Rescue in the night

**U.S. diplomat describes dramatic February mission to evacuate Nicaraguan prisoners**

BY DENISE DUNBAR

A widebody Boeing 767 can carry up to 375 passengers. But when Lance Hegerle, a senior diplomat with the State Department, led a secret mission to Nicaragua on February 9, the 767 that landed on a dark Managua runway at 2 a.m. was empty except for its crew and a small team of fewer than 20 people.

Their mission was to evacuate the more than 200 political prisoners that long-time Nicaraguan ruler Daniel Ortega turned out of his prisons that night. Ortega placed one condition on their release: They had to leave immediately for the United States.

The inmates themselves had no idea this was happening. Incarcerated in various prisons around the country, they were awakened by pounding on their cell doors at roughly 10 p.m. on February 8. According to Hegerle, these political prisoners were frightened and bewildered as they were led outside.

“They were put on Russian-donated prison buses with blankets on the windows and were driven to, they didn’t know where,” Hegerle said. “And each bus was a different story. They maybe guessed early on that they may be going to Cuba. Some thought they were going to a different prison. Some thought they were going to be executed. There was no information given.”

Hegerle, who was a State Department deputy director, was on board the 767 along with a small team brought 222 Nicaraguan political prisoners to Dulles Airport. To Hegerle’s right is Ryan Reid, the POL-ECON Chief of U.S. Embassy Nicaragua.
Happy National Good Neighbor Day

Did you know? In the early 1970’s Becky Mattson of Lakeside, Montana created National Good Neighbor Day, observed on September 28th to acknowledge and celebrate the importance of a good neighbor. In 1978, President Jimmy Carter issued proclamation 4601: “...Understanding, love and respect build cohesive families and communities. The same bonds cement our Nation and the nations of the world. For most of us, this sense of community is nurtured and expressed in our neighborhoods where we give each other an opportunity to share and feel part of a larger family...”

These days, these sentiments still ring true and we are so grateful for our local friends, neighbors and communities we work hard to build and strengthen. Here are some small gestures that go a long way when it comes to being a good neighbor:

- Offer a kind word. Even a small compliment goes a long way to creating a bond or breaking down barriers.
- Bring extra bounty from your garden or baked goods.
- Invite them to join an informal celebration at your home.
- Ask who they recommend for a service such as taxes, painting, or car care. You will earn their respect, especially if the question is something they have firsthand experience with.

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Man shot at Holmes Run Parkway

A 21-year-old man was shot Friday around the 5500 block of Holmes Run Parkway. The man was transported to a local hospital and is in critical but stable condition, according to the Alexandria Police Department. Samuel W. Tucker and William Ramsay Elementary Schools were locked down around 10 a.m. because of the shooting. During the lockdown, both schools continued a normal school day, but no one was allowed inside the building to keep students and faculty safe. The lockdown ended the same day at 12:25 p.m.

Shots fired at King Street

Four shots were fired around the 4300 block of King Street Friday. No one reported injuries and no arrests have been made. APD is still investigating.

City offers free gun, medication lock boxes

Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services offering free locking medication boxes and firearm trigger locks as part of the Lock and Talk Northern Virginia movement, as well as Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. Alexandrians can pick up free locks and boxes at several locations across the city, including 24/7 at the sheriff’s office. The state of Virginia is also taking measures to increase gun safety, as a new law gives taxpayers $300 tax credits on eligible gun-safe purchases from 2023 to 2027.

‘Run! Geek! Run!’ race raises money

Ironistic held its 16th annual Run! Geek! Run! 5,000 meter race this past weekend to benefit Move2Learn, a local charity focused on helping school-age kids move. This year’s beneficiary was Move2Learn, an organization that offers programs and equipment to keep students moving before, during and after school. Ironistic employees from across the country ran and volunteered at the event, along with local Alexandrians. Tyler French, 22, of Alexandria won the overall race with a time of 16:21.

Meet Colby!

One year old, Colby is ready to learn. He’s active and playful but needs a human to teach him manners. He loves to learn and appreciates a treat. Fifty pounds, Colby cherishes toys and loves Fetch. He would love a yard of his own or a long walk to the park. Colby would make a terrific dog for an active lifestyle.

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- School Days for Colby -

- PHOTO/MARTY DEVINE

WEEKLY BRIEFING
The American Horticultural Society celebrated 50 years with a gala at River Farm Saturday. The scene was decorated with flowers by Laura Dowling, former White House chief floral designer. The society was founded in 1922 and aims to connect people to gardening and showcase the art and practice of horticulture. River Farm is the headquarters of AHS and was once part of George Washington’s farmland.

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New digital parking meters

Alexandria Department of Transportation and Environmental Services will be installing new digital parking meters this fall. The parking meters will allow users to use the ParkMobile app or enter their license plate information into the kiosk. For more information, residents can go to alexandria.gov/parking.

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Potential Kaiser Permanente Healthcare strike

More than 75,000 Kaiser Permanente Healthcare union employees across the country are planning to strike from October 4 to 6 if a deal is not reached by Saturday. Kaiser has a location on Potomac Avenue in Alexandria. The main reason for the strike — according to the union press release — is due to the company’s poor response to its short-staffing crisis, which has led to delayed or denied healthcare for patients, mistaken diagnosis and neglect. Healthcare workers are calling on management to safely staff facilities and improve the level of care.

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Local woman achieves centenarian status

Helen Smith, a local Alexandrian, celebrated National Centenarian’s Day – a holiday to celebrate those who are 100 years or older – last week. Smith turned 102 on September 15. The presence of centenarians has doubled in the United States in the past 20 years. Other categories of centenarians are semi-supercentenarians, who are between the ages of 105-109, and supercentenarians, who are 110 and older, according to research by Boston University.

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for Central America at the time of this interview, said some of the prisoners told him they realized they were going to the airport only when they turned onto the airport runway. “Many of them remarked when they saw the plane, they thought it might be the United States. A couple of them said, ‘It’s when I saw you standing there. There’s the fat American. That’s where I’m going,’” Hegerle laughed.

The U.S. diplomatic team eventually got 222 of the 224 prisoners processed and on board; two opted to go back to their Nicaraguan prisons rather than evacuate. Their reasons are unknown – as is the reasoning behind the Ortega regime’s decision to let the other 222 leave for the U.S.

The plane was packed and raucous on its return – a striking contrast to the worried tiny team that had made the trip down just hours prior. By early afternoon on February 9, the jet arrived at Dulles Airport, where it was met by family, friends, government workers and the media, all of whom had been notified of what was happening once the plane was wheels up from Managua.

Many of these former political prisoners have remained in the metropolitan D.C. area – though a significant number resettled in South Florida, with a smattering in California, Texas, Arkansas and other states.

At least one former Nicaraguan prisoner has settled in Alexandria with their family. Because of safety concerns for relatives still in Nicaragua, they were only able to speak on background for this story rather than be quoted or give details about their political activities. The story of this person’s release, and those of all 222 prisoners, is told from Hegerle’s perspective.

‘A troubled democracy’

To fully understand the February 2023 rescue, one must have at least a passing understanding of political conditions in Nicaragua during the past five years. Hegerle posits that until 2018, the Ortega government was seen by the U.S. as “a troubled democracy.”

“The regime responded violently,” Hegerle said. “They killed over 300 protesters, some of them with sniper rifles shooting protesters carrying signs.”

Another U.S. government official, who spoke only on background for this story, said the opposition overreached in going from protesting one specific reform to setting up blockades in Managua calling for Ortega’s ouster. According to this official, Ortega restored order by bringing in Cuban snipers to kill more than 325 Nicaraguans who were on the blockades.

Hegerle said many of those arrested in 2018-19 were among those released in February.

“During that time period, the regime arrested a lot of people. A lot. They kept well over 100 in prison that we were tracking. Most of them were low-profile protestors, campesinos. They were usually convicted of trumped up, fictitious criminal charges,” Hegerle said.

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Arnoldo Aleman, whose regime is riddled with corruption, is elected president. He and his sons Luis Somoza Debayle and Anastasio Somoza Debayle rule Nicaragua through the Nationalist Liberal Party for 43 years.

$1936$ – Anastasio Somoza Garcia elected president. He and his sons Luis Somoza Debayle and Anastasio Somoza Debayle rule Nicaragua through the Nationalist Liberal Party for 43 years.

$1972$-$79$ – The FSLN, known as Sandinistas, wage guerilla warfare in Nicaragua.


$March 23$, $1988$ – Ceasefire signed between the Sandinistas and Contras.

$Feb. 25$, $1990$ – FSLN loses to the National Opposition Union. Violetta Chamorro serves nearly seven years as president, though the Sandinistas still control the army, labor unions and judicial system.

$Oct. 20$, $1996$ – Arnoldo Alemán, whose regime is riddled with corruption, is elected president. Alemán cuts a deal with Ortega to avoid prison and in return lowers the threshold to become president from $50\%$ plus $1$ to $35\%$ plus $1$.

$November 2006$ – Ortega returns to power with $38\%$ of the vote against a fractured opposition. Ortega begins rewriting the constitution to maintain and solidify his power.

$Sources$: “Nicaragua: Revolution in the Family” by Shirley Christian; Wikipedia; U.S. official who spoke on background.
people for both humanitarian and political reasons, according to Hegerle. “These are 222 people that have been in horrible conditions. And quite frankly, many of them represent the core of any possible opposition to the regime.”

Hegerle quietly assembled his team to make the flight down. “I picked people who had served with me in the embassy before because a lot of the political prisoners were (former) contacts of the embassy,” Hegerle said. “I knew several of [the prisoners]. One of them was actually in my house with his wife having wine and cheese the night before he was arrested.”

Hegerle’s exchanges with his colleagues as he went about recruiting people to make the trip were comical. “I wouldn’t tell them what they [would be] doing;” Hegerle said. “I said, ‘Look, I want to check, is your diplomatic passport valid?’ “Yes,” they responded. “Can you come with me starting at noon on Wednesday? I’ll get you back about three o’clock on Thursday afternoon,” Hegerle said he asked. “Sure thing. What are we doing?” they responded. “Can’t tell you,” Hegerle said he replied. “Want to come?”

Every single person Hegerle asked jumped at the chance to be part of the mission, as did well over 300 others who worked the reception center, hotel and airport upon the plane’s arrival at Dulles Airport. “Knowing me and knowing where we worked, they’re like, ‘I’m in.’ Every single one of them said, ‘I’m in.’” Hegerle said.

They chartered the plane, lined up the participants and ended up at the Norfolk air base at 10 p.m. on February 8. “That’s when I told the crew where we were going, because we had a charter flight with a charter crew. And we had a medical team there. All they knew is they were going to South America to pick people up … somewhere,” Hegerle said. “They weren’t really sure what we were doing until we got to the airport and we had closed the doors and there were no cell phones. We kept it very, very tight.”

The medical team was on board because the State Department wasn’t sure what type of physical condition the former prisoners would be in. “We had a large team of medics who had done similar work with the Afghan refugees,” Hegerle said. “And when they started talking about all of the things that they were preparing for, that’s when I went, ‘Oh my God, what are we going to get into here?’ Because we haven’t seen [some of] these people for four years.”

**The evacuation**
“... We flew down on an empty giant aircraft,” Hegerle said. “We landed on the military side of the runway. It was

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**Nicaragua**

**From** 

A former political prisoner expresses his joy at arriving at Dulles airport on February 9.
NORTE DE NICARAGUA
FROM | 9
Richard "Lance" Hegerle
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Alexandria Times

Lance Hegerle has done two tours of duty in Nicaragua, most recently as political counselor. He was stationed in Managua when the Ortega government rounded up dozens of political prisoners in 2021.

a little after 2 a.m. because [the Ortega regime] wanted us to get them out before people got up.

The logistical assistance the Ortega government had promised for the evacuation did not materialize, so Hegerle’s U.S. team improvised.

"The promised infrastructure, like tables and lights and the local ground crew, weren’t there. It was just us and a ring of military police in battle armor and AK-47s," Hegerle recalled. "It was a go and come; we didn’t refuel."

A particularly poignant moment was when the U.S. team could see the prison buses "kind of slowly coming down the road," Hegerle said. Hegerle got a few flight attendants to use their phones as flashlights on the dark runway.

"We just improvised a check-in process," Hegerle said.

There were important procedures that had to be followed for the evacuation. Everyone had to be scrutinized against a manifest. Every prisoner was pulled aside for a one-on-one conversation with a U.S. official, who asked the all-important question: “Do you wish to go to the United States? Because this plane is going to the United States.”

“One of the things we really wanted to ensure is that we were not participating in a forced deportation,” Hegerle said. “And so every single person [had to agree]. And some of them were confused. These were people who had been sleeping in a jail cell four hours earlier. And if they were not comfortable, then they were directed over and I would talk to them – I talked to every one of them – to explain the situation. ... Tell them what was going on and kind of assuage their questions.”

"That way everybody who got on the plane wanted to go," Hegerle said.

Many of the prisoners who had been incarcerated longer were indigenous farmers who had never before flown on an airplane.

"One of my friends was helping at the center for the check-in and he said he had to show some of them how to use an elevator," Hege- rle said. “You had those people and you had ex-foreign ministers. A lot of these people were like, ‘I want to go back to my farm.’ [I said] I got two options: prison bus or plane. I’d pick the plane.”

The scene just before the plane departed from Managua was intense.

"Everybody that volunteered for the flight, they’ve all said some version of [it was the] most emotional thing they’ve ever done," Hege- rle said. "Because these people, some of them were kissing the ground, because they knew they weren’t coming back. Many of them were crying. A lot of them were just hugging people because they couldn’t believe that they were free after four years in prison.”

On the plane

Hegerle described the flight home as “wonderfully chaotic.”

“There were siblings who hadn’t seen each other in years – they were both imprisoned. There were a lot of family reunions on that plane,” Hege- rle said.

It was difficult for the State Department officials to get the needed paperwork done on the flight back.

“We were all going around getting them to fill out some forms to speed the immigration process. Getting them to get out of the isles was almost impossible,” Hegerle said. “But how surreal it was that these people had been in a horrible prison cell at 10 p.m. and at 4 a.m. some nice flight attendant was saying, ‘Would you like the pasta or would you like the chicken?’”

The former prisoners coped with the sudden chaos in different ways.

“Some of them were just watching cartoons,” Hegerle said.

In some ways, that surreal flight home was the easy part. The political aspect is equally interesting, as two questions loom large: Why did Ortega release the prisoners rather than executing or continuing to hold them? And why did the Nicaraguan government issue passports with expiration dates 10 years out to opposition leaders that they were ostensibly trying to get rid of for good?

Hegerle had no definitive answer to either question.

“You can’t really think in the head of Ortega. I don’t much want to,” Hegerle said.

He cited sanctions from the U.S. government and pressure from other governments in Central and South America as possible factors in Ortega’s decision to release the prisoners.

“... the increasingly authoritarian bent of the regime and the things it’s doing to the opposition have really been unpalatable to the other governments in Latin America,” Hegerle said.

The 10-year expiration date on the passports and the intense desire of many of the former prisoners to bring democracy back to Nicaragua is an interesting combination that’s full of tantalizing possibilities for the future.

"Of the 222, if you asked them, I doubt more than a couple would say they didn’t want to go back [to Nicaragua],” Hege- rle said. “These people are here because they were given the option of staying in prison for eight to 10 more years or leaving the country.”

“But what they really want is a Democratic Nicaragua that they can return to.”

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SBDC

FROM | 1

year on July 1, read:

“Welcome to the first small business newsletter of our new (fiscal) year – where you will start to see changes that reflect the work we have been doing to update and expand the services we offer to Alexandria small businesses.”

The bulletin made it clear that change was afoot without explicitly saying the Alexandria SBDC had been shuttered.

“While we will continue to work with the Virginia Small Business Development Centers network to provide services so many Alexandria entrepreneurs have utilized, expect to see lots more about new and expanded offerings from our team and other partners who will be joining us in Alexandria,” the July bulletin from the AEDP read.

In June, the SBDC had sent out its regular bulletin, which listed upcoming events and other business related happenings and was printed using the regular Alexandria SBDC logo. There was no hint of a looming closure.

Both the June SBDC email and the July AEDP bulletin came from the email of Philomena Fitzgerald, who has the title “small business program manager” and is listed on the AEDP website, though with an SBDC email.

The official announcement the Alexandria SBDC had closed came from the Virginia SBDC and was dated August 7.

“Effective immediately, we are pleased to announce that the SBDC services in Alexandria will now be delivered by the [George] Mason SBDC. The Mason SBDC has a stellar track record in assisting entrepreneurs and small businesses in achieving their goals throughout NOVA,” the Virginia release, sent from statewide SBDC Director Jody Keenan, said.

The announcement went on to state that former banker Jack Parker, who had long consulted with businesses for the Alexandria SBDC, has moved to the Mason SBDC as a business analyst. Former Alexandria SBDC consultants Jennifer Gnaidy and Patra Frame will continue to assist local businesses as AEDP consultants, according to Elizabeth Bolton, AEDP’s vice president of strategic communications.

The change took place three months after the death of long-time SBDC Assistant Director Gloria Flanagan in May and about 18 months following the January 2022 retirement of Bill Reagan, who founded the Alexandria SBDC in 1996 and served as its executive director for more than 25 years.

The decision to shutter

Keenan and Bolton both said the decision to close the Alexandria SBDC came from the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership.

Keenan said she was notified in late spring of AEDP’s decision to close the Alexandria SBDC, but that it had been under consideration for some time.

“They let us know in June,” Keenan said. “Over the past couple of years, the city and AEDP have been looking at how they, as a city, can expand the services that they provide for small businesses. And in that kind of conversation and planning, they decided … they would not be running and managing the Alexandria Small Business Development Center.”

For much of its existence, the SBDC operated independently. The center did, however, work closely with AEDP for the past decade. Bolton spoke fondly about the SBDC.

“I’m really proud of the work that the organization did,” Bolton said. “It was co-located with AEDP for at least 10 years, I believe. It was a super close relationship.”

AEDP made the difficult decision to close the SBDC in late May this year. Bolton said multiple factors played a part in the decision – the pandemic being chief among them.

“COVID really laid bare the needs of the business community and [what needs] were and were not being met and who was being served,” Bolton said. “Like the most recent City Council election, they came in with clear ideas about how we could and should better serve programs as much as they’re looking for connecting directly to resources they can use,” he said. “And that’s done best one-to-one. That’s my key point is the value of Alexandria SBDC was the one-to-one involvement with the businesses.”

Gloria Flanagan

“I was hoping [the Alexandria SBDC] would continue to be a focal point for small business economic development in the city of Alexandria. That was my hope,” Reagan said.

Reagan praised the Mason SBDC, but said something significant will be lost by businesses not being able to sit down and work in person with Small Business Development Center employees.

“The most effective economic development impact comes from getting directly involved with the business owners, one-to-one, tending to their issues and solving their problems. That’s what I believe is crucial to that small business owner,” Reagan said.

Reagan also expressed concerns that other regional resources might be helpful but primarily remote in their assistance.

“[Small businesses are] not looking for webinars and grant services as much as they’re looking for connecting directly to resources they can use,” he said. “And that’s done best one-to-one. That’s my key point is the value of Alexandria SBDC was the one-to-one involvement with the businesses.”
the businesses in the community. When you add all of that together, that really led us to step back [and] take a look at how we wanted to do things.”

Bolton also said a big reason AEDP shut down the center was so they could bring everything under one roof and maximize funding opportunities for businesses.

“We feel like this arrangement where we brought everything in house lets us devote 100% of City Council funding to servicing our local businesses in the ways that they need to be serviced,” Bolton said.

Helping businesses

The Alexandria SBDC assisted a long list of leading Alexandria businesses in its 27 years of existence. Reagan said their list of clients included the Potomac Riverboat Company, St. Elmo’s Coffee Pub, Cheesetique, Pork Barrel BBQ, Red Barn Mercantile, fibrespace, Scramble among many others.

The Alexandria Times also utilized the Alexandria SBDC on two occasions, and Parker in particular provided useful guidance.

Reagan shared an inspiring story of a business owner whose venture thrived, partly due to assistance she received from Alexandria SBDC.

“She came to us having worked in New York at the World Trade Center after 9/11 and helping identify human remains, and she needed help in setting up her own business,” Reagan recounted.

Flanagan helped the businesswoman with setting up her consulting practice. Together, Reagan and Flanagan put the businesswoman in touch with a government contracting consultant to help get her government contracts. Later, when the entrepreneur had questions about needing help hiring

“[Small businesses are] not looking for webinars and grant programs as much as they’re looking for connecting directly to resources they can use.”

– Bill Reagan, former executive director of the Alexandria SBDC

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SBDC

and firing people, they connected her with a human resources consultant.

“She eventually got a $100 million dollar contract,” Reagan said. “She eventually sold the business to another corporation, but she still works with it. I ran into her during the summer, and she said: ‘I cannot believe how much help Alexandria Small Business Development Center has given me. Now the corporation is still looking for larger space, and I am insisting that they look for it in the city of Alexandria!’”

Reagan emphasized the SBDC’s mission was to offer tailored support to local businesses. While acknowledging that not every business achieved the same extraordinary success as this business owner, many did experience significant growth due to the center’s support.

“All programs are being retained, just delivered in a way more appropriately tailored to the local needs of local businesses,” Reagan said.

What’s next

AEDP is currently working in coordination with the city to come up with a new version of a grant program for businesses and is exploring different programs to assist businesses. According to AEDP’s Director of Small Business and Entrepreneurship Cristina Amoruso, businesses should expect more news on the matter soon.

“We are planning a launch sometime in mid-November,” she said. “We know that businesses are eager to receive assistance, and we definitely want to let them know that we are here to help them.”

Bolton asserted that all SBDC resources would continue under AEDP, but she did not offer specific details.

“All programs are being retained, just delivered in a way more appropriately tailored to the local needs of local businesses,” Bolton said in an email.

Keenan acknowledged the challenges that transitions pose but reaffirmed the commitment to supporting Alexandria’s small businesses.

“There’s always a transition with change, but we continue to be available and support the Alexandria small businesses and look forward to working with AEDP and others in the city to do the very same thing: support small businesses in Alexandria,” Keenan said.

Laurence Smallman, owner of Scramble, was taken aback by the news of Alexandria SBDC’s closure, given its pivotal role in the success of his business.

“I am very surprised to hear that the Alexandria SBDC has closed. It provided invaluable help to me as I started planning the business that became Scramble,” Smallman said in an email. “I opened in Alexandria on Eisenhower Ave in November 2017. Without the help of the SBDC, I don’t think my business would have succeeded as well as it has.”

Dylan Raycroft, co-owner of Rooftop Chimney Sweeps, echoed a similar sentiment.

“I was shocked and sad to hear the news about SBDC closing,” Raycroft said in an email to the Times. “I’ve met many good friends there who I continue to send business back and forth with, and to talk and share our best ideas with each other. I think our city will be poorer without the SBDC, and who will especially suffer are local entrepreneurs who are tied into the community and are willing to risk their own time and capital to build something right here.”

However, Alexandria small business owner Danielle Romanetti, owner of fibrespace, pushed back on the notion that services will be diminished with the closure of the Alexandria SBDC.

“When technically SBDC is gone, the small business department here in Alexandria has doubled in size and moved under an existing and well-staffed and well-funded city organization – AEDP,” Romanetti said in an email to the Times. “All services that SBDC offered are now under AEDP while we are now, as a city, taking advantage of Mason’s SBDC services. Anyone wanting information about operating specifically in Alexandria, has more services than ever before right here in the small business program at AEDP.”

Reflecting on the ongoing transition, Reagan expressed admiration for the Mason SBDC.

“Mason SBDC is an excellent resource with a great reputation. I don’t have any concerns about the quality of the help that Alexandria business owners receive there,” Reagan said.

While local businesses will still have useful resources, Reagan said something is definitely lost with the closing of the Alexandria SBDC.

“Every time we met with small businesses in the city of Alexandria, we made it very clear that the free assistance they were getting from us was courtesy of the city of Alexandria,” Reagan said. “And I think ... a lot of small businesses [felt] appreciation for the city that funded our operation.”

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Alexandria City Council held a town hall meeting Sunday afternoon during which they discussed homelessness, their views on ward systems, escalating violence, housing infrastructure and zoning.

In the two-hour meeting, Council members, Mayor Justin Wilson and Vice Mayor Amy Jackson took questions via flashcards from the 40 or so residents in attendance. City staff passed out these cards and pens upon entrance to the Del Pepper Community Center, where the meeting was held.

Wilson kicked off the meeting by joking with attendees about the Washington Commanders game happening simultaneously against the Buffalo Bills.

“We understand that we had competition for this time,” Wilson laughed. “You’ll still have plenty of time to watch the second half of the game and they’ll have a three touchdown lead by then.”

The first question tossed to the Council members was about passing a resolution on money in politics. Councilor Canek Aguirre said he was conflicted because he is a politician of color.

“It’s a little bit more difficult…already starting off with one hand behind your back,” Aguirre said. “I wish everybody would play by the rules, but that’s not the reality we’re living in.”

He said he was open to discussing it with the council, while Jackson said they need to keep their “eye on the prize” with state elections coming up.

Multiple questions came in regarding homelessness in Alexandria and the council’s efforts to reduce homelessness and/or build a new shelter. Councilor Alyia Gaskins fielded the first of the questions.

Gaskins said the city’s task force focused on preventing and ending homelessness is starting a deeper dive into the data about the root causes of this. She said this attempt to understand the reasons is a way to better support these populations in eradicating this issue in Alexandria.

Gaskins also said the city is not looking to build a new shelter, but assist existing shelters in providing resources for every type of person in need, whether they are a single parent, family unit or single person.

Aguirre added the homelessness issue is a widespread problem across the country and Council wants to expand current shelters to accommodate more people.

“The expansion of rooms is … not really dealing with the root cause of the issue,” Aguirre said. “We need to also be looking at resources to transition folks right because as soon as they hit the benefit cliff, all of a sudden they might be losing benefits.”

Jackson said it’s important to make housing more affordable to those populations. She said converting commercial to residential spaces and continuing to support food drives.

“We’re back to pandemic levels of food insecurity in this city,” Jackson said. “These are the people that need to make choices between putting food on the table for their families as well as paying their rent or mortgages.”

The conversation then moved to diverse representation, then to the potential for a ward system. Everyone on the council responded to this question. Jackson spoke first against the ward system.

“I like to know all the puzzle pieces and I would be concerned to have different people trying to vie for funding,” Jackson said. “You have really big areas like Del Ray going against a really small area in the West End and maybe that small area isn’t represented as well in terms of advocacy … or the number of people that are engaged.”

“Wards, I think, tend to foster competition and division between parts of our city,” Councilor Kirk McPike said. “A lot of the challenges that we face need to be a whole city effort. … We don’t want one part of the city or another bearing more of the weight because their representative isn’t as effective. Under this current system, we all care about everyone and can take a broad view on issues.”

Councilor John Chapman spoke next and said Washington, D.C.’s structure of advisory neighborhood commissioners is a better system rather than moving toward wards.

“These are volunteers that are at the hyper-local level,” Chapman said. “If we introduce something like that so neighborhoods have somebody that they could point to for their neighborhood representation, I think that might … solve some of the issues.”

Councilor Sarah Bagley also spoke against the ward system, followed by Gaskins. The conversation then moved to a discussion about crime and escalating violence on South Reynolds Street, as well as improved communications from the Alexandria Police Department, which the Times has reported on previously.

Wilson read multiple questions regarding an uptick in violence in the city. Council largely told residents to be cognizant of their surroundings, report everything to APD and lock all doors. Councilors said they were trying to invest more into the communications department to better notify the community. A deeper discussion on this topic took place at Tuesday’s legislative meeting.

“We are in the midst of investing further in our communications department [such as] adding roles at the APD and with the city,” Bagley said. “It is our intention to provide transparent information as promptly as possible.”

The last big topic of conversation at the meeting was about housing in the city. Council spent almost an hour of the two-hour meeting discussing housing. Several questions centered around unsavory landlord practices, rent increases, displacement and low-income housing plans.

“The housing market in Alexandria is, like in many places throughout the nation and in this region, in a crisis,” McPike said. “That crisis falls heaviest on those who have the least in our city.”

BY CAITLYN MEISNER

The Zoning for Housing initiative was also mentioned; McPike said these proposals intend to improve the health of the housing market to diversify the offerings available to incoming residents. McPike also said better code enforcement and improving older buildings are among priorities.

There were also questions on the topic of renaming Confederate street names after other important community figures. Council said they have plans for two or three streets at this point, but welcome suggestions for streets that need renaming and potential new names.

The next meeting will be Thursday at 6 p.m. It is a hybrid meeting to discuss Zoning for Housing further. The meeting is on Zoom and in person at the William Ramsay Recreation Multipurpose Room on 5650 Sanger Ave. In person and virtual interpretation services are available.
Council discusses crime spike

Alexandria officials outline plan to combat recent crime spike

BY RYAN HOPPER

With crime on the rise in the city, Alexandria City Council spent more than half of its four-hour Tuesday night legislative meeting discussing comprehensive strategies to combat crime.

“There’s nothing more important in what we do,” Mayor Justin Wilson said. “The safety of the community is the number one duty of government.”

Many different forms of crime are plaguing the city and the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area at large. According to the Alexandria Police Department, larceny is up nearly 22%, stolen vehicles have increased by nearly 48% and aggravated assaults are up by almost 51% when comparing the statistics from the first half of 2023 to Alexandria’s 20-year average from 2004 through 2022.

One of the most concerning is the recent spike in motor vehicle theft both locally and nationally. According to data from the Council on Criminal Justice, there were nearly 34% more motor vehicle thefts nationally from January through June 2023 compared to the same period last year.

A viral TikTok trend showing a relatively easy way to steal Hyundais and Kias is thought to partly explain this spike in car thefts. Alexandria Chief of Police Don Hayes encouraged Alexandrians who own the Korean-made brands to call the dealership they bought the car from or 311 to acquire theft protection for their cars.

“A software flaw and a Tik-Tok challenge was put out there,” Hayes said. “There were 118 of those cars stolen alone up to August 18.”

The spillover of crime from neighboring jurisdictions into Alexandria is a concern to city leaders, with D.C. homicides eclipsing 200 before October for the first time since 1997, when 305 people were slain in the nation’s capital.

One flashpoint of the meeting was when Councilor Alyia Gaskins pressed Hayes on community criticism stemming from the reporting of a September 1 incident on the corner of S. Washington and Wilkes Streets in Old Town. APD did not notify residents through the eNews alert system until September 14, despite the violent nature of the assault that was caught on a security camera.

Gaskins asked Hayes about the lack of communication about this incident.

“There’s certain things the media have reported that are not true,” Hayes said. “I’ll talk to you offline about that.”

Hayes said he could not discuss precise details in a public setting because the investigation into the incident, with the criminal still at large, is ongoing. Hayes said the incident was initially classified as a robbery and not an abduction, an assertion that was at odds with what APD Spokesman Marcel Bassett told the Times in the Sept. 21 story “Delayed crime reporting draws ire.”

“We didn’t leave that area until we were certain he left,” Hayes said. “Just because there wasn’t free to leave at the time, that doesn’t mean the person was kidnapped.”

Upon further questioning from Gaskins, Wilson abruptly cut her off and moved on to the next topic after an answer from Hayes.

Despite the challenges, city leaders want to maximize the opportunity to work with their counterparts across Washington, D.C., Maryland and Virginia to apprehend suspects through new technology and techniques.

To make it easier to prosecute those suspected of crimes, Alexandria Commonwealth’s Attorney Bryan Porter has created a new multi-jurisdictional grand jury in partnership with Arlington County. He hopes to add more local Commonwealth’s Attorney’s offices to the partnership in the future.

Porter underscored the importance of obtaining grand jury subpoenas of suspects because a grand jury is the only legal process where a witness can be forced to testify what they observed. In addition, grand jury subpoenas, unlike other subpoenas, are served in secret, protecting the witness.

“We can issue them a subpoena and compel them to come to court,” Porter said. “We are starting it this week and using it to combat serious, violent crime.”

The city will also expand its use of a license plate camera pilot program, with 12 cameras being added to the six cameras already in operation. Over the last six months, the six devices have averaged 2.6 million plate reads per month, the devices have been responsible for $243,744 of property recovered, including 14 stolen vehicles. Hayes and Porter both contend that these devices will assist in collaborating with other jurisdictions tracking suspects entering and exiting Alexandria.

City Manager James Parajan and Hayes pointed out that within the city, there have been a few notable hotspots of criminal activity. These include several residential areas, including the Reynolds Street corridor – specifically the Brent Place Apartments at 375 S. Reynolds St. – and the three-story apartment complexes on Beauregard Street by William Ramsey Elementary School, known as the Hamlets.

To combat crime in these areas, Hayes touted the success of the new Community Assistance Safety Team that has been implemented in areas like the Reynolds Street corridor with 123 felony arrests, 11 stolen cars obtained and three guns taken off the street by CAST in the last six months. Hayes says the goal of CAST is not just to rack up arrests but to ensure that members of the community feel safer in their day-to-day lives.

“We need to recapture the quality of life everyone deserves,” Hayes said.

Two officers have also been stationed in the Reynolds Street corridor, with one stationed there for an entire shift and the other living there among the community, able to respond in his off time.

“We are saturating the Reynolds Street area right now,” Hayes said. “You’ve [Council] seen the emails, people don’t feel safe out there.”

Another hotspot of crime mentioned is the Bradlee Shopping Center, where Alexandria City Public School employees, including new superintendent Melanie Kay-Wyatt Ed.D., have been conducting random walkthroughs alongside APD to catch and return truant students to class at nearby Alexandria City High School. When caught and identified, students’ families are notified three times per day by email and text in their native language as opposed to the previous policy of a robocall once in the evening.

“We are sending a clear message to the community that our schools are closed campuses,” Kay-Wyatt said. “If we can identify them, we try to engage with their parents immediately.”

A major concern for APD in implementing these new strategies is staffing shortages, a problem police departments are facing locally and nationally. Hayes reported while there are 20 potential officers in the academy, with APD down 11 detectives and not having other officers due to a variety of reasons, such as injury, the department is still short-staffed.

“We don’t have all the officers that it looks like we do on paper,” Hayes said. “When we get to where we want to be with staffing, we will be able to have officers respond within their beats.”

Following a comprehensive survey being conducted for the department, APD will have a long-overdue new beat structure that should be completed by April.

“The report is going to give us a tool to make measurements so we don’t have to commission a new study,” Hayes said. “Our beat structures haven’t been reconstructed in years. Potomac yards wasn’t even in existence yet.”

This drew the attention of Councilor Canek Aguirre, who wondered why this issue hadn’t been dealt with years ago, given the rapid development of the Potomac Yards neighborhood and the city as a whole in the past 15 years.

“I remember talking about this [beat structure] six to eight years ago under Chief Brown,” Aguirre said. “This is unacceptable … let’s just get it done.”

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Upon arrival, 13 Cedar St. may seem like a regular Alexandria home. The Rosemont dwelling has a red brick facade and beautiful greenery lining the front of the home and a lengthy wrap-around porch to fit almost every member of the family.

But 13 Cedar St. is anything but the “normal” Alexandria home. Every home has its quirks and its stories that make it unique, and this one has more than most.

The home was one of the first to built on the street in 1918 and has only had three families live there. Susan Tomai and Gerald Patterson – also known as Suzy and Gerry – have resided there since July 1995. “I always thought, ‘What could I do with that house if I could get my hands on it?’” Suzy said. “It was really run down. The windows were covered with ivy and the porch was decaying.”

Suzy said she adored the nearly 2,800 square foot house from afar for quite some time, often taking their dog for walks down Cedar Street. At the time, the couple lived on Oak Street, where they had just recently finished their basement.

“Then there was a ‘For Sale’ sign,” Suzy said. “I picked Gerry up from the airport [after a business trip], drove him by the house, and so we ended up buying it.”

Suzy said she and Gerry lamented the fact that, while they had done some work, there were still so many windows to install. They eventually hired contractors and moved into the home.

The home has three bedrooms inside and a large living room that opens up to two porches and a brick patio. The couple has since added a large addition to the house, which houses a kitchen and a library. They also installed air conditioning, added a large master bedroom and bath, and completely redid the kitchen. In short, the house is no longer a fixer-upper.
The location was convenient as both were working—Gerry for the federal government and Suzy as a broadcast producer—in the District of Columbia and the King Street Metro station was just blocks away. Then, as they had children, it was just a short walk to Matthew Maury Elementary, which is now Naimoi Brooks.

She said they then brought over a friend to take a look at the house after they purchased it. His reaction: “Oh, God.” Suzy and Gerry said the house was more than a fixer-upper, which was what they loved about it. With no excessive damage to the home and plentiful opportunities, the couple knew they had snagged a great house.

The front entrance is adorned with Rosemont charm: Beautiful hardwood floors that creak at each step with old-timey photographs and paintings to immediately show the home’s personality. Light from the outside pours in, reflecting off the glass table at the entrance. It holds three statues of birds, which Suzy subtly set as the theme to the home.

“We call the house the ‘Bird House,’ because my nickname used to be SuzyBird,” Suzy said. “I have eight brothers and sisters, and I got a nickname. That’s how that happened.”

Upon entering 13 Cedar St., three pathways beckon, each leading to another interesting space that reflects the couple’s life together. To the right, Suzy’s office—or the living room—is adorned with dozens of framed photographs of their two sons. A large, dark blue couch and three chairs make the room even more inviting.

Straight ahead leads to the butler’s pantry, or what used to be the home’s main kitchen. Now, it serves as a landing place for the couple’s glassware and trinkets.

Next is the dining room, painted a similar dark blue to match the living room. I always thought, ‘What could I do with that house if I could get my hands on it?’ It was really run down. The windows were covered with ivy and the porch was decaying.”

– Suzy Tomai, homeowner
A long, mismatched eight-seater table sits in the middle of the room with a candelabra fireplace and glass chandelier. They’re unable to light the fireplace due to the elderly home’s setup.

The second pathway leads to the kitchen, which was custom-built in 2010 to accommodate the family’s needs. Suzy said, coming from a big family, she knew exactly what she wanted. And as chronic hosters of dozens of parties, it was essential the kitchen could fit any number of guests.

“I wanted the six burners, I knew I wanted a workspace – chopping, dicing, putting it right into the trash,” Suzy said.

With that in mind, Suzy picked a table that was able to withstand the wear-and-tear of not only guests, but their two sons.

“I wanted my house to be the place where my children’s friends would always come to after school,” she said. “I didn’t want a table that I’d say, ‘Don’t put that there.’ The only person who’s ever damaged it was me.”

Under the six burners, they have a large oven and a smaller one just adjacent. Then a microwave, which Gerry said they only use to warm up their coffee or Chinese food. Off to the side is where the couple built a cleaning station for their dishes. In addition to the dishwasher, there is a separate sink and countertop.

Right off the kitchen is the backyard. The couple said it was important for the transition from indoors to outside to be continuous, which is why they installed large windows and painted the kitchen ceiling a natural color. Suzy’s favorite spot is the sunroom, but Gerry adores the small fire pit surrounded by Adirondack chairs. Beyond the gathering space is a spacious planter – built with bricks from the original space – that hosts dozens of herbs and flowers.

Gerry said he utilized the outdoor space as a way to con-
nect with his friends during the COVID-19 pandemic and would invite neighbors over for socially distanced gatherings.

The third avenue off the entryway leads to the upstairs portion of the home, which holds two bedrooms and two bathrooms. The main bedroom is attached to the larger bathroom, which has a his-and-her sink in the middle with a shower, large floor-to-ceiling cabinets and a vanity.

The balcony atop the second story holds plentiful seating for cooler days – as it often gets too warm during the summer months – that has a direct view of the George Washington Masonic Temple and their quaint backyard.

Suzy and Gerry agreed their favorite part of the home is the front porch. With almost a dozen places to sit on the expansive porch, it's a neighborhood gathering place – especially since Suzy decorates the ceiling of the porch for every holiday with everything from red hearts to shamrocks.

Gerry said since retiring eight years ago, he and his dog love to sit on the porch in the morning and watch dogs, children and neighbors go by. He said he is thankful the city and neighborhood is so dog friendly.

The massive pillars that support the porch from front to back are a statement piece. The couple said, as with the rest of the house, they had to restore the beautiful pillars.

“These porches make a difference,” Gerry said.

The couple said after 30 years, they still love the Rosemont neighborhood. Despite their long tenure on Cedar Street, one of Rosemont’s oldest, they are not the historic road’s residents of longest standing. In fact, they said there are denizens who have been there decades longer.

“[We’re just] middle of the road … of how long people have lived here,” laughed Gerry. “People come and they don’t move. We didn’t really know that we wanted to stay here forever.”

Yet they have.

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PHOTO/GERALD PATTERSON

All the participants at the couple’s murder mystery party.
The Twig hosts 81st Alexandria Homes Tour

Five homes in Old Town featured to showcase traditional home styles
BY KAITLIN MURPHY

The Twig hosted the 81st Historic Alexandria Homes Tour in Old Town on Sunday. While originally scheduled for Saturday, the event was postponed out of caution of the approaching tropical storm. Five historic homes were open for self-tours. About 715 guests attended, according to The Twig.

The Twig was chartered in 1933 in support of Alexandria Hospital. Now, the organization still helps the hospital in addition to operating a thrift store in Old Town. It has hosted the Homes Tour each year since 1997, though the Tour actually dates to 1941, when it was hosted by the Hospital’s Senior Auxiliary to raise money for the hospital, according to Twig’s website.

Highlights of the tour included original architecture, “vintage meets color professional designs,” Federal Style with a modern twist, a refurbished nursing school and the home of a previous Alexandrian mayor. Below is a glimpse of three of the homes that were on the tour.

A traditional Flounder home
The tour began with a quintessential Alexandrian architectural style, a Flounder house. This home remains true to its 1798 original structure. It is identifies by a single slope roof or a shed roof. In homes that are oriented with the short side facing the street, there is little space for windows and doors. Set back from the road behind a large brick courtyard, this home measures only 20 feet wide and climbs up three levels. According to a docent, the flounder design was used as a quickly built, temporary home allowing time for the homeowner to decide what they wanted to build later and avoid the glass tax.

The current homeowner is an artist and the daughter of a painter, so the walls are decorated with both of their works. Modern appliances have been creatively arranged in the kitchen to fit the space which might have been the side alley at one point.

A wooden staircase and railing – believed to be original to the home – winds up to the top floor. The ceiling slopes down on one side almost to waist height where two small windows open up for ventilation and the view. Baskets from Bunny Mellon’s collection hang high above the bed on a pegboard showcasing the tall wall on the opposite side. There is a change in light while ascending from the dark ground floor with one bay window to the bright space on the top floor.

Home fit for a politician
The Ticer House – with a name plaque on the exterior – began as a 1700s Flounder house. The original foundation is still intact. Over time, the house was expanded from its small footprint into the town-home it is today. Patsy Ticer, who served as Alexandria’s mayor and as a Virginia State Senator before her death in August 2017, saw the potential of this home when she purchased it in the 1960s. The space was modernized for comfort without compromising the historical details.

The living room opens to the dining area sharing a 10-foot ceiling allowing space to entertain. Furnishings give a nod to the era of the home and the clock in the living room is from the 1770s. Walking back, a step up reveals the exact footprint of the initial structure of the flounder house. The current homeowner was on site and showed the spots where the original fireplace and ladder or staircase would have been placed. The recently remodeled kitchen adds function to form and this space opens to the more modern 1970s family room.

Family heirloom
The Patton-Fowle House was built in the early 1800s and stayed in the hands of the Fowle family for 158 years. It was recently purchased and renovated in 2021. This is a classic example of Federal style architecture; due to the historic nature of the home, the foyer and staircase have an interior easement preventing a future change in style.

The current homeowners have been able to put their personal touches on the home in other ways. The large formal dining room boasts silk-painted wallpaper and highlights one of the eight working fireplaces in the home. The salon across the way centers on a custom serpentine couch in a 1950s design. Above, a custom chandelier with a ginkgo leaf design floats on top of three-dimensional wallpaper on the ceiling. Two art deco chairs flank another fireplace and the hues of the room are saturated with creams and blush.

A large and newly refreshed kitchen flows into an eating area with custom-printed marbleized wallpaper matching the walls to the ceiling. An edgy lounge off of the kitchen can be closed off with darkening shades and thick velvet curtains to allow the family to enjoy movies in a theater-like setting. The family made a comfortable space that suits their personality while making a modern home in a classic landmark. The juxtaposition of the interior of the home with the traditional Federal exterior was a surprise to the visitors.

- kmurphy@alextimes.com
Is now a good time to buy a home?

BY ELIZABETH LUCCHESI

Are you skeptical of real estate professionals’ advice suggesting the current housing market is a great time to buy?

If you’re wondering whether it’s an excellent time to buy a house, ask this instead: Is it a good time to buy a home in my life?

Housing market trends give essential context. But whether this is an excellent time to buy a house depends on your financial situation, life goals, and readiness to become a homeowner.

The real estate market is ever-changing and influenced by many factors, including interest rates, economic conditions, supply and demand dynamics and policy changes. Assessing the market’s current state is the first step in understanding if it’s an opportune time to buy a home.

Interest rates

Recently, interest rates have been historically low, making borrowing more affordable and attractive for potential homebuyers.

Higher year-over-year mortgage rates

2021 brought the lowest mortgage rates in history, with 2.65% in January 2021. The average rate for that year was just under 3%. In 2022, the average rate climbed to 5.34%. As a rule of thumb, homebuyers should budget no more than a fourth of their take-home pay toward their mortgage. A home affordability calculator can help you crunch the numbers.

Lean into your trusted real estate professional to get a pulse on the local market, how to make a competitive offer, creative financing resources when needed and how to negotiate the best price on your terms.

The bottom line

The consensus is the current real estate market is still favorable for homebuyers. Considering your unique circumstances, financial stability and long-term homeownership goals, it’s crucial to approach the decision thoughtfully.

If you’re financially prepared and clearly understand your budget, now could be an opportune time to embark on the journey of homeownership. It’s advisable to engage with a real estate agent and a mortgage professional to navigate the complexities of the market and secure a deal that aligns with your needs and aspirations. Ultimately, the decision to buy a home should be well-informed and reflective of your circumstances and aspirations.

The writer is the founder of the LizLuke Team of Long & Foster Real Estate. She is also a buyer and seller agent.
When it comes to cooking, we’re cavemen no longer

BY RORY CALLAGHAN

The action and process of cooking food hasn’t changed in all the years of human existence, but the way we go about it has greatly evolved. The microwave oven was truly the first major change in cooking technology, but it barely does an acceptable job of heating up leftovers.

Today’s ovens offer a wide array of smart functions that bring gourmet level cooking to a novice, or even a lazy cook. These improvements have also revolutionized kitchen design and planning in just this past year. They are not temporary trends that are popular now; no, these are here to stay, and I welcome them.

If you’re not ready to fully remodel the kitchen, or even replace appliances, you can put a smart cooking app on your phone that reads the temperature in the oven and the food via a wireless probe. Monitoring foods’ progress is easy and accurate. Some wireless probes have wires, which sounds like a bait-and-switch, but they’re referring to the unit that sends the information to your phone. There are true wireless probes available at a higher cost.

The term smart is overused and some items that claim the function are not particularly useful. It’s as if the technology was added only because it could be and touted as a feature.

Checking on food while it is cooking without opening the door is incredibly useful. Just put your food in the oven, tell it via the easy to scroll through menu the type of food it is, its weight and how you like it cooked. It takes it from there.

If you get distracted when it’s time to remove the food from the oven, there is one brand that knows you are late for retrieval. It briefly opens the door to release excess heat, closes again, stops cooking further and keeps your food hot until you are ready to eat. While the smart function is convenient, the quality of the food that comes out of these ovens is the main reason to get one. Or two.

Let’s get to how modern appliances are changing kitchen planning.

Make Your Home Less Hectic and More of a Haven

These days many people’s homes are teeming with activity, with everyone in each other’s way half the time. Tensions are high. Tempers are short.

Fix it with a full or partial remodel — always a good investment when it furthers your family’s enjoyment and relaxation.

We do complete kitchen remodeling in record time. We don’t dawdle in your home. We are always Covid-safe. We’ll build a full wall of built-ins with workstations in one day! M&M partners with licensed, insured General Contractors who are consummate professionals and master carpenters. Please give us the opportunity to earn your business.

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WE ♥ ALEXANDRIA!

817 S. WASHINGTON ST.
ALEXANDRIA, VA 23314
(703) 299-0092
A great looking kitchen should always be made with convenience and functionality in mind. People are choosing larger cooktops, usually 36” wide over the old standard 30.” Whether gas or induction, at only six inches wider, it adds two burners. That’s 50% more cooking surface for being only 20% wider, and for only a little more money. Some people don’t realize they can fit a 36” unit in their kitchen.

Ovens are being ordered more and more in a 24” size. These are all currently European or New Zealand brands, but American makers are tinkering with their designs because they are in demand. When we reduce the width of the oven by six inches, that delivers a few benefits, such as the option to cook faster and can be placed in a tall cabinet at a convenient level for loading and removing large items. No more stooping to the floor and wrenching your back just to get dinner out of the oven.

I had two separate clients recently who looked at these smaller ovens and dismissed them quickly saying, “That’s too small for us.” But after learning about them – and visiting a live demo – they decided to get smaller ovens and are thrilled with their decision.

Vegetarians are particularly drawn to these smaller pieces because they rarely cook something large enough to need a huge oven cavity. The steam option combines radiant heat with steam for a forgiving environment that cooks vegetables quickly with maximum flavor and nutrition. Meat eaters use them to sous vide and skip the immersion tank.

Oh, and we must also thank the U.S military and NASA, because almost all of the technology we enjoy started there. Nobody is thinking about ovens when we say, “Thank you for your service to our country.” But maybe we should, because every officer in the Pentagon knows that “an army marches on its stomach.”

Every decision we make when designing comes down to either/or. I rarely see a kitchen which I believe is a “perfect” design. Every kitchen is a custom product – even when using stock cabinets – and the best we can do is make the most perfect kitchen for that specific space. It might not be perfect, but it will be the best possible plan in the room, considering family members, their ages, cooking needs and how they live.

The writer is a lifelong kitchen designer. He can be reached at roryc@mandmappliance.com
Historic, inviting home for sale in Old Town

This striking historic home has been meticulously restored and is ready for its next steward. Sited on an expansive corner lot, it offers exquisite interiors, a breathtaking garden and a charming, detached garage. The inviting living room showcases gorgeous wood floors, a gas fireplace, built-in bookcases and numerous windows offering abundant natural light. In the dining room, there is a second gas fireplace and built-ins for display and storage. Enter seamlessly into the gourmet kitchen with wood burning fireplace, delightful window seat, Sub-Zero refrigerator and generous counter space. From the kitchen, exit the original 1790 door into the magnificent garden. The upper level offers a cozy den or office with a gas fireplace, a primary bedroom with a fireplace, a second bedroom with a walk-in closet, a remodeled full bath and a custom-built ladder leading to attic storage. The finished lower level includes a recreation room, full bath, laundry, and a hidden hatch with street access.

HOMES ADVERTORIAL

HOME OF THE WEEK

LEFT: Award-winning historic home in prime Old Town location. MIDDLE: South-facing living room with natural light and a gas fireplace. RIGHT: Private backyard oasis with detached garage.

OCTOBER 7

ART ON THE AVENUE
From quilters to card makers, hundreds of artisans will display their wares. Featuring food vendors and live music. Free.
**Time:** 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
**Location:** Mt. Vernon Avenue between Hume and Bellefonte Avenues
**Information:** artonthavenue.org

OCTOBER 10

‘TRUE TALES OF ALEXANDRIA’ DISCUSSION
Join author of “True Tales of Alexandria” Ted Pulliam to discuss his new book. Taking you back through 1623, 1654 and 1814, you’ll learn more about the true history of the most important figures in the city’s history. Copies will be available for purchase and signing after the event.
**Time:** 7 to 9 p.m.
**Location:** Gadsby’s Tavern Museum
**Information:** shop.alexandriava.gov

OCTOBER 13

DEATH AT THE CITY HOTEL
Step into the past with Gadsby’s Tavern Museum and learn more about the unwritten social guidelines of 1808 mourning periods. Sip delicious drinks, learn more about Alexandria history and create a mourning pendant. Registration required. $45 per person, $30 per volunteer. 21 and older only.
**Time:** 2 to 3 p.m.
**Location:** Charles E. Beatley Jr. Central Library, 5005 Duke St.
**Information:** alexlibraryva.org/event/9188830

CIVIL WAR WALKING TOUR
Want to hear about the stories of self-liberated African Americans in Civil War Alexandria? Lee-Fendall House Museum is hosting a rain-or-shine walking tour, sharing stories of soldiers and citizens during this era. Tickets are $15 and only 12 participants are permitted.
**Time:** 1 to 3 p.m.
**Location:** Lee-Fendall House Museum, 614 Oronoco St.
**Information:** Call 703-548-1789 or email contact@leefendallhouse.org for more information.

ALEXANDRIA ART FESTIVAL
Free festival featuring a variety of creations from artists around the country.
**Time:** 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
**Location:** 300 John Carlyle St.
**Information:** artfestival.com/festivals

OCTOBER 15

PAWS IN THE PARK
Leash your animal and head to the Oronoco Bay Park to celebrate the city’s love of animals with the Paws in the Park event. Make sure to bring a picnic blanket to enjoy the variety of food options available. Free admission.
**Time:** 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
**Location:** 100 Madison St.
**Information:** alexandriaanimals.org/events

WINE FESTIVAL & SUNSET TOUR
Tickets required. Taste samples from Virginia wineries after hours at George Washington’s estate. Bring a blanket and relax on the east lawn overlooking the Potomac River.
**Time:** 6 to 9 p.m.
**Location:** 3200 Mt. Vernon Memorial Hwy.
**Information:** mountvernon.org

HISPANIC CULTURE IN CINEMA
Interested in watching classic films in Hispanic cinema? The Patrick Henry Recreation Center is showing Encanto, Selena and Stand and Deliver to attendees. Free admission.
**Time:** 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
**Location:** Patrick Henry Recreation Center, 4653 Taney Ave.
**Information:** 703-746-5557

LATIN DANCE CLASS
Learn a variety of dances including salsa, bachata, merengue and cha-cha at the Latin Dance Class to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month. Bring water and comfortable shoes to move your body outside.
**Time:** 10 to 11:30 a.m.
**Location:** Lee-Fendall House Museum, 614 Oronoco St.
**Information:** Call 703-548-1789 or email contact@leefendallhouse.org for more information.

IN CINEMA
HISPANIC CULTURE IN CINEMA
Interested in watching classic films in Hispanic cinema? The Patrick Henry Recreation Center is showing Encanto, Selena and Stand and Deliver to attendees. Free admission.
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**Information:** 703-746-5557

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‘TRUE TALES OF ALEXANDRIA’ DISCUSSION
Join author of “True Tales of Alexandria” Ted Pulliam to discuss his new book. Taking you back through 1623, 1654 and 1814, you’ll learn more about the true history of the most important figures in the city’s history. Copies will be available for purchase and signing after the event.
**Time:** 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.
**Location:** Charles E. Beatley Jr. Central Library, 5005 Duke St.
**Information:** alexlibraryva.org/event/9198059

PAWS IN THE PARK
Leash your animal and head to the Oronoco Bay Park to celebrate the city’s love of animals with the Paws in the Park event. Make sure to bring a picnic blanket to enjoy the variety of food options available. Free admission.
**Time:** 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
**Location:** 100 Madison St.
**Information:** alexandriaanimals.org/events

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McEnearney Associates
Realtors, Old Town
lbishop@mcenearney.com
laurenbishophomes.com
202.361.5079
Editorial

Free Evan Gershkovich

Friday marks six months since Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich was arrested in Russia on what are widely considered to be fabricated charges of espionage. Gershkovich is accused of allegedly trying to obtain classified information.

A journalist doing their job, that is, investigating things that powerful people want to keep under wraps, makes reporters like Gershkovich easy targets for authoritarian regimes to detain and use as bargaining chips.

It’s important that the U.S. government keep pressing Vladimir Putin to release Gershkovich, and to keep reminding the world of his wrongful detention.

Today’s Alexandria Times page 1 story, “Rescue in the night,” is a tale of another wrongful detention writ large, in another authoritarian regime: Daniel Ortega’s Nicaragua.

Earlier this year, a State Department official was tasked with organizing the exodus of 222 Nicaraguan political prisoners who had been arrested on “crimes” ranging from protesting against the regime to criticizing it on social media to challenging Ortega for Nicaragua’s presidency. The story explains how this official orchestrated their safe exodus to the United States.

One of these former prisoners has settled in Alexandria after suffering mistreatment and malnutrition in the infamous Stasi-like Nicaraguan prison called “El Chipote.”

It’s important for Alexandria residents to understand that there are refugees in our midst who have endured great trauma in their homelands.

And the raids this summer on a Marion, Kansas, newspaper’s office and the publisher’s home were authoritarian acts right here in the United States. The local police chief, who had been investigated by the newspaper, used a flimsy excuse to seize the paper’s computers and the staff’s cell phones.

Wielding the levers of government to silence critics, squelch opposition and maintain power is reprehensible, whether done in Russia, Nicaragua or Kansas.

It’s important for each of us to stand up to abuses of power wherever they occur.

We can do our part by welcoming refugees who have escaped overseas horrors, by contributing to organizations that support investigative journalism – and by petitioning our government to help free Evan Gershkovich.

Farewell to the Alexandria SBDC

Like many Alexandrians, we were taken aback by the sudden announcement this summer that the Alexandria Small Business Development Center was being shuttered, its functions moved into the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership and to the George Mason SBDC.


It may well be, as several sources in this story contend, that the level of services to Alexandria businesses will remain as good or better than they were at the SBDC. Bill Reagan, founder and longtime director of the Alexandria SBDC, laments its demise in our story, as do several business owners.

Only time will tell if Alexandria’s small business owners will fare worse without the city’s own SBDC.

What we do know is that Reagan and the SBDC helped hundreds of businesses through the years, including this newspaper. We are grateful for the SBDC’s laser focus on small businesses, particularly locally owned ventures.

Our city owes thanks to Reagan, his longtime assistant – the late Gloria Flanagan – and all of the SBDC staff members and consultants who provided free assistance to Alexandria’s small businesses for 27 years.

Letters

We lack a sense of safety in Alexandria

To the editor:

If there is “job one” for Alexandria’s mayor and City Council, it is to focus their energies and Alexandria’s tax revenues on reducing crime. In the last three weeks, on my street, a woman was abducted, a man was assaulted, cars were broken into and there were several thefts.

My neighbors and I in Old Town are experiencing a steep loss in our sense of safety. This is an experience that is becoming pervasive throughout Alexandria, with the instability of rising crime crushing our lower income communities, where the majority of innocent victims reside.

Public safety efforts must be prioritized over nice-to-haves like Instagram-able neon signs and other tourist attractions. If we don’t feel safe, how can tourists – who are vital to Alexandria’s financial health – feel safe?

We need to take serious examples like the city of San Francisco, whose failure to deal with safety has led to a devastating drop in tourism. Tourists are repelled by crime and, unlike residents, have an easy choice of many destinations.

If tourists stop at a store on King Street only to witness a shoplifter sweeping merchandise into a garbage bag, find themselves the victim of a brazen pickpocketing or discover their rental car was broken into, it’s unlikely Alexandria will be their return destination.

We should recognize that the criminally inclined are responding predictably to weak authority when we underfund and understaff our police force. In addition, as we have seen in the failure to alert the public to a recent abduction, criminal offenses appear to be downgraded on the fly.

This shapes the public’s perception of crime as milder than it truly is, pervasively undermining crucial support for our police force. If only actual crimes could be suppressed so easily.

-KC Carlyle, Alexandria

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.

Opinion

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

Photo of the Week

Flower arrangements at the Alexandria Horticulture Society’s annual gala, held last Saturday at River Farm. No two tables had the same arrangement of flowers at the event.
How does density lower affordable housing costs?

To the editor:

Affordable housing is again at the forefront of public discussion because of a proposal that proponents say will provide more of it through more density. Linda Couture’s recent letter presents an in-depth discussion of the infrastructure problems with this proposal. I want to give another perspective through a discussion of our recent history. I moved to Alexandria from Washington, D.C., in 1981. I came here because I expected to commute into my Federal government job in the District by bus and Metrorail and so I did.

I was raised to consider voting as equivalent to a religious duty, so I quickly registered and began to follow Alexandria’s issues. A major issue, often discussed, was affordable housing. James Moran, later our Congressman for about 30 years, became mayor of Alexandria in 1985. I voted for him that year.

Not long after, I attended a well attended public non-partisan meeting with Moran. I don’t remember exactly who sponsored that meeting. I am certain it was non-partisan because as an active federal civil servant in 1985, I was banned from attending any partisan meetings.

What I do remember as clearly as if it was yesterday is Moran’s talk and how it was received. He pointed out that recent infrastructure improvements designed to prevent flooding in Eisenhower Valley plus the newly opened Metrorail station there meant it was ready for development. He also clearly stated that development could be both dense and affordable. The audience received his assessment with enthusiasm. Everyone at that meeting knew there was vacant land in Eisenhower Valley.

My most recent visit to Eisenhower Avenue last year was to renew my handicapped parking sticker at the Department of Motor Vehicles office there. I noted all the new residential buildings all built after 1985. I traveled from Holland Lane to the DMV a couple of miles west. I passed towering apartment buildings and new town houses.

These are very large townhouses. Just a few years ago they were advertised as each priced over one million dollars. I’m sure they would go for more if resold. I never inquired about the rental rates for the apartments when I became a renter. I knew they were too expensive for a retired civil servant.

Since I first came to Alexandria, mayors and council members have introduced plans for ever increased density. We certainly gained population, but not one searching for affordable housing. The question Mayor Justin Wilson and members of Council need to answer in addition to the missing infrastructure one is just how does this latest increased density plan truly result in more affordable housing?

-Katy Cannady, Alexandria

Letters

A game to remember

BY ROB WHITTLE

In 2000, the movie “Remember the Titans” immortalized the 1971 T.C. Williams football team as it successfully struggled to integrate its squad and the school itself. T.C. Williams went on to win the state championship with its mix of Black and white players, led by Coach Herman Boone, played in the film by Denzel Washington.

But T.C. Williams wasn’t the only Alexandria high school football team that provided drama during that 1971 football season. While no books or films have memorialized it, there was the clash of St. Stephen’s – now St. Stephen’s and St. Agnes School – and Episcopal High School, which those who participated in or witnessed it will never forget.

It is a story of honor, grit and determination that helped shape the lives of dozens of young men on both sides.

Like St. Stephen’s, EHS had a long history and tradition of living under an honor code: No lying, cheating or stealing. This credo would be tested just six days before the annual tilt between the two teams. Episcopal coach Jim Seidule called a special meeting of the squad the Sunday before the game. When angry, Seidule’s face looked like the breakup of a hard winter, as Mark Twain observed of a particularly fierce Union general. And Seidule was indeed angry.

As one player remembers it, “Coach said he’d heard that some players had broken training rules which, by rule, requires that the player be suspended for one week from the team the infraction was discovered. Coach demanded that those who’d broken training raise their hands. We all knew that if we were guilty and didn’t confess, then we were in violation of the honor code. We looked at one another in deathly silence.”

The campuses of Episcopal and St. Stephen’s are a quarter mile from each other, which, in itself, creates a natural rivalry. That rivalry extends not only to football, but other sports, academics, college admissions and, not insignificantly, girls.

A St. Stephen’s alum remembers game day: “Instead of taking the bus over, the Episcopal team and its student body walked over. I can still remember the only sound was their cleats on St. Stephens Road – ‘clomp, clomp, clomp.’ Man, it was eerie.”

Episcopal’s team proceeded to do “silent call” wherein the players warmed up – jumping jacks, stretches, push-ups – in total silence. Silent call was reserved only for blood rivalries.

Saturday finally rolled around. The Episcopal team had installed a new offense, inserting a safety into a guard position, a 145-pound bench warmer into a linebacker spot and on like that throughout the line-up. Fortunately for EHS, they still had their quarterback and running back.

A St. Stephen’s alum remembers game day: “May I speak candidly?” asked Randy. Assured that he could, he said, “Let’s play the game. We’re going to beating the s—t out of them.”

At the Sunday meeting, the deadlock was broken when the starting tackle slowly raised his hand. He was followed by a star linebacker, then a wide receiver. Before the meeting was over, 18 players had raised their hands. The next day, four more players fessed up, decimating the team by a total of 22 players, many of them starters. To compound the problem, St. Stephen’s in 1971 was ranked in the top five in the Metro area.

That week Episcopal’s headmaster called a meeting of senior faculty and one student leader. He wanted to call the game off out of concern the players would get hurt. One faculty member disagreed and the others seemed on the fence. The headmaster finally invited the student to speak up.

“May I speak candidly?” asked Randy. Assured that he could, he said, “Let’s play the game. We’re going to beat the s—t out of them.”

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Game on.

Legendary St. Stephen’s coach Sleepy Thompson’s first play was a trick tackle-eligible long pass for a touchdown. Seven-zip St. Stephen’s. An EHS player recalls saying to another, “Let’s just try to keep it close.”

Episcopal did more than that. They stunned the crowd with a 32-20 victory.

The rivalry has produced many stirring victories for both teams, but none more memorable in its drama than the 1971 clash of these two titans.

The writer is CEO of Williams Whittle Advertising and is the author of two historical novels, "Pointer’s War" and "Pointer and the Russian." He can be reached at rwhittle@williamswhittle.com.

Commentary
The return of the Alexandria Forum

The Alexandria Forum makes a return to the Alexandria History Museum at the Lyceum on October 20. First organized with the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1959, the forum originally focused on architectural history. Now, 64 years later, the Forum has a slightly different focus, as it updates the 1983 title of The Waterfront Forum: Birth and Rebirth, 1730-1983, to The Waterfront Revisited: Birth and Rebirth, 1730-2023.

This year’s keynote speaker, Abby Schreiber, Ph.D. will share her recent research while she conducted a comprehensive documentary study of the waterfront.

It is so appropriate the Alexandria Forum returns to the Lyceum, which was constructed in 1839 for the education of Alexandria’s men, women and children. The first lecturer at the building was U.S. Postmaster Daniel Bryan. In the 20 years preceding the Civil War, the Lyceum building’s use as both a lecture hall and the Alexandria Library made the building the intellectual and cultural center of Alexandria.

In 1958, the Alexandria Association organized a 12-member exploratory committee for a Forum on Historic House Restoration. That first forum, which took place in October 1959, was a collaboration between the Alexandria Association and the National Trust. The first event’s title was “Early Architecture of Alexandria and Northern Virginia.”

While many of the early forums focused on either buildings or the decorative arts, the 1962 edition was titled Potomac River Life in the 18th Century. The June 3, 1983, edition focused on the aspects of waterfront history that will be updated with the advantage of 40 years of research.

Additional research, presented by Molly Kerr, Audrey Davis, African American Heritage Trail Committee Members with Committee Chair Krystyn Moon, Ph.D.; Blake Wilson; Garrett Fesler, Ph.D.; Ben Skolnik, Ph.D.; and Tatiana Niculescu, Ph.D. will supplement Schreiber’s presentation, giving participants a snapshot on where historical research on the Alexandria Waterfront stands today.

The event begins at 9 a.m. and concludes with a reception. Tickets are $60 per person or $40 for OHA members, volunteers and students. For the schedule, additional information and to register, please visit alexandriava.gov/historic-alexandria/the-alexandria-forum.

Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.

Weekly Poll

Take the poll at alextimes.com

Last Week
Do you think APD needs to improve its system of crime notification?
91% Yes, assaults like what took place on Wilkes Street should always warrant an alert.
4% No, we get plenty of alerts.
1% I’m not sure.

This Week
Do you think the Alexandria Small Business Development Center should have notified local businesses before closing?
A) No, businesses should’ve been notified.
B) Yes, there is no reason SBDC needs to tell them.
C) Maybe, but they’re in good hands with George Mason.
Weekly Words

ACROSS
1 Silently okays
5 “Where ___ I?”
8 Meet market?
12 Like a little lamb
14 Absolut and Stoli competitor
16 Site analyzing forensic DNA
18 Cultural
19 Sign into law
20 Cat or rabbit breed
21 Blanchett of “Tar”
22 Cocktails (that are made five times in this puzzle)
25 Poker on a corkboard
27 Bloodhound stimuli
29 Buys
30 Sunburn relief
31 With 26-Down, Black Russian
32 Tommy ___ (“Hedwig and the Angry Inch” character)
34 Close up shop
36 Kid’s card game response
37 Grab
38 Vardalos of “My Big Fat Greek Wedding 3”
39 Emptied the food bowl
40 Great Lakes people
41 “Weekend Update” program, familiarly
42 Margarita rim material, in Monaco
43 With 21-Down, French Connection
44 Musician Fatboy ___
45 Shaped like a stop sign
46 Notes after mis
49 Relinquish control
52 “Could be worse!”
54 Somewhat
57 Plato’s mentor
60 One making many statements?
61 Architectural feature
62 Sentra carmaker
63 Digital facilities?
65 Dyed out?
66 Jab that hits hard
68 Beer bust offering
69 Nine-digit IDs
70 Spa days, mentally
71 Bad talk ... or talk badly
72 D.C. slugger
73 A little negative?
74 Extraordinary
75 When repeated, cutesy term for supper
76 Extraordinary
78 Some Muslims
79 Extraordinary
80 Held the crown
81 Presidential oration
82 Java bean
83 Employ
84 “Call again” feature
86 Tall pond growth
87 With 43-Across, French Connection
88 Arthur ___ Stadium
89 ___ de toilette
90 Sulk
91 Lines to the audience
92 Arrogant
93 Spies
94 “Much ___ About Nothing”
95 Emptied the food bowl
96 Arturo ___ Bruno
97 Arrogant
98 Beatrice ___ St Clair
99 In the zone
100 Wee
101 False opposition?
102 “Weekend Update” co-anchor Colin
103 Freelance work
104 “Much ___ About Nothing”
105 Not well
106 Rogue or Trailblazer (Abbr.)
107 Where one might find a stud?
108 Rogue or Trailblazer (Abbr.)
109 Where the Wild Things ___?
110 False opposition?
111 Acrobatic dive
112 Motivation
113 Animal that’s a homophone of a Greek letter
114 Extraordinary
115 Extraordinary
116 Extraordinary

DOWN
1 Brownish hues
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15 Brownish hues
16 Black forest or red velvet
17 Driver way behind the wheel
18 With 43-Across, French Connection
19 Marks a box
20 Growth
21 With 43-Across, French Connection
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DEATH NOTICES

ARTHUR J. BONIFER SR. (94), of Alexandria, Sept. 22, 2023
KERRY R. ST. CLAIR (78), of Alexandria, Sept. 13, 2023
MICHAEL FREEDMAN (71), of Alexandria, Sept. 18, 2023
LAWRENCE ADOLPH KUMITIS (49), of Alexandria, Sept. 15, 2023
MARK HENRY PASCHALL (70), of Alexandria, Sept. 13, 2023
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