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'C'mon, raise the rates:' Purcellville chooses safety over cuts

BY VALERIE CURY

At the April 22 Purcellville Town Council meeting 48 speakers voiced their opinion in packed and overflowing town hall—passionately demanding the town to fully fund its police department and not transition to the County Sheriff's Office. Residents, nearby neighbors, staff, former employees, and business owners all took to the mic in support. Their message was clear: the police department is a cornerstone of the town's identity. Speakers emphasized safety and community

values. The crowd was loud, emotional, and defiant. Some attendees hurled personal attacks and insults, highlighting



Supervisor Caleb Kershner

the intensity of public sentiment surrounding the department's future.

In the end after one tied vote, Council voted to fully fund the Purcellville Police Department for FY26 at \$3.2 million. The vote was 5-1-1, with Council Members Erin Rayner, Kevin Wright, Caleb Stought, Susan Khalil, and Carol Luke voting yes. Mayor Chris Bertaut abstained and Vice Mayor Ben Nett was absent for the vote.

Supervisor Caleb Kershner (R-Catoctin) was the first

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speaker. "Eliminating the Police Department is the wrong solution and that is my considered opinion along with the opinion of many of mine and your constituents—who have reached out to me over

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A vote, an opinion, and a State Police Investigation

BY VALERIE CURY

On April 21, Commonwealth's Attorney Bob Anderson issued a response to Council Member Caleb Stought's April 13 request for an advisory opinion. Stought had asked whether Purcellville Vice Mayor Ben Nett may have violated the State and Local Government Conflict of Interest Act—legislation that, among other things, defines and prohibits improper conflicts of interest, requires disclosure of economic interests, and governs whether an official can vote on certain matters including, in Nett's case, those involving the police department. Stought's request came after Vice Mayor Ben Nett's employment with the police department had ended on April 4.

Commonwealth's Attorney Bob Anderson responded on April 21, stating that Nett was "prohibited from voting on matters involving the police department, attending closed meetings concerning the department, participating in related transactions, and lobbying or discussing police matters with other town officials." He further wrote that "taking any action on these issues, with the knowledge that they are prohibited, could constitute a criminal misdemeanor offense."

Decisions made by the Town Council guide the actions of the police chief, who in turn oversees department personnel—including Ben Nett, who serves both as a police officer and a council member. This dual role presents a clear conflict

of interest, wrote Anderson on April 21. However, Nett's employment as a police officer had ended on April 4.

In February 2025, the Town Council hired an independent consultant to evaluate the Purcellville Police Department. Vice Mayor Ben Nett communicated with the consultant to share his own recommendations for changes to the department and to influence what would be included in the final report—an action widely considered inappropriate under any circumstances, wrote Anderson.

However, contrary to Anderson's assertions, the consultant's contract does direct him to conduct interviews with all available police department employees to "assess their perspectives on operations,

department leadership, department culture, morale, and operational efficiency." It also instructs the consultant to "engage with the town council members and gather insights into the community's expectations and concerns regarding the Police Department."

Anderson further wrote that "Nett voted in his capacity as Vice Mayor to eliminate the Purcellville Police Department," and appeared to be retaliatory and a conflict of interest. Nett's vote on April 8, was to direct staff to draft an ordinance to rescind Chapter 42 of the Town Code—a policy prescription for a vote to be discussed at a later date.

At that meeting Nett said the Town

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In-School Field Trip: BRMS students explore the art of clay

Blue Ridge Middle School students experience a creative in-house artistic field trip to explore the many forms of clay art.

BRMS art teacher, Elizabeth O'Neill said, "The goal of the in-house field trip was to provide students an active, hands-on experience learning from professionals without taking them off campus. Oftentimes art related field trips are full day, they take students off campus where most time is spent in transit, and they spend a majority of their time listening rather than making.

"While both experiences are good, our goal was to help them enrich and extend their learning in the best way

Alisa Gladstone, a former BRMS history teacher turned ceramic pottery business owner, guided students through a workshop on textured wall pockets and pressed plates. Her session introduced students to the art of creating intricate designs by pressing textures into clay, offering both a technical and creative foundation.

Building on this knowledge, Bauer led a session titled "Creative Clay Chickens," in which students took Gladstone's techniques to new heights. Encouraged to interpret the lessons with their own imaginative flair, they sculpted whimsical and unique creations, showcasing their originality and understanding of hand building methods.

The final session focused on wheel throwing, led by O'Neill and Laura Hennessey, a science teacher at BRMS and ceramic artist. Hennessey, who has experience throwing on the wheel outside of school, shared her expertise in altering cylindrical forms to produce varied silhouettes.

This advanced technique added depth to the students' understanding of the pottery wheel and its possibilities. From textured designs to imaginative sculptures and advanced wheel throwing, this hands-on in-house field trip inspired the creativity and potential within each young artist.

Eighth grader, Sam Wissler said, "The day was awesome sauce!" Also, eighth grader Mikey Mazeika added, "The day was fantas-

tic! It was a great way to explore clay art through different stations." Eighth grader Nash Umberger, followed with, "The in-school field trip allowed us to complete three different art projects in one day—not something we could ever do in just one art class."

Principal, Brion Bell said, "We strive to provide applied, authentic projects across all curriculums; today was sensational! Each student was transformed in this project into a designer, potter, thinker, builder, collaborator, and a doer."

"I really enjoyed the visit. Thank you to everyone who organized this great engaging experience for the students—it was outstanding," said Michael Pier-son, Loudoun County Supervisor of Fine Arts.



Nash Umberger with wheel-thrown bowls



Liam Sellers with a clay bird



Elizabeth O'Neill supporting student with wheel throwing



Elizabeth O'Neill with a textured wall envelope

possible by bringing people into the building and not miss too much class time in the process. I think we succeeded in providing that engaging learning experience to our upper-level art students. I hope this is a tradition that we can continue in the future."

BRMS art students from Elizabeth O'Neill's 3D 8 classes and Bret Bauer's Art 8 classes got their hands dirty during a series of interactive clay workshops. Over the course of three 50-minute sessions, students experimented with various hand building techniques and gained insights into the world of ceramics, led by experts and educators passionate about their craft.

The sessions featured contributions from a range of talented presenters, each bringing unique skills to the table.

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One Like and Many Gripes

BY CHARLES HOUSTON

I seem to vacuum random facts, which my brain manufactures into various ideas and opinions. A basic topic is protecting Loudoun County. Some of my ideas can be expressed in short paragraphs, or even in a sentence or two. Here goes ...

OPINION

National Ideas

Securitize and sell roughly \$1.6 trillion in SBA and student loans, and pay off that amount of the national debt.

Impose term and age limits government-wide, to include judges.

Limit the decisions of inferior courts to their own geographical district. Find a way to stop judge-stopping, which automatically injects partisanship.

Raise Social Security's retirement age by two months every year, until the retirement age has increased to 75 years.

Easy Local Ideas

There is one thing we should like: Our local government appears to be honest.

Eliminate the plastic bag tax, which is regressive and thus disproportionately burdens the poor. I think this tax was an aspirational, progressive idea that we

could do without.

Ever drove over the front of a roadway median while turning? They can be very difficult to see, so paint medians' noses optic yellow.

Improve traffic flow with "Slower traffic move right" and "Trucks use right lane." Who drives slowly in the left lane? Inattentive drivers. Rude drivers. Worst of all, passive-aggressive drivers who consciously drive the speed limit to force those behind them to do the same. Slow traffic in the left lane, intentional or not, often causes road rage.

End the grotesque practice of developers' using legal skills to grease the way to Board approval. If a developer takes pride in his proposed project, have him personally present his plans.

Local Mistakes – Probably no way to fix them

While State code mandates Planning Commissions, they only have to comment on broad issues. Their review of individual zoning applications is a waste of time and duplicative of Staff's professional advice. That's made worse by having two odious planning commissioners.

Grandfathering data center proposals

was a terrible mistake. The public has erupted over the intrusion of the 46 million square feet of data centers now up and running. The grandfathering allows another 61 million square feet of the ugly things. How on earth could the Board have let this happen, especially where a power catastrophe looms over us? There's a solution—impose such stringent requirements (e.g. setbacks, height limits etc.) that effectively block any more data centers.

Oops! An unintended consequence: The Board passed a zoning requirement that cluster subdivisions had to stay off prime agricultural soils. That's caused a huge reduction in conservation easements. It was also expected that these good soils would entice new farmers. That has yet to happen.

When planning districts were established, a hard edge (perhaps a greenbelt) should have been put between suburban and rural areas. In actuality, the Transition area, is dying a death of a thousand cuts as commercialization rolls through.

Difficult Local Ideas

Make all local elections non-partisan,

and don't identify the incumbents.

Understand the true nature of property rights, which one Supervisor cited as the reason for his wanting grandfathering. Our property rights are already limited by governmental taxation and regulation of such matters as zoning. Why squawk about "property rights" as if they were among the Ten Commandments? Doesn't it seem that the "property rights" banner is waved by wealthy businesses and promoters?

County government seems to have a "spend every dollar" mentality; our per capita spending is 50% higher than in nearby suburban counties.

The County has over \$250 million in undesignated funds. It seems to be rushing to squirrel that money away by creating new contingency accounts to serve as caches to hide that cash. Use the money to eliminate taxes on vehicles, and use future largesse to reduce real property taxes.

The School System - LCPS

LCPS spends like a drunken sailor, consuming more than 50% of our tax dollars. Worse, its capital spending is out of control. Can you say "\$221 million for a new high school?" The Supervisors seem to take pride in fully funding the annual LCPS budget request.

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Deadline for print edition is the third week
of each month, or, online any time.

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Democrats Dropped the Ball on Oak Hill ... Not Once, but Twice

BY DELEGATE GEARY HIGGINS

For the better part of the past year, I have been working hard to turn Oak Hill, President James Monroe's home in Aldie, into a State Park. Unfortunately, earlier this month, House Democrats killed what was the final shot at making Oak Hill a state park this year, and maybe ever.

Not a single Democrat in the House, not even the other Loudoun Delegates, had the courage to break from the instructions of their party leadership and vote for Oak Hill. Not only did every

House Democrat previously vote for the bill, but they voted for it when its posture was arguably worse, as the financial protections for the state were only added later by the Governor.

The Governor's amendment protected the Commonwealth from any financial burden and there were no other parks 'in line' ahead of it. There was no reason to vote against Oak Hill, other than selfish, partisan politics. Since when is preserving the home of one of our nation's founders a political issue?

The Democrats had two chances this year to make Oak Hill a State Park.

Originally, the Oak Hill State Park bill passed the House unanimously during the legislative session but was unexpectedly killed in the Senate by the Democrat chair of Senate Finance. Then, it was revived by the Governor in the budget during the "reconvene session," only to be killed by House Democrats.

Following the Democrats' failure to get this done during the legislative session, I called the Governor to ask for his help. The Governor and his team were initially concerned about the finances, as they feared maintenance costs would

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Mountain Overlay District's regulations are intentionally rigid for a reason

Dear Editor:

I'm extremely concerned about the Board action on April 15 to suspend lawsuit enforcement on the Mountain Overlay District.

After careful thought and discussion with County Zoning officials, stricter rewritten ordinances were enacted in the MOD ZOAM in 2023 and

approved by the BOS.

The MOD Ordinances are intentionally rigid to protect the mountains from continued misuse and development. The forest canopy, in particular, is an acknowledged source of clean water, carbon sequestration, and the oxygen we breathe. Their beauty drives the tourist industry here in Loudoun.

Enforcement is the only tool we have to enforce violations trying to monetize our mountains for personal or corporate enrichment.

A recent case in point, County Planning & Development is currently pursuing charges against a property owner on the steep slopes of the Blue Ridge in Bluemont. A real estate agent flipped the property after brazenly clear-cutting over 2+ acres of forest to obtain "million-dollar views." The property sold

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Heated debate erupts over mountainside feature protections

BY KATIE NORTHCOTT

Tempers flared at the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors business meeting on April 15 after Supervisor Caleb Kershner (R-Catoctin) proposed an amendment to mountainside feature protections.

Kershner's motion came in the context of the Board's discussion of the Department of Planning and Zoning Work Plan. Dan Galindo, Director of Planning and Zoning, attended the meeting to give the Board the department's quarterly update on the work plan. One of the department's projects is a zoning ordinance rewrite. Kershner asked that staff explore making some of the mountainside feature protections more lenient as part of this rewrite.

Kershner said he wanted to allow the staff to begin to address issues some developers in Loudoun County had been having with ridge feature protections and spring feature protections. He said that for many of these rules, applicants could not even get a special exception, meaning there is no leniency in these protections.

"Right now, there is no ability to even consider any differences to what the standards are," Galindo said. "So, we would be looking at what the staff could recommend [as] an option that would at least have the potential for the modification. Not something automatic but that gives the Board or even maybe the zoning administrators some leeway to make things work and not be quite so rigid."

Supervisor Laura TeKrony (D-Little River) questioned the need for this amendment given that the Mountainside Overlay District is a topic that will be addressed in Board's review of the zoning ordinances in Western Loudoun County. Galindo answered that the motion seeks to address some applications that are currently having trouble due to the rigid protections.

TeKrony preferred that these changes go through the rural ZOAM and CPAM rewrite process since other industries, including the equine industry are struggling with these protections.

"I'd rather fix it in a comprehensive, holistic view than look at it as a one-off because I could bring a bunch of these as one-offs," TeKrony said.

Vice Chair Michael Turner (D-Ashburn) concurred with TeKrony that it did not seem fair to prioritize one group in the rural CPAM and ZOAM process. He added that he did not know enough

about the situation Kershner was trying to address to feel comfortable supporting the motion.

Chair Phyllis Randall (D-At Large) said that she thought the Board should send the issue to the Transportation and Land Use Committee (TLUC) for discussion.

"I think this is what our committees are for: to work out issues or to see if issues even need to be worked out," Randall said.

Ultimately, the motion to send discussion of the mountainside feature protections to TLUC failed 4-4-1 with Vice Chair Turner and Supervisors TeKrony, Juli Briskman (D-Algonkian), and Koran Saines (D-Sterling) opposed and Supervisor Sylvia Glass (D-Broad Run) abstaining.

The Board discussed a different motion for about 20 minutes before returning to the discussion of the mountainside feature protections. Kershner made a second motion to suspend enforcement of violations in the Mountainside Overlay District until September. Kershner made this motion at the request of County Attorney Leo Rogers who did not want to prosecute an applicant who had committed a zoning violation.

"The idea behind the motion would be to suspend a lawsuit enforcement of violations of Mountainside Overlay District until we have the opportunity to discuss it when Rural returns to the Board in September," Kershner said.

Rogers indicated that the applicant had been working diligently to comply with the standards but had not been able to come into compliance, yet. He hesitated to file a suit against the applicant because it will be about a year before he can move forward with litigation. By then, the zoning ordinance may have changed. If TLUC had been allowed to discuss the protections, Rogers could have held off the charges.

Briskman reacted in disbelief. She criticized Kershner for failing to contact his fellow supervisors about this issue prior to the meeting.

"So basically, we were trying to change zoning and let this Mountainside Overlay District issue leapfrog everything else for one constituent who is just about to get sued?" Briskman said. "I guess I would advise my colleagues, if you have something you need to get done, if you have a motion, maybe call us."

Saines and Turner also expressed frustration that Kershner did not explain the situation before the meeting. Turner said he was appalled that the Board was even entertaining the discussion, expressing

concern over the precedent that would be set should the Board pass this motion. He worried that individuals would begin coming before the Board asking for exceptions from zoning ordinances.

"To ask this board to vote to absolve one person from compliance with our zoning laws is, I just think, completely and utterly inappropriate," Turner said.

Randall reprimanded her colleagues for their harshness toward Kershner. She said she was appalled at her colleagues' lack of courtesy and grace and that there was no reason not to send the discussion to TLUC.

"Had we sent this to TLUC, we might have been able to have some clarity and some difference at this moment," Randall said. "I think people should always make phone calls. Always. But truthfully, it's not just one of my colleagues who doesn't make phone calls."

Kershner apologized for any lack of communication and clarified his

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The pros and cons of reconnecting with an old friend

BY MICHAEL OBERSCHNEIDER, PSY.D.

Have you ever felt a mixture of excitement, anxiety, and nostalgia as you contemplate reconnecting with an old friend? Life has a curious way of moving us along separate paths, often gently guiding once close friendships into later distant memories. But for many, there comes a time in life when we find ourselves wondering about those we've left behind, feeling drawn by the warmth of a shared history.

Ask Dr. Mike



DR. MIKE

Imagine sitting across a café table from someone who once knew your hopes, dreams and secrets. In that moment, you could experience an undeniable

comfort that comes from being with someone special who has been a part of your previous chapters. Your old friend at that table could offer a profound sense of belonging and connection, serving as a bridge between your past and present. Remembering shared laughter, adventures, and even challenges could awaken a deep nostalgia, reminding you of the unique bond you once had.

But many friendships come with an expiration date, and sitting at that table with your old friend could also be disappointing or upsetting; the reconnection may not live up to your expectations.

So, before you reach out to that old friend who's been on your mind, I recommend that you think through the pros and cons of doing so.

The Pros

- Old friends often share a wealth of memories and experiences that can bring a sense of nostalgia and comfort. Revisiting those moments can remind you of who you were and how far you've come.
- There's often a unique bond with old friends that's hard to replicate. Reconnecting can reignite that deep, familiar connection, offering a sense of belonging and understanding.
- Life can be unpredictable, and having an old friend back in your corner can expand your support system. Sometimes, reconnecting happens just when you both need it most.
- Seeing how an old friend has grown and changed can be inspiring, and hearing their perspective on life (alongside your shared past) might offer valuable insights.
- Rebuilding a bond with an old friend can bring unexpected joy and laughter. It can be an opportunity

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FINANCIAL FOCUS®

Steps to take before—and after—a divorce

Submitted by Joshua Wolinski, Edward Jones Financial Advisor

Going through a divorce is emotionally painful and can disrupt one's life in many ways—but does it also have to be financially devastating?



JOSHUA WOLINSKI

Not necessarily. You can help yourself greatly by making a series of moves. Here are some to consider:

Before the divorce is final ...

- *Determine how you'll cover the cost of the divorce.* To meet the costs of a divorce, which can be tens of thousands of dollars, you may need to tap in to your income stream and savings accounts, or even explore alternative options, such as borrowing from your retirement plan, if it's allowed by a divorce court judge.
- *Create a budget.* You may want to build a temporary budget. Your divorce attorney can advise you on how long your separation period may last in a contested case.
- *Start building separate bank and brokerage accounts.* Consult with your

divorce attorney on ways to establish independent bank and brokerage accounts without harming your spouse.

- *Understand your retirement benefits.* Know the value of your and your spouse's 401(k) or similar plans, IRAs, pensions, stock options and other employer benefits. Also, you might need to negotiate the splitting of retirement benefits through a qualified domestic relations order (QDRO). A tax professional and a financial advisor can help you understand how different QDRO proposals can affect your retirement goals.

After the divorce is final ...

- *Finish building your separate financial accounts.* You may want to close any joint accounts or credit cards, change online access to financial accounts, remove your name from bills for which you are no longer responsible and complete any agreed-upon asset transfers, such as dividing retirement assets.
- *Create a new budget.* You can now create a longer-term budget, incorporating any spouse or child support you receive as income. You may also need to adjust your spending to reflect items in

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Just Like Nothing (else) on Earth: Coton Bridge Trailhead

BY TIM JON

I kept telling myself that if I didn't slip and break my neck on the rocky slope, and if I didn't slide all the way out into the moving water, and if I didn't run into an early-rising copperhead snake along the descent, I'd most likely be okay. That's what I kept telling myself: well, maybe



TIM JON

not in those exact words, but the basic feelings were certainly conveyed. You're reading the proof that I actually survived the morning's adventure, so I guess my equilibrium made a deal with the laws of nature to get me to my appointed destination. Now, I'd been meaning to make a personal visit to the riverside access to Coton Bridge for quite some time, and, after locating the nearest parking accommodations to the trail and walking the intervening half-mile or so to the road-side placard, I entered the mature hardwood forest that lined the eastern side of Goose Creek.

"Wait a sec! What Bridge? Where?"

Yep, I hear ya: this is not one of the more 'newsworthy' river crossings in the DC Metro area—with most of the big, bold



ink devoted to those few, traffic-ingested (yes, I said ingested) spans that connect the opposing sides of the Potomac, a little closer to Washington. No, the structure in today's story runs along Riverside Parkway, east of Leesburg, and crosses the aforementioned, and comparatively humble, Goose Creek.

But... Oh, how well I remember the day of the 'christening' of this public works project: this brings us back over two decades—to the Fall of the Year 2002. My most vivid memory of the ribbon-cutting for Coton Bridge will probably forever stick with me: a police helicopter hovering over the proceedings, while uniformed officers and their cars lined the roadway in either direction. You see, this was the time of the DC sniper killings,

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Greenfield Farm Phase 2 application “hits the nail on the head” says Miller

BY SOPHIA CLIFTON

On April 10, the Loudoun County Planning Commission held a work session to review the Greenfield Farm Phase 2 rezoning application, which proposes transforming 174.4 acres of agricultural land located in the Catoctin District, east of Evergreen Mills Road and south of Shreve Mill Road, into a mixed-use residential and commercial

community.

The project, submitted by Orme Farm LLC, calls for the development of 518 residential units, including 496 detached single-family homes and 22 multi-family attached units. It also includes approximately 44,265 square feet of commercial space. Proposed on-site uses include a convenience store with gas pumps, a drive-through restaurant, and, in a future separate application, potential

agri-tourism uses such as a winery or local market.

Since the November public hearing, the applicant has made several modifications to the proposal. To address environmental concerns, all active recreation areas and residential units have been relocated outside a 660-foot buffer surrounding a bald eagle nest found on the property. Within this protected buffer, the applicant now plans to create a stormwater management pond, a tree conservation area, and a pollinator meadow.

In making these adjustments, the applicant has slightly reduced the project's open-space allocations, cutting active recreation space from 53,600 square feet to 47,400 square feet and reducing public amenity space from 241,000 square feet to 235,000 square feet. Additionally, Orme Farm LLC has committed to installing a historic marker near the property's historic manor house.

The rezoning request seeks to change the land designation from agricultural to a residential/commercial zoning

district. The applicant is also seeking three special exceptions: permission for a convenience store with gas pumps, a drive-through restaurant, and a reduction in residential lot widths to 30 feet.

As part of the zoning changes, the applicant has proposed increasing the maximum size allowed for a convenience store from 5,000 to 6,000 square feet, to better accommodate modern designs that typically include food service and seating areas. Many commissioners supported this adjustment, noting it would better serve community needs and help mitigate traffic congestion.

Transportation and infrastructure improvements are a major component of the proffer statement submitted by the developer. In the first phase, the applicant has pledged to realign Shreve Mill Road, add two additional lanes along Evergreen Mills Road, and dedicate land for the future Crosstrail Boulevard. The second phase would involve building Crosstrail Boulevard as a four-lane road, and the third phase would consist of conducting traffic signal justification

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Behind the Curtain of Ben Demase's original musical, *The Gunslinger*

BY ASH WOERNER, LOUDOUN VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL

The Gunslinger is a new musical written, composed and directed by Ben Demase, set to be performed May 23 and 24. For tickets go to <https://loudounvhs.booktix.com/dept/main/e/GS>. Performances are Friday, May 23, 7 p.m., Saturday, May 24, 1 p.m. and 7 p.m.

The description of the senior CAS project is simple: develop a plan for an activity that allows for creativity, activity and community service. Nearly every senior chooses to do a CAS project, many seeing it as a simple way to get out of school early without doing all that much work.

For Ben Demase, however, his CAS project is a chance to make Valley history by writing, composing and directing his own original musical, "The Gunslinger."

"We haven't done one of those, a student-written musical," theater teacher Diego De La Espriella said. "We have done some stage readings of student written work and some student written plays, but a musical? Not so much."

Traditionally, a senior will volunteer to direct their own classic play for their CAS project (or Capstone, as it was formerly known) in the spring of each school year. Students may remember last year's

romantic comedy *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw, directed by senior Bridget McNally.

Demase hoped to take this tradition one step further.

"The idea of doing a western musical popped into my head over the summer," he said. "I've been sitting on it ever since."

Inspired by the fantastical visuals of *Kubo and the Two Strings* and *Rango*, Demase set to work on writ-



ing the first iteration of "The Gunslinger" as a 20 page short story. In its current form, the musical follows its titular character, *The Gunslinger*, as he wanders alone through the desert, looking to escape his abject past. As

he travels, he encounters a cast of characters who usher him along his journey.



Landing on this final concept took Demase some time, however. When he first approached De La Espriella with his idea, he pitched a completely different story.

"Originally, it was a different musical. It was called *The Death of*

Francis Parker, which I thought was cool. And then he passively mentioned the idea of *Gunslinger*, De La Espriella said. "He just kind of fell in love with that idea, and he dropped the other one."

Even once Demase had settled on *The Gunslinger* as the musical he would move forward with, the play underwent many changes. Initially, the story was meant to be a fantasy western—drawing more heavily from his inspirations—but eventually lost the fantasy element. To this day, the script still gets revised as needed to tell the story as Demase envisioned it.

"The show is about guilt, and it's about escaping your guilt and how not to do that, ironically," Demase said. "It's this character that's trying to escape their past, not quite running away, but trying to free themselves from all that's shackling them."

Now, Demase faces the trying task of taking his story from the page to the stage. Auditions were held in January and rehearsals are currently taking place every Friday after school, with more frequent rehearsals to begin in April.

"He's working on playwriting, composition, directing and designing," De La Espriella said. "He has his designers, but part of the director's duty is to provide

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11 »

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Workshop for landlords on rental voucher and homeless prevention programs

Landlords and property managers will have two opportunities to attend a workshop hosted by Loudoun County about the Housing Choice Voucher and Homeless Prevention and Diversion programs. The first will be in person on Tuesday, May 13, 11 a.m. - 12 p.m. at the Rust Library, 380 Old Waterford Road NW, in Leesburg. A second, virtual workshop will be offered Wednesday, May 14, 11 a.m. - 12 p.m.

GOVERNMENT

Each workshop will feature representatives from the county's departments of Housing

and Community Development and Family Services, and will include:

- Basics about the HCV program, including recent and upcoming changes
- Benefits of renting to voucher holders
- Fair Housing and "Source of Funds Discrimination"
- Overview of the Homeless Prevention and Diversion program
- Testimonials from landlords who have experience with the programs
- A question-and-answer session at the end of the workshop

The workshops are free, but attendees must register at www.loudoun.gov/housingworkshop.

Anyone who requires a reasonable accommodation for any type of disability or needs language assistance in order to participate may call 703-737-8323/ TTY-711. Three business days' notice is requested.

For more information about the workshop and about housing programs offered by the Loudoun County Department of Housing and Community Development, visit loudoun.gov/housing, or send an email to housing@loudoun.gov.

Leesburg American Legion Post 34 to hold Annual Golf Fundraiser

American Legion Post 34 will be holding their Annual Golf Fundraiser, scheduled for Friday, June 6, at the Raspberry Falls Golf & Hunt Club, located at 41601 Raspberry Drive in Leesburg. The event is a crucial part of Post 34's mission to raise funds for local veterans, their families, and a variety of

COMMUNITY

community programs, including Boys State, Girls State, scholarships, youth baseball, and more.

The fundraiser provides a unique opportunity for the community to come together, enjoy a day of golf, and support the men and women who have served our country. Post 34 Commander Ann Doss said, "The

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23 »

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Expansion of Loudoun commuter bus service begins May 5

Beginning Monday, May 5, Loudoun County Transit will add four commuter bus routes to improve service levels during peak morning and evening commuting hours. Loudoun's commuter bus service provides rides from points in Loudoun County directly to sites around Crystal City and Washington, D.C. One-way fares are \$11.00 with a SmarTrip® card and \$12.00 with cash payment.

Loudoun County's commuter bus service will add the following two morning and two evening routes. All other commuter bus routes will remain the same.

Morning Routes Added:

- Service from Harmony, Leesburg, and Dulles Transit Center to Washington, D.C.: *Route 484: departing from Harmony Park and Ride lot at 5:30 a.m.*
- Service from Dulles South and East Gate to Rosslyn, The Pentagon, and Crystal City: *Route 282: departing from Dulles South Park and Ride lot at 5:50 a.m.*

Evening Routes Added:

- Service to Dulles Transit Center, Leesburg, and Harmony: *Route 884: 3:15 p.m. departure from Washington, D.C.*
- Service to Dulles South and East Gate: *Route 681: 3:20 p.m. departure from Washington, D.C.*

The new Commuter Bus schedule is effective May 5, 2025. The upcoming schedule changes are online at loudoun.gov/BusChanges.

Commuter Bus Riders can Register for Guaranteed Ride Home

Commuter bus riders and commuters using an alternative mode of transportation at least twice per week are reminded that they are eligible for the free Commuter Connection's Guaranteed Ride Home program. The Guaranteed Ride Home program provides up to six free emergency rides home a year for illness, family emergencies, and unscheduled overtime. For more information about Guaranteed Ride Home, visit loudoun.gov/commute.

Loudoun County encourages bus riders to stay informed about any changes to the county's bus services by visiting loudoun.gov/BusChanges for current service changes. Bus riders may also subscribe to bus rider alerts at loudoun.gov/BusBiz to receive email and text alerts.

In addition, Loudoun County Transit riders may download the Transit app for free on Google Play or the Apple Store. After downloading the app, set your favorite routes to begin receiving notifications for the buses you ride. For more information about the app, visit loudoun.gov/TransitApp.

More Transit Information

Loudoun County Transit offers local bus service with connections to the Silver Line, commuter bus, and paratransit bus services, as well as a broad range of rider and commuter services, including information about ridesharing. For more information about the full range of Loudoun County's transit and commuter services, visit loudoun.gov/transit.

\$5.8M contract approved for W. Loudoun Rec Center oversight

At the April 15 Board of Supervisors Business Meeting, the Board voted to award a \$5,797,492.33 contract to Hill International, Inc. for third-party construction support services for the Western Loudoun Recreation Complex. Due to the scale of the project, external oversight was deemed necessary to ensure successful execution.

The 142-acre complex will be located at 36715 Main Street in Purcellville, just west of the Town of Purcellville. Initially envisioned as an 83,000-square-foot facility, the design has been expanded to 96,000 square feet to accommodate additional recreational programming, including a designated teen area.

The recreation center will feature a gymnasium, kitchen, fitness center, indoor running track, aquatics center with both a competition and leisure pool, spectator seating, wet classrooms, splash play area, multipurpose classrooms, and more.

The park will also offer a wide range of athletic facilities, including four

diamond fields and six rectangular fields. Some of these fields may feature synthetic turf and will be equipped with athletic lighting, restrooms, concession facilities, picnic pavilions, and designated areas for scorekeepers and umpires.

According to the FY25 Adopted Budget, the site will also be designed to accommodate the future Purcellville Library Replacement, which will be named the Western Loudoun Library.

Said Supervisor Juli Briskman (D-Algonkian), "We have decided we will be putting teen centers in our recreation centers moving forward. So this will be our first time that we are actually putting a teen center in the recreational center, which we think is more symbiotic, for lack of a better word, than what we have been doing."

Regarding the recreation center, Supervisor Caleb Kershner (R-Catoctin) said, "It's a big thing I've been advocating for. It's going to increase the fields. We all know we have a deficit in fields."

Art in the Burg on May 10

On Saturday, May 10, the Middleburg Arts Council and the Town of Middleburg will host its annual arts celebration, Art in the Burg. The event will feature artwork from local and regional artists, activities for kids, and a wine garden, on South Madison Street and Federal Street, from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Visitors will have the opportunity to connect with more than 40 artists and discuss their creative processes in the beautiful historic setting of downtown Middleburg, which offers a wonderful variety of shopping and dining options as well.

During this celebration of the arts, Thapasya Bharatanatyam Dance, Jubilee Performing Arts, Loudoun Jazz Society, and Loudoun Poetry will perform on the main stage. One juried artist will also be awarded the People's

Choice Award.

Attendees are encouraged to bring unopened cans of food to help construct the Art CAN Help sculpture. Local artists will design a temporary sculpture using the donated cans of food. Art in the Burg attendees may also make cash donations. All proceeds and canned foods used to create the sculpture will be donated to Seven Loaves Food Bank in Middleburg.

Art in the Burg also kicks off the final weekend to view the 2025 Foxes on the Fence display around the Town of Middleburg. The local fundraiser is auctioning off more than 40 hand-painted decorative foxes, hounds, and hares. The online auction ends on May 10. Visit <https://www.middleburgva.gov/355/Foxes-on-the-Fence> for more information.

For additional information go to www.middleburgva.gov/art, www.Artintheburgva.com, or email middleburgartscouncil@gmail.com. Follow Middleburg Arts Council on Facebook for updates.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

an idea of, you know, 'Where are we going?'"

The show's small, six-person cast features several familiar faces in the theater department: Emma Tulowitzky as *The Gunslinger*, Charlotte Abbe as *The Gravedigger*, Sarah Bader as *The Lover*, Mia Templeton as *The Preacher*, Abby Landes as *The Father* and Enaya Bokhari as *The Sinner*—with Jojo Apfeldorf, Jenna Amro and Eleanor Waldschuetz acting as understudies.

Aside from the actors, Demase works with a whole host of other students to bring this vision to life—whether that's to create choreography and costumes or to assist with directing.

"For the most part, it is written. It

really comes down to revising, redrafting all of that, getting the music ready," Demase said. "I'm terrified of that process, because it's a lot to put together a pit and work with all these people."

The music of *The Gunslinger* deviates from the traditional style seen in most musicals. Demase describes the style as folk with some blues influences. The instrumentation is guitar-led, inspired by Demase's own strengths as a musician.

"Personally, one of the issues I always have with musical music is it's very showtune-y," he said. "I wanted to stray away from that as much as possible to create a sort of unique experience."

Previews of some of these songs are available on the official *The Gunslinger*

Instagram page, [@gunslinger.musical](https://www.instagram.com/gunslinger.musical).

"They're the kind of songs that hit you right in the soul," *The Gunslinger's* choreographer Madelyn Piodela said. "My first thought was just 'I want to be front row when they perform this.'"

The promise of being a part of an original, student-made musical—particularly one

that had Demase as a creator—appealed to many of the students now involved in the production of *The Gunslinger*.

"I love Ben. He's super talented, a very, very talented musician," sophomore Mia Templeton said. "When I heard that he was writing, not only a piece of theater, but a musical specifically, I was really interested

'C'MON, RAISE THE RATES', CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

the last several weeks.

"As an elected official, we have to balance supporting law enforcement and public safety with saving taxpayer dollars. Keeping our residents safe and secure should, and is our top priority."

Kershner said that Purcellville has been one of the safest places in Virginia and that's been true in large part because of the presence of our police department. He said the majority of the Town Council now wants to end that and have the County provide the Town with law enforcement.

He told the Council that the Board has already passed their budget and the money has been allocated. "Law enforcement isn't just a vital service for Purcellville—it is part of your history. It's been here since 1908," he said.

Board Chair Phyllis Randall (D-At Large) reiterated that the County budget process ended April 1, and was part of a nine-month process. "In other words, we have completed our budget process." The sheriff's department had also presented "all of the positions requested and not included in that request were enough full-time positions to take on the law enforcement duties in Purcellville."

"In short," said Randall, "the Board of Supervisors has not allocated positions for the extension of law enforcement into Purcellville." She said the County has given \$5 million to Purcellville and they already maintain Firemen's Field.

Town resident Brian Morgan said concerned citizens of Purcellville are launching a recall to remove the mayor and majority Town Council members. He said the Council had misused their office by firing Rick Bremseth for no cause.

Morgan said that eliminating the police department "will place the safety of the community directly at risk." He said he had 1,088 signatures for the recall for Chris Bertaut, 1,091 for Ben Nett, 1,081 for Carol Luke, and 1,085 for Susan Khalil.

Sarah Morgan used her time in silence because she said if you can't say something nice, then don't say anything at all.

Erica Stought said everyone she talked to wants to pay more in taxes rather than lose the Town's Police Department.

Ami Neiberger said she was alarmed by the proposal to eliminate the Purcellville Police Department. "It's an essential part of the community."

Annie Bailey said that dismantling the police department should be a last resort to balance the budget. "The Purcellville Police Department are the good guys. You can't put a price tag on living in the safest town in Virginia."

Marty Kloeden, who retired from the Purcellville Police Department and then transitioned to a town senior management position asked how one would be able to duplicate the 5-minute response time. He lives in Philomont and said the Sheriff's Office response time varies from 5 to 30 minutes. "In a critical incident, every minute is an eternity."

An eighth grader at Blue Ridge Middle School said, "You are defunding a police department that keeps our town extremely safe. You can't take away police department jobs so our water bill can be lowered. Find other ways that don't include taking away our safety. She asked, "How would it work if a response time of 5 minutes is moved to 15 minutes?"

A Loudoun Valley High School 10th grader cautioned Council Members to do "what's best for the town and that's why you are in these seats now. You are defunding a police department that keeps us extremely safe."

Daniella Harris told Council Members to "remember the responsibility you hold and the trust that has been placed in you by your community."

Chris Kermode said, "Don't be fooled, this is a bad deal for Purcellville. The proposal to shut down the police department and hand over control to the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office isn't forward thinking. It's a short cut; it's an attempt to solve complex problems with simple outsourcing that sells our identity, independence and safety in the name of so-called efficiency."

Developer Casey Chapman said, "Our police department shows up every day, in and out, rain or shine, snow—whatever. He said the mayor "is sitting on a pillar of ego. He sits there smugly as a prick to these citizens."

Tanisha Ritter who is former Mayor Stan Milan's daughter, had her son speak

first. He said when he goes to school, he feels safe because of the police officer in school. "If they are not there, the bad behavior increases, just like yours."

School resource officers are provided by the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office, and are at every middle and high school.

Directing her comments to Town Manager Kwasi Fraser, Tanisha Ritter asked Fraser, "What are you doing? What are you doing?"

Mayor Chris Bertaut asked Ritter to "please direct your comments to the Town Council." Ritter said, "I need you to be quiet." She said she can direct her comments to whomever she wanted to, and since she was "the only Black people here, we can direct it to Kwasi. Do you know Mayberry my guy? Jim Crow."

Lieutenant David Camp posed the rhetorical question: "What does response time really mean? I speak about an active shooter. Everyone of you has a child in school." Camp said that when response time matters most—"what value is that to you.? To me it's priceless. You have the people here that want to work for you."

Council Comments and Vote

Up for discussion was a draft ordinance to delete Chapter 42 of the Purcellville Town Code and directing that law enforcement responsibility be referred to the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office.

Town Attorney John Cafferky said that there were a variety of issues with the draft ordinance that were "both practical and legal particularly given the time involved here with the proposed July 1 date.

Town Manager Kwasi Fraser said that there will be impacts on administration, parks and rec, IT and Human Resources. "If a decision is to be made, it's to be made with all the information before you."

Council Member Kevin Wright asked what the proposed budget was for the Police Department. Finance Director Liz Krens answered \$3.2 million.

Council Member Erin Rayner asked Parks and Recreation Division Manager Aime Ware to list all the events that are supported by the Police Department. They are two parades, Music & Arts Festival, Wine & Food, Celebrate

Purcellville, Memorial Day Ceremony, Michael Oaks' Discover Purcellville's Halloween Event in Dillon's Woods and the Homework Club.

Council Member Caleb Stought said the timeline causes concern as it was too rushed.

Mayor Chris Bertaut said that according to a Rice University study over 500 towns all transitioned to County Sheriff's Offices and there were no reported increases in crime rates in any of the towns.

A first motion was made by Wright to fully fund the Police Department and it was seconded by Rayner. Stought said, "It is abundantly clear that we can not figure it out in nine weeks. We are not going to get a plan by July 1."

Khalil said if the Council funds the Police Department, then that means other cuts are going to have to be made.

The first motion failed with a tie vote of 3-3 with one absent. Someone in the crowd shouted "Raise the rates, c'mon, raise the rates—referring to the utility rates.

At this point Town Manager Kwasi Fraser interjected, "Please, so I come before you as the Town Manager, not the politician. Mayor and Town Council, I think there is an opportunity. You heard the voice of the people tonight and I believe that if a decision is to be made tonight from this dais—I believe you can make this decision tonight.

"The reason I say that is I've sat here and I have not heard any opposing views. So again, I'll put on my political hat" and it's for the people.

"You can do that with a vote tonight." Fraser continued, "So, I'd like you to rethink what the vote needs to be looking at the voice of the people and hearing the voice of the people, please."

With that Rayner made another motion to fully fund the Police Department for FY26. The motion passed 5-1 with Bertaut abstaining.

Luke said the Council will have to make cuts in other places. I am just not for going into debt every year. Our budget is \$5 million more than last year.

Council Members agreed to take a hard look at the budget and negotiate honestly and to have a strategic meeting soon.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

to see what that would be like."

Demase, having performed in nearly every Viking Theatre show in his four years at Valley, is well-known among the students he now directs. Among his many roles, Demase has played Percy Jackson in *The Lightning Thief*, Black Stache in "Peter and the Starcatcher" and, most recently, prepares to play Nino in *Amélie*. "He is one of the most musically talented people I know," Piodela said.

The Gunslinger is set to take place on

May 23 and 24, and while there is much work to be done before then, De La Espriella is confident in Demase's ability to put on an impressive performance.

"We have worked on upwards of 10 shows together and I have seen him operate as an actor, musician and composer," he said. "It will be fun to see him work within our ensemble in a new capacity before he graduates."

Even Templeton, an aspiring professional actor who's acted in countless plays both in school and outside of it, was

impressed by the ease at which rehearsals are moving along. "Ben is also just a great director. You wouldn't expect that from a first-time director, but he is very efficient, very good, knows his way around the stage," she said.

Demase, for one, has found himself growing more and more excited by the show he sees coming to life before his eyes, rehearsal by rehearsal.

"The thing I always hear is that some scripts look amazing on paper and perform terribly," Demase said. "But sitting

there and watching the actors performing scenes," he said, "this feels good—this feels like theater."

Ash Woerner is a senior at Loudoun Valley High School in Purcellville. They have acted as The Viking's Opinion Editor for the past two years and will pursue journalism further at Washington and Lee University.

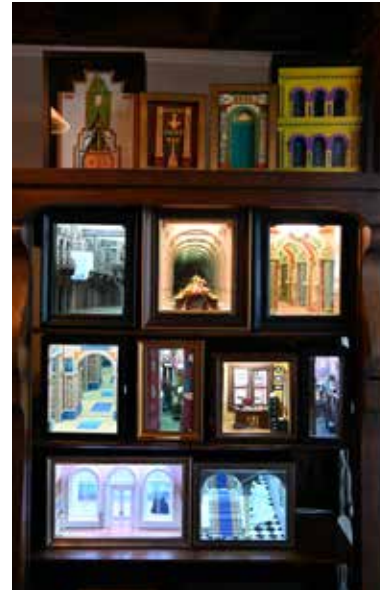
Interview contributions by Enaya Bokhari. This article was originally published in The Viking on March 28, 2025, and reprinted with permission.

Round Hill's C'est Bon by Savoir Fare celebrates Round Hill artists




On April 12, C'est Bon by Savoir Fare's owner and executive chef Joan E. Wolford, celebrated Round Hill local art and paired it with a Gourmet Gallery of hors d'oeuvres and a three-course seated meal.

Four local artists displayed their art and it was followed by a seated dinner. Featured artists included tableau artist Richard Schmoyer, painter Penny Hauffe, potter David Norton and painter William Travis.



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SAR Honors 250th Anniversary of Revolution's First Battle

On April 19, 1775 Colonial militiamen faced off against about 700 British Regular Army troops on the village green at Lexington, Massachusetts. Warned by Paul Revere and friends, Militia from all over Massachusetts poured into the area to prevent the British from Seizing munitions and powder and attempting to capture Colonial leaders.

On the 250th Anniversary of that fateful day, the Sgt Maj John Champe Chapter, Virginia Sons of the American Revolution sponsored a commemoration at Champ Farm near the village of Aldie. A highlight of the event was participation by two Regular British Army reenactors representing His Majesty's 65th Regiment of Foot. Bernie Way dressed as a Lieutenant and Lloyd

Harting dressed as a Sergeant, provided Red Coat Color and a British perspective of events as they read part of the program script.

Five SAR Chapters and four DAR chapters participated, with nine militiamen carrying reproduction muskets. The company of musket men simulating events at Lexington fired the "Shot Heard around the World," followed shortly by a volley in unison then individual random fire. The Company then moved to "Concord" where they fired a second volley in unison followed by random fire.

For more information on the Sgt Maj John Champe Chapter go to johnchampe-sar.org.



Photo: Mike Watson, SAR

SAR DAR & Brits. L-R Top row: Bernie Way, Lloyd Harting, Grace Mills, Jim Watts, Anita Bonner, David Welker, Jack Mills, Greg Hall, Andrew Mills, Ken Morris, Paula Schwoerer, Jacob Schwoerer; front row L-R: Mark Sink, Dale Corey, Sean Carrigan, Barry Schwoerer.

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Round Hill 21st Annual Hometown Festival May 24

Round Hill kicks off its annual Hometown Festival on May 24. To register for the 5K race at Round Hill Elementary School go to www.roundhillva.gov/residents/webforms/hometown-festival-5k-registration-form. Registration ends Monday, May 18 at 4 p.m. The race day registration begins at 7 a.m. at Round Hill Elementary School. There is no registration required for the 1/2 mile kids' fun run.

Drive, and winds through Mountain Valley and Greenwood Commons, Hillwood Estates and goes through the old part of town. Sign up for the parade at: www.roundhillva.gov. Line up begins at 9 a.m.

There will be a Memorial Ceremony in the Town Park at 11 a.m. and music will be provided by the Round Hill Elementary School Chorus.

Children's Fair and Youth Stage

The parade begins on Evening Star

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23 »

New Sterling Recycling Center on track for completion in summer



Construction on the new Sterling Recycling Center located in Claude Moore Park is progressing on schedule with completion expected this summer. The new center replaces the Sterling Park Community Recycling Center, which was closed permanently in September due to renovations at Park View High School, where the center was located.

Like Loudoun County's other public recycling centers, the new Sterling Recycling Center will accept typical household quantities of bottles, cans, jugs, jars, cardboard and paper.

More information about the county's recycling centers, including details about accepted materials and directions to the centers, may be found at loudoun.gov/recycle.

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Inova Blood Donor Services marks 20 years and celebrates retired Chief Johnson

BY VALERIE CURY

Celebrating two major milestones, Inova Blood Donor Services marks its 60th anniversary and the 20th anniversary of its Loudoun location. Inova Blood Donor Services is located at 45745 Nokes Boulevard, Suite 160, in Sterling. A highlight

of the celebration on April 23 was the special recognition of retired Loudoun County System Fire Chief Keith Johnson.

On hand to speak were Inova leadership team members Nicholas Lilly, Senior Director, Inova Blood Donor Services and Sean McCleary, Vice President,

Professional Services, Inova Health System.

The Sterling facility serves as the central hub for Inova Blood Donor Services, where all blood products are tested, processed, and distributed, according to Inova Blood Donor Services Director

Nicholas Lilly.

Inova Vice President of Professional Services Sean McCleary emphasized the critical role of community partnerships—ranging from government agencies to churches and nonprofits—in supporting the center's operations. He noted that the impact of Inova Blood Donor Services extends far beyond what he previously realized, and that its success relies on strong local collaboration.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22 »

Joshua's Hands prepares for 9th Annual Virginia Touch-A-Truck

Joshua's Hands will present their 9th Annual Virginia Touch-A-Truck on May 10, from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. The event will be held at StoneSprings Hospital, located at 24440 Stone Springs Blvd, Dulles.

Kids of all ages (0-100) are invited to put their imagination in gear and go! Enjoy Virginia's original Touch-A-Truck where kids get a chance to get behind the wheel and rub elbows with their hometown heroes.

Attendees will climb on and explore

their favorite vehicles including big rigs, fire engines, cement mixer, utility vehicles, vintage vehicles and many more... It will surely be a day to be remembered.

The event will be held from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. There will be a horn-free hour from 10-11 a.m. for children with special needs and/or sensitive ears. Food trucks will be onsite as well.

Entrance fee is \$5/person. Children ages 12 months and under are free. Starting at 10 a.m. the first 300 paying kids

will receive a free die cast car/truck with admission. Proceeds will benefit Joshua's Hands.

For more event information: www.virginiatouchatruck.com, and for organization information go to www.joshuashands.org.

Joshua's Hands is a nonprofit organization dedicated to education and service. The organization was established in memory of Joshua Guthrie, a community

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 »

GREENFIELD FARM, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

studies and implementing further improvements along Evergreen Mills Road.

Planning Commission Vice Chair Mark Miller (Catocin) emphasized that the applicant's commitment to constructing these roads would provide essential infrastructure at a lower cost than if the county funded the improvements itself, helping to meet the transportation goals outlined in the county's 2019 Transportation Plan. "That is very significant," Miller said. Planning Commission Chair Clifford Keirce (Sterling) agreed, saying, "The county knows the roads need to be built and this will cost significantly less."

However, county staff, including Land Use Planner Allison Britain, disagreed. "Staff continue to identify an impact to heritage resources as an issue for commission consideration and continue to identify outstanding issues related to capital facilities and transportation impacts," Britain said.

The preservation of the early 1800s Greenfield Farm manor house, located on a 10-acre parcel at the center of the project site, was a key point of discussion. Although the manor is not currently included within the limits of the Phase 2 application, its historical significance has led to staff concerns about the lack of a formal preservation plan.

At the meeting, staff reiterated that heritage impacts remain an outstanding issue that needs binding commitments from the applicant. While some commissioners expressed reluctance to impose long-term conditions before a standalone preservation application is submitted, expected in May 2025, others stressed the importance of securing a preservation plan now to ensure the structure's protection.

Suggestions included establishing clear standards for structural stabilization, ongoing maintenance, and adaptive reuse possibilities such as a small winery or produce market. County staff plan to continue working with the applicant to

define specific preservation measures to be included in future submissions.

After deliberations, the Planning Commission voted 7-1 to forward the rezoning application to the Board of Supervisors with a recommendation for approval, with Commissioner Ad Barnes (Leesburg) voting against and Commissioner Madhava Reddy Madireddy (Dulles) absent.

Although the commission's recommendation advances the project, several outstanding issues remain, including finalizing transportation funding details, addressing capital-facility contributions, and ensuring sufficient protections for the site's heritage resources.

Commissioners Ad Barnes and Eric Combs (Ashburn) also voiced their concerns about how close the development would be built to Leesburg Executive Airport. Combs said the Town of Leesburg sent the planning commission several resolutions opposing the application. "That airport is getting pretty busy," Barnes said. "There are a lot of

executive jets coming up."

Miller said the county has worked on revising the Comprehensive Plan to highlight the area where Greenfield Farm would be built, shifting it from a rural policy area to a transition policy area to meet the needs of the community's continued growth. "This application is to do pretty much just that. A small lot, transition-type neighborhood. It's what we asked for," he said, commenting that the application "hits the nail on the head."

As Loudoun County continues its broader efforts to transition rural areas into more mixed-use, transit-oriented communities, the Greenfield Farm Phase 2 project stands at a critical crossroads. The outcome of the next application cycle, especially regarding the manor house's future and infrastructure commitments, will play a pivotal role in shaping both the development and the preservation priorities for this part of the county.

FINANCIAL FOCUS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

the divorce agreement, such as expenses now covered by your former spouse and court-ordered responsibilities for paying college education expenses for dependent children and possibly the attorneys' fees for a former spouse.

- *Review your protection plans.* You may need to review your life, homeowners and auto insurance policies. And if you were covered under your spouse's health insurance plan, you may want to apply for COBRA to stay on that plan up to 36 months or switch to your own employ-

er's plan, if available. If you don't have access to an employer's health insurance, you may want to explore a marketplace plan from the Affordable Care Act or contact a health insurance broker.

- *Review your estate plans.* To reflect your new marital status, you may need to work with your legal professional to change some of your estate-planning documents, such as a will, living trust, advanced health care directive or power of attorney. Also, review the beneficiary designations on life insurance policies, IRAs, annuities and investment accounts, as these designations can likely

supersede instructions on your will or trust.

- *See your tax professional.* You may need to consult with your tax professional on issues such as changing your tax return filing status, claiming a child as a dependent and dealing with tax implications of assets received in the divorce.

Going through a divorce is not easy—but by taking the appropriate steps before and after the divorce is finalized, you can at least help put yourself in a more secure and stable financial position to begin the next phase of your life.

Remember, your individual financial goals and questions deserve individual attention. If you think you might need specific financial advice, please reach out to a local financial advisor.

This article was written by Edward Jones for use by your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor. Edward Jones. Member SIPC.

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A VOTE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Council had hard choices to make. He said the proposed budget was a good starting point because “it puts us at zero percent rate increases on water and waste water.”

He reminded Council that when he took office in January the proposal was to again raise utility rates 18 and 22% on top of the 16 and 18% increases made last year. “I was the last one to come on board with this.”

Nett said the Police Department for several years hasn’t been able to provide 24/7 coverage, “contrary to public claims otherwise including those on the Town’s website.” He said the decision is “supported by members of staff who have likewise noted that the Police Department has been the source of most of the human resources complaints over the last decade to include past litigation.”

On April 22, Mayor Chris Bertaut read a letter he sent to Attorney General Jason Miyares:

“I am writing to express my growing alarm regarding the criminal investigation your office has authorized into Council Member and Vice Mayor Ben Nett, now being carried out by the Virginia State Police. The events surrounding this investigation strongly suggest that it is politically motivated, procedurally improper, and fundamentally at odds with the democratic principles that underpin public service in the Commonwealth.

“On April 21, 2025, the Commonwealth Attorney’s Office issued an advisory opinion at the request of another Town Council member, Caleb Stought, a political opponent of Mr. Nett. Alarming, that opinion contained a material misstatement of fact. It claimed that Vice Mayor Nett voted to disband the Purcellville Police Department. This is categorically false.

“The official public record reflects that on April 8, 2025, Vice Mayor Nett did not vote to disband the police department. Rather, he voted—along with the majority of the Council—to direct the town attorney to draft an amendment to the Town Code for future consideration. This was a procedural step to explore a policy change, not a final decision to enact it. The vote was legal, proper, and consistent with the responsibilities of any

elected local official engaged in shaping public policy.

“Despite this, the Commonwealth Attorney’s Office has since issued a Notice of Criminal Investigation to all Town Council members, advising that Vice Mayor Nett should be barred not only from voting on matters related to the Purcellville Police Department, but even from attending meetings where the Police Department is discussed. The latter demand has no identifiable legal basis and appears to represent a direct and unconstitutional infringement on Mr. Nett’s rights—both as an elected official and as a private citizen entitled to attend and speak at public meetings under the First Amendment.

“This is just the most recent and alarming escalation in a troubling series of events:

“1. Violation of Procedural Rights: Then-Officer Nett was placed on the Brady List by the Commonwealth Attorney’s Office before being allowed to respond to the allegations, and before any hearing—violating the Virginia Law-Enforcement Officers Procedural Guarantee Act and denying him due process.

“2. Politically Motivated Witnesses: A key witness in an alleged HR infraction is Council Member Erin Rayner, a political opponent. The push for Nett’s dismissal was led by the then-Deputy Chief of Police—a position Mr. Nett had proposed eliminating during his campaign, creating the clear appearance of political or personal retaliation.

“3. Orchestrated Recall Effort: Mr. Nett is facing a recall petition driven by political adversaries, citing weak or unsubstantiated claims—such as alleged FOIA violations and procedural concerns over a Town Manager hiring, which falls squarely within the lawful authority of the Town Council. Notably, a listed witness to the recall is failed mayoral candidate **Stan Milan**, again highlighting the political nature of these attacks.

“4. Conflict of Interest in the Prosecutor’s Office: A high-ranking member of the Commonwealth Attorney’s Office, **Nicole Whitman**, previously ran for office with Council Member **Erin Rayner**, serving as her campaign manager. This constitutes a direct conflict of interest that casts doubt on the integrity

of any prosecutorial action involving Mr. Nett.

“5. Criminalizing a Lawful Vote: A central event leading to this investigation appears to be Mr. Nett’s lawful vote on April 8, 2025, to direct the town attorney to draft a proposal for eliminating the local police department—a policy decision, debated and voted on publicly, with the town attorney confirming that Mr. Nett was not barred from participating. That this vote would contribute to a criminal inquiry is alarming and chilling to the democratic process.

“The totality of these circumstances suggests that investigative and legal mechanisms are being leveraged not to uphold the law, but to target and silence an elected official for his policy positions and political independence.

“I urge your office to immediately reassess its involvement in this investigation and to publicly clarify the legal basis—if any—for the extraordinary steps now being taken to curtail Mr. Nett’s rights as both an official and a citizen. Democracy depends on the ability of elected representatives to speak, deliberate, and vote without fear of political or prosecutorial retaliation.

“Thank you for your time and attention to this serious matter. I trust your office will act with the integrity and impartiality the Commonwealth of Virginia requires and deserves.”

On April 8 the majority of town council voted to direct the Town Attorney to draft a proposal for eliminating the Town Police Department. The Town Attorney in consultation with the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Advisory Council said Nett could vote on the draft ordinance.

Despite Anderson’s advisory opinion, On April 22, G. Stewart Petoe, Executive Director Virginia Conflict of Interest and Ethics Advisory Council again reaffirmed that Nett’s participation is permissible under COIA.

“Your employment with the Purcellville Police Department ended on Friday, April 4, 2025. Therefore, as of Saturday, April 5, 2025, you no longer had a personal interest in the Police Department. Accordingly, it was and is permissible for you to participate in transactions that concern the Police Department from April 5 onward, including those that *solely* concern the Police Department.

“This is in contrast to your restrictions under the State and Local Government Conflict of Interests Act when you were employed with the Police Department. While you were so employed, you had a personal interest in that agency and had a personal interest in any transactions that involved or could affect that agency. This is why you were prohibited from participating in any transaction that *solely* involved the Police Department. You were permitted to participate in transactions that involved the Police Department and at least two other Town agencies or departments, pursuant to the exception provided for in Virginia Code section 2.2-3112 (B) (1); «a

member of a business, profession, occupation, or group of three or more persons the members of which are affected by the transaction...” This is why you were permitted to participate in transactions involving the town’s overall budget, but could not participate in transactions that impacted only the Police Department.

“You are still within the time period for filing a grievance against your termination on April 4. It is my legal opinion that this does not generate a personal interest in a transaction for you for transactions that concern the Police Department. The definition of “personal interest in a transaction” is defined in relevant part as: **a personal interest of an officer or employee in any matter considered by his agency. Such personal interest exists when an officer or employee or a member of his immediate family has a personal interest in property or a business or governmental agency, or represents or provides services to any individual or business and such property, business or represented or served individual or business (i) is the subject of the transaction or (ii) may realize a reasonably foreseeable direct or indirect benefit or detriment as a result of the action of the agency considering the transaction.**

“The operative language from this definition for purposes of my conclusion is “a *reasonably foreseeable* direct or indirect benefit or detriment.» [Emphasis supplied]. Both the Council and the Office of the Attorney General have stated that for purposes of COIA, benefits or detriments must be «reasonably foreseeable.» Benefits or detriments that are purely speculative do not create a personal interest in a transaction. A scenario in which you might be reinstated to your former position, if you are successful in a grievance proceeding, is speculative. Therefore, this fact (of your being within the grievance window) does not create a personal interest for you in a transaction involving the Police Department.

“Therefore, it would not be impermissible for you to participate in transactions that solely concern or could impact the Police Department. (As noted above, you were always permitted to participate in transactions that involved the Police Department and at least two other Town agencies or departments).”

On April 22, the Office of Commonwealth’s Attorney Bob Anderson notified the Purcellville Town Council that, as of April 21, the Virginia Attorney General had authorized the State Police to conduct a criminal investigation into Vice Mayor Ben Nett.

Chief Deputy Commonwealth’s Attorney Nicole Wittmann previously served as Deputy Attorney General for Criminal Justice and Public Safety after joining the Office of the Virginia Attorney General in 2022. She returned to Loudoun County to rejoin the Commonwealth’s Attorney’s Office in January 2025. In 2019, Council Member Erin Rayner—Vice Mayor Nett’s political opponent—served as campaign manager for Wittmann’s bid for Commonwealth’s Attorney.

JOSHUA’S HANDS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

servant, who died at the age of 16. The organization that bears his name continues his legacy of service.

Joshua’s Hands awards college scholarships, cultivates volunteers, encourages teen safe driving and brings volunteers together to make quilts for America’s Valiant Warriors who serve and sacrifice on our behalf. The total number of quilts made since January

2011 is now 2700+. The organization is best known in the community for this quilting project and their annual, free Fall Festival, now in its 40th year. This event will be held Oct. 11, in western Loudoun County.

Joshua’s Hands is an all-volunteer organization, with no paid staff. The Virginia Touch-A-Truck serves as a fun community event and a major fundraiser for Joshua’s Hands. All proceeds go to further the work of the organization.



Commanders' John Bates joins Mercer Middle's Walk in support of cleft care

BY VALERIE CURY

Mercer Middle School in Aldie held its annual "Walk for Smiles" walk-a-thon fundraiser on April 25 to support children born with a cleft lip and/or cleft palate. Proceeds from the event will go to Smile Train, the world's largest organization dedicated to cleft care. First launched in 2011, the fundraiser welcomed a special guest this year—Washington Commanders tight end John Bates, who was also born with a cleft condition.

On the outside track where the walk-a-thon took place, Bates said he grew up with a cleft lip and had to deal with that his whole life. "When I moved to Washington four years ago, Troy Reinhart reached out to me about some different opportunities to give back to the community."

Reinhart is the Senior Vice President, Philanthropy and Ambassador Development with Smile Train.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 21 »

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Joseph and Poole named principal and teacher of the year

Two outstanding Loudoun County Public Schools educators have been selected Washington-area Principal of the Year and Teacher of the Year by *The Washington Post*, the first double win for LCPS since 2013. Kimberly Poole, a career Mustang at J.L. Simpson Middle School, has been selected as The Washington Post Teacher of the Year. Jeff Joseph, principal of Dominion Trail Elementary since 2013, has been named Principal of the Year.

The Washington Post Principal of the Year Award recognizes a principal who goes beyond the day-to-day demands of their position to create an exceptional educational environment—and the Teacher of the Year Award recognizes teachers who exemplify excellence in their profession to encourage creative and quality instruction.

“Kimberly Poole and Jeff Joseph represent the very best of LCPS—passionate, dedicated, and deeply committed

“Kimberly gets to know her students so that they want to be successful and make her proud of their accomplishments.” Parent Ashley Townsend observes she is a fixture at Simpson, stating, “Mrs. Poole is such an amazing asset to our community. She’s empowering tweens of this generation to do all the things she knows they’re great at doing!”

Principal of the Year, Mr. Jeff Joseph, has been an educator and administrator at Loudoun County Public Schools for over 23 years. Mr. Joseph currently serves as principal of Dominion Trail Elemen-



Photos: Loudoun County Public Schools



tary School in Ashburn, a role where he has fostered growth for the community over the past 10 years.

“The biggest change he made was treating his staff as family, creating a trusting and loving environment,” described an educator. “He believes that when our basic needs are met, we are better able to focus on academics.”

to student success,” said Superintendent Dr. Aaron Spence. “Their recognition by *The Washington Post* is not only a celebration of their individual excellence, but a testament to the power of strong relationships, innovative teaching, and compassionate leadership. We are incredibly proud of their impact on our students, our schools, and our community.”

Teacher of the Year, Kimberly Poole, works at the helm of the Simpson Middle School Career and Technical Education department, helping every 6th-grader study technology and integrating her students’ project-based learning with the dedicated Amazon Think BIG Space.

She teaches Intro to Computer Applications and serves as the yearbook adviser. She’s spent 25 proud years at Simpson. Fellow teacher Lisa Hamilton emphasizes Mrs. Poole’s personalized approach with students, fostering connections that nurture a deep sense of pride.

Mr. Joseph has a passion for building a strong, supportive learning environment where students’ physical, mental, and emotional well-being are vital—creating an opportunity for students “to realize their full potential,” observed a former student. “Reason 1,352 why we love our principal: I just witnessed Mr. Joseph running across the parking lot to give an umbrella to a child walking home without one,” said a parent during an unexpected downpour.

These two outstanding educators will be celebrated by their school communities in the coming weeks and will share their best practices with other LCPS educators and leaders throughout the year at professional development sessions.

They will also be the guests on the LCPS Podcast on Thursday, April 24. Listeners can tune in on any major streaming platform at <https://www.lcps.org/o/communications/page/podcast>.

MERCER MIDDLE SCHOOL,
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

Bates shared that growing up, he had no idea until he moved here and connected with Troy—only then did he learn from his parents that both they and his grandparents had been supporting the organization since he was a child.

“Since the last four years, I have been doing what I can whenever I can to give back to the community and try to make a difference. I am excited to be here and give back to the youth and kids.

“I remember being in their shoes not long ago, so to be able to come back to school as both my parents were educators for over 30 years—so schools, education really hit home for me. It’s great to be here doing this walk-a-thon,” said Bates before being surrounded with excited students.

LCPS teacher Brian Fontaine has been doing the walk-a-thon since 2011, which benefits Smile Train. “We started it to encourage kids to change the lives of others, or to do some good in the world,” said Fontaine. He said the first year we raised \$22,000 with the help of corporations matching funds, and over the years they are going to break \$400,000.

“It’s the kids that do all the work. They



raise all the money. So we just organize and put it together. We have some fantastic teachers that do a lot of the work,” said Fontaine.

Mirela Mrkonjic said it is her fifth-year teaching at Mercer Middle School and her fourth-year working with Mr. Fontaine. She works with all the students who make all the posters, the envelopes, and the slides together and get the students involved. The fundraiser lasts about a month in the spring.

Around 150 students took part in this year’s walk, helping raise funds to provide life-changing cleft lip and palate surgeries for children in need worldwide. After the outside events which included tug-of-war, Bates met with top student fundraisers and delivered remarks in the school auditorium. He encouraging students to keep making a difference and to lead with kindness.

JUST LIKE NOTHING (ELSE), CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

and authorities seemed to be taking no chances with the safety of then-Governor Mark Warner, and many other state and local officials. That day’s event proceeded without incident, but, in 10 years of local news coverage, this was the first and only airborne security detail I had experienced. Authorities in Maryland would eventually arrest the two killers in late October of that year.

So—to me—Coton Bridge will always represent, at least partially, the organized and successful response of regional authorities to those acts of atrocious and senseless violence. All these memories accompanied me—on that recent visit—as I made my way along the wooded ridge above the River, looking for any type of civilized trail down to the water.

What I found was a daunting slope of rock and clay, mostly free from vegetation, with some fallen trees strewn across the surface, just to make things a bit more interesting. “More interesting” to an aging storyteller with multiple injuries and other medical issues—at least these days—doesn’t take much. I especially didn’t want my trusty digital camera to end up in the drink; I also wanted to keep at least most of my body parts dry and fracture-free. And, as we know, the elements coalesced to allow my relative safe passage to the River’s edge, which I then followed upstream in the direction of the

Bridge’s pilings at water-level, with the morning traffic whizzing by overhead.

Now, driving along Riverside Parkway and crossing Coton Bridge can seem a very passive, innocuous thing—one could even pass over without realizing that a water crossing was in progress; seeing the structure from the level of Goose Creek was much more impressive, as if seeing the edifice turned upside down—revealing the massive pieces involved, and getting just an idea of the obvious amount of planning and design, as well as the heavy work of muscle and machinery. I realize that this paragraph consisted of only on sentence, so ya got me.

And, having carried the far-off, dark memories of the DC sniper shootings to the shores of our local river, I’d like to think I left some of the emotional weight of those times, and images and words in the slow-moving water; perhaps they’re somewhere far out into the Atlantic by now, settling to the deep bottom. And, yes—I made my peaceful way back along the shore, and up the steep bank, and across the ridge, all the way to Riverside Parkway, and then to my waiting car at the nearest crossroads; I had no swift plunge into the drink, no lost camera, no broken bones and no poisonous snakes. Just a friendly (so I told myself, anyway) box turtle, who—if he didn’t grant an exclusive interview—he didn’t totally shun my presence.

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INOVA BLOOD, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

Inova team members who were recognized were: Yared for 35 years of service, Carolyn—29 years, Norman—24 years, Daniel—24 years, Rebecca—24 years, Kavita—21 years, AJ—21 years, and Ting—for 20 years.

Retired Chief Johnson said that Inova supplied blood to an accident where four or five people were trapped and the rescue team ran out of blood. “Dr. Morgan sent one of our battalion chiefs to get blood, and they gave it to him”—they just gave it to him and didn’t ask any questions. “Those people are alive because of the blood that people, all of us gave to all of us--and it was truly successful.”

He said the blood donor program has been a great partnership, and he is a regular donor. “My family is a regular donor. It’s not about just going to a house fire,” said Johnson.

“If you give blood, it saves lives,” and it’s a pretty awesome thing that you do,” he said.

Loudoun County Board Chair Phyllis Randall said she was hoping retired Chief Johnson would say ‘I want to come back so bad.’ “He didn’t say that, he said ‘No, I’m going to Disney on Friday.’”

“But Chief Johnson’s example, the example he set for all of us in the way you serve, in the way you give back ... has made an incalculable impact on Loudoun County and in the regions,” said Randall.

“I say all the time, Chief Johnson is my fire chief, and you can be a fire chief—but you are not going to be my fire chief. Chief Johnson is my fire chief—is my fire chief.”

Randall said the County’s Fire and Rescue Department, led by our former Fire Chief Johnson has blood drives on a regular basis. “The amount of blood that our Fire and Rescue has given is astonishing.”

“They know the importance of it. They know the importance of the life saving measures of having blood available. They

do it themselves and they also do things like Battle the Badges, where they have competitions with the sheriff’s office to see who can donate the most blood.

“In normal life you don’t you know, you’re not like I got to get to the cleaners, got to go to the grocery store, got to give blood. So, you have got to think of ways to make people remember to give blood.”

Randall noted the short shelf life of blood and emphasized its critical role in



saving lives in Loudoun County. She highlighted the efforts of Inova and local firefighters, recognizing Inova as a leader in the field.

Randall said the program came from a tragedy in 2017 where a food truck landed on top of a car with a family in the car. Unfortunately, the mom didn’t make it out, but one thing the EMS had to deal with was that it was going to take so long to get the family out of the car that they had to bring blood to the scene. “Now units carry blood on them.”

“In Loudoun County we do hard things, and we do them well, and we do them often,” said Randall.

To learn more about donating, go to inovablood.org. The hours of operation are 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily except for Sunday, which is 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

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ROUND HILL'S FESTIVAL,
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

Entertainment will be at the Round Hill Baptist Church. Amusement rides will be available to include a rock wall, Turbo Tubs, and a moon bounce starting at approximately 11:30 a.m.

The Round Hill Volunteer Fire Department Open House and Safety Fair will be open from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Now you're talking—the pie eating contest will be held at the Town Park. Sign up is the on the day of the festival. The categories will be for youth, teen and adult—and will begin at the conclusion of the Memorial Ceremony at the Information Table in the front of the Town Park. Sign ups are first come, first serve.

A Cornhole Tournament and Silent Auction is sponsored by the Purcellville Cannons baseball team and pre-registration will be limited to 12 two person teams. Day of registration will also be available up to a maximum of 16 teams total. The event is for ages 12 plus and will take place from 3 to 5 p.m. Sign up at: hometownfestival.org/about/event-schedule-2/.

At 3:30 p.m. homemade and kit cars will compete in timed heats for the "fastest kid in Round Hill. The race will run the length of N. Locust Street.

For lunch the Round Hill Fire Department



will offer pulled pork sandwiches. Tammy's Diner will have sausages and hot dogs on the grill.

C'est Bon by Savoir Fare will be serving berry salad, chicken salad platter, seafood tarragon tortellini salad, marinated and grilled flank steak salad, desserts and drinks. Gringo Gordo's food truck will be at the Round Hill Baptist Church.

From 5 to 10 p.m. come join the community for drinks and dinner at the Town Park. There will be food trucks and Two Smooth Dudes offering tater tots, wraps, salads and pineapple smoothies. Roaming Coyote will be offering Mexican specialties.

Wine will be offered by Williams Gap Winery and beer from Dirt Farm Brewing.

All day long Gruto's Ice Cream will be available. Save the date for a day to be remembered.

HEATED DEBATE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

intentions. He encouraged his colleagues to offer a forward-looking solution to an applicant who, he believes, made an honest effort to comply with zoning ordinances but made a mistake.

"This is not an attempt to protect any particular one person, overall. I take

offense at that, Mr. Turner, and you should apologize for that, quite frankly," Kershner said. "What we do for almost every applicant who finds themselves in violation cause they made a mistake or they didn't make the grandfathering cut-off, we work with that applicant."

Kershner's motion passed 6-3.

AMERICAN LEGION, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

Annual Golf Fundraiser is an important tradition and our biggest fundraiser for Post 34. We are thrilled to bring the community together once again at Raspberry Falls Golf & Hunt Club.

"This event not only raises vital funds for our veterans and their families, but it also plays a key role in supporting local youth programs that foster the next generation of leaders. We are grateful for the generous support of our sponsors and participants, who make a direct impact on the lives of those who need it most."

The Legion is seeking both sponsors and golfers to participate in this year's event. Sign-up for registered golfers begins at 7:30 a.m. on June 6, with a

shotgun start at 9 a.m. A luncheon will follow the golfing at about 3 p.m.

- Business sponsors will receive valuable exposure and benefits, including:
- Logo and web link placement on the official tournament website
- Signage at the golf course on the day of the event
- The opportunity to include your business's promotional items in golfer "goody bags"
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To learn more about the event, register to play, or become a sponsor, go to: <https://birdease.com/Post34tournament2025> and follow the links at the top of the page.



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OPINION: OAK HILL, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

eventually fall back on the Commonwealth. I invited the Governor out to see the property and discuss the plan at greater lengths. He accepted.

The Governor spent almost three hours at Oak Hill, touring the property and sitting down to discuss the finances with the homeowner Gayle DeLashmutt, a representative from the Conservation Fund, his Secretary of Natural Resources, and myself. I was thoroughly impressed with the Governor's in-depth understanding of every aspect of the plan as he dug in with questions to figure out how to make this work. When he left, we were both optimistic that we could get this done and address all of his financial concerns.

A little over a week later, he let us know that Oak Hill would in fact be included in the budget, and announced the amendment in a press conference, crediting my "arm-twisting" and our site visit. The Governor's amendment laid out steps and benchmarks that must be met to ensure that the Commonwealth would not carry any financial burden from the proposed State Park. The amendment successfully took away any possible negative aspect of the State Park plan—it would be a free State Park with no costs to the Commonwealth.

Everything was moving in the right direction, and it looked like we would get a new, beautiful and historic 1240-acre State Park in our district. That was until politics for some reason reared its ugly head.

We got word a few days before the vote that members on the other side of the aisle were going to change their votes to oppose the park despite having already voted for it.

Somehow, a free state park that would permanently conserve over 1,240 acres of open space and President Monroe's home had become a divisive partisan issue. Every single Republican in both chambers had committed to support the Park, but House Democrats were convinced by House Leadership to change their votes.

When the reconvene session came around early this month, sure enough, the Oak Hill budget amendment was killed on a party-line voice vote. Republicans unanimously supported the amendment, but Democrats had just enough votes to kill it.

I cannot understand why anyone would have voted against this. The park

was entirely funded by private donors, non-profits, and a one-time grant of \$22 million from the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors. There would be no cost to the Commonwealth for maintenance thanks to the Governor's amendment and the large endowment. Everything about the park was great for Loudoun and great for Virginia.

This travesty truly displays the worst side of politics. Having served eight years on the Board of Supervisors here in Loudoun and one term on the School Board, I have held elected office for more than a dozen years. Never have I been a part of anything as divisive and partisan as the politics of Richmond. Killing a free state park not once, but twice in order to prevent your political opponents from garnering a so-called "win" is a level of nasty politics that was previously unfathomable to me.

I have heard a lot of blame thrown around for Oak Hill going down, but let's be clear: this falls squarely on the 51 Democrat members of the House of Delegates and their leadership who put party politics above what is best for our Commonwealth and flip-flopped their vote to kill the park. Not to mention the Loudoun Delegation who did not support the county they represent or the Democratic majority on the Board of Supervisors.

I'll be back next year, but I fear that Oak Hill may just not be. The family had given us a deadline of this year to sell the property, and there are fundraising and grant pieces that could expire.

I will continue to support the acquisition of Oak Hill for a State Park and will be exploring every possible option, but I am incredibly disappointed in my Democrat colleagues who participated in this raw partisanship—killing the Oak Hill State Park not once, but twice, when we could have just gotten it done this month! Given the fact that the Democrats in the both the House and Senate have now gone out of their way to kill Oak Hill twice this year, I hold no illusions about an easy or guaranteed passage next year.

Delegate Geary Higgins represents the 30th House of Delegates District, which encompasses Western Loudoun and Northern Fauquier Counties. He and his wife live in Waterford, Virginia where he raised his three daughters.

LETTER: DISTRICT'S REGULATIONS, CON'T. FROM PAGE 4

quickly for \$1.4 million and the agent went AWOL.

When a person owns or buys mountainside property, they have become stewards of that land for succeeding generations. There are responsibilities entailed with that ownership to serve the public good.

Monetizing the mountains is an

attractive business investment for commercial entities and individuals seeking financial gain, at a huge cost to the environment.

Yes, the regulations are intentionally rigid to protect and preserve our beautiful mountains.

Peter Weeks

President, Friends of the Blue Ridge Mountains

ASK DR. MIKE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

to share new experiences while honoring the old ones.

- If the friendship drifted apart for a specific reason, reconnecting could provide a chance to address unresolved feelings or misunderstandings, leading to closure or renewed strength in your relationship.

The Cons

- If your friendship ended on a very negative note or involved difficult unresolved issues, reconnecting might bring back too much old pain for one or both of you.
- People change over time, and if you've grown apart in values, interests, or lifestyles, you might find it hard to reestablish a meaningful connection.
- If the friendship you once had was unhealthy or involved patterns like

manipulation, judgment, alcohol or substance abuse or negativity, it may be best to move forward without rekindling those dynamics.

- You might want to consider your bandwidth to reconnect, as your current priorities might make it difficult to invest the time and energy needed to rebuild an old friendship.
- Sometimes the idea of reconnecting can be more romanticized than the reality, and rekindling things might not live up to expectations.

What's the best way to reconnect?

- Reflecting on your intentions to reach out to an old friend is important. Take a moment to explore your reasons for wanting to reconnect deeply. Understanding your motivations can help clarify your expectations and reduce anxiety about the process.

- If you decide to reconnect, perhaps it's best to begin with a simple, heartfelt message expressing your genuine desire to reconnect. Acknowledge the time apart gracefully, emphasizing your interest in their well-being rather than immediately diving into past complexities.
- Be truthful about your emotions and the reasons behind reaching out. Authenticity encourages reciprocal openness and creates a solid foundation for rebuilding trust.
- Be prepared emotionally. Having internally clear and defined communication and emotional boundaries to protect your well-being before reconnecting is a good idea.
- Keep in mind that high school reunions, college reunions, or other sorts of planned group gatherings can be a less direct and safer way to reconnect with an old friend.

Remember, reaching out to an old friend can leave you vulnerable, risking rejection or disappointment if your feelings aren't reciprocated. Acknowledging and preparing for this potential outcome can soften its emotional impact.

In closing, reconnecting with an old friend can be meaningful, blending nostalgia, vulnerability, and profound emotional growth. It can be a wonderful decision in so many ways. However, it can certainly also be risky, so knowing your motivations in advance and preparing yourself is important.

"The joy of meeting an old friend is unmatched, like finding a piece of your heart you don't know was missing."

—Unknown

Michael Oberschneider, Psy.D. is a clinical psychologist in private practice. He can be reached at 703-723-3999, and is located at 44095 Pipeline Plaza, Suite 240, Ashburn.

ONE LIKE AND MANY GRIPES, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

Don't micromanage spending cuts, just take a sword to this Gordian knot and chop 15% or so off any LCPS budget request.

A Criticaster's Jihad

One local crusader has studied County finances in detail and reached two conclusions. His first one is true – County spending is out of control.

His second thesis is that real property taxes should comprise 60% of county revenue. Because of windfalls from data

centers, we're not near that "balanced budget" benchmark. But whoever set that 60% mark? Why is it magic? Why do a few top county officials buy into it?

There are two ways to meet the 60% target: Cut data center taxes (Is the criticaster crazy?) or even crazier, impose higher real property taxes. Say goodbye to this Board when elections next come around.

An analogy would be if the County had a winning MegaMillions ticket and pocketed, say, \$200 million. Would you say to the lottery, "We'll take only \$80 million

because we must maintain a balanced revenue stream?"

A Populist Crusade

At Gettysburg, Abe Lincoln spoke simple words that define the best concept for governance: "Government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth."

In theory, that sentence makes you feel good. In practice, it makes you want to choke most politicians and all lobbyists. For millennia, governments have been of, by and for the powerful and

the wealthy. At the Federal level, consider the influence wielded by big corporations, big unions, big nabobs. At our state level, Dominion exerts the most power over the General Assembly. At the local level, do big promoters and rich land barons usually get their way?

Yep. It kinda makes me sad. Angry, too.

Charlie Houston and his wife live on a small farm in Paeonian Springs. While writing this he had to pause to find some Roloids.

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