.

However, when I married into my wife Dina's family, not only did I gain in-laws, I also inherited — for lack of a better word, Dina's two grandmothers (Frances and Filomena) and one grandfather (Cesare). All with whom I would develop adult relationships which would last over 25 years — and only occasional visits to nursing homes, an experience much different than I had with my own grandparents. It wasn't so much a revelation as it was an enriching and rewarding opportunity. An opportunity I feel extremely fortunate to have had. It makes me smile — and remember, to this day.

Juxtaposed against this history and combined with my own cancer diagnosis — which originally was a "13 month to two years" prognosis, I share the following story/acceptance of reality from Dina's Italian grandfather "Chez." The 'acceptance of reality' to which I refer is death. A very common thought/pre-occupation if you're diagnosed with "terminal" cancer or are an individual of a certain advanced age. And the type of conversation that I never had with my own grandparents as I was too young, and they were too old (if you know what I mean). Yet one I occasionally had with Dina's grandparents.

As per usual, it was a holiday, so Dina and I were visiting West Chester, Pa. where "all the relations" lived, and we were staying overnight with her grandparents — also as usual. "Chez" all I were talking about cars for some reason. Dina's grandparents owned one car, an Olsmobile Omega, a four-door sedan. Chez got to talking about all the cars he had owned, and he remembered back an impressive number of years/cars. And within this car context, "Chez" says that the Omega is the last car he'll ever own. He'll rarely drive the car anyway. Usually, I drove it when we visited. But his admission, at least to me, was a tacit acceptance of his own inevitable death (he was already into his late 80s at this juncture but still living at home). However, it was said with humor and sincerity if that's even the word. No regrets, no complaints, no why or woe is me. Just understanding that, to quote Forrest Gump's mother (Sally Field) "Death is just a part of living."

I am sharing this anecdote with you because recently I've been thinking an identical thought to myself lately. I've been saying that the 2019 Audi Q3 that I'm driving and still paying monthly for, ultimately will be the last car that I own/buy. Since I've been saying it to myself, I'm not sure I've been saying it with the same humor as "Chez" had said all those years ago. I sure hope so. If so, it's an attitude I learned from him. And one I'm proud to have learned.

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

BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 6

Monday, March 17: Candidates must return completed packets to MCC in-person by 5 p.m.

Tuesday, March 25: Candidate Orientation will be held at MCC from 6:30-8 p.m.

Wednesday, April 2: Absentee Voting begins at 9 a.m. at MCC.

Saturday, April 19: Candidates Meet & Greet, MCC Spring Parking Lot Sale, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Friday, May 9: Absentee Voting ends at 5 p.m.

Friday, May 16: In-Person Voting held at Friday Night Rides, Lewinsville Park, 4-8 p.m.

Saturday, May 17: In-Person Voting held at McLean Day, Lewinsville Park, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

For more information on the MCC Governing Board Elections, call the Center at 703-790-0123, TTY: 711, or log on to the Governing Board Candidates' webpage: <https://mcleancenter.org/2025-call-for-candidates/>



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