Alexandria judges recuse in ZFH lawsuit

Virginia Supreme Court to appoint outside judge to preside over contentious case
BY WAFIR SALIH

Alexandria Circuit Court judges have recused themselves from presiding over the Coalition of Livable Alexandria’s lawsuit against the city over the Zoning for Housing ordinance. Both CLA and Alexandria Director of Communications Ebony Fleming have confirmed the recusal.

This move mirrors a similar instance in 2023 when judges in Arlington Circuit Court recused themselves after 10 homeowners sued

SEE RECUSAL | 11

Achsah Nesmith, former Carter speechwriter, dies at 84

BY CAITLYN MEISNER

Eudora Achsah Nesmith, journalist, speechwriter for former President Jimmy Carter and Alexandria resident for 46 years, died March 5. She was 84.

A trailblazer in journalism and public service, Achsah made history as one of the first female speechwriters in United States history. She was also the only one who served all four years of Carter’s administration.

Achsah Posey was born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia, to a nurse and storekeeper.

SEE NESMITH | 8

CANDIDATE PROFILE

John Chapman seeks fifth Council term

Economy, affordable housing, community engagement among top priorities
BY WAFIR SALIH

John Chapman’s re-election campaign is in full swing as he runs for his fifth term on City Council. He stands as the most experienced candidate currently in the race.

“Experience matters,” Chapman said. “Having seen a pandemic and multiple government shutdowns, I certainly understand the opportunities, but also the challenges [facing] our community.”

Chapman said the issues that dominated the 2021 council election were primarily pandemic related. Keeping schools open, supporting businesses and ensuring public health safety had shaped the political landscape.

In this election cycle, Chapman acknowledged the Monumental Arena as being the hot topic of discussion. He said he views the arena proposal as a microcosm of a bigger debate about the city’s economic direction and priorities.

“I think the biggest conversation right now is the arena, but that goes into an overall conversation about how does the city stay economically sustainable in the near future and into the far future,” Chapman said. “What do we not want to see in terms of development, in terms of projects here? How do we balance what we’re doing with residential property taxes and business taxes? I think those are some of the big conversations that need to happen.”

Chapman doesn’t believe the arena will end up happening in its current form and voiced his concerns about the project, transportation being chief among them.

“I don’t think this thing passes and I don’t think it comes to fruition,” Chapman said. “I think there’s some extreme challenges on the transportation side. I think we have very creative and smart staff, but I don’t think we get enough resources from the state to make this work.”

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The epitome of elegance and modern comfort crafted by Bluestone Builders. Indulge in the extraordinary. This home is situated on a 9,000 sq ft lot and has 7 bedrooms, 6.5 bathrooms, ELEVATOR and ROOF DECK. Welcomed by a lighted staircase, covered porch and beautiful entry foyer. Enjoy a functional layout and unique floor plan offering open living spaces for entertaining or quiet family weekends at home. Guests are welcomed to a spacious entry foyer and open light-filled main level. The main level layout offers so many options: main level bedroom with full bath OR home office; formal dining room or den/study, breakfast, or, casual family room...multi-functional! The kitchen boasts an oversized island, Sub-Zero refrigerator, pot filler, drawer microwave, Italian stove. To include ample counter space, cabinetry and breakfast room that enjoys a double sided gas fireplace with the living room. Beautiful sets of French doors open to the custom bluestone patio. Al fresco dining and entertaining is easy with the outdoor kitchen: built-in grill and beverage refrigerator. Enjoy evenings by the fire table in the shadow of the illuminated Masonic Temple and unwind to the gentle sound of the water feature. There is a rear entry into the kitchen as well as a side entry to a mud room with built-ins and a convenient half bath. There is an elevator from the Basement level to the 3 upper levels. The primary suite is a retreat with vaulted ceilings, walk-in closet and second closet space, spa-like bathroom with soaking tub, oversized shower and double vanity. Two bedrooms share a Jack & Jill bath. A fourth bedroom has an en-suite bath & vaulted ceilings. Laundry room is on the primary bedroom level. The third level with full bath is versatile: it is the perfect party room with staircase to roof deck or a bedroom suite! The open staircase leads to a ROOFTOP deck with panoramic views of the DMV! The perfect spot for fireworks or rooftop beverages overlooking the city! Finished lower level has 9’ ceilings, a recreation room which can easily accommodate a pool table, large sectional, game table-ideal for hosting gatherings or movie nights. The walk-in pantry could also be outfitted to be a wine cellar! The au pair suite with exterior entrance and natural light can also function as a work out room or home office- there is a full bath as well. The house has 4 zones of HVAC for each floor. Alley access and 4 off-street parking spaces. ADU above garage OR garage are OPTIONS available. Convenient to King St Metro, shops and restaurants in Old Town & Del Ray.

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ACHS teacher Eva Irwin wins $25k Milken Educator Award

Alexandria City High School English teacher Eva Irwin won a $25,000 Milken Educator Award Tuesday. The award was presented to Irwin by Milken Educator Awards Founder Lowell Milken and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Lisa Coons, Ph.D., at a schoolwide assembly.

Irwin is the first Alexandria City Public Schools teacher to receive the Milken Educator Award and was unaware of her candidacy or that she had won until the assembly. Recipients are sought out while early to mid-career for what they have achieved – and for the promise of what they will accomplish.

“During her short time at Alexandria City High School, Eva Irwin’s dedication and leadership are commendable and [is] making a positive impact on students, colleagues and the community,” Milken said. “We are proud to welcome Eva to the Milken Educator Network and look forward to seeing her accomplish even greater things in the future to advance educators and students.”

Coons also lauded Irwin for her accomplishments, which included helping her students dramatically improve their performance on the state English and writing exams during the 2022-23 school year. Seventy-five percent of Irwin’s students passed the state English exam and 82% passed the state writing exam, both up from 68% in 2021-22 and above state and district rates.

“We are blessed with outstanding teachers in Virginia, and Eva Irwin at Alexandria City High School is one of the best in the nation,” Coons said. “It is great to see her receive the recognition she deserves and that we could all celebrate her achievement. She is a great representative for Virginia teachers across the Commonwealth.”

The Milken Awards will honor up to 75 recipients across the country in 2023-24 as part of the Milken Family Foundation’s Journey to the 3,000th Milken Educator. 2023-24 will reach $75 million in individual financial prizes spanning the length of the initiative and more than $144 million invested in the Milken Educator Award national network overall, empowering recipients to “Celebrate, Elevate, and Activate” the K-12 profession and inspiring young, capable people to pursue teaching as a career.

Fish kill reported in Four Mile Run

The City of Alexandria’s Department of Transportation and Environmental Services received notification from Arlington County’s Department of Environmental Services last week concerning a fish kill event at Four Mile Run, located between Mount Vernon Avenue and Route 1. Witnesses reported a significant number of dead fish alongside live fish, reptiles, and waterfowl.

An investigation found a manual operation error at the County’s Water Pollution Control Plant that released higher-than-usual levels of sodium hypochlorite into the waterway late on March 12 as part of the regular wastewater treatment process. A correction was made in less than 90 minutes.

Water quality levels in Four Mile Run are returning to normal, and there is no ongoing threat to Four Mile Run. Officials at the plant will review and refine procedures in coordination with the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality.

City staff responded to the area and are coordinating with the City’s Fire Marshal, HazMat, Arlington County, and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality’s Northern Regional Office, which was contacted by Arlington staff. Arlington officials are addressing the Plant’s procedures in coordination with DEQ.

“Because everyone needs a home.”

Meet Molly!
AlexandriaAnimals.org
703-746-4774

Sponsored by

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400 S. Washington Street
Old Town
703-628-2440

Almost fully grown, this sweet lil’ pup, Molly, is house hunting this spring. Molly has an adorable pink-spotted nose and is extremely affectionate with humans and dogs. She hopes for a home where snuggles are plentiful and puppy kisses appreciated. Cute as she can be, Molly makes adorable “piggy” sounds when she wants attention.

Adoptable Pet of the Week

Cherry Blossom Pink

Meet Molly!
AlexandriaAnimals.org
703-746-4774

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“Because everyone needs a home.”

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Glories of Spring
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228 S. Pitt Street, Alexandria

For ticket information scan QR code or visit stpaulsalexandria.com

PHOTO/MILKEN FAMILY FOUNDATION

Eva Irwin received a $25,000 Milken Educator Award, dubbed the ‘Oscar of teaching,’ in a surprise event at ACHS.
Food security report released

The Department of Community and Human Services’ “Food Insecurity Report: Understanding the Disparities and Experiences of Hunger Across the City of Alexandria,” released on March 13, indicated that 92% of Alexandrians have attained food security, while 91% live above the federal poverty line.

The report summarizes an assessment of the realities of food insecurity for families in Alexandria, the resources available, the experiences of people accessing food programs and recommendations for improvements to better meet the needs of residents.

The report also found that of the 8% of city residents who experience food insecurity, 44% are not eligible for government assistance due to income. Four populations were identified in the report as “under-resourced:” the unhoused, older adults, immigrants and non-English speakers and the Latino community.

The study concluded that “certain population groups have a harder time accessing the traditional charitable food system model. At the same time, thousands of community members facing food insecurity find the traditional models to fit their needs.”

The report recommended continuing the programs that are helping residents obtain needed help obtaining food while also “adapting or adding programs that address the particular needs of those neighbors that are being missed.”

The study and report were developed with funding from the American Rescue Plan Act by See What I Mean Consulting. In collaboration with the DCHS Food Security Coordinator, SWIM analyzed data from across the city and researched client experiences to develop this report.

- ddunbar@alextimes.com

APD apprehends suspect in N.C. homicide

The Alexandria Police Department apprehended a man Tuesday night who is suspected in a North Carolina homicide, according to a city news release. At approximately 10:57 p.m. on Tuesday, APD officers received a “be-on-the-lookout” notice for a male suspect wanted on charges related to a homicide in Huntersville, North Carolina.

At 11:59 p.m. APD officers spotted the suspect’s vehicle. Police pursued the vehicle as it drove to a dead end in the 100 block of Madison Street where the suspect fled the vehicle and ran from the scene.

Officers pursued the suspect on foot and apprehended him without incident on Madison Place.

The suspect, later identified as 53-year-old Rahn Ferguson, was taken into custody. The suspect is being held at the Alexandria Adult Detention Center and is awaiting extradition.

APD offered thanks to the Virginia State Police, Fairfax County Police Department, Metropolitan Police Department’s Harbor Patrol and U.S. Park Police for their support in the search for the suspect.

- ddunbar@alextimes.com

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Chapman said that not only would these transportation challenges affect Alexandria, but D.C. and Arlington as well.


Chapman advocated for judging the project on its merits and disapproved of some of the negative comments being aimed at Ted Leonsis, CEO of Monumental Sports.

“What I don’t like is people making personal attacks against a company or targeting an owner,” Chapman said. “I know he’s a billionaire. I know that’s easy, but I don’t want any of these business owners that put their personal lives and whatnot aside to build their business personally attacked either.... We’ve got to be a business-friendly city and say to every business owner: ‘You have a chance for your business to come to this city and grow in this city as long as we understand how that growth affects everyone else.’”

Maintaining a business-friendly atmosphere in the city is central to Chapman’s campaign. He proposed that the city should convene an economic summit where residents, stakeholders and policymakers can come together and discuss the city’s economic trajectory in the years to come.

“I’m calling for us to have an economic summit here in the city, bringing in community members, stakeholders, folks in the economic development community [and] elected officials to talk about what the city needs to look like to attract business for the next 10 to 15 or more years,” Chapman said.

This election comes in the wake of Council’s unanimous decision to adopt the Zoning for Housing ordinance late last year. The proposal contains zoning reforms aimed at increasing housing and addressing affordability, while also eliminating protections related to single-family zoning.

Prior to the final vote, Vice Mayor Amy Jackson motioned to defer the single-family zoning amendment from the final package. Chapman seconded the move. The motion for deferral failed, leading to all members – including Jackson and Chapman – voting in favor of the ordinance as it stood.

Chapman said he stands by his final vote, but still believes deferring the single-family zoning amendment could have mitigated concerns.

“I think the idea where you separate out the most talked about item, separate that out and talk about that specifically, and have the community understand these [other items], and most of them support these [other items] – I don’t think you have the same animosity to Zoning for housing than you do with them all bunched together,” Chapman said.

Chapman said he would support recognizing the Del Ray neighborhood as a historic district. This comes after “Save Del Ray,” a local grassroots group made up of community members, has grown in prominence the past couple years as they’ve advocated for preserving the historic character of the neighborhood.

“Del Ray is similar to Old Town,” Chapman said. “I’m calling for us to have an economic summit. ... to talk about what the city needs to look like to attract business for the next 10 to 15 or more years.” — John Chapman, city councilor
Town where folks want to keep a certain style, a certain intensity of use. And I think you respect that. I think there’s some conversation whether that should be a historic district either,” Chapman said. “I honestly would support that; that’s a way to kind of temper the size of the development that happens in that area.”

Born in 1981, Chapman is a fourth generation Alexandrian. His mother served on the board of Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority, which Chapman said left an impact on him growing up. “My mom getting involved in some of the early boards and commissions, and frankly, just having me and my sister sit there and do homework while she’s at a board meeting – I think was impactful for me,” Chapman said.

Chapman attended St. Stephen’s and St. Agnes School from first to 12th grade. He grew up in public housing in north Old Town until he was in sixth grade. His family then moved to Quaker Hill. In his sophomore year of high school, Chapman and his family became homeless.

“During 10th grade we had a bout of homelessness. We were homeless for maybe seven or eight months,” Chapman said.

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Chapman’s priorities remain consistent with the goals he had when first elected to Council in 2012, with a focus on community engagement, education and affordable housing. He has since expanded his priorities to include environmental concerns and economic development.

“I’ve continued to keep education, affordable housing and community engagement in there, but I’ve added more about the environment and particularly more about economic development,” Chapman said. “I think there does need to be a big conversation about economic development and retaining small business here in the city so that we understand how we’re going to do that for the next decade.”

Chapman emphasized how
critical having a home is and spoke to the concerns of those currently facing struggles like the ones he faced growing up.

“Having a home here means a lot to me,” Chapman said. “Having that stability and making a space for our family has been a key thing for me. I know that I’m not the only one that feels that. There’s a number of people in the community that love the city and want to be here, and as times get challenging, they want to make sure there’s resources or support for them and their family if things don’t work out perfectly.”

Chapman attended St. Olaf college in Minnesota, where he obtained his bachelor’s in social studies education. In college he was involved in student government, where he oversaw student organizations on campus. He initially went to college wanting to be a social worker, but ultimately decided on studying to be a teacher. Chapman returned to Alexandria and took on various roles in education within Fairfax County, ultimately securing a position as a school administrator.

Chapman highlighted a ribbon cutting during his early days on Council, where he saw the affordable housing policies he advocated for in his first campaign have a real-world impact.

“During my first campaign, I talked about the fact that we need more non-profits coming into the city and doing housing, so seeing one of these newer non-profits come in, build a building and house people – seeing the actual faces of families [during the ribbon cutting] that now had a home because of the work that we had done and what I championed as was that moment for me,” Chapman said.

Before his 2012 council run, Chapman served as president of the local branch of the NAACP and president of Alexandria Young Democrats. Currently as a Councilor, he serves on committees such as the Northern Virginia Regional Commission and the Alexandria Redevelopment & Housing Authority Task Force.

Chapman said fatherhood has made him more forward-thinking as he considers the future his son will inherit. “As a father, I have to imagine my son being 18. ... When he graduates, I know what that date is going to be: 2038. What do I want the city to look like in 2038?”

Chapman envisioned what Alexandria might look like in 2038 and how he hopes for sustainable growth as the city grows denser, as well as keeping the city attractive for both businesses and professionals. “I still want to be able to attract business, attract good staff, whether it’s staff in the city, staff for ACPS. ... The city is probably going to be a lot more dense and have more people in it, but you want that to still be able to work,” Chapman said.

-Chapman4Council Via X


SPRING 2024

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Del Ray Dog Fest

ALX Dog Walk and Sustainability Festival

91st Old Town Alexandria Historic Homes & Gardens Tour

PNC Parkway Classic 10 Miler, 5K & Kid’s Dash

Mount Vernon Spring Wine Festival & Sunset Tour

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She started her journalism career at The Atlanta Journal-Constitution after graduating from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. She started as a summer intern and never left.

“When that summer was done, they hired a couple of the interns … and they didn’t say anything to Mom, so she just kept working,” Susannah Nesmith, Achsah’s daughter, said.

Achsah told the story to her loved ones often, saying an editor—who, according to Achsah’s telling, never anticipated hiring a woman reporter—came up to her and merely said, “So, I guess you’re going to stay.”

At the AJC, Achsah covered a myriad of stories, including investigations, the Georgia state legislature, Carter’s campaign for governor and the Civil Rights Movement. When Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in 1968, Achsah was tasked with writing the front-page obituary about him.

“She told me she wrote that as she wept,” Susannah recalled. “It was just a traumatizing thing, I think, for anybody who believed that the South could change. She had very deep respect for him and very high hopes for what he could accomplish.”

Achsah met her husband of nearly 57 years, Hollis Jefferson “Jeff” Nesmith Jr., in AJC’s parking lot. Jeff was a fellow journalist, winning a Pulitzer Prize in 1998 for his reporting uncovering mismanagement in military healthcare. He died in January 2023.

Achsah covered Carter throughout his campaign for governor in 1966 and became close to him, as she was often the only reporter present, Susannah said. They became so close that once he was president-elect in 1977, his press secretary, Jody Powell, called and offered her a speechwriting job. They were living in Philadelphia at the time for Jeff’s job.

She declined it, though, citing her children as the main reason; she had stopped working when Susannah was born in 1970. As the story goes, Susannah said, “Dad asked her if she could get back on the phone and say, ‘[He] can raise babies.’”

Susannah said one thing her parents taught her and her brother Jeff was what to expect and find in a partner.

“She always said the best gift she gave us was finding the best father for us, and it was true,” Susannah recalled. “Dad had so much respect for her and her career.”

Achsah never bragged about her position, either in the literal sense or in history; Jeff said she was humble and often credited the women who came before her.
Achsaḥ Nesmith and her fellow speechwriters for President Jimmy Carter were sworn into their jobs in 1977.

Nesmith

FROM

those that were not paid.

“She was always quick to point out that maybe they weren’t salaried, but John Adams’ wife helped him write speeches,” Jeff recalled. “I think she recognized the glass ceilings that she was breaking — not just in the White House, but in newsrooms in Atlanta in the ’60s.”

In 1977, the family moved into a historic home on Longview Drive in Alexandria that had been used as a hospital during the Civil War. Jeff said because his mother was a history buff, Alexandria was the perfect place for her.

“She loved the historicity of Old Town and just everything about Alexandria … [it was] something she really valued,” Jeff recalled. “All throughout that house, just stacks and stacks of books about [Thomas Jefferson and George] Washington and the founding fathers and the Civil War.”

Susannah said Achsaḥ chose Alexandria specifically for the public school system.

“Education was always super important to my mother … and the [Washington, D.C.] area was still kind of working its way through integration,” Susannah said. “[Alexandria schools] seemed to be successfully on the tail end of integration. She didn’t want us to go to schools that had not yet been integrated.

“…She believed very deeply in the end of the Jim Crow South and in the New South. Alexandria was personal to her,” Susannah recalled.

And the reason she re-entered the workforce to write speeches for Carter was similar: She believed in him as a person and aligned with his views and values. Susannah remembers Achsaḥ’s sadness when Carter was not reelected.

SEE NESMITH
for a second term, believing he would be even better a second time around.

“She was deeply disappointed when he lost the election [in 1980],” Susannah recalled of that time. “The day after, she planted hundreds of daffodil bulbs along the sides of the driveway. She told a reporter … that it felt like the only good thing she could do.”

Following the Carter presidency, Achsah freelanced and volunteered with the Old Presbyterian Meeting House for several years. A pillar of her character was trying to rectify injustice wherever she could. Mary Miller, assistant church secretary at the time, remembers Achsah’s gentle and cordial demeanor, calling her a “very nice lady.” She recalled Achsah’s accomplishments at the Meeting House and involvement in the community.

“She was a very, very lovely lady,” Miller recalled. “She was serious, and yet she could be friendly and she was chatty, yet she could be quiet.”

Homelessness was an important issue to Achsah, and she was instrumental in the creation of Carpenter’s Shelter. She also created a bagged lunch program in the area, which was an instant success.

“There were a lot of people worried about the homeless population in Lafayette Park in [the District], the Vietnam veterans,” Susannah said. “Other churches, when she first reached out to them, didn’t think there was much need for that – it was kind of a D.C. problem.”

Around this time in the mid-1980s, Achsah also went to work for then U.S. Sen. Sam Nunn, a Democrat from Georgia who has since co-founded the Nuclear Threat Initiative.

“Achsah had a quiet and caring but very strong voice, with a depth of knowledge across many areas. She was a talented and wonderful partner for those of us in the arena of public service,” Nunn said in a written statement. “I was very proud to be the beneficiary of Achsah’s wonderful character, her wisdom and her sound judgment. She was able to read a room on every occasion.”

Later in life, Achsah tutored children in Alexandria City Public Schools, most often teaching them how to read. Susannah said she was instrumental in teaching her and her brother how to read as well, even as she worked in the White House.

“While she was in the White House, at night, taught my brother and I at the same time when he was three and I was seven,” Susannah recalled.

Achsah officially retired in 2000 or 2001. Though in her 60s by then, she received her master’s of arts in liberal studies from Georgetown University.

Reflecting on her parents’ life lessons, Susannah said she will always remember their mantra to “figure it out.” Achsah had never written a speech before being hired by Carter.

“To turn down the opportunity because she didn’t know how was not something she had considered,” Susannah said. “Neither one of them not knowing how was never used as an excuse for anything, because you could figure it out.”

When Jeff and his family moved to Arlington at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, it became routine that he and his children would meet with his parents each week.

“It was, for the first time, they could spend more regular time with the [grand]kids,” Jeff recalled. “These last few years have been particularly special for me, just being able to watch them interact and get to know each other.”

Achsah is survived by her daughter Susannah and husband Charles Rabin; Jeff and wife Tara Ronzetti; two grandchildren and niece Debbie Middleton. In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made to Mamatoto Village, the Carter Center or NTI.

-cmeisner@alextimes.com
The lawsuit challenges the Zoning for Housing initiative, a hotly debated ordinance that City Council passed in November 2023.

“Prior to passage of this, [we said] it needed to be decoupled so that you could work on the different pieces, and maybe three would have gone through with no problem and others would have been modified and then passed. But the way it was done, we can’t go in and say, ‘Well, we just want this piece to be changed.’ It doesn’t work that way. It’s all or nothing, unfortunately,” Byrd said.
Weekly Words

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108 March Madness org. 143 "*April Fools' Day officials?*
109 Bigwig from Abu Dhabi 144 "*April Fools' Day officials?*
110 "That makes sense now"

Solutions from last week

LOU COOK (89), of Alexandria, March 8, 2024
ELENA AURORA JALDIN (81), of Alexandria, March 14, 2024
TINA ELISABETH ANNA KUTCHMANICH (65), formerly of Alexandria, Feb. 27, 2024
HELEN PAGE SMITH (102), of Alexandria, March 15, 2024
CHRIS SUTTON (68), of Alexandria, March 15, 2024
CHARLES DEAN WILLIAMS (94), of Alexandria, March 13, 2024
Bishop Ireton performs ‘Into the Woods’

Sondheim’s classic enchants, Elina Viana impresses as the Witch

BY NAOMI BAUTISTA, FAIRFAX HIGH SCHOOL

At Bishop Ireton High School’s production of “Into the Woods,” “the woods are just trees, and the trees are just wood,” until the classic fairy tales twist their endings on a journey in and out of the woods that delivers a happily ever after ending.

“Into the Woods” is one of Stephen Sondheim’s best-known musicals; it took to the Broadway stage in 1987, won three Tony Awards and has had many star-studded revivals since. The show intertwines classic Brothers’ Grimm fairy tales and turns them on their heads, creating new endings for beloved fairytale characters such as Cinderella, Red Riding Hood and Jack while introducing the Baker, his Wife and their own quest. Bishop Ireton had great courage to take on Sondheim’s difficult score, and delivered a show filled with enchantment, wonder and grief.

As spellbinding and entrancing as her character, Elina Viana masterfully portrayed the Witch. Viana’s voice soared over the stage with a mature tone, easy vibrato and a show stopping belt. Viana also showcased depth of emotional range as an actor; confidently playing the contrast between a deformed hag in “The Prologue,” sultry enchantress in “Ever After” and a grieving, vindictive mother in “Last Midnight,” Viana’s performance was heart wrenching, magnetic and contained a captivating energy.

On a quest to have a child were the Baker and his Wife, performed by Donovan Furey and Lauren Allen. The two played off each other beautifully, dynamically portraying both the snarky banter throughout the show and heartwarming sweetness in “It Takes Two.”

Also journeying through the woods was Larissa Yaksic’s Little Red Riding Hood. Yaksic was able to portray Little Red’s youth and naivete without the characteristic whine while bringing color and joy into each scene. Playing the charming, if not sincere, Princes were Pierce Aldridge and Julien Goulet. Aldridge’s smooth baritone and deadpan delivery paired with Goulet’s physical humor made their duet “Agony” a humorous delight.

Comedic timing and dynamic energy were carried through a colorful cast of supporting characters. Gabby Viana was awe-inspiring with skillful puppeteering of a papier-mâché cow, Milky White, and animated facial expressions that allowed the audience a peek into the cow’s emotions. Cinderella’s Step-family had a delectable “love to hate them” energy and the Bird ensemble brought a touch of elegant wonderment with their balletic movement.

The storybook-inspired set by Joseph Murray, Charlotte Rayder, Caroline Reams and Sarah Petz centered around an immense willow tree was truly breathtaking and accented the different fairy tales being told through incredible small details. Many of the luminous and eye-catching costumes by Claire Gibbons, Catherine Carow and Iona McCluskey were handmade, and reflected each character’s personality and journey.

In particular, the Witch’s change from old hag to stunning enchantress was accentuated by stylistic and material differences. Each “tale” had a distinct color and was inspired by a different historical era, adding to the twisted feeling of the show. The dry ice utilized by the special effects team of Anna Wisneski and Cherri Hansford for the Witch’s entrances, exits and spells was both an impressive technical feat and contributed to the mystical air and magic of the woods.

Bishop Ireton’s “Into the Woods” reminded one that “there’s hope of getting through the journey” as each passing moment was filled with magic, life and the true spirit of an ever after.

This Cappies Review was of the performance at Bishop Ireton on March 16.
Ways seniors can save on enjoyable activities

BY FAMILY FEATURES

Retirement may mean you have unlimited time to enjoy each day, but it doesn’t mean you have a budget to match.

You probably already know staying active is essential for aging with grace, so instead of letting limited funds keep you at home, explore some ways you can enjoy your leisure time without breaking the bank.

Hit the gym

Many fitness centers offer special rates and programs for older adults. Hitting the track or joining a group fitness class are easy ways to socialize while getting some exercise. The discounted membership is also an investment since staying fit is important for physical and mental health.

Enjoy early dinner deals

You can still enjoy dining out occasionally, especially if you take advantage of lower-cost meals designed with older adults in mind. Many specials are for meals earlier in the day, which is consistent with a growing trend toward earlier dining. Eating earlier promotes better digestion, and earlier meals are often lighter portions for smaller appetites.

Check out the library

Your local library is filled with hours of free entertainment, but it’s not just the kind you’ll find from getting a library card. You can undoubtedly find a book that covers any genre or interest you can name, but most local libraries also offer programming tailored to special interests and the sessions are typically offered for free or at a low cost. Other resources to explore include your library’s DVD collection and internet access if you don’t have a computer at home.

Nurture a garden

Tending a garden may seem like a seasonal activity, but you can make it a year-round hobby. Researching and planning is a good way to carry your gardening enthusiasm into the cooler months and you can start seedlings indoors to extend your growing season. While you’re digging into this low-cost pastime, remember the results of your efforts, such as fresh fruits and veggies, can help cut your grocery costs too.

Mind your money with DIY

Saving money at the grocery store is just one way you can make DIY projects work for you. There are dozens of ways you can put your skills and interests to use by passing time doing something you enjoy while benefiting your bank account. If you like to tinker with cars, figure out what repairs you can handle yourself and avoid hefty service fees. Crafting and sewing might mean you have ready-made gifts for special occasions and a way to repair or repurpose damaged clothing instead of discarding it.

Ask about discounts

You may be surprised by how many places offer discounts for older adults that they don’t readily advertise. When you’re booking an appointment or checking out, inquire about discounts for older adults, including any restrictions, age requirements, the amount of the discount and other pertinent details.

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The Alexandria Commission on Aging – a 21-member citizen body appointed by City Council to advocate for older Alexandrians – is now accepting nominations in four categories for the 2024 awards.

Since 1990, the Alexandria Commission on Aging’s Excellence in Aging Awards Program has honored individuals and organizations that have made superior contributions in advancing issues and projects that make a favorable impact on older Alexandrians.

Awards are presented in the following four categories.

**Annie B. Rose Lifetime Achievement Award**
This award recognizes an individual whose exemplary achievements span a lifetime of public service. These achievements have been devoted to significantly enhancing the community, especially to advancing social justice and aging concerns for all citizens. The award honors the superior example of Annie B. Rose for her lifetime of outstanding service.

In the last five years, awardees include Suzanne Adams in 2022; Kupenda Olusegun and Bob Effert in 2019; Mary Hamil Parker, Ph.D. in 2018; William "Bill" Clayton and Carol Siegel in 2017; and Wanda Dowell in 2016.

**Lois Van Valkenburgh Excellence in Aging Award**
This award recognizes an individual who has made outstanding contributions to elevating the quality of life for older adults in Alexandria within the past year. This award is in honor of Lois Van Valkenburgh, a longtime Alexandrian, community leader and past chair of the Alexandria Commission on Aging. Van Valkenburgh was a tireless advocate of and expert in issues related to aging. Her strong spirit, steadfast dedication and extensive network helped to make Alexandria a better place in which its oldest citizens can age gracefully.

Awardees include Barbara "Babs" Waters and Frederick Reardon in 2022; Luley Chow, Cedar Dvorin and Susan Lane in 2019; Mary Lee Anderson in 2018; and Wanda Dowell in 2016.

**Excellence in Aging Award for an Organization**
This award recognizes an organization that has made outstanding contributions to elevating the quality of life of older Alexandrians.

Past awardees include HomeAid Northern Virginia in 2022; Giant Food Store at 3131 Duke St. and Legal Services of Northern Virginia in 2019; The Hermitage Northern Virginia in 2018; Rebuilding Together Alexandria in 2017; and At Home in Alexandria in 2016.

**Public Service Award**
This award recognizes a City of Alexandria employee who has advanced, improved or otherwise contributed to making Alexandria a more livable community for all ages during the course of their job.

Past awardees include Terri Lynch in 2022; Michael Brown, Dana Lawhorne and Kim Robertson in 2019; Margaret Orlando in 2018; Debbie Ludington and Arthur Thomas in 2017; and Robert Fulk in 2016.

Nominations can be made on the city’s website and are due by March 29. The awards will be presented at 5:30 p.m. on May 14 in the Vola Lawson Lobby of City Hall at 301 King St.

For more information or questions, contact Pamela Austin at 703-746-5738 or pamela.austin@alexandriava.gov.

The writer is the chair of the Alexandria Commission on Aging.
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Debunking common bathroom remodeling myths

BY FAMILY FEATURES

Many homeowners put off upgrading essential spaces like the bathroom because they perceive the hassle or expense outweighs the benefit. Common myths surrounding these projects keep many homeowners from even envisioning a beautiful new bathroom, let alone embarking on a remodeling project.

To help sort facts from fiction, consider this information from bathroom experts.

Myth: A traditional down-to-studs remodel is the “right” way or “only” way to achieve a new bathroom.

Truth: Tradition and right are not one and the same. There are plenty of innovative ways to achieve a like-new bathroom without the messy demolition, stress and unexpected delays.

In fact, according to the survey, 50% of respondents who renovated their bathroom in the past five years agree that a tub-over-tub liner is an affordable solution that eliminates these renovation pain points while providing the same quality and durability of a traditional remodel with long-lasting results.

Myth: Tub and shower liniers are made from substandard material that results in a low-quality look.

Truth: Constructed from the same premium acrylic found in high-end spas, custom liner products are a high-quality solution that’s just as attractive, exceptionally durable and easy to clean.

Myth: Tub and shower liniers are “coverups,” which can worsen or create problems with mold or water damage.

Truth: Custom-made tubs and showers are installed using a grout-free, watertight system that prevents future mold and water damage. Extensive sanitizing of existing bath areas ensures a clean and strong foundation prior to installation. In fact, 47% of survey respondents who renovated their bathroom in the past five years used a tub-over-tub solution as part of the renovation.

Myth: Liners are a temporary fix that won’t last or serve as a long-term replacement.

Truth: One in four future renovators believe tub-over-tub solutions are covers and insufficient substitutes for a complete replacement.

Myth: The number of bath and shower style options are limited and won’t fit contemporary bathroom design trends.

Truth: Custom tubs and showers are available with hundreds of design and customization options to suit any space or style and blend in seamlessly with your chosen aesthetic. From Scandinavian to English Country, you can find an expansive portfolio of designs that can be integrated into an existing design or incorporated into an updated look.

HOME OF THE WEEK

Historic Old Town home renovated with modern amenities

Experience the perfect blend of historic charm and modern luxury in this fully renovated Old Town gem.

Boasting an unbeatable location, this 4-bedroom, 3.5-bath Big City home features top-to-bottom updates for a truly bespoke living experience. Revel in the stunning herringbone flooring, an open marble fireplace visible from both the living and dining rooms and a chic wet bar perfect for entertaining. Massive windows flood the space with natural light, highlighting the unbelievable ceiling height and offering a bright, airy feel. Don’t miss this opportunity to own a piece of history with all the modern amenities you desire.

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A second chance after a rejected dance

Shared interest in Black culture forms bedrock of Venus and Eric Hylton’s marriage

Venus and Eric Hylton intertwined pinkies as they lunged backward against their brown leather sectional, howling with laughter. A centuries-old sacred oath, the pinky promise, was performed as Eric pleaded with his wife of 27 years to consider the story of their meeting as he remembered it.

“I saw her on the dance floor and she’s dancing with some guy,” Eric recalled. “I just put my number in her coat pocket and walked back. Of course she’s like, ‘Oh, God that’s pretty bold.’”

Venus didn’t recall being quite so struck by her future husband’s audacity. She rolled her eyes.

Venus and Eric Hylton have been married for 27 years.
To encourage support for the rest of his flawed tale of romance – featuring deleted voicemails, chance-encounters and declined invitations to dance – Eric offered his pinky as a last ditch effort. Venus accepted, signaling a truce.

The Alexandria couple and parents to two adult children, change to Yakiri, 27, and Akobe, 25, don’t agree on details regarding the story of how they met, but they have settled on key facts that remain true in their relationship: laughter, competition and taking every chance they get to brag about their better half.

“To sum it up, you have to enjoy each other,” Eric said. “You have to enjoy being around each other. That’s hard, to be honest. You have to work towards that over time.”

The couple agreed this effort can be difficult to maintain when raising a family, balancing work and instilling a solid foundation of values in children. But it’s work they’ve put forth since meeting in Atlanta during Morehouse College’s homecoming weekend in November 1995.

Both Eric and Venus attended Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Eric went to Morehouse College and Venus graduated from Grambling State University. The couple met at an infamous “Petie Party,” named for the host of the get-togethers. Venus turned Eric down the first time they met. When the smooth-talking young professional asked her to dance, Venus didn’t budge.

“I really don’t dance well,” Venus said. “I have to have the right song and the right beat. So I said no.”

The couple began dating after weeks of pursuit by Eric. They were married in a traditional African ceremony the next year in 1996 in Atlanta. What was intended to be an intimate celebration and reception in a Georgia art gallery transformed into more than 250 people avoiding

“...You have to enjoy being around each other. That’s hard, to be honest. You have to work towards that over time.”

– Eric Hylton
torrential downpour.

“It was supposed to be small,” Venus said. “I didn’t want anything large but [Eric] took over and it ended up being like 250 people. I know because I did the invitations and hand calligraphy.”

Eric was set on having six kids while Venus didn’t like the thought of any. The couple compromised by having two children before moving to Alexandria’s Old Town neighborhood in 2004. The family purchased their current home in 2005.

Venus paused her teaching career for 17 years to raise the couple’s two children and take care of the homefront; she got back into educating after the kids moved out. She is a middle school teacher in the Arlington School District.

“One of the things that attracted me to my wife was when she was teaching in Atlanta, to connect with a lot of the kids, she knew hip hop and rap,” Eric said. “I always thought that was just such a cool technique. Even to this day she still connects with her students and they’re so surprised. That’s golden for them.”

Eric is the former IRS commissioner of the Small Business and Self Employed Division. He supervised 20,000 employees at times during his career.

His work took him to countries from Australia and Singapore to cities like Dubai and Bogota.

“And we were in tow because the kids were young,” Venus added.

The young parents decided it was best to travel as a family whenever possible because raising two young kids alone is an incredibly difficult task, they said.

A responsibility both partners took pride in was raising their children and preparing them for life as Black Americans. Venus and Eric said they wanted their son and daughter to embrace Black culture as they had learned to do in college.

“We wanted them to know who they are before they face a world that is going to tell them that they’re not anything, that they’re not worth this or that,” Venus said. “Not that it always comes, but we wanted to arm...
Eric led by example when he served as the first Black president of the T.C. Williams High School – now called Alexandria City High School – Parent Teacher Association from 2014 through 2016, according to Venus.

Eric and Venus employed a chalkboard in their split-level house to teach Yakiri and Akobe outside of school. The couple learned Swahili together. They then gave lessons on the language to their children.

“‘To just be very honest, when you think of society, the enrichment of African culture is not celebrated as much,’” Eric said. “‘So we wanted our kids to have that thought process and recognize that we came from kings and queens.’”

Eric and Venus still share hobbies and interests, particularly music and reading, with the kids around. They said these artistic forms allow them to continue to celebrate Black culture and their own heritage.

“We are descendants of Africans, and one thing that helps is we’re both history buffs,” Eric said. “‘We always wanted to think about African history before slavery.’”

Reading authors like Toni Morrison and Isabel Wilkerson has transformed into a rather expansive list of Black history podcasts. For Venus, it’s The Black Excellence Podcast, TheGrio Daily with Michael Harriot and Rachel Maddow’s Ultra Podcast.

Eric settles for a more “geeky” genre of podcasts, he

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“We wanted our kids to have that thought process and recognize that we came from kings and queens.”

– Eric Hylton

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The couple’s love for music is also how they stay connected with each other and Black culture amid the busyness of daily lives. Be it rap, hiphop, neo soul or jazz, the couple frequents concerts across the Potomac in D.C. Highlights from their concerts over the years include Jay-Z, Erykah Badu, Jill Scott, Eric Roberson and Nas. Venus and Eric can be found around Alexandria supporting Black-owned businesses like 1799 Prime Steak and Seafood, out on walks and partaking in local charitable events.

“That was our story. As they always say, it was meant to be,” Eric said. “And here we are almost 30 years later.”

-jmatheson@alextimes.com

The couple married in a traditional African ceremony in 1996.
Good sleep and mindfulness can ease wedding day stress.

How to manage stress on your big day

BY KATHRYN ZIEMER, PH.D.

So the big day is nearly here. Wedding invitations have been sent out. Venues have been booked. Preparations have been made. At this point, you’ve nearly crossed the finish line and you’re finally ready to say “I do.” But what if it all doesn’t go smoothly? What if the wedding guests don’t get along? What if a vendor drops the ball, or worse … drops the cake? Your mind is spinning. Your pulse races. So many expectations, so much build-up. So much money invested, and all the eyes will be on you.

Everything you’re feeling is normal. Getting married is a huge life milestone, and it’s natural to be nervous when expectations are so high. But, as much as possible, you want to go into it feeling good and with a calm mind so you can enjoy the day, which requires a strategy.

Let’s break down stress management for the 24 hours leading up to your wedding, step by step.

The night before the wedding

Good sleep is the foundation for your successful wedding day for two reasons. First, it will recharge you physically so you can still be on your feet dancing at the end of the night. Good sleep also provides you with critical emotional regulation, so when something doesn’t go according to plan, you can take it in stride.

According to top sleep researchers, REM-sleep – or rapid eye movement – is like “overnight therapy” for our brain. We feel calmer and better able to regulate our emotions when we get enough sleep.

Here are a few tips to help you unlock a great night of sleep:

- Avoid drinking alcohol the night before.
- Limit screen-time at least two hours before bed. Screens can be mentally activating, and blue light inhibits natural melatonin release.
- Keep your bedroom cool, ideally 60-67 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Keep your bedroom dark, light is the enemy of sleep.
- Avoid using sleep aids which may disrupt REM cycles and leave you groggy the next day.
- If you find you can’t sleep, don’t force it. Try getting up and reading a book until you feel sleepy again.

The morning of

You made it through the night and now it’s the big day!

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It’s important to go into it with the right mindset. Start the day with some relaxation, whether it’s deep breathing, stretching or meditation. Some light exercise is another great way to manage stress and kick start those feel-good endorphins. This will help set a calm and positive tone that can carry you through.

Remind yourself of the purpose of the day: You’re celebrating your love and commitment to your partner surrounded by friends and family. Grounding yourself in this truth can help you let go of any hiccups or irritations that crop up throughout the day.

**Before the ceremony**

You may have jitters as you near the start of the ceremony. This is normal. Rather than catastrophizing or imagining worst case scenarios, try engaging in mindfulness instead, such as noticing what you’re feeling or thinking without judging yourself. Try to let go of any worries and focus instead on the present moment.

If thoughts are flooding your mind, try focusing on your breath instead as it moves in and out of your lungs. Doing this for even a minute can help you feel calmer.

After you’ve had a quiet moment to yourself, don’t forget to eat something. Grab a light, healthy snack so you don’t go into this on an empty stomach. Low blood sugar is a mood and energy killer, and the Internet is littered with tales of brides and grooms who didn’t have time to eat during their reception because they were graciously making the rounds across the room.

**During the reception**

The moment has finally arrived and now is the time to savor it. Accept that not everything will go according to plan; if something unexpected happens, remember that your wedding guests are probably none-the-wiser.

And don’t forget about gratitude! Reminding yourself of the things you’re thankful for can help you feel better in even the most stressful situations. This is a special moment. Rarely will you ever find all these people from different aspects of your life in one place together. This is your time, so take it all in. You’ve earned it!

The writer is the founder and Clinical Director of Old Town Psychology, an award-winning psychology practice in Alexandria offering therapy and cognitive assessments for all ages.
Compassion in action

We are in the midst of what seems like an endless cycle of bad news. There are wars overseas, political battles in the U.S., lingering negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic – and our planet is warming at a frightening rate.

Sometimes really good news can get lost in the din. So we want to spotlight a significant announcement by the city last week: The Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services released a report about food insecurity in our city, which according to the USDA numbers is 10.6%, and the U.S. as a whole, which is 11.5%, according to U.S. Census data.

Just as important as the numbers is the DCHS report's overarching message: that efforts by the city, nonprofits and houses of worship are effectively helping many struggling families and individuals attain food security. The biggest challenge is to reach those who, despite the best efforts of well-meaning city and private organizations, are not receiving needed help.

One significant prong in this city-wide effort to help with food insecurity is making sure students have access to healthy food while at school. Alexandria City Public Schools Superintendent Melanie Kay-Wyatt, Ed.D., discusses the school district’s emphasis on helping students establish sustainable healthy eating patterns in her column on the facing page.

For students who come from households struggling with food insecurity, the meals they receive at school are essential to not just learning, but their overall health. The ACPS healthy eating initiative is being implemented in fun ways, such as taste testings, that help students to try foods they might otherwise shy from eating.

The city and nonprofit organizations impressively teamed up to provide testing and vaccines to underserved populations in Alexandria during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. We have confidence that they will continue creatively partnering to feed those in our city who most need it.

In the midst of an ongoing strife all around us, this progress by those working to improve food security in Alexandria provides an example of compassion in action.

Fully fund ACPS

To the editor:
The board of The Alexandria Council of PTAs is committed to supporting and speaking up for Alexandria City Public Schools students and staff. As Alexandria residents, we know that our public schools are a cornerstone of what makes our city great. It’s imperative that we prioritize resources for the success of our diverse and growing student population.

Recently, the Alexandria School Board proposed a budget addressing critical needs within our educational system. This budget includes provisions for essential teacher and staff positions to meet the diverse needs of our students. Failure to adopt this budget by City Council could exacerbate existing equity issues within our schools, hindering the potential of all our students.

One of the most pressing concerns highlighted by the budget is the need for competitive salary increases for our teachers. Currently, Alexandria faces one of the highest vacancy rates among neighboring districts, and many of our educators reside in these areas. If neighboring districts offer higher salaries to match or surpass those of ACPS, the allure of commuting to Alexandria may diminish. Consequently, our schools could face prolonged vacancies, depriving students of the quality instruction they deserve. Long-term substitutes are not a sustainable solution; we must attract and retain qualified teachers to ensure our students receive the education they need to succeed.

While the School Board’s budget represents a crucial step forward, it is only the beginning of what our educational system truly requires. While we advocate for increased funding from state and federal sources, it is essential to recognize that nearly 80% of the school division’s budget comes from the city. As such, City Council bears a significant responsibility to prioritize education funding. We cannot afford to wait for others to act, nor can we shortchange the future success of our children.

Alexandria’s PTAs and their partners call on all individuals and groups within the city to join us in urging City Council to find innovative solutions to fully fund the School Board-approved 2025 budget. Whether through online comments, letters to Council members or speaking at meetings, we must all lend our voices to ensure that our educators are fully funded and that our students have the resources they need to succeed.

Letters

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.
A statement from Bill Euille

Dear fellow Alexandrians:

I am writing to set the record straight with respect to a recent article, "Former Mayor Euille was focus of FBI probe" in the February 15 Alexandria Times, regarding a June 2012 check payable to me from Hubert Hoffman.

To be clear, this was a loan that was appropriately supported by a promissory note. Mr. Hoffman and I have been friends since the 1970s, having first met when I graduated from college and returned to Alexandria to begin a career in the construction industry.

In 2012, I was a party to business investment in Washington, D.C. Unfortunately, my business partner absconded with more than $200,000. The source of those funds was my personal bank line of credit. My business partner then filed for bankruptcy and abruptly left the area unannounced.

As a result, I was in desperate need of funds to repay the bank and to protect my personal home from foreclosure. So, I turned to my friend Mr. Hoffman for a loan. The loan was timely repaid in full. I thank Mr. Hoffman for coming to my rescue. The foregoing facts were fully disclosed to the FBI and U.S. Attorney.

I have served Alexandria and its citizens with dignity and respect for more than 20 years. I have not and would never accept a payment of any kind from anyone for my vote or support. I am deeply embarrassed by this situation and express my remorse for the resulting optics.

-Bill Euille, former mayor, City of Alexandria

Don’t overcomplicate things

To the editor:

I was disappointed to read Bill Rossello’s column "Becoming a one-faction town" in the March 14 Alexandria Times, criticizing, among other things, my giving to mayoral candidate Alyia Gaskins, implying that the giving was tied to a private investment company on whose board I happen to sit. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I’ve never talked to the company about giving and don’t have a clue as to any investments it might have in our city. I gave as soon as Alyia announced because I like her and think she can win and will be a great mayor. She has tons of energy and takes the time to engage with residents in ways I admire.

I am sure we don’t agree on some policy issues but she’s honest and we both love Alexandria and that’s enough for me. I looked and realized I gave generously to Bill Rossello when he ran for office too. Same reasons. Smart, lots of energy, loves Alexandria. Sometimes it just isn’t any more complicated than that.

-Reg Brown, Alexandria

Healthy food choices fuel success

Access to healthy food options has a direct impact on academic achievement, performance and overall well-being. With March celebrating National Nutrition Month and School Breakfast Week, that is food for thought I would like to address as it impacts our Alexandria City Public Schools’ students and their ability to learn.

Nutrient-rich foods support brain health and cognitive function, leading to improved memory and concentration. Research shows a lack of nutrients may cause students to lose focus easily and be more irritable and less engaged in learning. In addition, getting adequate nutrition through food can support a healthy immune system, reducing absences from school due to sickness or injuries.

This year’s “Beyond the Table” theme focuses on the farm-to-fork aspect of nutrition and drives home the importance of sustainable eating patterns that support student health and well-being as well as support environmental health. Sustainable eating patterns include plant-based food choices and locally sourced ingredients. Through our School Gardens Program, ACPS strives to cultivate a community of life-long learners who are empowered to actively engage in academic and environmental learning. Its vision is to inspire every student to care about the well-being of themselves, their community and the earth.

At Alexandria City High School, our nutrition staff offers a plant forward menu in its Nature’s Cafe. As demand for vegetarian and plant-based alternatives grow, ACPS has committed to offering hot vegetarian entree items daily at all schools. We also have salad bars which we call Greens ‘n More Bars filled with fresh fruits and vegetables at all schools. These salad bars are a wonderful way to allow students to select and sample unlimited quantities of a variety of fresh produce, as students who choose their own fruits and veggies are more likely to eat them!

In an effort to help students expand their food choices, our nutrition staff regularly incorporates new items onto our menus. We promote the acceptance of these items through taste testing events and educational awareness. Knowing that it is also important to foster a welcoming environment, our team serves up appealing food options with great customer service and comfortable cafeterias.

Our students gain a better understanding of where food comes from through ACPS’ garden-based learning opportunities that help make connections to curriculum concepts. From sowing seeds, to harvesting produce, to regular garden maintenance, students experience the process of growing. Students also build other life skills by caring for plants which encourages responsibility as they learn about environmental stewardship while at the same time they engage in physical activity in a safe environment.

Our ACPS Gardens Program aims to teach and inspire students to be kind to our planet. One sustainable choice we are hoping to explore more is composting our food scraps to feed our soil, an idea already employed by the ACHS Garden Club as it composts food scraps from the cafeteria for use in their school garden space. At Lyles-Crouch Traditional Academy, a class of fourth grade students recently built a compost bin to begin learning about and composting food waste from their cafeteria.

ACPS also maintains two community gardens. The garden at George Washington Middle School functions as a collective growing space while at Cora Kelly School for Math, Science and Technology individuals can reserve and tend to plots.

Nutritious eating habits really are an important ingredient in helping our students achieve better outcomes – academically, socially and emotionally. Skipping a meal, especially breakfast, can lead to students becoming irritable because they are hungry. In turn, it becomes harder for students to focus, problem solve and retain crucial information. Let us help fuel our students for success, encouraging healthy meal choices each day!

-The writer is superintendent of Alexandria City Public Schools.
Letters

Let’s vote on the arena

To the editor:

When I first heard about the new arena, I thought it was awesome. It would be really cool to be able to go to games so close. But then I heard that the city was paying for it. That doesn’t seem fair or to make any sense.

I think it’s great that basketball players can make millions of dollars. However, the city should not be responsible for building and paying for it. If the city has extra money available, I think they should build something that could benefit the city in the long term like recreation centers, parks or even improve the tree canopy.

The city should use our tax dollars for things that build our community and improve the lives of Alexandrians. Instead, we are being robbed for the purpose of building an arena that will increase traffic, damage the Potomac and destroy small businesses that were already in the designated area.

The most appalling part of this project is how much public disapproval there is toward the project but that the city is still going forward with this. My suggestion is that we have a vote. Let’s make sure that the people who are paying for the project actually have a say in it.

—William McCusker, 8th grade student, SSSAS
Life Scout, Troop 129

The city dodged a bullet

To the editor:

Whereas the mayor, and all six City Council members – until Amy Jackson’s reversal – supported the idea of the Monumental Arena and seemed to treat it like a silver bullet that would solve all the city’s problems and long-term fiscal concerns with one project, it is my view that this was a chimera. A magic money tree that, like an oasis in the desert, might not lead to salvation or be a well from which everyone can drink. And like some trickster in a circus tent, it might lead to financial ruin by putting the city on the hook to cover the bill while straining city services beyond its capacity. In my opinion, the city dodged a bullet.

When one door is closed, it may be time to go back to the drawing board, and look back on how this happened and not make the same mistake again: the mistake of secret deal-making behind closed doors to decide our city’s future.

There must be an open process that is transparent and welcomes citizen participation. We also need to reevaluate the role of the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership. The director of economic development gets paid more than our city manager, and more than all our Council members combined.

The AEDP has its own offices with more than 10 staff members three blocks from City Hall, paid for by tax dollars, that can have meetings behind closed doors with developers and billionaires and decide what is best for the city. I don’t think we have moved city hall three blocks away and I don’t think we should.

In fact, I think Economic Development is a basic function of government and we should not have a private-public partnership which has gone too far to the private side. We need to bring it in from the cold and have a transparent process so that we can FOIA and apply public meeting laws to it.

Lastly, in the process of opposing the Arena, the one thing I’ve heard that people want and think we’ll need is a new public high school. Not all kids learn the same and our one high school is too big. We cannot bring people from all parts of the city and squeeze them into one high school and claim it is good enough for everyone, that one size fits all. Quality education that meets the needs of all our students with different learning styles and needs is imperative, especially with Alexandria’s projected population growth.

With Amazon and the Virginia Tech Innovation Campus next door, a STEM high school as good as Thomas Jefferson Governor’s School in Fairfax County could be built at the Arena site. The stadium site was going to be purchased from JBG for $150 million. We were going to spend $106 million on this project. Alexandria City High School cost $100 million.

We can build a world-class high school with the help of Amazon and Virginia Tech and make it something to be proud of. In 40 years, we may not have a sports team, but we will have some world-class educated students with great skills who want to give back to Alexandria. To me, that is a long-term investment worth making.

—Boyd Walker, Alexandria

Criticism of Blackstone is unfounded and contradictory

To the editor:

In Bill Rossello’s March 14 column “Becoming a one-faction town” in the March 14 Alexandria Times, Rossello argues that the Alexandria Democratic Committee and the mayor and City Council have been unduly influenced by investment firm Blackstone, citing as evidence the campaign donations of a Blackstone board member who lives in Alexandria. His column draws a direct line from Councilor Alyia Gaskins’ vote on the Zoning for Housing changes that eliminated single-family zoning to a donation that an unnamed board member made to her campaign the following week.

Putting aside his unfounded insinuation that this donation was somehow improper, Rossello’s claim of influence makes little sense on the facts. As he correctly notes, Blackstone has recently gotten back into the single-family home ownership business, acquiring two companies that together own approximately 62,000 single-family homes – though only 486 in the entire Washington metro area.

However, as Blackstone has repeatedly stated, it sees these assets as good investments because of the artificially restrained supply of housing. If Blackstone wanted to maximize this investment, it would want to prevent changes to the zoning code that would allow for the building of more housing units. In fact, it would likely have wanted to support candidates with platforms much like the one Rossello ran on in 2021, not supporters of Zoning for Housing.

It makes sense, then, that this donation came from an individual and not from Blackstone itself. What Rossello has discovered is a fellow citizen with a day job who has opinions independent of his or her job.

Rossello should apologize, as his assertions are incoherent and contradictory.

—Joe Fray, Alexandria

Why didn’t Del Ray arguments apply to Old Town too?

To the editor:

In reading the “Controversial SUP denied” article in the March 14 Alexandria Times, I was surprised to see City Council basically using all of the arguments residents used against granting a special use permit to the developer of 301 N. Union St.

I wondered if they saw the irony in denying the SUP for a 1,174 square foot, two-story home because of “street frontage, design, adherence to neighborhood character” when the same arguments were made against putting a 50-unit residential building on 301 N. Union St. and rather than deny it, City Council is considering a change in the Alexandria Master Plan to permit the project to move forward against the wishes of by far a majority of the residents.

—Sydney Smith, Alexandria
Jane Martin, freedom seeker

Jane Martin was an enslaved, mixed-race woman, who enjoyed the prospect of future emancipation as a “term slave.” John Carlyle Herbert, who claimed ownership of Martin, guaranteed her freedom after a defined term of years when he sold his Virginia plantation, along with the livestock and enslaved workers, in 1805.

Herbert moved to Maryland but owned land in Alexandria’s waterfront between Queen and Cameron Streets. Martin was among the many enslaved people of the Chesapeake who, in the post-tobacco economy, were considered surplus labor. In cities like Baltimore, Washington, D.C. and Alexandria, a greater number of enslaved people were made into “term slaves” or were rented out to households, small industries or infrastructure projects like the C&O Canal. Martin was likely a household worker, though the nature of her work is unrecorded.

Herbert sold Martin’s term of labor to Andrew Jamieson, an Alexandria baker whose bakehouse was located at Union and King Streets. Jamieson then sold Martin’s term to Capt. John McCobb, a lumber merchant, who in turn sold to Andrew Bartle.

Bartle was a wharf and bridge builder who briefly owned a wharf at the foot of Queen Street, north side. Bartle was locally infamous. He sued Andrew Jamieson for fraud related to the waterfront parcel, however Jamieson won in court and Bartle was evicted.

Bartle was credited with devising a new strategy to remove obstructions and improve the catch for Potomac fishing. Bartle accused another local wharf builder, William Stoops, of stealing white oak timbers and using them to build Jonah Thompson’s wharf in Alexandria. The two exchanged barbs in the local newspaper, but ultimately in court Bartle won: Stoops ended up in debtors’ prison.

While Bartle’s legal and financial troubles played out, Jane Martin sued for an injunction to stop the sales. Bartle sold Jane Martin and her small child to Eli Legg, a slave trader who was known to sell enslaved people to the deep south. At that time, with the support of Thomas F. Herbert, Jane Martin sued for an injunction to stop the sales.

She argued that with around three years left to serve in her term, she feared Legg intended to sell her to the deep south without her term attached, thereby making her a slave for life. Further, she expected Legg would sell her child separately and they would be permanently separated.

Martin’s request to the court was to forbid Legg to sell her or her child out of the District of Columbia, and her request was granted. The injunction continued until November 1819, which may be when Martin’s term of slavery ended.

Thomas F. Herbert paid her court costs, and the outcome of her life after that point is unknown.

Historic Alexandria celebrates Women’s History Month throughout the month of March. For a listing of virtual events and celebrations, please visit alexandriava.gov/WomensHistoryMonth.

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

Weekly Poll

Last Week

Do you think “swatting,” the practice of calling in a false emergency to 911, should be a felony or misdemeanor?

- 73% A felony.
- 19% It depends on the circumstances.
- 6% A misdemeanor.
- 1% I’m not sure.

This Week

What do you think of the decision by Alexandria’s Circuit Court judges to recuse themselves from the Zoning for Housing lawsuit?

- A) Local judges should always recuse themselves when residents sue the city.
- B) This was a special circumstance.
- C) Judges should never recuse.
- D) I’m not sure.
Board of Architectural Review
LEGAL NOTICE
OF A PUBLIC HEARING

A Public Hearing will be held by the Board of Architectural Review on Wednesday, April 3, 2024 beginning at 7:00 p.m. in the City Hall Council Chamber, room 2400, second floor of City Hall, 301 King Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314 on the following applications:

BAR#2024-00006 OHAD
Request for signage at 105 N Washington Street: Suite 201
Applicant: Sarah Mason

BAR#2024-00078 OHAD
Request for alterations at 1405 E Abingdon Drive, Unit 6
Applicant: Christine Laba

The Board will receive a status update on the proposed updates to chapters of the Design Guidelines in the Parker-Gray Historic District.

Public comments will be received at the Public Hearing. The public may submit comments in advance to Molly Lambert at molly.lambert@alexandriava.gov or make public comments on the day of the Public Hearing.

For reasonable disability accommodation, contact Alicia.Chase@alexandriava.gov or 703.746.3810, Virginia Relay 711. If you prefer communication in another language, free interpretation and translation services are available to you. Please email LanguageAccess@alexandriava.gov or call 703.746.3960.

For further information, call the Department of Planning & Zoning at 703.746.4666 or visit alexandriava.gov/dockets.

If you use the Zoom Webinar application, please be sure you have updated the application to the latest version for the best results. If you are unable to access the Zoom Webinar, please use the Dial-in Number to access the Public Hearing. Public comment will be received at the hearing. The public may submit comments in advance to City Clerk at CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov or make public comments on the day of the hearing.

Individuals with disabilities who require assistance or special arrangements to participate in the City Council meeting may call the City Clerk and Clerk of Council's Office at 703-746-4550 (TTY/TDD 838-5056). We request that you provide a 48-hour notice so that the proper arrangements may be made. City meetings are closed-captioned for the hearing impaired.

City Council (Public Hearing Webinar)
Registration Link: https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_HNaL3WUtEn69Z9825n8aLg

Zoom Audio Conference:
Dial-in number: 301-715-8592
Webinar ID: 925 8951 5073
Webinar Passcode: 559945

If you are unable to access the Zoom Webinar, please call the City Clerk at 703-746-4550 or email CityClerk@alexandriava.gov.

Relay 711. If you prefer to communicate by phone, call the City Clerk at 703-746-3810, Virginia Relay 711.

For more information, visit alexandriava.gov or make public comments in advance to the City Clerk at CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov or call 703.746.3960.

Public hearing Webinar
Zoom Webinar by the following link:
Dial-in number: 301-715-8592
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