



The Fairfax Independent

FREE PRESS CIRCULATION
Vol. 3 No. 2 | FEBRUARY 2026

~ The Independent News Press ~

fairfaxindependentnews.press

Record Number of Americans Identify as Independents, Gallup Poll Finds Independent Voters Break Another Record: Fairfax City Voters Smashed that Record in 2024!

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

The September 2024 edition of The Fairfax Independent, published its inaugural cover story - Fairfax City Voters Support Non-Partisan Elections.

By a wide margin, Fairfax City voters support keeping elections for city offices non-partisan. Overall, 67% support non-partisan elections, while only 17% oppose it and 16% are undecided, according to a recent poll conducted by Mason-Dixon® Polling & Strategy. City of Fairfax voters are ahead of the trend, according to Gallup's latest poll.

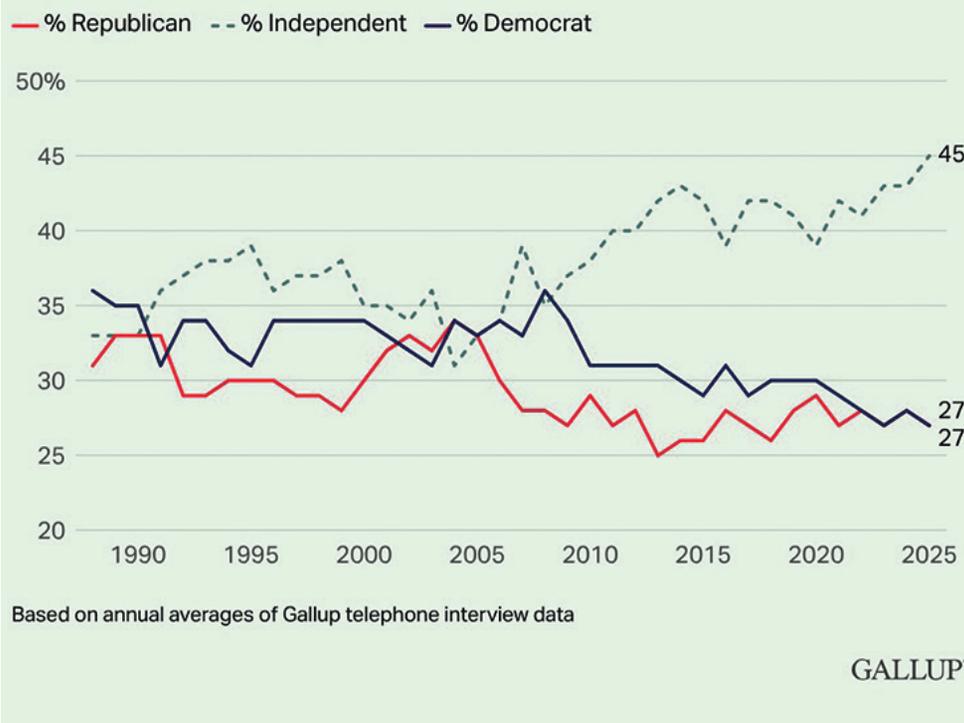
The latest Gallup polling conducted in 2025 and just released, shows a significant shift in the American political landscape: a record 45% of U.S. adults now identify as independents, surpassing previous highs and marking the largest share of nonpartisan voters in decades.

This is the highest level recorded since Gallup began tracking partisan identity by telephone in 1988. This surpasses previous peaks of 43% in 2014, 2023, and 2024 showing an ongoing growth trend over the past decade and

The survey, conducted in 2025, also found that 27% of Americans identify as Democrats and 17% as Republicans, highlighting a growing trend of voters step-

U.S. Political Party Identification, 1988-2025

In politics, as of today, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat or an independent?



Gallup US Political Party Identification Infographics - January 12, 2026

ping away from traditional party labels. Younger generations are driving much of this growth. More than half of Generation Z adults and a majority of millennials identify as independents, while older generations are more likely to stick with traditional party affiliations.

"People are increasingly saying they

don't feel fully aligned with either major party," noted Jeffrey M. Jones, political analyst who authored the new Gallup report. "This could signal a long-term shift in how Americans engage with politics." Gallup analysis of the data, pointing to a growing desire among Americans for a political identity outside the traditional two-party system.

Unlike strictly partisan voters, independents tend to cast their ballots based on specific issues. According to political analysts and recent polling trends, the concerns that resonate most include:

- ▶ The economy and cost of living, including inflation, job growth, wages, and housing prices.
- ▶ Healthcare access and affordability, with an emphasis on practical solutions that relieve costs without radical changes.
- ▶ Government accountability and ethics, reflecting broad dissatisfaction with perceived political gridlock and partisanship.
- ▶ Education, from school quality to student debt.
- ▶ Public safety and national security, which remain priorities across age groups.
- ▶ Environmental policy, especially among younger voters who favor balanced approaches that protect the environment without harming job growth.

"Independents are not a monolithic group," said Jones. "They can be decisive, but their priorities vary, so appealing to them requires understanding what issues matter most to them." And they often support candidates who emphasize pragmatic solutions and bipartisan cooperation rather than strictly partisan agendas.

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Super Bowl LX and Halftime Plans Take Center Stage

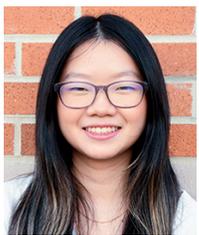
Newsroom Team



AGUNG SETYAWAN
ARTWORK
EDITOR AND
COMMUNICATIONS

Agung holds a Master's degree in Communication Science from the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Sebelas Maret University, Indonesia. His passion for design—specifically newspaper layout—began in 2006 during his undergraduate studies, where he was an active member of the Student Press Board (LPM Pabelan) at Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta (UMS).

Prior to his current role, Agung gained extensive experience working remotely as a professional newspaper designer for media outlets across New York, Michigan, Florida, and Tennessee. He officially joined The Fairfax Independent as Art Director in February 2025. Agung feels right at home with The Independent News Press team; despite the fast-paced environment and the time zone difference between Indonesia and the U.S., he is dedicated to meeting every deadline with precision.



CAROLINE CHU
WRITER

Caroline is a sophomore at Oakton High School, where she works as the news editor for The Oakton Outlook. She has possessed a passion for writing and consuming news since she was a child, and she hopes to continue developing as a journalist by reporting local stories. In her free time, she enjoys reading, cooking, and spending time with her friends and family. Caroline joined The Independent News Press as a writer who covers the government and business.



HEATHER DURKIN
WRITER

Heather Durkin is a writer and librarian from Fairfax City. She is a former research reporter for U.S. News and World Report and producer for the Washington Post. She holds a MS in Library and Information Science from Simmons University in Boston, MA. She also worked in the Government and Finance Division of the Congressional Research Service in the Library of Congress as an information professional. She has a BA in Communications

from VA Tech. She writes about interesting people and places.



BETHANY HAN
WRITER &
MARKETING

She is a high school student at Woodson High School and has lived in Fairfax for almost a decade. She hopes to further pursue writing in college through majoring in English, and her other interests include reading and field hockey. Bethany writes on business, entertainment and helps with marketing and ad sales for The Independent News Press.



TANIA HOSSAIN
EDITOR &
PUBLISHER

Tania Hossain is the editor, publisher, and co-owner of The Independent News Press, a consortium of local print and online newspapers in Virginia. She focuses on writing about community issues and advocates for local newspapers, both print and online, especially in the age of AI from selfie filters to betting on military strikes. A Merrifield resident, she is a keen backyard gardener, loves forest bathing and a curious biohacker, believing that proactive health keeps one out of the costly illness industry. Inspired by Oprah Winfrey's O Magazine launch, she feels fortunate to be running this newspaper.



LIZNA ISLAM
COMMUNICATION &
MARKETING

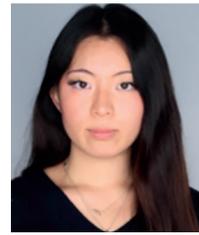
Taslima lives in Northern Virginia and holds a Master's in Computer Science. She loves Fairfax City, where many of her favorite clients are based. She works as a freelancer managing email newsletters, social media and supporting the advertising team at The Independent News Press.



PHILLIP KIM
WRITER

Phillip graduated from George Mason University with a degree in Media Production and Criticism. A proud Korean American and longtime Virginia resident, he hopes to use the power of journalism to celebrate and bring the local community together. Phillip joined The Fairfax

Independent this May last year and writes about arts, entertainment, and community.



HANNAH LEE
WRITER

Hannah Lee is a first-year undergraduate student at Georgetown University. She enjoys learning about government and history, and she intends to eventually pursue a career in the legal field. In her free time, Hannah enjoys exploring the city and going on walks. Hannah writes about politics and policy for The Independent News Press.



SAVI MAMGAIN
WRITER & AD SALES

Savi has lived in Fairfax, Virginia for her entire life. She is a graduate of Woodson High School and studying at the University of Mary Washington. She is very interested in the history of the City of Fairfax. She joined The Independent News Press as marketing and social media coordinator. Savi writes about culture, traditions, and schools.



LAYLA MOHRAN
WRITER

Layla has lived in Fairfax County her entire life. She is currently a junior at George C. Marshall High School and enjoys writing about her experiences, entertainment stories, and other school news. Layla has been writing for her school magazine for three years and plans to continue during her senior year.



FAIROUZ OUIKHLFEN
WRITER

Fairouz Ouikhlfen (fae-rooz whee-kell-fin) is an undergraduate literature student studying in the honors program at George Mason University. She is from Tysons Corner and is an alumnus of the NICU at Medstar Georgetown University Hospital. She plans to pursue an English MA and PHD in 20th-century transatlantic modernism and memory studies. She plays the flute and is studying her ancestral language of Chleuh Berber, as well as improving her French and German. Fairouz enjoys shopping (window and otherwise), cooking, re-watching Gossip Girl, and taking public transit. Fairouz



DARIA PARNES
WRITER

Daria Parnes, a retired public librarian and strong library advocate, has lived in Fairfax County since 1980. Originally from West Hartford, CT, she holds degrees from Syracuse University (History) and Simmons College (Library Science). Her 30-year library career included positions in Boston, Brooklyn, Cobb County, Prince William County, and culminated as Branch Manager of Reston Regional Library in Fairfax County. She is committed to community volunteerism, emphasizing unseen local needs and giving back. Additionally, she runs "Managing 4 Success Virginia," a company focused on developing leadership skills.



SHAHRIA SANI
WEBSITE

Sani is an experienced website designer and digital marketing specialist from Bangladesh. Since starting his professional journey in 2017, he has worked with clients across various industries, creating visually appealing websites and powerful digital strategies that drive real results. Known for his creativity, technical expertise, and commitment to quality, Sani continues to help businesses grow in the digital world. Sani manages all the websites for The Independent News Press. When he's not working, he loves exploring new destinations and discovering new places, or relaxing with favourite music.



LISA VOHRA
SOCIAL MEDIA
STORYTELLER
& CONSULTANT

Lisa is joining us as a digital storyteller and social media consultant. Lisa comes to us from Voice of America (VOA) where she has spent the last twenty years honing her craft in digital media as a reporter, producer and anchor. She helped grow television at VOA before it became ubiquitous online. Lisa worked on shows such as VOA Connect, and on assignment for Africa 54. She also collaborated with the graphics department on election explainers for Aaj Tak station. She is planning on bringing her varied expertise in production and storytelling to The Independent News Press.

The Fairfax Independent

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The Fairfax Independent, your
source for local news, stories,
and community updates.

Established in our beloved City
of Fairfax and
operating since July 4, 2024, The
Fairfax Independent part of a
consortium of local newspapers
published by The Independent
News Press.

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Business Minded * Community Driven * Independent Thinking

Tania's Letter - February 2026

DEAR READERS & FRIENDS:

2026 is on a roll! It seems just the other day that Chap tossed this amazing newspaper my way and I just happened to be in the way - maybe even intercepted the ball. Anyways, here I am, an accidental publisher. But once I knew I had the ball tucked away, I sure as heck wanted every single edition to be a touch down.

I am so excited to introduce you to our newsroom team on page 2 - the writers and production team who make our newspaper shine. I am happy to share that the days of Tania writing the entire paper are over. We did have to cut down our paper by 4 pages till we bring on a few more writers. That will happen soon as well.

I wanted to take this space to thank our artwork staff, Agung who stays up

into the wee hours - going on 3 am now 2 days in a row - getting each edition out. Never a word of weary or rush. He was my all round MVP for 2025 for rescuing me from having to become a hack layout editor - that would have been a nightmare for our print shop.

I am thrilled to welcome digital storytelling heavyweights, Lisa Vohra who interviewed me and promptly adopted us to usher us into the new age of digital storytelling. I am so excited that our Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, and whatever else she has planned for us will finally be able to tell some stories.

To our haters, we don't witch hunt people. We go to great lengths not to write "according to our sources." Our guest writers send in information on how they would like to be identified. Guest writers that we solicit get a promo line since we asked them to republish their

article. Did we forget to add Op-Ed ONE time on a guest article? Sure.

Anyways, back to the love - to our beloved readers, thank you for sending us money. It means I was able to pay one more writer. One day I hope to host you for a tailgate or a picnic - I have always wanted to host a watermelon seed spitting contest at a picnic for the community. Let's see how much love 2026 brings me.

On Valentine's Day, if you want to make a contribution to our newspaper, please email me at info@theindependentnewspress.com. If only all our City readers sent in \$12 / month, it would pay for our newspaper to go out to mailboxes every single month.

Enjoy the rest of winter.

With gratitude, Tania

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Virginia Lawmakers Advance Historic Constitutional Amendments; Voters to Decide in 2026

BY FAIROUZ QUIKHLFEN

The 164th Virginia General Assembly, controlled by Democrats in both chambers and with newly inaugurated Governor Abigail Spanberger at the helm, has moved swiftly to advance a slate of major constitutional amendments that will be decided by voters later this year.

On January 14, the House of Delegates passed four constitutional amendments that it had previously approved in the 2025 session. By January 16, the State Senate confirmed all four measures, completing the second legislative passage required for each to go before the public in a statewide referendum.

One amendment would guarantee a fundamental right to reproductive freedom

in the Virginia Constitution – including access to abortion, contraception, fertility care, and related health services – while allowing the state to regulate care consistent with judicial standards. This follows sustained legislative support for reproductive rights since the 2022 Dobbs decision.

This amendment, along with two others, is slated for the November 2026 general election ballot.

Virginia will ask voters to repeal the 2006 constitutional ban on same-sex marriage and formally enshrine the right of two adults to marry regardless of sex, gender, or race. While same-sex marriage has been legal nationwide since Obergefell v. Hodges (2015), the amendment updates the state constitution to reflect current law and values.

Another measure will ask voters to approve the automatic restoration of voting rights for people convicted of felonies once they have completed their full sentences – replacing Virginia's current system, which requires individuals to petition the governor for individual restoration. Critics have long argued the existing process is outdated and uniquely restrictive.

The most politically charged measure would allow the General Assembly to redraw congressional district lines mid-decade, outside the usual post-census process. The proposal is designed to respond if other states undertake mid-decade redistricting – potentially allowing Virginia lawmakers to adjust maps ahead of the 2026 elections.

That amendment is expected to ap-

pear on an April 2026 ballot, giving voters an earlier opportunity to weigh in before the midterm elections.

Because state constitutional amendments in Virginia must be approved by two successive General Assemblies with a general election in between, all four proposals will now go before voters in 2026. Three – reproductive freedom, marriage equality, and automatic voting rights restoration – are scheduled for the November referendum, while the redistricting question may be placed on an April ballot to allow new maps to be used for federal elections this fall.

As the session continues through mid-March, lawmakers will also tackle the state budget and other policy priorities, but these constitutional questions are already shaping up to be top issues for voters in 2026.

Inauguration Day Reflections: January 17, 2026

REPUBLISHED FROM
CITY OF FAIRFAX
COMMISSIONER OF
REVENUE PAGE
JOHNSON FACEBOOK

TEN VIRGINIA
GOVERNORS

Yesterday, following a long-standing tradition in the Commonwealth of Virginia, the outgoing Governor retired from the inauguration ceremony after the swearing-in of the new Governor. This was not a slight, but a sign of respect that from that moment, the full responsibility for Virginia rests with the new Governor.

After the example set by our own George Washington, who willingly surrendered authority, Virginia has always treated the peaceful transfer of power with respect and quiet seriousness.

Yesterday's swearing in and unity by nine former Virginia Governors affirms the Commonwealth's long tradition of orderly transition and renews my hope for the future. In Virginia, we cherish our freedom and understand that power is a privilege and should be held humbly and relinquished completely.

At this hour, as Virginians, we would do well to remember who we are. Our history teaches us perspective, restraint, tolerance, and respect for our fellow Virginians and our democratic institutions.

"Having now finished the work assigned to me, I retire from the great theater of action." - General George Washington.

May God Bless Abigail Spanberger and grant her courage and wisdom as she begins to lead us.

Governor Spanberger Signs 10 Executive Orders on First Day in Office

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Within minutes of her swearing in on January 17, 2026, Governor Abigail Spanberger hit the ground running on her first day in office, signing 10 executive orders aimed at addressing affordability, housing, education, public safety, and government operations.

Among the actions, Spanberger directed state agencies to identify ways to reduce living costs for Virginians, including in healthcare, housing, child care, energy, and groceries. She also established an Interagency Health Financing Task Force to improve coordination, reduce waste, and strengthen long-term healthcare financing.

The governor called for a review of housing regulations to boost supply and streamline permitting, while directing the Department of Education to strengthen literacy and math programs and refine accountability systems in public schools. She also established an Economic Resiliency Task Force to assess the impact of federal policy changes on Virginia's workforce and budget.

Other executive orders expand the authority of the governor's chief of staff, set procedures for emergency authority if the governor is unreachable, and review appointment processes for public university boards. Spanberger also issued a comprehensive equal opportunity directive, ensuring nondiscrimina-



75th Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia Abigail Spanberger being sworn in (TINP / Tania Hossain)

tion policies across state government employment.

One of the most notable moves was rescinding former Governor Glenn Youngkin's Executive Order 47, which required state and local law enforcement to cooperate with federal immigration enforcement. While the order removes the state's directive, existing local agreements with federal immigration authorities remain in place until formally terminated. Spanberger emphasized that state police should remain focused on core public safety duties.

"These first executive orders reflect my priorities for a more affordable, equitable, and resilient Virginia," Spanberger said in a statement. "We are taking immediate steps to address the issues that matter most to Virginians."

Family of Slain Fairfax City CEO Opposes Potential Insanity Plea in Ongoing Murder Case

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

The family of Gret Glycer, a Fairfax City nonprofit leader who was fatally shot in his home in 2022, vehemently opposes a potential insanity-based resolution in the case, saying it would deny accountability and prevent a public examination of the evidence.

Glycer, founder and chief executive officer of the DonorSee Foundation, was killed during the early morning hours of June 24, 2022, inside his Fairfax City home. Police report said Glycer was shot multiple times while asleep in bed beside his wife. He was pronounced dead at the scene. His wife and children, who were also in the home, were not physically harmed.

Joshua Danehower, of Arlington, Virginia, was later arrested and charged with second-degree murder in connection with the killing. According to the Glycer family, no additional charges were filed in the case. The family has said the decision to proceed with a single charge has heightened their concern about how the case may ultimately be resolved. They argue that additional charges often pursued in homicide cases — including firearm-related offenses or higher-degree murder charges when evidence supports them — can affect sentencing outcomes and accountability, and they continue to urge that the case be heard by a jury.

The prosecution has remained pending in Fairfax County Circuit Court for more than three years, with repeated continuances. Defense-ordered psychological assessments were completed several months ago, the family says, and recent delays have been attributed to the prosecution's internal review rather than new defense evaluations.

For much of the case, Senior Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Eric Clingan served as lead prosecutor. The family says they were getting nowhere with Clingan and were recently informed that he was temporarily removed from leading the case after the possibility of an insanity plea emerged, and that Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Jenna Sands is now advising the prosecution on next steps.

According to the family, prosecutors told them that if the case were proceeding to a full jury trial, Clingan would need

to return to lead the prosecution, but that Sands has taken over because of the potential insanity-plea path.

Incidentally, Clingan was the subject of recent media reporting. In August 2025, Fairfax County police cited Clingan for drinking in public, a misdemeanor offense, after officers responded to a call behind a Centreville shopping center. Body-camera footage released by the WJLA I-Team shows officers driving Clingan home without a breathalyzer test and ultimately issuing a summons.

According to WJLA I-Team, Clingan's case was ultimately dismissed in General District Court on October 10, 2025. A Fairfax County Police spokesperson said Clingan had completed the necessary court requirements to have the charge dropped.

The Glycer family says they were told recently that Clingan was placed on leave to address a personal matter following that incident, and that Sands assumed a larger role in the Glycer case as a result.

At the center of the dispute is a psychiatric evaluation conducted in the case. Family members say Sands has advised against taking the case to trial largely because she does not want to contradict the conclusions of the prosecution's own expert, even though, according to the family, Virginia law still permits the case to be tried before a jury.

The family says the psychiatrist has indicated privately that his reports are not meant to be decisive in determining whether a case goes to trial and that final outcomes are typically shaped by broader legal considerations. They also say the psychiatrist is often retained by defense teams and tends to favor findings of legal insanity and rehabilitation rather than incarceration.

The same psychiatrist, Dr. Eric Drogin's work has drawn recent attention in another Virginia case. People magazine reported that the same psychiatrist issued the evaluation that led a judge to accept a not guilty by reason of insanity plea in the case of a mother whose 2-year-old child died after ingesting toxic levels of Benadryl. In that case, the plea was accepted despite objections from the child's father, and the defendant was committed for psychiatric treatment rather than sen-

tenced to prison.

The Glycer family says the psychiatrist's involvement in both cases has heightened their concern that a single expert opinion is being given outsized weight in deciding whether their case will ever be heard publicly by a jury.

Under Virginia law, a defendant found not guilty by reason of insanity is not convicted of a crime. Instead, the court determines whether the individual should be committed to a state psychiatric hospital for treatment and supervision.

Such commitment can be indefinite and may, in some cases, last longer than a traditional prison sentence. However, decisions about continued confinement are based on periodic evaluations of the individual's mental condition and perceived risk to the public, rather than a fixed term imposed by a jury.

The Glycer family says this framework, while appropriate in some cases, is not suited to what they describe as a calculated and violent act, and that an insanity plea would limit transparency and public accountability.

"This was a calculated and violent act," said Gizan Glycer, the victim's sister

and spokesperson for the Glycer family. "We believe a jury should hear the facts and determine accountability."

A court hearing currently scheduled for January 23 was initially listed as a status hearing. However, Glycer shared that the family was told during an in-person meeting with prosecutors that the hearing could instead become a plea hearing, depending on whether the psychiatrist submits a required report to the court by a January 15 deadline.

The prolonged legal process has taken a significant emotional toll on Glycer's family and supporters, who remember Gret as a devoted husband, father, and community leader whose work through the DonorSee Foundation connected donors directly with people in need around the world.

As the case moves forward, the family continues to call for a public trial and greater transparency, while prosecutors have stated that determinations regarding legal insanity involve complex standards and expert review and that no final decision has yet been announced.

[We will continue to update this story across all our websites starting with <https://fairfaxindependentnews.press/>]

Fairfax County Raises Trespass Towing Fees

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Fairfax County is cracking down on trespass towing. New rules now require tow companies to hold a county permit, and fees have jumped—base towing for standard vehicles is \$210, with higher charges for storage and administrative costs.

Revised Fee Schedule

The update also standardizes the fee structure that a tow operator may charge when removing and handling a trespass-towed vehicle. Highlights of the new fee schedule include:

Hookup and Initial Tow Fee for

passenger vehicles and lighter vehicles (7,500 lbs GVWR or less): \$210 (up from \$150)

Hookup Fee for heavier vehicles (7,501 – 10,000 lbs): \$305 (up from \$250)

Tow Fee for largest vehicles (>10,000 lbs): \$610 (up from \$500)

Drop Fee—charged if a vehicle is released before it is towed: \$80 (up from \$50)

Storage Charge after the first 24 hours: \$61 per day (up from \$50)

Administrative Fee for lien or owner notification: \$92 (up from \$75)

No storage fee is charged for the first 24 hours after a vehicle arrives at a storage facility

Northern Virginia Housing Market Favoring Buyers in 2026

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Northern Virginia's housing market finished 2025 with mixed signals: inventory rose significantly, sales increased only slightly, and buyer leverage strengthened across nearly all counties. According to the latest Casey Samson 2025 Market Update, the region is entering 2026 largely as a buyer's market, offering opportunities for those looking to purchase.

Across Northern Virginia (NOVA), overall housing inventory grew 15% in 2025, yet total home sales only increased 5%. Arlington County led the region in performance, showing the strongest combination of sales and market stability. "All NOVA counties are currently favoring buyers going into 2026," notes Casey Samson of Samson Properties, who tracks the market weekly for clients and publishing partners.



Inventory growth by county in 2025 compared to 2024 (Courtesy of Casey Samson: casesamson.com)

Market analysis shows that less than 40% of homes under contract typically signal a buyer's market—a trend now consistent across the region. Additionally, 30–35% of homes listed in 2025 withdrew unsold, highlighting the challenges sellers face in a market dominated by "have-to" sellers rather than "want-to" sellers. Lower-priced homes outperformed higher-end properties, continuing a trend seen throughout the D.C. metro area.

While most key markets in Northern Virginia saw modest inventory growth, sales were generally anemic. Aldie was an outlier, posting 40% inventory growth alongside a 26% increase in sales, countering the expectation that buyers are primarily moving closer to urban centers.

All key markets remain in a buyer's market except for Haymarket, where inventory remained low throughout 2025. Despite some positive gains, 25–30% of homes in

these areas were withdrawn unsold, underscoring the ongoing caution among sellers.

New home markets in Vienna, McLean, and Arlington showed a mixed picture. Overall, inventory of new homes rose 5%, but sales fell 13% in 2025. Vienna was the only key market to record a sales increase (7%), while other areas struggled with excess supply.

"Other than lower-priced new homes, most markets have huge excess inventory supplies. About 70% of new homes are available for sale, and 60–75% withdraw unsold," Samson notes. "It is a great time to buy a new home!"

With inventory high and sales growth modest, Northern Virginia buyers are entering 2026 with a range of options and negotiation leverage. Sellers, especially those in higher price brackets, may need to adjust expectations as the market continues to favor buyers.

NASA Rolls Artemis II Moon Rocket to Launch Pad Ahead of Historic Crewed Mission

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — NASA has taken a major step toward its first crewed mission to the Moon in more than half a century, rolling the towering Artemis II Space Launch System (SLS) rocket and Orion spacecraft to Launch Pad 39B at Kennedy Space Center.

The rollout marks the transition from assembly to final launch preparations for Artemis II, the first mission in NASA's Artemis program to carry astronauts beyond low-Earth orbit since Apollo 17 in 1972.

Standing 322 feet tall, the SLS rocket was transported from the Vehicle Assembly Building atop NASA's massive crawler-transporter during an overnight journey covering roughly four miles. Once secured at the pad, teams will begin final system checkouts, pad integration, and countdown rehearsals.

NASA is targeting early 2026 for the Artemis II launch, with its earliest launch opportunities beginning February 6, 2026. Additional launch dates are available



Image courtesy of Art Harman: View of Artemis II Space Launch System (SLS) rocket and Orion spacecraft Launch Pad 39B at Kennedy Space Center. Local photojournalist and space historian, Harman's work is available on his fine art photography website at writingwithdark.com

February 7, 8, 10, and 11, depending on weather conditions and final readiness milestones. Backup launch windows extend into March and April 2026 if needed. A specific launch date will be confirmed following completion of the wet dress rehearsal—a full countdown test in which the rocket is fueled with more than

700,000 gallons of cryogenic propellant—and a formal flight readiness review.

Artemis II will carry four astronauts—NASA's Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover, and Christina Koch, along with Canadian Space Agency astronaut Jeremy Hansen—on a roughly 10-day

mission that will loop around the Moon and return to Earth. The mission will follow a free-return trajectory, allowing the spacecraft to naturally swing back home using lunar gravity.

Although Artemis II will not attempt a lunar landing, it will serve as a critical test flight for life-support systems, deep-space navigation, communications, and crew operations in the harsh environment beyond Earth orbit.

Success of Artemis II will clear the way for Artemis III, which aims to land astronauts near the Moon's south pole later in the decade. The Artemis program is central to NASA's long-term strategy to establish a sustained human presence on the Moon and use lunar missions as a stepping stone for future crewed exploration of Mars.

As final tests get underway at Launch Pad 39B, Artemis II now stands as the most imminent human return to lunar space in over 50 years—bringing NASA closer to a new era of deep-space exploration.



Image courtesy of Art Harman: Collage of America 250 stories projected on the Washington Monument, kicking off America 250 Celebrations on New Year's Eve. Local photojournalist and historian, Harman's work is available on his fine art photography website at writingwithdark.com

Freedom Day and Black History Month

BY FAIROUZ OUIKHLFEN

February 1, 1865 is the date referenced by National Freedom Day, a holiday created to observe the day President Abraham Lincoln signed the 13th Amendment into law in the United States Constitution. The law was ratified on December 18th, 1865 and abolished slavery in the United States. It is not observed as a public holiday, so no schools, workplaces, or government offices are routinely shut down in observance of it. In the city of Philadelphia, a National Freedom Day tradition sees wreaths are laid at the city's Liberty Bell, which has long operated as a symbol of the American Revolutionary War of Independence from Great Britain, and of Philadelphia's role in it.

February 1st also marks the first day of Black History Month. Black History Month came from Negro History Week, coined by Dr. Carter G. Woodson in 1926 in a press release from his organization, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. Dr. Woodson was a historian who earned his MA and PHD at the Uni-

versity of Chicago and Harvard University, respectively. He was born in New Canton, in Buckingham County, Virginia, about an hour's drive south of Charlottesville. He was active throughout the first half of the 20th century, and served as the Dean of the School of Liberal Arts at Howard University in Washington D.C. and the West Virginia Collegiate Institute.

In addition to February being the anniversary of the signature of the 13th Amendment, the 12th and 14th of the month are the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, the former of whom was an anti-slavery writer and orator from Talbot County, Maryland and like Woodson, has a historic home maintained by the National Park Service. Both men's birthdays were widely celebrated by the African-American community at the time Dr. Woodson was drafting his ideas for a Negro History Week.

Dr. Carter Woodson intended Negro History Week to enhance existing history studies in classrooms, which he felt disinherited the achievements of black Americans. He did not mean

for the week to be permanent, but pushed for the nation's schools to cast the week as a benchmark by which all students would have something to show in terms of what they had been studying all year. The week was a benchmark for a broader public education campaign to combat the role misinformation and omission played in the dehumanization of African-Americans. It was not intended to be celebrated as a separate event.

By the end of the 1960s, ideas of making a Black History Month not specific to an isolated group of African descendants and placing black Americans back into the picture of a global black consciousness gained steam. In 1976, in the aftermath of that rising black consciousness on university campuses, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History spearheaded the institutional language change from "Week" to "Year".

"America's Presidents" Gallery Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery

The nation's only complete collection of presidential portraits outside the White House, this exhibi-



tion lies at the heart of the Portrait Gallery's mission to tell the American story through the individuals who have shaped it.

"America's Presidents" is newly refurbished with improved lighting and paint, new labels, and wall texts. The new, entirely bilingual (English and Spanish) and accessible presentation includes extraordinary works of art, notably Gilbert Stuart's "Lansdowne" portrait of President George Washington.

Three Area Restaurant Weeks!

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Food lovers, rejoice! The culinary scene in Northern Virginia comes alive each year with Restaurant Week, a celebration that showcases the diverse, vibrant flavors of Oakton, City of Fairfax and the Town of Vienna. Whether you're a longtime resident or just visiting, this is the perfect opportunity to explore new dishes, support local businesses, and enjoy a week of delectable experiences.

Oakton recently launched its first-ever Restaurant Week in 2025, a community-driven event designed to highlight the town's growing dining scene. Running for ten days in January till the 26th, participating restaurants offer special prix-fixe menus, discounts, and featured dishes, giving diners a chance to sample Oakton's

culinary diversity at accessible prices.

This year 11 local favorites joined the celebration, providing everything from international flavors to comforting hometown classics. Oakton's restaurant week was launched and sponsored by the Greater Oakton Community Association. While we might be just a couple of days shy of featuring Oakton due to the print deadline, we will be sure not to miss the next one!

We will be covering this year's Oakton Restaurant Week and other stories on our Fairfax Independent website at <https://oaktonindependentnews.press>

Fairfax City's Restaurant Week is a long-standing tradition that transforms the historic streets of Old Town into a foodie's paradise. This winter, Restaurant

Week in the City will take place between February 27 - March 8 and will feature prix-fixe lunch and dinner menus at a variety of local restaurants.

From casual cafes to upscale dining, Fairfax City offers a range of options, including signature dishes and seasonal specials. Supported by the Fairfax City Economic Development, Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the Old Town Fairfax Business Association, Restaurant Week in Fairfax City encourages both residents and visitors to explore the city's rich culinary offerings while supporting small businesses.

We will be covering this year's City of Fairfax Restaurant Week and other stories on our Fairfax Independent website at <https://fairfaxindependentnews.press>

The Town of Vienna's Restaurant Week is a highly anticipated event that kicks off spring, running for about ten days in early March. With 40+ participating restaurants, diners can enjoy a mix of cuisine styles – from cozy cafes and casual eateries to fine dining establishments.

Past highlights include a kickoff event on the Vienna Town Green, complete with live music, giveaways, and food tastings. Restaurants across Vienna offer special prix-fixe menus, discounts, and a la carte deals, making it easy to try new dishes or enjoy old favorites.

We will be covering this year's Town of Vienna Restaurant Week and other stories on our Vienna Independent website at <https://viennaindependentnews.press>

Prima Medicine - Tysons Grand Opening

BY BETHANY HAN

Fairfax City's Prima Medicine recently had its grand opening of their new Tysons location. Come visit at Tysons, 1945 Old Gallows Rd, Suite 405, Vienna, VA 22182.

Prima Medicine is a state-of-the-art primary care practice that provides exceptional care for adults at its two offices in the metropolitan Washington, D.C., area: Fairfax and South Riding, Virginia. Prima Medicine is part of Privia Medical Group, a national physician-directed, multispecialty medical group known for its commitment to providing superior, coordinated care.

Under the leadership of Washingtonian magazine's 2018 Top Doc, Chethana Rao, MD, the medical and professional staff at Prima Medicine will never rush you through an appointment. The well-trained, compassionate medical staff's number one job is to help you maintain the best overall health throughout your lifetime. The staff also knows that getting sick isn't something you can plan ahead of time. In addition to offering regular office hours, same-day or next-day appointments are available as well as weekend hours.

New Virginia Wine Law Raises Concern for Small Wineries Across the State

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

A law passed by the Virginia General Assembly in 2023 that changes how farm wineries are classified and regulated is now drawing criticism from small winery owners across the Commonwealth as it begins to take full effect. Critics say the measure, intended to protect the reputation of Virginia's wine industry, may instead force some of the state's smallest producers to close their doors by the end of the year.

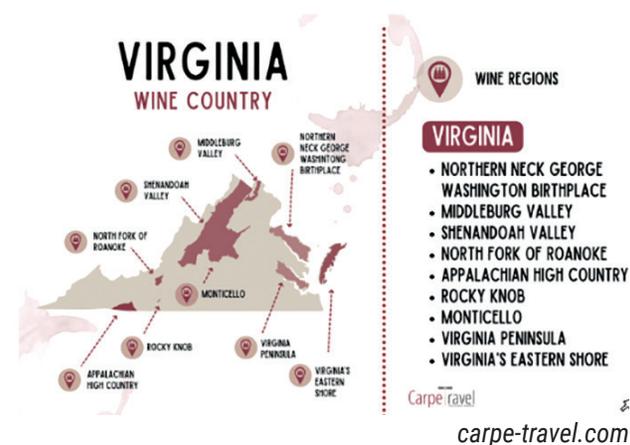
Virginia's wine country has become an economic engine in recent years, with regions such as Loudoun County alone hosting dozens of wineries and generating millions in tourism and related revenue. But under the new system established by Senate Bill 983, wineries must now meet stricter requirements tied to the amount of fruit they grow on site and how much is sourced within the state to qualify for certain farm winery licenses – a change that hits boutique producers particularly hard.

Previously, Virginia's alcoholic beverage control structure allowed a variety of small producers to operate under a broad farm winery license. Starting this year, however, the law creates a tiered structure that links licensing eligibility to vineyard size and sourcing:

- ▶ Smallest wineries must grow a minimum acreage of grapes on the licensed premises.
- ▶ Additional tiers require increasing percentages of fruit sourced from within the Commonwealth.
- ▶ Those that cannot meet these land and production requirements risk losing or downgrading their licenses – jeopardizing their ability to sell wine directly to consumers.

Advocates of the law say it was designed to preserve the integrity of Virginia wine – ensuring that bottles labeled as Virginia are made predominantly from Virginia fruit – and to crack down on producers who technically held licenses without substantial local grape production.

Although comprehensive statewide data on closures isn't yet available, several small producers have signaled they are exploring changes to their business models or considering sales in lieu of mandatory compliance. Others worry that the loss of smaller boutique wineries could diminish the diversity and charm that have helped make Virginia wine country a destination



for both tourists and local residents.

Virginia's wine sector contributes significantly to local economies, not just through direct production, but by supporting tasting rooms, events, agritourism and related hospitality services. In Loudoun County alone, wineries generate nearly \$5 billion in economic activity – a figure stakeholders fear could be at risk if smaller producers disappear.

Supporters of the law argue that it ultimately strengthens the brand of Virginia wine and protects consumers – but opponents counter that the implementation timeline and requirements disproportionately burden smaller operators. Trade groups and winery owners are now calling for legislative review or supplemental support as the industry adapts.

Talent Capital: The Region's Connected Workforce Hub

BY CAROLINE CHU

Leaders in the Greater Washington area recently introduced TalentCapital.ai, an AI-driven resource aimed at helping residents develop their skills and discover new careers in the local job market. The platform operates differently from standard job sites, instead serving as a complement to local employers, programs and resources. In order to simplify the search for existing opportunities, Talent Capital consistently updates its database of available jobs while offering customized search features. Its system combines job informa-

tion from multiple sources within the DC metropolitan area, including job boards, employer postings, and hiring events.

Celeste, its AI assistant, is a key technological mechanism through which Talent Capital's information is made accessible to job seekers. After a user shares their skills, preferences, and location, Celeste can instantly find opportunities in their area that align with their experience.

Talent Capital operates through the Metropolitan Washington Council of Gov-

ernments and uses advanced technology from BuildWithin, a Tysons company specializing in artificial intelligence.

The Fairfax County Economic Development Authority has joined forces with collaborators throughout the Washington D.C., Virginia, and Maryland area in supporting this initiative. Its release could not have come at a better time: Northern Virginia is currently experiencing significant demand for more employees, with nearly 50,000 job openings in the approximately 17,000 companies that are actively hiring.

Notably, the platform is free for both those seeking employment or employers looking for new hires. AI-driven features such as Celeste are available at no charge, while additional services like coaching or training come at a low cost for individuals who were impacted by recent federal employment changes.

Those interested can get started by visiting the Talent Capital site (<https://talentcapital.ai/>). Users can chat with Celeste or create an account to receive personalized job matches and resources. Users can also browse free opportunities in the Resources page.

Fairfax City Business Marketing Grant

City of Fairfax Economic Development

The Fairfax City Business Marketing Grant is designed to support businesses located and operating in Fairfax City by providing access to professional marketing services. A total of \$25,000 will be awarded across at least five businesses, enabling them to procure marketing expertise tailored to their needs. This initiative connects locally owned businesses with industry experts, providing tools and strategies to stay competitive, enhance visibility, and drive long-term success.

To apply to the Fairfax City Business Marketing Grant, applicants must review and complete all sections of the application. Please submit the completed application form and attachments via email to [tara.borwey@fairfaxcityecondev.org](mailto: tara.borwey@fairfaxcityecondev.org) or deliver them in person to: Fairfax City Economic Development, 10300 Eaton Place, Suite 235, Fairfax, VA 22030. Application is available on the Economic Development website at <https://gofairfaxcity.com/business-assistance/incentives-grants>

Fairfax City Awards Grants to Six Local Nonprofits

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

January 8, 2026 – The City of Fairfax has announced the award of \$199,509 in grant funding to six local nonprofit human services organizations through its Fiscal Year 2026 nonprofit grant program. The funding is designed to support organizations that deliver vital services—ranging from food security and mental health counseling to housing and recovery support—to Fairfax City residents.

Mayor Catherine Read stressed

that city-nonprofit partnerships are vital. She noted that while the city can't directly provide all services, strategic funding significantly strengthens nonprofits already helping vulnerable residents. Mayor Read stated, "Fairfax City has prioritized the delivery of needed services to our community through important relationships with area nonprofits."

Grant Recipients:

- ▶ Britepaths (\$40,000): Summer meals and bilingual books at Daniels Run Elementary.
- ▶ The Heart Leaf Center (\$40,000):

Mental health counseling for eight children and families.

- ▶ Pathway Homes (\$40,000): Predevelopment of 10 supportive housing units for adults with serious mental illness.
- ▶ Chris Atwood Foundation (\$39,509): Peer recovery specialist outreach in Fairfax City.
- ▶ Fairfax CASA (\$25,000): Volunteer advocacy for children in the foster care system.
- ▶ The Lamb Center (\$15,000): Employment certifications and materials for guests experiencing homelessness.

Amazon Makes Major Land Purchases in Virginia for New Data Centers

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Amazon is doubling down on Virginia's reputation as a hub for digital infrastructure, buying thousands of acres of land in the state to expand its network of data centers.

In mid-January, Amazon Web Services (AWS) purchased nearly 1,920 acres in Louisa County for approximately \$72 million. The company has not confirmed specific plans for the property, but analysts say the land will likely support future data centers and related infrastructure. Louisa County officials say the development will involve community input and compliance with zoning regulations.

Meanwhile, in Prince William County, Amazon struck a record-setting

deal, paying \$700 million for 189 acres in the Devlin Technology Park near Bristol. The site is zoned for data center use and could accommodate up to 3.5 million square feet of facilities. The deal is among the largest undeveloped land sales in Virginia history, reflecting high demand for land near the nation's capital that is ready for large-scale tech development.

These recent purchases continue Amazon's broader expansion in Northern and Central Virginia, a region often called "Data Center Alley" due to its high concentration of cloud computing facilities. The state's access to fiber optic networks, reliable power, and business-friendly zoning policies have made it a prime target for companies like Amazon, Google, Microsoft, and Meta.



Do You Have A Story to Tell?

We would love to share your story with our readers.

Submit your ideas to us at info@theindependentnewspress.com

No, The Chair Broken

OP-ED BY KATY JOHNSON,
CITY OF FAIRFAX RESIDENT

I am writing this as a plea for leadership that listens and includes the people. A plea for leadership that will connect us. A plea for leadership that does not use rhetoric to further divide the people who really do so desperately need each other right now, leadership that will work to bring We the People back together, We the People who make up the very fabric of this beautiful little City that we ALL call home.

When leadership believes elections give carte blanche to do as you

wish, with total disregard to the people whom you were elected to serve, and you lead with an attitude and belief that you can simply dismiss those who take time out of their busy lives to petition their elected officials, then the problem does not lie with the Chair. Instead, it lies with the elected official who occupies the Chair.

No, Madam Mayor, the Chair is not broken, and neither is the Charter that has served our City since its inception. The Charter does exactly what it was meant to do: it gives the power back to We the People where it is meant to be.



City of Fairfax Mayor Catherine Read Announces She Will Not Seek Re-Election

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

On January 13, 2026, City of Fairfax Mayor Catherine Read announced that she will not seek re-election this year, ending her bid for a third term. The announcement came abruptly at the end of a public hearing which cancelled the continuance of the George Snyder Trail by a 4 - 2 vote by council members related to the funding of the trail.

In her statement, Mayor Read described her experience in office as increasingly frus-

trating and voiced deep concerns about the challenges inherent in the mayoral role. "The chair I'm sitting in is broken," she said, using a stark metaphor to explain her decision and the state of municipal governance.

Mayor Read indicated that the administrative burdens and political complexities of the office have made it difficult to deliver the outcomes she believes the city needs. Her comments reflect a broader frustration with the way local government functions and the limits of municipal authority in addressing persistent issues.

FY 2027 City of Fairfax Budget

The City of Fairfax is preparing its Fiscal Year 2027 budget for July 1, 2026, to June 30, 2027, with final adoption expected in May 2026. City officials have held public hearings and open houses to gather input from residents and stakeholders. While final numbers are not yet released, priorities are expected to include funding for Fairfax County Public Schools, investments in transportation, utilities, parks, and public facilities, and continued sup-

port for public safety and community services. Tax rates and utility fees for FY 2027 will be announced with the adopted budget. Residents can review updates and proposed plans on the City's official budget website.

City of Fairfax Manager will present the Proposed FY 2027 Budget on February 24, 2026. All meetings listed are scheduled to begin at 7 pm. Please check the City Meetings link on the City website at www.fairfaxva.gov

Fairfax City, County Advance Renovation of Willard Center

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Fairfax City and County officials are moving forward with plans to renovate and expand the Willard Center, a vital hub for health services, recreation, and community programs. The redevelopment aims to modernize the facility, expand program space, and improve accessibility for residents of all ages.

The Willard Center, located in the heart of Fairfax, has long served as a gathering place for seniors, youth, and families. Mayor Read highlighted the project's significance, saying, "The Willard Center is more than a building – it's where our community comes together."

Chairman McKay said, "By working

together, the city and county can ensure this facility remains a vibrant space for generations to come."

The project is estimated to cost \$126.9 million, with Fairfax County contributing roughly \$73.6 million and Fairfax City funding about \$53.3 million. County funding comes primarily from approved bonds, while the city will also cover the cost of an optional performing arts space that would cost \$4.5 million. Construction is expected to begin as soon as possible and can continue till 2028.

Fairfax County will continue operating essential health and human services at the center, including: nurses' clinic, dental care, and pharmacy services; maternal and child health programs, in-

cluding WIC nutrition services; speech, hearing, and tuberculosis care; early childhood education and infant/toddler classrooms; senior programming relocated from Green Acres Senior Center. These services will be available to both city and county residents, often on a sliding-fee basis.

Recreation and community space will be operated by the City of Fairfax, the center will feature: a full-size gymnasium and elevated running/walking track; fitness rooms, multipurpose classrooms, and spaces for youth and senior activities; areas for community gatherings, arts programming, and after-school programs. The shared facilities are designed to encourage community engagement, wellness, and learning for all ages.

Residents are encouraged to provide input at upcoming City Council meetings, where the Willard Center project will be discussed:

► Tuesday, February 10, 2026 – 7 p.m., Work Session

► Tuesday, February 24, 2026 – 7 p.m., Regular Meeting

Both meetings take place at City Hall Annex, 10455 Armstrong Street, Room 100. City Council meets on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month. Residents can also stay informed and provide feedback through the city's website and Engage Fairfax at <https://engage.fairfaxva.gov/willard-sherwood-health-and-community-center>

Letter to the editor, Willard/Sherwood building

I attended the council meeting on Tuesday, October 14. I didn't know that there was going to be a vote on several motions on the Willard/Sherwood building and I am glad that I was present to listen to the presentations and to hear how each council member and mayor voted on those motions.

I was so happy to listen to previous city councilmember, Michael DeMarco, speak on behalf of the Willard/Sherwood building. It was great to hear our very own Brooke Hardin discuss the few land use changes for the project and the Fairfax County employee who presented as well. What a great collaboration between city and county. As Michael said - all this started in 2013. I remember the time well. I became a member of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board in 2011 and remained a board member till 2021. I recall Michael and previous Councilmember, Janice Miller, holding countless meetings. They created a committee to find the best spot to relocate the amazing Senior Center and the wonderful day care from Green Acres! There were open houses and meetings where our community met and gave plenty of ideas to this committee. I remember visiting Green Acres and thinking - I will be 55 in just about ten years and it would be so great to be in a new building. I am sure many of you have been in the Green Acres

building - there were buckets in the gym because the roof was leaking, the windows are so old, the bathroom toilets and entire bathrooms need replacement. The cardio equipment could use an update. The parking is limited. Accessibility is available and a little difficult. Green Acres is not close to transportation options. I am sure there are many more issues.

I remember the agenda of our monthly meetings where Parks and Recreation Director, Cathy Salgado and/or members of that committee would give us an update each month for years!

I resigned from PRAB in 2021 because I retired from FCPS and I am helping to care for my parents out of state. It was before I resigned that Fairfax County and Fairfax City agreed to a conceptual design for the new Willard/Sherwood Center. I was thrilled! What a great and amazing project. PRAB collaborated with the Senior Center, the daycare, recreation staff, and the community to come up with space ideas! I loved the idea of a walking track and the idea of a second floor outside patio. Having places to gather is so important. Having places that are beautiful and easy to get to and places that make you feel alive is priceless. This building is what we need for our seniors, our community, our students. I remember

discussing the possibility of the connection to Sherwood and it was going to be harder than we thought. I am so excited that from the drawings I saw at the October 14 meeting - the connection is now a done deal. Thank goodness for the amazing architects working to come up with solutions. Hooray!

Imagine my shock - as I heard three members of the council voting No on these motions multiple times. I was so sad to hear the No votes each time a vote was taken. These motions were land use motions. Nothing hard about them. We have been at this since 2013. Hundreds if not a thousand folks have come together to envision this modern building that features lots of parking, is on the bus route, and has bicycle access! The building will be ADA compliant and I didn't know that solar panels will be placed on the roof to make this building energy efficient! How terrific is that! I believe the senior center will have a modern kitchen and exercise equipment. Hooray, Hooray, Hooray!

Thousands upon thousands of collective hours were put to good use to come up with a beautiful design that will take care of Fairfax City and Fairfax County residents for decades and decades.

I have no idea how many council

members participated in those amazing discussions from 2013 onwards. I hope some of the council did or at least heard they were going on. One could participate online as well. They were some of the richest in terms of engagement and some of the most thoughtful meetings I have attended. They were purposeful!

When relatives and friends come to Fairfax City, I very proudly show off our Library, our museum, our Old Town Square, our Old Town Hall, Blenheim, and our city hall. I can't wait to show them this new modern building that so many people will utilize for so many purposes.

The future of our community looks bright because we will have a gorgeous building that will offer healthcare for our residents, we will have the ability to take classes, engage in sports and exercise, and most importantly spend time with one another building friendships and breaking bread with each other.

When motions come up to make this building a reality I urge the council members to vote YES for a healthier future for all of us. I look forward to the dedication and the cutting of that ribbon!

Evie Ifantides

Fairfax City Resident

The Path Forward is Clearer for the City

**OP-ED BY JUDY FRASER,
CITY OF FAIRFAX RESIDENT**

As the dust settles after the January 13 City Council vote that brought the long running George Snyder Trail controversy to a swift conclusion, it is hitting me what a long journey this has been. For those who are interested I thought I'd share a brief summary of its history.

I'd say the most accurate description of the George Snyder Trail as it existed in 2015 was a hodge podge of small trail and sidewalk segments collectively named for the former mayor.

The idea to connect them and extend it to Chain Bridge was formalized in a 2015 Parks and Rec strategic plan but with no means to pay for it. City staff determined that if they designed it so that it met VDOT bicycle path design

specs and strengthened the connection to I-66 it might qualify for a transportation grant through a new program called Smart Scale. The hitch was that the VDOT requirements meant the trail could no longer be the on-grade natural surface trail envisioned by the original proponents. Several of those early advocates were bicyclists but notably they were not advocating for a VDOT level bike trail.

It was turned down for Smart Scale funding but in 2017 the concession fund, private money provided from the company that widened I-66 as part of its contract with the Commonwealth, was made available to local jurisdictions affected by the construction project and all of a sudden the GST had its funding.

Only after it was engineered to meet VDOT specs and awarded \$13.6 million from the concession fund did regional bi-

cycle enthusiasts get wind of the project. They threw their support behind it as part of their larger lobbying effort for off road trails, not so much out of a particular interest in this location.

The idea that it would be a part of the Cross County Trail (CCT) may have been discussed but I've never seen anything formal from the county that they requested this be a segment of their recreational trail (after all, even John Mason didn't propose renaming it the Gerry Connolly CCT!). That goal/role was also not included in the grant submission. It seems the idea was embellishment after the fact as far as the records show.

The advocacy for an alternative started in 2018 thanks to the Friends of Accotink Creek, the Audubon Naturalist Society and the city's own Environmental Sustainability Committee, who first rang

the alarm bells after seeing the proposal.

However, it took the combined efforts of many groups and individuals over the next 8 years to fight these plans to pave over forested land in the city, and while this one was obviously the most formidable, each success was a result of advocacy, persistence, and ultimately, electing council members who made good on their campaign commitments to protect the city's environment and who listened to their constituents.

Two takeaways: Your vote matters so choose wisely.

The participants on both sides of this controversy were united on one thing- all supported safer bicycling options. Let's find ways to utilize already paved roads to make cycling safer and more convenient in the City.

Sincerely, Judy Fraser

What the Customer Wanted: George Snyder Trail

Perspective from City of Fairfax Council Member Thomas D. "Tom" Peterson

As many of you know, the Fairfax City Council held two important votes Tuesday evening of this week on the disposition of the proposed George Snyder Trail.

- 1 The first was to proceed with a supplemental appropriation to fund the construction contract (3-3 vote with nays by Hall, McQuillen, and Peterson; motion by Hardy Chandler, FAILED).
- 2 The second, with City Attorney guidance, was to cancel the project (4-2 vote in favor of cancellation by Bates, Hall, McQuillen, and Peterson; motion by Peterson, PASSED).

This highly controversial project is now cancelled.

My decision not to proceed with an appropriation and to join a majority of the Council to cancel was based on:

- ▶ Review and evaluation of troves of City and community based information as well as additional fact-finding on my part (based on years of professional experience on transportation, economics, and environment issues).
- ▶ Years of strong, broad based community concern coupled with unmet requests for consideration of alternative trail alignments and design.
- ▶ My commitment as an elected official to listen in earnest to citizens and act

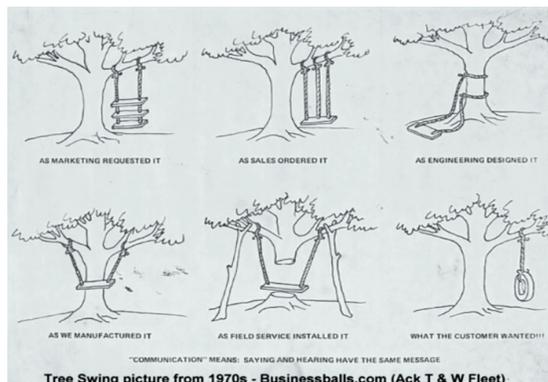


Image courtesy of Council Member Thomas D. "Tom" Peterson.

on their behalf.

As my meeting statement indicates, after years of turmoil, it is my judgment that it is time to move on to more popular and effective choices, and to approach projects in a more collaborative and informed manner.

As a postscript I have added my favorite cartoon from business school on why it is so important for people to work together and respect "What the Customer Wanted!!!"

The rope swing on the bottom right of the graphic is equivalent to the gravel foot path originally proposed and embraced by the community at a cost of \$250,000 (in contrast to the most recent paved and graded byway at \$25.2 million).

Let's learn constructively from this chapter in our City's history and move ahead. A great example would be the proposed Fern Street Connector Path which we reviewed in our same meeting and is likely headed for rapid approval.

Listening, Reflecting, and Serving Fairfax City: My Vote on the George Snyder Trail Project

Perspective from City of Fairfax Council Member Rachel McQuillen

I know the decision to cancel the George Snyder Trail project has stirred strong feelings, and I want to share why I voted as I did. My decision was guided by a careful review of the project's full history, extensive public outreach, and consideration of long-term impacts. Throughout the process, concerns from residents, particularly those living closest to the site, remained unresolved. Public feedback was overwhelmingly opposed to the project. In addition, I considered practical issues such as future maintenance costs, potential strain on existing infrastructure, storm-water runoff and related expenses, and environmental impacts. As a councilmember, my responsibility is to protect our shared resources and ensure that city projects reflect both the needs of residents and the sustainability of our community. Canceling a project is never easy, but thoughtful governance sometimes requires pausing, reassessing, and choosing a more responsible path forward.

My perspective is shaped by years of service in Fairfax City, including my time on the PTA and the School Board. Those experiences have taught me that how we lead matters as much as what we do. Our children, neighbors, and fellow residents are watching how we handle disagree-

ment, how we speak about others, and whether we choose respect, fairness, and collaboration over hostility. We often say we want leaders who can work across differences and bring diverse perspectives together to find the best solutions. One of the clearest ways to understand a candidate's values is by observing how they treat others, especially those with whom they disagree.

I am deeply grateful to the residents who have shared their voices and taken the time to engage in this process. Every voice matters in shaping our city, and I will continue to listen carefully and reflect community priorities in every decision. Moments like this can be used to push division or advance negative narratives, but leadership rooted in collaboration and unity strengthens our city, while fear, anger, and partisanship weaken it. Maybe it is the mom in me, but I truly believe how we show up matters. Let us model the community we hope our children will one day lead.

My door remains open for respectful conversation, and my focus continues to be on listening, collaborating, and serving Fairfax City with care, integrity, and thoughtfulness.

I Want to Clarify My Position Regarding Trails, the Community Survey, and the George Snyder Trail

Perspective from City of Fairfax Council Member Stacy Hall

Our community survey clearly showed that residents continue to want trails. I agree with that. I took the survey myself and indicated that trails are a high priority for me as well. I strongly support trails, walkability, and safe options for biking and transportation.

However, the survey did not ask residents whether they supported a project that would cut through a forest, remove more than 600 trees, significantly impact wildlife and insects, and place a roughly 30-foot-wide road through the woods. Those are two very different things, and it's important to be honest about that distinction.

I also believe it is my responsibility to serve our community in a way that ensures long-ago voted-on projects, plans, and decisions remain relevant to today's population when-

ever possible. What began more than 20 years ago as a stone-dust trail with broad

support gradually evolved into a transportation project, with very little new community input along the way. That evolution created a pivotal moment for us to pause, listen, and reassess what our community wants now.

While I value being a good partner to our neighboring jurisdictions, our first responsibility is to our residents—the people who elected us to make thoughtful, informed decisions on their behalf. Good government listens, adapts, and is willing to ask hard questions, even when funding or momentum already exists.

I will continue to support trails and safe transportation options, while also standing up for our environment and the voices of our community.

Our Libraries Need Our Voices and Support

OP-ED BY DARIA PARNES OF OAK HILL, FAIRFAX COUNTY

I have been a public library advocate my whole life!

As a child I was transported to fantasy lands, explored the world and did my homework in my local library. In college I was on a work study scholarship based in my university library. I went to graduate school for my Masters in Library Science degree. Then I worked in libraries across the country in various positions and witnessed first-hand how life altering fully funded library services can be to their communities: story-times, school support, public computers, adult language classes, how-to materials, current information and many more services/topics of interest, some of which we take for granted.

I have found that public library funding mirrors the story about the canary in the mine. The canary's health reflects the air quality in the mine. Public libraries reflect the vitality of the communities within which they reside. Canaries need clean air to survive and public libraries need to be fully funded to flourish.

For the past three years, the Friends and Advocates Network (FAN), of which I am a member, has worked to support Fairfax County Public Libraries (FCPL) by advocating to the Board of Supervisors for adequate library funding. Created by the Library Board of Trustees, FAN gives residents a voice in ensuring that our libraries remain strong and accessible to all.

Thanks to community advocacy, FCPL received one-time additions to its collection budget of \$300,000 in FY 2024 and \$500,000 in FY 2025. Although serious countywide fiscal challenges prevented a permanent increase last year, residents made clear how much the library means to them. In a year when many county agencies sustained budget cuts, FCPL did not—an outcome that reflects strong public support.

As the FY 2027 budget process begins, the Board of Supervisors must hear from residents early. The current FCPL collection budget of \$3.172 million amounts to about \$3 per resident per year. By comparison, nearby and similarly sized library systems spend \$7 to \$10 per resident annually. This gap has serious consequences.

FCPL is now rationing books. Most new titles are purchased only for the six regional libraries, with few or none available at the 14 community branches. Many residents experience long waits—often months—for popular titles. Nonfiction collections are also increasingly outdated.

Many nonfiction titles on the shelf are old or outdated. A March 2025 comparison of materials on artificial intelligence highlights the problem. FCPL holds 845 AI-related titles, while Montgomery County, Maryland, holds 4,107. Only 26% of FCPL's titles were published in 2023 or later, compared with 46% in Montgomery County. That system also offers instant access to 3,000 eBooks through a service funded within its \$8 million collection budget—something FCPL cannot afford with its current funding.

One-time infusions of money are no longer sufficient. To bring FCPL's collection budget in line with comparable library systems, FCPL is requesting an increase of \$8–\$11 million over the next five years to permanently raise the base budget. This investment would benefit students, job seekers, families, seniors, and lifelong

learners throughout Fairfax County.

Community voices are essential. Please contact your District Supervisor by visiting www.fairfaxcounty.gov and selecting "Board of Supervisors." You may also call to request a personal meeting. Please share how you use the library and why a fully funded collection matters to you. Personal stories illustrate how libraries affect our daily lives and families.

Your voice is magnified by including others in your support! Please consider involving your local communities: families, schools, civic associations and other affiliations. Help get the word out.

Please mark your calendars when the Advertised Budget will be released on February 17, 2027. Get ready to help spread the word of how important public libraries are to our communities! We are facing another difficult budget year, but your advocacy continues to be a powerful voice for the library. You, and your efforts are very much appreciated and will reflect back to our communities.

THANK YOU!

Storyteller Lisa Vohra Brings "Healthy Food Of Digital Media" to Local Media!

BY HEATHER DURKIN

One of the ironies of this past year is that the vast government layoffs in the DMV area have freed up some very talented people. Lisa Vohra is one of those gems. And as The Independent News Press continues to grow and evolve, we are pleased to announce that Lisa is joining us as a digital storyteller. Lisa comes to us from Voice of America (VOA) where she has spent the last twenty years honing her craft in digital media as a reporter, producer and anchor. She helped grow television at VOA before it became ubiquitous online. Lisa worked on shows such as VOA Connect, and on assignment for Africa 54. She also collaborated with the graphics department on election explainers for Aaj Tak station. She is planning on bringing her varied expertise in production and storytelling to our local newspaper.

Information overload floods digital media every day in the walled gardens of TikTok, Instagram, and others. Misinformation, click-bait, AI slop along with trusted information inundate people making it very difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff.

Lisa thinks that we can use social media in a much better way than people currently do. She will offer content that is "healthy" versus "ultra processed". "No one knows what to believe...I want to be the healthy food of digital media," Lisa says. "It exists. It may not be what is mostly consumed. I want to offer healthy food and help people's brain wiring to seek that."

She also believes that a connection exists between healthy habits and journalism. "If the whole goal of journalism is to help shape minds and give a perspective and to help minds think. Doing pieces that help people seek out the better, I think is a missing link."

It's an exciting time. The Independent News Press wants to go back to the basics of journalism, storytelling, community and trust. Lisa plans to create human stories that are a minute long. "How do you tell a story in one minute? It's doable because you just get to the soul of it all," she says with a twinkle in her eye.

Lisa's professional blog is available on the following website at <https://balancingthenoise.com/>.

Buddhist Monks Still Walking for Peace from Texas to Washington, D.C.

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

A group of Buddhist monks continues their long spiritual pilgrimage from Fort Worth, Texas, to Washington, D.C., walking roughly 2,300 miles to promote peace, compassion and unity across the country.

One specific goal they have is to ask Congress to recognize Vesak - the day that marks the birth and enlightenment of the Buddha - as a federal holiday intended to be a day of reflection, compassion, and unity for all people. The trek, known as the "Walk for Peace," began on Oct. 26, 2025, and is expected to last about 120 days. Along the way, the monks have drawn large crowds as they pass through towns and cities, including recent stops in North Carolina where supporters gathered to greet them.

Accompanying the monks is a rescue dog named Aloka, who has become something of a symbol of the journey and helped the group's social media following grow into the millions.

Their path has not been without hardship. In Texas, an accident involving the monks' support vehicle left two monks injured, and one lost a leg; the group chose to continue walking.

The monks walk mindfully - some even barefoot - and offer peace teachings and meditation to those they meet, emphasizing that peace starts within and grows outward.

They hope to reach Washington, D.C. in mid-February and present a message of unity and compassion to nation's capital.

Fairfax Federation Crisis Escalates Amid Conflicting Claims of Authority, Discrimination, and Bylaw Compliance

BY FAIROUZ OUIKHLFEN

A leadership dispute within the Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations ("Federation") has escalated into a significant governance controversy, marked by contested board actions, emergency special meetings, disputed communications, and sharply conflicting accounts regarding the legality and legitimacy of the removal of the Federation's President.

At the center of the dispute is Morgan Jameson of Oakton, who was elected President by the Federation's membership on May 22, 2025. A small group of Board members, led by First Vice President Dave Fitzgerald of McLean, assert that Jameson has been removed as allowed per the Federation bylaws. Jameson strongly disputes that claim.

According to Jameson, events began on Friday, December 12, 2025, when Fitzgerald called him at approximately 12:18 p.m. Fitzgerald indicated that three Board members were petitioning for a special meeting, one agenda item being a discussion of whether Jameson should continue serving as President.

Jameson stated that he asked Fitzgerald to provide the petition by email and indicated he would have no objection to scheduling a meeting once the written petition was received per Federation bylaws. However, Jameson said Fitzgerald insisted the meeting be held on Sunday, December 14, despite Jameson having previously stated he would not be available that day. In addition, Jameson shared that he never received a request by Fitzgerald in writing as required by the Federation bylaws.

Fitzgerald subsequently distributed an email to the Board announcing that a meeting would take place on December 14. On Sunday, December 14, 2025, Fitzgerald convened the special Board meeting. During that meeting, the Board took several votes on several items, including a vote purporting to remove the President.

Jameson maintains that he never directly received formal notification of any vote to

remove him, nor was he informed of any charges, allegations, or reasoning underlying the Board's purported action.

According to the Federation bylaws - Article IV, Section 7, it is stated that a minimum of ten (10) member associations may petition in writing for consideration of removal of an officer from office. Such petition shall be submitted at a regular meeting. A hearing on the complaint shall be held at a regular or special meeting not more than two (2) months after submission of the complaint and after written notice of such complaint to all member associations and the Board of Directors. Disposition of the complaint shall be by ballot; removal shall require a three-fourths (3/4) vote.

In the following days, Jameson sought legal opinion to clarify his removal from this volunteer position under both the Federation bylaws and the Virginia Non-stock Corporation Act ("VNCA") under which the Federation was established. In a legal opinion letter issued on December 17, 2025, and circulated by Jameson to the Federation Board, it stated that "The members are vested with the authority to remove officers. This makes sense, because the members (not the Board) elect the officers. Accordingly, for the foregoing reasons, it is my legal opinion that the purported removal of Mr. Jameson as President of the Federation on December 14 was null and void."

In the days following the meeting, changes were made to the Federation's website removing Jameson as President. Fitzgerald also asked other officers to update the Federation's bank signature card to remove Jameson.

On December 20 and again on December 21, 2025, Fitzgerald emailed the Federation listserv stating that the President had been removed and that he was the Acting President. There is no Acting President defined in the Federation bylaws, but that the First Vice President is to execute the duties of the president in absence (such as a removal).

Jameson has yet to be officially informed about the charges against him and the actions taken. He first learned of his removal from several board members who reached out to him and when he received the listserv distribution that also included media, elected officials, and community

members, which included personal friends of Jameson. According to Jameson, he started receiving text messages asking if he "embezzled money" from the organization and what he did wrong to get "kicked out."

In our email to Fitzgerald and Jameson, on January 13, 2026, we asked the following question - Was the December 14, 2025, special meeting held in accordance with the Federation bylaws as stated in the Federation bylaws Article IV, Section 7 - If so, we would like a copy of the written petition for public record."

In response to questions regarding the legitimacy of these actions, Fitzgerald provided the following statement by email on January 15, 2026:

"The Board of Directors of the Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations removed the president of the organization in accord with its Bylaws and governing law. The Federation has no further comment."

Jameson disputes this characterization, stating that the Federation's bylaws do not authorize the Board to remove a sitting President without a vote of the membership, nor do they provide for an "Acting President" designation under the circumstances described. He further stated that he remains unaware of whether, when, or how any membership vote on his removal would occur.

"A few rogue members of the Fairfax

County Federation of Citizens Associations Board are attempting to illegally and without membership input, remove me," Jameson said. "Throughout this time, I have been subjected to defamation that has seeped beyond the board and into the community."

Jameson stated that member organizations—including Homeowners Associations and District Councils such as Braddock, Hunter Mill, and Mason—were not informed of any cause for removal and were denied any opportunity to vote or provide input. He noted that such an action would be unprecedented in the Federation's 85-year history.

Jameson further alleged that Fitzgerald went as far as to direct past President Tim Thompson of McLean to pressure a board member to involve law enforcement in an effort to bar Jameson from attending Federation meetings, which are held in public facilities.

The following week, a Board meeting originally scheduled for January 15 at the Kings Park Library in Burke was moved to a virtual format without public notice. Jameson was removed from Board communications.

Jameson maintains that all actions taken to remove him were conducted in bad faith, in violation of the Federation's bylaws and Virginia state code, and without the involvement of the membership that elected him.

Better Arguments Workshop Series

COMMUNITY EVENT HOSTED
BY RADHIKA MURARI

At a time when conversations too often turn into standoffs, many of us want to do better - but aren't sure how. In response, I am hosting a free five-part Better Arguments workshop series.

The Better Arguments Project, developed by the Aspen Institute, is part of William & Mary's broader Democracy Initiative, which advances civil discourse, civic engagement, and the skills needed to live and lead in a pluralistic society.

The series is free and open to the public, and participants are wel-

come to attend any individual session - there is no expectation to attend all five. Sessions will be moderator-led and highly participatory, creating space for reflection, listening, and respectful dialogue.

This free series is hosted by Radhika Murari (W&M '95), a member of the William & Mary Washington Campus Advisory Board in the spirit of William & Mary's commitment to democratic engagement.

[Editor's note: due to print space limitations, please visit the workshop details and to registration information posted on our website at <https://fairfaxindependentnews.press/better-argument-workshop-series>]

Touchy-Feely February Celebrate Galentine's Day

BY FAIROUZ OUIKHLFEN

Celebrating Galentine's Day, a movement toward a February 14th Valentine's Day holiday less centered around a necessity for a boyfriend and more broadly defined as a Valentine's Day for your friends, conjures up images of clinking champagne flutes in a bubble bath and shared mischievous smiles at in the pedicure chairs of the nail salon, but Galentine's Day does not always have to require an appointment.

A first and crucial step toward planning a Galentine's Day activity is intentionality. What exactly are you planning to celebrate? If nail appointments and brunch are hated by both parties, there is no reason to stick to that as a template. Think of the

things that cement your friendship in the first place. What are the little things about your friend that affirm why it feels so good to be around them? To my own best friend, who now lives in Florida but with whom I speak on the phone with regularly, it was the comfort and strength sitting and eating lunch with her against the walls of our high school. With her, it was not demeaning to feel alone. She made me feel worthy.

A Galentine's Day activity could be mall-walking, a phone call, anything that symbolizes your friendship. Maybe you are both too busy to meet up, but a phone call symbolizes your confidence in each other. It is often the little moments spent with someone that define a friendship, just like it is the small things about someone that

stick in our memory. Some friends follow a show together and watch each episode on their own time or simultaneously, some go through the same recipe book in their own separate homes, color in an adult coloring book and see which person finishes their copy of the book first, or plant the same plant in their own household/community gardens. You don't even need to be present with someone to do something with them, as long as you know the other person is sharing a similar experience.

Galentine's Day is not about skipping out on obligations and places you're needed to meet up just to show that you did. Galentine's Day is a reminder of what makes a friendship important and that you intend to carry it on through the rest

of the New Year. A small activity or note is better than a rushed mega-day neither parties have time for. Who can relax during something they're forcing a space for that doesn't exist into their jammed schedules?

Galentine's Day is all about sharing kindness, but that can happen on any day of the week, month, and year. And after all, if you really are too overbooked on Galentine's Day to celebrate anything, you still have Random Kindness Day on February 17th, and No One Eats Alone on the 20th. One could complain about the amount of touchy-feely holidays in February, but days centered around hearts and kindness can't really ever be that horrible. We could all use a reminder to stop and think about others who continue to touch our lives.



Image Source: South Lakes Sentinel (Photo Credit / Brian Goldman)

Glamour Gals: Brings Joy and Companionship to Community

BY BETHANY HAN

It's officially the season of love, now that New Year's is over and pink teddy bears line the shelves of Target. While Valentine's Day is usually viewed through romantic rose-colored lenses, it could also be a celebration of the many different kinds of love, like for family and friends. Glamour Gals, a program that focuses on intergenerational connection and leadership skills, has been spreading community and self love throughout the nation since being founded in 2000. Started by Rachel Doyle, the program's chapters train up teenage girls and young women in leadership and compassion, as volunteers visit local nursing homes to give the residents makeovers.

A few ideas for Valentine's Day Around Fairfax

BY CAROLINE CHU

Surprise your valentine with a concert performance featuring internationally renowned pianist Thomas Pandolfi and the William & Mary Symphony Orchestra. Romantic, orchestral serenades composed by Paul Ladmirault, Strauss, and Tchaikovsky are a part of this enchanting evening experience – stunning renditions of Tchaikovsky's Sleeping Beauty and Strauss's Die Fledermaus: Overture are among the featured pieces. The performance begins on Valentine's Day at 8 pm at Capital One Hall. More information is available on the Capital One Hall events <https://www.capitalonehall.com/events-tickets>

Feeling hopelessly single (or hungry) on Valentine's Day? Sign up for Love at First Pho, a singles meet and greet hosted by Alo Vietnam Restaurant and Bar in Herndon! Attendees can mingle with prospective partners or friends, all the while enjoying delicious Vietnamese cuisine and reveling in the cozy atmosphere. Taking place Valentine's Day from 6:30 P.M to 10:00 P.M, this event is perfect for solo adults looking to chat over savory bowls of pho and a glass of wine. More information is available on Alo's website at <https://www.alovndulles.com/>

There's nothing more classic than a romantic Valentine's Day dinner! Thankfully, Northern Virginia's food scene has much to offer. Randy's Prime Seafood and Steaks serves delicious American cuisine, with a Valentine's special hour from 11:30 A.M to 10:00 P.M. The freshly-opened Churasuko, a Brazilian and Japanese fusion steakhouse, is another option for meat lovers that

features a beautiful atmosphere and unique dishes. 2941 Restaurant in Falls Church delivers elevated French and European flavors with a three-course prix fixe on Valentine's Day, offering main courses from branzino to ribeye and luxurious desserts such as Passionfruit & Macadamia Entremet. For more intimate dining, Bellissimo in Old Towne Fairfax serves exceptional Northern Italian cuisine with vegetarian and gluten-free options.

Angelika Film Center's showing of the romantic classic Casablanca is perfect for couples seeking a timeless Valentine's Day experience. This 1 hour 42-minute film features iconic performances from Academy Award winners Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman. With convenient showings at 4:30, 7:00, and 9:30, couples can choose their perfect time slot before or after dinner. Set against the backdrop of World War II, this tale of love, sacrifice, and impossible choices continues to captivate audiences decades after its release in 1942.

More information is available on Angelika's website at <https://angelikafilmmcenter.com/mosaic>

Celebrate Valentine's Day at District Candle Lab in Fairfax for a creative evening. Couples can create custom 12 oz. candles while enjoying a glass of champagne and chocolate truffles. This intimate experience combines hands-on creativity with indulgent treats and a romantic atmosphere, making it perfect for couples seeking something unique beyond a traditional dinner date. With limited spots available, this two-hour experience offers the ideal blend of romance, artistry, and fun. More information is available on the District Candle Lab website at <https://districtcandlelab.com/>

Every Kid Is A Star at Traveling Players Ensemble

BY PHILLIP KIM

For nearly a quarter century, Traveling Players Ensemble has been shaping young artists and delighting audiences across Northern Virginia. Founded by veteran educator Jeanne Harrison 24 years ago, the nonprofit theater company is distinctive in one striking way: every public performance is performed entirely by student actors, from elementary school through high school.

Young actors take on ambitious roles, often in timeless classical works, guided by professional artists and educators. Harrison, who now serves as the Producing Artistic Director, keeps cast sizes relatively small – typically around a dozen students – so every actor has a meaningful role and responsibility. “Kids are infinitely capable storytellers,” she says, “and they should be entrusted with complicated stories.”

Many students return year after year to a retention rate of 70%, creating a close-knit community that welcomes newcomers while maintaining a high level



Traveling Players ensemble cast photo of middle schoolers (Photo Credit / Isaiah Brown – Pint Sized Productions)

of trust and collaboration. The result is a theater experience that is both artistically inspiring and personally transformative.

Based in Tysons Corner Center since 2020, Traveling Players stages three shows this winter, all based on Greek mythology: Atlanta for elementary students, The Odyssey for middle schoolers, and Women of

Troy for high school performers.

For parents considering enrollment, Traveling Players offers programs ranging from beginner-friendly day camps for first through fifth graders to intensive residential conservatories for older students. Its high school Shakespeare trope even tours professionally. Beyond acting, stu-

dents can explore technical crafts such as costuming, lighting, and sound. Some summer programs include more than 400 hours of instruction, giving students time to build skills, confidence, empathy, and friendships.

“They grow in confidence, acting and public speaking skills, their understanding of the world, vocabulary, analytical skills, and empathy,” Harrison explains. “It doesn’t just prepare you for a show. It prepares you for life. Life is an improvisation, and this gives kids more confidence to trust that they will navigate their way through.”

Traveling Players Ensemble places a strong emphasis on accessibility, offering one of the most generous need-based financial aid programs in the region. “Every kid deserves it,” Harrison says.

Families looking for a place to enjoy ambitious, high-quality theater as well as a rare opportunity for children to grow through immersive arts education, Traveling Players Ensemble’s doors are always open in Tysons Corner Center.

Vienna Theatre Company Brings The Sunshine Boys

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

The Vienna Theatre Company presents Neil Simon’s classic comedy *The Sunshine Boys*, a sharp and heartfelt look at friendship, aging, and the highs and lows of show business. The play follows former vaudeville partners Al Lewis and Willie Clark, once famous as a comedy duo, who are reluctantly reunited for a television special after years of bitter estrangement. What unfolds is a fast-paced, laugh-out-loud comedy with moments of surprising warmth and nostalgia.

Performances will take place at the Vienna Community Center, 120 Cherry Street SE, Vienna, VA. Tickets are \$16 for general admission and are available online, at the Vienna Community Center, or at the door, as available. Recommended for ages 13 and up.

Performance Schedule

► Fridays & Saturdays: January 23, 24, 30, 31; February 6, 7 at 8:00 p.m.

► Sundays: February 1 and 8 at 2:00 p.m.



34th Annual Chocolate Lovers Festival (Feb. 6-8)

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Feb. 6-8, 2026

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Contact

Special Events Team

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NOVA PARKS

GMU Researchers Uncover Hidden Complexity in Human Genetics

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

FAIRFAX, VA – January 19, 2026 – Researchers at George Mason University have made a groundbreaking discovery in human genetics, revealing that certain harmful genetic mutations can unexpectedly cancel each other out when combined.

The study shows that looking at combinations of genetic variants, rather than individual mutations, is key to understanding how genes affect health. Using artificial intelligence alongside lab experiments, GMU scientists were able to predict how these complex interactions work—an advance that could im-

prove diagnosis and treatment of genetic diseases.

“Clinical genomics has been stuck in a rut for decades. We’ve shown that you need to look at combinations of variants to fully understand their impact,” said GMU’s Chief AI Officer Amarda Shehu. “Our AI model expands coverage from one gene to another, accelerating interpretation and bringing us closer to true precision medicine.”

The findings, published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, may pave the way for more accurate precision medicine, bringing tailored healthcare closer to reality.

GMU Gears Up for Homecoming: Be Brave! Be Bold!

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

From January 30 to February 7, 2026, George Mason University will host one of the most spirited traditions of the academic year – Homecoming Week. Packed with events that bring together students, alumni, faculty, staff, and the Fairfax community, this year’s festivities promise to be bigger and bolder than ever before.



Patriots.

► **Comedy Night with Josh Johnson:** Enjoy laughs with The Daily Show’s comedian and headliner Josh Johnson – one of the week’s marquee events.

► **#MyMasonMemory Campaign:** Share your favorite Mason memories online – selected photos will be featured in a special video montage during the week.

Homecoming at Mason isn’t just about a game – it’s a campus-wide celebration of Patriot spirit. Organized jointly by Student Involvement, the Patriot Activities Council, Mason Athletics, Alumni Relations, and many student organizations, Homecoming offers opportunities for everyone to reconnect, compete, and show their Mason pride.

This year’s Homecoming lineup features a mix of fun, tradition, competition, and community engagement:

- **Taco Tuesday Trivia:** Test your trivia skills with friends at Banditos at University Mall.
- **Homecoming City Crawl:** Explore local Fairfax bars, restaurants, and businesses while connecting with fellow

Homecoming culminates on Saturday, February 7, with a festive Homecoming Tailgate & Festival near EagleBank Arena before the big game. Tailgaters can secure permits in advance for vehicle parking, games, and giveaways – celebrating Mason spirit in full green and gold. The tailgate leads into the Men’s Basketball Homecoming Game vs. Saint Joseph’s, tipping off at 4 p.m. in EagleBank Arena.

The #MyMasonMemory campaign highlights this connection by encouraging both alumni and current students to submit photos of their favorite university moments. These shared snapshots—ranging from late-night study sessions to tailgate fun—are featured across Mason’s social media platforms, strengthening the collective bonds of Patriot Nation.



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Gretchen Bulova Wins 11th Goes To Richmond

BY HANNAH LEE

Gretchen Bulova was elected on January 13, 2026 to represent the 11th House District in the Virginia General Assembly. She secured 68.79% of the vote against Republican Adam Wise. Wise previously ran against Delegate David Bulova in the November 4, 2025 General Election but did not win by over 15,000 votes.

Former Delegate David Bulova, who had held the position since 2006, resigned, creating a vacancy. Over his nearly 20 years as a delegate, Bulova championed legislation focused on improving transportation, reforming educational standards, and increasing fiscal transparency. He was appointed as the Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources under the Spanberger Administration. The City of Fairfax announced on December 12, 2025, that it had received a Writ of Special Election for the 11th House District. This ultimately led to the recent election



Delegate Gretchen Bulova (Image Credit Candidate Campaign)

of Gretchen Bulova, the wife of former Delegate David Bulova.

Her candidacy was significantly bolstered by substantial endorsements from influential figures within the party and the local community, including during the Democratic Party primary election that

occurred within a matter of days. She received the strong support of Congressman Walkinshaw, lending her campaign considerable credibility. In addition, she was endorsed by Fairfax City Mayor Catherine Read, and Chairman Jeff McKay, demonstrating support within the party membership hierarchy and a seamless transition from her husband's tenure.

Delegate Bulova's core priorities centered on key issues affecting her constituents. She focused on combating the increasing cost of living to improve affordability for district residents. A major emphasis was also placed on school safety, where she proposed resources and measures aimed at creating secure learning environments for both students and staff. Furthermore, her platform demonstrated a strong dedication to proactive environmental stewardship, championing sustainable policies and initiatives designed to safeguard the region's natural resources for the benefit of future generations.

In addition, Democrat Margaret Franklin secured the delegate position in the 23rd House District, representing portions of Prince William and Stafford Counties, with a substantial 77% of the vote. Her Republican opponent, Verndell Robinson, lost after receiving 22.56% of the ballots. The vacancy in this district occurred after Governor-elect Spanberger appointed former Delegate Candi Mundon King as the Secretary of the Commonwealth.

Combined with the general election results from November, the Democrats continue to retain a large majority in the House, maintaining a 63-36 lead. Spanberger's victory over former Lieutenant Governor and Republican Winsome Earle-Sears represents the potential for major change as key elected positions in both the 11th District and the Commonwealth experience sweeps in blue. As Spanberger organizes her staff in preparation for the governor's office, Virginians can anticipate further changes within the General Assembly and other elected offices.

Like Most People, I think Re-Reducing is a Terrible Idea - and the New Governor can stop it

OP-ED BY CHAP PETERSEN
REPUBLICATED FROM
THEVIRGINIAATTORNEY.COM

Saturday was a historic day as Abigail Spanberger was sworn in as the 75th Governor of the Commonwealth, our first female Chief Executive.

Within minutes of taking office, the Governor issued a number of Executive Orders which rolled back Republican initiatives and implemented an aggressively Democratic agenda. To the victor go the spoils.

True leadership, of course, is rising about partisanship to do what's right for the people. Very few leaders in America have that type of moxie. Abigail Spanberger can be one of them.

The 2026 General Assembly has already passed a proposed

constitutional amendment, HJR 4, which would replace the 2020 constitutional amendment on "Bi-partisan Redistricting," which Virginia votes passed by a 2-1 margin, with a "flex version" designed to maximize Democratic gains in the 2026 mid-terms.

The "flex version" comes into play if "any state," regardless of size, context or partisan leanings, decides to draw a new Congressional map. (Presumably, California qualifies as "any state" -- so the threshold is already met). The bottom line is that HJR 4 is intended to render Virginia's "non-partisan redistricting" law a dead letter, before it reaches its fifth birthday.

There are some Assembly Democrats who never supported redistricting -- and so they get a pass. Otherwise, this is a cynical and shallow move, especially if

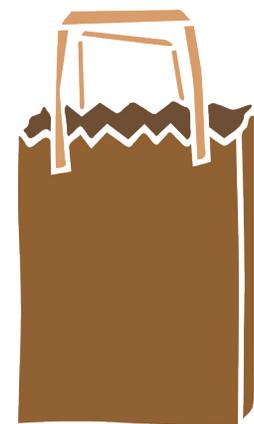
the referendum is held in April so as to limit turnout to partisan activists.

The Governor does not vote on a constitutional amendment: only the Assembly. However, she has to approve two key pieces of legislation: the first to set the referendum's voting date, the second to actually change the State Code.

In either case, the Governor could veto the bill, thereby killing the amendment. In doing so, she would send a resounding message: There's a new Sheriff in town and the partisan games are over.

It wouldn't hurt her one bit with the voters. And it would make her a national voice of logic and courage in the era of Trump-driven insanity. Stay tuned.

Super Bag Sale!



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Super Bowl Sunday
February 8
12noon – 3pm

at the Freeman Store & Museum's
Used Book Cellar

131 Church Street NE, Vienna



The Freeman Store & Museum is operated by Historic Vienna, Inc.

FCPS Goal 5 Strategic Report: Leading for Tomorrow's Innovation

BY SAVI MAMGAIN

In December 2025, Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) released its annual Goal 5 Report Presentation, a comprehensive review of progress toward the division's Strategic Plan objective of preparing every student to graduate ready for life beyond high school. Goal 5 – "Leading for Tomorrow's Innovation" – emphasizes readiness for future challenges, including academic success, career pathways, and innovation skills cultivated through the FCPS Portrait of a Graduate competencies.

The presentation begins by situating Goal 5 within FCPS's broader strategic framework, which includes five pillars of success: differentiated and culturally responsive learning environments; strong home, school and community partnerships; a diverse and supported workforce; and a culture of equity, excellence, and accountability. Goal 5's specific focus is ensuring students graduate prepared for a changing world.

A central component of the report is an analysis of graduation outcomes for

the Class of 2025. FCPS monitors graduation through two key metrics: the on-time graduation rate (OGR), which includes students graduating within four years under state criteria, and the four-year federal graduation indicator (FGI), aligned with federal reporting standards.

For SY 2024-25, the on-time graduation rate remained high at 93.3 percent, representing a slight decline compared to prior years. The federal graduation indicator also dipped modestly to 89.3 percent. These shifts highlight the challenge of sustaining exceptional performance amid evolving state standards and diverse student needs.

However, the headline figures mask important disparities across student groups. The data show that Hispanic students and Multilingual Learners had lower on-time graduation rates and higher dropout rates than their peers, an equity gap that continues to drive division strategies for targeted support.

Another dimension of graduation success reported in the presentation is the distribution of diploma types. A ma-

majority of FCPS graduates earned an Advanced Studies Diploma – the highest standard – though the percentage dipped slightly for the Class of 2025 compared to previous years. Advanced diploma attainment remains a key indicator of college and career readiness.

The goal report also assesses students' postsecondary readiness. Survey data shows high school students are confident in their future plans, with most feeling prepared for college or careers and taking goal-aligned coursework.

The presentation also illustrates that nearly all seniors reported having a defined plan after graduation, and a substantial portion of the Class of 2024 – the most recent cohort with complete outcome data – enrolled in college within four months of graduation.

Goal 5 focuses on innovation, using the FCPS Portrait of a Graduate (POG) competencies—communication, collaboration, ethical/global citizenship, critical thinking/creativity, and goal direction/resilience—as key to future success. The

report indicates that most secondary students believe their schools offer sufficient opportunities to develop these POG skills.

The presentation highlighted the Student AI Innovation Challenge, a major program that drew participation from over 1,100 high school students. This initiative is designed to prompt students to work with new technologies, leading up to a final showcase event in early 2026.

In addition, the report detailed strategic goals for the 2025-26 school year aimed at improving graduation support and student transition services. Key efforts include implementing new monitoring tools for graduation status, focusing outreach on students at risk of not graduating, expanding career and technical education opportunities, and strengthening support systems for students requiring additional educational assistance.

Readers can view Superintendent Reid's presentation at the December 18, 2025 meeting of the School Board on the following FCPS YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/live/gtjsGwW6Eqs?t=3174s>

From page 15 → :
GLAMOUR GALS...

Glamour Gals fosters self-love in its clients, as "Rachel Doyle has found there is nothing like a beauty makeover to lift a woman's spirit, no matter what her age," said Oprah Winfrey.

However, although these famous makeovers are the cornerstone of what this program does, its purpose reaches further than simply beautification. Glamour Gals fosters community love through regular interaction and quality time spent with the elderly residents in nursing homes. Their volunteers grow in empathy and compassion as "our teen volunteers trade stories with seniors during visits. This helps increase our volunteers' emotional intelligence, and understand the humanity and beauty in others." Retirement homes aren't usually pegged as places of vibrant intergenerational networks. In fact, the elderly often suffer from loneliness and depression as they're distant from their families and loved ones. Luckily, Glamour Girls turns their chapters' partnering homes into beauty parlors in every sense, both in cosmetics and the community that grows through consistent

conversations and connection between clients and volunteer cosmeticians. "Our teen volunteers trade stories with seniors during visits. This helps increase our volunteers' emotional intelligence, and understand the humanity and beauty in others."

Recently, South Lakes High School junior Zahra Nikzad brought this mission into the FCPS region by starting another Glamour Gals chapter club at her school. Superintendent Dr. Michelle Reid spotlighted Nikzad's venture as a student who is "bringing joy and companionship to our community." While the club is still new, it's evident that it's already creating much positive change in the Fairfax community as they work towards establishing relationships with the elderly population through club meetings and events.

In this season of love, it's easy to get wrapped up in the romantic. However, this Valentine's Day, let's expand beyond chocolates, teddy bears, and flowers. There's so many kinds of love, and so many ways to share it with the people in this city. As singer Olivia Dean said, "The more you look, the more you find. It's all around you all the time." Make this holiday about celebrating love in all its forms, in our loved ones, in ourselves, and in our communities.

Virginia AG Urges Schools to Adopt IHRA Antisemitism Definition

BY SAVI MAMGAIN

Former Virginia Attorney General Jason Miyares has urged all K-12 school districts to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism in their codes of conduct and anti-discrimination policies. In a Jan. 5 letter to superintendents and school boards, Miyares said the definition offers a clear way for schools to recognize and address antisemitism and help fulfill their legal duties to protect students' civil rights.

Virginia formally adopted the IHRA definition in 2023 through state law as a non-legally binding tool for identifying and combating antisemitic discrimination and hate crimes. The definition describes antisemitism as a perception of Jews that may be expressed as hatred

and includes examples of how it can appear.

Miyares pointed to state data showing an increase in reported hate crimes, including anti-Jewish bias, and said Jewish students deserve safe, discrimination-free schools. While his guidance is advisory rather than mandatory, he encouraged districts to integrate the definition into existing policies.

Supporters, including civil rights advocates, say a common definition helps educators identify antisemitic behavior. Some civil rights groups, however, argue the IHRA examples could be misapplied to restrict political speech, particularly criticism of foreign policy – a debate reflected nationally as schools consider how to balance combating discrimination with protecting free expression.



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Remainder of Fairfax, Oakton, Marshall and Madison High School Winter Sports

BY LAYLA MOHRAN

FAIRFAX HS

This new year, the Fairfax High School lions continue to show out for the remainder of the winter sports season.

The varsity girls basketball team had their tournament, which started on December 27 and ended on December 30. During the first day, the Lions lost against McLean High School with a final score of 34-42. The following day of the tournament also resulted in a loss against Westfield. However, the Lions got a win on the final day of the tournament, December 30, against John R. Lewis High School. Their victory with a final score 34-28 ended the tournament on a positive note for Fairfax High School. With these and previous game statistics, the team stands with a 4-7-0 record. February has only four scheduled games currently. On the third, the Lions will go against Robinson High School, the sixth, South County High School, the ninth, West Springfield High School, and the eleventh, Alexandria City High School.

For the varsity indoor track teams, all currently scheduled meets have been completed. The boys junior varsity wrestling team has their final event, a tournament, against Westfield High School on January 31.

MARSHALL HS

New year, same high level of intensity for the Marshall Statesmen to wrap up the winter sports season.

The girls varsity gymnastics team has two events in February. On the second, the Statesmen will have their district tournament against Washington Liberty High School. Then, the Statesmen will go against them again on February 11 for their northern region tournament.

The boys and girls varsity indoor track team's season is a bit longer than the gymnastics team. The athletes have their liberty district tournament on January 29 and 30 at the Prince George Sports Complex. Opponents are yet to be announced. On February 11, the Statesmen will have their northern region championship at the same location. On March 2 and 3, the team will have their state tournament at

the Virginia Beach Sportsplex against opponents that are yet to be announced.

For the wrestling teams, athletes have a home match against Herndon High School on January 29. On February 7, Marshall will have their liberty district championship against Langley High School. Six days later, the northern region championship will take place against and at Centerville High School. On February 21 and 22, the Statesmen will have their state tournament at the Virginia Beach Conference Center against unannounced opponents.

The boys varsity basketball team currently has an impressive 8-2-0 record. At the start of the season, the Statesmen held an impressive seven game win streak against Independence, Osbourn Park, Centerville High School, Chantilly High School, Brooke Point, Langley High School, and James Madison High School. However, on December 27, the streak was lost when Marshall lost against St. Anthony's with a score of 59-61. Against Wakefield on January 5, Marshall won by 11 points. Four days later, the Statesmen just barely lost against McLean High School, losing by one point. The team will continue to have games and their next invitational is scheduled for January 17 against Woodgrove High School. The current last scheduled game is on February 13 against Herndon High School. Similarly, the girls varsity team has a record of 8-4-0. Winning against Stafford, South Lakes High School, Mt. Vernon High School, Wakefield High School, and McLean High School. The team has no scheduled invitationals.

OAKTON HS

This year, the Cougars at Oakton High School continue to play hard to wrap up their winter sports season.

On January 28, the girls and co-ed varsity wrestling teams will have a meet against James Madison High School. The co-ed varsity will also have a meet at Westfield High School on the last of January.

All levels of both gender basketball teams, except boys varsity, will be having a game against Chantilly High School on January 29. The girls teams will have their games at home while the boys' games are at Chantilly. The girls and boys freshman

teams play at 4 and 4:30 respectively. Girls junior varsity (JV) plays at 5:45 and the boys at 7:30. The girls varsity game is at 7:30. On February 3, the teams will also have a game against South Lakes High School. Two days later, the teams will play Westfield High School. On February 11, the teams will play against James Madison High School.

The swim teams will also be having a meet on January 30 at the Cub Run Recreation Center. On February 6, the Cougars will have another meet at the Oakmont Center.

The girls varsity gymnastics team will have a meet also against South Lakes High School on February 4.

The first sports team, lacrosse, will have their first game on February 28 against Chantilly High School.

Film and information regarding upcoming events can be found at oakton-sports.net.

MADISON HS

This new year, the James Madison High School Warhawks continue to show out for

the remainder of the winter sports season.

On January 29 and 30, the varsity indoor track teams will have their district finals at Prince George's Sports and Learning Complex in Landover, Maryland.

On the same day, the basketball teams will have their games against Westfield High School. The co-ed varsity winter sideline cheer team will be performing at the girls away games.

On January 30, the varsity swim teams will have a meet against Centerville High School at Cub Run Rec Center.

The co-ed varsity wrestling team will have a meet at Riverbend High School while the JV co-ed team will have a meet at Westfield High School on January 31.

On January 31, the co-ed riflery team will have an event against Centerville High School at Isaak Walton League of America (IWLA) and again on February 7, but against Yorktown High School.

Upcoming dates, tickets, and film can be found on warhawksports.org.

VHSL Names 2025 Class 6 All-State Girls Volleyball Team

BY LAYLA MOHRAN

The Virginia High School League (VHSL) has released its highly anticipated 2025 Class 6 all-state girls volleyball team, spotlighting the Commonwealth's top talent as the year comes to a close. The roster celebrates athletes who have dominated the court with skill, dedication, and leadership, representing schools from across Virginia. 2025 ended on a good for these players!

The team consists of many Fairfax County Public School students, including the player and coach of the year. The player of the year, Laila Chadwick is a student at James Madison High School and the coach of the year, Steph-



anie Noriega, works at West Springfield High School. Superintendent Michelle Reid expressed her pride for the representation of FCPS in the team in her January 5th weekly reflection: "it was a strong showing for FCPS! Madison High School's Laila Chadwick was named Player of the Year and West Springfield High School's head coach Stephanie Noriega was named Coach of the Year. Go Warhawks and go Spartans!"

Fairfax Figure Skater Headed to the Olympic Stage: Cheers from Fairfax!

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Fairfax figure skater preparing to compete on one of the biggest stages in sports: the Winter Olympic Games.

Figure skater Ilia Malinin and short track speed skater Brandon Kim, both Fairfax natives, have earned spots on the U.S. Olympic team, bringing international attention – and hometown pride to Fairfax!

Ilia Malinin, born and raised in Fairfax, has quickly become one of the most recognizable names in men's figure skating. Training at local ice rinks from a young age, Malinin showed early promise and steadily climbed the competitive ladder through regional, national, and international events.

Over the past several seasons, Malinin has distinguished himself with technically demanding programs and powerful

jumping ability, helping him secure national titles and establish himself as a top contender on the world stage. His performances have drawn attention not only for their difficulty but also for their energy and confidence.

Malinin is a graduate of Marshall High School and has continued his education locally while pursuing elite competition. Despite frequent travel for training and events, he remains

closely connected to Northern Virginia, often crediting the area's skating community for supporting his development.

The 2026 Winter Olympics, officially the Milano Cortina 2026 Games, will be held in Milan and Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, from February 6 to 22, 2026, featuring events in the Italian Alps and Lombardy region, with ski mountaineering debuting as a new sport.

Super Bowl LX and Halftime Plans Take Center Stage

BY LAYLA MOHRAN

Super Bowl LX, set for Sunday, February 8, 2026, at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California. With the NFL championship approaching, excitement isn't just about which teams will play – it's also about one of the most talked-about halftime shows in years.

After a thrilling playoff season, the remaining teams vying for the championship are:

- ▶ AFC Championship: New England Patriots vs. Denver Broncos
- ▶ NFC Championship: Los Angeles Rams vs. Seattle Seahawks

The winners of these matchups will face off in Super Bowl LX. Fans are keeping a close eye on players and coaches, as this year's playoffs have been full of dramatic moments, injuries, and standout performances.

Every year, the Super Bowl brings

friends and family together to celebrate football, enjoy great food, and host watch parties. Local establishments throughout our area are planning gatherings where fans can catch the big game on big screens. Classic game-day fare like chicken wings, chips and dip, charcuterie boards, and football-shaped desserts will be on many menus.

In Falls Church City, the 8th Annual Super Bowl Watch Party at Settle Down Easy Brewing promises free pizza and wings for attendees while supplies last (bring your own tailgate favorites too). Groups of eight or more are encouraged to RSVP at the Eventbrite link provided by the venue.

Aside from what can we say about the Commanders? Two new players have emerged to play in the halftime slots but not on the same field. Every Super Bowl has its own pop culture chatter.

The official Super Bowl LX Apple Music Halftime Show will be headlined by global music star Bad Bunny, marking a

highly anticipated moment for the Super Bowl stage. Apple Music and the NFL released an official trailer showing Bad Bunny dancing in his native Puerto Rico to his song "BAILE INOLVIDABLE," with people of diverse backgrounds joining him under a flamboyant tree – a symbol of pride and culture. The theme teased in the trailer is unity, rhythm, and celebration, with the tagline "On February 8, the world will dance."

The performance will feature a multicultural showcase of music and movement designed to engage audiences around the globe. Additionally, Charlie Puth will sing the national anthem, Brandi Carlile will perform "America the Beautiful," and Coco Jones will sing "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

The selection of a solo Latin artist as the Super Bowl halftime show headliner for the first time underscores the increasing significance of global music and cultural trends.

In addition to the NFL's official entertainment plans, Turning Point USA – a

conservative nonprofit organization – has announced that it will host a separate halftime event on February 8 called the "All American Halftime Show" to celebrate "faith, family, and freedom."

Bad Bunny's selection has generated considerable attention from fans and critics alike. Some see it as a historic and inclusive moment for the Super Bowl stage, while others have voiced differing opinions, resulting in varied reactions on social media and in public discourse. Regardless of perspective, the halftime show – including both official and alternative programming – is shaping up to be an integral part of Super Bowl Sunday conversation.

Whether you're tuning in for the football action or planning to watch the halftime show, Northern Virginia offers plenty of community-centric events and parties. From neighborhood gatherings to organized watch parties at local breweries and sports bars, Super Bowl Sunday is a time for neighbors to come together and celebrate.

From Page 21 → **VHSL NAMES...**

In the all state first team, students from FCPS schools like Langley High School, West Springfield High School, West Potomac High School, James Madison High School and Lake Braddock High School made an appearance, causing FCPS students to make up half of the team. As for the all state second team, students from Woodson High School, West Springfield High School, James Madison, George C. Marshall, and Wakefield High School were acknowledged. Impressively, FCPS students were more than

half, 60%, of the all state second team.

Chadwick's impressive achievements this season allowed for her recognition as Region 6D and Concord District player of the year this season. This season alone, she played 111 sets, had a 95.5% serve percentage, 454 digs, a serve receive average of 2.06, and a season hitting percentage of 0.311 on 839 tries. However in her overall career, she has had a remarkable 1,026 digs, a hitting percentage of 0.277 with 1,985 tries, a serve receive average of 1.95, and a serving percentage of 92.5%. Due to this outstanding volleyball career, her 2025 senior season statistics

weren't the only ones that gained recognition. In her sophomore year, she was on the all state second team and became a first team all state honors during her junior year (InsideNOVA).

Noriega's efforts also earned her the title of coach of the year, allowing her to make history. Twice. Noriega created history, earning the Class 6 state trophy. The team's 3-2 win in the state finals allowed for Noriega and her team to be the first in school history to do so. Not only was the Spartan's state finals record an achievement, but so was their season record. Their final record, standing at 30-2, earned

them the Region 6A title and an opportunity to play in the quarterfinals in 2023 and the state semifinals in 2024. Noriega held a 73-13 record and consecutive Region C designations simply from these three seasons alone. Throughout the entirety of Noriega's career, she earned a 416-93 record, giving her the title of the seventh most wins in VHSL history (InsideNOVA).

Thanks to the efforts of hard working coaches like Noriega, hard working student athletes like those on the first and second all state teams, and supportive families, FCPS was able to make history happen.

Acclaimed Fiddler's Concert Canceled After AI Error

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

A scheduled concert by acclaimed Canadian fiddler Ashley MacIsaac was abruptly canceled last month after an AI-powered search tool falsely labeled him as a sex offender. The error, generated by Google's AI summary feature, led event organizers to cancel the show, leaving fans disappointed and raising concerns about the reliability of artificial intelligence.

The performance, which was to take place in Halifax, was pulled after organizers came across the AI-generated claim, which incorrectly identified MacIsaac as having a criminal record. "We acted quickly after seeing the information online, but it turns out it was entirely false," said a spokesperson for the venue.

MacIsaac, a Juno Award-winning musician known for blending tradition-

al Celtic fiddle with modern influences, has denied the accusations and is reportedly considering legal action against Google for the reputational damage and financial losses caused by the cancellation. "This AI-generated error has real consequences for artists and their livelihoods," MacIsaac said in a statement.

The incident has sparked wider debate about the increasing role of AI in

everyday information retrieval. Experts warn that while AI summaries can be useful, they can also produce inaccurate or misleading information with significant real-world consequences.

Google has since apologized for the error and confirmed that steps are being taken to prevent similar incidents in the future. The event organizers have also said they hope to reschedule the concert once the issue is resolved.

GMU Researchers Uncover Hidden Complexity in Human Genetics

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

FAIRFAX, VA – January 19, 2026 – Researchers at George Mason University have made a groundbreaking discovery in human genetics, revealing that certain harmful genetic mutations can unexpectedly cancel each other out when combined.

The study shows that looking at combinations of genetic variants, rather than individual mutations, is key to understanding how genes affect health. Using artificial intelligence alongside lab experiments, GMU scientists were able to predict how these complex interactions work—an advance that could improve diagnosis and treatment of genetic diseases.

"Clinical genomics has been stuck in a rut for decades. We've shown that you need to look at combinations of variants to fully understand their impact," said GMU's Chief AI Officer Amarda Shehu. "Our AI model expands coverage from one gene to another, accelerating interpretation and bringing us closer to true precision medicine."

The findings, published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, may pave the way for more accurate precision medicine, bringing tailored healthcare closer to reality.

BestCrosswords.com - "Bar Jokes" by Barb Olson on 1/16/2026

Across

1- Throat woes, for short; 7- Temperature control syst.; 11- Type; 14- Game name, after "truth"; 15- Biblical "hairy man"; 16- B' ___ brith; 17- Defendant's failed court proceeding?; 19- CFL three-pointers: Abbr.; 20- Green-lights; 21- "___": Miami (cop show); 22- Overloads, with "on"; 24- Result of a too-small jury box?; 28- "The Waste Land" author's monogram; 30- Language learner's challenge; 31- Netanyahu's lang.; 32- Discussion point; 34- Ace; 36- "Duck Hunt" platform; 37- Convicted one's lengthy jail term?; 41- "The Hurt Locker" hazard, briefly; 42- Wines and dines; 43- Crystal ball reader; 44- Univ. in Antigonish, N.S.; 46- Some small winds; 49- Out patients' places?; 50- Court exhibit filled with helium?; 53- ___-Barbera cartoons; 54- Lord's Prayer opener; 55- Postie's path: Abbr.; 58- Caesar's 1400; 59- Legal filing against a suntanner?; 64- Guitar learner's instrument, maybe; 65- Actress Tremblay or Thompson; 66- "Rebecca" writer du Maurier; 67- Kazakhstan, once: Abbr.; 68- Grocery shopper's aid; 69- Entraps;

Down

1- Artsy NYC area; 2- "Star ___"; 3- Nutritional stats; 4- Hammer and drum site; 5- Hagglng subject; 6- Dojo master; 7- Daughter of Loki; 8- B.C. classical music grp.; 9- Some Energizers; 10- Zodiac switch-over spots; 11- Social media marketer; 12- Molson Canadian and Labatt Blue; 13- Smackeroo targets; 18- ___ one's loins; 23- Estimator's suffix; 24- Ball-shaped hammerhead; 25- Forest-scented cleansing brand; 26- Mottled horse; 27- Give off; 28- Crime clues on roads; 29- Carpentry tool with a magnet; 33- Cut a green; 35- Guitar maker ___ Paul; 38- Joystick fumbler, maybe; 39- Japanese noodles; 40- Argon's neighbour; 41- Narrow strip of land; 45- Popular anxiety drug, informally; 47- "The Time Machine" species; 48- Auditory test elements; 51- Laundry instructions spot; 52- Kidney or liver; 55- German mining valley; 56- Pitchfork part; 57- Are, in Arles; 60- "___ supposed to believe that?"; 61- Brand name symbols; 62- Milliner's merchandise; 63- Where to get mud on your face;

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Betting on War: How Apps and AI are Turning Global Conflicts into a Commodity

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Conflict is being transformed into a tradable commodity through the growth of online markets. These digital platforms now allow individuals to place real-money wagers on geopolitical events, such as the likelihood of the United States initiating military action abroad. Aiding some of these traders are artificial intelligence tools, which help inform their decisions. What was previously the exclusive concern of policymakers and intelligence professionals has now shifted to a public, digital marketplace where the prospects of war are reduced to mere probabilities, percentages, and potential payouts.

Prediction markets are online platforms where users buy and sell contracts on the outcome of real-world events.

These can range from elections and sports results to economic trends – and now, even potential military strikes. The price of a contract reflects the market's belief in the likelihood of the event. If the event occurs, the contract pays out; if not, the bettor loses their stake.

Some popular platforms include Polymarket, a crypto-based prediction market that has hosted bets on elections, oil prices, and military action; Kalshi, a U.S.-regulated platform offering binary event contracts approved by the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC); Manifold Markets, an online forecasting site that allows users to estimate event probabilities using play money; and Metaculus, a forecasting community where experts and the public estimate probabilities for future events. Other AI-driven tools, like Predic-

tive Pulse, analyze news, troop movements, and historical data to generate probability forecasts – feeding traders' decisions and influencing market odds.

AI isn't placing bets itself – but it shapes the information that traders use. By scanning news articles, analyzing diplomatic statements, and detecting patterns in troop movements, AI creates numerical probabilities that traders treat as authoritative. But there's a critical limitation: AI cannot interpret political intent or confidential intelligence. It sees patterns, not strategy. Yet when markets respond to AI-driven forecasts, public perception can swing dramatically, even if reality is far less volatile.

Polymarket has seen high-profile bets on U.S. military action, with some wagers exceeding tens of thousands of

dollars up to \$40,000. In one instance, a sudden spike in odds created a frenzy of speculation online, prompting headlines suggesting a strike was imminent – even though no official intelligence supported it. Other platforms have faced controversy over disputed payouts, raising questions about fairness, transparency, and ethical responsibility.

The rise of markets that allow bets on potential military action raises serious ethical questions. Critics argue that profiting from the possibility of war normalizes conflict as entertainment or speculation, and that algorithms can amplify misinformation, causing unnecessary panic. Regulation is uneven. While platforms like Kalshi operate under government oversight, many crypto-based sites remain lightly regulated or in legal gray zones.

TSA to Charge \$45 Fee for Travelers Without REAL ID Starting February 1, 2026

TSA PRESS RELEASE

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has announced a new fee that will affect air travelers in the United States who do not present a REAL ID-compliant form of identification at airport security checkpoints. Beginning February 1, 2026, passengers aged 18 and older who lack a REAL ID, passport, or other acceptable federal ID will be offered the option to pay a \$45 fee to use TSA's new identity verification system called ConfirmID.

Travelers without a REAL ID will be charged a \$45 fee to cover the cost of identity verification via TSA ConfirmID. This verification is valid for 10 days for multiple flights, but does not guarantee successful confirmation. TSA and experts urge passengers to obtain a REAL ID or use an alternate ID (e.g., passport, military ID, trusted traveler card) to avoid the fee and potential security delays.

BestCrosswords.com - "Bar Jokes" by Barb Olson on 1/16/2026 (solution)

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	28	29	T	S	E		30	I	D	I	O	M		31	H	E	B	R		
	32		I	T	E	M			34	N	A	I	L		36	N	E	S		
	37		R	U	N	O	N	38	39	S	E	N	T	E	N	C	E			
41	I	E	D		42	W	O	O	S			43	S	E	E	R				
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53	H	A	N	N	A					54	O	U	R		55	56	57	R	T	E
58	M	C	D		59	60	61	62	H	I	N	G	S	U	I	T				
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67	S	S	R		68	L	I	S	T		69	S	N	A	R	E	S			

HOW A COW BURNED DOWN THE FAIRFAX COUNTY JAIL

REPUBLICATED FROM CITY OF FAIRFAX COMMISSIONER OF REVENUE PAGE JOHNSON'S FACEBOOK POST

On the morning of December 12, 1883, two Fairfax County men were arrested in Washington, D.C. on suspicion of grand larceny of a cow!

RICHARD "DICK" LANE and JOHN WHEELER

In 1883, Richard "Dick" Lane was a 30-year-old African American man and the former slave of William B. Scarce (1814-1860), Alexandria, Virginia. Scarce was also Dick's biological father. Dick was born in July 1854 in Alexandria, Virginia. His mother, Jane Lane (1811- ?), was also the slave of William Scarce. William Scarce was the proprietor of the Virginia House Tavern, formerly located at 1600 King Street, in Alexandria.

In 1883, John Wheeler, was a 21-year-old African American man and likely the former slave of George William Washington Jackson (1817-1862) and Martha (Love) Jackson. John's mother was likely Mary Wheeler (1835- ?), of Fairfax Court House and also the slave of George Jackson. The Jackson's were the proprietors of the Dranesville Tavern on Leesburg Pike.

THE COW CAPER

In the early morning hours of Wednesday, December 12, 1883, Richard "Dick" Lane and John Wheeler, entered "Strawberry Vale", the 144-acre farm of James N. Walton near Peach Grove (now Tyson's Corner) Fairfax County, Virginia. Strawberry Vale was located on the south side of Chain Bridge Road (Rt. 123) at the interchange of present-day Interstate 495.

Lane and Wheeler appropriated one of Walton's cows, intending to sell the animal for \$60 at one of the cattle markets in D.C. The two men first drove the beast nine miles down Chain Bridge Road and across the Potomac River to Drovers Rest, a longstanding cattle market just above Georgetown. This is today's 4759 Reservoir Road. Unable to find a buyer there, they moved on to Center Market, which was located on Constitution Avenue, between 7th & 9th Streets (now the site of the National Archives).

Unfortunately for Lane and Wheeler, at Center Market they encountered Metropolitan Police Officer Walter A. Nicholson, who became suspicious. Nicholson ar-



The only known photograph of the original Fairfax County Jail, c. 1863. Source: Virginia Room, Fairfax City Regional Library / Image Courtesy of Page Johnson.

rested the two men on suspicion of grand larceny and carried them to the Fifth Precinct Station House, located about a mile away at 500 E St., S.E. Under interrogation, Lane and Wheeler confessed to the theft and were held until they could be and turned over to Fairfax County authorities.

The following day, Fairfax County Sheriff George E. Sangster arrived to take charge of the prisoners, and presumably, the cow who was returned to its owner at Strawberry Vale. Lane and Wheeler were placed in the "Dungeon Cell" of Fairfax County Jail to await trial.

THE FAIRFAX COUNTY JAIL

The Fairfax County Jail was a significant two-story brick structure, approximately 50' x 25', constructed between 1799 and 1800, at the same time as the Fairfax County Courthouse. The jail was located approximately 190 feet S.W. behind the Courthouse, on a north-south axis, parallel with West Street.

A residential jailer's house was constructed at the same time and was located just south of, and adjacent to, the jail. The jailer's house was 1½ stories and detached from the jail. In 1883/4, Fairfax County Jailor, John T. Pettit, resided here with his family.

ESCAPE AND FIRE

After languishing in the Fairfax County jail for several months, Lane and Wheeler hatched a bold plan of escape.

A 2 a.m. Sunday March 9, 1884, there were just three prisoners in the jail - Dick Lane, John Wheeler and an African American boy, Harvey Wheeler, who was serving a sentence of 15 days for some minor offense.

John Wheeler described what happened. '[I] and Lane had decided to get out of the jail, [we had] collected a lot of pieces of wood, and on Saturday night put the pieces in the diamond cut in the door and set fire to them. The door was of wood, lined with sheet iron, and was soon consumed, not, however, until the flames had gotten under the roof. By this time the boy [Wheeler], who was in the adjoining room had roused the jailer, and before we could get away, Mr. Pettitt appeared on the scene and took charge [of me] and bound [me] to a tree until the furniture had all been gotten out of the jail and the residence of the jailer. Both buildings were destroyed.'

Jailer, John T. Pettit gave the following account for the Alexandria Gazette 'At about 2 o'clock Sunday morning [I] was awakened by a noise and on rushing into the jail yard discovered that the jail was on fire...accompanied by Mr. Matthew Davis, [I] opened the outer door, when we were set upon by Wheeler and Lane, and so fiercely assaulted, that Lane succeeded in escaping. Wheeler was, however, not so fortunate.'

All three occupants of the jail nearly died. However, in the confusion, Dick Lane managed to escape. Wheeler, it was said, "was in a pretty bad way, his eyes being terribly swollen and his speech somewhat affected by the smoke."

The resulting fire completely destroyed the eighty-five-year-old jail along with the adjacent jailer's house. Lane was recaptured and both men were placed in the Alexandria Jail to await trial.

THE VIRGINIA PENITENTIARY

May 19, 1884, Lane and Wheeler were tried in Fairfax County Circuit Court and convicted of arson and grand larceny. They were sentenced to eight years in the Virginia Penitentiary in Richmond, four years for "cattle stealing" and four years for "jail burning".

On May 23, 1884, Lane and Wheeler were processed into the penitentiary. The prison register identifies John Wheeler as prisoner #6315, a native of Appomattox Co., Virginia, 22 years old, 5'6" tall, "dark ginger cake" in color, black hair and black eyes.

On February 28, 1886, John Wheeler attempted to escape the Virginia Penitentiary by "cutting out". He was given an additional sentence of one year by the Richmond City Circuit Court.

In 1888, John Wheeler's 9-year sentence was commuted due to his having contracted "phthisis" (i.e. tuberculosis). He was pardoned by Virginia Governor Fitzhugh Lee on July 14, 1888.

The prison register described Richard Lane, as prisoner #6314, a native of Washington, D.C., 31 years old, 5'5" tall, "dark ginger cake" in color, black hair and black eyes.

Lane had previously been incarcerated in the Virginia Penitentiary in 1876 for a forgery committed in Fairfax County. He served two years.

In addition, Lane's prison record indicates that he was given an additional 5-year sentence by the Richmond City Circuit Court on June 16, 1884, for an unknown offense committed shortly after his arrival.

In 1891, Richard Lane's 13-year sentence was commuted due to his having contracted tuberculosis while incarcerated. The penitentiary doctor indicated that his case was "hopeless." He was pardoned by Virginia Governor Philip W. McKinney on May 16, 1891, having served 7 years.

Both men presumably returned to Fairfax County, but disappeared from the historic record.

In 1885, a new Fairfax County Jail was constructed behind the courthouse. It was in use as a jail until 1953. It is now used by the Office of the Fairfax County Sheriff.

Acknowledgement to Alexandra "Alex" Campbell, Assistant Archivist, Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records, who provided invaluable documentary support for this article.

Hunter Mill Road: Preserving Fairfax's Hidden History

BY STEVE HULL, OAKTON HISTORIAN & HUNTER MILL DEFENSE LEAGUE MEMBER

For most drivers, Hunter Mill Road is simply a scenic stretch through Fairfax County. But for a dedicated group of local historians, it is a corridor rich with untold stories, stretching from before the Civil War to the present.

The effort to recognize and preserve Hunter Mill Road began between 2000 and 2002, when the History Committee conducted its first research survey. Led by Jeannette Twomey, Holly Towne, Jody

Bennett, and Michael Meyer, the team successfully applied to have the road designated a Virginia Byway and deemed "Eligible to List on the National Register of Historic Places" as well as the Virginia Landmarks Register.

When the committee leadership changed around 2004, a new team—Steve Hull, Charlie Balch, Bob Eldridge, and Jim Lewis—took the research to new depths. They spent thousands of hours digging through archives at the Fairfax Library, Fairfax Courthouse, Library of Congress, and National Archives, and even traveled to the Library of Virginia in Richmond and

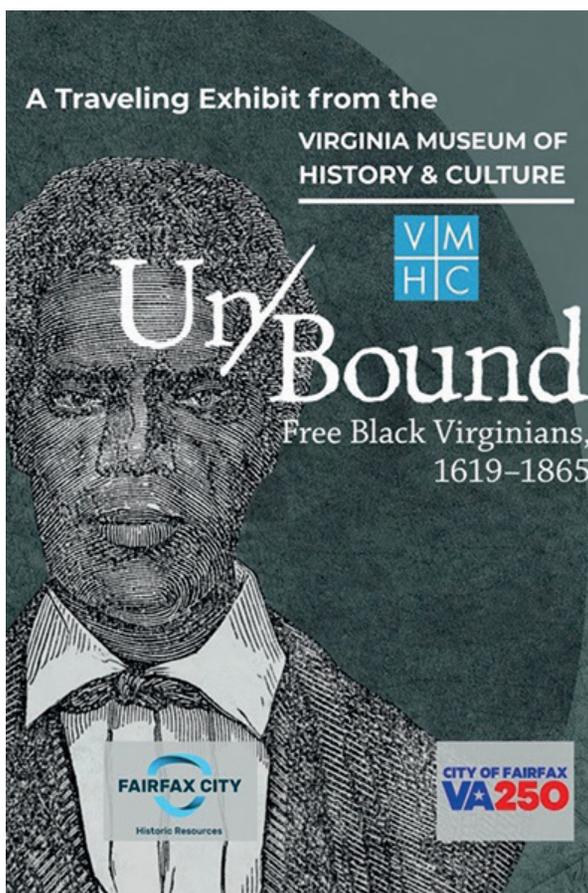
the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center in Pennsylvania. They also drew on the knowledge of local historians like Tom Evans and Ed Wenzel, uncovering stories and documents that had been overlooked for decades.

Their first major public project was the film *The Danger Between the Lines*, which depicted life along Hunter Mill Road during the Civil War. Building on that success, Jim Lewis spearheaded the creation of tour books and guided tours, using the team's research to bring history to life for residents and visitors.

The work didn't just educate—it left a lasting mark on the corridor itself. Revenue from the film and tour books funded eleven historic markers, making the road's rich past visible to anyone who drives it today.

"Hunter Mill Road is more than a scenic route," said Lewis. "It's a living history, and every field, house, and bend in the road has a story to tell."

Thanks to the decades of dedication from these volunteers, Hunter Mill Road stands as a model of local history preserved, celebrated, and shared.



Un/Bound Free Black Virginians, 1619-1865

This traveling exhibit from the Virginia Museum of History and Culture will be on display at the Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center from Jan. 28 - March 9. The museum's hours are 11 a.m. - 4 p.m., Wednesday - Monday, Closed Tuesdays.

Virginia Sees Significant Rise in Hate Crimes – A Growing Public Safety and Community Concern

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Hate-motivated violence in Virginia has risen sharply in recent years, contrasting with the stabilization or decline of many other crime categories. State data reveals an alarming increase in hate crimes—offenses based on bias against a victim's protected characteristics—raising significant concern among community leaders, law enforcement, and civil rights advocates.

According to the most recent Crime in Virginia report, hate crime incidents in the Commonwealth rose about 25.5% from 2023 to 2024 — marking the second con-

secutive year of increases. In 2024 there were 340 hate crime incidents involving 344 offenses and 377 individual victims, up significantly from the prior year.

This uptrend parallels earlier years of growth: hate crimes reported in 2023 represented nearly a 49% jump compared to 2022. Over the past decade, the broader pattern in Virginia has been upward: one local news analysis documented roughly a 176% increase in reported hate crimes over ten years, even as national totals slightly declined.

While most Virginia hate crimes are racially motivated, primarily tar-

geting Black or African Americans, the largest percentage increase has been in religion-based bias. Reported religious hate crimes doubled from 2023 to 2024, largely due to a spike in anti-Jewish incidents, which community leaders attribute partly to heightened global tensions like the Gaza conflict.

According to state statistics, the vast majority of hate crimes in Virginia involve assaults or vandalism rather than solely symbolic conduct. More than 90% of reported offenses were either physical assaults (simple or aggravated) or destruction/damage of property, including graffiti and bias-motivated harassment.



MENOKIN: The Glass House Project

Tuesday, February 3, 2026 6:00 PM

Learn about the most engaging preservation project in America! Menokin was the 1769 home of Francis Lightfoot Lee, a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

<https://www.fauquierhistory.org/walking-tours>

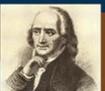
Fauquier Historical Society Annual Meeting
3 February 2026, 6:00 pm | 321 Walker Drive | Warrenton VA
Join us for a talk about

MENOKIN

1769 home of Francis Lightfoot Lee
signer of the Declaration of Independence

The Glass House Project
The Most Engaging Preservation Project in America
uses innovative display techniques to reveal the historic fabric of the ruin in its current state with missing portions of the original house to be replaced with architectural glass.

FREE
open to the public



Francis Lightfoot Lee



the ruin

the innovative restoration

Yards + Gardens = Yards

GUEST WRITER CONTRIBUTION BY CITY OF FAIRFAX COUNCIL MEMBER THOMAS D. "TOM" PETERSON

It's cold now, but not too soon to plan something special for our environment this Spring by going native!

Before modern settlement, our City was home to the Doeg tribe, an Algonquian-speaking people who cultivated food in a sustainable forest and farm system on the soils beneath our feet. Today, we can help restore the health of this natural system as we "green" our yards, gardens, porches, patios, and roofs – including plants that come for the winter.

For example, the "yardens" seen in many of our neighborhoods are a form of sustainable agriculture that is blended with lawns, of which we have no shortage (the combined acreage of lawns in the US exceeds our national wheat crop). Manicured lawns are seeded with nonnative grasses, so blending in healthy gardens, native flowers, and shrubs help restore past diversity. Home orchards also can be blended with gardens.

Native plants help pollinators, including bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds. Their hard work gives us food and beauty, but they are in decline from habitat loss and chemical pollution and need our help. My neighbor, an avid gardener who grew up on a farm, now pollinates his crops by hand to compensate for their loss. Even one native shrub or flower can make a difference.

The more homes that join, the more our modern landscape mimics the past and protects our future, so please consider jumping in. Many helpful community resources are available, including the City's Environmental Sustainability Committee.

3 Days of Instagram-Worthy Spring in DC, Maryland & Virginia

BY SAVI MAMGAIN

Our area bursts to life in the springtime with a vibrant mix of festivals, floral beauty, and cultural events. Spring is one of the best seasons to experience the nation's capital – thanks to mild temperatures, blooming flowers, and a calendar full of iconic celebrations. I put together a 3 day itinerary for you to enjoy.

From cherry blossoms to waterfalls and charming local streets, here's a 3-day route to make your feed pop approved by Chatbot!

Day 1: DC – Cherry Blossoms & Waterfront Vibes

- ▶ **Tidal Basin**
Morning glow + cherry blossoms = iconic shot. Don't forget the Jefferson Memorial in the background. Pink petals + water reflection = feed goals.
- ▶ **National Arboretum**
Bonsai trees, flowering gardens, and wide open spaces. Perfect for nature close-ups or serene selfie moments.
- ▶ **Smithsonian Museum**
Snap quirky exhibits, giant dinosaur skeletons, or astronaut suits for that nerd-chic aesthetic.
- ▶ **Fletcher's Cove**
Paddleboard or kayak with the Potomac as your backdrop. Shots of you gliding among spring blooms = major story content.



Image generated by Chatgpt

- ▶ **The Wharf**
Sunset reflections, outdoor cafes, colorful boats. Perfect for golden hour photos and cocktail shots.
- ▶ **Frying Pan Farm Park**
Farm animals + rustic barns = rustic-chic photography. Bonus points for baby animals.
- ▶ **Hidden Oaks Nature Center**
Forest trails, wildlife exhibits, and natural light peeking through the trees. Great for earthy, moody shots.
- ▶ **Burke Lake Park**
Lakeside picnic, boating, and nature trails. Pastel water reflections + golden hour = dreamy content.
- ▶ **Old Town Fairfax**
Colorful streets, boutique storefronts, and quaint cafés. Perfect for lifestyle shots with local charm.
- ▶ **Mosaic District**
Street art, outdoor concerts, and vibrant shopping spaces. Night lights + live music = fun, urban shots.
- ▶ **Optional: Great Falls Park (VA)**
Sunset from the cliffs or riverside. Epic landscape shot to close your 3-day adventure.

Day 2: Maryland – Gardens, Markets & Waterfalls

- ▶ **Brookside Gardens**
Flower-filled walkways, ponds, and bridges. Macro shots of blooms, pastel backgrounds, and picnic setups = dreamy.
- ▶ **Bethesda Farmers Market**
Fresh flowers, seasonal produce, and artisanal treats. Flat-lay shots of colorful baskets and pastries are a must.
- ▶ **Great Falls Park (MD)**
Dramatic waterfalls + rugged cliffs. Capture movement with slow-shutter waterfall shots or wide-angle epic landscapes.

Day 3: Virginia/Fairfax – Farms, Gardens & Local Charm

- ▶ **Meadowlark Botanical Gardens**
Flower-filled meadows, reflective lakes, and the Korean Bell Garden. Perfect for romantic spring vibes.

Hum Your Way to Calm (Yes, Even in the Shower)

BY TANIA HOSSAIN
REPUBLISHED FROM
BLOOMINGWELLNESS.BLOG

If someone told you the secret to feeling calmer, sleeping better, and lowering stress was something you learned before you could talk, you might roll your eyes. Surely it can't be that easy. But surprise—it is. The secret is humming.

Yes. Humming. The thing you do absentmindedly when you're happy, bored, or pretending you don't notice someone watching you.

Humming works because of a behind-the-scenes hero called the vagus nerve. This nerve runs from your brain down through your throat, vocal cords, heart, lungs, and gut. Think of it as your body's calm-down hotline. When the vagus nerve is stimulated, it tells your nervous system, "We're good. No danger. You can relax now."

When you hum, gentle vibrations ripple through your throat and chest, directly stimulating this nerve. Bonus: humming naturally slows your breathing and length-

ens your exhale—two things your body loves when it's trying to shift out of stress mode. The result? Less tension, a calmer heart rate, better digestion, improved mood, and sometimes even better sleep. Not bad for a sound you don't even need a melody for.

Now let's talk about the best place to hum: the shower.

Humming in the shower is not just okay—it's encouraged. The warm water relaxes your muscles, the steam opens your

breathing, and the echo makes you sound way better than you actually do. It's private. It's cozy. It's basically a spa treatment you already own. While the water runs, take a slow breath in, then hum gently on the exhale for a minute or two. Low and easy is perfect. No Beyoncé-level vocals required.

Not a hummer? Totally fine. Singing counts. Chanting "mmm" counts. Gargling water counts. Long dramatic sighs absolutely count. Even slow, audible breathing can help. The goal isn't per-

formance—it's sending your body the message that it's safe to stand down.

Wellness doesn't always have to be complicated, expensive, or Instagram-worthy. Sometimes it sounds a little silly and feels surprisingly good. So the next time life feels overwhelming, your thoughts are racing, or your shoulders are glued to your ears, try something simple.

Step into the shower. Take a breath. And hum.



Saturday, January 17, 2026 - The Inauguration of the 75th Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia, Her Excellency Abigail Spanberger: top left - Governor Glen Youngkin hands the key to the Governor's mansion to incoming Governor Spanberger; Governor Youngkin and Mrs. Youngkin attend the joint session of the General Assembly to swear in the 75th Governor; soon to be sworn in Spanberger passed Youngkin on the way to her seating area; just before the swearing in with the Honorable House Speaker Don Scott presiding; the Honorable Jay Jones taking oath of office as the Commonwealth's Attorney General; the Honorable Ghazala Hashmi taking oath of office as the Commonwealth's Lt. Governor; and last two bottom right images of the Honorable Abigail Spanberger taking oath of office as the 75th Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

David Poole: Reflections on Inauguration Eve

REPUBLICATED FROM HIS FACEBOOK POST DATED JANUARY 16, 2026

David Poole is the founder of the Virginia Public Access Project (VPAP) And author of *Trusted Source: How a Virginia Nonprofit Gained Bipartisan Support in an Era of Political Polarization*

On the eve of Spanberger's inauguration, I couldn't help notice today's Richmond Times-Dispatch mustered only 3 govt/political stories. (Two of those were features about a crafts market.)

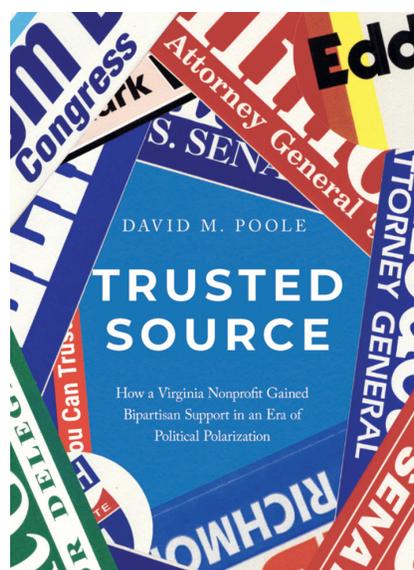
This pitiful output is a sad measure of how many newspapers -- their advertising business model destroyed by the internet -- exist today in name only.

Things are only going to get worse. We all will feel the recent retirement of political editor Andrew Cain, a witty, hard-work-

ing soul who labored punishingly long days overseeing the paper's bread-and-butter state government coverage. His byline became more frequent toward the end; with a decimated staff, Cain would roll up his sleeves and write the news himself.

I've been around long enough to remember when the RTD deployed a veritable army of reporters to cover the legislative session. They had the biggest presence in the capitol's cramped press room, located next door to Chicken's Snack Bar.

I've included an image from January



12, 2002 edition, published the day before Gov. Mark Warner was sworn in. The RTD had 9 articles written by 5 different reporters: Tyler Whitley (3), Pamela Stallsmith (2), Jeff E. Schapiro (2), Gary Robertson (1) and Michael Martz (1).

Schapiro retired last spring, taking an impressive collection of bow ties and deep

institutional memory with him. Martz is the final connection to the past, though you often won't bump into him in the corridors of power. Martz now resides in Maryland and does most of his reporting remotely.

The RTD coverage was never perfect. They tended to be a company town paper that I used to think focused too much on the play-by-play, seldom stepping back to look at the big picture.

(The big picture was left to the imperial Washington Post, which maintained a two-person bureau in Richmond that was supplemented by a third scribe during the legislative session. In the press corps there was a saying: 'It's not a story until the Post covers it.' Sadly, another recent retirement -- Laura Vozella, with her irrepressible curiosity -- has knocked the Post bureau down to a single reporter, Greg Schneider.)

My past criticism of the RTD now seems unfair and spoiled. What a better place Virginia would be today if a half-dozen RTD reporters (along with Bob Brown and his Nikon) were combing the halls of power!