

# Mount Vernon Gazette

MOUNT VERNON'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER • A CONNECTION NEWSPAPER

FEBRUARY 20, 2025



Grist Mill Park barn.



PHOTOS BY ROBOT DOWN MEDIA

Future plan for the barn.

## Barn at Grist Mill Park Could Become Restaurant, Community Hub

BY MIKE SALMON  
THE GAZETTE

Everyone in Mount Vernon has passed the big red barn at the Grist Mill Park at one time or another and for years, it's looked the same. The barn and silo come from another time, and the surrounding gardens and ballfield seem to grow each year.

Real estate moguls Mark and Michael White, made a proposal under the Virginia Public-Private Education Facilities and Infrastructure Act to the Fairfax County Park Authority.

The Whites propose now that the barn become a family-style restaurant run by the Whites to add a business to this area along Mount Vernon Highway. Mark and Michael White are looking at it as a way to enhance

the area for many families living nearby and the newly improved bike trail could improve local access.

"My brother and I got the idea; the county needs a hub like that," said Mark White.

So they whipped up a plan with local restaurateur Noe Landini and developer Victor Bonomi who are all partners in this venture. Landini is famous around Old Town Alexandria for several restaurants he's been

behind, and Bonomi is CEO of Tech24 Construction and known for his work on breweries and restaurants in the area.

Mark and Michael White are real estate agents in the area alongside their father Chris White, with Long and Foster Realty in Alexandria.

The hub White mentioned would be a

SEE BARN AT GRIST MILL PARK, PAGE 11



PHOTO BY MIKE SALMON/THE GAZETTE

Supervisor Dan Storck with Holly Dougherty of the Mount Vernon-Springfield Chamber of Commerce.

## Annual Town Hall Meeting Takes Flight Across Mount Vernon

It was the 38th Annual Town Hall Meeting.

BY MIKE SALMON  
THE GAZETTE

"The Commons of Mount Vernon," is the new name for the Old Mount Vernon High School redevelopment project, a project that's been underway for a few years as construction crews transform a dated high school building into a learning center that will train many in Mount Vernon for the next stage in their lives here in Fairfax County.

That announcement was a big part of the town hall meeting that started off with the exhibit hall where many of Mount Vernon's

organizations had displays, such as the South County Chamber of Commerce, the U.S. Army Museum and many more.

The Commons is set to open in the fall of 2026, Storck said.

Everyone ushered into the auditorium where Supervisor Storck paid tribute to the late Gerry Hyland, former Mount Vernon supervisor who died recently. Hyland's dedication to civil service and the many accomplishments he achieved in office were highlighted in a tribute video showing Hyland in action around the district.

"Gerry was a true community

pillar," said Storck.

Storck relied on technology as he's done in past years and took a flying tour through the Mount Vernon District highlighting accomplishments achieved in 2024 including the newly rebuilt recreation center on Beacon Hill Road, affordable dwellings and transportation improvements at various places throughout the district.

There were about 250 people in the auditorium and 200 people online for this town hall. Guest speakers included Chairman Jeff McKay, U.S. Rep. Gerry Connolly, U.S. Rep. Don Beyer and Fairfax County Executive Bryan Hill.



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## Braddock Heights

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\$3,295,000 | With 6 bedrooms and 5.5 bathrooms, this gated estate has luxurious gardens, high ceilings, vintage pine floors, thirty foot art gallery foyer, and 5 fireplaces all on a half acre.

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## Old Town

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SCREENSHOT SOURCE: FAIRFAX COUNTY CHANNEL 16

Bryan Hill



SCREENSHOT SOURCE: FAIRFAX COUNTY CHANNEL 16

Chairman Jeff McKay

## ‘Difficult Choices’ in Fairfax County FY2026 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 his-

**How to Provide Input on the FY 2026 Budget**

- Email [FY26Budget@publicinput.com](mailto: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](http://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](http://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](mailto: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](http://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](http://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

tory,” Hill said.

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.

SEE ‘DIFFICULT CHOICES’, PAGE 4

“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

## Supervisors React to Budget Prospects

BY MERCIA HOBSON  
THE CONNECTION

Some comments were lightly edited for clarity.

### Jeff McKay (D), chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

McKay: “This is the first time any of us have heard this budget. Adoption, as was mentioned, is May 13. So there’s going to be a lot of time for deliberation in the months ahead, from not only our residents, but from county employees and other groups that might be affected by this.”

“If we had a food and beverage tax in place, we could conceivably not have to increase the tax rate on real estate.”

### County Executive Bryan Hill:

“That is correct, sir.  
McKay: And that 48 million is at 3 percent. The state, of course, allows localities to go up to 6 percent. I, for one, would not support that. But you’re at 3 percent, and that’s \$48.1 million. Is that a half a year?”

Hill: Yes.

McKay: If that was in place, we would obviously, if [the meals tax had been] adopted, because of the setup and preparation for it, we would only be able to collect half a year’s worth of revenue. But in future budget years, that would represent two times \$48 million. I just want to make sure that’s roughly what your math shows.

Hill: Roughly.

McKay: It’s important for us to know that \$48 million is not a full year’s worth of collections if it were to be implemented.

### Andres F. Jimenez (D-Mason District):

“There are over 200 position cuts, and I’m curious how these positions were identified or cut. Were they unfilled positions? Were they vacant?”

Hill: “There’s a lot of unfilled. There’s vacant, and there’s a couple that have people in them that we’re going to try and move around to other merit positions as well.”

### Rodney L. Lusk (D-Franconia District):

“What are we doing with our economic development partners to help us expand

SEE SUPERVISORS REACT, PAGE 15



# Airplane Crash 76 Years Ago Killed 55 at National Airport

World War II surplus flown into flight path by reckless pilot.

BY MIKE SALMON  
THE GAZETTE

The recent fatal airplane crash with the military helicopter at Reagan National Airport was not the first time a fatal crash occurred in this part of the Potomac River, just north of Old Town. A lesser-known crash occurred on Nov. 1, 1949 when a Bolivian pilot named Erick Rios Bridoux flying a P-38 “war surplus” airplane hit an Eastern Airline plane, killing 55 people.

The P-38 and the DC-4 were at the final approach at the airport and the P-38 “failed to comply with the traffic pattern prescribed” for the airport, reported a local newspaper. There were 51 passengers on the Eastern Airlines plane and four crew members.

According to an old newspaper article dated Jan. 6, 1950, the Bolivian pilot was charged with seven counts in the fatal crash for violating Civil Aeronautics Administration, who said he was flying in a careless and reckless manner. The CAA asked that his pilot’s license be revoked. On Oct. 24, the



A surplus WWII plane being restored. There were thousands of surplus airplanes after the war like the P-38 that crashed at National Airport.

PHOTOS BY MIKE SALMON/CONNECTION

same pilot flew the P-38 war surplus plane to Beacon Field in Mount Vernon and back to National Airport without a valid permit, getting cited for that violation too.

The CAA claimed the plane was not in airworthy condition at the time. Bridoux de-

nied all responsibility for the crash.

Eastern sued him for \$500,000, the article stated.

After World War II ended in August 1945, the United States had thousands of extra combat airplanes. The Reconstruction Fi-

## CAA Places Crash Blame On Bridoux

‘Careless and Reckless Manner’ Cited; Permit Revocation Is Asked

The Civil Aeronautics Administration charged Bolivian P-38 Pilot Headlines in a local paper after the crash in 1949.

nance Corporation had 500 buyers for the planes but they didn’t sell enough, so at one point they tried to melt them into aluminum ingots for other uses. Many were parked in the Arizona desert near a place called Kingman, Arizona, according to General Aviation News.

Fast forward to January 13, 1982 and 78 people lost their lives in another crash into the Potomac River. This time it was Air Florida flight 90, a Boeing 737 that took off on an icy day and hit the 14th Street Bridge over the Potomac River. Four motorists on the bridge were killed as well. The ice and snow build up on the wings were a factor.

## ‘Difficult Choices’

FROM PAGE 3

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

ee 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.”

### FY 2026 Budget Summary

Net County resources are projected to increase by \$263.96 million

Allocation of resources include:  
\$118.00 million for County priorities  
\$125.34 million for Schools  
\$8.49 million for Affordable Housing  
\$6.52 million in reserve for Tourism Promotion  
\$5.62 million balance for Board Consideration

Schools remain at 51.5% of General Fund Disbursements in FY 2026

County’s reserves remain budgeted at target of 10% of General Fund disbursements

### FY 2026 Budget Summary

### ADJUSTMENTS INCLUDED IN FY 2026 GENERAL FUND BUDGET

(Amounts shown are in millions, net change over FY 2025 Adopted Budget Plan)

Projected Revenue Increase	Projected Revenue Increase			
	County	Schools	Unallocated	Total
Projected Revenue Increases				
- Revenue Increase at Current Real Estate Tax Rate (\$196.57)	\$123.05	\$125.34	\$12.14	\$260.53
- 1.5 Cent Real Estate Tax Rate Increase (\$50.93)				
- Transient Occupancy Tax Increase (\$13.03)				
Additional ¼ Penny for Affordable Housing	(\$8.49)	--	--	(\$8.49)
Revenues associated with Expenditure Adjustments	\$5.68	--	--	\$5.68
Net Impact of Transfers In	(\$2.25)	--	--	(\$2.25)
<b>Total Available</b>	<b>\$118.00</b>	<b>\$125.34</b>	<b>\$12.14</b>	<b>\$255.47</b>
FY 2026 Requirements	FY 2026 Requirements			
	County	Schools	Unallocated	Total
School Operating Support	--	\$118.64	--	\$118.64
County Compensation	\$123.60	--	--	\$123.60
Debt Service	\$8.60	\$6.70	--	\$15.30
New Facilities	\$4.80	--	--	\$4.80
Contracts/Inflationary	\$16.22	--	--	\$16.22
Information Technology	\$10.57	--	--	\$10.57
Cost of County Operations	\$10.17	--	--	\$10.17
Mandates/Expiration of Grant Funding	\$3.84	--	--	\$3.84
Reductions	(\$59.80)	--	--	(\$59.80)
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$118.00</b>	<b>\$125.34</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$243.34</b>
Reserve for Tourism	--	--	\$6.52	\$6.52
<b>Total Uses</b>	<b>\$118.00</b>	<b>\$125.34</b>	<b>\$6.52</b>	<b>\$249.86</b>
Available Balance for Board Consideration	--	--	\$5.62	\$5.62

COUNTY EXECUTIVE’S PRESENTATION ON THE FY 2026 ADVERTISED BUDGET 9



Fairfax County Board of Supervisors say The Pledge of Allegiance before the meeting Tuesday morning, Feb. 18.





PHOTO BY JANET BARNETT/GAZETTE PACKET

## Reunion

Martin Smith, left, a two-time NCAA track Coach of the Year for the Wisconsin Badgers, was joined by high school friends from Francis C. Hammond, T.C. Williams and Ascension Academy at the Jan. 28 Rotary Club of Alexandria meeting at Belle Haven Country Club where Smith spoke about his storied track coaching career. Smith coached over 300 All-Americans and his teams won 26 conference championships. With Smith are John O’Conner, Jim Clark, Drew Carroll and Frank Spicer.



## 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](http://vdot.virginia.gov) and navigate to Traffic and Travel/For freight operators/Truck restrictions. This page references a posted structures report and a GIS map tool that contain detailed information about restricted structures in Virginia. To receive email notifications regarding new or updated weight restrictions for structures statewide, complete the sign-up form on the web page.

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

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



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# Standing with Federal Workers

BY DELEGATE PAUL KRIZEK

**A**s a state legislator, and your Delegate, I am busy in Richmond working for my constituents and the Commonwealth. Nevertheless, I am deeply concerned about what is happening across the river and the impact of Elon Musk's reckless firing spree, which violates the U.S. Constitution. These mass layoffs undermine the rule of law, threaten government accountability, undermine public trust in our federal agencies, and directly harm hard-working Americans. The consequences are especially severe for our local communities, where abrupt staffing cuts to USAID, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and many more agencies will hit families hard.



Here in Virginia, these cuts are more than just numbers on a page — they affect real people. Foreign Service, Civil Service, veterans, and everyday Virginians rely on these essential services. For each government job lost, we lose over three government contractors, further harming government reliability and institutional trust.

Our Speaker of the House, Don Scott, recently established the House Emergency Committee on the Impacts of Federal Workforce and Funding Reductions. This emergency committee will be chaired by my friend and colleague, Del. David

Bulova, to ensure continued support for Virginia's vulnerable federal workers. There are 145,000 civilian federal employees in Virginia and more than \$106 billion in federal contracts in our state. The committee will begin meeting once the Virginia General Assembly session concludes next week. Furthermore, our Democratic leadership in the General Assembly is working on emergency legislation to expand unemployment benefits to impacted federal workers and contractors.

We've heard empty promises from President Trump. He claimed he would lower costs for Americans but has so far failed to act. In an Aug. 15 campaign speech, he told voters that if he won, he would "immediately bring prices down, starting on day one." After his election, all he could offer was a weak statement during a TIME Magazine interview about how "[i]t's hard to bring things down once they're up." Instead of lowering prices, President Trump has proposed 25% tariffs on our closest neighbors and allies that will further raise prices during this cost-of-living crisis. Meanwhile, Governor Youngkin doesn't protest as Washington prioritizes unelected billionaires over working families.

Effective governance relies on established rules, ethical standards, and the expectation of norms, with proper consequences if they aren't followed. Mr. Musk's extensive access to criti-

cal government institutions raise important concerns about accountability. Prior to his appointment as a "special government employee," his companies were reportedly promised "\$3 billion across nearly 100 different contracts last year with 17 [different] federal agencies," per the New York Times. Conversely, Mr. Musk's companies have been targeted in at least 20 recent federal regulatory investigations. Particularly troubling is Mr. Musk's access to the federal payment system, which might expose details on "public contractors who compete directly with Musk," as noted by the Campaign Legal Center. Responsible spending of taxpayer funds is essential, but so is protecting the security, stability, and integrity of these government institutions and their rules and ethics.

Let me be clear. These dramatic cuts are not just bad policy, they are an abuse of power. In spite of this, our community is fortunate to have strong leadership during this volatile time, and I commend Congressman Don Beyer and our Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine for speaking out and standing up for our constituents in Mount Vernon and Franconia.

We must continue to resist these reckless and harmful decisions and fight for the programs that hardworking Virginians depend on. Let us stand together for our families, our communities, and future generations. We must not allow unelected Elon Musk to dismantle our federal workforce and profit at the expense of the rest of us.

## The Home Stretch

BY SEN. ADAM EBBIN

**A**s 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.

### 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 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 en-



Ebbin

forcement on these buys, and transportation costs.

### 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

SEE EBBIN, PAGE 7

## Submit a Letter to the Editor

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A Connection Newspaper





Ebbin

FROM PAGE 6

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.

This bill would allow localities to waive certain zoning restrictions, reduce administrative fees, and expedite site plan approvals for nonprofit-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 Affordabil-

**Park Authority Open Hire Events for Newly Renovated Mount Vernon Rec Center**

The Fairfax County Park Authority is excited to announce open hire events for the newly renovated Mount Vernon Rec Center, which is reopening in May 2025 and looking to fill over 290 part-time positions across multiple departments.

**Open Hire Events:**

- Saturday, March 15, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Belle View Elementary
- Sunday, March 23, noon to 3 p.m. at Martha Washington Library
- Wednesday, April 16, 4 to 6 p.m. at Martha Washington Library
- Saturday, April 19, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Martha Washington Library
- Monday, April 21, 5 to 7 p.m. at Martha Washington Library

To learn more about the open positions at Mount Vernon Rec Center and to submit an application online, visit the Mount Vernon Rec Center jobs webpage. For questions, contact [FCPAJOBS@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:FCPAJOBS@fairfaxcounty.gov).

ity 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 contract-

ed 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



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# What's Happening Outside?

PHOTOS BY GLENDA BOOTH

BY GLENDA C. BOOTH  
THE GAZETTE

**D**uring winter's cold grip, nature may seem dead, but there's a lot going on out there. Biologists say nature is dormant. For some wildlife, romance is in the air.

Bald eagles have mated, are incubating eggs and soon will raise young eaglets nestled down in their nests.

Barred owl courtship is underway. Signs of courtship behavior include a pair perched close together, bobbing heads and bowing, raising their wings and calling. Great horned owls too are mating.

Waterfowl like northern pintail ducks and tundra swans at Mason Neck will soon fly north to their breeding grounds.

### Mammals More Active

This is prime breeding season for coyotes and foxes in our area, say county biologists. Some people report being awakened in the middle of the night by the piercing male fox's mating call.

White-tail deer are dropping their antlers. They bred in late September through February. Does

**“Spring is when you feel like whistling even with a shoe full of slush.”**

— The late Doug Larson, journalist

usually have twins between May and July, says Virginia's Department of Wildlife Resources website.

Eastern gray squirrels do not hibernate and scamper about all year. Their nests, clumps of leaves and twigs called dreys, are very visible in trees about 30 feet above ground before the leaves come out. Males chasing females may be mating behavior. Their young will be born between March and April. On an occasional warm day, chipmunks may leave their burrows to forage.

Beavers, not true hibernators, are leaving the warmth of their wetland lodges more frequently. Muskrats also do not hibernate and by late winter they may be seen more frequently as they be-  
SEE WHAT'S HAPPENING, PAGE 9



Beech trees retain their leaves all winter.



Snowdrops are in bloom in February.



Squirrel nests are very visible before trees leaf out.



Chipmunks emerge from their underground burrows on warm days.



Winter aconite is one of the earliest plants to bloom in Northern Virginia, in February.



Many birds feed on poison ivy berries in winter.





For many years, ospreys have had a nest on a platform at the Belle Haven Marina.



Osprey build nests on many types of structures.

# What's Happening Outside?

FROM PAGE 8 come more active in daylight hours.

River otters, active in the Potomac River and its tributaries, have been spotted catching fish and running about in Huntley Meadows Park, reports Chris King, the park's Natural Resource Manager.

He observes, "This year has been a challenging one for some of our wildlife owing to a very poor mast crop which normally sustains the animals through the winter. Particularly low yields of acorns and hickory nuts as a result of the long-lasting snow and cold have made it difficult for foraging wildlife."

Fish, frogs and turtles slowed their metabolism for winter and burrowed into the ground to survive in a state of dormancy. Some insects overwinter as larvae, nymphs, eggs or pupae. Some hibernate. Some insects like bees spend the winter inside hollow stems.

## Plant Life

American robins and cedar waxwings flock and feed on berry-bearing shrubs and trees like American holly.

Many bird species also feed on eastern red cedar and poison ivy berries. Heads up! Poison ivy's hairy vine may not have leaves, but it too, like summer's leaves, can cause rashes.

Some early-blooming buds are starting to open. February's snowmelt revealed snowdrops blooming.

Beech and red oak trees kept last summer's leaves all winter, but they will drop them soon. Maple tree sap will soon rise.

## A March Preview

Though March weather can be unpredictable, spring will come, officially on March 20. Bulging buds will open. Overwintering insects and amphibians will emerge.

Male groundhogs will end their winter hibernation, leave their burrows and mate with females that give birth four weeks after mating. "Groundhogs begin to emerge when they sense the ground and air temperature is rising," according to a Library of Congress article. "An extended winter could delay the growth of the plants they need to eat after their long hibernation. They will de-

lay their mating season and emerge later to make sure that there is food available. Since they lose over half their body weight during hibernation, this is very important for their survival." And no, despite the myth, their shadow does not predict when spring will arrive.

Ospreys will return from their southern wintering grounds, mate and reconstruct or build messy nests near waterways on light poles, platforms, channel markers, stumps and in trees. Like all raptors, they have keen eyesight, powerful talons and a strong curved beak for tearing their prey. Excellent anglers, nicknamed "fish hawks," they will bring fish to their young.

Tree swallows, Northern rough-winged swallows and wood ducks will return. Bald eagles will bring fish and other prey to their eaglets.

Amid the sweet scents of spring, stinky skunk cabbage plants will rise. This plant gets its name from its odiferous "aroma" that the brave can whiff by breaking off a leaf. Virginia bluebells will brighten woody areas.



Many birds, like red-bellied woodpeckers, visit bird feeders in winter.

# Flu Numbers Very High & Increasing in Alexandria

Alexandria Health Department reports that data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows that emergency department visits for flu in Alexandria are very high. Additionally, the percentage of Northern Virginia emergency department visits where people were diagnosed with the flu is more than three times the percentage at this time last year.

With this increase in flu, Alexandria Health Department recommends that people take added precautions to prevent the spread of flu.

## Some tips include:

- ❖ It is not too late to get a flu vaccine - get vaccinated if you have not done so already.
- ❖ Regularly wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds. Or use alco-

hol-based hand sanitizers when soap and water are not available.

- ❖ Cover your mouth and nose with your inner elbow (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing.

❖ Feel free to mask to prevent the spread of airborne germs.

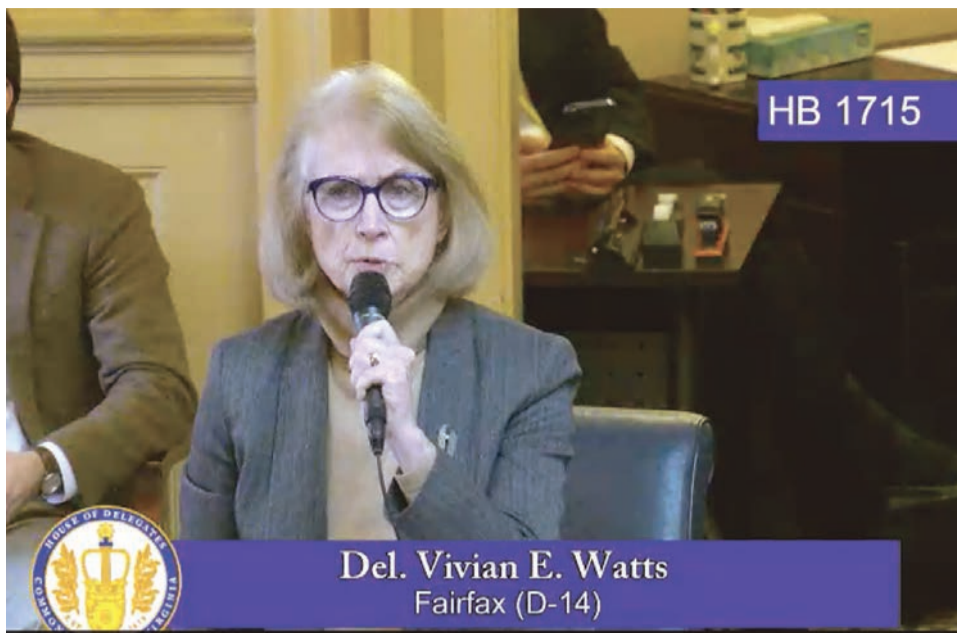
- ❖ Maintain a clean and sanitized space by disinfecting high-touch surfaces, such as doorknobs and handrails.

- ❖ Stay home if you're feeling sick and consider postponing gatherings with others who feel sick.

People should stay home until they are feeling better, and they have been fever-free for at least 24 hours.

More information on the flu and other respiratory illnesses is available on the health department's Flu Season website.





Del. Vivian Watts speaks to her mail theft bill on the House floor.



Sen. Saddam Salim introduces his mail theft bill on the Senate floor.

# Penalties for Porch Pirates

**Mail theft expected to rise to felony in Virginia.**

By SUSAN LAUME  
THE GAZETTE

**H**ave 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 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.



Neighborhood porches are popular spots for package deliveries and thefts



# Barn at Grist Mill Park Could Become Restaurant, Community Hub

FROM PAGE 1

multi-faceted place centered around the barn including a full-service restaurant, event space, outdoor entertainment and music venue, a bike rest stop, public restrooms and support infrastructure for future lighting at the playing fields. The team will own these business entities but the Fairfax County Park Authority will still own the barn.

The timeframe for this venture is a little loose at this point but the Request for Proposals closes on April 25. So far it isn't clear if the county has gotten any other interest about this barn and surrounding property. It's a big project with lots of details and with the county government involved, the procedure may take time. "There is a lot ... to navigate so a timeline is difficult to do," White said. After the RFP date, "we're going to work out the details with the park authority," he added.

On Feb. 6, the park authority officially acknowledged the White's action for the barn. "The Fairfax County Park Authority has re-

ceived and accepted an unsolicited proposal under the provisions of the Public-Private Education Facilities and Infrastructure Act of 2002 (PPEA) for the redevelopment of the barn at Grist Mill Park in the Mount Vernon District," it said on the county website.

"During our master plan process for Grist Mill Park, we heard the community's strong desire to find new and creative uses for the barn," said Park Authority Executive Director Jai Cole in a park authority statement. "The Park Authority has long used public-private partnerships as a means of bringing high-value, high-impact amenities to our community parks. They expand creativity, opportunities for innovation and leverage outside resources for the benefit of our more than 16 million visitors each year."

Grist Mill Park – located at 4710 Mount Vernon Memorial Highway in Alexandria – provides more than 75 acres of playing fields, garden plots, an off-leash dog area, playground, historic barn, trails and woodlands.

## BULLETIN BOARD

Submit civic/community announcements at [ConnectionNewspapers.com/Calendar](http://ConnectionNewspapers.com/Calendar). Photos and artwork welcome. Deadline is Thursday at noon, at least two weeks before the event. Or email to [calendar@connection-newspapers.com](mailto:calendar@connection-newspapers.com)

### VOLUNTEERS WANTED

Assistance League of Northern Virginia is an all-volunteer non-profit organization that feeds, clothes and provides reading assistance and books to children in need. Assistance League's programs touch the lives of hundreds of children in Fairfax and Prince William Counties and the City of Alexandria. There are many volunteer opportunities for community members to contribute to helping those in need. To learn more, email [info@alnv.org](mailto:info@alnv.org), or visit [www.alnv.org](http://www.alnv.org).

STEM Professionals Needed. Help assist K-12 STEM teachers as part of the American

Association for the Advancement of Science's STEM Volunteer Program, [stemvolunteers.org](http://stemvolunteers.org), during the 2018-19 school year. In the 2017-18 school year, there are 85 volunteers in 6 Northern Virginia school districts. Contact Don Rea at 571-551-2488, or [donaldrea@aol.com](mailto:donaldrea@aol.com).

Volunteer Drivers Needed. Drivers needed by the American Cancer Society to take cancer patients to treatment in Northern Virginia. To volunteer, call 1-800-227-2345 or go to [cancer.org/drive](http://cancer.org/drive).

RSVP, a volunteer network for seniors seeking service opportunities in and around Fairfax County, Arlington County and the City of Alexandria, offers a wide array of opportunities for volunteers 55 and older. RSVP volunteers enjoy flexible schedules, free accident and liability insurance while serving, optional mileage and meal reimbursement and are invited to volunteer

SEE BULLETIN, PAGE 14

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- Promote your events in the online community calendar





# Bamboo: Food for Some, Problem for Many

**National Zoo pandas enjoying area's plants.**

BY SUSAN LAUME  
THE GAZETTE

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 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

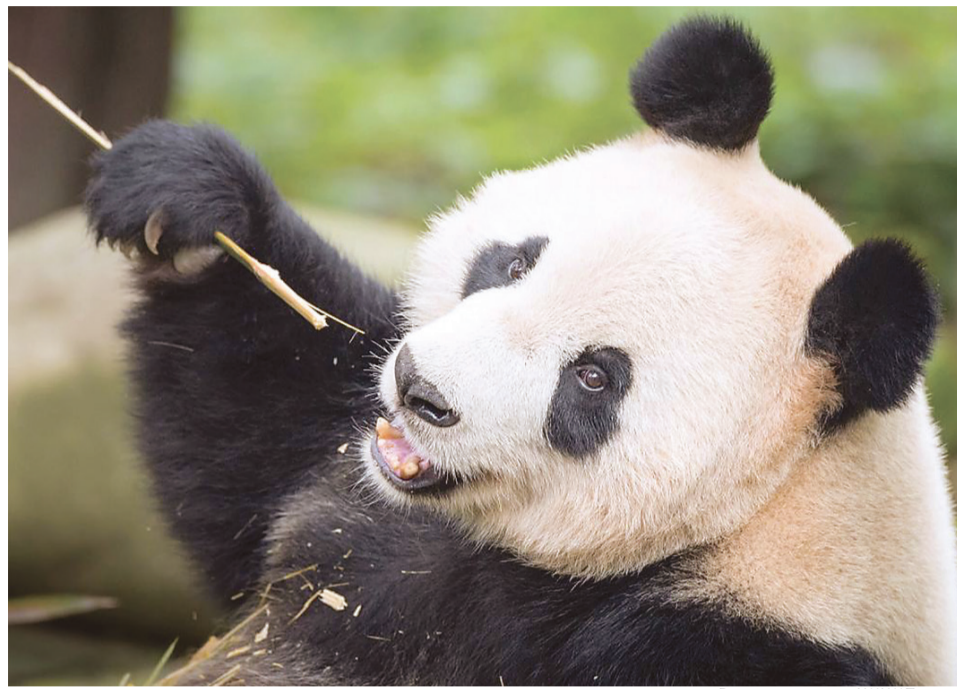


PHOTO FROM WWF.ORG

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



PHOTO BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION

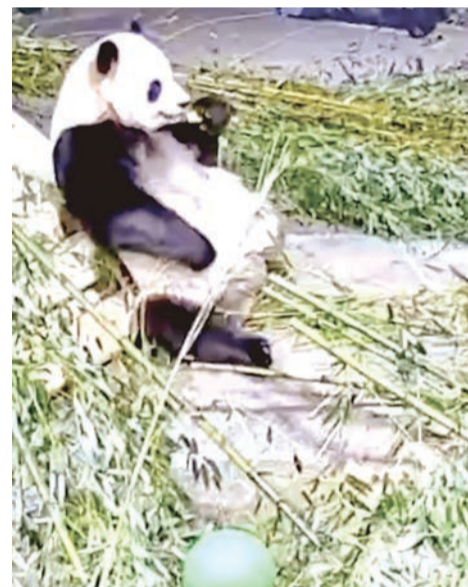
FCPA manager Patricia Greenberg is tasked with managing bamboo and other invasive plants on county property

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



PHOTO BY SUSAN LAUME/THE CONNECTION

Easy to spot this time year, running bamboo remains green when most native plants have lost their color, like this found behind Pohick Ridge Ct, Springfield



SCREEN PHOTO FROM PANDA CAM

This National Zoo panda's bamboo meal could have been harvested in Fairfax County

times per week, helps to satisfy the appetites of their panda charges. Since other zoo animals enjoy the fibrous plant as well, the

## 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."

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 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>



PHOTO - FCPA

Park maintenance operations and contractors use lethal methods to remove highest priority bamboo patches



# ENTERTAINMENT

**JAN. 16 TO FEB. 23**

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

**FEB. 7 TO MARCH 1**

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

**FEB. 8-MARCH 1**

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

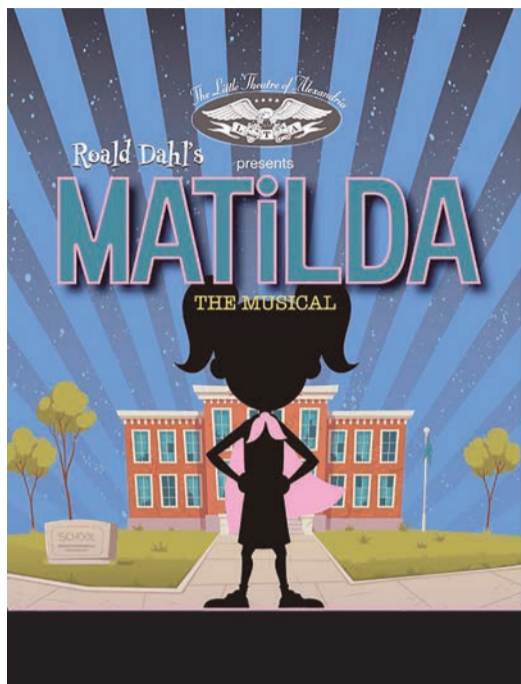
**WEDNESDAY/FEB. 19**

**"Strategies for Addressing Solo Aging, Social Isolation, and Mental Health for Seniors."** 1-2:30 p.m. At Beatley Central Library, 5005 Duke Street, Alexandria. Many older adults in our community are aging by themselves or what we like to call "solo aging." This can cause anxiety and a fear of loneliness, but it doesn't have to be that way. By taking advantage of resources to stay connected to the community and developing a network of friends, solo aging isn't so scary, and even maybe the best time of one's life. Senior Services of Alexandria, along with At Home in Alexandria (AHA), a local senior village, is bringing together a group of experts in the field to talk about this topic by exploring practical strategies for supporting older adults as they navigate solo aging, combatting social isolation and prioritizing their mental health. Speakers include Steve Gurney of the Positive Aging Community, and Rhonda Williams, Supervisor of the city's Older Adult Clinical Services Team. Also, attendees will learn about local resources on how to stay connected to the community. This event is free! Please RSVP by email at events@seniorservicesalex.org or call 703-836-4414, ext. 110.

**FRIDAY/FEB. 21**

**The Thirteen.** At 7:30 p.m. At Virginia Theological Seminary, Immanuel

www.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM



Roald Dahl's "Matilda The Musical" can be seen now through March 1, 2025 at the Little Theatre of Alexandria.

Chapel, 3651 Deanery Dr. Alexandria. The Thirteen returns to the mystical Camino de Santiago de Compostela - Camino of St. James of the Field of Stars - with two works that explore transfiguration: David Lang's Pulitzer Prize-winning the little match girl passion and Gabriel Jackson's 2011 To the Field of Stars.

**SATURDAY/FEB. 22**

**Watercolor Workshop - Watercolor from the Beginning.** 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. At Green Spring Gardens, Alexandria. (16-Adult) You will learn everything you need to build a strong foundation in getting started in watercolor. Learn detailed information on paper, paint and brushes explained clearly and demonstrated with helpful visual aids. Practice mixing colors, learn how to do basic washes and find out about special techniques unique to watercolor. A supply list will be emailed before class. Bring a lunch. \$107 per person. Register online at <http://www.fairfax-county.gov/parks/parktakes> or call Green Spring Gardens at 703-642-5173. Code 7IL9G66

**SATURDAY/FEB. 22**

**Fairfax County NAACP Black History Month Celebration.** 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. At Harvest Assembly Baptist Church, 8008 Fordson Road, Alexandria. Featuring a Gospel Explosion Concert, Guest Speaker Leslie Houston, president of the Fairfax Education Association, who will share words of wisdom and encouragement on the importance of education, advocacy, and community empowerment. A light lunch will follow.

**SUNDAY/FEB. 23**

**Stolen History.** 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. At Green Spring Gardens, Alexandria. (Adult) Throughout history, artifacts have been plundered from their countries of origin. Hear about cultural treasures stolen by souvenir-takers, relic smugglers and antiquities traffickers, past and present. Consider the significance of looted artifacts, whether they have been preserved or purloined and the arguments for giving them back. \$40 (lecture + tea); \$18 (lecture only).

**MARCH 1-31**

**Woodlawn Needlework Show.** 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. At Woodlawn & Pope-Leighey House, Alexandria. Join in a special tour for a history of Woodlawn while discovering the stories behind pieces of the Needlework Show. Offered Fridays and Saturdays at 2:30 p.m. Throughout the month of March, enjoy free live needlework demonstrations. Tentative schedule will be available in mid-February.

**SATURDAY/MARCH 1**

**Used Book Sale: 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. at Sherwood Regional Library, 2501 Sherwood Hall Lane, Alexandria.** Selection of over 20,000 gently used children's books, fiction, history, biography, home and garden, cooking, crafts, sports, religion, travel, CDs, DVDs, and more. Unless specially priced, \$1 for hard backs and large paperbacks, and 25 cents for mass market paperbacks. Visit <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library/branches/friends-of-sherwood-regional> for information on other days and times for the library's ongoing book sale.

**SUNDAY/MARCH 2**

**Armato/De Sapio Duo.** 2 p.m. At The Athenaeum, Alexandria. Michael De Sapio (violin) and John Armato (guitar) return to the Athenaeum - this time branching out from their Baroque roots to play a delightful program of duos for violin and classical guitar. Enjoy a program of rarely heard chamber works from early Romanticism to the 21st century - music that is sweet, sensuous, and easygoing.

**MARCH 7-29**

**"Fairy Tales Around the World" exhibit.** At Del Ray Artisans Gallery, 2704 Mount Vernon Ave., Alexandria. Features artwork inspired by stories of faraway lands, perilous journeys with magical characters and fantastic creatures. Join them for the Opening Reception on Friday, March 7, 7-9 p.m. Gallery hours are Thursdays 12-6 p.m., Fridays 12-9 p.m., Saturdays & Sundays 12-6 p.m. Details at DelRayArtisans.org/exhibits

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orchestrations and additional music by **Chris Nightingale**  
produced by **Kadira Coley**  
directed by **Janie Downey**

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**FEB. 8 - MAR. 1, 2025**

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Roald Dahl's Matilda The Musical is presented through special arrangement with Music Theatre International (MTI). All authorized performance materials are also supplied by MTI. [www.mtishows.com](http://www.mtishows.com)



The Woodlawn Needlework Show will be held March 1-31, 2025 at Woodlawn & Pope-Leighey House in Alexandria.

At Westin Alexandria Old town. Reception dinner and dancing. Cocktail/formal attire

**SATURDAY/MARCH 8**

**Write Like a Woman Networking**

**Workshop.** 1 p.m. At The Athenaeum, Alexandria. Founder and Facilitator, KaNikki Jakarta, welcomes you to year 10 of the Write Like a Woman Networking Workshop. This popular workshop invites amateur and professional women writers of all genres ages 18-100. Each workshop centers on uplifting and inspiring through writing and allows participants to enhance their writing styles through writing prompts and encouragement. Space is limited, RSVP to [greatpublishing@yahoo.com](mailto:greatpublishing@yahoo.com)

**FRIDAY/MARCH 14**

**2025 Women's Leadership Forum**

**Panel.** 7:45-10:30 a.m. At The Westin Alexandria Old Town, 400 Courthouse Square, Alexandria. Presented by The Chamber ALX. The forum will bring together women (and men) at all stages of their careers for an interactive, "straight talk" panel discussion filled with inspiration and insight.

**SUNDAY/MARCH 16**

**New Strings.** 2 p.m. At The Athenaeum, Alexandria. Original Works for Guitar Solo and Violin-Guitar Duet by Oscar Somersalo and Neal Learner. String-instrument lovers are invited to enjoy a unique recital of new works for guitar solo and violin-guitar duet by composers Oscar Somersalo (guitar) and Neal Learner (violin). The event promises something for everyone with virtuosic playing and delightful compositions that span musical genres from classical and jazz to pop and rock.

**FRIDAY/MARCH 21**

**Alexandria Symphony Orchestra.**

7:30 p.m. At St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 228 South Pitt Street, Alexandria. Bach has inspired across four centuries. His music is universal, his humanity eternal. In the splendor of St. Paul's Episcopal, James Ross leads the strings of the Alexandria Symphony in Dmitry Sitkovetsky's arrangement of Bach's Goldberg Variations.

**SATURDAY/MARCH 22**

**Bishop Ireton High School 60th**

**Anniversary Gala.** 6 p.m. to Late.

**THE BIRCHMERE**

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

**FEBRUARY**

Wed. 19: Billy F. Gibbons \$89.50 SOLD OUT!

Thu. 20: Drew Lynch \$45.00

Fri. 21: Gary Gulman "Misfit Stand Up Tour" \$59.50 SOLD OUT!

Sat. 22: Newmyer Flyer Presents: Laurel Canyon \$39.50 SOLD OUT!

Sun. 23: Chayce Beckham \$29.50

Fri. 28: Aaron Watson "Buy The World A Round" Tour 2025 \$35.00

**MARCH**

Sat. 1: A.J. Croce - Heart Of The Eternal Tour \$59.50

Tue. 4: Robin Trower \$55.00 SOLD OUT!

Wed. 5: Robin Trower \$55.00 SOLD OUT!

Thu. 6: Hank Azaria and the EZ Street Band - Performing the music of Bruce Springsteen! \$45.00

Fri. 7: The High Kings & Mary Black \$89.50 SOLD OUT!

Sat. 8: The High Kings & Mary Black \$89.50 SOLD OUT!

Sun. 9: Alan Doyle with special guests Fortunate Ones \$49.50

Mon. 10: Natalie MacMaster & Donnell Leahy \$49.50

Thu. 13: Tigran Hamasyan - The Bird of A Thousand Voices (Concert Version) \$39.50

Fri. 14: Loose Ends featuring Jane Eugene \$59.50

Sat. 15: Loose Ends featuring Jane Eugene \$59.50

Sun. 16: The Stylistics \$69.50

Wed. 19: ZZ Ward - The Dirty Sun Tour, with Liam St. John \$49.50

Thu. 20: Ladysmith Black Mambazo \$49.50

Fri. 21: Rufus Wainwright - Going To A Town Solo Tour w/ Sloan Wainwright \$69.50 SOLD OUT!

Sat. 22: Edwin McCain \$39.50

Sun. 23: WATCH Awards Ceremony -7pm- \$20.00 SOLD OUT!

Thu. 27: Leo Kottke \$49.50

Fri. 28: Dave Hollister \$55.00

Sat. 29: Harmony Sweepstakes A Cappella Festival 2025 Mid-Atlantic Regional \$35.00

Sun. 30: Gaelic Storm with Reverend Peyton's Big Damn Band \$59.50

Mon. 31



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# 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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# BULLETIN

FROM PAGE 11

group projects and social gatherings. To sign up for an upcoming orientation, email Carly Hubicki at [chubicki@volunteerfairfax.org](mailto:chubicki@volunteerfairfax.org) or call RSVP at 703-403-5360. To learn more about RSVP, visit [www.rsvpnova.org](http://www.rsvpnova.org).

**Mentors Wanted.** Two creative programs that help transform the lives of Alexandria's preteens are seeking volunteer mentors. SOHO, which stands for "Space of Her Own," and "Space of His Own," serves vulnerable fifth graders in Alexandria. The programs pair men and women with youth in need of positive adult role models, to help support and guide youth in making healthy choices and succeeding in school and in life. Visit [www.spaceofherown.org](http://www.spaceofherown.org) and [www.spaceofhisown.org](http://www.spaceofhisown.org). For more information on how to become a SOHO mentor, contact Sarah Maroney at [sarah.maroney@alexandriava.gov](mailto:sarah.maroney@alexandriava.gov) or phone at 703-746-4687.

**Farmer's Market Volunteers Needed.** To volunteer for the Farmer's Markets, email Brian Morreale, [brianmorreale@gmail.com](mailto:brianmorreale@gmail.com)

### SUPPORT GROUPS

**Postpartum Support Virginia** sponsors a free, bi-monthly support group for women suffering depression and/or anxiety during pregnancy or in the first year following childbirth. Meets on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of each month at Inova Alexandria Hospital, Health Education Center, rooms 1-2, 4320 Seminary Road. Contact co-moderator Susan Doyle at [suzjdoyle@gmail.com](mailto:suzjdoyle@gmail.com) or 571-403-0673.

**The Parkinson's Disease Support Group** of Alexandria meets the 1st Wednesday of each month at 2 p.m. at the Hollin Hall Senior Center, Room 109, 1500 Shenandoah Road. All Parkinson's patients and caregivers are welcome.

**The Caregiver Support Group** is facilitated by the Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services Division of Aging and Adult Services. Meetings are held the first Wednesday of each month at the Adult Day Services Center, 1108 Jefferson St., 4-5:30 p.m. Participants are full- or part-time caregivers providing care locally or long distance to a family member or friend. Participants share their experiences, provide support for each other and receive resources to assist them with caregiving.

The next Caregiver Support Group meeting is June 7. For more information or to register, contact Jennifer Sarisky at 703-746-9999 or email [DAAS@alexandriava.gov](mailto:DAAS@alexandriava.gov).

**FACE Center Support Groups** provide parents with a space to share their daily parenting frustrations and triumphs while offering new strategies for helping parents to cope, build positive parent-child relationships and best support their children's learning.

- ❖ Support Group in English, every Monday, 6-7:30 p.m. at ARHA Main Building, 401 Wythe St.
- ❖ Support Group in Spanish, every Wednesday, 6-7:30 p.m. at Community Lodgings Brookside Center, 614 Four Mile Road.

Registration not necessary. A light dinner and childcare services provided free. Contact Krishna Leyva at 703-619-8055 or [krishna.leyva@acps.k12.va.us](mailto:krishna.leyva@acps.k12.va.us) for more.

**Divorce Workshop for Women.** Second Saturday of each month, 9 a.m.-1

SEE BULLETIN, PAGE 15

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# Supervisors React

FROM PAGE 3

both the commercial and the industrial tax base? What are we doing to grow the opportunities? How are we attracting more investment into the county to help us bolster and lift those percentages?"

Hill: "Obviously, we need to understand where we came from before we move forward. But the future is ever-bounding, never limitless. The conversations on AI and space and data centers are just out there for us to deal with, and it's unfortunate that we're not further advanced in those technologies, but we're going to get there."

**James R. Walkinshaw (D-Braddock District)**

"For either the three or 4 percent food and beverage tax, I think you said you incorporated a 3 percent dealer discount. Roughly how much is that dealer discount?"

Hill: "At a 3 percent tax, it would be about \$1.8 million."

Walkinshaw: "One thing I'll just note on the food and beverage tax, and I think you know the chairman was headed in this direction, but the opportunity that it presents is because basically, 1 percent on the food and beverage tax is equivalent to 1 percent on the real estate tax, give or take. It's the potential for a permanent three or four-cent reduction in the real estate tax rate- three or four cents below what that real estate tax rate otherwise would have been."

**Dalia A. Palchik (D-Providence District)**

"For consideration later, such as how to focus on trying to have more of that tax base

## Mount Vernon-Springfield Chamber Scholarships for High School Seniors

Applications are now open for business scholarships for graduating high school seniors provided by Mount Vernon Springfield Chamber of Commerce. Scholarships of \$2,000 will be awarded to graduating seniors pursuing further education in a business related field.

Students may apply online at <https://mountvernonsspringfield.com/business-scholarship-application/> or email [info@mountvernonsspringfield.com](mailto:info@mountvernonsspringfield.com) to request more information. The application deadline is Monday, April 28. Scholarships will be awarded on May 22 at a special reception at the US Army Museum.

For the past 25 years, the Chamber of Commerce has invested in the future of our community by awarding more than \$300,000 in scholarships to develop the next generation of business and community leaders.

be focused again on commercial and rely less heavily on residential homeowners."

**Daniel G. Storck (D-Mount Vernon District)**

"Environmentally, we have an operational energy strategy that when we talked about it at our environmental committee meeting four or five months ago, asked specifically then about, will we continue to fund that operational energy strategy."

Hill: "We're funding a lot of environment. We're going to continue to fund the environment."

**Pat Herrity (R-Springfield District)**

"I'm having trouble and struggling with the recommendation here to increase the penny for affordable housing. According to VPAP from 2020 to 2024, our population went down by about 30,000 people ... Could you just take a strategic look at the population change and come back to what's driving that? What do we think the answers are, and balance that up against housing needs?"

Hill: "There's so many criteria out there. We'll work on that ... But when you say affordable housing, this board, by majority, approved us to move forward with 10,000

new homes by 2034. Until this board tells me not to do that, then I am going to continuously push towards that."

**Walter L. Alcorn (D-Hunter Mill District)**

"Very quickly on the county population, our demographic report comes out in March. I'm just looking at the last one that came out. We only went down one year, which was a pandemic year, but we've gone up every year since and every year before, so I don't know where those numbers are coming out."

Herrity: "It was in VPAP just the other day; it was net out-migration authority."

McKay: "Not supported by our own data. Way outdated at this point."

**Kathy L. Smith, Vice-Chairman (D-Sully District)**

"This is the hard work facing the board now because we are going to hear from people who don't want things to be cut, and we have to make those tough decisions. And so keeping in mind, how do we provide the services we need to this community, knowing that there's probably going to be more people in need, but knowing that we're going to have to make some of these hard decisions moving forward."

### BULLETIN BOARD

FROM PAGE 14

p.m. at Hilton Alexandria Old Town, 1767 King St. The workshops are designed to provide education on the legal, financial, family and personal issues of divorce in a logical, yet compassionate way. The workshop fee is \$25. Visit [www.novasecondsaturday.com](http://www.novasecondsaturday.com) for more.

**ONGOING**

**Backflow Preventer (BFP) Assistance Program.** The City of Alexandria has reinstated its sewer Backflow Preventer (BFP) Assistance Program for homeowners in designated areas that historically experience basement back-ups or flooding. The program reimburses homeowners for up to 50 percent of the cost of installing a BFP device by a licensed plumbing contractor, up to a maximum of \$2,000. The current program period is through Dec. 31, 2019. Alexandria homeowners should call the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services at 703-746-4014 or visit [www.alexandriava.gov/tes](http://www.alexandriava.gov/tes).  
**Robust Walking.** Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at 9 a.m. at Mount Vernon Recreation Center, 2701 Commonwealth Ave. Free 55+ robust walking 1-hour exercise class (with chair exercise option). No class on holidays. Contact [jjkingconsulting@yahoo.com](mailto:jjkingconsulting@yahoo.com).

**Seeking Donations.** Computer CORE, which is dedicated to helping low-income adults become computer literate is seeking donations. Visit [www.computercore.org/contribute](http://www.computercore.org/contribute).

**Senior and Job Programs.** 8:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. Queen of Apostles Church, 4650 Taney Avenue, Alexandria. St. Martin de Porres Center offers senior and job placement programming Monday through Friday at the parish. Email Kathryn Toohey, [ktoohey@ccda.net](mailto:ktoohey@ccda.net).

**Be Heard at the City's Monthly Public Hearings.** A schedule of the meetings can be found at [www.alexandriava.gov](http://www.alexandriava.gov). Voice opinions, speak about something on the docket or just speak about something you are concerned about. Sign up in advance to speak through the city's website. Anyone is welcome at any of the public hearings.

**Public Space Recycling.** Alexandria has placed more than 80 bright blue recycling containers next to public trash cans in the commercial districts along Mount Vernon Avenue and King Street, as well as other public spaces, including parks, recreation fields, and other high-traffic pedestrian areas. Visit [alexandriava.gov/Recycling](http://alexandriava.gov/Recycling).

**Composting and Food Waste.** Alexandria now has Resource Recovery Stations, located at the City's Farmers' Markets (Old Town, Del Ray) to collect food waste. More than 270 people have participated in the food waste program over the last several months. Participants

drop off items weekly, over eight tons of waste has been collected, to be composted to make a natural fertilizer. To learn more about composting visit [alexandriava.gov/YardWaste](http://alexandriava.gov/YardWaste).

**English as a Second Language Class.** Charles E. Beatley, Jr. Central Library, 5005 Duke St. Tuesdays and Thursdays, all levels 10 a.m.-12 p.m., intermediate workshop 3-5 p.m. All classes free. Call the information desk, 703-746-1702.

**The Talking Book Service at Alexandria Library** will now operate Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Patrons may also reach the service at 703-746-1760.

**Digital Magazines.** Patrons of Alexandria Library will have unlimited access to read digital magazines, which can be viewed on most Internet-enabled devices inside or outside of the library. Accessible through [www.rbdigital.com/alexandriava/zinio](http://www.rbdigital.com/alexandriava/zinio).

Eligible low income households can now use their SNAP benefits to buy local foods at the Old Town Farmers' Market. SNAP customers are able to use their electronic benefits transfer cards to purchase fresh fruits, vegetables and other eligible food products at the market. The Old Town Farmer's Market is located at 301 King St., and is open on Saturdays, year round from 7 a.m. to 12 p.m.

## 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.*



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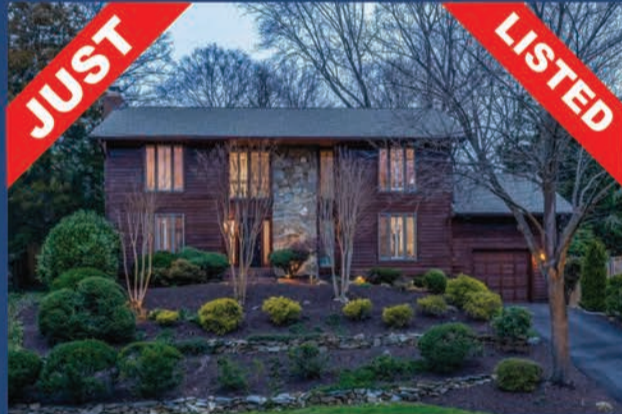
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