

Be Independent

The Fairfax Independent

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Sign the Petition: Haveabite's Last Cry for Help

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Havabite Eatery, a cherished family-owned restaurant in Old Town Fairfax will be closing its doors at 10416 Main Street on March 31, 2025, after 47 years of serving the community. Havabite Eatery is a staple in the Old Town Fairfax, offering homemade Greek, Italian, and American cuisines.

We were able to talk to Ida, whose family owns Haveabite Eatery. Despite sticking it through 2 rent increases during the pandemic, the restaurant is closing simply because of the landlord's unwillingness to renew the lease. Ida does not know what the landlord is planning for that small have-a-bite of a space. They even reached out to Mayor Read and so far it appears that Ida's cry for help might become a broken heart on March 31.

"I learnt everything about business in that building. Everyone that came to eat became a friend. We saw weddings and funerals. That building means the world to me. And I feel like someone snatched my baby away from me," said Ida during our brief conversation. "We started from nothing and step-by-step, year-by-year, we have built a reputation, a faithful clientele, and an embedded place in the heart of this town. We've seen children grow into adults, families expand, and the city thrive. Old-Town Fairfax City isn't just our business location, it is our home," continued Ida as she became tearful and sadder.

Ida's heartbreak has been echoed across 100s of Facebook posts. "Yes I delivered pizzas in the iconic red delivery car as an FHS senior. My daughter Mary Walton was also a server there. Literally hundreds of Fairfax kids grew up sitting on

“
I learnt everything about business in that building. Everyone that came to eat became a friend. We saw weddings and funerals. That building means the world to me. And I feel like someone snatched my baby away from me.
”
IDA

--those stools eating Greek gyros and souvlaki," Chap Petersen posted on Facebook.

Their petition states - The reality we face now is threatening our existence in this beloved town. The intrinsic value we bear in the fabric of Fairfax City transcends profits and losses. We – just like so many small businesses – are a representation of the American Dream, the spirit of entrepreneurship, and the backbone of our economy. Therefore, we are turning to you, the community that has known and grown with us. We are asking for your support in making voices heard that we wish to remain in Old-Town Fairfax City. Together, we can weave a narrative of economic



Picture by Chap Petersen

sustainability, shared history, and communal growth.

Haveabite's change.org petition to Mayor Read has gathered over 600 signatures in less than three weeks. Along with their heartfelt plea to stay open in the current location, they are asking the Mayor to retain the character, stability, and heritage of Fairfax City.

Ida handed the phone to her son Saeid, owner of Mazadar, located at 11725 Lee Hwy, Fairfax - near the Fairfax County Government Center. Saeid mentioned that the two restaurants will be operating from the same location until Haveabite can

go back to their old home or find a new home in the City. I asked if they would still have my favorite avgolemono soup on the menu. Saeid said come by to grab some soup! We will continue with Haveabite's story in the next edition of The Fairfax Independent. In the meantime, please visit Mazadar because Haveabite is on the menu!

The link to Haveabite's petition to preserve the heritage and stability of Old Town Fairfax City and keep local businesses is available on the following change.org website at <https://www.change.org/p/preserve-the-heritage-and-stability-of-old-town-fairfax-city-keep-our-local-business>

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GMU Women's Basketball Champs!



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Letter from the Editor: Growing Together

Dear Readers and Friends,

Inspired by the 2025 World Happiness Report, I'm excited to share my vision of growth, community, and impactful storytelling with you. Every newspaper is more than just printed pages; it's a living entity fueled by the voices and stories of its community. Today, I invite you to play a larger role in our journey through your generous support as a Friend of The Independent News Press - <https://theindependentnewspress.com/> friend.

Our publication thrives on the passion of our editorial writers and the financial contributions of those who believe in independent journalism. To expand our reach, improve coverage, and bring you more local stories, we need your help. Your donations will enable us to invest in community jour-

nalism, cover important stories, and provide a platform for diverse voices to spark new conversations in our community.

As we grow our newest City newspaper, I value your feedback, from grammar and writing suggestions to shared stories about local events, business closures, and personal triumphs and challenges. I want to hear it all, but I often run out of time. So, instead of a Finnish-style sauna gathering, let's connect over a weekly brown bag lunch or a shuffle dance session! Let me know.

Beyond financial contributions, we encourage you—our loyal readers—to spread the word. Share our stories, invite others to join our readership, and become our friend. A newspaper's strength lies in its community, and together, we can continue to inform, engage, and inspire one another.

Thank you to the Petersen Family for the seed money to start our beloved newspaper and the free office space; to Angie Tran and Lizna Islam for their help in creating our beautiful newspaper and websites as they move on to bigger projects; and to our advertisers for their ongoing support.

There is something very special about ink on paper - cannot be deleted - true independence is owning your ink. Together, we can build something truly remarkable. Your involvement with my beloved newspaper will make a difference. Let's Grow Together.

PS. If you know a grant writer for non-profit media, please connect us!

Best regards, Tania

Email: info@theindependentnewspress.com
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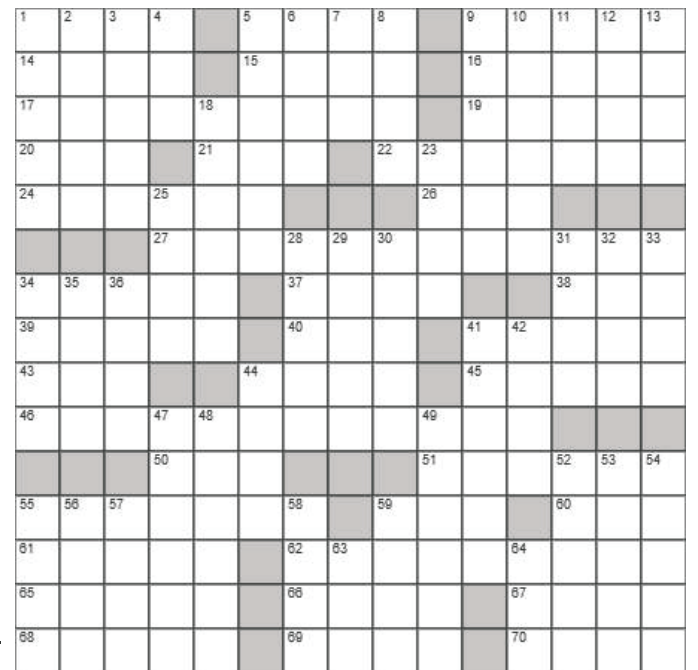
BestCrosswords.com. "Flowery Speech" by Steve Faiella on 3/15/2025

Across

1- What you may be thinking every 5th weekday:Abbr; 5- Twist, as polling results; 9- Cuts' protectors; 14- The "A" in A.D.; 15- Roughly; 16- Chef's hat; 17- "Rubbish!"; 19- Maltreatment; 20- New Zealand bird; 21- Dog breeders' org.; 22- Motorized two-wheelers notably used in "Paul Blart:Mall Cop"; 24- Enter again, as data; 26- Author Harper ____; 27- Region between Mars and Jupiter; 34- Myanmar's former name; 37- Granny; 38- Aunt in Madrid; 39- "____ be dreaming!"; 40- Sixteenths of lbs.; 41- Time divisions; 43- "The Lord of the Rings" tree being; 44- On the calmer side of the boat; 45- Give the slip; 46- Modern (or ancient) language instructor; 50- Agent Gold of HBO's "Entourage"; 51- Show ocular interest; 55- Doesn't sit still; 59- Building blaster, for short; 60- Foul up; 61- High-speed Amtrak service; 62- Composition of a delicate doily from The Emerald Isle; 65- Broken, as a bronc; 66- Ripsnorter, or a one named British pop singer; 67- Change for a \$5 bill; 68- Children's book author Blyton and "National Velvet" author Bagnold; 69- Castle stronghold; 70- Begins to blossom;

Down

1- Come to a point; 2- Lawn dwarf; 3- Add computer data; 4- Fashion-obsessed gent; 5- Light bulb's place; 6- McDonald's founder Ray; 7- PC key for getting out of trouble; 8- Stir-fry pans; 9- Presented, as a play; 10- Spider's abandoned creation; 11- Hue close to turquoise; 12- Like bees or beavers; 13- Realizes; 18- Tries to scare off as a Yorkie would; 23- Film director Kazan; 25- Sweet potatoes' cousins; 28- W.W. II bomber ____ Gay; 29- Tears to the ground; 30- Beginning; 31- Mount in Sicily; 32- Committed perjury; 33- "Don't ____ me, bro"; 34- Oktoberfest order, in Hamburg; 35- "I seriously doubt that"; 36- Monotonous routines; 41- Highest point; 42- Baking site; 44- Have a go ____ (try); 47- Holed out in two under par; 48- Grooves of tires; 49- Admits, with "to"; 52- Reeves of 'The Matrix'; 53- Curved like a rainbow; 54- Rapunzel feature; 55- It has a fickle finger; 56- "Not if ____ help it!"; 57- Actress Moore of "Ghost"; 58- Shimmery fabric; 59- Bathroom flooring; 63- McClanahan of "The Golden Girls"; 64- High shot in tennis;



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Governor's pardon of Tyson's shooter

BY CAROLINE CHU

On Feb. 22 2023, police sergeant Wesley Shifflett shot and killed Timothy McCree Johnson in an incident that has since sparked extensive controversy and debate around the use of deadly force by law enforcement. Johnson had reportedly fled after being caught shoplifting two pairs of sunglasses from the Nordstrom inside Tysons Corner Center. Police confronted him in a poorly-lit wooded area following a short foot pursuit. After issuing two commands to get on the ground, Shifflett fired two rounds at Johnson, striking him in the chest. He was pronounced dead 44 minutes later at Fairfax Hospital.

During his testimony last fall, Shifflett affirmed that he had reason to believe that Johnson, unarmed, was about to produce a firearm from his waistband. The sergeant cited suspicious move-

ments, such as the repeated "back-and-forth motion" Johnson made with his right hand, as the reason behind his decision to fire.

During the trial, prosecutors reiterated that Shifflett acted _____, claiming that he "handled a firearm in a manner so gross, wanton, and culpable as to show a reckless disregard for human life." Among the variety of arguments presented to the court, the defense maintained that Shifflett used deadly force in fear of his life and acted in accordance with the training, expectations, and duties of a police officer.

On Oct. 4 2024, the grand jury acquitted Shifflett of involuntary manslaughter and convicted him of reckless handling of a firearm. At his sentencing hearing on Feb. 28 2025, Circuit Court Judge Randy Bellows delivered a sentence of 3 years in prison and 5 years of probation.

“
Why did you shoot me? I didn't have anything.
”
TIMOTHY MCCREE JOHNSON

Days after the sentence was issued, Shifflett was granted clemency by Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin. In a statement, Youngkin emphasized his belief that the court's decision is "unjust and violates the cornerstone of our justice system." "Sgt. Shifflett has no prior criminal record, and was, by all accounts, an exemplary police

officer," Youngkin said. "It is in the interest of justice that he be released immediately."

Johnson, 37, is survived by his mother, Melissa Johnson, a primary advocate for Timothy's justice. At a news conference, she stated that the Governor's decision to commute Shifflett's sentence triggered painful memories of losing her son. "It felt like I could hear my son's voice crying out from the dirt at Tysons Corner mall again, saying, 'Why did you shoot me? I didn't have anything,'" she said.

Fairfax County Commonwealth's attorney Steve Descano similarly expressed his outrage at the Governor's involvement in the case. "For political reasons, Glen Youngkin stuck his face in where it didn't belong," Descano said. "If you care about having a fair justice system of Virginia that's untainted by outside influence, Glenn Youngkin just spit in your face."

Virginia Colleges Dismantle DEI Programs Amid Political Pressure

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

In recent months, we have been reading in the media from AP News to Axios, about several Virginia colleges and universities that have begun dismantling their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs in response to political pressures and potential federal funding implications. This trend aligns with broader national movements influenced by directives from the Trump administration and state-level leadership.

University of Virginia (UVA): UVA's Board of Visitors voted to close its DEI office following President Trump's executive order targeting such initiatives. This decision has sparked debates among stakeholders, with some viewing it as a return to merit-based policies, while others see it as a setback for civil rights advancements.

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) and George Mason University (GMU): Both universities had initially planned to implement DEI-related course requirements for undergraduates. However, after scrutiny from Governor Glenn Youngkin's administration, these plans were abandoned. VCU's Board of Visitors voted to drop the requirement, and GMU faced similar pressures leading to the cessation of their DEI course mandates.



Virginia Tech: Virginia Tech's Board of Visitors approved a resolution to dissolve the university's "Office for Inclusive Strategy and Excellence." This move prompted significant protests on campus, reflecting the contentious nature of the decision. University spokesperson Mark Owczarski emphasized the institution's commitment to creating a welcoming environment despite structural changes.

Virginia Community College System (VCCS): The VCCS Board voted to revise its strategic plan by removing language related to DEI. This decision aims to align with re-

cent federal guidance on discrimination and merit-based opportunities, ensuring continued federal funding.

Virginia Military Institute (VMI): In a notable leadership change, VMI's Board of Visitors voted against extending the contract of Superintendent Cedric T. Wins, the institute's first Black superintendent. Wins attributed his ouster to political motivations tied to his diversity efforts, including the removal of a Confederate statue and the introduction of inclusive programs (Olivia Diaz and Ben Finley, March 1, 2025, AP News).

The dismantling of DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) programs at Virginia colleges could have several significant implications for student applications and enrollment. We tried to present pros and cons breakdown of how these changes might affect the higher education landscape:

1. Potential Shift in Applicant Pool:
Decrease in Applicants from Diverse Backgrounds: Students who value a commitment to diversity and inclusion may view these moves as a signal that the institution is less supportive of such efforts. This could lead to a decline in applications from underrepresented minority groups, who might feel less welcome at institutions that remove DEI initiatives.

Increase in Applicants Seeking Merit-based Systems: On the other hand, students who prioritize merit-based admissions over diversity-related policies may see the dismantling of DEI programs as a positive step and might be more inclined to apply to these schools.

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Pathway Homes Buys Fairfax City Building to Serve as Nonprofit's Multi-Use HQ

On January 14, 2025, Pathway Homes, a regional nonprofit providing mental health services—starting with safe, stable housing—to individuals marginalized by poverty and inequity, announced that it will be moving into a 19,000 square foot building located at 4010 University Drive in Fairfax City. The commercial space will be built out by early 2027 as Pathway's new mixed-use headquarters that will include at least 10 units of supportive housing to help people with serious mental illnesses and other disabilities who are over 50 to age in place.

We got on a brief phone call with Pathway Homes CEO Sylisa Lambert-Woodard to catch the excitement! "Pathway Homes needed a new home and we found our new home in Fairfax City thanks to Mayor Catherine Read's tireless efforts and the generous seed money from the Potomac Health Foundation. We plan to make it one that serves our community even better. It will give us the space to run the nonprofit while also providing direct services and housing to clients," explained Lambert-Woodard. "We are excited to transform a commercial property into an innovative, multi-use facility that will help us address the affordable housing crunch that hinders our ability to serve more people."

Pathway envisions that the embedded housing will be permanent supportive housing units with access to WIFI and other smart features for the region's most vulnerable—those with income 30% or below the Area Median Income. The ADA accessible, one-bedroom units will embrace universal design—which creates spaces to suit all abilities—and feature a private kitchen and living area along with effective resident services to promote resident independence.

Currently, Pathway Homes leases,



Pictured Sylisa Lambert-Woodard, Mayor Read Council Member Amos - photo courtesy of Pathway Homes.

owns, and manages more than 500 properties across Northern Virginia that provide supportive services using the Housing First Model. Pathway Homes' supportive services focus on helping individuals attain and strengthen the skills needed to manage their mental and physical health and remain stably housed. Its highly skilled team provides the coordinated care and intensive treatment participants need to maintain their home, enhance personal relationships, develop healthy life habits, and achieve their personal goals.

In addition, Lambert-Woodard shared that they will have a mobile vehicle (whose name will be shared in the future, maybe as a picture) that can serve unhoused individuals where they are. This vehicle will carry showers, laundry and nursing care along with many more needed services. "Our new building will be the hub that enables us to be even more creative and collaborative in finding solutions to help people live their best lives. We look forward to more funders joining us in making this a successful endeavor for Fairfax" Lambert-Woodard added.

For more than 45 years, Pathway Homes has enabled tens of thousands of people in the National Capital Region with serious mental illnesses and other co-occurring disabilities to access affordable housing and critical supportive services to help them recover their lives. Following the Housing First model, Pathway Homes is a partner in preventing and ending homelessness, touching nearly 2,000 lives in 2024 and ensuring access to affordable stable homes in permanent supportive housing units. For more information, to donate or volunteer, please visit Pathway Homes website at <https://www.pathwayhomes.org>.

VIRGINIA COLLEGES...

From Page 4

2. Impact on Campus Culture:

Potential Decrease in Campus Diversity: As DEI programs play a critical role in fostering an inclusive campus environment, their removal could reduce diversity initiatives such as recruitment, mentoring, and support for underrepresented students. This could result in a less diverse student body, which might affect campus

culture and the educational experience for everyone.

Challenges to Retention: Students from marginalized groups who initially enrolled at these schools with the expectation of receiving support through DEI programs may feel alienated or unsupported. This could affect retention rates, especially for first-generation students or students of color, who may rely on these programs for academic and social support.

3. Recruitment and Financial Aid: Changes in Institutional Financial

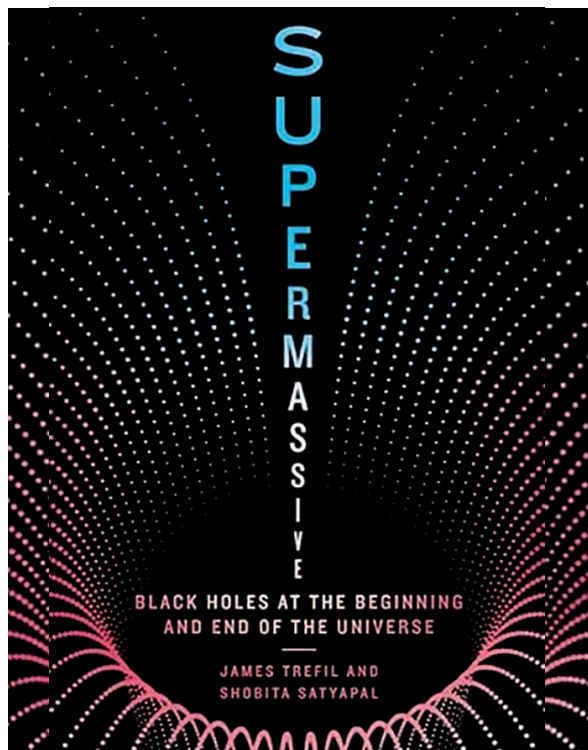
Aid and Scholarships: Some DEI initiatives are linked to scholarships and financial aid programs that help students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The removal of such programs could potentially affect the ability of schools to attract and retain low-income and minority students, leading to a smaller applicant pool from these communities.

Effect on Institutional Reputation: Institutions that dismantle DEI programs might face negative publicity, which could influence how prospective students view the school. This might discourage students who place a high value on social justice and

diversity from applying, potentially reducing the appeal of these schools in the competitive higher education market.

As Class of 2026 gets ready to send out college applications soon, the dismantling of DEI programs could cause a ripple effect in application and enrollment numbers, with potential declines in diversity at some schools and shifts in the types of students who are attracted to these institutions. The full impact will depend on how these changes are perceived both within the student body and in the broader public. We can only hope for the best.

Supermassive: Black Holes at the Beginning and End of the Universe



BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Black holes, demystified: follow along the quest to understand the history and influence of one of space science's most fascinating and confounding phenomena. Published on March 4, 2025, by Smithsonian Books, this 256-page volume is a comprehensive resource for space enthusiasts and those intrigued by the cosmos' profound phenomena.

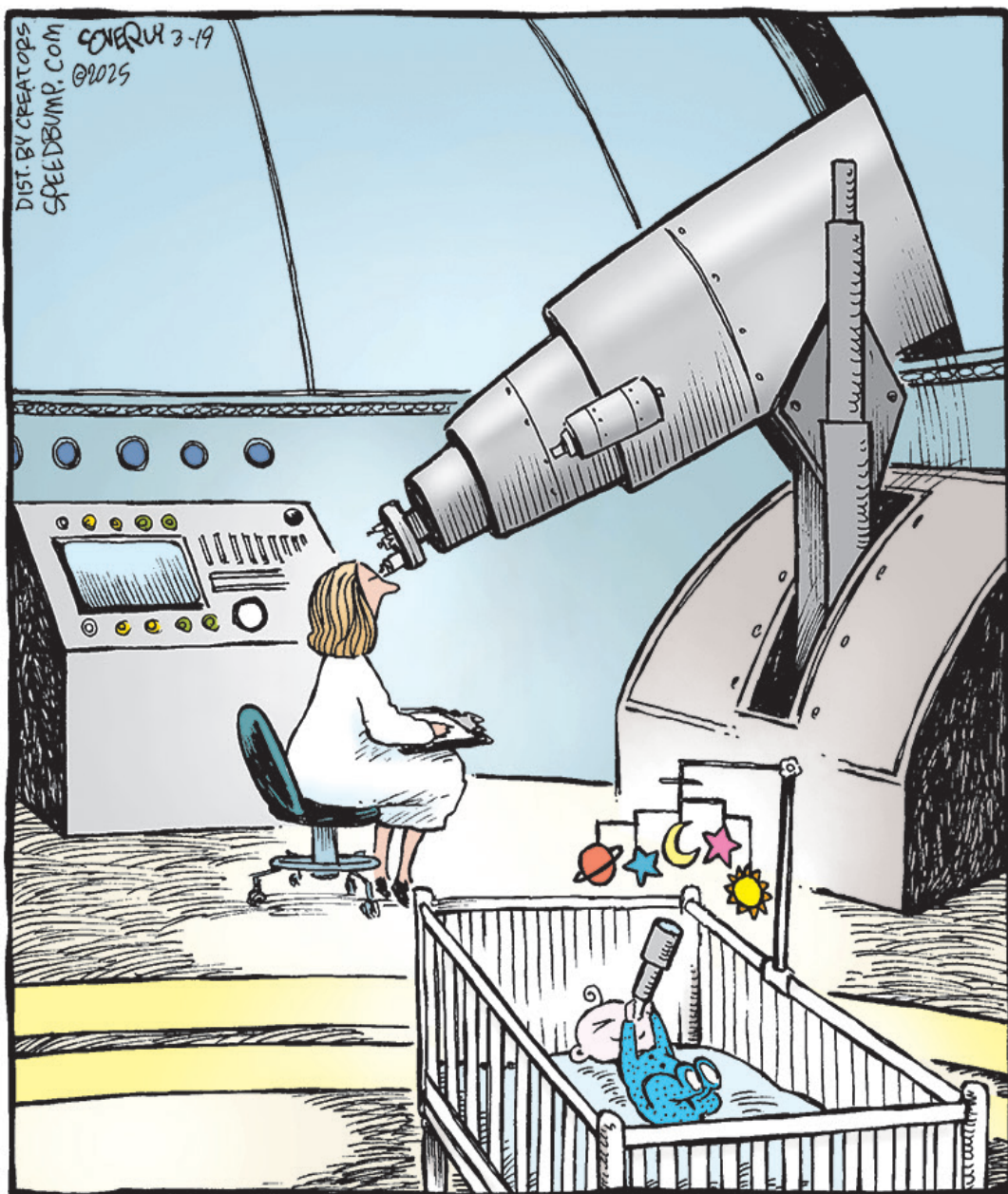
Physicist James Trefil and astrophysicist Shobita Satyapal, both professors at George Mason University. The book illuminates the science and theories behind the many types of black holes—their birth and death, their visibility, the “cosmic hum” generated by their collision, and so much more, with a particular focus on the supermassive black holes found at the heart of almost every massive galaxy.

The authors adeptly guide readers through the evolution of black hole research, highlighting pivotal moments such as the first successful black hole detection and the groundbreaking 2019 unveiling of a supermassive black hole's image. As I read through the pages, I could not help feeling like I was in an Indiana Jones movie weaving and bobbing from a math and science classroom to bouncing in jalopy driving over rugged volcanic terrains while gripping a camera.

We chatted with author Shonita Satyapal over the phone about her desire to write this book. “I have always been fascinated by the deepness of the sky. I wrote this book because I wanted everyone to know about the black hole discoveries and for girls to know that their space in science has endless possibilities.” It was easy to get lost in space during our con-

versation and we will share a more independent interview with her in the future.

Author James Trefil is a professor of physics at George Mason University. He has written more than 50 books about science for the general audience and has served as Contributing Editor for Science for USA TODAY Weekend and as a regular contributor and science consultant for Smithsonian and Astronomy magazines. Author Shonita Satyapal is Professor of Physics and Astronomy at George Mason University. She received the NASA Presidential Early Career Award for her work on infrared spectroscopy and instrumentation. Her research centers on understanding the connection between the growth and evolution of supermassive black holes and the host galaxies in which they reside.



Rebel by Chap Petersen is now available at The Virginia Shop located on the ground floor of The Library of Virginia in Richmond.

#1 New Release in Political Leadership on Amazon.

“Most politicians are cowards. They pander to the voter fears and stereotype their opponents to make sure they remain popular with the “right people” – those that control their party nominations.”



Rebel by Chap Petersen Available on Amazon



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New Business Opening Ribbon Cutting

BY CAROLINE CHU

Romp n' Roll

Romp n' Roll, a kids gym and enrichment center, celebrated its grand opening and ribbon cutting this past January at Fairfax City Mall, 9600 B Main Street.

At Romp n' Roll, we offer a wide variety of enrichment classes designed to keep your child engaged and thriving. From gym classes that build strength and coordination to art, music, cooking, science, dance, and sports, every session is crafted to spark creativity, curiosity, and confidence. With our playful, clean facilities and warm, highly trained instructors, we create an inviting space where kids can explore their world and parents can feel part of a welcoming community.

For over 20 years, families have trusted Romp n' Roll as the go-to destination for

mommy and me classes, toddler activities, and preschool fun. Whether you're looking for a single visit to see what we're all about, or a membership with flexible, month-to-month plans, we make it easy for your family to join the adventure.

Bond Vet

Opened in January at 9428 Fairfax Blvd., Bond Vet offers a range of veterinary services for pets in the DMV area. We're on a mission to strengthen the human-animal bond through better pet care, and we started with a new approach: urgent care.

Because much like humans, pets often show symptoms for which an ER visit is not necessary, but a primary care clinic may not be able to make time for. We felt there should be a comforting, transparent, and thorough place for pet parents to get answers, quickly.

Since we opened in June 2019 in Cobble Hill, Brooklyn, we've treated tens of thousands of cats and dogs. And as we've grown, we've expanded our services into those of a full-service veterinary clinic, offering our trademark urgent care, as well as routine care, like wellness exams, vaccines and spay/neuter, as well as surgeries, dental cleanings, and international health certificates.

Twoburritos

Twoburritos held a ribbon cutting ceremony in February at its new location. Situated at 4290 Chain Bridge Road, the restaurant serves hearty Mexican cuisine.

Welcome to Twoburritos, where the vibrant flavors of Mexico come alive on your plate! Nestled in the heart of Fairfax, VA, we're more than just a taco joint—we're a celebration of Mexico's rich culinary traditions. Inspired by the bustling taquerías and vibrant street markets of Mexico, our mission is to bring the authentic taste of Mexican street food to your table. Every taco we serve is crafted with passion, using fresh, locally-sourced ingredients and traditional cooking methods passed down through generations.

Join us for a culinary journey that's as exciting as it is delicious. Come for the tacos, stay for the experience—because at Twoburritos, we're not just serving food, we're sharing a piece of Mexico with every meal.

Z!Eats

The Z!Eats grand opening took place in February at 9414 Fairfax Blvd. Z!Eats offers a diverse menu of soups, salads, bowls, and more.

We weren't born with a silver spoon in our mouth. It started in 1997 with two spice merchants who shared a love for soul-soothing soup. They believed that soup should be celebrated – and that clean, nutritious ingredients should be the norm. They called it Zoup! Today, we are Z!Eats.

We work hard to be better than “good enough” and we mix that passion into our clean ingredients nourishes the mind, spirit and body. At Z!Eats we love to create delicious better-for-you options that keeps your body flowing. We offer a variety of menu options to mix and match our that can zatisfy your creativity.

We hold ourselves to a high standard and we're never content until our guests are zatisfied in every way. Our menu is as diverse and evolving as your palate. We want you to be happy and inspired. We want you to feel welcome and then some. In other words, you can always count on us for everything you need to be zatisfied.

Merle Norman Cosmetics

Merle Norman Cosmetics, a cosmetics studio that offers cosmetics, skincare products, and beauty services, hosted their grand opening and ribbon cutting this past February.

Since 1931, Merle Norman Cosmetics has defined prestige skin care and cosmetics. The award-winning brand is celebrated by millions of women across multiple generations as a solution-driven beauty industry staple. As an advocate of female entrepreneurship, Merle Nethercutt Norman created franchise opportunities in the 1930's. Today, independently owned “Studio” franchises continue to set the standard of excellence in communities for go-to, results-driven beauty products and expertise.

Founder Merle Nethercutt Norman believed every woman should define her own version of beautiful. We subscribe to this belief. As a small business, we are dedicated to helping every customer find their perfect color, formula or problem-solving product.

South Block

In March, South Block's ribbon cutting occurred at their location on 9672 Main Street. South Block is known for their hand-crafted smoothies, juice, and acai bowls.

South Block's journey began with a mission to unite the local community through good vibes and awesome food. The founder, Amir, grew up in McLean, VA, where his parents owned local video stores, fostering his deep appreciation for community connections.

After noticing a lack of fresh juice and smoothie options in the DMV, Amir opened his first juice bar, Campus Fresh, in 2006 at George Washington University. Over five years, he honed his craft, built meaningful connections, and supported the GWU community through student fundraisers.

In 2011, Amir launched the first South Block in Clarendon, VA, on the “South Block” side of town—a modest 700-square-foot space. Guided by the belief that small acts of kindness could create significant impacts, Amir and his team immersed themselves in the community, supporting local businesses and schools.

Fish Window Cleaning

A Fairfax franchise of the company Fish Window Cleaning opened this past March at 11200 Main Street, Suite C3. In addition to their expertise in cleaning windows, Fish Window Cleaning offers a variety of additional cleaning services.

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 Gainesville, VA 20155
 (703) 929-2296

A Path Forward for the Snyder Trail

BY JUDY FRASER

In 2017 when the grant was awarded, staff confidently told the Council that it would be completed in 3 to 4 years. It has already taken twice that long, and it is not even out to bid.

One thing we can all agree on is that this project is taking a long time. It will take at least two or three more years to bid and build. The reason it has taken so long is primarily because we have a small staff with a lot of irons in the fire. The transportation staff keeps busy, and frankly they are probably working on projects that are higher priority. The city's slow rollout turned out to have a silver lining because it took three years for citizens to get wind of the project. Once they did, they quickly realized that it was too destructive, without any minimal offsetting benefit, and that plans needed to be reconsidered. If Council had listened to the residents back in 2020 at the one and only public hearing and taken a serious second look at that time, we would likely have a different but viable project under construction today. So when the mayor and staff proclaim that any more delays would only "tie up the money for another two years, essentially" with "still no assurance with a project that can move forward" really the city has only itself to blame.

The good news is that with a new Council getting its bearings there is hope on the horizon for some common sense and transparency in the Snyder Trail deliberations. The work session on March 11, 2025, was the first time that all six Council members participated in an earnest discussion of the pros and cons of this project and displayed a steadfast, earnest and serious intention to do their best for the city. In contrast, the previous Council included three members who would simply not countenance any modifications to this project. So it is a big deal that we have a full bench of Council members who are open to discussing alternatives. At the same time, we have also learned that VDOT is also open to options. In fact, it has come to light that two years ago VDOT staff suggested some alternatives for the trail to staff that would be less destructive! Not only is VDOT willing to consider alternatives, but they also suggested some. This was not communicated to previous Council members.

At the March 11 work session, with support from his colleagues, Council member Peterson broke through the wall of resistance and was able to cobble together a path forward. Council member Hall stressed



the need for more information and less fear mongering. She's right, the threats have been like storm clouds gathering over this project during Read's reign as mayor. Those clouds will dissipate once dialogue can begin in earnest with the entities involved. Either the so-called threats (e.g. damage to the city's reputation, millions of dollars of indebtedness, angry "regional partners", groups of activists ready to throw wrenches at every project) will be revealed to have little substance and can be put to rest or minimized.

Council members Peterson, Hall, McQuillen and Amos set the example -they asked questions and then asked follow ups, and we watched a real dialogue begin to take place.

The ultimate reason this project is collapsing is because there was not enough public engagement early on. Given that most of the community still doesn't know about the project more than eight years later, it is pretty clear there has not been nearly enough public outreach. Mayor Read even noted that her neighbors had never heard of the Snyder Trail. And they live next door to the mayor! Part of the reason that public outreach was so limited is that staff knew that wider outreach would spark greater controversy. This is a community that has repeatedly voiced support for protecting our remaining woodlands. And maybe, deep down, staff knows it's a bad idea to plow

through intact habitats and stream buffers for a six minute bike ride. Yet the mayor and staff are still pushing a process that is basically, 'you all decide what you want to do, and then we will inform the community'. But every single Council member asked for more information before committing to a course of action. The mayor and city manager instead pressed Council members to take a position. The mayor demanded, "Do you want a resolution to cancel it or a resolution to pursue half of it?" Council member Amos diplomatically pushed back, stating that a decision did not need to be made that night. To put it more bluntly, the Council needs time and information to provide the guidance to the staff so that appropriate options can be identified. Then the city needs to come to the community with options BEFORE Council makes any decisions on the project's disposition.

This process has also resulted in some very good things:

We are making progress adding, improving and widening sidewalks and installing bike lanes throughout the city. We may find we can make Fairfax Boulevard safer for bicyclists and people sooner than later.

We have reinvigorated support for protecting natural spaces from bulldozers. We should proceed apace to protect these places from future errors of judgement.

We are learning about what good pub-

lic engagement takes, and how important it is. And we are experiencing the truth behind the proverb, "If you want to run fast, run alone, if you want to run far, run together."

Our new leadership is willing to speak frankly and to listen to citizens.

Overall, all of us can consider ourselves fortunate that this project has finally encountered a Council that will take it in hand and either mold it into something the community will support or fearlessly take the steps necessary to move on.

NEW BUSINESS... From Page 7

Fish Window Cleaning has grown to be the world's largest window cleaning company with more than 270 franchise territories in 45 states, yet we still maintain the traditional values we were founded on. We will always treat every customer as though they are our only customer.

Mike Merrick founded Fish Window Cleaning in January 1978. Based on growing demand and his success, Mike realized there was a need for this service in other markets. He used his 20 years of experience to create the Fish Window Cleaning franchise system. In 1998, the first FISH franchise opened in Tampa, FL.

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Resources: Federal Employees and Others Impacted by Downsizing

Area governments are responding to significant alterations to the federal workforce, offering resources to constituents impacted by these changes. The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments is supporting these efforts by sharing data, information, and by connecting public, private, and non-profits leading this work in metropolitan Washington. Please visit their website at <https://www.mwcog.org/community/data-and-tools/federal-workforce-resources-and-data/>

Find opportunities in Virginia.

Click on a region to learn more.

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Valley / Piedmont



No, Being a Jerk is Not a Basis for Deportation

OP-ED BY CHAP PETERSEN
REPUBLICATED FROM
THEVIRGINIAATTORNEY.COM

John Adams gets a lot of love from American historians. Maybe too much love, as his administration in 1798 enacted the notorious "Alien and Sedition Acts," which was the first (but not last) Federal law that criminalized political dissent. The law was quickly repealed by Thomas Jefferson (a much better President), but it set an early marker in American history: people in power will seek to suppress hostile voices.

Today's America is much different. We have a President who is vocally opposed by the legacy media, whether he's proposing

good ideas (eliminating wasteful Federal spending) or bad ideas (waging gratuitous trade wars with U.S. allies). Nobody is threatening these media voices with criminal prosecution; indeed, being anti-Trump is the default position of nearly every DC metro institution.

Instead, the targets are a more vulnerable population: students and others who are non-citizens and represent unpopular causes.

Before we get too far, let me lay down some obvious markers: first, most American colleges and universities have a very poor record on free speech, having succumbed years ago to a "woke" agenda

which is the antithesis of the First Amendment; second, the anti-American opinions and antics of the protestors in question do not inspire sympathy and raise the obvious question of why such people choose to live in the USA.

Having said that, the decision by the Trump administration to deport Mahmoud Khalil, a permanent resident and ringleader in the Columbia University protests last spring, is a bad decision. Those protests, while exposing the incompetency of the University leadership, did not pose a threat to "U.S. national security." Nor did they compromise our foreign policy. They were, at worst, performative and irritating – but not criminal.

The revocation of a permanent residency based solely on a political opinion conflicts with the letter and spirit of the First Amendment, which states that "Congress shall make no law restricting freedom of speech."

It is important for independent voices to stand the ground here for the First Amendment, even in this instance of "unpopular" speech. (And, yes, there is an irony in letting critics of our nation enjoy its unique constitutional protections).

Committing crimes is a basis for deportation. But expressing opinions should not be.

The Heart Leaf Center: 3rd Annual Golf Tournament on June 9, 2025

Heart Leaf Center Press Release

Golfers to Compete in 3rd Annual Golf Tournament at Chantilly National Golf and Country Club presented by The Heart Leaf Center in Support of Children's Mental Health.

The Heart Leaf Center is proud to announce its 3rd annual Golf Tournament, set to take place on June 9, 2025, at the prestigious Chantilly National Country Club in Centreville, Virginia. This year's event promises an exciting day of golf, networking, and philanthropy, bringing together golf and community to support The Heart Leaf Center.

Registration is NOW OPEN at <https://givebutter.com/1CvX11>



About The Heart Leaf Center

Founded in 2021, The Heart Leaf Center provides high-quality play therapy

mental health services for underserved children and families through low-cost counseling. For more information about

The Heart Leaf Center, visit <https://the-heartleafcenter.org>. The demand for services far exceed the funding we have available.

Early Bird Pricing through April 30, 2025, is \$150 per player and \$500 for a foursome. After April 30, 2025, the cost is \$175 per player and \$600 for a foursome.

Each ticket includes greens and cart fees, breakfast, lunch and a ticket to the post event reception.

We hope to see the community come together to support a great cause while enjoying an amazing day of golf.

Northern VA Real Estate Update: Steady and Promising Despite Uncertainty

BY ZINTA RODGERS-RICKERT (ZINTA & BOB),
RED TRUCK REALTY GROUP

There's been a lot of chatter about the Northern Virginia real estate market, but much of it is noise rather than reality. The truth is, our market remains strong, with opportunities for both buyers and sellers.

Seasonal Inventory Trends

Inventory levels have seen a slight increase, but this is a normal seasonal shift—not a cause for concern. Every year, as we move past Valentine's Day, more homes hit the market. Sellers take advantage of the spring season, giving buyers more choices. Well-priced and well-presented homes continue to attract attention and often receive offers within days.

Impact of Potential Government Layoffs

There's been speculation that government layoffs could negatively impact the market. However, most homeowners are unlikely to sell immediately after a job loss, as finding new employment often takes priority over moving. Many will choose to stay put, keeping inventory tight. Plus, not all affected workers are homeowners, further minimizing the market impact.

Spring Market Outlook

The spring market is already showing signs of strength. Open houses are busy, and homes that are priced right and in good condition are moving quickly. That said, the market remains price-sensitive—overpriced homes tend to linger and may require adjustments. Sellers should remain realistic with their pricing strategies.

Mortgage Rates and Buyer Confidence

Mortgage rates have been trending down for five consecutive weeks, which could bring more buyers into the market and boost demand. However, economic uncertainty remains a factor.



Market Performance and Buyer Behavior

On some homes, buyers have more time to make decisions as the median days on market rose to 19 in February, up from 16 last year—but still well below the 45-day pre-pandemic average. Home prices are holding steady; however some buyers are finding opportunities for seller assistance and home inspections are on the comeback.

Looking Ahead

Despite affordability challenges and tight inventory, the market is showing resilience. As rates continue to fluctuate, buyers may need to act quickly when they dip. If you're considering buying or selling this spring, now is a promising time to make a move.

If you have questions about the market or want to explore your home's value, I'm here to help. Give me a call at (703) 304-1150 or send me an email to zinta@zinta.com



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What is Earth Day? Our Power, Our Planet

BY CAROLINE CHU

Every year on April 22nd, Earth Day is celebrated with the kickoff of thousands of green programs, activities, and community events around the globe.

Created in 1970 by Wisconsin senator Gaylord Nelson to raise awareness of environmental issues such as pollution, the holiday has since become the centerpiece of modern environmental activism.

Earth Day has given rise to monumental successes over its 55 years of observance, such as the advancement of landmark environmental laws in the United States and the mobilization of over 1 billion people annually to fight for the Earth's protection. This year, EARTHDAY.ORG, the organization behind the holiday, is channeling their efforts toward spotlighting the merits of renewable energy with the theme Our Power, Our Planet.

How can I participate?

There are many ways to participate in Earth Day or contribute to sustainability year-round. FCPSGet2Green, an environmental stewardship program for Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS), offers a variety of suggestions for schools and communities look-



ing to become environmentally conscious:

- ✧ Save energy. Unplugging devices not in use, such as computers, televisions, or microwaves reduces the amount of energy being consumed. In the same vein, turning off the lights when leaving the room also accomplishes this objective. Opening the window blinds during the daytime can decrease the number of needed lights and increase the temperature of the room in the winter. As for HVAC, closing the doors and windows when the air conditioning or heat is on and keeping the vents clear is essential.
- ✧ Address climate change. The devastating effects of climate change may seem insurmountable; however, there are achievable steps communities can take to usher in a climate-friendly future. For those with a green thumb, planting a few native plants in the backyard is an effective means of helping absorb the

amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. In general, reducing, reusing, and recycling is also of critical importance; because all manufactured products have a carbon footprint, these simple actions go a long way in mitigating humans' environmental impact. Finally, encouraging sustainable transportation (e.g. walking or biking) whenever possible is another great way to limit excess greenhouse gases. For those who live farther away from their school or workplace, carpooling or public transportation is also a beneficial option.

- ✧ Set up a wildlife habitat or an edible garden. While these gardening projects may be time-intensive or laborious, the derived benefits make it all worthwhile. Creating a wildlife habitat provides valuable ecosystem services such as soil health and carbon sequestration while also supporting local biodiversity. Meanwhile, edible gardens serve as a healthy source of nourishment that also lower carbon emissions associated with food transportation or unsustainable agricultural practices. The FCPSGet2Green website (which can be accessed here) provides helpful instructions and resources that can be adapted for personal or community use.

Our Power, Our Planet

BY MALA PERSAUD OWNER,
Trace—The Zero Waste Store, Vienna, VA

Weather-wise, 2025 has already delivered a series of devastating blows. From the LA fires to severe storms and tornadoes in the Midwest to our own relentless winter cold, the evidence of human-induced climate change confronts us daily—and we're only in Q2.

Large-scale policies to lower emissions, preserve biodiversity, conserve water, and reduce waste could mitigate the worst effects of climate change. Yet, the United States has long lagged in adopting and implementing global targets, and that's unlikely to change soon. As we watch federal regulations roll back and environmental protections dismantled, climate anxiety feels more overwhelming than ever.

The antidote to anxiety is action, and for now, individual action is what we have. Humans are driving climate change, so taking responsibility for our choices is at least a starting point. Studies show that household decisions account for as much as 72% of global emissions.



Residential energy use is a major factor: U.S. households consume more electricity than any other country. At an average of 12.87-megawatt hours per person per year, we use more than twice as much as the average European and more than three and a half times the global average.

Meat and dairy consumption is another issue. In November 2024, Vox reported that "in recent decades, meat consumption in America increased to a staggering 224 pounds of red meat and poultry, 280 eggs, and 667 pounds of dairy per year." The ripple effects are immense—the cost to animals, the plastic packaging, and

the financial and environmental costs of transportation and refrigeration.

Then there's single-use plastic. Every year, 460 million metric tons are produced, and every day, the equivalent of 2,000 dump trucks full of plastic waste ends up in the ocean.

But individual consumption is one piece of the puzzle we can control. Small changes add up:

- ✧ Adjust your thermostat. In winter, turn the heat down and wear a sweater. In summer, if you need a sweater—or, like I did at my old office, a blanket!—the AC is too high. Adjust it. This small change saves energy and money.
- ✧ Go meatless one day a week. It's a simple shift with big environmental benefits.
- ✧ Ditch single-use plastics. Many people bring their bags to the supermarket. Let's bring them to the drugstore, mall, farmer's market and everywhere else that we shop. Bring a reusable coffee cup to the café. Walking past the trash can knowing you haven't added to the pile of trash is satisfying.

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FAIRFAX CITY

Real Estate Taxes are Going Up This Year

BY HEATHER DURKIN

Real Estate taxes are going up. The City Manager's proposed budget increases the real estate tax rate by \$0.095 to \$1.125 per \$100 of assessed value. For CY 2025, the average City resident's (assessed value of \$694,503) annual real estate tax bill would raise the average annual bill by \$1,126.

According to the City Manager's proposed budget, the real estate tax rate necessary to provide residential equalization, whereby the average homeowner would pay no more in taxes than in the prior year, equates to \$0.9629 per \$100 of assessed value. The real estate tax necessary to provide commercial equalization equates to \$1.0237 per \$100 of assessed value and a combined equalization rate of \$0.9843 per

\$100 of assessed value.

The council's decision to adopt a higher advertised rate provides flexibility to address potential economic uncertainties before the final budget vote on May 6. Council members Anthony Amos, Billy Bates, Stacey Hardy-Hardy Chandler, and Rachel McQuillen voted in favor, while Stacy Hall and Tom Peterson opposed.

Key Components of the FY2026 Advertised Budget Proposal:

Real Estate Tax Rate: \$1.150 per \$100 of assessed value, a \$0.120 increase.

Meals Tax Rate: Increase from 4% to 6%, marking the first adjustment in 21 years.

The Wastewater Utility Rate is also increasing by 6.0% to fund capital and op-

erating costs and the Stormwater Utility Fee is increasing by 6.0%, with an estimated annual bill increase of \$9.70 for a typical residential property.

All other tax rates, including commercial real estate tax, Old Town Service District tax, and personal property tax, will not change.

School Funding: \$71,427,547 allocated for the City School Board's tuition contract with Fairfax County Public Schools, plus a \$3 million allocation to initiate a school bond program.

Employee Compensation: A proposed 3.5% merit increase for general employees.

The public comment period will stay open until April 8th so anyone who would

like to make a public comment on their opinions on the budget can make a comment.

Remainder FY26 Budget Review Schedule

April 1: Budget work session

April 8: Budget public hearing, budget work session, introduction of proposed C&I, wastewater, storm utility, and Old Town Service District rates

April 22: Public hearing for proposed real estate tax rate, C&I, wastewater, stormwater utility, and Old Town Service District rates; introduction of the FY 2026 proposed budget appropriations; FY 2025 quarterly financial review; budget work session

May 6: Public hearing on proposed FY 2026 budget appropriations; budget adoptions

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Popular Annual Financial Report

REPUBLICATED FROM CITYSCENE

The City of Fairfax published its very first Popular Annual Financial Report (PAFR), which provides a snapshot of the city's financial activities during fiscal year 2024 (July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024). The report includes key statistics and insights drawn from the city's Annual Comprehensive Financial Report and other sources. This information provides a clear picture of the city's funding sources, expenditures, and debt obligations, and highlights our commitment to maintaining a safe, welcoming, and financially sound community. The PAFR program was created by the Government Finance Officers Association to help state and local governments communicate complex financial information in an accessible and engaging way. The city plans to submit the PAFR for GFOA's award consideration and to join the esteemed "Triple Crown Winners Circle," an exclusive group of local governments with annual audits, budgets, and PAFRs recognized by GFOA. Read the report online at fairfaxva.gov/government/finance/audit-reports.



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City of Fairfax Budget Open House

April 2 • 4-8 p.m.
 Sherwood Community Center,
 3740 Blenheim Blvd.

- Learn about the proposed FY 2026 budget (download your own copy at fairfaxva.gov/budget)
- Visit interactive stations
- Speak with city councilmembers and city staff

Info: fairfaxva.gov/news

To request this information in an alternate

Pardon Me, Governor

OP-ED BY CHAP PETERSEN

Republished from thevirginiaattorney.com

Everybody who serves in public office leaves with at least one item of unfinished business. In my case, his name is Pete Parsons.

Those of us who graduated Fairfax High School in the mid-80's will remember Pete as a big, fun-loving kid who played football and wrestled heavyweight for the Rebels. He was the life of the party. And, if you went to school in the Eighties, there were lots of parties. (ed. note: we were the last generation that enjoyed a non-digital youth).

We survived those days with a few scars and blurry memories, then moved on to raise our own families. But not everyone made it through.

In the case of Pete, he became addicted to cocaine, then committed a felonious assault in 2006 while he was high. The facts were not good, and it was an era where judges had little tolerance for crimes committed under the influence. He

was convicted and sentenced to 26 years incarceration, more befitting a second-degree homicide.

Pete disappeared into the Dept of Corrections, where he got clean, got a degree, and eventually became a certified Peer Recovery Specialist. He is currently housed at the Green Rock Correctional Center in Chatham, Va. He's served almost 19 years of his sentence, with 7 left to go – and now he's 59 years old.

Pete would have been forgotten, but for our old coach Mitch "Coach Sut" Sutterfield, who kept in touch with Pete and got me involved, while I was in the Senate, to fight for Pete's early release. For the past ten years, Coach Sut and I have written letters and made phone calls to Parole Board members and Governors (of both parties) to secure Pete's early release – no dice, thus far.

Virginia abolished ordinary "parole" in 1995, which means that long-term offenders actually serve their sentence with only a small reduction, up to 15%, for "good time." There is also "geriatric parole," which allows

prisoners at age 60+ to be released early if they have served the bulk of their sentence. The reasoning is that 60+ releases pose little threat to society. That's it. Otherwise, 26 years means 26 years.

Of course, the Governor has the ability to short-circuit the process by issuing a "conditional pardon" to deserving prisoners. Last week, the Governor issued such a pardon to the police officer who shot and killed a fleeing suspect at Tysons Corner in 2022. Otherwise, this Governor has issued no pardons (yet).

Long-term incarceration carries a cost. It's a cost to the taxpayer. It's a cost to the individual who serves a sentence long, long after the crime occurred. At some point, enough is enough. I believe Pete reached that point long ago. It's time to let him live free.

We have resubmitted Pete's conditional pardon application to the Governor's office. Everyone tell us – don't expect good news. But you have to try. Failing that, I'm hopeful that his 60th birthday will bring him before the Parole Board for a "geriatric re-

lease." Anyone who knows the facts of his case is supporting him. You have to have faith – and that's all you can have sometimes.

In my last letter from Pete, he told me he just wants to put his toes in the Atlantic Ocean once he reaches the outside. That would be a nice gift if we could make it happen.

JCP Notes: I cannot talk about criminal justice reform, without mentioning a couple things: one, the General Assembly in 2025 did pass a bipartisan bill on "probation reform" which updates an outdated system and provides incentives for enrollees to "do the right thing." Hopefully the Governor will sign this good legislation.

Second, I have to mention my friend and former constituent Sean Weneta, who was pardoned by Governor Northam in 2020 and has been a tireless advocate for justice-based causes like the probation reform bill. Unlike some advocates, Sean is a bridge-builder who brings people together. That type of positive energy is how things get done.

SB936: Decreasing probation period

BY HANNAH LEE

There are 61,000 Virginians on probation, which is the largest segment of the state's criminal justice system. Severe understaffing is burdening active probation officers and consequently reducing the capacity and quality of their work. More probationers combined with less staff is proving to be a less-than-ideal equation.

The cherry on top?

Virginia does not have any limits for felony probation terms. This makes the state one of only seven in the United States to lack a check on the duration of probation, but more importantly, it means that individuals may spend a lifetime on probation—a chronic issue that, as the population grows and urban crime increases, will only further weigh on the correctional system. With this growing stream of individuals serving probation, however, arise social complications. Virginians who finish their probation terms often face difficulties reintegrating back into

their daily lives. Limited work experience and education, difficulty securing housing, healthcare, and other social services, and chronic mental health or substance use issues—all prevalent issues amongst individuals in or formerly in the system—serve as barriers in this transition, increasing the chances of reoffending and creating an incessant cycle of conflict with law enforcement.

These concerns are addressed by Virginia Senator Christie New Craig's (R-19) bill SB936. A sister to Virginia Delegate Wren Williams' (R-47) HB2252, SB936 outlines new changes to the probation system in order to reduce probation periods. It establishes a set of mandatory criteria that must be fulfilled to reduce probationers' terms, including maintaining stable housing, health insurance, employment, earning a degree or educational certification, and complying with mental health or substance use treatment programs. The bill received a unanimous, bipartisan vote of 40-0

This use of incentivization is a new approach to the state's criminal justice system, and if passed, it could lead to drastic changes. As the state progresses in restructuring the system, this bill would facilitate a crucial bridge in transitioning from probation to a normal life, providing individuals with the incentive to secure stability beyond their term. Individuals' efforts to meet such criteria would also have a broader societal impact as former probationers enter the workforce, boosting both the state's economy and their own livelihoods. Furthermore, by placing a limit on probation terms, the bill would reduce the number of individuals in the probation system, thus alleviating the burden on overworked staff. It's a win-win situation for both sides.

While SB936 currently awaits action by Governor Glenn Youngkin, it symbolizes a step towards modernization and refreshing the system to better align with our changing society. As this incremental progress continues, we can gradually address each issue, clearing the path for a more effective system.

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2025 Cherry National Cherry Blossom Festival

National Cherry Blossom Festival announces events lineup for highly anticipated 2025 Season! National Park Service Reveals Peak Bloom prediction as March 18-31

"This festival is one of DC's most cherished traditions. It brings our city to life, boosts our local businesses, and showcases the very best of Washington, DC," said Mayor Muriel Bowser. "Whether you're a first-time visitor or a lifelong Washingtonian, the National Cherry Blossom Festival is a fabulous time to come together and celebrate our city in full bloom."

The Festival, one of the world's greatest celebrations of spring, features well-loved signature events, including:

- ✔ Pink Tie Party presented by Union Station Washington D.C. and Design Cuisine
- ▶ Friday, March 14 - The pinkest soiree on the DC social calendar, where guests flaunt their best pink and floral attire on the pink carpet and experience carefully curated food and cocktails from local DC-area restaurants, music, and more.
- ✔ Opening Ceremony co-presented with The Japan Foundation
- ▶ Saturday, March 22 - A one-night-only showcase featuring performances from world-renowned artists connected to both the U.S. and Japan, highlighting the anniversary of the 113th anniversary of the gift of trees.



Credit picture to Jason Dixon Photography.

- ✔ Blossom Kite Festival presented by Amazon
- ▶ Saturday, March 29 - Thousands of kites of all shapes and sizes take flight, with the iconic monuments as their backdrop.
- ✔ Petalpalooza® presented by Chase
- ▶ Saturday, April 5 - A day-long, interactive, outdoor celebration of music, art, and community at the Capitol Riverfront. The evening concludes with a choreographed fireworks display over the Anacostia River.
- ✔ National Cherry Blossom Festival Parade® presented by Events DC
- ▶ Saturday, April 12 - The nation's most beloved springtime parade fills the iconic Constitution Avenue with blossom magic, featuring a procession of pink and petals, giant helium balloons, stunning floats, electrifying performances, and more than 3,000 participants from across the country.

For more information, updates, and a full schedule of events, visit National-

CherryBlossomFestival.org.
###

ABOUT NATIONAL CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL

The National Cherry Blossom Festival is one of the world's great celebrations of spring. The 2025 Festival takes place March 20 - April 13 and includes four weeks of events featuring diverse and creative programming promoting traditional and contemporary arts and culture, natural beauty, and community spirit.

5 Events to Attend in Fairfax During the National Cherry Blossom Festival

WHAT'S NEW AT THE LAB?

National Cherry Blossom Festival Celebration at the Lab



www.fxva.com

Bloom, baby bloom! It's BACK: The annual National Cherry Blossom Festival is a beloved annual tradition in the Capital Region to commemorate the gift of 3,000 cherry trees from Tokyo to the United States in 1912. However, the festival's fun has expanded beyond the National Mall to be celebrated throughout the DC metropolitan region, including Fairfax County, Virginia. Each year, locals and visitors alike gather to enjoy a wide range of activities, including cultural performances, food vendors, educational programming, and stunning blossom displays.

Here's how to experience the beauty of the blooms in all their glory right here in

Fairfax County.

National Cherry Blossom Festival Celebration at the Lab

Various dates through April 13, 2025

Join the Children's Science Center Lab to explore the chemistry behind the petals and witness how capillary action can help flowers become acid-base indicators. Other activities include creating flower origami and learning the science and history of cherry blossoms while embarking on a scavenger hunt throughout the entire Lab.

Blossom Bash
March 30, 2025

Watch Tysons Corner Center's Plaza transform into a pink masterpiece. With support from ArtsFairfax and 20 talented local artists, the plaza will come alive with stunning Cherry Blossom chalk art in honor of the National Cherry Blossom Festival. Visitors can also enjoy exciting giveaways, exclusive promotions, delicious treats from Tysons' best restaurants, live music, face painting, and so much more!

Art Blooms at Mosaic
April 5 - 6, 2025

Turn to Page 21 → 5 EVENTS...

3033 Chain Bridge Road: Fairfax BOS Approved

The aging AT&T campus in Oakton stands at a crossroads, poised for a dramatic transformation that could reshape the character of this Fairfax County community. After decades as a corporate office space, this 33-acre property is now the subject of an ambitious mixed-use development proposal that exemplifies the broader challenges and opportunities facing our suburban communities as they adapt to changing workplace dynamics and housing needs.

On March 18, 2025, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a Comprehensive Plan amendment to allow mixed-use development on the 33-acre former AT&T site at the intersection of Chain Bridge Road (Route 123) and Jermantown Road. The proposal includes demolishing the early-1980s office building and constructing 854 housing units along with 110,850 square feet of retail and service space. This approval came with a reduction in the project's maximum floor-area ratio (FAR) from 1.0 to 0.88, effectively decreasing development potential by 12%. Additionally, the board allocated \$425,000 for a traffic study to explore improvements along a 1-mile stretch of Chain Bridge Road near Jermantown Road.

Now that the Comprehensive Plan amendment has been approved, the redevelopment of 3033 Oakton (3033 Chain Bridge Road) will move through several key phases:

1. Rezoning & Site Plan Approval

- ✦ The developer will submit a rezoning application and detailed site plans to Fairfax County.
- ✦ This includes specifics on building design, landscaping, environmental impact, and transportation improvements.
- ✦ Public hearings before the Fairfax County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors will be required.

2. Permitting & Engineering Reviews

- ✦ Once rezoning is approved, engineering studies will be conducted, including storm-water management, traffic impact analysis, and utility planning.
- ✦ The county will issue permits for demolition and construction based on compliance with regulations.

3. Infrastructure & Traffic Study Implementation

- ✦ The approved \$425,000 traffic study will determine necessary roadway improvements near Chain Bridge Road and Jermantown Road.
- ✦ The developer may be required to fund or contribute to traffic mitigation measures before construction begins.

4. Demolition & Construction

- ✦ The existing AT&T office building will be demolished.
- ✦ Construction of residential and commercial structures will take place in phases, which could span several years.
- ✦ Utilities, roads, and community amenities will be built alongside the new development.

5. Leasing & Occupancy

- ✦ Once completed, residential units and commercial spaces will be leased or sold.
- ✦ Community amenities, retail stores, and services will open gradually.

The next major milestone is the rezoning application and site plan approval process, which typically takes 12-24 months before construction can begin.

The development's website is located online at <https://www.3033chainbridge.com>. Readers can follow our coverage on this project online on oaktonindependentnews.press



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Paul VI School Facade Preservation Update

BY HEATHER DURKIN

The Paul VI school building may soon get the long awaited preservation treatment that has been long awaited by city residents. In December, the IDI Group Companies, the developers of Boulevard VI, sold the property to Virginia Epic Properties. A building permit has been filed with the City by Virginia Epic to revitalize the building while still

preserving the facade. The project, dubbed the St Paul Project, includes a proposal to renovate the interior structure and replace the rear and side facade which are presently draped with an industrial grade covering. In addition, repairs to the front facade, which has many broken windows and lights, are also included in the application. Retail and office space are planned, but tenants have not been selected yet.

Interestingly, the proposal includes a design for a contemporary white accent façade and large glass storefronts on the front. This will definitely transform the look of the current facade. Purists say it may be too much of a change, while others may say it preserves enough of the current look and feel and that the integrity and spirit of the facade is still there. Time will tell.




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Theater Alliance's 'American Fast' Examines Faith, Family, and Basketball

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

American Fast," presented by Theater Alliance, is a compelling and timely production that delves into the intersection of sports, faith, and personal identity. The play centers on Khady, a college basketball star on the brink of making history during the NCAA Championships. As March Madness coincides with Ramadan, Khady faces a profound personal dilemma that thrusts her into a national controversy, challenging her commitments to her team, her faith, and herself.

Under the direction of Reginald L. Douglas, the cast delivers powerful and nuanced performances. Gigi Cammarato portrays Khady with depth and authenticity, capturing the internal conflict of a young woman navigating the pressures of athletic ambition and religious devotion. The supporting cast, including Travis Xavier as Gabe, Raghad Maklouf as Suzan, and Renee Elizabeth Wilson as Coach, enrich the narrative with their compelling portrayals, adding



Raghad Maklouf as Suzan and Gigi Cammarato as Khady in American Fast at Theater Alliance. Photo credit Theatre Alliance

layers of complexity to Khady's journey.

The production's creative elements are noteworthy. Nadir Bey's scenic design

effectively transports the audience into the high-stakes world of college basketball, while Minjoo Kim's lighting design enhances the emotional resonance of key scenes.

The choreography by Siani Nicole and Nathanael Hatchett adds a dynamic physicality that underscores the athletic themes of the play.

Final Buzzer

According to Kareem Fahmy, Arab playwrights constitute only 1% in the US. "American Fast" is not just a sports drama; it is a profound exploration of identity, belief, and the sacrifices one makes in the pursuit of success. The narrative challenges audiences to reflect on the complexities of balancing personal convictions with external expectations. Theater Alliance's commitment to producing socially conscious and thought-provoking theater is evident in this production, making it a must-see for those seeking a meaningful and engaging theatrical experience.

Performances run from March 20 to April 13, 2025, at Theater Alliance's pop-up venue in Southwest DC. Tickets are available through their official website <https://theateralliance.com>.

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October 8: The Fight for the Soul of America

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

October 8" (also titled "October H8TE – The Fight for the Soul of America") is a 2025 documentary directed by Wendy Sachs and co-produced by Debra Messing. It is now playing at select theaters near you.

The film examines the surge of antisemitism in the United States following the October 7, 2023, Hamas-led attacks on Israel. It focuses on pro-Palestinian protests on university campuses, exploring how anti-Israel sentiments evolved into antisemitism. The documentary features interviews with notable figures such as Michael Rapaport, Noa Tishby, U.S. Representative Ritchie Torres, U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, Sheryl Sandberg, Dan Senor, Scott Galloway, and Mosab Yousef. It also scrutinizes the role of social media in amplifying antisemitic sentiments among young people.



Critical reception has been mixed. The Hollywood Reporter noted some instances of cherry-picking and questionable conclusions but acknowledged the importance of the film's message and the need for corrective action by political, academic, religious, and civil leaders. The Washington Post praised the documen-

tary's "often-moving first-person student testimony" and its evidence suggesting that Hamas may be behind certain campus organizations but lamented its lack of criticism toward the Israeli government and military. Conversely, Haaretz criticized the film for presenting a "black-and-white picture" of the conflict.

Audience reactions also vary. Some viewers appreciate the documentary's illumination of the rise in antisemitism and its potential threats to democracy. For instance, a reviewer on Rotten Tomatoes remarked, "It makes you aware of the dangers of some organized groups and the threats they pose to democracy." However, discussions on platforms like Reddit reveal differing opinions, with some users questioning the film's perspective and balance.

In summary, "October 8" delves into the complex and sensitive issue of antisemitism in the U.S. post-October 7, 2023. While it has been commended for shedding light on this pressing concern, some critics argue that it offers a one-sided narrative. As with any documentary addressing contentious topics, viewers are encouraged to approach it with a critical mind and consider multiple perspectives.

5 EVENTS.....From Page 16

Welcome spring with a weekend of fun-filled family activities! In partnership with URBNmarket and FRESHFARM, the Art Blooms festival at Mosaic District hosts over 90+ handmade and vintage vendors, special performances, selfie stations, and more. The event is free to attend, and a complimentary shuttle service is available from the Dunn Loring Metro Station.

Hot Tip: If you love supporting small businesses and shopping with local vendors, be sure to visit Mosaic District every Sunday from 10am - 2pm all year-round for the FRESHFARM Farmers Market.

**Spring Garden Market at Historic River Farm
April 11-12, 2025**

Spring has sprung, and the Spring Garden Market at Historic River Farm is in full bloom! With row after row of colorful flowers, fragrant herbs, and freshly-picked produce, this market is a gardener's paradise. From dainty daffodils to veggie seedlings, there's something for everyone's green thumb. Plus, you'll find garden-themed art, books, tools, and accessories. So put on your sun hat, grab a basket, and head on down to the Spring Garden Market for a day of fun in the sun! Who knows, you might just leave with a new addition to your garden.

**Art Walk April: Celebrating Cherry Blossom Season
April 13, 2025**

Workhouse Arts Center is adding some spring to its step with its Second Saturday Art Walk on April 13 to celebrate the Cherry Blossom season and the Japanese culture. Enjoy an origami demonstration, Japanese tea tasting, caricature drawings, and an inspiring art walk through exhibitions and artist studios across the campus. Immerse yourself in the beauty of the Cherry Blossoms through art and take-home crafts!

If you're looking for more National Cherry Blossom Festival events in and around Fairfax County, be sure to check out our official guide, which has more events in the region. Happy petal peeping!



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2025 World Happiness Report: America Is Not Happy

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

The World Happiness Report, first published in 2012, is an annual survey that ranks countries by their citizens' self-reported happiness levels. Commissioned by the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network, the report utilizes data from the Gallup World Poll, which gathers responses from approximately 1,000 people per country. Respondents evaluate their lives on a scale from 0 to 10, assessing their overall satisfaction.

The United States, once a consistent fixture near the top of the World Happiness Report rankings, has recently seen its happiness levels take a noticeable dive. In fact, the 2025 report marks the country's lowest ranking ever, now sitting at 24th place globally. So, what's going on? Yes, President Trump came up but let's dive into the key reasons behind this decline and what might be done to turn things around.

Why is Happiness Declining in the U.S.?

✔ Social Isolation and Loneliness

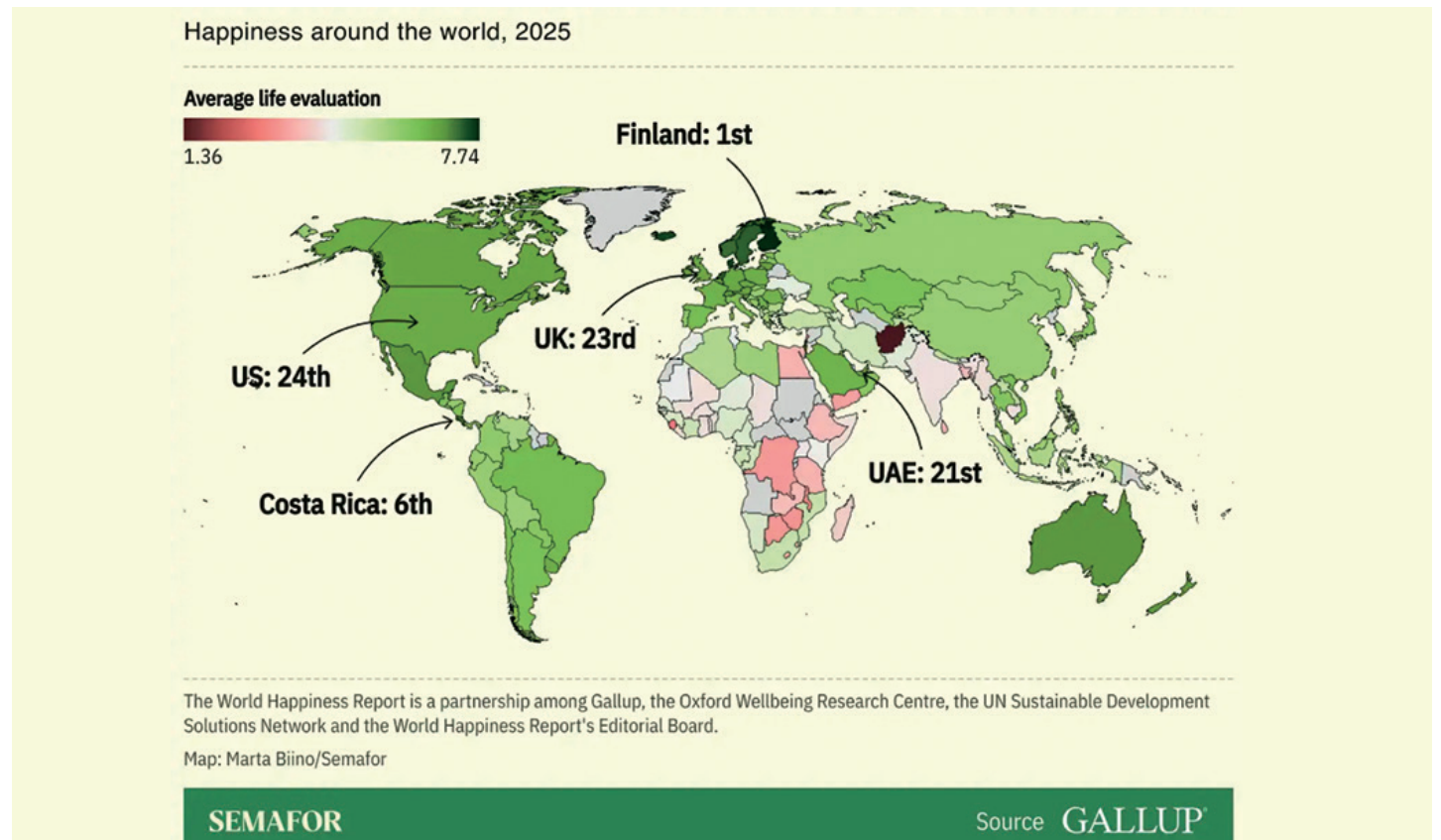
Have you noticed that more and more people seem to be feeling disconnected? Well, it's not just in your head. Social isolation has become a significant issue in the U.S., and it's something the 2025 happiness report really highlights. After the pandemic, more people are living alone or simply feeling disconnected from their communities. This sense of loneliness is showing up in lower happiness scores, and it's no surprise—humans thrive on social connections. Without them, mental health can take a real hit.

✔ Trust Is Eroding

Trust in institutions and fellow citizens is at an all-time low in the U.S. The report points out that confidence in government and societal systems is fading, and that's not a good recipe for happiness. When you feel like you can't trust the people around you or the systems that are supposed to protect you, it's tough to feel content and secure in your life.

✔ Economic Inequality

The wealth gap in the U.S. has widened dramatically over the years. While the U.S. is still one of the wealthiest countries in the world, the divide between the rich and the poor is becoming harder to ignore. People at the lower end of the income ladder are facing struggles in accessing quality healthcare, education, and other essential services. And let's face it—when you're constantly worried about your financial security, it's hard to feel truly happy.



✔ Political Polarization

You've probably noticed the growing divide between different political factions in the U.S. Well, it turns out that this polarization is impacting national happiness too. When a country is as divided as the U.S. is, it's hard for people to come together, even for common causes. The report shows that these deep divisions are creating more stress and less cooperation, ultimately contributing to a general sense of dissatisfaction.

✔ Health Concerns

Despite having some of the best medical technology in the world, the U.S. is still struggling with health challenges. From rising stress levels to mental health issues and chronic diseases, Americans are not feeling their best. When you're physically or mentally unwell, it's pretty hard to feel happy. Plus, the lack of accessible healthcare is a huge barrier for many.

✔ The Role of Eating Alone

Here's an interesting tidbit: the report suggests that eating alone is another factor contributing to the dip in happiness in the U.S. After the pandemic, solitary dining has become more common. And while eating alone might be convenient, it's not doing our happiness any favors. Sharing meals is a social experience that brings people together, and when it's absent, loneliness can creep in.

✔ What Can Be Done to Improve Things?

So, what's the solution? How can we turn this ship around? It's not going to be easy, but there are some practical steps we can take to improve happiness in the U.S.

✔ Fostering Social Connections

One of the most straightforward ways to boost happiness is to strengthen social bonds. It could be as simple as encouraging community events, volunteering, or even organizing family get-togethers. The more we engage with others, the less lonely we'll feel, and the happier we'll be.

✔ Rebuilding Trust

Trust in society is crucial for happiness, so efforts to rebuild that trust are necessary. This could mean pushing for more transparency in government, encouraging cross-party dialogue, and finding ways to unite rather than divide. A little faith in the system goes a long way in making people feel secure and content.

✔ Tackling Economic Inequality

Reducing the gap between the wealthy and the rest of the population could do wonders for national happiness. Policies that ensure equal access to healthcare, education, and housing would make a significant difference. When people feel like they have a fair shot at a better life, happiness follows.

✔ Prioritizing Mental Health

Mental health is more important than ever, and the U.S. needs to do more to address this crisis. By improving access to

mental health resources, reducing stigma, and fostering a supportive environment, we can improve overall well-being. After all, a healthy mind is key to a happy life.

✔ Encouraging Shared Meals

On a more personal note, let's talk about food. Having shared meals with family or friends can be a powerful way to feel connected. It's not just about the food—it's about the bonding, the laughter, and the sense of togetherness. So, if you've been eating solo a lot lately, consider inviting someone over to share a meal. It could make all the difference.

✔ Wrapping Up

The decline in happiness in the U.S. is a complex issue, but it's not without hope. By addressing loneliness, rebuilding trust, tackling economic inequality, prioritizing mental health, and encouraging social activities like shared meals, the U.S. can reverse this downward trend. A happier society starts with each of us—by fostering connections, supporting one another, and making choices that prioritize well-being, we can work toward a more joyful future for all.

On a happier note, we were thrilled to be in attendance at the Gallup building and took lots of notes that we will be sharing in future editions. If you noticed, we now have a Happiness Section! So send us some happy news and let us know how we can get back on the Top 10 of the World Happiness Report.

Governor Youngkin's 2025 Legislative Actions

Governor Glenn Youngkin has concluded his actions on the 916 bills sent to him during the 2025 General Assembly session, a process marked by both cooperation and conflict. He signed 599 bills into law, amended 159, and vetoed 157, also returning the budget with numerous amendments and item vetoes.

Governor's statement released in a press release "I have completed my actions on the more than 900 bills sent to me during the 2025 legislative session," said Governor Glenn Youngkin. "The legislation that I've signed into law and the budget amendments I've put forward this year will go a long way to helping ensure Virginia remains a great place to live, work, and raise a family.

"Among the bills I have signed are proposals that will keep school lunches free from artificial dyes, cement Virginia as home of the world's first commercial nucle-

ar fusion facility, expand rural electric co-ops ability to drive economic development, modernize school transportation to reverse chronic absenteeism, and give more students opportunities to take advanced math classes.

"I have returned many bills with recommended amendments, hoping that we can come together next week with common purpose to advance these bills.

"And I have vetoed bills that I think will take the Commonwealth backward by raising the cost of living, hurting our strong job growth, stifling innovation, undermining our All-American All-of-the-Above Power and Energy Plan or making our communities less safe.

"I thank every member of the General Assembly for their service to the Commonwealth and await their return next week to consider the additional actions on these bills."

Governor Youngkin's 157 vetoed bills passed during the 2025 Virginia General Assembly session, surpassed the veto count of any Virginia governor in the past 30 years.

Notable vetoes include:

Recreational Marijuana Market: Legislation to establish a retail cannabis market with sales beginning in May 2026 was vetoed.

Minimum Wage Increase: A proposal to raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour by 2027 was rejected.

Paid Sick Leave: A bill mandating paid sick leave for all Virginia workers was vetoed.

Collective Bargaining for Public Employees: Legislation aiming to remove the prohibition on collective bargaining for public employees was turned down.

Prescription Drug Affordability Board:

A proposal to create a board focused on prescription drug affordability was vetoed.

Firearm Purchase Waiting Period: A bill introducing a five-day waiting period for firearm purchases to allow for comprehensive background checks was rejected.

Education and Health Initiatives: Youngkin vetoed measures related to mental health support in schools and other diverse topics, including temperature regulations in correctional facilities and restrictions on certain weapons in public spaces.

Governor Youngkin stated that these vetoes were necessary to prevent increased costs for businesses and consumers and to maintain public safety.

The full list of signed, amended and vetoed bills are available on the Governor of Virginia website at <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/newsroom/news-releases/2025/march/name-1043239-en.html>



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Pictures from March 20 Watch Party Night taken by Tania Hossain.

GMU Women's Basketball Champs!

BY LAYLA MOHRAN

George Mason University's women's basketball team has experienced a remarkable transformation in recent years, solidifying its position as a rising power in the Atlantic 10 Conference. Under the leadership of Head Coach Vanessa Blair-Lewis, the Patriots have achieved unprecedented success.

On March 15th, the women's George Mason Basketball team beat the Saint Joseph's Hawks by 15 points, making history. By winning their first ever Atlantic 10 Championship, the patriots also entered their first NCAA tournament, giving them high power in the conference.

To end the Patriots' successful regular season of 27 games won and only 5 games lost, they played an impressive last game against Saint Joseph. Paula Suárez and Zahirah Walton scored 23 and 19 points respectively, both scoring more than their average points per game of 15.1 and 13.9 points.

Prior to the last game of the season, the patriots played against the hawks two other times, once in January and February. However, both times they played, the patriots lost. This is also what made their win at the end of the season so significant. Their comeback shocked every viewer and got them into the NCAA tournament.

To prepare for the beginning of the tournament, George Mason's players had a sendoff celebration on March 20th to celebrate their hard work and to progress in the tournament. Fans came to show their appreciation and love for the team.

The Patriot's historic NCAA tournament debut was hometown heroes worthy from team Watch Party to send off to Baton Rouge where they faced a tough challenge against Florida State.

While the final score of 94-59 reflected a loss, the game provided a valuable experience for the team and showcased their resilience on a national stage. Paula Suárez led the team with a career-high 25 points, proving that the Patriots could compete against top-tier competition.

The extension of Vanessa Blair-Lewis's contract through the 2028-29 season underscores the university's commitment to the program's continued success. The Patriots' historic 27-win season and NCAA tournament appearance have set a new benchmark for the program.

The Patriots' remarkable season and NCAA tournament appearance signify a new era for the program. While sustaining success presents ongoing challenges, the team's strong foundation and bright future suggest continued growth and excellence in the years to come.



Still Feeling March Madness!

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

March Madness is in full swing, with both the men's and women's NCAA basketball tournaments advancing toward their respective championships. Here's an overview of the current developments:

Men's Tournament

▶ Sweet 16 Composition:

For the first time since the NCAA tournament expanded to 64 teams in 1985, all teams in the Sweet 16 are from power conferences—specifically, the SEC, Big 12, Big Ten, and ACC. This is a rare occurrence, highlighting the strength and dominance of these major conferences in the college basketball landscape.

SEC's Record-Breaking Performance:

The SEC has set a new benchmark by sending seven teams to the Sweet 16, which is a record for the conference. This shows just how deep and competitive the SEC has become in recent years. Teams like Alabama, Auburn, and Kentucky have been particularly strong, with Alabama notably performing well throughout the tournament.

Upcoming games - Duke vs Arizona and BYU vs Alabama on March 27 and Auburn vs Michigan and Ole Miss vs Michigan State on March 28 will determine which teams advance to the Elite 8.

Women's Tournament

▶ Sweet 16 Field:

As with the men's bracket, the women's tournament has seen several strong power conference teams advance. The field of 16 includes a mix of well-known programs, with UConn, despite a few challenges, continuing to perform at a high level. This reflects the depth of talent and competitiveness in the women's game.

Notable Coaching Changes & Program Shifts

▶ Coaching Changes:

Ryan Odom has recently been appointed as the new head coach at Virginia. His hiring follows a successful stint at another program, and fans are excited to see what he will bring to Virginia's basketball culture. Odom's experience is expected to help elevate UVA's already strong program to new heights.

Saint Francis' Division Shift:

Saint Francis University, a small private school in Pennsylvania, has announced its decision to transition from Division I to Division III athletics by the 2026-27 academic year. This move will impact their athletic programs, as Saint Francis will no longer compete at the highest level in NCAA sports.

The rivalry between conferences is heating up, with the SEC, Big 12, and Big Ten being the front-runners. The SEC, in particular, is making waves, with its dominance showing through teams like Alabama, Auburn, and Kentucky, who are all vying for a spot in the next rounds. The Big 12 and Big Ten are also keeping pace, with teams like Kansas and Indiana proving formidable.

What's Next?

As the tournament progresses, the level of competition only intensifies. Teams are starting to hit their stride, and individual players are making their mark on the national stage. The Sweet 16, which is now underway, will feature some of the most exciting matchups of the tournament, and it's anyone's guess who will make it to the Elite 8, Final Four, and ultimately, the championship game.

For real-time updates, you can follow March Madness coverage at your local pub, on sports networks like ESPN and the official NCAA March Madness website at <https://www.ncaa.com/news/basketball-men/article/2025-03-23/2025-march-madness-mens-ncaa-tournament-schedule-dates>



Ani Nishanian being interviewed.

Congratulations! 2025 National STEM Finalists

BY NUNIK NISHANIAN

Congratulations to this year's National STEM Finalists from all across the United States. The National STEM Festival celebrates the exceptional talents of our nation's youth and the innovative businesses driving progress, all year round. The Festival's mission is to guide bright minds toward careers in STEM and to tackle the world's most pressing challenges. This year's Festival was hosted by EXPLR and was held from March 19 - 21 in DC.

Ani Nishanian from Rocky Run Middle School, along with Lynda Pistun and Ashrita Gandhari from Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, were named 2025 National STEM Champions, an honor given to only about 100 students nationwide. This achievement highlights their incredible innovation and dedication to STEM education. These students' accomplishments showcase the strength of STEM education in our district and the remarkable talent fostered in our schools.

Attendees also participated in mentor sessions, engaged in hands-on STEM activities, explored a public expo, and benefited from networking opportunities, among other exciting offerings. For more information, please visit the Festival's overview website at <https://www.nationalstemfestival.com/festival-overview>

The Looming Public Health Crisis: AI Data Centers and Air Pollution



BY TANIA HOSSAIN

The relentless march of artificial intelligence, with its insatiable hunger for data and processing power, is creating an unforeseen environmental and public health crisis. As computer processing demands surge, driven by the AI boom, the associated air pollution from power plants and backup diesel generators is poised to inflict a heavy toll on human health (Peter Fabris, Contributing Editor Dec. 16, 2024, Building Design + Construction). While the tech industry touts the potential benefits of AI, a critical examination reveals a darker side: a rapidly escalating public health burden that demands immediate attention. It seems that in the fervor to embrace the future coupled with public officials with little knowledge making decisions, we may be inadvertently poisoning the present.

The Deadly Emissions from AI's Energy Consumption

The core of the problem lies in the immense energy consumption of AI data centers. These facilities, housing thousands of servers, require a constant and reliable power supply (Nancy W. Stauffer, MIT En-

ergy Initiative, 2025). While some data centers are powered by renewable energy sources, the reality is that many still rely on fossil fuels, particularly coal and natural gas - nuclear power is next. The burning of these fuels releases a cocktail of harmful air pollutants, including fine particulate matter (PM2.5) and nitrogen oxides, which are known to contribute to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases (Jeff Young, Dec. 12, 2024, Newsweek). According to the EPA, PM2.5, also known as fine particulate matter, refers to microscopic particles in the air that are less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter. These particles are so small that they can penetrate deep into the lungs and bloodstream.

The scope of the issue is difficult to determine, but recent projections are eye-opening. Shaolei Ren, a UCR associate professor, and his colleagues project that the growing demand for power could result in as many as 1,300 premature deaths and billions of dollars in health costs each year by the end of this decade (Jeff Young, Dec. 12, 2024, Newsweek). Indeed, the numbers suggest that "AI data centers will be exceeding the entire California on-road emissions" And that's before considering

the emissions from backup diesel generators, which are often used during power outages. It seems that progress always comes at a price, and this time the tab is high.

The Public Health Costs: A Looming Catastrophe

Total public health costs from cancers, asthma, other diseases, and missed work and school days are approaching an estimated \$20 billion a year, according to Peter Fabris. As the American Lung Association notes, power plants that burn fossil fuels produce air pollutants that harm lung health. Exposure to PM2.5, a major component of coal emissions, is associated with an increased risk of death. This should hardly be surprising considering that fine particle pollution from U.S. power plants cuts short the lives of nearly 24,000 people each year, including 2,800 from lung cancer (Mortality and Health Damage Due to Air Pollution from Power Plants, 2004). Children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of air pollution. Their bodies are still developing, they breathe more rapidly, and they spend more time outdoors. Air pollution is associated with respiratory hospitalizations, lost school days due to

asthma attacks, and even infant death. Unless something changes soon, it may well be the case that our children will pay for our technology.

Ignoring the Warning Signs: A Dangerous Oversight

What is perhaps most alarming is the apparent lack of awareness and transparency surrounding this issue. Shaolei Ren points out that sustainability reports by tech companies tend to focus solely on carbon emissions and water usage, while completely ignoring the unhealthy air pollutants (Peter Fabris, 2024). This omission is a dangerous oversight, as it allows the tech industry to present a misleading picture of its environmental impact. After all, "We also have something that is already affecting people right now, and that is air pollution" (Jeff Young, 2024). It is akin to touting the fuel efficiency of a car while ignoring the toxic fumes it spews into the atmosphere. A more holistic, comprehensive evaluation of the impacts is needed (Jeff Young, 2024).

Towards a Sustainable Future: Regulations and Solutions

The path forward requires a multi-pronged approach. First and foremost, tech companies must be held accountable for the air pollution caused by their power consumption and backup generators. Standards and methods should be adopted that require them to report these emissions transparently (Peter Fabris, 2024). There is hope in the fact that even the Trump administration, known for its lax environmental policies, did not revoke Biden's executive order acknowledging the public health impact of data centers. Secondly, we need to accelerate the transition to cleaner energy sources. While renewable energy sources like solar and wind are crucial, they are not always reliable (Goldman Sachs, Is Nuclear Energy the Answer to AI Data Centers' Power Consumption, 2025). Nuclear power, particularly small modular reactors, offers a promising alternative, providing a steady and carbon-free source of electricity (Manuel G. Pascual, El Pais, 2025). But nuclear power is not without its own challenges, and will need public support to move forward. While AI itself may have a role in mitigating greenhouse

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THE LOOMING...

Can Water Damage Be Fixed at Cell Phone Repair Shops?

BY DENYS KOBZAN
CEO OF MR. FIX ELECTRONICS

Our cellphones in the modern world almost seem to be a mirror of us. They contain priceless memories, close friends, and necessary everyday apps among other things. It might therefore seem like a tragedy when our phones fall into a sink, toilet, or get trapped in a deluge. You might be shocked to find, though, that water damage is often treatable with professional assistance before you settle for a different phone.

The Difficulties of Water Damage in Modern Devices

Modern marvels of technology are iPhones, Samsung Galaxies, Google Pixels, and other cellphones. But their intricate interior parts are quite prone to water damage. Unlike simpler phones of the past, modern gadgets include complex circuits, delicate sensors, and powerful batteries vulnerable to even a tiny bit of liquid.

Among the several issues water can bring about is:

- ✦ Water potentially corrodes the delicate electrical connections inside your phone, causing malfunction and long-term harm.
- ✦ Water can bridge gaps between electrical paths, resulting in short circuits that might fry important parts.
- ✦ Water exposure can compromise the battery, resulting in lower capacity, overheating, or even significant fire hazards in very rare circumstances.

Why Do Do-It-Your Own Fixes Usually Fail?

Advice on how to mend water-damaged phones at home is abundant on the internet, but misguided. Typical recommendations call for immersing the phone in rice, running it through a hairdryer, or perhaps freezing it. These techniques are usually useless, though, and can even aggravate the damage.

- ✦ Rice: Although it can absorb some moisture, it won't extract water caught inside the phone's interior components. Actually, small rice particles can lodge in buttons and ports, aggravating other problems.
- ✦ Heat from a hair drier can deform fragile parts and aggravate corrosion.
- ✦ Extreme cold might generate condensation inside the phone upon thawing, therefore causing more water damage.



Expert Repair Is Crucially Important

Should water have come into contact with your phone, the best line of action is to consult a qualified cell phone repair facility such as Mr Fix. Here is why:

- ✦ Professional repair professionals have the tools, knowledge, and experience necessary to precisely identify water damage and evaluate the scope of the problem.
- ✦ Modern Instruments and Approaches: Repair businesses have access to specific tools and methods for sensitive component repairs and water damage cleanup.
- ✦ Using microscopes, technicians can see and eliminate rust on circuit boards—a chore not doable at home.
- ✦ Ultrasonic cleaners guarantee a complete cleaning by releasing water caught far inside the phone's inside.
- ✦ Component-Level Repair: Should damage to specific parts be required, experts can replace them with premium parts, restoring the phone's functioning.

Finding Out Whether Your Phone Has Water Damage

While some water damage—such as a shattered screen or evident liquid within the phone—is clear-cut, others may be more subdued. These signs should help you to be alert:

- ✦ Most current cell phones feature tiny stickers inside that change color when liquid comes into contact with them.
- ✦ Water damage might cause the touchscreen to become unresponsive or detect phantom touches, therefore upsetting its functionality.
- ✦ Water damage might compromise the charging port, thus either charging your phone will be difficult or impossible.
- ✦ Unusual Sounds: Water damage may be indicated by the speaker or microphone's crackling sounds.
- ✦ Water exposure might cause defective parts in your phone to overheat.

Mr Fix: Your Certified Water Damage Repair Solution

If you believe there is water damage on your phone, avoid wasting time using dangerous do-it-yourself techniques. Visit Mr Fix for a quick, reasonably priced, expert repair job. Our licensed team of

specialists only employs the best quality tools and materials; they have vast expertise fixing water-damaged equipment.

What Mr Fix offers:

- ✦ Our experts will assess the degree of the water damage and give you an open repair estimate free from obligation.
- ✦ Fast and Effective Repairs: We work to minimize downtime by getting your phone back to you as soon as possible.
- ✦ Reasonably priced repair services help to guarantee accessibility.
- ✦ Guaranteed Repairs: We support all repairs with a satisfaction guarantee behind our work.
- ✦ Let water not let your smartphone be sidelined. To arrange an appointment and get your phone returned in operating order, contact Mr Fix now. For additional information or to speak with a representative, visit <https://mrfixelectronics.com>

Remember—many times, water damage is treatable with professional assistance!

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EGG-STREME NIGHT EGG HUNT

Thursday, April 17
Starting at 8pm
Historic Blenheim -
3610 Blenheim Blvd.

Here's an EGG-STREME challenge:
Finding eggs IN THE DARK!! Join us for a
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Enjoy activities, crafts and games before the
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Participation is \$5.

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Picture by Tania Hossain

Easter: Gratitude, Reflection & Remembrance

BY CAROLINE CHU

Easter is an annual Christian celebration that takes place on the first Sunday after the Paschal full moon (the first full moon following the vernal equinox). It commemorates the resurrection of religious figure Jesus Christ. After the solemn observance of events in Christ's life during the majority of the Holy Week, joy and celebration culminate on its final day, Easter Sunday. Every year, millions of Christians celebrate with feasts, communion with friends and family, and their own unique traditions.

Easter is considered one of the most significant occasions for Christians. Christ's triumphant homecoming to the living symbolizes hope, renewal, and the triumph of life over death.

Churches are often decorated with flowers, particularly lilies, and candles. Many Christians begin the holiday with Easter Vigil or sunrise services.

In addition to religious significance, Easter is also rich with secular traditions. The Easter bunny, another common symbol of Easter, is featured in many Western observances of the holiday. In many cultures, Easter eggs hold a prominent position in cultural celebrations. Slavic countries such as Poland and Ukraine are famed for their elaborate egg decorating techniques, where eggs are intricately designed with the help of wax and plant-based dyes. In the United States and Canada, Easter is commonly celebrated with Easter egg hunts, where adults hide plastic, candy-filled eggs for children to find. Locally, the City of Fairfax's

Parks and Recreation department is hosting an Easter egg hunt on April 17 at 8 pm. Dedicated to teens aged 10-14, the event promises to be an exciting challenge for participants due to the hunt's occurrence in the dark, as well as the activities, crafts, and games also taking place.

For me, this Easter egg hunt brings back lovely memories from Easter's past. Although my family doesn't observe Easter like we did in my childhood, I fondly remember our own Easter egg hunts and rich meals with family as the holiday approaches every spring. Although my personal celebrations may vary throughout the years, Easter remains a time for gratitude, reflection, and remembrance for both me and other Christians around the world.

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Passover & The Feast of Unleavened Bread

BY CAROLINE CHU

As winter winds down and spring returns to Northern Virginia, millions of Jews around the world will soon be celebrating Passover (Pesach), an annual Jewish holiday of great cultural and religious importance. Spanning 7 days for those in Israel and 8 for the rest of the world, Passover commemorates the liberation of the Israelites from their ancient Egyptian oppressors, as told in the Biblical book of Exodus. The holiday espouses values of freedom, redemption, and justice that are still significant for Jewish communities.

A critical element of celebrating Passover is the Seder, a ceremonial meal involving storytelling, singing, and of course, food. Occurring on the first 1-2 days of Passover, family and friends gather together to observe this ritual. The dishes served on the Seder plate are highly symbolic, as they represent the plight of Jewish predecessors. These foods include bitter herbs, which symbolize the bitterness of slavery; charoset (a sweetened blend of chopped nuts and apples) standing in for the mortar used by the Israelites to make bricks in Egypt; and eggs, representing life and new growth. Notably absent from the table is the presence of any leavened wheat products. This is because the Israelites



had no time for bread to rise when fleeing Egypt. In its place, matzah, an unleavened flatbread, has become a symbol of affliction and freedom.

In addition to symbolic foods, it is also customary to read from a Haggadah,

a book that recounts the story of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, and sing Passover songs such as Dayenu ("It Would Have Been Enough") or Mah Nishtanah ("The Four Questions").

Due to Passover's fixed date in the

lunar cycle-reliant Hebrew calendar, the date shifts annually on the Gregorian calendar. This year, Passover will be taking place from April 12th to April 19th or 20th. Newcomers interested in participating in the holiday can contact their local synagogues to find a communal seder.



Panelist photo courtesy of Council Member Anthony Amos.

Fairfax Rotary Constitution Day

BY AUSTIN KENNEDY,
ROTARY MEMBER - CONSTITUTION
PROJECT

The Rotary Club of Fairfax has a long-standing tradition of promoting civic education among students. One of their notable initiatives is the distribution of Constitution booklets to eighth-grade students. During their 2-days during their 30 minute panel discussion, the club provided these educational materials to Kath-

erine Johnson Middle School to enhance students' understanding of the U.S. Constitution.

The two assemblies were held this year. The March 3 assembly was attended by Mayor Catherine Read and the panel Austin Kennedy, Nathan Desnoyers, Tom Ross, Council Member Rachel McQuillen, Council Member Anthony Amos, Julia Strickland, Barry Gordon, and Jeff Platenberg. The March 5 panel included Austin

Kennedy, Tom Ross, Mitch Sutterfield, Gloria Rubin and Gene Rubin. During the assemblies, student representatives asked important questions such as can the constitution be changed and why do we have a constitution.

Beyond this, the Fairfax Rotary supports educational programs such as sponsoring high school speech contests and awarding scholarships to graduating seniors from Fairfax High School. They also

recognize outstanding educators through their annual Teacher of the Year awards.

While these efforts underscore the club's commitment to civic education, there is no specific information available about a dedicated "Fairfax Rotary Constitution Day" event. The Fairfax Independent was thrilled to be invited to cover this important Fairfax Rotary service event. More information about the Fairfax Rotary is available on their website at <https://fairfaxrotary.org/>.

Eating Together: A Key to Wellness and Happiness

BY TANIA HOSSAIN

Have you ever noticed how much better a meal feels when you're sharing it with others? It turns out, there's a lot of truth to the idea that eating together boosts happiness. That is if you eat together with others 13 times a week. The 2025 World Happiness Report shows just how important those shared meals are for our well-being.

The Simple Joy of Eating Together

We all know that food can bring people together, but the report actually backs it up. People who share meals with others feel more satisfied with their lives, experience more positive emotions, and generally have stronger connections with the people around them. When we sit down to eat with someone, we don't just share food—we share laughter, stories, and support.

How It Affects Us Globally

It's not just an individual thing either. Around the world, countries that make communal dining a big part of life see higher levels of social trust and less loneliness. When we share meals, it's more than just a chance to bond—it helps build stronger communities where people feel more connected and supported.

So, What's in It for Us?

Eating together isn't just fun; it's good for us, too. Here's why:

- ✦ **It's Great for Mental Health:** Sitting down with others to share a meal can lower stress and boost our mood.
- ✦ **It Strengthens Relationships:** Whether it's family, friends, or even coworkers, dining together deepens those connections.



✦ **It Makes Us Happier:** Let's face it—sharing a meal with others just feels good. It's a mood booster and a simple way to feel more content.

How to Make It Happen

It's easy to get caught up in busy schedules and eat on the go or alone, but making time for shared meals can really make a difference. Here are a few ideas:

✦ **Family Meals:** Try to have dinner together as a family. It's a great way to check in, share the day, and enjoy each other's company.

✦ **Community Events:** Why not host or join a potluck or neighborhood gathering? It's a fun way to meet people and build stronger community ties.

✦ **Work Lunches:** Take a break and eat lunch with coworkers. It's an easy way to bond and lighten the mood at work.

✦ **Social Programs:** There are programs that offer shared meals to people who are isolated. Supporting these initiatives can help make sure no one feels alone.

The Bottom Line: Sharing a Meal = More Happiness

At the end of the day, eating together is about more than just food—it's about creating moments of connection, boosting our mental health, and fostering a sense of community. The 2025 World Happiness Report shows that when we make time to break bread with others, we're not just nourishing our bodies—we're nourishing our relationships and our happiness.

So, next time you sit down to eat, consider inviting someone to join you for at least 13 meals a week according to research. Your body—and your mood—will thank you!

Autism Society Celebrates 60 Years of Advocacy

The Autism Society marks its 60th anniversary, celebrating decades of advocacy, support, and inclusion for individuals on the autism spectrum. Since 1965, it has influenced policies like the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and promoted workplace inclusivity.

With a vast network of local affiliates, the Society provides essential resources, sensory-friendly events, and support programs. Looking ahead, it remains dedicated to advancing neurodiversity, healthcare access, and disability rights.

To commemorate this milestone, special events and advocacy initiatives will take place nationwide. Please visit the Autism Society's website at autismsociety.org to learn more and get involved.



Autism Society

Celebrating 60 years



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