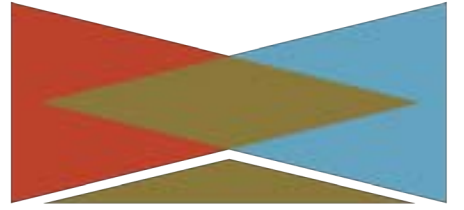


# THE RESTON LETTER



## Stubborn 'snowcrete' slows life across region



A frozen-solid Lake Thoreau sits silently, with Town Center and Reston Station behind it. Temperatures have rarely risen above freezing for the last three weeks. Deer by Soapstone Drive stick together. Photos by Benjamin Burgess

By Brian Crosson, guest writer

Winter Storm Fern dropped snow, ice, and frigid temperatures across the country between Jan. 23 and Jan. 27. Reston and its surroundings were hit with up to nine inches of snow and sleet, leading to widespread accumulations of unforgiving "snowcrete." The stubborn combination of snow and ice, further solidified by continuously brutal frigid temperatures, made the task of plowing roads and

sidewalks far more difficult than normal. Icy roadways were made even more treacherous as entire lanes were coated with unyielding blocks of ice before they could be cleared. Motorists struggled with narrowed roads well after the end of the storm. Residents were stuck in their neighborhoods as clearing crews recovered from their round-the-clock battle against unrelenting conditions. Trash and recycling collection were delayed as it was impossible for trucks to

make it into neighborhoods. All normal community activity was severely curtailed by travel and weather conditions. Fairfax County Public Schools cancelled all classes for the entire week of Jan. 26, as well as the following Monday. The balance of the week of Feb. 2 was disrupted by two-hour delays to the start of each school day in response to the unprecedented challenges associated with clearing parking lots, sidewalks, and bus stops.

## MLK Day of Service brings Reston Hospital staff and Herndon High student together to Fight Teen Hunger

Contributed by Food for Neighbors

Volunteers from Reston and Herndon turned the Martin Luther King Jr. National Day of Service on Jan. 19 into a day of action, volunteering with Food For Neighbors to help restock school food pantries serving local students.

Now in its ninth year, the Reston-based nonprofit works with area middle and high schools to operate in-house food pantries, relying on community volunteers and donations collected through its Red Bag Program. This year's MLK Day of Service drew support from across the community, including staff from Reston Hospital Center and a first-time volunteer from Herndon High School.

Despite cold winter temperatures, more than 800 volunteers participated across Northern Virginia, gathering, sorting and delivering food. The effort resulted in a record 31,186 pounds of food collected to support more than 10,000 students facing food insecurity in Fairfax, Loudoun and Arlington counties.

Reston Hospital Center contributed nearly 300 pounds of food. Sarah Murray of Reston Hospital organized doctors and staff from the ICU and trauma departments, finding a creative solution to busy schedules by making a food donation the "admission ticket" to the hospital's holiday gathering.

"Each bag of food matters," said Karen Joseph, founder and executive director of Food For Neighbors. "It represents



Reston resident Aiden Smith helps collect food on MLK Day of Service. Photo contributed by Food for Neighbors

one less student going hungry. Community partners like Reston Hospital help ensure school pantries are stocked for students who rely on them."

At a Food For Neighbors sorting site, Jack, a Herndon High School ninth-grader, volunteered for the first time. "It was good to help out in a new way in our own community," he said.

His mother, Katie, has previously volunteered as a Food For Neighbors driver, picking up donation bags from neighborhood homes. "I've seen how a small impact brings big results when all those donations are added together," she said. "It's inspiring to see how our community comes together to help students in need."

Scan to visit [foodforneighbors.org](http://foodforneighbors.org) and get involved

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### education



New afterschool AI program opening, South Lakes Marching Band's winter trip to Pearl Harbor, Middle school students read their writing on CBS, Steve Trout in the Making an Impact column, Joe's crossword

### kids



Find the differences, Catching ZZZs, Pancake and heart art, jokes, MacGyvering, Sage Greene's geocache mystery

### sports



Herndon and South Lakes girls wrestling programs finish their second years, new Riverbend Fútbol Club

### opinions

A call to write to public officials about a proposed VA tax bill, Dr. S. advises against 'snow plowing'

### lifestyle

Phantom Foodie reviews Reston's new Nash & Smashed, Inside Art, swimming in the winter, ideas for volunteer hours in the new Teen Feed

[info@therestonletter.com](mailto:info@therestonletter.com)

The Reston Letter, LLC

@therestonletter [therestonletter.com](http://therestonletter.com)

# THE BULLETIN

**Mission Statement:**

The Reston Letter seeks to inform the Reston community of local events, highlight local group and individual accomplishments, and, secondarily, to provide a platform for residents to weigh in on local topics relevant to the majority of readers.

## Fairfax County makes progress on Reston North Park Playground

By Katy Keffer, guest writer

Reston prides itself on its favorable environment for outdoor activities, from its extensive network of trails to its neighborhood parks and recreation areas. One location in particular—Reston North Park, located at 11760 Stevenage Road and affectionately known by area parents as the “Home Depot Playground”—is receiving a significant upgrade this year, with new equipment and enhanced safety features. The project is expected to be completed in the spring, just in time for children to return to outdoor play.

Renovation work began in late November, focusing on improving safety and accessibility throughout the playground and surrounding areas. Much of the park dates back to the 1980s and 1990s, and the original materials had reached the end of their lifecycle. Since construction began, the county has made steady progress, clearing outdated equipment, leveling the ground, and addressing site features such as stormwater management.

In an email response, Andy Grabel, public information officer for the Fairfax County Park Authority, said the outdated playground is being replaced with “mod-

ern, universal play equipment.” Several new structures have been installed, revealing sleek, colorful designs that expand the park’s play options. According to Grabel, the upgrades include “sensory-rich experiences and activities for multiple age groups.” Although the playground is currently closed, nearby trails remain open, allowing residents to regularly observe progress. As construction vehicles move gravel and prepare the space, a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere is taking shape.

Safety and accessibility were key priorities in planning the renovation. Pathways connecting the parking lot to the playground and adjacent baseball field are being improved to create more accessible routes. Grabel highlighted the park’s new “single-level design,” which eliminates steps between play areas and incorporates poured-in-place surfacing to support safe, seamless movement.

Before long, neighbors will again hear bubbling laughter, joyful squeals, and the crack of a bat meeting a baseball. The playground will reopen to children in late March or early April. Date of the county’s ribbon-cutting ceremony will be announced when the project nears completion.



The Reston North playground will look a lot different this spring. Most notably, the dangerous wood retaining wall that kids love to climb is gone. Photo by Katy Keffer

## New agreement reached on W&OD Trail vegetation maintenance

By Gene Powell, staff writer

A new agreement has been reached between NOVA Parks and Dominion Energy Virginia governing vegetation management and tree trimming along the Washington & Old Dominion (W&OD) Regional Park.

“The new agreement formalizes practices that support current reliability, safety, and environmental stewardship standards while strengthening coordination between the organizations, local governments, and trail users,” Dominion said in a Feb. 3 news release.

“This MOU (memorandum of understanding) reflects a shared commitment between NOVA Parks and Dominion Energy to protect both the health of our community and the natural resources that define this region,” said NOVA Parks Executive Director Justin Wilson. “...The MOU prioritizes thoughtful pruning to preserve the park’s character while also investing in long-term habitat restoration, including invasive species management, native plantings, and the introduction of pollinators. Together, we can help ensure the W&OD Park, and its 45-mile trail, remains



Powerlines stretch over a section of the W&OD Trail, winding through Reston. NOVA Parks and Dominion Energy’s agreement reflects a commitment to environmental stewardship while keeping the W&OD Trail safe for all. Photo by Benjamin Burgess

a vibrant and valued community resource for generations to come.”

Joe Woomer, Dominion Energy’s senior vice president of electric transmission, said in the release that “by working together, we are balancing the safety and reliability of the grid with the long-term stewardship of this cherished resource. That’s a win-win for our customers and communities.”

The agreement replaces a 25-year-old MOU between the energy company and NOVA Parks that had been discarded. Park and local government officials objected in November 2024 when Dominion began what they described as “clear cutting” under its transmission lines in the Dunn Loring area of the trail. Work was halted temporarily, and Dominion and NOVA Parks developed an interim plan that

allowed trimming and limited replanting—primarily between Dunn Loring and Vienna—to resume.

Under the new MOU, Dominion will provide 30 days’ advance notice to NOVA Parks, neighboring jurisdiction officials, and nearby residents before undertaking transmission projects or major maintenance work. Notices will be sent by mail and posted on signage along the trail, the company said.

The agreement promotes pruning of existing trees as the initial step, with tree removal undertaken only when necessary, according to the release. It also encourages the planting of low-growing native trees and pollinators, along with enhanced invasive species management, to support the park’s long-term ecological and aesthetic value.

The Washington & Old Dominion (W&OD) Railroad Regional Park features a paved trail running 45 miles between Shirlington and Purcellville, passing through Arlington, Falls Church, Vienna, Reston, Herndon, Sterling, Leesburg, and Purcellville. More than 2 million people use the trail each year.



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**RACE THROUGH THE HEART OF RESTON!!**




# THE BULLETIN

## Purple pants spark conversations—and open doors for job seekers

By Ellyn Wexler, staff writer

On any given Saturday morning at the Reston Farmers Market, regulars know to look for John E. Foster. He's easy to spot, welcoming visitors at the GreenFare Organic Café booth, greeting neighbors by name, and wearing his now-signature purple pants.

What many shoppers may not realize is that Foster, a Herndon resident with deep ties to Reston, has spent more than 15 years helping local residents navigate job loss, career transitions, and the emotional toll that often comes with both.

Since 2009, Foster has been a volunteer with Career Network Ministry (CNM), a free, community-based organization that supports job seekers throughout Northern Virginia, including many from Reston and Herndon who first learn about the group through neighbors, churches, or local word-of-mouth.

Foster's involvement began during a period that may feel familiar to many in the community. In 2009, he lost his job due to a departmental downsizing, an experience that forced him to stop, reassess, and reimagine what came next. "When you lose a job, it gives you the chance to relook at where you are," Foster said.

As a job seeker himself, Foster found CNM and began attending meetings while searching for new opportunities. Through relationships built there, he was introduced to a startup company and eventually found his way forward. When CNM later needed help teaching Linke-

d skills, he stepped in, not as an expert looking to lecture, but as someone who understood firsthand the uncertainty of starting over.

Today, Foster is part of a team that teaches LinkedIn classes to job seekers, many of whom are local residents navigating layoffs, career pivots, or reentry into the workforce. He has watched LinkedIn evolve into a critical tool for modern job searches. "If you're not on LinkedIn, you don't exist to recruiters," he said.

But the technology, Foster emphasized, is only part of the equation. What keeps people coming back to CNM, and what sets it apart, is its sense of community. "Career Network Ministry isn't just about jobs," he said. "It's about relationships."

Originally founded as a ministry of McLean Bible Church, CNM has grown and adapted over the years. It now partners with Holy Trinity Church in McLean, offering in-person meetings on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month, as well as a full schedule of online programming. That hybrid model has made it accessible to job seekers across Reston, Herndon, and surrounding neighborhoods.

The organization is entirely free and open to everyone, a core value Foster believes is essential, especially during times of economic uncertainty. "When people lose their jobs, many can't afford to pay for coaching or résumé help," he said. "We meet them where they are."

CNM offers multiple programs, including live workshops, online sessions,



John E. Foster—better known as the man with the purple pants at Reston Farmers Market—helps locals navigate job loss through Career Network Ministry. Photos contributed by John E. Foster.



and small job-search teams that provide accountability, encouragement, and peer support. For many participants, that emotional support is as critical as résumé reviews or interview prep. "So many people tie their self-worth to their job," Foster said. "When that's gone, they feel lost. CNM reminds them they're not alone, and that they're more than their job."

That spirit of connection carries into Foster's other local work. Since 2018, he has served as an ambassador for Green-

Continued on page 4

### Best time to sell?

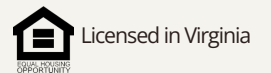
If you don't sell in the spring, should you wait?

**Homes sell all year round!** Don't let the national 'experts' tell you when to sell. I'll bring my local expertise to your situation and we can put a plan in place to get your home sold.



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### In Loving Memory

## Mary Ann Roman Corrigan

Longtime Reston resident Mary Ann (Roman) Corrigan died Jan. 3 after an acute stroke. Born in 1946 in Queens, N.Y., she was raised with the spirit of possibility in postwar America. She was in the first class at Fordham University that admitted female students, where she met the love of her life, Mike Corrigan. They enjoyed 56 wonderful years together.

Mary Ann earned a PhD in English from the University of Michigan. Memories of the Ann Arbor winters never left her, and once she had disposable income, she went to the Caribbean every January. She taught college English for four years in Germany while Mike was stationed there with the Army. Upon their return in 1974, they settled in Reston and she taught

at Georgetown University and Northern Virginia Community College. In the 1980s, she left teaching to develop educational software.

She and Mike and their children led an active life, with trips all over the U.S., Europe, and the Americas. She loved playing tennis, and did so as long as her knees allowed it. Mary Ann was an excellent but reluctant cook. As she said, "I cook because I like to eat."

In 2014, she found a publisher for "By Cook or by Crook," the first of nine Five Ingredient Mysteries written under the pen name Maya Corrigan. She wrapped up the series in 2023, but continued to write new material and support other writers and artists.

A beloved mother, wife, and friend, Mary Ann is survived by husband



Mike, sister Regina, children Nora and Paul, and grandsons Kai and Oscar. She is preceded in death by parents Helen and Walter, and brother Bill. A memorial service will be held at United Christian Parish, at 11 a.m. Feb. 21. No flowers, please, although in remembrance, you may wish to drink a cup of tea, a daily habit she enjoyed.

# YOUR VOTE MATTERS

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# THE BULLETIN

## Speaking with Impact—creating ‘great presenters’

By Gene Powell, staff writer

Speaking with Impact, opening a location in Reston, is more than a company that improves speaking skills – much more, said co-owners Denise Harrington and daughter Nia Harrington.

The company’s tag line identifies its goals, the pair said. “We take great people and turn them into great presenters,” Denise said. “We are hands-on and we guarantee transformation ... something you can apply today” Nia said.

Denise started working a with communications consulting firm in 1991 in the San Francisco Bay area. “Most of my clients at that time were ... executives from the top tier Silicon Valley companies,”

Speaking with Impact services include development of leadership speaking skills, effective change management, crisis communication training, and the effective showcasing of products and services. The range of communications training runs from skills for in-person remarks in small corporate groups to speaking at convention “main stage” events.

“What sets us apart and has allowed us to last more than 30 years, is

we do more than training and coaching ... we’re able to see the holistic version of people and provide them with their direct needs,” Nia said. “We’re not looking to create cookie cutters ... What we bring to the table is an ability to see the person and help them begin to utilize their skills,” Denise said.

Training can include body language, posture, eye contact and learning to use a “pause” while speaking. “If they have a shaky voice ... a good pause can help,” Nia said. The idea for the stand-alone company was prompted by Denise’s desire to have a family, and a move to Portland, Ore., where Denise became an independent contractor. Nia was born as initial clients came on board. Shortly after relocating, Denise said she gave a speech titled “Speaking with Impact” – which became the company’s name. Among her first clients was Nike, “which remains with me today.”

Speaking with Impact has grown to include clients in Texas, Detroit, and New York. “And now, a lot of our clients are growing in Reston, which is becoming the (regional) tech area,” Nia said. “We never completely focused on Washington DC ... but in 2020 we decided it would be nice not to have to travel so much,” having

relocated their home to the Middleburg area about 15 years ago. “And the good news is there are so many clients in the Reston area who have their home offices in Silicon Valley, and who are people we’re used to working with.”

The company held a Reston launch party in early February, in partnership with Carr Workplaces on Library Street at Town Center, to explain their work as well as how to use the Carr space. The open house featured a session on “practical strategies from communication experts for being more effective in the boardroom, followed by time to connect with others.”

Speaking with Impact also is offering a two-day, in-person course Mar. 25-26. “Bring a friend, bring five friends, bring your whole team,” Nia said. The program will cover “virtual platforms, hybrid platforms, and face-to-face interactions when presenting, talking to customers, conducting team meetings, and “All Hands” sessions.”

The Reston Letter readers, using the code Impact15, are offered a discount from the standard \$2,550 cost. To register, visit their website, speakingwithimpact.com, and click “Register Now.”



Mother-daughter duo Denise and Nia Harrington own their communication training business Speaking With Impact, launching services in Reston this month. Photo contributed by SWI

## Reston Association announces resignation of CEO Mac Cummins

Contributed by Reston Association

The Reston Association Board of Directors announced on Jan. 22 that it has accepted the resignation of Michael “Mac” Cummins as chief executive officer, effective immediately.

During his tenure, Reston Association reached significant organizational milestones and enhanced service delivery to its members. The board thanked

Cummins for his stewardship of the association’s resources and his commitment to Reston’s “Live, Work, Play” vision.

“We appreciate Mac’s contributions to Reston and his leadership of the staff,” said Board President Travis Johnson. “We wish him the very best in his future endeavors.”

Cummins said it had been a privilege to serve the members of Reston Association

and thanked the Board of Directors, staff, and Senior Leadership Team for their dedication and hard work in making Reston a fantastic place during his tenure. He said he looks forward to their continued success as he pursues new professional opportunities.

Peter Lusk, Reston Association’s chief operating officer, will serve as acting CEO during the interim.

## Reston Association to hold Seasonal Job Fair

Contributed by Reston Association

Reston Association is preparing for summer and inviting local job seekers to its Seasonal Job Fair from 10 a.m. to noon Saturday, Feb. 28, at RA headquarters, 12001 Sunrise Valley Drive.

The event will feature a wide range of temporary positions in aquatics, camps, maintenance, tennis and member services, offering an opportunity to land a rewarding seasonal job — or even begin a long-term career — with Reston Association.

RA’s seasonal roles are well suited for teens seeking their first job, college students returning home for the summer, retirees or adults looking for flexible, part-time hours, and anyone interested in working in a supportive, community-focused environment.

During the job fair, attendees will have the chance to meet one-on-one with RA staff to learn about available positions, speak with human resources representatives about onboarding, certifications and training, and gain insight into work schedules, responsibilities and

what a typical day on the job looks like. Job seekers can also network directly with hiring managers and apply on site for immediate consideration.

RA offers a fun, engaging work environment where employees help support Reston’s popular community amenities. Many positions are open to applicants ages 14 and older.

Advance sign-up is encouraged to help staff prepare. More information about seasonal employment opportunities is available at [reston.org/careers](http://reston.org/careers).

### Job seekers, cont’d from page 3

Fare Organic Café at the Reston Farmers Market, helping educate shoppers about plant-based nutrition and wellness. The purple pants that have become his calling card began as part of the uniform for a fathers’ cheerleading team with the Chantilly Youth Association, a detail that reflects his sense of humor, visibility, and community pride.

GreenFare’s mission, Foster said, mirrors the values that keep him involved with CNM. Through educational programs and a popular 21-Day Kickstart initiative, the café helps residents improve their health, a foundation Foster sees as inseparable from professional and personal resilience. “All of this is about building a better community,” he said.

After more than a decade of volunteering, Foster says it’s the people (neighbors helping neighbors) that keep him coming back. “Every one of us makes a difference,” he said. “Sometimes we see it. Sometimes we don’t.”

For Reston and Herndon residents facing a career transition, Foster offers a simple reminder: help is closer than you think. “Sometimes taking the first step is the hardest,” he said. “But we’re a click away.”

More information about Career Network Ministry, including meeting times and resources, is available at [www.careernetworkministry.com](http://www.careernetworkministry.com).

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# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Submit your event at [therestonletter.com/events](http://therestonletter.com/events)

<p><b>1-28</b> FEB</p> <p><b>Diva Central dress drive</b></p> <p>Drop off items at RCC Hunters Woods or RCC Lake Anne. Items must be in good condition. Donations benefit students in Reston and nearby communities</p>	<p><b>14</b> FEB</p> <p><b>Coeur d'amour</b></p> <p>4 p.m. An afternoon of romance and music RCC Lake Anne</p>	<p><b>14</b> FEB</p> <p><b>Sibling Love Storytime</b></p> <p>10:30 a.m. Join author Jen Fier Jasinski for the launch of her latest picture book. Scrawl Books</p>	<p><b>17</b> FEB</p> <p><b>School's Out Parkour Day Camp</b></p> <p>9 a.m.-4 p.m. MindShift Gym Ages 6-12 Learn the foundations of parkour \$100.00 to \$150.00, sign up online</p>
<p><b>18</b> FEB</p> <p><b>"Ain't No Back to a Merry-Go-Round"</b></p> <p>7:30 p.m. Screening &amp; Talk-Back with director Ilana Trachtman. The Leila Gordon Theatre RCC Hunters Woods</p>	<p><b>21</b> FEB</p> <p><b>Winter Birding at Lake Audubon</b></p> <p>8-10 a.m. Join bird guides on a winter bird walk to Lake Audubon Walker Nature Center</p>	<p><b>22</b> FEB</p> <p><b>"All The Great Books (abridged)"</b></p> <p>3 p.m. and 7 p.m. Comedy show by Reduced Shakespeare Company. The Leila Gordon Theatre RCC Hunters Woods. \$25-\$35</p>	<p><b>25</b> FEB</p> <p><b>Senior Movie Day Movie is Anniversary (Rated R)</b></p> <p>Doors open at 9 a.m. and movie starts at 10 a.m. LOOK Cinemas Reston Town Center</p>
<p><b>28</b> FEB</p> <p><b>Friends of The Reston Letter swim</b></p> <p>7:30-8:30 p.m. (free for subscribers) Goldfish Swim School Reston</p>	<p><b>6</b> MARCH</p> <p><b>Skate to Break the Stigma</b></p> <p>7:30-9:30 p.m. Ice skating in support of breaking the stigma surrounding mental health SkateQuest</p>	<p><b>8</b> MARCH</p> <p><b>Eggnormous Spring Festival</b></p> <p>10-11:30 a.m. RCC Hunters Woods Rain or Shine Infant - 8 Years Old</p>	<p><b>8</b> MARCH</p> <p><b>Private wine-tasting Friends of The Reston Letter</b></p> <p>noon-2 p.m. The Wine Cabinet</p>
<p><b>10</b> MARCH</p> <p><b>Taproom Theology</b></p> <p>6:30-8:30 p.m. Lake Anne Brewhouse</p>	<p><b>11</b> MARCH</p> <p><b>Youth Art Month Reception</b></p> <p>6-8 p.m. Art from South Lakes High School and Langston Hughes Middle School students RCC Hunters Woods</p>	<p><b>14</b> MARCH</p> <p><b>Diva Central Shopping Event</b></p> <p>1-3 p.m. 12-18 years old Glam up with Diva Central! Style dresses, shoes and accessories at RCC's unique boutique event. Open to middle and high school students RCC Lake Anne</p>	<p><b>14</b> MARCH</p> <p><b>"Pi Day: More than Three for the Age"</b></p> <p>4 p.m. Reston Community Orchestra concert RCC Hunters Woods</p>

## LIFETIME

### Why not somewhere else?

By Scott Parkin, staff writer

Family members and friends often ask me why we chose to retire in Reston. Why not move somewhere warmer or more affordable? My answer is not always the same. For one thing, at my age it's hard to leave what's familiar. My spouse and I have lived in Northern Virginia since 1981 and in Reston since 1986, and we:

- prefer a mild climate and the freedom of not worrying about forest fires, earthquakes, tsunamis, or volcanoes
- enjoy strong social and family connections here, along with opportunities to give back to the community
- like living in a highly walkable area with many transportation options, including a major airport just minutes away
- appreciate the region's rich cultural life

- continue to explore the area's state, county, and national parks
- are grateful for access to some of the best healthcare in the Mid-Atlantic region
- take advantage of the area's wide range of restaurants

Plus, Fairfax County, of which Reston is a part, is often listed as one of the best places to retire because of its high quality of life. When we first moved here, however, Reston was a sleepy bedroom community, and we liked that a lot. There was little traffic and far fewer people living and working here. The Town Center existed only on paper. Today, Reston is a thriving exurban metropolis, with traffic congestion, a very high cost of living, and seemingly untethered development. Because of the incredible growth he witnessed before he passed away, Reston founder Robert E. Simon reportedly once said, "This isn't exactly

what I had planned."

So on any given day, I might offer a different answer to the curious family member or friend. For instance, I've always wanted to go to New Zealand. I sometimes say—if they're still listening—that if we ever travel there, we might not come back. It's a small country surrounded by ocean, with snow-capped mountains, fjords, rainforests, penguins, and far too many sheep. There is little or no gun violence, no nuclear weapons, and a culturally progressive society. There's a lot to like, but the idea of moving across the world at our age is probably not the best idea. I guess we'll stay put.

Scott Parkin is a cofounder and board member of Reston for a Lifetime, a non-profit organization with a mission to educate and inform residents about aging in place. [www.RestonforaLifetime.org](http://www.RestonforaLifetime.org)

### Reston Art Gallery presents 'A Touch of Red,' an all-member show

Contributed by Reston Art Gallery

Reston Art Gallery's exhibit, "A Touch of Red," an all-member exhibition, runs through March 1 and features works that incorporate the color red across a range of media and styles. The exhibition examines how artists use red in different ways—from small accents to dominant visual elements—reflecting the color's varied associations with en-

ergy, warmth and intensity.

"A Touch of Red" highlights the range of work produced by artists affiliated with the gallery. Media include painting, sculpture, mobiles, fabric art and mixed media. Participating member artists are Pat Macintyre, Julia Tova Malakoff, Sandra Dovberg, Rosemarie Forsythe, Marthe McGrath, Jennifer Duncan and Cindy Grisdela, along with adjunct members Doug Fuller

and Wayne Schifflbein.

An opening reception is scheduled for Sunday, Feb. 15, from 2 to 4 p.m. The event is open to the public. The gallery is located at 11400 Washington Plaza W, Suite B. Regular hours are Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sundays from noon to 5 p.m., or by appointment. Additional information is available at [RestonArtGallery.com](http://RestonArtGallery.com) or on Instagram at @RAGSReston.



## Youth Soccer Programs!

**Travel Programs:**  
USL Y U10-U16

**Rec Spring Programs:**  
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# EDUCATION

## Langston Hughes Middle School students celebrate America on CBS News

By Kaydence Smith, staff writer

Langston Hughes Middle School [LHMS] students stepped into the spotlight after earning a chance to showcase their writing in a CBS News segment honoring America’s upcoming 250th anniversary.

The feature is part of “America A to Z,” a CBS series celebrating the nation through the voices of Americans across generations. LHMS was selected to represent the letter “B,” themed “America the Beautiful,” after CBS producers specifically sought out middle school students to share their perspectives.

According to Jackie Durr, LHMS Teacher of the Year and instructor of the selected class, the opportunity came together quickly. A CBS producer contacted district leadership, which then worked with school administrators to identify a class that could best represent the school and respond to the prompt.

With just one day’s notice before winter break, students took on the prompt

“America the Beautiful” with complete creative freedom. Durr encouraged them to “use your most sincere voice.” Some students chose poetry, others wrote essays, and a few addressed their pieces directly to America in letter form.

Each student offered a distinct perspective. One wrote that “America holds an unlimited amount of opportunities for all sorts of people,” while another reflected that “the dreams we create along the way, the freedom to be whoever we want, and the hopes we set for our future” are what make America beautiful.

Students could opt out of appearing on television, and several chose to do so. From those who volunteered, nine students were selected based on the sincerity of their work. In collaboration with the school division’s communications team, Durr helped ensure the final group reflected a wide range of voices and viewpoints.

The selected pieces included vivid descriptions of sunrises and beaches inspired by family trips, reflections on friendships and neighborhoods, and

heartfelt tributes to teachers and learning. Two students collaborated on a two-voice poem, alternating sections as they recited it together.

“Middle schoolers are still very hopeful,” Durr said. “They are great examples of hope for the country and the future.”

For the school community—and especially the students chosen—the experience is both a point of pride and a rare opportunity. “I focus a lot on validating that their ideas are worthy of putting pen to paper,” Durr said.

Adding another local connection, the Annandale High School band recorded a rendition of “America the Beautiful,” which played during the segment.

The feature, titled “Sixth-grade students share what they believe makes America beautiful,” aired Jan. 15 during the 8 a.m. hour on CBS News and is now available on the CBS News website.

LINK: <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/sixth-grade-students-share-what-they-believe-makes-america-beautiful/?intcid=CNM-00-10abd1h>



Reston students read their writing for the CBS news crew. Pictures by Steven Brasley, Fairfax County Public Schools

## South Lakes Marching Band brings its spirit to Pearl Harbor

By Mark Hazlin, SLHS marching band parent

Before dawn on Thursday, Dec. 4, members of the South Lakes High School “Spirit of Reston” Marching Band gathered at BWI Airport for a bleary-eyed journey to Hawaii to participate in the 2025 Pearl Harbor Memorial Parade.

Band Director Grayson Fore led a combined group of South Lakes and

Marshall High School band members on the educational trip.

Before parade day, students toured historic Pearl Harbor sites, including the USS Arizona Memorial, where they viewed a documentary film and heard from veterans and historians about the Dec. 7, 1941, attack that drew the U.S. into World War II. After visiting the USS Missouri, the combined band delivered its first tribute performance at the me-

morial site.

On Dec. 7, the 84th anniversary of the “Day That Will Live in Infamy,” the band rehearsed at Fort DeRussy, an active military installation, and joined a mass band performance of “God Bless America” ahead of the evening parade.

While units staged for the parade, the South Lakes-Marshall drumline became part of an impromptu “drum battle” with another school’s percussion section. What began as warmups quickly turned into a lively exchange of cadences that drew a crowd of spectators. Fairfax County School Board member Melanie Meren shared the moment on social media, giving viewers back home a glimpse of the students’ camaraderie and competitive spirit.

The band then took part in the Pearl Harbor Memorial Parade, marching approximately one mile through downtown Waikiki along Kalakaua Avenue and performing for thousands of onlookers. The evening concluded with dinner at Kapiolani Park, where the Marine Forces Pacific Band provided entertainment.

Students also experienced Oahu beyond the memorial events, visiting the North Shore, the Dole Plantation, and beaches including Waimea Bay, Sunset Beach, and the Banzai Pipeline, with lunch in Hale’iwa. At the Polynesian Cultural Center, they toured island vil-



South Lakes students march in Hawaii. Photo by Dan Greene

lage exhibits, participated in canoe activities, and viewed the IMAX film “Hawaiian Journey,” followed by the evening production “Ha: Breath of Life.”

The trip concluded with additional sightseeing, including a hike at Diamond Head, before the group returned home—bringing with them a shared experience that blended history, music, and representation of their Reston community on a national stage.



Seahawks band members at the USS Missouri in Honolulu. Photo contributed by Mark Hazlin



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# EDUCATION

## Local students shine at Virginia Thespian Festival

By Erin Gibbons, staff writer

The Virginia Thespian Festival (VTF) brings high school theater students together from across the state for a weekend focused on hands-on learning, performance and connection. Students quickly learn how to show up prepared, accept feedback, and support each other in a setting that values effort, kindness, and growth.

At the heart of the festival is the student experience. From morning until night, participants move between workshops, rehearsals, competitions, performances, callbacks, and mainstage shows. They spend the weekend doing what they love, creating a community where they feel supported and understood while learning alongside peers who share their passion.

Lily Ingraham, president of South Lakes High School Virginia Thespian Troupe 4709, said the festival helped her grow both artistically and personally.

“VTF is a wonderful experience, helping students expand their passion for theater and connect with like-minded peers,” Ingraham said. “I was able to grow artistically and build confidence through workshops led by professionals. By performing in the One Act Competition, I had an impactful theater experience and bonded with my peers. Through VTF, I found a theater community where art is celebrated.”

Laila Tomhave, president of the Herndon High School Virginia Thespians, performed in one of the festival’s mainstage productions. “This year at the Thespian Festival, I had the privilege of performing in one of the mainstages,” Tomhave said. “The mainstages are evening productions put on by thespians from all over the state. The production I was part of was a Musical Theatre International pilot production of ‘Come From Away,’ in which I played Diane with Northern Virginia Performing Arts. Through that experience, I got to meet and bond with

theater students from all over Northern Virginia and share this impactful story with friends and fellow thespians.”

For many students, the festival marks their first time performing outside their school, seeing high-level student productions or learning directly from professional actors, singers, dancers and designers. Workshops offer practical instruction in auditioning, movement, stage combat, scenic design, makeup, directing, and more.

Students return to their schools energized, bringing new skills and ideas that strengthen local theater programs and creative communities. Aspiring performers also gain exposure to next steps beyond high school through the college fair, auditions and scholarship opportunities offered throughout the festival.

In January, more than 60 students from South Lakes High School and 12 students from Herndon High School attended the Virginia Thespian Festival. South Lakes’ Virginia Thespian Troupe



Herndon High Theatre students participate at VTF. Photo contributed by HHS Theatre

4709 earned state runner-up honors in the one-act competition for “Metamorphoses” by Mary Zimmerman. Students also received 36 superior ratings, the highest possible, across musical theater, acting, playwriting, stage management, scenic design, lighting design, and makeup.

The festival demonstrated how meaningful, hands-on arts experiences build confidence, strengthen teamwork and help students discover what they are capable of, onstage, behind the scenes and wherever their creativity leads them.

## AI Project Academy brings human-first AI learning to Reston’s young students

By Ellyn Wexler, staff writer

When a fifth-grader with dyslexia—and a passion for basketball—posed a simple question, it sparked a new educational idea: “Why can’t kids use AI to solve real-world problems?”

For Uno Mutlu, a Reston parent and technology professional with a doctorate in engineering, that question revealed a growing gap in how schools approach artificial intelligence. AI was already part of children’s lives, he realized, but there was no safe, structured, age-appropriate way for them to learn how to use it thoughtfully. Schools were often avoiding AI altogether or limiting it to advanced tracks, while many students were already experimenting with AI tools on their own, frequently without guidance.

That realization led to the founding of AI Project Academy in May 2025. Based in Reston, the Academy was created by a team of instructors, technologists, and parents, including Mutlu’s wife, Burcu. Their goal was to introduce AI literacy early, in a way that is ethical, inclusive, and aligned with how children actually learn. As AI increasingly shapes how students research, communicate, and solve problems, Mutlu said families and educators have been left without a clear roadmap for helping young learners engage with it responsibly.

Parents see AI creeping into homework, search engines, and social platforms, while also hearing about its importance for future careers, yet many lack a trusted pathway to guide their children. Educators, meanwhile, are under pressure to bring AI into classrooms but often lack the time, training, or practical models to do so effectively. The result, Mutlu said, is that AI instruction is either pushed aside or reserved for a small group of advanced students, leaving many others behind.

AI Project Academy was designed to bridge that gap through a human-first, project-based approach that treats AI as a thinking partner rather than a shortcut. The Academy currently serves students in kindergarten through sixth grade, roughly ages 8 to 12—an age group Mutlu describes as critical, yet frequently overlooked in AI education. These are the years when students are forming learning



Burcu Mutlu and Uno Mutlu (above) started AI Project Academy last year. Their son Dalyan Mutlu (right), was the inspiration for their program. Photos contributed by Uno Mutlu.

habits, confidence, and identity, and the Academy plans to expand to older grade levels in the future.

Mutlu’s involvement in the Academy is both professional and personal. His background spans advanced technology, research, and real-world problem solving, but it was his role as a Reston dad that made the issue impossible to ignore. He watched children, including his own, encounter AI with curiosity but little guidance. From the start, he said, the team was clear they did not want to build a tool-first program, but rather an after-school learning experience that supports future-ready skills such as critical thinking, fact-checking, creativity, and confidence—especially for students who do not always thrive in traditional classrooms.

His own child, Dalyan, participates in the Academy, and that experience directly influenced its design. As a basketball player working to improve his three-point shot, Dalyan began using AI to communicate more effectively with his trainer, sharing ideas, analyzing feedback, and adjusting technique. What stood out most, Mutlu said, was not just the technical aspect, but Dalyan’s growing clarity of expression and confidence. AI became a way to organize thoughts and work through challenges, rather than a shortcut around learning.

That philosophy is central to the Academy’s approach. Students are taught to learn with AI, not just about it, and are

encouraged to question, fact-check, and challenge AI outputs. Technical skills are embedded within hands-on, real-world projects where students research, iterate, reflect, and present their ideas. Ethics, safety, privacy, and critical thinking are not treated as separate lessons, but as essential parts of the learning process from the beginning.

What distinguishes AI Project Academy from other technology programs, Mutlu said, is this holistic approach. Students complete end-to-end projects within a single guided environment, using AI as a support for deeper thinking rather than a replacement for it. The curriculum is intentionally inclusive, designed to support a wide range of learning styles, and places ethical reasoning and responsible use at the foundation of every project.

Since launching, the Academy has received a strong response from the Reston community. Through PTA outreach and local events, early waitlists have formed, and there has been interest from both public and private schools. The immediate focus is on strengthening partnerships within Reston and with local community organizations before expanding thoughtfully into other regions.

“Our goal,” Mutlu said, “is to make sure every child has a seat at the AI table—and to start doing that right here in Reston.”

For information, visit <https://www.aiprojectacademy.com>.



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# EDUCATION

**Making an Impact**

## Steve Trout: Reston Legend

By **Chuck Cascio, author and former South Lakes teacher**

When Steve Trout was in the fourth grade, dinner time was special. Of course he enjoyed the food, but the biggest treat was that he was permitted to leave the table each night at precisely 6:44 p.m. to watch iconic DC sportscaster George Michael's segment on channel NBC4. "I knew what I wanted to do from fourth grade on," Steve says. "That I later got to work for the George Michael Sports Machine was one of those magical full-circle moments."

Over the years Steve consciously chose ways to fulfill that fourth-grader's objective. As a freshman at South Lakes High School in 1990, he started announcing basketball games and continued to do so for all four years at the school. "Tuesdays and Fridays were my favorite days at South Lakes," he says, "because that's when the basketball teams played. Those nights at the mic were magic--they poured gas on the fire I needed to make my way in this world. I couldn't care less that announcing made me late to almost every Friday night gathering with friends."

However, he acknowledges that meeting with friends around Reston was also an integral part of his life. "Reston is a magical place, and it had a massive impact on who I am," Steve says. "It's where I learned to accept and to trust people...and to bus a table. It's where I illegally sledged down the big hills, skipped school to go to TCBY (This Can't Be Yogurt), and met South Lakes legends like Ms. Liz Knapp and Ms. Sharon Brophy. It's where I had my first kiss, my first speeding ticket, and my first beer."

A unique experience that impacted Steve's life choices occurred after a South Lakes basketball game he was announcing. "Washington football legend Doc Walker, then a reporter with NBC4, told me he thought I did a great job. He handed me his business card, and I carried that card in my wallet for probably 10 years. That compliment stayed with me—and fueled me—for years."

After graduating from South Lakes in 1994, Steve majored in journalism at James Madison University and became the sports editor of the student newspaper. His experience led to two summer internships at NBC4. After graduation, he spent a year with the George Michael Sports Machine before moving into on-air roles. "In 1999, I landed my first on-air job as the number-three sports anchor at WVIR-TV in Charlottesville, Va., eventually working my way up to the number-one nightly sports anchor. Naturally, I tried my best to be Central Virginia's George Michael...but got nowhere close."

The circle that began at Steve's dinner table in fourth grade closed in 2004. That year, he joined NFL Films as a Supervising Producer and Director—and has since won five Emmy Awards. "I can say without exaggerating that I get up in the morning and I still love what I do. Twenty-one seasons at NFL Films and not one day has felt like work."

Steve lives outside of Philadelphia with his wife, Ali, and their three children, but a recent project brought him briefly back to Reston with his production team to develop a segment of the show "Hard Knocks In Season" about the Washington Commanders. He and his crew stayed at the new JW Marriott at Reston Station on Wiehle Avenue, and the trip flooded Steve with Reston memories that he shared with his coworkers.



Steve Trout

"First of all, how crazy is it that there is a JW Marriott in Reston," Steve says. "The window of my hotel room literally looked out over the intersection of Wiehle and Sunset Hills. I used to roller skate up that street, rode my bike on the W&OD trail right there, and spent many a weekend night at what we called the 'McTaco Hut.'" Steve regaled his crew with stories about the area--how the hotel was on the site of his former orthodontist's office (torn down several years ago to make room for what is now Metro Plaza development); that his childhood home, where his mother still lives, was just four minutes away; that Paolo's Restaurant, where he worked for seven years, was then one of only three restaurants in the now bustling Town Center.

Steve says he took his coworkers to dinner at his mother's home, on another night brought her to dinner with them, and one evening, "my mom joined us for drinks!" And then he did something directly related to the circle that had started decades earlier: "I went to a South Lakes girls' basketball game to watch my friend's daughter play, and the young announcer there killed it! It was all such an amazing collision of my worlds."

## Crossword Corner

By **Reston crossword constructor, Joe O'Neill**

Joe O'Neill, a 40-year Reston resident, is a retired English professor and IT executive who recently began writing and submitting crossword puzzles to major U.S. daily newspapers.

Joe's puzzles have appeared in the New York Times and Wall Street Journal. This is O'Neill's 31<sup>st</sup> crossword puzzle creation, made specifically for The Reston Letter readers!

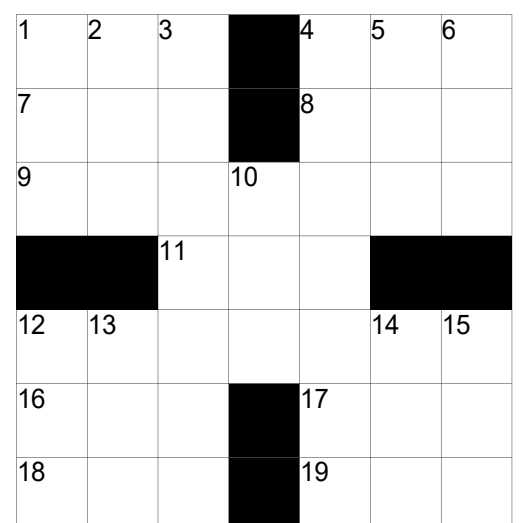
### Eff Around

#### ACROSS

1. Mo. that last leapt in '24
4. Common London weather
7. Fifth or Park in N.Y.C.
8. Fury, rage, etc.
9. Color of burgundy wine or rubies
11. Enemy
12. Links org. featuring the FedEx Cup
16. Tierra \_\_\_ Fuego
17. JFK, LAX, and LGA regulatory org.
18. Rock's \_\_\_ Fighters
19. Supplied eats

#### DOWN

1. It's all the rage until it's not
2. The first forbidden fruit taster
3. Bison-cow hybrid
4. Unleash angrily immediately, as a text
5. Mine output
6. HS diploma equivalent
10. Poker prize
12. Many a PC file
13. Cable's Nat \_\_\_ Wild
14. It's capital is Abu Dhabi: Abbr.
15. "Totally gnarly!"



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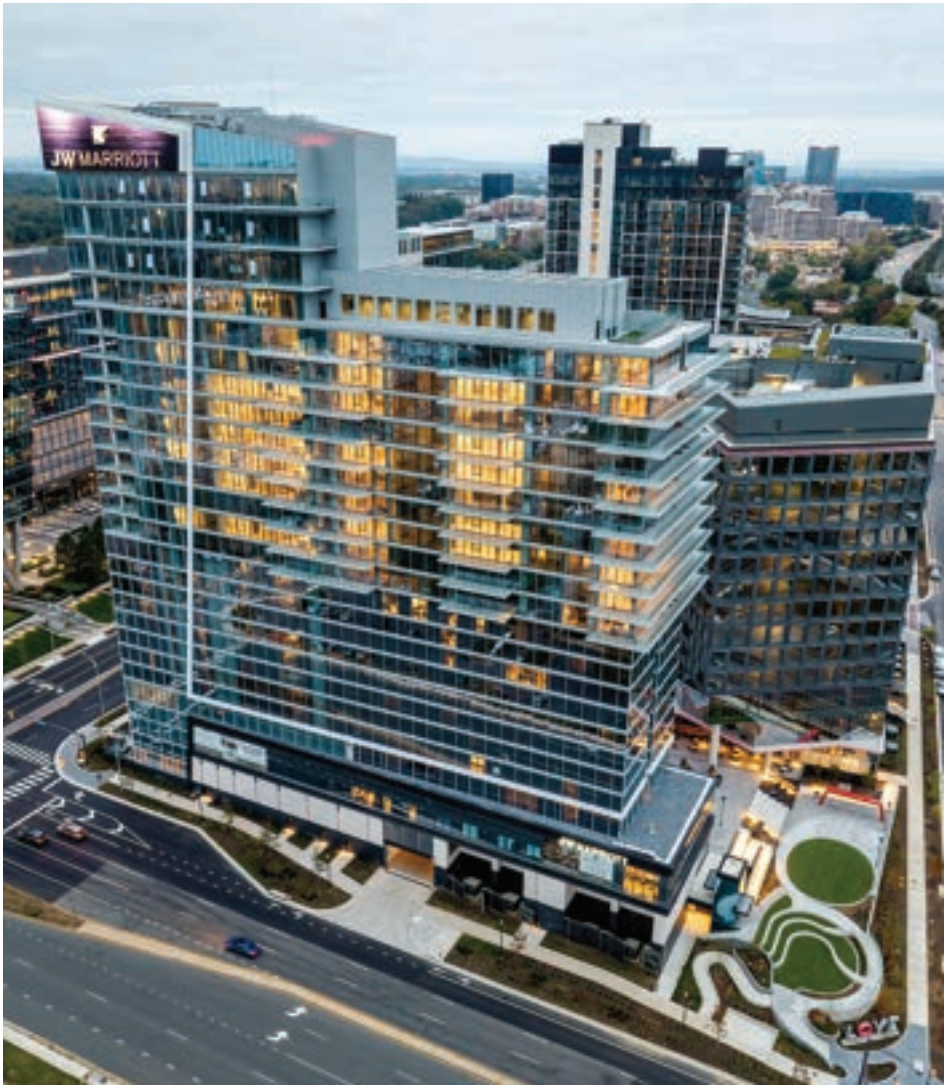
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SLHS Chorus hosted Broadway Night on Jan. 23 and 24. This year, 116 students from South Lakes pyramid schools participated. As one student shared, "I was nervous, but I loved being on that stage!" Photos by Jennifer Heffner, East 27 Creative

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# SPORTS

## New Riverbend Fútbol Club set to connect community and youth sports in Reston, NoVa

By Anthony Ozdemir, staff writer

This spring, Riverbend Fútbol Club launches with a clear mission: to keep soccer fun for kids while reconnecting the community with youth athletics. Led by experienced directors, the club emphasizes character and confidence, growth on and off the field, and meaningful community engagement—pushing back against trends that have reshaped the youth sports landscape.

That mission responds to challenges facing youth sports nationwide. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, the sharp rise in sports specialization has contributed to increased stress, anxiety, burnout, and a loss of community connection among young athletes, with nearly 70 percent of children dropping out of youth sports by age 13.

Club directors Melissa Yu (Riemer) and Ben Mortimer have seen the effects firsthand and are committed to creating a positive environment that allows kids to be kids again, at both the recreational and competitive levels.

Both bring extensive experience and shared values that place children and community at the center of the program. Executive Director Yu has more than two decades of leadership experience in youth soccer, along with a background in the sciences that informs her focus on players' physical well-being. Technical

Director Mortimer, a former standout player at George Washington University, brings years of Division I coaching experience and a player-first approach centered on development, confidence, and enjoyment.

Together, they provide leadership grounded in youth development and meaningful relationships. "Kids just really want to have a positive experience and belong," Yu says. "Feeling comfortable, happy, and included—even if you're not the best—is part of that. We want kids to enjoy sports and participate for as long as they choose."

That philosophy challenges the growing expectation that children commit to a single sport year-round, often at the expense of their well-being. Research shows such pressure can do more harm than good.

At Riverbend Fútbol Club, success is defined as more than wins and losses. "Youth sports should be about more than standings and scholarships," the club emphasizes.

Coaches are hired and trained to prioritize positive relationships and community connection, easing the pressure that has pushed many young athletes away from the games they once loved.

Community engagement is central to the club's vision. Yu credits Mortimer's technical leadership with fostering opportunities to bring families together



Photo contributed by Riverbend Fútbol Club

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beyond the field. Partnerships with Inova Health and the Make-A-Wish Foundation, along with community events featuring food trucks and a festival-style atmosphere, are designed to help children "understand service and value connection with their community."

The club also emphasizes sustainable development beyond soccer. "We are partnering with companies to serve

**Continued on page 11**

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# SPORTS

## Girls can wrestle, too

### Seahawks girls wrestling program finishes its second season

By Matt Reider, staff writer

Below the main gym at South Lakes High School is a large, low-ceilinged room covered wall-to-wall in wrestling mats. Across the hall is the football team office, with a small desk in the corner designated for the wrestling program. Although the varsity wrestling team is still technically listed as co-ed, a separate girls' varsity wrestling team was created in 2024 and is now in its second year. On many nights, the mat is shared, with boys' wrestling using one side of the room and the newly formed girls' team practicing on the other.

As head coach Victoria Smith led the girls through practice, Joy Suzuki, the girls' wrestling assistant coach, explained that the sport is still new at the high school level. Suzuki has been part of the South Lakes wrestling program for more than 10 years, beginning with the co-ed team, and said nine girls made the roster after tryouts. Girls are not necessarily cut during tryouts, she noted, but athletes who do not commit the time and effort required will eventually be removed from the team. While the boys' JV, boys' varsity, and girls' teams often compete on the same evenings, the smaller number of girls in certain weight classes means that sometimes only two or three wrestlers are able to compete. At tournaments, however, participation is broader, allowing athletes in all weight classes to wrestle.

Like many newly added sports, finding a head coach in the summer of 2024 was a priority. Victoria Smith, South Lakes' first girls' varsity wrestling coach, wrestled at Oklahoma City University before transferring to compete on the women's wrestling team at Lock Haven University in central Pennsylvania. After graduating, her boyfriend accepted a position with the coaching staff at George Mason University, prompting the couple to move to Northern Virginia. As Smith began attending local wrestling matches, she found herself missing the sport and decided to begin a job search of her own. At the same time, girls' wrestling had just been added as an official Fairfax County varsity sport, with 12 coaching openings posted.

Asked what she hopes to instill in her student-athletes, Smith answered without hesitation. "I'm trying to install resilience and strength," she said. "It's just you on the mat. I'm trying to build strong, independent women." As for the team's progress, she described it as a work in progress.

"We're a solid team," she said. "The girls who started last year are very strong, but the newer participants are still 'green' because the program is so new."

On the evening of Jan. 17, the Seahawks hosted Madison for two girls' matches. A third match had been scheduled, but the Madison competitor withdrew due to illness. In the first bout, Mariana Artibee fell behind 3-0 in the opening period and trailed 4-0 early in the second. She responded with three points in the second period and three more in the third to secure a 6-4 comeback victory. Anna Day Marco started strong, building an early three-point lead, but was pinned in the second period, giving her opponent the win.

The crowd, which included several male wrestlers who arrived early, gathered specifically to watch the girls' matches. Their presence reflected a clear respect for the skill and determination of their female teammates. Although the season is short and the roster small, Smith and her trailblazing wrestlers are laying the foundation for what promises to be a strong and lasting program.



South Lakes freshman Anna DeMarco with a breakdown on a Madison wrestler on Jan. 17. Photo by Isadora Guerreiro

### Hornet girls wrestling team unites in second season



Herndon freshman Valeria Torrico Vasquez takes on a South Lakes wrestler on Dec. 10. Photo by Karl Majer

By McAllister-Pearce-Biney, student writer

Across town in Herndon, the girls wrestling program is also wrapping up its second season. While the girls and boys teams compete separately, they train and practice together in their low-ceilinged, mat-lined wrestling room.

Senior Eja Gatewood reflected on the season from a team-first perspective, noting that while the

team's record showed steady improvement, the most meaningful progress came through a growing sense of unity.

"Wrestling teaches discipline in a way few sports can," Gatewood said. Through demanding weight cuts, grueling training sessions and the challenge of working through injuries, the team learned to rely on one another.

Senior Sharon Alcantara-Ramirez echoed that sen-

timent. "Showing up every day, pushing through exhaustion and committing even when things get difficult builds a different level of mental focus," she said.

Alcantara-Ramirez, Sabrina Cardwell, Flor Diaz Ventura, Gatewood, and Valeria Torrico Vasquez will represent Herndon High School at the Liberty District tournament, which will be hosted by Herndon on Feb. 14.

#### Riverbend Fútbol Club, cont'd from page 10

as mentors for kids exploring future pathways," Yu says. These partnerships connect young athletes with resources, role models, and opportunities while strengthening the region's social fabric.

Built on its core values—R.I.S.E. (Respect, Integrity, Strength, and Excellence)—Riverbend Fútbol Club offers Northern Virginia a youth soccer organization that values every player and family, supports healthy competition, and keeps the game fun while making soccer a meaningful part of community life.

For families, the club presents a refreshing alternative. At a time when youth athletics has left many children behind, Riverbend Fútbol Club aims to create space for kids to enjoy the game, be themselves, and build lasting connections.

Registration for recreational programs and tryouts for the summer league are now open. Tryouts for the club's competitive program will begin in March.

For more information or to register, visit [rb-fc.com](http://rb-fc.com).



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# KIDS

## Solve problems by MacGyvering

By Bob Welland, Kids Section editor

MacGyver was the star of an action TV show in the 1980s. He used STEM to save the day, like defusing a bomb with a paperclip or fixing a getaway car with an egg. Long after the show ended, the word "MacGyver" means to improvise a brilliant solution. Here's some real world MacGyvering that you can do:

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Want to watch your phone hands-free but don't have a stand? Simply cut a paper cup at an angle, leaving a lip at the bottom to prop up your device. *No paper cup?* Use a 15 oz plastic yogurt/cream container. *Larger tablet?* Use a 32 oz tub. *Big screen TV?* Use an oil drum or wine barrel. Just kidding!



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### Scrape by without a Scraper

Your parents will drive you to school on a cold day. But there's frost on the car windows and they can't find an ice scraper! Oh no! Just tell them to use a plastic card from their wallet. The card's edge can remove thin ice. There's a chance it could break so use an old loyalty or gift card (not an important ID or credit card).



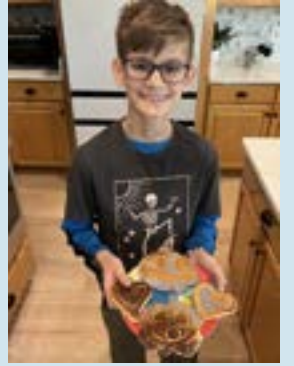
## Find 8 Differences: Sledding on Mount Reston



## Little Hands, Big Pancake Art

By Alexis Estep, mom, chef, Restonian

February is National Pancake Month so we thought it would be fun to give pancake art a whirl. It's where you add some of your pancake batter into a squeeze bottle or piping bag and draw shapes, letters or designs on the hot pan a minute before ladling more batter on top. It's fun, messy and creative; a perfect escape from the cold and dreary weather of February. We made batter from scratch and used a store bought mix of ube flavored for some contrast. So grab someone you love and let your imagination run wild!



Lars thinks his pancakes taste better with smiley faces!

### Ingredients:

- 3 eggs
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 1 1/2 cups flour (I use einkorn flour)
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 2/3 cup buttermilk
- 3 tablespoons butter, melted

### Directions:

1. Separate eggs; beat egg yolks with vanilla. Sift dry ingredients; add alternately with buttermilk to the beaten egg yolks. Add melted butter. Whisk the egg whites for about a minute and fold into the batter. Pour some into a squeeze bottle or piping bag.
2. On a hot griddle (400 degrees), or pan over medium heat, draw designs, shapes or letters, then after 1 min, top with more batter. When bubbles rise in the pancakes, about 3 min, then flip and cook for another 2 min or until golden brown. Serve immediately.

**EMAIL US YOUR PANCAKE ART**  
[info@therestonletter.com](mailto:info@therestonletter.com)

## RESTON AMUSEUM



Robert E. Simon designed the town of Reston

**Why did he get a good night's sleep before announcing the town name?**  
 He wanted to Rest-on it.

**How did he plan so many tennis facilities without hurting anyone's feelings?**  
 Court-iously

**Why did he design so many trails?**  
 He didn't want Reston to be path-etic.

**He typed his plan on a keyboard where the biggest key was lime colored. Why?**  
 Because he wanted lots of green spaces.



# KIDS

## Sage Greene and the Mystery of the Buggy Geocache

Mystery Fiction by Arthur Semicolon Doyle

Sage and big brother, Dan, hike through Lake Fairfax Park. Off the trail, they see a girl walking in circles among the trees. She stares at her phone, not looking ahead, until she collides with a tree. Bonk!

Sage and Dan run over to her. "Are you okay?" asks Sage. The girl smiles. "I'm fine. Typical risk for a Geocacher!"

"Geocacher?" asks Dan. Sage explains, "People hide boxes called geocaches anywhere in the world and post the longitude and latitude on a website. Hunters use GPS to try to find them." "Like me!" says the girl. "I'm Heidi. There's a geocache nearby that hasn't been found in 15 years. Want to help?"

"Sure," says Dan. "How do you know when it was last found?" Heidi explains, "You always record the date of your find on the website and on a paper log in the box. The website says this one is called Bug Box, last found in 2011, and it has insect-themed knick-knacks inside."

Heidi's GPS app is only accurate to a few yards, so they all inspect a small area of the forest. Sage kicks away leaves from a tree trunk, uncovering a small hollow. She shines her phone flashlight and sees a plastic box. "Found it!"

Heidi unlatches the lid. She lays a bandana



down and dumps the contents on it: a rolled-up paper, rubber bands, a playing card and three real insects. "Yuck!" yells Dan, "Bugs got into the box." "No," says Heidi, "It was air-tight. Someone put them in. I said it was insect-themed." Dan sneers at the three bugs: a stink-bug, a red fly with white spotted wings, and a shiny blue beetle.

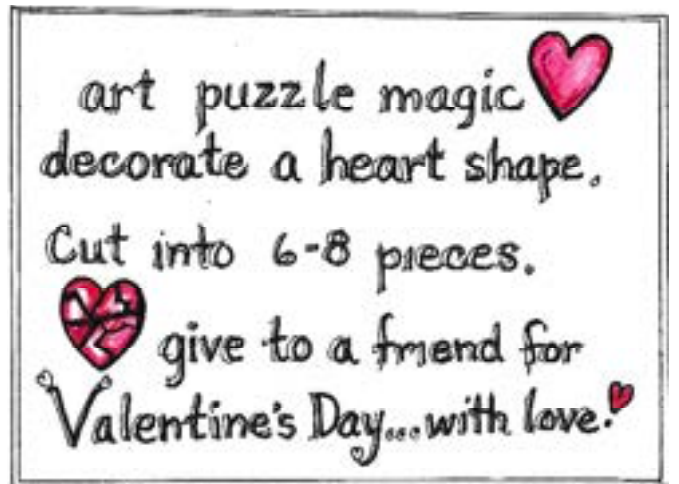
Heidi inspects the other objects. "The paper log's last entry was from 2011. Here's a Magic the Gathering card for a wasp monster, copyright 2007. And a bunch of weird rubber bands in the shapes of spiders and butterflies."

"Awesome!" squeals Dan. "Silly Bandz! Really cool collectors items back in 2010!" The girls smirk at him. "Ahem... I mean, some people liked them... not me." Changing the subject, he says, "Heidi, you're the first to

find this in 15 years. Congratulations."

Sage sighs. "I'm sorry but that's not true. This box was opened recently, probably in the past year."

### How does Sage know?



### Solutions

#### Sage Green Mystery:

Sage picks up the red bug with white spotted wings. "This is a spotted lanternfly, native to Asia. They started showing up in the US in 2014 and Reston in the past year or so. Someone put it in the box but didn't update the log."

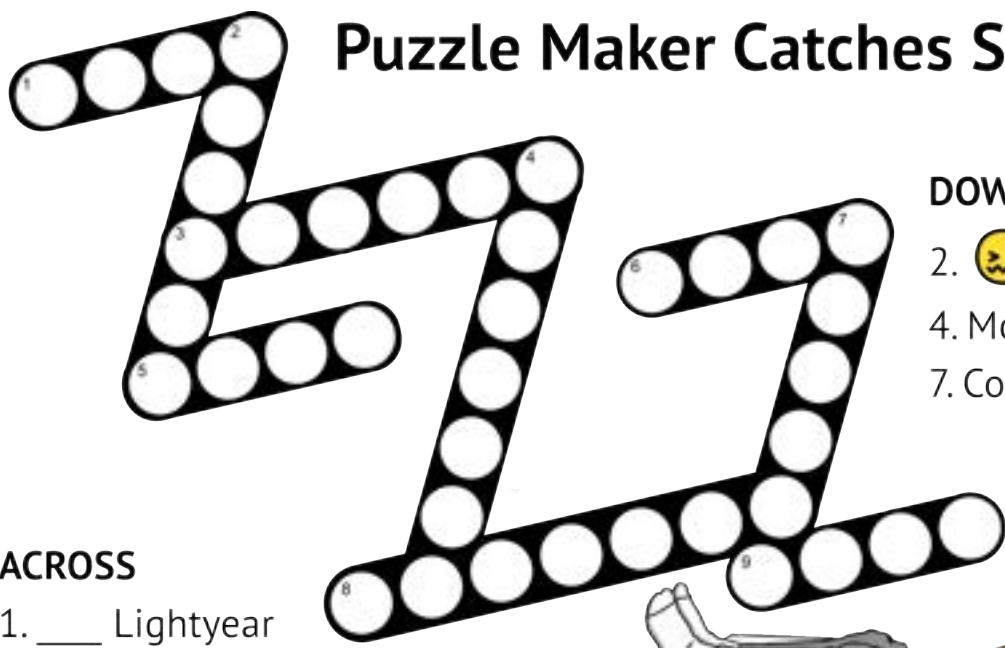
Heidi pulls out a pencil. "That's okay. I'll write 'Spotted by a lanternfly sometime in 2025' in the log." She packs up the box, adds a few plastic toy spiders that she brought, and tucks it in the tree hollow.

Heidi, Dan and Sage hike away, each with a Silly Bandz on their wrist.

**Find Differences:** Left to Right: 1) Fluffier clouds, 2) Missing snowboarder, 3) Sledder in air, 4) Snow on posts, 5) Pom-pom in back, 6) Dog closer to man, 7) Dinosaur, 8) Banana

**ZZZ Crossword:** 1) Buzz, 2) Zigzag, 3) Ziploc, 4) Crazier, 5) Gaze, 6) Quiz, 7) Zipper, 8) Ritz

### Puzzle Maker Catches Some ZZZs



#### ACROSS

1. \_\_\_ Lightyear
3. Resealable plastic bag
5. Long look
6. Surprise test
8. The Magic School Bus teacher
9. Round cracker brand

#### DOWN

2. 😞 mouth shape
4. More wacky
7. Coat closer



# OPINIONS

We want to hear from our readers! What local topics do you care about? Please pitch your opinion articles or article ideas to [ezreston@gmail.com](mailto:ezreston@gmail.com)

Ask Doctor S.

## Please stop plowing the snow

As parents, we are responsible for raising children who are prepared to become independent, self-sufficient adults. Barring intellectual, developmental, or social-emotional challenges that may require a longer period of support, we have roughly 18 years to do so. There are, of course, many paths to adulthood—college, trade school, a gap year, or the military, among them. While how young adults develop their academic and professional identities certainly matters, I am far more concerned with the ways parents undermine their children's ability to become emotionally independent adults.

Parents often get in their children's way from a very young age, frequently without realizing it. In many cases, this happens because they have internalized their own parents' missteps and unconsciously repeat them.

Snowplow parenting—also known as lawnmower or bulldozer parenting—occurs when parents, like a snowplow clearing roads, remove all obstacles from their children's lives so they never experience disappointment, frustration, discomfort, or failure. In doing so, parents deprive their children of opportunities to take ownership of themselves and to develop critical problem-solving and coping skills. These children often grow into adults who struggle to advocate for themselves, show vulnerability, tolerate difficult emotions, or choose healthy relationships. As a result, they may be at greater risk for issues ranging from addiction and self-harm to

profound loneliness.

Many mental health providers, educators, authors, podcasters, and others speak about the mental health crisis among today's youth. Parents who have snowplowed every academic, social (including athletic and artistic), and emotional challenge their children encounter may believe they are helping. In reality, they are handicapping them.

Consider this scenario: a 10-year-old boy does not make the travel baseball team. He feels sad and cries after hearing the news. Instead of asking how he feels, listening with empathy, and allowing him the time and space to process his disappointment, a snowplow parent may contact the coach, berate him for rejecting their son, demand an explanation, and badmouth the coach, the league, or both—to friends, family, and even online. In the first scenario, the child learns that it is safe to express his emotions and that sadness and disappointment are part of life. In the second, he learns none of that; instead, he learns to deflect responsibility and blame others. Unfortunately, I hear far too often about parents who swoop in and attack teachers, administrators, coaches, music and theatre directors, and countless others who oversee children's activities—many of whom are volunteers.

Parents who cannot tolerate their children's discomfort often have unresolved issues of their own. These may include growing up with parents who



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were emotionally or physically absent, overly harsh or critical, controlling, or abusive. As parents, we are our children's primary role models and their first relationships—the ones that set the stage for all others. It is critically important that we heal ourselves (which does not mean "fixing" ourselves, as no human is ever truly "fixed"). Healing means doing the work required to become self-aware, to accept responsibility, and to remain open to growth. Otherwise, we risk passing our unmet needs and unresolved pain on to our children. Our children are their own people, not reflections of their parents' pasts.

Stay warm and safe in the actual snow!

Psych'd to see you next month! -Dr. S.

*Dr. Hayley B. Sherwood is a longtime Clinical Psychologist in Reston/Herndon. To learn more, please visit her website at [www.oakhillpsychological.com](http://www.oakhillpsychological.com).*

*Please visit the About Us section on our website to learn more about our team of therapists!*

## When 'services' mean essentials: A tax proposal could hit Reston hard

By Susan Kousek, Reston resident

A proposed Virginia bill could have significant implications for Reston residents, particularly those already feeling the squeeze of rising costs. House Bill 978 would expand the state's sales and use tax to include a wide range of services—many of them routine or essential parts of daily life in our community.

The proposal raises questions locally. Why now, especially after Virginia closed the last fiscal year with a sizable budget surplus? And why target services that many families, seniors, and small businesses rely on—not luxuries, but necessities?

If HB 978 passes, Reston residents would pay sales and use tax on the following services:

- **Admissions**, including movie tickets and events
- **Recreation, fitness, and sports facilities**, from gyms to youth programs
- **Non-medical personal services or counseling**, such as in-home support for seniors, people with disabilities, or individuals recovering from illness. These services can include help with bathing, dressing, eating, medication reminders, transportation, and other daily needs
- **Dry cleaning and laundry services**
- **Companion animal care**, including veterinary wellness exams, grooming, training, and other services that support pets' physical and emo-

tional well-being

- **Residential home repair**, maintenance, landscaping, or cleaning services when paid directly by homeowners
- **Vehicle or engine repair**
- **Repairs or alterations to tangible personal property**, such as furniture, appliances, or jewelry
- **Storage of tangible personal property**, including long-term storage units
- **Delivery and shipping services**, with reports elsewhere suggesting a per-delivery charge
- **Travel, event, and aesthetic planning services**, such as wedding or event planners

The bill also proposes new taxes on digital services, defined as software application services, computer-related services, website hosting and design, data storage, and digital subscription services. According to the bill, these taxes would apply when the purchaser is a business, although services otherwise exempt under existing law would remain exempt.

In addition, digital personal property—defined as digital products delivered electronically that a purchaser owns or can continually access without an ongoing subscription fee—would also be taxed. For Reston's many small business owners and self-employed professionals, the bill carries added responsibilities. Anyone offering these services

would be required to register for a Virginia sales tax number, collect the tax from customers, and remit it to the Virginia Department of Taxation on a monthly or quarterly basis.

### Call to Action

HB 978 was referred to the Virginia House Finance Committee on Jan. 13. Residents who oppose the bill are encouraged to contact their state representatives promptly.

House Finance Committee Chair Delegate Vivian Watts, who introduced the bill, can be reached at [delvwatts@house.virginia.gov](mailto:delvwatts@house.virginia.gov).

Residents can find their own state representatives by entering their address at:

<https://whosmy.virginiageneralassembly.gov/>

For Reston residents, current representatives include:

**Delegate Karen Keys-Gamarra,**  
**District 7 (House Finance Committee)**

804-698-1007 |

[DelKKeys-Gamarra@house.virginia.gov](mailto:DelKKeys-Gamarra@house.virginia.gov)

**Sen. Jennifer B. Boysko, District 38**

Capitol: 804-698-7538

District: 703-437-0086

[SenatorBoysko@senate.virginia.gov](mailto:SenatorBoysko@senate.virginia.gov)

A full list of House Finance Committee members is available at:

<https://www.vpap.org/general-assembly/standing-committees/house-finance/>

# LIFESTYLE

## Inside Art

By Louise Seirmarco-Yale,  
Reston Artist



What is it about snow? Why are we so comforted when the earth is blanketed in snow?

Recently we had a real snow event, not just a few flurries. We love a fluffy, light snowfall too, of course, as those first flurries on our face are exciting, igniting our childlike wonder and curiosity. We always notice how we feel when it snows. It stirs our emotions, just like experiencing an art event.

It is different, though, when snow accumulates. It begins to blur the edges of everything, softening the shapes while defining new ones. Snow simplifies form. The world changes, whether you watch it happen or wake up to a new white world. It is compelling. We wonder, too, “how much snow will fall?” We cannot wait to see the answer.

Our latest snowfall did not disappoint. Some people got the snow day they wanted, a welcome relief from the daily grind. Since childhood, most of us want the chance to play hooky, with a legitimate excuse. That aside, there are other reasons to love the snow. The look of it is fascinating to our senses. It is a visual treat. Like all art. Consider what snow does to the light.

Snow is not “just white,” but rather, it amplifies light. Snow reflects the sky’s color and raises luminance. Snow brightens the environment significantly. More light often correlates with psychological uplift, especially in winter when daylight is scarce. It also quiets sound, making the notion of “blanketing the earth” a welcome respite for our ears.

The early morning sun surprises us when it becomes a golden rectangle on the neighbor’s yard instead of staying only in the sky. In a snowscape, we experience a complete sensory and perceptual reset: more light, fewer details, new colors, quiet air, altered horizons. Familiar terrain becomes temporarily otherworldly. The core of snow’s beauty lies in that transformation, both visual and psychological. Snow triggers the category of the sublime. It provides vastness, purity, and transformation, which are common traits in Romantic landscape art.

Again, what is it about snow? Why are we so comforted when the earth is blanketed in snow? Like our emotional response to art, it just feels good.

Despite snow’s inconvenience, and the effort required to accommodate it, we are rewarded by its inherent beauty. Just like art.

Art provides a mental holiday, like a snowfall. Making room for art—giving ourselves permission to find it—is simply gratifying. We can make art happen anytime we want, unlike the magical snow art that Mother Nature alone can provide.

Take a moment today to reset. Remember the visual and psychological pleasure of a snowfall, and give yourself more exposure to the arts. Seeking beauty is fun—just like snow.

Louise Seirmarco-Yale is a Reston artist, speaker, teacher and author of “Art.

You Be The Judge. Reawaken Your Instincts and Enjoy Art On Your Own Terms.” It is available on Amazon or for free download at [people-needthis.com](mailto:people-needthis.com). Email her at [hello@people-needthis.com](mailto:hello@people-needthis.com).

## Smashing it

By Phantom Foodie

I was cooking up a storm during the recent snow and ice, but after all that digging out, it was time to dig into something new. We have a full slate of reviews prepared for 2026, and first up this month is Nash & Smashed, a halal eatery in the Home Depot shopping center featuring Nashville-style chicken and smash burgers.

The space embraces a modern fast-casual aesthetic—clean, orderly, and welcoming—with a friendly staff and a touch-screen ordering kiosk. I ordered takeout, and my meal was ready on time and neatly packaged for pickup.

I sampled a variety of menu items, partly out of curiosity and partly to refuel after all that shoveling—and I happily shoveled more than a little food into my face.

Both the classic and mushroom smash burgers delivered the sought-after textural contrast: a crusty exterior with a juicy interior that no thick patty can match. Cheddar melted into every crevice, while the signature smash sauce added tangy sweetness without overwhelming the beef. Paired with a soft brioche bun, the crunch made for a satisfying meal. At around \$10, the burger is fairly priced for the quality. (Note: the brioche bun can be substituted with a lettuce wrap.)

The Golden Crunch Chicken Sandwich was equally impressive—crispy on the outside and juicy inside. A meatless pea-protein burger is also available, though it feels more obligatory than inspired.

Chicken tenders, bites, wings, and



Smash burgers are the speciality at Nash & Smashed. Photo by Phantom Foodie

thighs—oh my. The chicken is consistently crispy yet tender, complemented by an array of sauces ranging from creamy to tangy, with heat levels from classic to hot. The honey sriracha struck a perfect balance of sweet heat for my palate.

Kids’ meals are available with options like chicken or cheeseburgers, paired with various side combinations.

In an era of fast-casual dining dominated by overwrought menus and endless customization, this rapidly expanding chain offers a refreshing balance of quality, price, and convenience. Properly smashed. Properly delicious.

So if winter weather has you feeling blue, warm up with some Nashville hot chicken. Or, if you’re craving Southern comfort food while cheering on Team USA in Milan Cortina, grab a bucket of

fried chicken, cornbread, and mac and cheese. Just don’t forget the napkins.

**Nash & Smashed**

**1675 Reston Parkway in the Home Depot Shopping Center**

**703-988-4818**

**10am - 10pm (midnight on Friday and Saturday)**

*The Reston Letter and its staff do not receive solicitation, compensation, or special endorsement from any restaurant or culinary establishment. Our reviewer dines unannounced to make the experience genuine. Our mission is to provide our readers with an accurate representation of our reviewer’s experience so they may make their own informed decisions. Taste, service, and culinary preferences vary.*

## A winter escape: Keeping kids active in Reston’s indoor pools

By Moses Gregorio, General Manager,  
Goldfish Swim School Reston

Reston was designed around the idea that nature and community should be just outside our front doors. Whether it’s a morning jog around Lake Anne or a weekend stroll through the Town Center, neighbors here are known for staying active, no matter the season. But as the gray Virginia winter stretches into February, even the most energetic families can start feeling cabin fever.

While outdoor pools won’t open for months, some families find ways to keep moving indoors. Swimming in a heated pool is a favorite option for many. It helps children stay active when playgrounds are too cold and provides a sensory reset that can lift moods during the darker months. Keeping up with swim practice year-round also helps children maintain the skills they built over the summer—like any muscle, swimming abilities need consistent work.

Indoor swim facilities in Reston offer environments that make winter swimming easy for parents and kids alike, with warm changing areas and practical features like hair dryers to avoid the chill after lessons.

Beyond exercise, some of these facilities have become local hubs where teens and community groups gain experience and connect with others. Students from area high schools often work there, and programs occasionally open their doors to groups testing new ideas, from robotics teams to educational activities. These spaces reflect Reston’s long-standing focus on active living, learning, and community connection.

Even in the depths of winter, families can find ways to stay active and keep kids ready for summer swimming—all without leaving town.

For more information, visit [goldfishswimschool.com/reston](http://goldfishswimschool.com/reston).



Goldfish Swim School is one of Reston’s indoor swim facilities. Photo by Moses Gregorio

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# LIFESTYLE

## TRL Teen Feed

### Local volunteer opportunities help students earn community service hours

By Meg Marsh, Reston neighbor

Many students throughout Reston and Herndon are required to complete community service hours as part of graduation requirements, honor society participation, or involvement in clubs and extracurricular activities. As the Fairfax County school year reaches its midpoint, now is a good time for students and families to review these requirements, make a plan, and—ideally—find meaningful ways to enjoy making an impact in the community.

Finding service opportunities for students younger than 18 can sometimes feel challenging, so the options below have been vetted and are appropriate for middle and high school students.

The nonprofit organization **Cornerstones** (<https://www.cornerstonesva.org/volunteerops>) provides housing, food, financial assistance, child care and youth services, family and community strengthening programs, and community resource centers. Its website offers a variety of off-site volunteer opportunities that count toward service hours and are especially well suited for students younger than 16. These opportunities include:

- Making snack packs
- Preparing bagged meals
- Catering for the Embry Rucker Community Shelter

- Building kits (hygiene, seasonal, or welcome-home kits)
- Hosting donation drives

**The Optimist Club of Herndon**, which supports youth sports programs, offers an adaptive basketball league called Basketball Buddies. Students, ages 12 and older, may volunteer as “buddies” on Saturday mornings after registering through the club’s website. (<https://www.herndonoptimist.org/basketball/basketball-buddyball-program-current-season-information>)

**Great Falls Reston Soccer** provides a similar program, TOPSoccer, for children with disabilities. Students can volunteer to assist with practices and earn service hours by signing up through the GFRSC website. (<https://www.gfrsoccercub.org/community>)

The Reston Association also offers opportunities through its **Volunteer Reston** program. By emailing Ha Brock at [ha@reston.org](mailto:ha@reston.org), students can learn about upcoming volunteer activities and how to register properly. (<https://www.reston.org/199/Volunteer-Reston>)

In some cases, high school students may earn service hours by volunteering at their school’s sports concession stands, depending on individual school policies and booster programs.

While many clubs and honor societies require community service hours,



UNICEF Unite SLHS members raised money for hungry children on Jan. 24. Photo contributed by the Schobert Family

they also often provide built-in opportunities to earn them. This approach removes much of the guesswork and allows students to volunteer in areas that align with their interests or skill sets, such as Model UN, UNICEF, English Honor Society, FBLA, DECA, Dance Team, Breast Cancer Awareness Club, and many others.

In a world where most things can be found with a quick online search, earning service hours often requires

a bit more initiative. Asking a teacher, coach, counselor, or other trusted adult for ideas or opportunities can open many doors. Although balancing service hours with academics, extracurriculars, and part-time jobs can be challenging, the experience gained through volunteering often shapes future interests in meaningful ways. As Mahatma Gandhi once said, “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”

### Reston Community Center announces new leadership in arts education

By Contributed by Reston Community Center

Reston Community Center has hired Rebecca Campana as its new Arts Education Director. She began her role on Jan. 14, 2026, following the retirement of Cheri Danaher, who dedicated 35 years of service to RCC.

Campana brings more than 20 years of experience in arts education and creative program leadership. Most recently, Campana served as Creative Learning Programs Director at Arena Stage, where she helped develop and expand youth focused multi-art and theatre programs. Her background also includes work as a teaching artist and more than a decade

as an annual guest artist at the University of Notre Dame, leading youth playwrighting programs. She holds a dual Bachelor of Arts degree in Journalism and Mass Communication and English Literature and is currently completing a Master of Arts in Creative Writing.

“Rebecca understands the power of arts education to change lives,” said RCC Board Chair Bill Bouie. “We are excited to welcome her leadership and experience to RCC’s arts programs.”

“I am honored to take on this role,” said Campana. “Reston Community Center’s work aligns with my belief that every person deserves access to meaningful arts experiences.”

RCC Executive Director BeBe Nguyen added, “Rebecca’s experience growing and sustaining arts education programs will be a strong asset to the Reston community as RCC continues its mission of enriching lives through the arts.”

RCC’s arts education program serves learners of all ages through classes, workshops and creative experiences that support skill development, self-expression and creative growth. Over the past 35 years, the program has expanded under the leadership of Cheri Danaher, whose vision and stewardship elevated its quality, reach and role in the community.

Today, the program includes visual and performing arts instruction, in-demand ceramics classes, monthly art exhibitions and community favorites such as the annual Gifts from the HeART Shopping Event and award-winning initiatives like the Unforgettable program reflect RCC’s commitment to inclusive and meaningful

arts access. Cheri Danaher began at RCC as Box Office Manager in January 1991 and became Arts Education Director in November 1994.

#### About Reston Community Center

Reston Community Center provides a wide range of programs in aquatics, arts, enrichment and lifelong learning for all ages. RCC cre-

ates and sustains community traditions through special events, outreach activities and facility rentals enjoyed by all of Reston. RCC has been enriching lives and building community for more than 45 years. For more information visit [restoncommunitycenter.com](http://restoncommunitycenter.com) or contact us at 703-476-4500.

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