School Board appoints interim superintendent

"I’m grateful for the opportunity and I look forward to working with strong leaders, amazing staff and it’s just an opportunity for us to just keep getting better and better,”

– Melanie Kay-Wyatt,
ACPS interim superintendent

Melanie Kay-Wyatt to lead ACPS for 2022-23 school year
BY OLIVIA ANDERSON

The Alexandria School Board appointed Melanie Kay-Wyatt, Ph.D. as the interim superintendent of Alexandria City Public Schools at its July 28 meeting.

Kay-Wyatt is currently the ACPS chief of human resources and joined the district in July 2021. Previously, she served as both the ACPS executive director and acting chief of human resources, until she was promoted to chief on July 1. She will be the second Black female interim superintendent at ACPS.

Starting on Sept. 1, Kay-Wyatt will replace current Superintendent Gregory Hutchings, Ed.D., who announced his resignation on June 10 amid mounting concerns about violence in ACPS, complaints from many parents about transparency and misgivings around his approach to COVID-19 safety.

Hutchings and School Board members praised the work Kay-Wyatt has done during her time at ACPS, though several parents in a local school-oriented Facebook group expressed concerns about aspects of her past performance.

According to a letter Hutchings sent to families earlier this year, Kay-Wyatt has increased staff recruitment fairs by 40% and targeted outreach to Latinx candidates and graduates from historically Black colleges and universities.

“Under her leadership, ACPS has strengthened partnerships with universities, resulting in more internship placements and a pipeline for educator applicants and student teachers,” Hutchings wrote.

At ACPS, she created a three-phase program for staff on/offboarding as well.

COMING UP ACES

Alexandria wins its first Cal Ripken League championship
BY OLIVIA ANDERSON

This past weekend was a momentous one for the Alexandria Aces, who won the Cal Ripken Collegiate Baseball League title for the first time in the team’s 14-year history.

The Aces, a summer baseball team for college players, defeated Bethesda Big Train 5-3 on Saturday at Shirley Povich Field in Bethesda to claim the championship.

According to Aces Coach Chris Berset, what began as a mission to just develop as a team and enjoy the summer slowly evolved into palpable excitement surrounding the possibility, and subsequent reality, of a league championship.

“It’s a pretty cool feeling,” Berset said. “The team we beat, Bethesda Big Train, is a very, very good team over there. ... We were able to come together as a team and just kind of outworked them just a little bit at the end.

“The tables were turned.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Kay-Wyatt spearheaded the staff vaccination effort and testing requirement process last fall.

SEE ACPS | 5

SEE ACES | 6
Celebrate National Chocolate Chip Cookie Day with Us!

This week, we’re taking a break from talking about real estate... because today, August 4th is National Chocolate Chip Cookie Day! When it comes to treats, these top our list and we want to celebrate by treating you to what we think are some of Alexandria’s BEST, baked locally by our friends at Together We Bake.

Together We Bake’s mission is to provide a comprehensive workforce training and personal development program to help underserved women gain self-confidence, transferable workforce skills, and invaluable hands-on experience which will allow them to find sustainable employment and move toward self-sufficiency.

(OK, yes, chocolate chip cookies are the best & supporting local charities is also the best, but we are never too busy to chat with you about your options and how we can help you achieve your real estate goals!)

Enter Our Cookie Giveaway!

Here’s the easy way to let us treat you:
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3. The first 15 readers who contact us will win a bag of the most delicious chocolate chip cookies made by our friends at Together We Bake, courtesy of The Rivkin Group!
Camp counselor arrested for alleged sexual assault

The Alexandria Police Department’s Special Victims Unit is investigating the arrest of an adult male for the sexual assault of a victim under 13 years of age.

Police arrested Tae’Sean Atwater, 21, who is suspected and charged with the sexual assault of the minor. Atwater is currently being held at the Alexandria Adult Detention Center.

Atwater has been a camp counselor with Campagna Kids, a summer camp and before-and-after-school program for elementary school children, since 2019. Atwater has worked at multiple Campagna Kids sites, including Patrick Henry Elementary School summer camp, Samuel Tucker Elementary’s before-school program and George Mason Elementary’s after-school programs.

The preliminary investigation has not uncovered evidence of inappropriate contact by Atwater with other children. APD is asking that any members of the public who have information related to the incident or information on possible past inappropriate encounters with Atwater contact APD Detective Jason Marable by phone at 703-746-6883 or by email at Jason.Marable@alexandria.gov, or call the non-emergency line at 703-746-4444. Tips can be anonymous.

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Man pleads guilty to vehicular manslaughter

A resident of Hyattsville, Maryland pleaded guilty last week to a felony count of involuntary manslaughter in connection with the death of an Alexandria resident. The hearing took place on July 28 at the Alexandria Circuit Court.

Fredy Ortiz Dominguez, 46, struck Alexandria resident Roy Saravia Alvarez, 46, with his work truck while Alvarez was walking on the sidewalk at the intersection of West Glebe Road and Mount Vernon Avenue on the evening of Nov. 13, 2021.

Alvarez had exited a bus at the intersection of Glebe and Mount Vernon and began walking westbound on the sidewalk after crossing Glebe Road. Dominguez was the second car in line waiting to turn left from northbound Mount Vernon onto Glebe. While the car in front of Dominguez completed the turn without incident, Dominguez took a wide turn and drove up onto the sidewalk, hitting Alvarez from behind and pinning him underneath his vehicle.

According to onlookers, Dominguez pressed his gas pedal and rocked his truck back and forth for six minutes while Alvarez remained pinned underneath the vehicle. Onlookers tried to get Dominguez to stop, but he continued to press the gas pedal until police arrived.

Although Alvarez was freed from underneath the vehicle by the fire department within 10 minutes of arrival, he had succumbed to his injuries and was pronounced dead on the scene.

The cause of the collision remains undetermined; neither alcohol nor drugs were a factor in Dominguez’s driving behavior, the investigation revealed, and Alvarez and Dominguez did not know each other.

The sentencing hearing for Dominguez will be held on Sept. 15. The maximum penalty for involuntary manslaughter is 10 years in penitentiary.

Dominguez is incarcerated at the Alexandria Adult Detention Center awaiting sentencing.

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Police investigate shots fired incident

The Alexandria Police Department is investigating a shots fired incident on the 300 block of S. Reynolds Street on Tuesday, according to a news release.

There was a heavy police presence on the street on Tuesday evening in response to the incident. No injuries or property damage were reported.

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Summer learning program under way

Breaks with Impact, a summer learning program that teaches students about issues surrounding their community and offers volunteer opportunities, is in full swing.

Day programs in July were open to students in grades 6 through 12, who volunteered with social issues like food insecurity, climate change and supporting women, according to the Volunteer Alexandria website.

During the past week, 41 volunteers donated their time and energy over an eight-day period to pack and distribute 35 bags of groceries at a local food pantry, bag 400 groceries for a monthly food distribution, mulch 315 feet of trail at Chinquapin Park, pick up 20 pounds of trash at Windmill Hill Park, feed more than two dozen people at Meade Memorial lunch program and write welcome letters to women returning from incarceration, according to a news release.

According to Volunteer Alexandria’s website, the goal of BWI is for “students to notice their discomfort, discuss it within a supportive community, and finally consider how they might live their lives differently as a result of the experience.”

A program for high school students is being offered from August 16 to the 18. For more information and registration details, visit https://www.volunteeralexandria.org/bwi.

Flood mitigation project accelerates

The Flood Action Alexandria team is getting a head start with a portion of its local funding while awaiting a potential federal grant for a flood mitigation project, according to a news release.

The proposed project includes Notabene Drive, Four Mile Road and Old Dominion Boulevard and received a portion of its local funding from City Council in June.

The project plans to install “660 linear feet of 42-inch pipe to replace the existing 24-inch pipe to provide additional capacity to the storm sewer drain excess water runoff,” according to the release.

“We want to do some of the preliminary work so we can just keep going on design and construction on that project,” Jesse Maines, chief of the Stormwater Management Division, said during the June 28 City Council meeting.

The federal 2023 Community Project Funding Program grant proposal was submitted by Rep. Don Beyer (VA-8), which provides targeted funding for local projects across the country.

The city approved the Stormwater Utility Fee funding to start the first stage of planning and design. That way, if the grant is approved, the project will be ready to quickly move onto the construction phase.

Lawyer named Business Leader of the Year

The Alexandria Chamber of Commerce has selected long-time Alexandria lawyer Cathy Puskar of Walsh, Colucci, Luberly & Walsh P.C. as its 2022 Business Leader of the Year.

Puskar’s practice focuses on land use and zoning matters in the City of Alexandria and Arlington County. Over the years, she has successfully represented a number of clients in obtaining the necessary entitlements for a variety of projects, including major residential, commercial and mixed-use developments, according to a news release.

Puskar earned her Juris Doctorate and bachelor’s degrees from George Washington University and the College of William and Mary, respectively. She currently serves on the board of the Alexandria Police Foundation and the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce’s Government Relations Committee and is a member of the Alexandria Bar Association, Arlington County Bar Association, Northern Virginia Building Industry Association and the Urban Chapter of the Northern Virginia Building Industry Association.

Interested residents can register to attend the in-person Best in Business Awards presented by Burke & Herbert Bank on Oct. 27.

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Skye’s The Limit

2-year-old Skye has a lot to smile about, especially the opportunity to find his new home in Alexandria. This sweet Beagle-Border Collie mix can be shy at first, but blossoms around other dogs. He’s quite congenial. Skye is also an energetic fellow and at 50 pounds, would love an exercise buddy as part of his new home package.

Meet Skye!
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as a VIP recognition awards program to honor staff, and she assisted in improving employees’ total compensation packages.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Kay-Wyatt spearheaded the staff vaccination effort and testing requirement process last fall. She also helped keep schools and offices open this year while simultaneously navigating critical staff shortages.

During Kay-Wyatt’s appointment at the meeting, Chair Meagan Alderton praised her work in human resources, particularly throughout the pandemic, and expressed excitement for what she’ll accomplish next year.

“It’s really been great to see her unique perspective to work in leading human resources from an instructional lens, knowing exactly how schools work and using that knowledge to make sure that we are doing our best in human resources to supply our schools with the staffing that we need,” Alderton said.

Kay-Wyatt’s career spans 26 years. Before joining the district, she worked in human resources at Spotsylvania Public Schools, served as a principal and assistant principal at Fredericksburg City Public Schools and served as a special education teacher at both Culpeper County Schools and FCPS.

“We’re thankful that she’s here, we’re thankful for her leadership, and I’m very much looking forward to seeing what Dr. Kay-Wyatt will do to help us move along because I know she will be amazing,” Alderton said. “It won’t be easy, but [she is] here for the cause and here for the fight.”

Kay-Wyatt expressed gratitude for the opportunity to serve the school community, and according to an ACPS statement, will place an emphasis on continuing “work around social, emotional and academic learning, meeting the needs of the whole child and ensuring that we provide a safe and welcoming environment for all students, staff and families.”

“I’m grateful for the opportunity and I look forward to working with strong leaders, amazing staff and it’s just an opportunity for us to just keep getting better and better,” Kay-Wyatt said during the meeting. “I want to thank you for the opportunity and thank the community in advance for their support. We’re going to have an amazing school year.”

Board Member Abdel Elnoubi congratulated Kay-Wyatt on her new position, calling her the type of leader who is able to bring people together, build consensus, is eager to share credit and is passionate about students and their success.

“I’m excited to work with Dr. Kay-Wyatt, who is an experienced educator,” Elnoubi said. “... [She] recently led HR during a tumultuous time, a very difficult time, but she dug in, she worked, she embraced the role, she did a great job by the numbers and also by the testimony of some of the principals I talked to who actually saw the impact of her work and her team’s work on school staffing.”

ACPS received a large number of applicants for the role, which Elnoubi said “speaks volumes” about the district.

Vice Chair Jacinta Greene welcomed Kay-Wyatt into her new role while acknowledging that there is a lot of work to be done.

“We are so happy that you’re even interested in taking a job as the superintendent in these days and times. It’s just so very difficult and we understand that, and I just want to say that we are behind you 100% to support you, to make sure that you succeed,” Greene said.

However, a number of parents and community members have also expressed concerns in the Open ACPS Facebook group regarding Kay-Wyatt’s appointment, pointing to qualms with her handling of COVID-19 and a perceived lack of leadership during her time as chief of human resources.

“I want to give her a chance but what was her proven track record in hiring, retaining teachers and responding to staff concerns during her tenure as acting director of HR? Not exemplary IMO,” one parent wrote.

Another parent claimed Kay-Wyatt indicated “she’s not concerned with teacher retention in this district, only with attracting new teachers.”

Kay-Wyatt’s contract includes a monthly salary of $21,383, according to a news release, and the board will immediately begin the search process for a permanent superintendent.

Kay-Wyatt’s contract extends through June 30, 2023, or until a permanent superintendent is hired.

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this season, as the Aces swept Bethesda two games to none.

The Aces were hot heading into this year’s playoffs, having won their last seven regular season games in a row to finish at 26-10 – the exact same record as Bethesda. But since the Aces won four of the six games against Bethesda, they were deemed the number one seed going into the playoffs, with Bethesda the second seed.

During the first round of playoffs the Aces swept the South County Braves, winning two games straight and landing a spot in the championship series.

Because the Aces were the top seed, they hosted the first championship game on July 29, beating Bethesda 8-6.

The next day they traveled to Bethesda for the final game, which according to Frank Fannon, majority owner and former Alexandria City Councilor, included approximately 900 attendees – about 150 of which were Aces fans.

The game itself was something of a ping pong match, as the Aces took a 1-0 lead, then Bethesda scored twice to go ahead 2-1. By the top of the ninth inning, the teams were tied 3-3.

The Aces manufactured the winning run in the ninth inning. Dylan Koontz, a rising sophomore from Campbell University, reached base on a sacrifice bunt by C.J. Boyd, from Appalachian State University.

Koontz scored after Bethesda’s catcher made an errant throw to third base when Koontz attempted to steal. The throw sailed into left field, allowing Koontz to race home to give the Aces a 4-3 lead.

Moments later, Cade Sullivan, from Western Michigan University, hit a home run and extended the lead to 5-3.

In the bottom of the ninth inning, the Aces brought out closer Ryan Brown from Ball State University, who finished the game with a three-up-three-down inning, cementing the Aces’ historic win.

“We poured out onto the field. We celebrated ... and we stayed out on the field for about 30 minutes and we just celebrated in Bethesda,” Fannon said.

Koontz said scoring the winning run brought as much exhilaration for him as it did for fans and his fellow teammates.

“It was awesome. I got to third, and I don’t have a lot of stolen bases, so I got to third and was already very excited,” Koontz said. “I was running home and Beret was jumping up and down and the guys were screaming and yelling. It was very fun and I was very excited when I got to home plate.”

After the win, team members convened to say their goodbyes and take photos with the trophies. Some went out afterward, but others had to prepare for a long trek home, as many of the players are from out of state.

“I’ll be staying in touch with almost all of them probably for the rest of my life,” Koontz said.

Fannon, who had been on the team’s board since 2008 and took over as majority owner several years ago, said much of the credit goes to Beret, calling him “such a leader among men.” Beret, who is in his fourth season as the Aces coach, used to play professional baseball and before that college ball at the University of Michigan. He owns Prime Time Baseball, a baseball training academy in Alexandria.

Although the Aces have had talented rosters in the past, Beret attributed the

The Alexandria Aces won the Cal Ripken League Championship for the first time in their 14-year history.
team’s success to an even-keeled determination among the players.

“We just had the right mix of experience, leadership and talented ball players,” Berset said. “My leaders didn’t get up too much when it was going well, and they didn’t get too low when [we lost]. ... We were able to reel off 11 wins in a row at the back end of the season and it’s a testament to them. We had different guys stepping up every single day and it was just an absolute joy to come to the ballpark to work with these young men.”

Compared to Bethesda, the Alexandria Aces’ roster doesn’t include players from nearly as many big-name schools, which Fannon said only adds to the sweetness of their triumph.

“They might have had better individual players, but we had the better team,” Fannon said. “It was just amazing, the unity that they had. ... These guys were all based on what’s best for the team. They put their own egos and attitude aside to do what was best for the team.”

With the 2022 season in the rearview mirror, the goal for next year includes improving seating and amenities at the stadium in order to create a better experience for Aces fans and hopefully draw bigger crowds, Fannon said.

But the Aces’ most important goal is to continue fostering an opportunity to make memories and come together over a shared love for baseball.

“Most of these players will never see each other again, but they’ll never forget the 55 days they spent together in the summer of 2022 on a championship team in Alexandria, Virginia,” Fannon said.

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Three of the Aces star players, Jacob Hartlaub, Adam Tellier and Ryan Brown, all from Ball State University, pose with Jackson Fannon.


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NEED TO PLACE AN AD?
New race and identity program launches for Alexandria parents

Open Horizon will launch its pilot program for Alexandria parents in September, which will provide participants the opportunity to engage in conversations about race and identity.

Open Horizon will provide parents a space to discuss racial equity issues

BY LIANA HARDY

Local advocacy organization Open Horizon will launch a new program for Alexandria parents to discuss the topics of race, belonging and identity this September.

The Northern Virginia-based foundation is partnering with Conversations About Race & Belonging, a network of facilitators who lead community discussions, to create the “Conversations About Race & Belonging: Parents Program,” a biweekly initiative that will meet for eight in-person or online sessions between September and January. Program leaders hope that the meetings will teach parents how to talk about uncomfortable subjects and facilitate more conversations about local and national issues involving race.

Parents in the program will engage in self reflection and work to understand the perspectives of different participants, as well as learn more about the history of systemic racism and racial inequity in the United States, according to Michele Chang, Parents Program organizer and facilitator. Chang said the program will provide parents with a safe space to have difficult conversations, learn more about racial issues and explore their own personal histories with race.

“The focus is on offering a place for people to have conversations about what they are uncovering in terms of their own understanding of their own awareness, and then learning, quite frankly, about the history of race and racism in our country,” Chang said. “The facts and figures are really a lens through which we can practice listening to one another and having conversations that most people find pretty uncomfortable.”

The Parents Program will host six regular sessions, along with a retreat and a “community immersion” session that will bring members of the community into the discussion, and provide participants readings, podcasts and occasional videos to engage with in between sessions. The program hopes to include around 30 parents, who will be selected after completing an application.

According to Chang, many cultural sensitivity programs or diversity trainings focus on students or teachers rather than parents, leaving many parents without opportunities to learn about and discuss issues of racism and identity.

“What we’ve observed is that the students are getting materials in school, teachers are getting cultural competence and other training hopefully, but the one group that’s kind of left out in the cold are the parents, who don’t have a place that they can have these conversations and ask difficult or awkward or uncomfortable questions and learn racial literacy,” Chang said. “So this is a program that seeks to give parents a little bit of all of that.”

Creating more spaces for Alexandria parents and other community members to have open and honest discussions will help the community work together on local issues of race and inequity, as well as challenge biased narratives and stereotypes, according to School Board member Abdel Elnoubi.

“As someone who was an advocate myself before running for office, and still consider myself one, I believe more community conversations and parent engagement/advocacy is certainly a good thing,” Elnoubi said. “I also think having tough honest conversations about equity, identity, race, etc., especially with people who have different views and politics than ours – as long as the conversations are rooted in facts and evidence – help challenge pre-conceived notions and biases, and is something our community and country desperately needs.”

Both students and staff at Alexandria City Public Schools have reported that racial inequity continues to be a problem for the school system, which has one of the most diverse student populations in Virginia. In an equity audit report conducted by education consultant KickUp in 2019, 63% of ACPS staff surveyed said they saw a noticeable relationship between student demographics and rigorous classes.

Students also reported similar issues: nearly 40% of surveyed students from Alexandria City High School said that it seemed like students were placed in classes and groups based on race. ACPS also released an equity report in 2019 that noted achievement gaps, particularly in math and English, among Latino students, Black students, economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities.

Factors such as a lack of consistent instructional support, harsh disciplinary policies and an unequal distribution of funding and qualified, experienced teachers can lead to achievement gaps in schools, according to a study conducted by the University of Washington.

ACPS has continued to
address issues of inequity through its 2025 Strategic Plan, a five-year plan that aims to eliminate opportunity and achievement gaps, according to Kennetra Wood, ACPS' executive director of equity and alternative programs.

Open Horizon’s Parents Program will help parents work alongside ACPS to promote racial equity, according to Wood, who said the program is “an example of how our Alexandria City community and families can support the work we are doing within the school division through enhancing their knowledge of diverse racial groups and the additional intersectionality of one’s identity.”

“If the community and families are growing and evolving with the school division, it can only strengthen our relationship and foster a partnership that will support each of our students to thrive in an environment that is inclusive of one’s individual identity which fosters a sense of valuing and belonging,” Wood said.

The Parents Program is particularly relevant to the Alexandria community, according to Chang, because of issues of inequity in the City and in ACPS, as well as a long history of racial segregation and oppression.

“There’s a lot of rich Alexandria history, a lot of deep issues that we will hope to be able to introduce as a lens through which we can practice these skills,” Chang said. “We should be looking for ways that we can reach across and understand each other, understand where our stories are. And then we might be able to actually come to more collaborative ways of approaching problems that are very real in our schools.”

The Alexandria Parents Program will be the first of its kind for Open Horizon, which provided funding for the program, and Conversations About Race & Belonging, although another version of the program will be launched in Arlington in October. Chang says that she and the other program facilitators hope to have a joint session between the Alexandria and Arlington cohorts, and that if both programs do well, additional race and identity programs could be launched in Alexandria in the upcoming future.

However, since the program has opened its final round of applications, only a few parents have signed up. Chang attributes the low enrollment to parents’ uncertainty about fall schedules and hopes that by the end of August more parents will sign up.

“It’s kind of hitting at a very low point for families to consider,” Chang said. “People are holding back a little bit and that’s why we’re really hoping to get the word out … We only have a few people who have signed up right now in the dead of July and August.”

The Parents Program will close applications on Aug. 31 for both the Alexandria and Arlington programs. While the program will require participants to pay a $25 fee before the first session, the fee can be waived for families who are unable to pay, according to Chang.

Unlike other programs, Chang hopes that the Parents Program will go beyond just lessons on racism and inequality, and increase community understanding and awareness of others and their perspectives.

“What’s really unusual about this program is that it doesn’t just focus on racism, on systemic racism, on individual bigotry. It really looks at what lies at the heart of the growing divisiveness in our society and really addresses the need to listen to one another,” Chang said.

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To dig or not to dig

Resident’s privy digs draw interest from community, frustration from officials
BY KASSIDY MCDONALD

For the past 10 years, Tom Leveille has dedicated his career and field work to privy digs in Alexandria on the weekends. Most recently, Leveille completed his 51st dig in the city last month at a 19th century duplex on North Pitt Street. Although his excursions have yielded excitement from many community members, there have also been raised the eyebrows of city officials.

Leveille, who has completed more than 500 privy digs in total, developed a love for archaeology during college. Leveille attended Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia for undergraduate studies where he planned to major in geology. One day he decided to buy a gold pan because he “was enamored with hands-on stuff.”

“This is little tiny creek off of 495 that you can pan for gold and apparently there was an old mill on that site. And I was shoveling stuff into a bucket one day and this old bottle fell out of the bank.

And it had all this writing on it,” Leveille said. “I basically fell in love with it to the point where I changed my major in college to pursue archaeology instead of geology. And I basically have done it on the weekends ever since, sometimes more than once a week.”

Privy digging is a form of archaeological excavation where century-old outhouses are dug up. The goal of this dig is to find historical artifacts that were once discarded in the privy by people who have lived at the location of the home. Leveille said the outhouses were built of “wood, brick or stone” and “constructed at various depths.”

Due to the 19th century’s lack of local garbage pickup, people threw away trash and unwanted items in their outhouses and they became buried over time.

Alexandria’s plumbing system was interconnected for a long time, Leveille said, which makes it a perfect spot for privy digging because most old houses have them in their backyards, sometimes spanning across two properties.

“From the colonial time period all the way up until about the 1920s is when Alexandria utilized privies. The town had municipal wells, across the old borders, so it was up to each individual house to take care of their own property,” Leveille said.

This means that homeowners could just throw trash or unwanted items in their backyard privy and then not clean it out. Technically, privies aren’t supposed to have items in them because they were supposed to be cleaned out by the people that lived there, but as Leveille has found in Alexandria, that is not usually the case.

While some people welcome Leveille’s privy digging process, he found that others completely oppose the idea. According to Leveille, one can discern many details about the people who once lived there based on the artifacts, which to him is what makes the digs so special.

“You can tell what their children were sick with. You can tell what their favorite flavor of soda was. You could tell exactly what they ate for dinner for months on end,” Leveille said. “You could tell what decorations they liked on their pottery in their house. There’s just so many different things that you can pick out of their day to day life from the things they left behind that you can’t exactly tell from just looking at the house.”

Leveille has found particular success in Old Town, where he’s discovered many artifacts such as old bottles and pottery. He speculates that this is because the people who lived in Old Town were wealthier “once upon a time.” There’s no place quite like it for privy digging, according to Leveille.

Leveille and his four-to-six-member team are adamant about sharing their discoveries.

“It’s not like some pirate raiders ... or a lot of like TV shows about people who do digging. It gets made out into some like pirate thing but yeah, it’s not like that. There’s so much of the stuff that comes out of these things that we always want everybody involved to be happy. Nobody’s paying us. We just do this because we like the history,” Leveille said.

Alexandria is one of the few cities in the country that has an Archaeological Commission that is dedicated to protecting and preserving the rich history of the city. The city has had professional archaeologists working on staff since the 1960s.

They too enjoy the history found in privies from centuries ago and what type of stories it can tell, but the Alexandria Archaeological Commission
has an opposing approach to Leveille’s mindset.

City archaeologists prefer not to dig privies up if there isn’t an urgent need for repairing a sinkhole. It becomes important for the AAC, which is a citizen’s group, to preserve these privies because it “gives archaeologists and historians references to look back at if they find another,” AAC Chair Ivy Whitlatch said.

The city’s website includes a step-by-step guide on backyard archaeology in Alexandria, and what to do if you encounter a privy or well on your property. The guide serves as a resource to residents to “show how you can save history, fix your sinkhole, and become one of Alexandria’s Archaeology Protectors,” according to the website.

Step three on the website specifically outlines the difference between the AAC’s approach and that of Leveille: they usually don’t dig.

“City of Alexandria Archaeologists won’t disturb or dig the area. We want to record the information and advise that the best practice is to keep the possible well or privy in place for future generations,” the site says.

City Archaeologist Eleanor Breen said the “primary role is to partner with residents to share info about Alexandria’s history.”

“If you are approached by a person asking to dig your yard who is not a City of Alexandria archaeologist, please call us at 703.746.4399,” the site says. Knocking on doors is the approach Leveille and his team take most weekends when they want to dig in someone’s backyard.

The Zebra published an article about Leveille’s city digging efforts in 2020, which led Whitlatch to write a Letter to the Editor in response, expressing her disappointment that incorrectly conducted digs often result in history not being documented.

“Finding old bottles certainly can be exciting, but if excavated properly, we can discover who owned them, what food they ate, and other details of their lives. Without context, objects, even the smallest fragments, are robbed of a great deal of their power to tell a story and help us learn more about our past,” Whitlatch wrote in her letter.

Whitlatch said that the archaeologists are here to help. She encouraged homeowners to reach out to the city about a privy or well in their backyard, adding that Alexandria’s archaeologists are a great resource the city has made readily available to its residents.

The history behind these privies doesn’t only date to colonial times. Information on more recent eras, such as Alexandria’s Prohibition history, can be gleaned from bottles and other artifacts inside privies.

“It is not just always the early days of Alexandria [found in privies], there are stories from prohibition. It is a continuously evolved story under the ground,” Whitlatch said.

Breen also emphasized the importance of keeping privies intact to better understand the Prohibition era in Alexandria.

“One of the many research questions we have is how did prohibition affect the use and discard of glass bottles in early 20th century Alexandria households? This and other questions are best answered from the archaeologically excavated collections curated with Alexandria Archaeology and possibly in buried features to be archaeologically excavated in the future. Wells and privies and all the artifact fragments they contain offer a snapshot into family life in Alexandria over many time periods,” Breen said in an email.

Although the AAC and Leveille’s team have different opinions on how to go about dealing with the privies and their historical artifacts, they share something in common: a love for history and a desire to share it with Alexandria’s residents.

For the AAC, this looks like recording and documenting information, keeping the privy in place for future generations and giving tours and lessons in Alexandria’s Archaeology Museum, located on the third floor of the Torpedo Factory Art Center, to teach residents more about the history behind the city.

For Leveille, this looks like giving artifacts to the homeowners of the properties he’s dug, sharing images of his finds on his Instagram page and eventually getting skilled enough with the team’s GoPro to livestream their digs for the public’s enjoyment.

“One of my dreams is making archaeology accessible to everybody. I feel like museums do a great job of letting people see kind of like the finished work of archaeology, or you know, whatever the given thing is the museum represents, but being able to watch it live is kind of a different perspective. I want to bring it to the table,” Leveille said.

-kmcdonald@alextimes.com

Archaeologist holds a key excavated from an Alexandria site on exhibit in the museum.
Alexandria cat survives 15-story fall

Sasha Fierce, an 8-year-old cat, fell from the 15th story of the condo building.

Eight-year-old Sasha Fierce tumbled from condo balcony
BY KASSIDY MCDONALD

Cats always land on their feet, right? That statement definitely rings true for Meagan Wilson’s 8-year-old cat, Sasha Fierce.

On July 21, sometime between midnight and 5 a.m., the peach-colored domestic long-haired feline fell off the 15th floor condo balcony where she lived. She miraculously survived with minimal injuries for a fall that far.

“It wasn’t warm and fuzzy during the event, but it is now,” Wilson said.

Wilson woke up at 5 a.m. that morning because she was having trouble sleeping. She noticed that her balcony door was not locked all the way, as she was on it earlier that evening. Wilson then noticed her other cat had managed to get outside on the balcony and was pacing back and forth.

She panicked, wondering where Sasha could be. Wilson began checking closets in her condo, bedrooms and even the condo’s hallways. Her toddler was asleep in the next room and Wilson couldn’t leave her sleeping alone if she went downstairs to check outside.

The worst thought crossed her mind. There was no way Sasha could have fallen 15 stories and lived, she presumed. She gave her next-door neighbor Stan Valadzko a call and asked him to go check for her.

Wilson waited in her condo nervously when she got a call from her neighbor. To Wilson’s surprise, Sasha was there – and alive.

“Alive or like half-dead alive with her tongue hanging out?” Wilson asked her neighbor on the phone.

She told him not to pick Sasha up if she was extremely hurt, but he said the cat seemed to be walking. Her neighbor then carried the cat upstairs and gave her to Wilson.

Wilson was shocked to see Sasha walking around when she placed her on her bed. While she called her vet, she said she began to pet Sasha to see if there might be any broken bones on her body. When she grazed over her back, Wilson said Sasha “hissed.” She believed Sasha could be internally bleeding, which would be the worst possible option for her pet.

After dropping her toddler off quickly at daycare, Wilson rushed Sasha to VCA SouthPaws Veterinary Specialists & Emergency in Fairfax. Sasha was dropped off with the vet staff, and they told Wilson to stay on call for updates about her beloved cat.

Within 15 minutes she received a call back following their initial checkup: the vet had incredibly good news. Staff believed Sasha had some debris stuck in her eye from the fall, either wood or mulch, Wilson said. She was also pretty bruised, but so far they didn’t suspect there were serious complications from the fall.

The vet kept her there for additional x-rays and bloodwork just to make sure there was nothing wrong internally. Wilson said they even had Sasha on oxygen to make sure she was breathing correctly. In the discharge instructions provided to the Times by Wilson, the vet described Sasha’s diagnosis as a miracle. The worst thought crossed Wilson’s mind. There was no way Sasha could have fallen 15 stories and lived, she presumed. She gave her next-door neighbor Stan Valadzko a call and asked him to go check for her.

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“Hunched in the hind end but walking on all four legs. Surprisingly, no internal trauma to her chest or abdomen or broken bones identified on workup. Corneal foreign body in the left eye – but this was flushed away with eye flush and left only a superficial corneal ulcer. She has done great for us today & I’m thrilled to send her home for continued care, close monitoring and some TLC as she heals from her bumps and bruises. She is one lucky kitty!”

Sasha’s diagnosis is truly a miracle, according to the vet, and Wilson expressed deep gratitude. As Sasha recovers at home, she will require some pain medication and eye drops and will visit the vet again in two weeks for a checkup.

Wilson wrote in her original Facebook post about the incident. “... I’m still in shock. She’s one lucky kitty.”

Sasha is currently at home with her family recovering from her fall.

PHOTO/MEAGAN WILSON
Times Living

PETS

Ready to learn
Tips for how to train and mentally stimulate your pet
BY GINA HARDTER

Back-to-school season is right around the corner, but getting back into the learning habit isn’t just for kids. Explore some fun ways to keep your pet mentally enriched all year long.

You can teach an old dog new tricks
Whether your pup is young or a senior, is new to your home or has lived with you for years, it’s always a good time to take on some training. You can work on behavior basics like “sit” or “lie down” or, if they’ve mastered those skills, move on to fun and cute party tricks like “roll over,” “spin,” “take a bow” and “sit pretty.” When teaching dogs tricks, it’s important to make sure you have a lure that really interests them, whether it’s an especially yummy treat or a favorite toy, and that you aren’t overwhelming them. Training sessions should remain short, no more than 10 minutes, and follow your dog’s lead if they are getting frustrated by taking a break. With a new training session every day, you can have the most polished pup on the block in no time.

Clicker training... for cats?
Dogs aren’t the only pets who can learn tricks; many cats respond just as well as dogs to clicker training, which pairs a verbal command or hand signal with a desired trick, then rewards the cat for the behavior by “clicking” a clicker and giving them a treat. At the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria, cats can learn skills like “sit,” “lie down,” “spin” and more, espe-
Training for small mammals

Guinea pigs, rabbits, mice and rats can get in on the training fun too. A great starting point is target training your small pet, in which you offer them a target, like an open hand or a target stick and teach them to approach and touch it for a reward. Start by putting the target close to your pet’s nose, and when their curiosity means they reach out and sniff it, reward them with a treat for doing so. Once they’ve learned that action, move the target further away so they move to touch it. Soon they will be running or hopping to the target for their treat. This is also a great way to help shyer pets come up to the gates of their enclosure to meet new people, as we teach some of our smaller mammals at the AWLA.

Bird behavior basics

Depending on their size and breed, different birds have different capabilities, but all birds can benefit from the mental stimulation of learning new skills. Basic tricks include training your bird to “step up” onto your finger, which is a wonderful way to bond with your bird buddy. Birds can also be taught skills like “fly to me” – always in a safe and contained space – and even housetraining. Larger birds like parrots and cockatoos can also learn language, so when you are training them to speak, remember they’re likely to repeat it.

Back to routine

Sometimes summer schedules can get a bit lax, but fall is a great time to make sure you are getting your whole family, including your pets, back to a regular routine. Pets thrive on a predictable schedule of exercise, meals and of course, training, so it’s the perfect time to add a daily training session to your routine.

The writer is director of marketing and communications for the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization supporting Alexandria and beyond. More information is available at AlexandriaAnimals.org.
You’ve never seen a Marsh Girl as attractive and kempt and impressive as the Marsh Girl in "Where the Crawdads Sing." Even though she has lived all by herself in a rudimentary cabin deep in the wetlands for the better part of a decade with no formal schooling and very little social contact, she looks like she stepped out of a Sears catalog. She apparently shaves her legs, bathes and shampoos on a regular basis, has lovely white teeth, and get this: she’s such a brilliant observer and student of her surroundings that she just sold a book of her seashell drawings to a publisher and received a nifty $5,000 advance. And this is in 1969, so that’s about $40,000 in today’s dollars. Marsh Girl has it going on!

And yet when Marsh Girl is literally hauled out of the water and charged with the murder of a local young man named Chase who is a former football hero, practically everyone in town is convinced she’s guilty, because after all, she’s that weirdo Marsh Girl, aka Missing Link or Wolf Girl. Nothing but a savage, they’ll tell ya. Of course she murdered Chase, they say, because she knew she wasn’t good enough for him.

This is one of the many eyebrow-raising hitches in the plot of the uneven and at times implausible period-piece drama "Where the Crawdads Sing," and yet we are recommending it because Daisy Edgar-Jones (“Under the Banner of Heaven”) is luminous and spectacularly effective in the lead role; it’s one of the most gorgeously photographed films of the year, the invaluable David Straitharn provides terrific supporting work, and despite the problematic storyline, it works as an escapist piece of fantasy entertainment.

Director Olivia Newman (“First Match”) and screenwriter Lucy Alibar (“Beasts of the Southern Wild”) have been tasked with adapting one of the most successful books in recent history: the 2018 novel of the same name by Delia Owens, which sold a whopping 12 million copies after being selected by Reese Witherspoon’s Hello Sunshine Book Club. Witherspoon is one of the executive producers of the movie.

With Louisiana filling in for North Carolina, the time-jumping storyline is faithful to the novel, telling the story of one Catherine Danielle Clark, aka Kya, who is but 6 years old by the time her mother, then her older siblings and finally her abusive father abandon their marshland cabin, leaving Kya to fend for herself. Somehow the girl survives for years, with the occasional help of Mabel (Michael Hyatt) and Jumpin’ (Sterling Macer Jr.), a local couple who own a nearby grocery store and seem to exist solely for the purpose of quietly and kindly looking after Kya whenever they can. Jojo Regina does wonderful work portraying Kya as a little girl, with Edgar-Jones picking up the role when Kya is a teenager and young woman in her 20s.

It’s 1969 when adult Kya is arrested and charged with the murder of upscale townie Chase Andrews (Harris Dickinson), Retired attorney Tom Milton (David Strathairn), who is right out of the "To Kill a Mockingbird" playbook, volunteers to take Kya’s case and tells her he can’t defend her unless he gets to know her, at least a little bit. Cue the flashbacks to the 1950s and early 1960s, as we see how Kya becomes one with her surroundings, getting to know all the creatures great and small with the skill set of the untrained but talented scientist/author she will become.

A goodhearted and handsome local boy named Tate Walker (Taylor John Smith) takes a shine to Kya, first befriending her, then teaching her to read and write and eventually falling in love with her, and for this stretch of time the film plays like a soggy version of "The Notebook." Tate goes off to the University of North Carolina with the promise to return to Kya on the Fourth of July, but in a heartbreakingly effective scene, Kya spends the night on the beach alone and wakes up devastated because Tate never showed up.

A year or so later, another handsome local comes calling. Chase Andrews says all the right things as he courts Kya, but there’s something off about this guy. Against her better judgment, Kya allows Chase into her heart, but she eventually learns the truth about this jerk and tries to extricate herself from his life, but the possessive and duplicitous and violent Chase is having none of it.

When Chase is found dead in the marsh, all signs and a considerable amount of circumstantial evidence point to Kya, which leads to the trial portion of the movie, complete with witnesses who are predisposed to judge Kya, a district attorney dead set on convicting her and a courtroom packed with observers who react on cue every time a bombshell is dropped. After the verdict is read, we’re given an epilogue that spans a number of decades and feels rather rushed, but provides a measure of suitably satisfying albeit melodramatic closure.
Light up the night

Transform your patio into an evening of entertaining
BY BRANDPOINT

If you love entertaining friends and family outdoors, you’re not alone. Transforming outdoor areas into extended living spaces continues to be a huge trend, as everything from smaller balconies to spacious porches and patios creates an opportunity to expand your home environment well into the evening hours with one crucial design element: lighting.

Lighting an outdoor space can make a world of difference in creating ambience, lending additional functionality to a space or improving aesthetics within a space – making or breaking an evening barbecue, party or intimate gathering. Luckily, lighting choices are one of the most affordable ways you can enhance any area of your home, and the outdoors is no exception. Even small changes like swapping your light bulbs creates the perfect opportunity to have some fun and express your personality with different colors and design styles.

Here are some easy and affordable ways to transform your outdoor areas for effortless warm-weather entertaining.

Get the party started
To create an upbeat mood, nothing is more fun and festive than bright, vibrant colors, so consider upgrading your entertaining space with a Color Changing Party LED Light Bulb. You’ll bring any indoor occasion to life using red, green, blue and yellow light, with five lighting effect options to choose from. EcoSmart light bulbs are equipped with user-friendly and innovative features, meaning you can easily switch between colors using a toggle on each bulb or conveniently cycle between colors with the simple flip of a standard wall switch.

Pump up the jam
A party atmosphere isn’t complete without music. Set the tone for an exciting night with your guests and keep them dancing or singing all night long with a Bluetooth Speaker LED Light Bulb. This EcoSmart bulb combines color selectable lighting with Bluetooth technology. Simply connect to your favorite Bluetooth device, without the need for any extra wiring or a hub.

Go vintage
Everything vintage and retro is all the rage right now, making small changes like swapping your light bulbs creates the perfect opportunity to have some fun and express your personality with different colors and design styles.
but it’s not always easy to create the look and be practical at the same time. One fun option is to use strands of Edison bulbs to give your deck or patio a “bistro” atmosphere. Or if you want a more intimate, old-fashioned look, illuminate the night with the warm glow of EcoSmart Flame LED Light Bulbs, which create an alluring ambience by simulating a warm and realistic flickering flame effect without emitting any heat. Better yet, you won’t have to worry about the risk that real flames from candles or torches can bring.

Enjoy a bug-free shindig

Your light bulbs can even help you keep those pesky pests away from your get-together in a more natural way. Opt for outdoor yellow Bug LED Light Bulbs, which help to repel insects and can be used as an alternative to bug sprays.

Be ready for anything – even outages

Don’t let summer storms rain on your parade! In case your power goes out, Battery Backup light bulbs are energy efficient and equipped with a power failure battery that will automatically turn on in the event of a power failure – and can last up to three hours. When in regular use, the internal battery will charge, ensuring that you’ll always have an option for light during an outage.

You can set up your backyard for all kinds of entertaining with these, and many other selections, by exploring the wide variety of innovative features and the latest lighting options from EcoSmart. Whether your plans include hosting backyard barbecues or creating a refreshing outdoor oasis, lighting up your space has never been easier.

Consider using Battery Backup LED light bulbs, energy efficient bulbs equipped with a battery that will automatically turn on in the event of a power failure.

A colonial dreamscape

This is the home from which the American dream has evolved. Experience this one-owner, one of a kind, 5 bedroom, 3.5 bath Colonial boasting over 3,800 finished square feet, surrounded by lush green landscapes. The residence sits on a premium .43 acre corner cul-de-sac lot, and showcases a fully renovated first and second floor, swimming pool, two outdoor decks, cedar shake roof, widened driveway and luxurious accents throughout. From the moment you enter the foyer, you will see dentil crown molding centered by old world textured decorative finishes in a white-washed glaze and highlighted by a beautiful 19th century chandelier – complemented by controllable LED cove lighting found not only in the foyer, but in several other areas of the house as well. The half bath on the main level has Swarovski crystal fixtures and numerous accents you just don’t see in homes at this price point. The main level laundry and mudroom reimagined with a wood folding table and new front-loading washer and dryer leads to a true car aficionado’s dream garage. This garage is one of the largest in the neighborhood and has custom flooring, recessed lighting and accent paint design; it could even double as additional entertaining space. The master bedroom was reimagined to feature a huge walk in closet with multi-level built-ins, and the master bathroom is a unique getaway with a whirlpool bath, heated floors, glass surround shower with rain water shower head, dual Italian vessel vanities complemented by modern light fixtures and LED medicine cabinets and programmable wi-fi speakers. Open Saturday from 2 to 4 p.m. and Sunday from 1 to 4 p.m.
Our View

Hire carefully

It’s been a seller’s market for more than a year, both in real estate and in the realm of employment.

Buyers in hot real estate markets have engaged in bidding wars for desirable properties, sometimes devising clever ways to stand out from other bidders. Likewise in the job sector, where signing bonuses have long been a staple of white-collar jobs but are now being offered by many restaurants and for warehouse work. And just to be clear, in employment it’s the worker who’s the seller: their time and services are for sale to prospective public or private sector employers.

Two pieces in this week’s Alexandria Times touch on interesting aspects of making important hires in a seller’s market.

Our page one story, “School Board appoints interim superintendent,” discusses the hiring of Melanie Kay-Wyatt, Ed.D. as interim superintendent of Alexandria City Public Schools, while columnist Mark Eaton, a former Alexandria School Board member, considers myths surrounding effective hiring in the public sector.

One key takeaway from converging these stories is that the hiring of a permanent superintendent of ACPS – to the second-most important public sector job in Alexandria after the city manager – is no easy task.

Kay-Wyatt is, in many ways, an unusual choice for interim superintendent. Interims, whether in churches, corporations or the public sector, tend to either be extremely experienced, otherwise retired people from their field who step back in to run an organization for a short period of time or long-time assistants who are deeply familiar with the culture and history of their organization.

Lois Berlin, Ed.D., who served as interim superintendent between the departure of Alvin Crawley, Ed.D. and the hiring of Gregory Hutchings, Ed.D., ACPS’ current superintendent, is an example of the former. This is also the norm in many churches as they seek a permanent pastor.

The second model was followed in the past few years when Alexandria’s current fire and police chiefs, Corey Smedley and Don Hayes, were first promoted to interim head of their department following the resignation of their predecessors and then named permanent chief. Promoting an existing employee as interim head, both in the public and private sectors, often allows that person to audition for the top job.

Kay-Wyatt fits neither mold. She’s not a grizzled industry veteran with years of experience as a superintendent, nor is she a long-time ACPS employee steeped in our district’s past accomplishments and ongoing challenges.

This is not to say she won’t be effective. As Eaton points out in his column, “The ideal interim appointment is someone who tries out successfully for the permanent job.” It would be best for our city’s children – and parents, teachers and taxpayers – if Kay-Wyatt both merits and wants the permanent job.

But we see a couple of significant yellow flags, to use a racing metaphor:
- Kay-Wyatt inherits a school system in crisis. An ACPS student was murdered in a gang fight 10 days before graduation this spring. Another student was allegedly the victim of a sexual assault in October 2021. Our schools are, simply put, not safe right now – and the biggest danger is from within. Learning can’t happen until our schools are made safe, and the solution is going to involve unglamorous, roll-up-your-sleeves hard work on building processes and rebuilding trust.
- Our school system, like our police department, is losing staff at an alarming rate. One parent on the Open ACPS Facebook page lamented what they saw as a disregard by Kay-Wyatt toward retaining existing staff in favor of bringing in new hires. While excessive turnover neces-

Opinion

“Where the press is free and every man is able to read, all is safe.”
- Thomas Jefferson

Photo of the Week

The sunrise on Saturday behind the Chart House restaurant on the Potomac River.

Your Views

Another flaw in GW historical marker

To the editor:

The article reporting on the dedication of the state historical marker recently placed outside the George Washington High School addresses the dispute among members of our community about the correct year in which the Alexandria school system was integrated—1959 or 1965. With all due respect to those advocating for the propriety of including one year or the other on the plaque, it seems to me that the more offensive language included on the historical marker is its expressly noting that “[f]or two decades this was the city’s only public high school for white students.”

Is that supposed to be a point of pride? Were white students previously unduly burdened by not having their own public high school before GW was built? What, exactly, is the point of emphasizing this particular fact? Are we also going to point out other places in our city, such as its water fountains, public restrooms, restaurants and hotels that were originally meant to be used only by white folks?

I’m not saying that this particular aspect of the marker is historically incorrect. I’m merely questioning its historical significance. Most every place of public accommodation, including our schools, was built for whites only, an aspect of our history that at once caused an indelible stain on our nation and immeasurable pain to our nation’s Black citizens.

We are still as a society paying a heavy price for that grotesque policy. I’m just not sure what is gained by underscoring it on this otherwise important historical marker.

-Roger W. Yoerges,
Alexandria

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Your Views

Civic engagement needed on housing policy

To the editor:

City hall expects development projects to get through the process expeditiously, even if it means cutting corners, such as with the Eisenhower East project last May, where our City Council put the developer’s interest ahead of city taxpayers because staff took too long finding the extra million dollars the developer should pay. The threat that a developer might not be able to do a project is sufficient to wrest concessions from elected officials no matter what small area plans say. Besides, city hall will insist that it will miss out on a contribution to BikeShare and the housing trust fund.

City hall relies upon the Council of Governments’ allocation to each jurisdiction of a number of new housing units to meet forecast population growth. But the COG doesn’t vote or pay taxes in Alexandria, so critics are within our rights to criticize city hall when it puts outside interests before those of city taxpayers and voters. The COG allocation has the appearance of a smokescreen to mask concessions to special interests.

Instead of ignoring or attacking critics, city hall has failed to engage civic leaders in respectful debate in which it could point out that as long as the local population continues increasing, the people have to live somewhere reasonably proximate to their jobs and daily life activities. Folks cannot welcome Amazon to Northern Virginia without affording a place to live for the workers Amazon will bring.

You cannot be for population-increasing policies, e.g., child tax credits both parties support, abortion restrictions Republicans favor, or immigration increases Democrats demand, and object to making way for enough housing for these additional people to live.

The dais could press civic leaders opposing some particular development as to exactly where they’d build housing for this additional population. And civic leaders would well answer carefully, because a generic “somewhere else” is insufficient. If every project belongs “somewhere else,” they will all end up nowhere, and a specific somewhere else is open to the rejoinder, “Have you obtained the somewhere else’s support?”

-Dino Drudi, Alexandria

About Alexandria

Civic engagement needed on housing policy

Hiring is never an easy task. The stakes are much higher the further up an organization’s leadership chart you go. It’s essential that for ACPS superintendent, the permanent hire is done with great care.

Alexandria’s city government and ACPS are the products of hiring decisions. Voters make hiring decisions in elections and administrators make hiring decisions for staff positions. These decisions cumulatively, and sometimes individually, are extremely important to the city’s quality of life.

For example, anyone candid about education will admit that, despite serial romantic attachments to fads and new programs, the best route to success is to hire great people and empower them in every way possible.

Here, for easy reference, are common myths and delusions about public sector hiring:

Myth #1: The search scope guarantees a quality applicant pool. The much-discussed “national search” – one Alexandrian refers to it as “the intergalactic search” – is no assurance that the applicant pool will be deep or qualified. Macroeconomic forces, specifically the degree of competition for, and difficulty of filling, a position outweigh the scope of the search process in affecting applicant pool quality. The “national search” is mostly a buzzword for highly compensated recruitment consultants.

Myth #2: Alexandria can pay below market rates and expect above average job performance because “everybody wants to live here.” Alexandria is an attractive community even with its sticker shock housing prices. However, the city is not the only attractive place to live in the United States or even in Northern Virginia. Civic pride will not offset hiring economics. It may finally be time to rethink the city’s desire to be “middle of the pack” in employee compensation.

Myth #3: Nobody who works here is good enough to be promoted. This myth arises when a person who has worked his or her way up in the city or ACPS administration becomes a candidate for a top position. It can be easy to discount the advantage of familiarity with the problem landscape and to focus on issues of personal style. The best organizations succeed in part because they find ways to accommodate excellent people who may be impolitic, eccentric or even difficult.

Myth #4: If we can hire a great person who knows nothing about our problems, they would all be solved. This delusion, often called the “The person on a white horse syndrome,” assumes that total unfamiliarity with Alexandria and its problems guarantees successful job performance. Unfortunately, this myth often combines with impatience about the time necessary to master a new position’s learning curve, which results in disappointment on all sides.

Myth #5: Alexandria hires against other municipalities. This is partially true. The larger truth is that Alexandria also competes against the private sector, a ruthlessly efficient system for individual gratification, for the best people. Public sector employee churn can result from younger employees gaining valuable experience and leveraging it into attractive positions with other public and private employers. Some positions simply have more extensive turnover rates. For example, Education Week says school superintendents have departed at a 25% rate the past two years. In other words, free agency rules.

Myth #6: We can objectively perfect our hiring processes to materially improve the quality of the workforce. Hiring should be thorough, efficient and courteous. No call or message should be unreturned. But while human resources personnel and processes are important, hiring decisions always include a subjective element. The more people who will work with a job candidate have opportunities to meet the candidate, and to exchange views on how the candidate will fit the proposed position, the better the hiring outcomes will be.

Myth #7: An interim appointee should not be a candidate for the permanent position. Why not? The ideal interim appointment is someone who tries out successfully for the permanent job.

Myth #8: Interviewing job applicants is a time-consuming annoyance for non-human resources personnel. This may be the most destructive delusion of all. The opportunity to interview employment candidates is not a workday intrusion, it is an opportunity to create a legacy. A note to qualified and motivated people who want to work in Alexandria: You’re hired.

The writer is a former lawyer, member of the Alexandria School Board from 1997 to 2006 and English teacher from 2007 to 2021 at T.C. Williams High School, now Alexandria City High School. He can be reached at aboutalexandria@gmail.com and subscriptions to his newsletter are available free at https://aboutalexandria.substack.com/.

OUR VIEW

FROM 18

Civic engagement needed on housing policy

Hiring is never an easy task. The stakes are much higher the further up an organization’s leadership chart you go. It’s essential that for ACPS superintendent, the permanent hire is done with great care.

The opinions expressed in letters and columns are those of the writers only and do not reflect the views, nor receive the endorsement, of the Alexandria Times.
Alexandria’s suction pumper fire engine

The Friendship Fire Company was Alexandria’s first fire company, founded in 1774. Friendship’s early firefighting was typical of that time. Buckets of water were used to douse flames to prevent fire from spreading. As the company moved through the 19th century, it continued to grow and acquire new technologies.

In 1851, Friendship purchased a hand-operated suction pumper fire engine for $1,008 from John Rodgers in Baltimore. It is preserved in the Friendship Firehouse Museum and will be leaving this month for conservation treatment.

The new engine was a great leap forward in the technology of firefighting. Suction pumper fire engines were far more sophisticated and effective than earlier apparatus, and required significantly more manpower to operate. The company pulled the pumper and associated hose reel to fire locations. Once there, 20 to 22 men were positioned at multiple locations on the pumper, which had a reservoir to hold water.

The introduction of the Alexandria Water Company, and running water, in 1852 provided the teams with needed supplies of water. Operating the engine was hard work, so teams of men would switch out every few minutes to keep the pumper operating.

Engines like this were meant for both work and display. They were highly decorated with carvings and/or pictures. The Friendship pumper has multiple carvings, including the clasped-hand symbol of the company on each side. These decorations made the engine a showpiece when the Friendship Fire Company participated in civic events and parades. Even after the company stopped fighting fires in the 1880s, their ceremonial and fraternal activities continued.

Technology is ever-evolving, and the hand suction engine was not the height of technology forever. The first steam-powered engines were brought to Alexandria by Union forces during the Civil War. These required less men to operate, but were more expensive and required horses to pull. These types of engines, and their cost, helped to push firefighting away from the older volunteer model to the more centralized version we see today.

The conservation treatment for the hand suction engine is possible thanks to donations by the Friendship Veterans Fire Engine Association, Alexandria Association, Historic Alexandria Foundation and many individual donors. The piece is in good condition for being 171 years old, but time has begun to take its toll. Friendship’s engine is currently red, and it has been through several paint jobs over the years.

Red fire engines did not become popular until the 1880s. Identifying the various paint layers on the piece will be one objective of the conservation treatment. The conservator will open windows into the existing paintwork and choose a more historically accurate color scheme based on the findings. In addition to painting, metalwork needs to be replaced and woodwork will be repaired. When the hand suction engine returns, it will be more stable and more accurate to when it was fighting fires in Alexandria.

Weekly Poll

How do you feel about Melanie Kay-Wyatt’s appointment as ACPS interim superintendent?

A) I’m excited about her appointment.
B) I’m skeptical, but willing to give her a chance.
C) I am not in support of her appointment.
D) I don’t care either way.
Weekly Words

ACROSS
1 Tightly grasp 
7 Frilly 
11 Buds 
15 U.K. org. that announced "There is no news" on April 18, 1930 
18 Cut out 
19 Like a cold fish 
21 2D geometry calculation 
22 Fish in unagi sauce 
23 Uncovering a query's many flaws? 
26 Corp. head honcho 
27 Frisbee, for one 
28 Passing comments? 
29 Allow 
30 "Light My Fire" band, with "The" 
32 French for "friend" 
34 What Hamlet did at the start of this soliloquy? 
39 Roller for a core workout 
42 Aloe ___ 
43 Ancient prophet 
44 Johnson of U.K. politics 
45 Bite-size crossword, e.g. 
46 Pyramid, for a pharaoh 
47 ___ Day (Jan. observance) 
49 Doesn't beat an escape room? 
53 When repeated, a patriotic chant 
56 Cowardly sort 
57 Loafing around 
59 Banded gemstone 
60 Percussionist ___ E. 
62 Buds, in Bolivia 
63 It's dropped on stage 
67 What a teacher gets after too many students request more time? 
68 Banded gemstone 
69 Dang! 
71 High deg. 
73 Has faith in 
75 Peering at 
78 ___ and Means Committee 
79 Happy 
80 Xmas mo. 
82 Shaving ___ (sets with razors) 
83 Word after "tiny" or "Tater" 
84 Goal of a philosophy treatise, perhaps? 
85 Aid's partner 
86 Puffed cereal 
87 "Pants on fire" person 
88 Weasel out of 
89 Snowboarder on the slopes 
90 "Howdy!" 
91 Churn up 
92 Horror film descriptor 
93 Like old footage, perhaps 
94 A Stooge 
96 Teacher with a patriotic chant 
98 Don't beat an escape room? 
102 Third of a third 
103 Apple's mobile platform 
104 Prince, to a king 
105 U.S. Pacific island 
109 Latin gods 
110 Meeting on a fast train? 
111 Martins, e.g. 
112 Not fictional 
113 AOL alternative 
114 Island once known for its colossal 
115 Coloring liquid 
116 Ice cream brand 
117 (Stop touching my whiskers!) 
118 Like two best friends 
119 Aloe ___ 
120 Island once known for its colossus 
121 Coloring liquid 
122 Ice cream brand 
123 (Stop touching my whiskers!) 
124 Southern neighbor of Arizona

DOWN
1 Reputation, informally 
2 LPGA star Thompson 
3 Strike callers, for short 
4 Suffered a loss 
5 Drugstore chain 
6 Tush 
7 Doesn't keep up 
8 Words before "king" or "mode" 
9 ___ au vin 
10 Who's solving this puzzle 
11 LuPone of Broadway 
12 Diamondbacks, on scoreboards 
13 Fifth zodiac sign 
14 Pacific flatfish 
15 "Chill out, dude!" 
16 Spare tire 
17 Like a cold fish 
18 Like a cold fish

Solutions from last week

EXPANSION by Garrett Chalfin, edited by David Steinberg

DEATH NOTICES

HAROLD ASH (93), formerly of Alexandria, July 26, 2022
KAREN COLE (66), formerly of Alexandria, July 20, 2022
DREMA DRUMHELLER (77), formerly of Alexandria, July 25, 2022
ROSEMARIE LAQUE (93), of Alexandria, July 29, 2022
BARBARA "BOBBI" LUNGREN (73), of Alexandria, July 22, 2022
WAYNE MAYS (80), of Alexandria, Aug. 1, 2022
GARRY MITCHELL (66), of Alexandria, July 25, 2022
ROBERT "BOB" POMEROY (96), of Alexandria, July 24, 2022
GAIL PUGH (68), formerly of Alexandria, July 30, 2022
KEVIN ROVER (67), of Alexandria, July 30, 2022

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AUGUST 4, 2022 | 21
**FESTIVAL** See the Friendship Fire Company’s 1851 hand-operated fire engine before it goes out for conservation treatment. Learn about fire safety and see City firefighting equipment up close. There will be music, displays by community organizations, craft vendors and food and beverages available. This family event is presented by the Friendship Veterans Fire Engine Association and Historic Alexandria.

**Time:** 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.
**Location:** 107 S. Alfred St.
**Information:** https://www.alexandriava.gov/FriendshipFirehouse

**SCOTTISH DANCE OPEN HOUSE** Join the Alexandria School of Highland Dance for a free open house to learn more about Scottish Highland dancing and meet our teachers and current dancers. At this event, you'll have the chance to tour the studio space, see what a typical class is like and even enjoy a brief performance.

**Time:** 5 to 6 p.m.
**Location:** 2377 S. Dove St.
**PUBLIC NOTICE**

**ABANDONED WATERCRAFT**

Notice is hereby given that the following watercraft has been abandoned for more than 60 DAYS on the property of: Bruce G. Welch, 3574 Cypress Creek Rd., Comfort, TX 78013. Phone # 956-279-0830

1982 Shamrock 20’, White. Hull# SHA013490382 REG# VA1664 KK.

Application for Watercraft Registration/Title will be made in accordance with Section 291-733.25 of the Code of Virginia if this watercraft is not claimed and removed with 30 days of first publication of this notice. Please contact the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources with questions.

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**PUBLIC NOTICE**

Dish Wireless proposes to colocate wireless communications antennas at a centerline height of 54 feet on a 62-foot building at the approximate vicinity of 181 E Reed Avenue, Alexandria, City of Alexandria, VA 22305. Public comments regarding potential effects from this site on historic properties may be submitted within 30 days from the date of this publication to: Trileaf Corp, Monica Argueta, m.argueta@trileaf.com, 8600 LaSalle Road Suite 301, Towson, MD 21286, 410.853.7128

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**EVENTS/COIN SHOW**

Charlottesville Coin, Currency & Stamp Show. Free Admission! Elks Lodge #389. 389 Elk Drive Charlottesville, VA. Saturday, August 13th. 9am-5pm. Contact Jackie Dean (540) 832-0024, Debomb14@aol.com.

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