

THE RESTON LETTER

Reston welcomes a fresh gathering place EatLoco opens new farmers market, walkable from Town Center



Eager market-goers welcomed EatLoco's first Reston location on March 29. The market will be open every Sunday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. through November. Photo by Benjamin Burgess

By Dawn Crosson, owner and editor

EatLoco opened its newest weekly market in Reston on March 29, bringing 80 vendors, local food and family-friendly fun to a parking lot near Wegmans and Halley Rise apartments. Visitors sampled pastries, coffee and pickles, chatted with local vendors and even fed alpacas, enjoying the crisp, sunny spring day.

This is EatLoco's fourth location and

the first to open under its new owner and CEO, Lauren Katz. She helped launch a market last year as director of operations.

"I'm most excited about the location and the ability to create a huge market. I'm also thrilled to bring EatLoco to the community where I grew up," Katz told The Reston Letter. The market is designed to be convenient for walkers. Reston Town Center residents can easily reach it via the Metro pedestrian bridge over the toll road.

The market will run Sundays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. through Nov. 22. Organizers chose the timing to avoid competing with the Reston Farmers Market, which runs Saturdays from 8 a.m. to noon from April through November at Lake Anne.

"We believe there is room for everyone in Reston to enjoy fresh, local food," Katz said. "We're excited to be part of the community while respecting the established market's loyal customer base."

Fran Lovaas, co-manager of Reston Farmers Market, said the feeling is mutual. "We think there is always room for more farmers markets; supporting the small farmer is our core belief. There are



The EatLoco market brings a third farmers market to Restonians. Photo by Isadora Guerreiro

more than 63,000 residents in Reston and our market draws more than 2,000 customers most Saturdays." The market also attracts visitors from outside the area.

After opening day, Katz said clearer parking signage became a top priority. EatLoco pays a flat fee to provide free parking, but nearby pay-to-park signs

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Developers move forward with smaller golf course redevelopment plan

By Gene Powell, staff writer

Owners of Reston National Golf Course are seeking county approval to build about 300 homes on just under 15 acres of the 166-acre course.

A recent application filed with Fairfax County asserts that a 1966 zoning decision designated the section as "medium-density residential development." County officials, who have not yet accepted the decades-old zoning claim, will review the application. Staff from Fairfax County's Department of Planning and Development and the Planning Commission are expected to consider it later this year.

The ownership group highlighted

the zoning designation last year during public hearings on proposed redevelopment of all or part of the 18-hole course, which opened in 1970 as "Reston South." At that time, a larger plan was proposed: replacing the entire course with residential housing on 86 acres and creating a publicly owned "linear park" on the remaining 80 acres.

Proposals for residential development on the course's south side have circulated for more than a decade, drawing strong community opposition. Last year, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors voted to exclude the larger redevelopment plan from the 2025 Comprehensive

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education



Langston Hughes Middle unveils book vending machine, GlamourGals club connects students with seniors, Making an Impact column, upcoming high school musicals

sports



Herndon baseball and South Lakes softball seasons kick off, South Lakes track team's success at Nationals

lifestyle



Phantom Foodie reviews sushi restaurant, floral art column, redesigning for light, Reston public transportation for teens, Reston housing market update

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Find the differences, Temporary Road disappears, save the data centers, Reston elementary school name puzzles

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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.

Diva Central's Dress Drive holds 24th annual shopping event

By Kaydence Smith, staff writer

For more than two decades, the Diva Central Dress Drive has helped transform how students prepare for milestone events. Now in its 24th year, the drive continues to grow, expanding access to formalwear for students across the community.

The Diva Drive is a free shopping event for middle and high school students. Participants browse a wide selection of dresses, shoes, bags and accessories for prom, homecoming and other formal occasions. The event serves students across Northern Virginia, welcoming all regardless of income, gender or size.

The goal is simple: ensure every student leaves feeling confident and celebrated.

This year's event took place March 14 at Reston Community Center Lake Anne following a monthlong donation drive in February. Dresses were collected at Reston Community Center locations and through mobile pop-up events. The RCC on Wheels van expanded access with stops at North Point and South Lakes shopping centers,

helping boost both donations and awareness.

In total, 213 students attended and 146 dresses were distributed along with countless accessories, shoes and bags. Sizes ranged from 0 to 22-plus, reinforcing the event's commitment to inclusion.

Beyond the numbers, the emotional impact remains at the heart of the drive. Organizers say it is especially meaningful to see students return year after year, sometimes across generations. One standout moment this year came when a woman who attended the first Diva Drive returned with her daughter to share the experience.

The event relies on strong community support. This year, 21 volunteers contributed their time, many of them returning annually and bringing others with them, helping the effort grow each year.

Organizers are already looking ahead to next year's milestone 25th anniversary and hope to mark the occasion in a big way. When February comes around again, consider donating formalwear to Diva Central. A single dress can help make a student's night feel special.



Middle and high schoolers took home a total of 146 dresses at Diva Central on March 4. Photo contributed by Reston Community Center

Farmers Market, cont'd from page 1

may confuse visitors. With 1,000 free spaces available, shoppers are encouraged to follow posted signs and enter via Edmund Halley Drive, turning right at the circle.

Vendors can sign up at EatLoco.org. Organizers are aiming for 80 to 100 vendors weekly while limiting duplicate categories. So far, lemonade and coffee vendors have been especially popular and dozens were turned away on opening day. "We have plenty of room for dairy, meat and unique product vendors," Katz said.

At Lake Anne, Reston Farmers Market will kick off its 29th season on April 25. Shoppers will find 30 returning vendors, some of whom have participated all 29 years, along with four new additions. Its small-town feel,

combined with proximity to the Lake Anne Merchants craft market, shops and restaurants, makes it walkable for North Reston residents.

Vendors interested in RFM can visit the Fairfax County Park Authority website for more information.

Both markets feature live music, with many performers returning to RFM year after year. "They make the market dance!" Lovaas said. Visitors can also consult Master Gardeners most Saturdays for advice on growing plants.

Reston Farmers Market asks customers to keep dogs away from vendor areas, while EatLoco allows leashed dogs. RFM provides mesh and compostable bags to encourage a plastic-free experience.

As a third option, Reston is home to a midweek farmers market on Wednes-



Early shoppers hit the new market bright and early. Photo contributed by EatLoco

days 3 to 7 p.m. at St. John Neumann Catholic Church off Lawyers Road. Run by FRESHFARM, a local network with 26 markets and farm stands in the DMV, this market is open all season. More of a quick stop for fresh groceries

than an experience in itself, visitors enjoy this market for its smaller crowds.

Together, the three farmers markets offer Restonians strong opportunities to support local businesses and enjoy fresh, local food.

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THE BULLETIN

Welcome to the neighborhood! Family-run Toastique serves up community and creativity

By Bianca Moskaitis,
guest writer

Reston Town Center just got a little tastier. If you haven't walked past the brand-new Toastique yet, consider this your sign to head over. Since opening on March 9, Sharon Morgan-Barnhart and her family have been serving gourmet toasts and cold-pressed juices daily from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. But it's more than the food—the Barnharts bring a level of care and teamwork that makes the shop special.

The March 6 ribbon-cutting with the Greater Reston Chamber of Commerce was a proud moment. Toastique's arrival brought excitement to the RTC family, and seeing neighbors come together to welcome the Barnharts reminded me why I love living and working here.

The March 7 grand opening drew a lively crowd. People came out to support the Barnharts and sample what they've been creating, setting an

energetic tone for their first week.

At Toastique, the whole family pitches in to bring their dream to life. Sharon prepares fresh, healthy, made-in-house food that tastes as good as it looks. You can see the care in every dish.

I recently brought the Golden Connections group from the YMCA for a hands-on experience, making their onion jam from scratch. The sweet, tangy aroma filled the room as we stirred and tasted, and seeing the process firsthand made me appreciate the Barnharts' work even more. It was a welcoming experience and a reminder of how important local connections are in Reston.

Whether you're grabbing a smoothie after a workout or sitting down for avocado toast, stopping by Toastique supports a local family. Next time you're at the Town Center, stop in and say hello. It's where good food and community meet.



The Barnhart family cuts the ribbon at Toastique's grand opening on March 7. Toastique, offering gourmet toasts, sandwiches, hand-crafted coffee and fresh juice, boasts whole foods in a grab-n-go fashion at their Reston location. Photos by Benjamin Burgess




How's the market?

This is by far the question I am asked the most. If you would like to chat about the market, feel free to reach out and let's talk about what is going on in the Reston area.

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Reston National, cont'd from page 1



Reston National Golf Course owners are now looking to redevelop only part of the course with 300 new homes. Photo by Benjamin Burgess

sive Plan Amendment Work Program. A representative of the owners said that plan is “no longer an alternative.”

Owners say operating the course is no longer financially sustainable. Mark Looney, the owners' attorney, told The Letter that the course “hasn't had any major capital investment in the property” and said revenue from the planned 14-acre housing project would fund upgrades to the course as well as programs such as youth golf education.

Opponents argue that Reston's original planning documents call for the golf course to remain and do not allow residential development. They also raised concerns during last year's hearings about traffic and the potential impact on local schools.



The Reston Farmers Market

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THE BULLETIN

Kurt Rose: Herndon-Reston Rotary Club 2026 Citizen of the Year

By Gene Powell, staff writer

Kurt Rose will be honored for years of community service and his commitment to bringing books to thousands of young Reston-area students when the Rotary Club of Herndon-Reston names him Citizen of the Year.

Rose is a co-founder of the RoSigle Community Giving Foundation, which supports the Dolly Parton Imagination Library national program in all Reston ZIP codes. Since 2022, the library has distributed more than 27,000 books to children under age 5.

The foundation also supports programs with George Mason University's Center for Community Mental Health, Kids R First and Fairfax County Public Schools. It sponsors the Reston Card-

board Boat Regatta, presented by Reston Museum.

Co-founders Rose and Dianne Rose, along with Andy and Kim Sigle, fund RoSigle's administrative costs so "100 percent of donations go back to the community," Rose said.

Rose's community service extends beyond the foundation. He helped open Aspen Jewelry Designs in Herndon in 1993 and "adds sparkle to anything he does," said Andy Sigle. "He has an infectious attitude that inspires others around him to do big things."

Rose serves on multiple boards, including the Reston Museum's board, and for 17 years has chaired the Rotary Club's annual golf tournament. Jane Nash of Rotary said Rose personifies the club's guiding principle, "service above self."

Among the foundation's innovative

literacy programs is a token-operated book vending machine at Langston Hughes Middle School. Teachers can reward students with a token to select books. Another is a free library at the South Lakes High School Food Pantry, in partnership with Scrawl Books, which has distributed more than 1,600 books since 2022.

The foundation also runs a summer reading initiative. According to its website, "over 600 students enrolled in the Fairfax County Public Schools SOAR summer learning program at Hunters Woods Elementary and Forest Edge Elementary were able to browse in our pop-up shop and select a book to grow their home library."

The Rotary Club will host a dinner to honor Rose from 4 to 7 p.m. April 26 at the Reston Community Center, 2310



Kurt Rose has dedicated that last four years to providing books to children and serving Reston in other capacities. Photo contributed by Jane Nash

Colts Neck Road, Reston. Tickets are \$60 and available until April 15 at <https://www.eventcreate.com/e/2026-citizen-of-the-year>. This marks the 57th year the local Rotary Club has presented the award.

ARRO-USA honors Afghan women on International Women's Day

Contributed by Laurie Callahan, UCP Board clerk and ARRO Board secretary

Women from across the Washington, D.C. area gathered at United Christian Parish in Reston on Sunday, March 8, to celebrate International Women's Day with the Afghanistan Refugee Rescue Organization (ARRO-USA). The event

offered a space to share experiences, discuss challenges and explore opportunities for building a life in the U.S.

Speakers highlighted stories of resilience and determination. Master of ceremonies Hamida Arash, president of Arash Fashion, spoke about the severe restrictions women face in Afghanistan and how she built a successful business in the U.S.

Alaha Ahrar, president of International Kindness Sharing, emphasized the importance of education and work for women's empowerment. "If women are educated, families will flourish, and if women are able to work, society will flourish," she said. Attendees also shared personal stories of women who shaped their lives, including mothers, teachers and mentors.

Guests reflected on the challenges of adjusting to life in the U.S. Palwasha Azimi, who moved to the U.S. in 1993, described adapting to a new culture as her biggest hurdle. An asylum seeker, who asked to be called Nooria, spoke about the difficulty of starting over as a refugee and building a community while facing language barriers.

Anne Hochstrasser, a retired Fairfax County social work supervisor, offered guidance on government and nonprofit resources to help new arrivals navigate resettlement.

The evening included an Iftar dinner after sunset during Ramadan and a per-



Alaha Ahrar (left) and well-known Afghan singer Latifa Azizi were among those who shared on National Women's Day in Reston for Afghanistan Refugee Rescue Organization. Photos contributed by ARRO-USA

formance by Afghan singer Latifa Azizi, whose songs invited audience participation. Several husbands attended to support their wives and daughters, along with Sayed Makhdoom Raheen, former Afghan Minister of Information and Culture, and many American friends.

Sediqa Khalili, vice president of ARRO-USA, introduced the Voice of Afghan Women Initiative, which aims to advocate for women's rights and build

community support. Bilal Ahmad Niazi, president of ARRO-USA, closed the evening by announcing new partnerships with Arash Fashion, Mantu Halal Food Company, and International Kindness Sharing to strengthen social, economic and cultural support for Afghan women.

The celebration highlighted resilience, hope, and the power of community in empowering Afghan women in the U.S.

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

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<p>12 APRIL</p> <p>EatLoco Farmers Market</p> <p>Weekly outdoor market Sundays 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Parking lot of Halley Rise</p>	<p>17 APRIL</p> <p>Opening Night A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum</p> <p>8 p.m. Reston Community Players Leila Gordon Theater Tickets on restonplayers.org</p>	<p>18 APRIL</p> <p>Celebrate Reston!</p> <p>12-4 p.m. Community festival in honor of our founder's birthday Lake Anne Plaza</p>	<p>22 APRIL</p> <p>Senior Movie Day</p> <p>Eleanor the Great Doors open at 9 a.m. and movie starts at 10 a.m. LOOK Cinemas in Reston Town Center</p>
<p>25 APRIL</p> <p>Opening Day Reston Farmers Market</p> <p>Weekly outdoor market Saturdays 8 a.m.-12 p.m. Lake Anne Plaza</p>	<p>25 APRIL</p> <p>Reston Association's Community Yard Sale</p> <p>8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Find bargains from neighbors or sell from your own booth. Sign up to sell. RA parking lot on Sunrise Valley</p>	<p>25 APRIL</p> <p>ChalkFest at eARTh Day</p> <p>11 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Reston Town Square Park</p>	<p>25 APRIL</p> <p>Friends of The Reston Letter MindShift Gym Experience</p> <p>11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Free to subscribers MindShift Gym</p>
<p>26 APRIL</p> <p>Run thru Reston Reston Runners half-marathon/5K</p> <p>7:30 a.m. South Lakes High School register at restonrunners.org</p>	<p>1 MAY</p> <p>Spring Festival</p> <p>1-5 p.m. Walker Nature Center Live animals, crafts, kayaking, more</p>	<p>3 MAY</p> <p>Annual Tour de Hunter Mill community bike ride</p> <p>8 a.m. Ride with Supervisor Alcorn Short or long ride options fairfaxcounty.gov for more info</p>	<p>3 MAY</p> <p>Master class and wine tasting event</p> <p>2-4 p.m. The Wine Cabinet at North Point Register online thewinecabinet.com</p>
<p>9 MAY</p> <p>Reston Water Safety Day</p> <p>11 a.m.-1 p.m. & Free family swim 1-4 p.m. Reston Community Center Hunters Woods Family activities, prizes</p>	<p>13 MAY</p> <p>Meet the SLHS STEAM Team</p> <p>7-8:30 p.m. South Lakes High School room 370 Meet students who create our public art.</p>	<p>16-17 MAY</p> <p>Tephra ICA Arts Festival</p> <p>11 a.m.-6 p.m. both days Reston Town Center Hundreds of artists from around the country</p>	<p>31 MAY</p> <p>The Reston Letter graduation post deadline</p> <p>Submit your graduation announcements printed in our June issue by submitting now! (See p.14)</p>

LIFETIME

Won't you be a neighbor?

By Scott Parkin, staff writer

Reston is made up of many small neighborhoods, including roughly 160 cluster and condo associations where some of our older residents live. Like most seniors, many of these neighbors want to age in place and stay independent as long as possible—but independence sometimes means needing a little help.

In 2016, we sold our large, three-story townhome, partly because we wanted to downsize to a home with less maintenance and fewer long-term worries. Eventually, we might have needed a stair chair or an elevator, and modifications to our kitchen, bathroom, entrance, or garage. While we had friendly neighbors nearby, whether we could count on them for occasional help was uncertain.

At the time, our cluster had no system—formal or informal—for supporting older adults who wanted to remain in their homes. Since then, I've learned that other clusters in Reston have created volunteer networks to help neighbors with yard work, rides, home tasks, or regular check-ins. Reston also had the Useful Services Exchange (USE), which offered similar help through a time bank, though it is no longer active.

Creating a "neighbors helping neighbors" group is similar to what's called a village. Villages started more than 20 years ago when small groups of neighbors banded together to improve the

experience of aging. Today, hundreds of villages exist across the country, and the Washington, D.C. metro area has the largest concentration.

If your cluster or condo association has residents interested in starting a neighbors-helping-neighbors program, resources are available at the Reston for a Lifetime website (www.RestonforaLifetime.org/neighborshelp). Groups that want to formally organize may also consider joining the Washington Area Villages Exchange (www.wavevillages.org), which offers workshops, an annual conference, and online resources.

Even without formal organization, residents can support older neighbors in small ways. Offering to mow a lawn, help with spring cleanup or checking in from time to time can make a big difference. At the very least, sharing information from Reston for a Lifetime can connect seniors with resources to help them stay safely in their homes.

Communities thrive when neighbors look out for each other. As Reston grows, thinking about how we support those who want to age in place ensures our neighborhoods remain vibrant, connected and caring.

Scott L. Parkin is a staff writer for The Reston Letter and co-founder and board member of Reston for a Lifetime (www.RestonforaLifetime.org), a nonprofit that educates and informs residents about aging in place.

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EDUCATION

Making an Impact

Sarah Planchon Pope

By Chuck Cascio, author and former South Lakes teacher

Approximately one million people in the United States suffer from multiple sclerosis (MS), with about 25,000 new cases diagnosed annually. A leading research center for MS is at the Cleveland Clinic, where Sarah Planchon Pope, a 1986 graduate of South Lakes High School, serves as a senior researcher. She describes her role as "designing and running clinical trials. I work in one of the best MS Centers in the world with some of the best MS clinicians, and I feel like I am able to make a difference."

The first science-related interests of Sarah's life were animals. She lived in a garage on a farm with her parents, who were finishing graduate school at Indiana University. That interest grew when 3-year-old Sarah and her parents moved to a townhouse on Reston's Ivy Oak Square and later to the Lakewinds community. "I explored streams in the woods behind Terraset Elementary, caught and played with crayfish, climbed on fallen trees, and created imaginary worlds," Sarah says. "My parents never knew where I was, which was okay because Reston was safe, and I was never afraid."

At SLHS, AP Biology proved especially meaningful, as it was "taught by my absolute favorite person at the school, Faye Bresnick Cascio. She was the biggest influence in choosing biology as my college major because she made biology such a wonderful experience." Sarah earned a bachelor of arts in biology at the University of Virginia and then worked in the school's Gastroenterology Lab. "The goal was to learn more about ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease, including trying to develop an animal model. I liked the translational aspect of research and decided to pursue a graduate degree."

In the fall of 1994, Sarah enrolled in a graduate

program in Human Oncology at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where "the focus was 'bench-to-bedside'—developing treatments for current states of diseases and how to get those treatments to people as quickly as possible. I absolutely loved that program!"

Two incidents from different points in her life were particularly impactful in Sarah's career pursuit. "When I was 4 years old living in Ivy Oak Square, a very sweet adult neighbor was very kind and liked to play with me. One day, she was simply gone. She had passed away from cancer. I remember being very sad and saying that I wanted to cure cancer one day. That event stuck with me—so when I applied for graduate programs, I focused on oncology."

In graduate school, Sarah was part of a support group for cancer caregivers when she "started talking to a gentleman whose wife was fighting breast cancer. I was growing breast cancer cells in a Petri dish in an incubator, so I asked if he would like to see them. He was very excited. I showed them to him and explained what we were studying, and he started to cry. He said how much it meant to him that we were working to fight this disease. That was when my decision to pursue research was absolutely validated. I want to help people, to try to make someone's life better."

Her PhD in human oncology led Sarah to the Cleveland Clinic, where she has been deeply involved in research for 25 years. Much of her work has focused on oncology-related topics, but "in 2008, an opportunity presented itself for me to be project manager of a Phase I stem cell transplant trial in multiple sclerosis, so I shifted my career from bench research to clinical trials and from oncology to neurology."

Sarah currently runs "a multi-center international trial" entitled DELIVER-MS, which is "designed to see if there is a difference in clinical outcomes 10 years after



Sarah Planchon Pope

disease-modifying therapies start. This trial's primary readout should occur in 2027. Getting to see what happens to brain volume loss in the participants after three years is super exciting."

Unsurprisingly, Sarah has even more in the works. She says the Food and Drug Administration recently approved what is known as an "Investigational New Drug application" for a study using a new drug called remibrutinib, created in collaboration with Novartis, that uses advanced imaging techniques to look at changes in the brains of MS patients. Sarah and her team at Cleveland Clinic's Mellen Center will develop ways to study those changes.

In 2006, Sarah, her husband, Clark, and their 3-year-old daughter, Meredith, were living in Cleveland when they decided to buy a home in nearby Shaker Heights because "it had the commitment to diversity and the feel of a planned community, like Reston. There are walking paths, lakes, neighborhoods centered around schools, and village centers. The progressive feeling is here too, so Shaker Heights just felt a bit like home."

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EDUCATION

Local nonprofit installs book vending machine at Langston Hughes Middle

By Kaydence Smith, staff writer

A new kind of vending machine in Reston dispenses books instead of snacks.

The RoSigle Foundation, a local nonprofit, recently installed a book vending machine at Langston Hughes Middle School, giving students a fun and engaging way to access free reading material. The initiative supports the organization's broader mission to promote literacy and educational equity.

Two couples, Andy and Kim Sigle and Dianne and Kurt Rose (see p. 4), founded the organization and share a passion for education and reading. Their backgrounds include librarianship and early childhood education. After learning Reston was not enrolled in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, which mails free books each month to children from

birth to age 5, they stepped in to bring the program to the community.

The founders cover all administrative and personal costs, allowing every donation to support literacy programs directly.

The nonprofit serves multiple age groups and focuses on building a strong foundation in reading. It helps families enroll in the Imagination Library and has distributed more than 26,000 books since launching locally. The program now reaches about 1,000 children in the Reston area.

As the program grew, organizers identified a gap among middle school students, who often prove harder to engage in reading. They developed the book vending machine to address that need.

Students "purchase" books using tokens they earn through positive behavior, academic effort or other school-based incentives. At the unveiling and ribbon-cutting ceremony, students gathered around to watch the first few books get dispensed from the machine, starting with the student who designed the artwork on the outside of the machine.

"We wanted something that is ex-

citing for them," Kim Sigle said. "Book ownership is one of the predictors of academic success. That's why we're trying to get books into kids' hands."

The project drew strong community involvement. A local creative team repurposed a traditional vending machine into a customized book dispenser, and students designed its exterior through an art contest.

Librarian Kim Sigle curates the book selection and updates it regularly to reflect student interests and school initiatives. The foundation sources many books from local businesses such as Scrawl Books.

The Langston Hughes machine marks the start of a broader effort. The foundation plans to install additional machines in area elementary schools, with designs tailored to younger readers and larger picture books.

Beyond the vending machines, RoSigle distributes books at Reston summer camps, maintains a Little Free Library at George Mason Center for Mental Health, supplies books to food pantries and supports programs such as MathCounts.

Community members can support the foundation through donations that



An LHMS middle school student operates the book vending machine at its ribbon cutting. Photo by Isadora Guerreiro

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 33rd crossword puzzle creation, made specifically for The Reston Letter readers!

Forested Wasteland

ACROSS

- The "cruellest" month of Eliot's "The Waste Land"
- State that's 90% forest and the home of LL Bean
- Rainbow-shaped
- "Ya gotta have _____, miles and miles of _____"
- Slow, musically

DOWN

- "_____ and the Night Visitors" (opera)
- "Gay" French city in Cole Porter Song
- Puerto____, as a native of Ponce
- Sluggish
- Brought about

1	2	3	4	5
6				
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8				
9				

South Lakes Theatre Arts presents '9 to 5: The Musical'

By Erin Gibbens, SLHS theatre boosters

There's something special about a musical that makes you laugh while also making you feel seen. That's exactly what audiences will experience in "9 to 5: The Musical," on stage at South Lakes High School April 30 through May 2.

Set in a 1970s office, the story follows Violet (Lily Ingraham), Judy (Jocelyn Looney) and Doralee (Sidney Walkup), three women who are very different but united by a shared experience: being underestimated. Doralee, in particular, challenges assumptions and forms an unexpected alliance built on dignity, strength and self-awareness.

"Playing Doralee has been really special, not just because it's been so much fun, but also because of what she represents," said Walkup, a South Lakes sophomore.

"Women are often judged for what they do, say or wear, and Doralee shows the importance of staying true to yourself. That's a message I'm proud to share."

The production highlights the small, real moments of solidarity—side glances, shared laughter and the courage to stand up for one another. "It's a story that celebrates friendship, resilience and the courage it takes to stand up for what's right," said Michael Viola, director of South Lakes Theatre Arts.

Tickets are available for performances at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, April 30, and Friday, May 1, and at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Saturday, May 2. For more information and tickets, visit <https://www.slakes-theatre.com/>.



During the annual Aldrin vs. Armstrong sixth grade "A" game on March 13, each school's Pep Squad performed at halftime and staff from both schools took part in a basketball shooting contest. Photo contributed by Armstrong Elementary

fund book purchases and program expansion. Even small contributions can make a difference.

The RoSigle Foundation shows how a simple idea can create lasting impact, one book at a time. For more information, visit rosigle.org.

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FOLLOW ON SOCIAL!



EDUCATION

South Lakes students connect with seniors through GlamourGals

By Ellyn Wexler, staff writer

When Zahra Nikzad launched a chapter of the nonprofit GlamourGals at South Lakes High School in 2025, she hoped to make a meaningful difference. Unable to visit her own grandmother, who lives in another country, she saw an opportunity to reach out to seniors in her local community. The idea felt ambitious, but she was drawn to the organization's mission: bringing teens and seniors together to build lasting relationships through small acts of kindness.

"It's about showing up," Nikzad said. "That's what makes the difference."

GlamourGals, a national nonprofit with 162 chapters, pairs students with seniors for hands-on grooming sessions and companionship. The program aims to combat social isolation and foster intergenerational bonds. Students help seniors feel confident and appreciated through thoughtful attention, whether painting nails, styling hair or sharing a relaxed conversation over tea. For Nikzad, the most rewarding moments come from seeing seniors light up when someone

listens, laughs or takes the time to engage.

Treasurer Noor Atiya never expected that a simple manicure or conversation could spark such meaningful connections. "I thought it was just about doing nails, but it's so much more," she said. "Even a smile or kind word can brighten someone's day and teaches patience, empathy and the value of listening."

Vice President Mena Yacob agreed. "It's not about the nails or the hair," she said. "It's about building real relationships. Listening to their stories, laughing at their jokes and learning from their experiences—those are the moments that stay with you."

For many students, GlamourGals has been a chance to step outside their own routines and gain perspective. "I've been struck by the humor and resilience of the seniors I meet," said club member Azza Ali. "They tell stories you'd never hear in school and they have this amazing ability to find joy in little things."

Students often bring personal touches to their sessions, such as themed nail art, crafts or favorite music. Nikzad said these gestures deepen connections and leave lasting impressions.



GlamourGals South Lakes founder Zahra Nikzad poses with a Brightview Great Falls resident. Photo by Azza Ali

Books, games or personal photos from students' lives often spark laughter and conversation, creating bonds that extend beyond the time together.

Nikzad observed students applying nail polish while chatting with residents, laughing over shared stories and gentle teasing. One initially shy resident lit up when a student asked to see her favorite family photos. She proudly showed the photos and told stories about her grandchildren, a moment that showed these experiences are equally rewarding for seniors and students. Nikzad said she's seen how these visits lift spirits and encourage conversation among residents.

Through these interactions, students say they've grown more confident, compassionate and aware of the challenges seniors face. "You realize that gestures of attention and support can make a real impact," Nikzad said. "It's motivating to see that what we do matters, not just for the seniors but for ourselves too."

In just a few months, South Lakes' GlamourGals chapter has grown from a single idea into a lively program that bridges generations. More than a club, it's a place where students and seniors connect, swap stories, share laughs and spread a little joy, proving that even small acts of kindness can leave a big mark.

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SPORTS

South Lakes Seahawks track teams finish strong at state and national meets

By Shanen Elliott, sports writer

The South Lakes Seahawks boys and girls indoor track and field teams wrapped up successful seasons with third-place finishes at the VHSL Class 6 State Championships at the Virginia Beach Sports Complex. The boys scored 44 points, trailing only state champion Gainesville (51) and runner-up Patriot (49), while the girls scored 51 points, behind Robinson (75) and North Stafford (53).

Seniors Alex Guthrie and Blake Jackson led the boys. Guthrie claimed the Class 6 sprint titles in the 55-meter dash (6.33 seconds) and 300-meter dash (34.03 seconds, a school record) and anchored the boys 4x200 relay team to seventh place. Jackson won the long

jump (23-5.5) and placed second in the triple jump (47-2.75), setting South Lakes school records in both events. The duo contributed 40 of the boys' 44 points. Other scorers included senior Milo Wilkins (shot put, 5th), senior Hayato Tano, junior Lordweasley Ahape and senior Julian Laurence.

The girls continued their relay dominance with a fourth consecutive state title in the 4x800 relay, finishing in 9:04.67 and overcoming a 60-meter deficit on the final lap. The team—freshman Quinn Jackson, junior Sarah Ghantiwala, senior Aya Ryan and anchor Caroline Elliott—ranked fifth nationally. Elliott also added 14 points with runner-up finishes in the 1,600 and third in the 1,000 meters, while Ryan placed second in the

500 meters and anchored the 4x400 relay to fourth place. Other standout performances included sophomore Tia Tuffour, third in the 55-meter hurdles, and the 4x200 relay team, which finished second.

Two weeks later, several Seahawks competed at Nike's Indoor National Championships at New York City's Armory. Alex Guthrie finished sixth in the 200 meters, while the girls 4x200 relay also placed sixth. Both the girls Distance Medley and Sprint Medley relays earned All-American honors, with the Sprint Medley setting a new South Lakes school record of 3:59.08.

The South Lakes Seahawks will carry their post-season momentum into the VHSL outdoor track and field season.



South Lakes Distance Medley Relay team came in third place at Nike Nationals. Photo by Brooks Ross, rossvisuazz

Hornets baseball off to strong start

By McAllister Pearce-Biney, student writer

Herndon's baseball team has opened the season strong with a 5-2 record, including wins in its first series at home and on the road against Wakefield. The Hornets have shown early consistency at the plate and on the mound.

"Preparation played a major role in our success," said senior David Castillo. "This was a great start, but we can't be complacent. We emphasize winning the week, and the players have shown grit, togetherness and a growth mindset."

In last week's series, junior Max Tiboni reached third after a throwing error and scored the go-ahead run on the next pitch.

Senior pitcher Hayden Rita set the tone with four shutout innings, allowing two hits and striking out six. Castillo led the offense, going 2-for-3 with a triple, two runs scored and two RBIs. Senior Charlie Morgan made key contributions, going 1-for-3 with two RBIs, a run scored and a stolen base.

Herndon's strong start reflects a program that has posted one of the best re-

records in three of the past five seasons.

"Getting a win in front of the home crowd shows the work we put in behind the scenes pays off," Rita said, adding that the team feeds off strong community support.

Coach Stephen Frank said the goal is clear. "We want to be the No. 1 seed and win our district tournament. This team is well prepared for the challenge." He pointed to consistency on both sides of the ball as a key to the team's early success.

During spring break, the Hornets traveled to Charleston, S.C., for the Shipyard Charleston Invitational, going 2-2 against strong competition, including Vero Beach, Fla., which is 44-6 in its last 50 games.

Herndon's JV and varsity teams both comfortably beat their rivals South Lakes this week. The next varsity home game is Thursday, April 9 at 6:30 p.m. against Woodgrove.



Senior Hayden Rita pitched four shut-out innings at the Hornets' home opener. Photo by Karl Majer

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Senior David Castillo races toward first base, going 2-for-3 on opening night. Photo by Karl Majer

SPORTS

Seahawks spend spring break on the diamond

By Matt Reider, staff writer

While most high school students were out of the area—or at least out of classes for spring break—Coach Joe Mills spent a summerlike evening in late March at the softball field. His South Lakes varsity team was among Fairfax County squads competing in the annual Spring Break Varsity Softball Invitational.

Before the game on Monday, Mills stood outside the left-field fence, coordinating his lineup while sporting a blue South Lakes shirt. His team was spread out beside him, each pair tossing a softball back and forth to warm up. It is his first year coaching South Lakes, although he has been in the softball dugout for years. Like most coaches, he liked his team's chances. "We have a good group this year," he said. "We just need to work on a few things."

Although South Lakes had four games scheduled for the tournament, the first, on Saturday, was rained out. The location in Hayfield is a 40-minute drive from South Lakes Drive, yet that night they were considered the home team, hosting the visiting—and undefeated—South County Stallions. Prior to the game, Meagan Maguire (No. 8) and Payton Berry (No. 30) threw warmup pitches along the first-base side. It was a perfect day for softball, the crack of the catcher's glove



Senior third baseman Kayla Rudolph (left) and senior pitcher Meagan Maguire celebrate as Payton Berry looks on. The Seahawks softball team spent much of spring break kicking off their season. Photo by Beth Shaw

echoing the velocity of Maguire's fastball. The rest of the team took fielding practice from Mills as some parents raked the infield. After a dropped pop fly or two, the coach called out, "Stop being nonchalant and let's go."

About 10 minutes before the game, three umpires arrived and collected the game balls from the home dugout. A quick meeting at home plate followed among the coaches, umpires and team

captains. Maguire started, and the first Stallions batter walked on a 4-1 count. After settling in on the mound, she retired the next three batters in order, ending the half-inning.

Like most high school sports, parents were part of the action. Ronny Shaw ran the scoreboard and announced the batters, while Sean Berry kept the scorebook. Parents staffed the snack shack selling \$3 hot dogs, younger siblings ran around,

and friends and family lined both sides of the field, offering encouragement and restrained commentary on the strike zone. Beth Shaw roamed the sideline taking photos. After two and a half scoreless innings, South Lakes took the lead with three runs on timely hits with runners in scoring position. South County responded in the top of the fourth with two runs. After trading runs, South Lakes held a 4-3 lead in the top of the sixth.



Senior Fiona Shaw at bat Photo by Beth Shaw

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KIDS

Clean stream? Check the Snobs and the Slobs

By Bob Welland, Kids Section Editor

Reston streams may look clean if there's no trash in them, but there may be invisible pollutants in the water caused by pet waste, motor oil, road salt, etc. If you ever play in a stream or worry about the health of fish and birds, you want to know the water quality in our streams. Scientists and volunteers monitor our streams by checking for the Snobs and the Slobs.

You don't know **the Snobs and the Slobs**? Do you live under a rock? Because they do. Their scientific name is **benthic macroinvertebrates** and these baby insects can warn us

of problems hiding in the water.

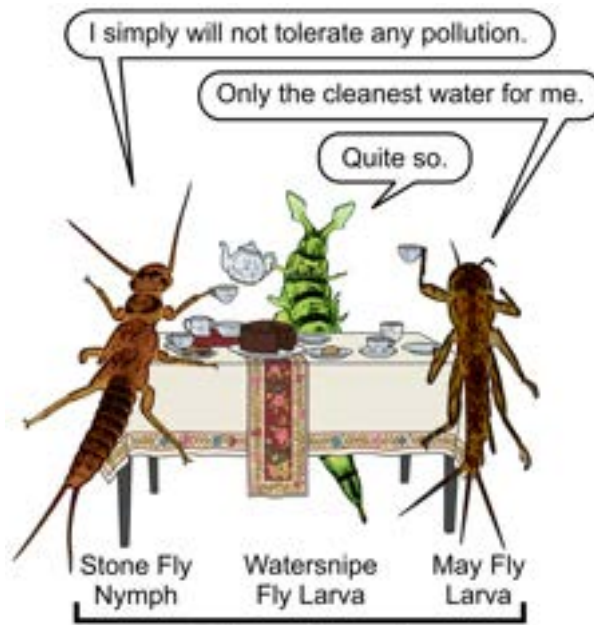
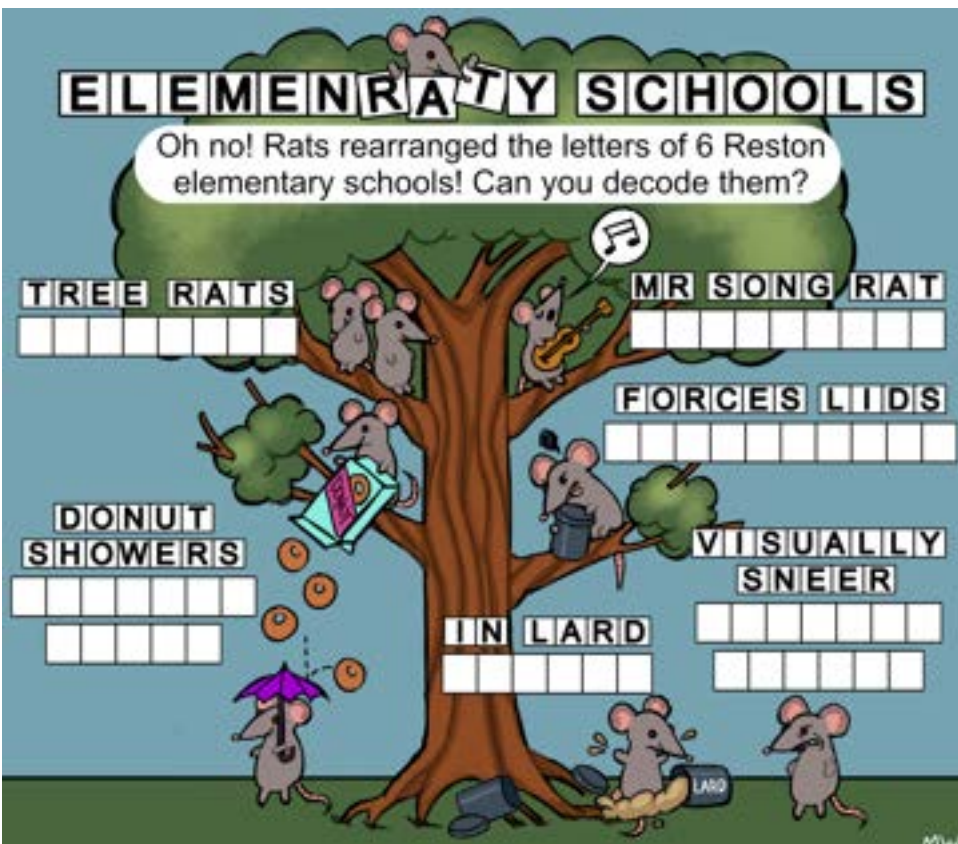
A wide variety of these organisms live in the muddy stream bed, but some are more sensitive to pollution than others. Some species require very clean water to live (The Snobs), others thrive in polluted water (The Slobs) and there are many species in between. A healthy stream has a wide variety of all types. An unhealthy stream has less diversity and more pollution tolerant organisms.



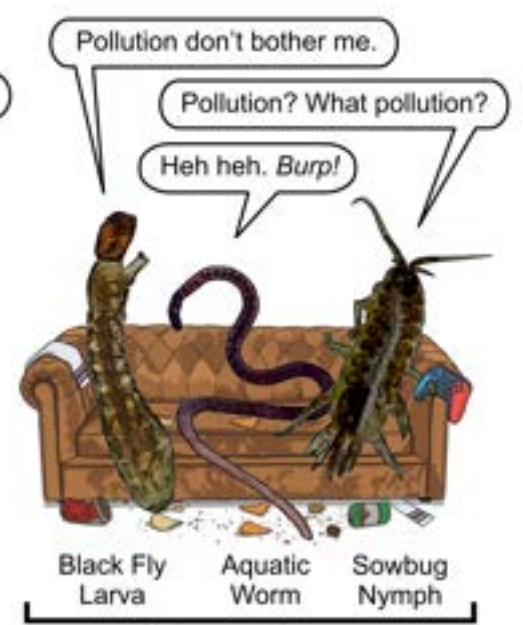
Volunteers disturb the mud and rocks upstream of the net



Bugs are sorted in ice cube trays. Photos by Carla Brown



The Snobs



The Slobs

the macroinvertebrates off the net and place them in white ice cube trays. The goal is to collect around 200 bugs.

They count the types of each species. This data gets collected two to four times each year to understand what is normal for the location and to spot any changes happening for the good or bad.

If you aren't a snob and don't mind getting a little sloppy in the mud, there are two ways to volunteer for stream monitoring. Fairfax County NVSWCD (Northern

Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District) runs workshops throughout the year for adults and youth over 12. Youth must be accompanied by an adult. Search for "stream monitoring" at fairfaxcounty.gov. The Reston Association also welcomes volunteer stream monitors. See www.reston.org/197/Streams.



Little Hands, Bird Nest Bites

By Alexis Estep, mom, chef, Restonian

Spring has officially sprung and we wanted to celebrate by making a classic and fun snack, Bird Nests! Now I know what you are thinking, we won't be eating real nests, but rather ones made from chow mein noodles and chocolate. What's not to love?!

Ingredients:

- 1 cup semisweet chocolate chips
- 2/3 cup peanut butter or butterscotch chips
- 1 can (5 oz) chow mein noodles
- Jelly beans or yogurt-covered raisins

Instructions:

Line a cookie sheet with parchment paper. Melt chocolate and peanut



Chocolatey, crunchy nests with jelly bean or yogurt raisin "eggs"

butter chips on low heat over a double boiler or in the microwave in 30 second increments until melted and smooth. Fold in chow mein noodles until they are thoroughly coated. Spoon 2 tbsp of mixture into a pile for each nest. Top with a few jelly beans or raisins to resemble eggs. Refrigerate until set and then enjoy!

APRIL FOOL'S NEWS

Temporary road disappears

"We knew it would happen eventually."

Restonians were shocked to wake Wednesday morning to find Temporary Road had vanished overnight. Located between Reston Parkway and North Shore Drive, Temporary Road has existed for over 40 years, lulling the gullible residents into thinking it was permanent.



Views from North Shore Drive before and after Tuesday night

Reston teens put on talent show to save community data center

A group of plucky Reston teenagers are organizing a talent show in support of an endangered local data center. Their leader, Echo Slop, says "we depend on that data center as a place for doing homework because AI does it for us." Ms. Slop will be singing the song "Domo arigato, Mr. Roboto" in the show. "Those meddling kids don't stand a chance" says evil environmentalist Berk Enstoks. "That center is wasting the energy and water needed for our meddling children's future."



The Digi Slurp data center consumed all the water from the Watermine. Future plans include installing intake pipes to all Reston swimming pools.



Poster for the talent show. The teens insist they did the artwork themselves.

Town Square Fountain to be relocated

In order to help with construction of another high-rise near Reston Town Square Park, the popular "sprayground" will be moved to a new location at the Reston Town Center, just three blocks away, inside the FedEx Office store.

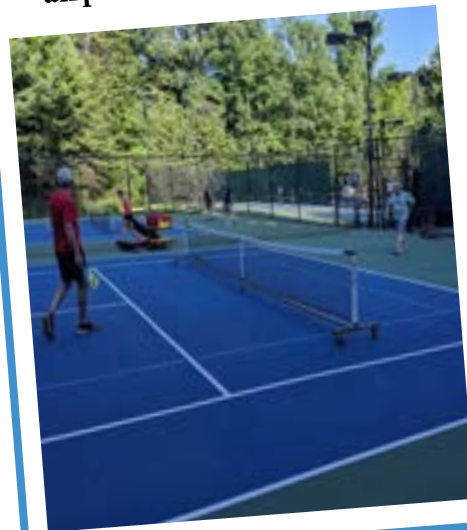


Briefs

Lake Anne wins the Concrete Association of America's annual "Best Playground Award" for 30th year running



Autumnwood Residents complain that noise from Pickleball Courts drowns out the natural sounds of traffic, airplanes and leaf blowers



Opinion

Latin should be taught at Herndon High School

By Loren Ipsum

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Solutions

ElemenRATy Schools: (Left to right, top to bottom) Terraset, Armstrong, Crossfield, Hunters Woods, Aldrin, Sunrise Valley



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..."Uggh! You kids and your meaningless

OPINIONS

Ask Doctor S.

My kid doesn't listen!

I often meet with parents who wonder why their children “don’t listen.” Many are exasperated after trying “everything” to motivate their kids. That often includes some combination of yelling, issuing consequences such as taking away electronics, offering rewards like shopping trips or money, imposing long or vague grounding, restricting time with friends or assigning extra chores.

Instead, what if parents allowed children more say over certain aspects of their lives?

Giving children age-appropriate choices helps them build the skills they will need as adults, including executive functioning, self-regulation and task initiation. As children approach adolescence, natural consequences are often more effective than parent-imposed ones. In other words, consider what outcome would most likely happen on its own. When a child has the intellectual and emotional capacity, parents can begin to step back from constant direction and control.

Many children are not hungry at set mealtimes and prefer to graze throughout the day. Try to avoid bargaining with your child to “take a bite” or withholding other food if they do not like what is served. At the same time, parents are not short-order cooks. Keep a simple, nutritious option on hand—such as Cheerios—and allow your child to choose that instead of the prepared meal. Cheerios

are always an option.

Turning meals into a battle is a reliable way to create stressful power struggles and may contribute to disordered eating.

It is OK if your child goes to school without a coat, forgets sneakers for gym or wears mismatched outfits. It is OK if they choose athletic shorts every day from elementary school through middle school and beyond. If your child can dress themselves, let them—and, as tempting as it may be, try to hold back commentary.

If your child feels cold or cannot participate in P.E. or recess, they may choose differently next time. If they skip combing their hair and receive unsolicited feedback from a peer, that can be a learning opportunity, too. For middle schoolers, even something like toothbrushing can become an issue best addressed by a dentist or another trusted authority figure, rather than through repeated parental reminders.

Many children need help with homework, especially early on. It can be useful to create a dedicated workspace at home, with a system for organizing papers, including a place for forms that require signatures and a brightly colored folder for items that need to be returned to school.

Some children need time to develop a system that works and may benefit from practicing how to ad-



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vocate for themselves with teachers, coaches and other adults. Once routines are established—particularly by late middle school—decisions about when and how to complete work should increasingly fall to the child. Teachers, administrators, other trusted adults and peers will help reinforce accountability, creating valuable real-world learning opportunities.

Keep in mind that we only “have” our children for about 18 years, give or take. Allowing them the space to learn from experience is one of the best ways to prepare them for adulthood.

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

Do you have a question or a topic you'd like me to address? Please submit suggestions to info@therestonletter.com.

Dr. Hayley B. Sherwood is a longtime clinical psychologist in Reston-Herndon. To learn more, visit www.oakhillpsychological.com, or see the About Us section to learn more about the team of therapists.

Restonian

Call Me Loudounian: Why Loudoun is better than Reston

The rumors are true. After nearly two decades of covering Reston like invasive English ivy, we've decided to move on to brighter, beiger pastures. That's right—we're swapping the earth tones of our plastic-fantastic planned community for the bright lights and particleboard charms of our neighbor to the west, Loudoun County. Back in the day, we used to derisively call this “graduating,” but we're older and ... older now.

“But why?” one—maybe two—of you unrelated to us by blood or marriage might be asking. “What does Loudoun have that Reston doesn't?” Thought you'd never ask, silly rabbits.

Midscale chains. A wise man once said that when one is tired of visiting the same shops and restaurants found in exurban strip malls blanketing 98 percent of the country, one is tired of life. We do have that here, but fortunately, there's an even greater movable feast of midscale chain eateries, shoppes, cofferies, saladaries, cupcakeries—maybe even a picklery, if we're lucky—to our west.

Unimproved roads. Ever since they added a fancy third turning lane to the intersection of Route 7 and Baron Cameron, we've been overwhelmed—

what is this, Talladega? A windy two-lane road originally surveyed by a Civil War general, carrying traffic from dozens of massive subdivisions, would let us “bliss out,” as the kids no longer say, while sitting in never-ending traffic.

Latency. When you're in the highly lucrative online blogging business, every millisecond counts. The only way we can be sure we won't be scooped on a critical bit of wastewater board meeting news is to have a massive data center behind our home to plug our 300-baud modem directly into.

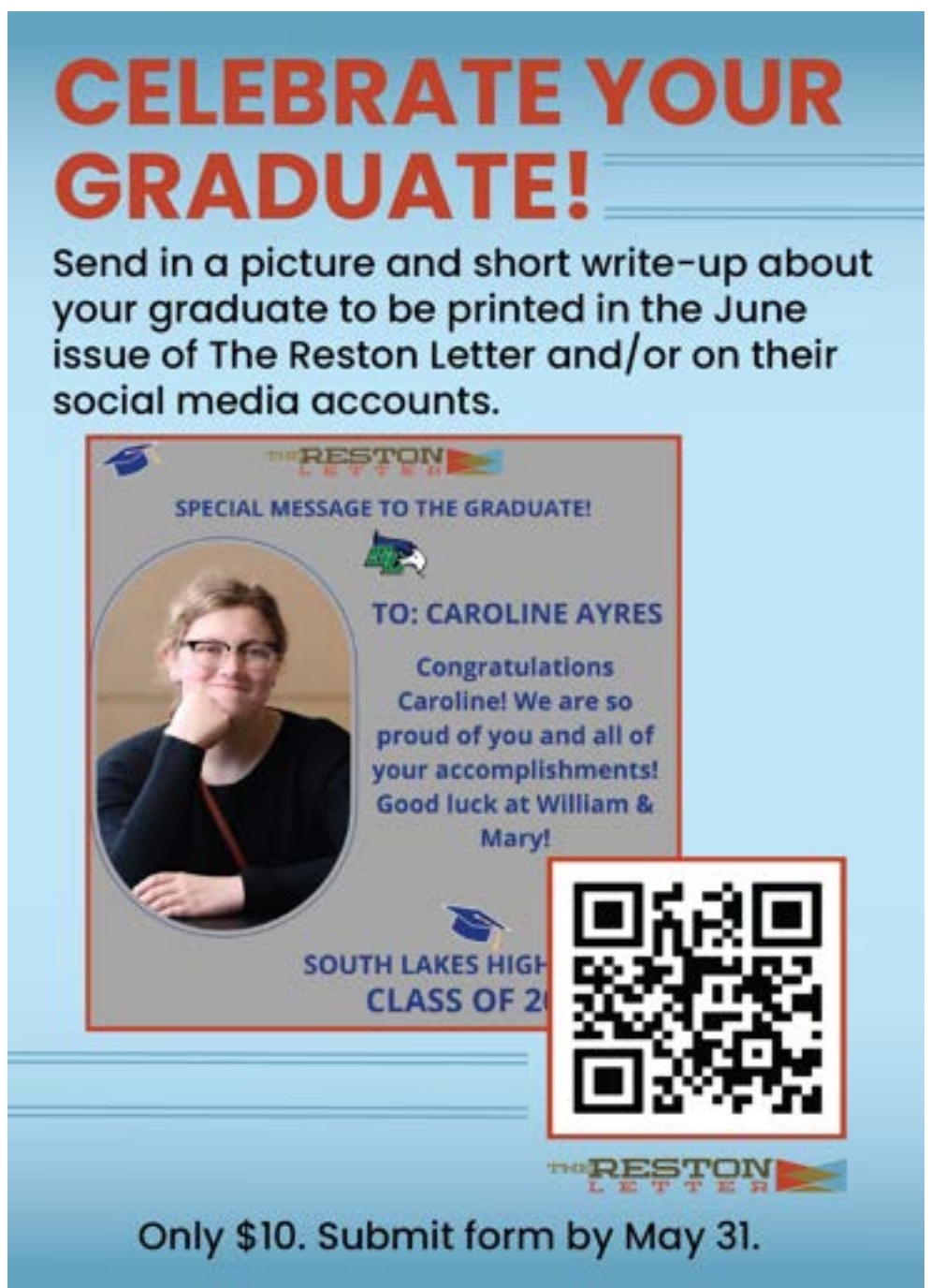
Advantage: Loudoun.
Upscale vowels. The word “Reston” does roll off the tongue nicely, but having a couple of luxury “u”s in one's address speaks to a certain exclusivity we'd like to grow accustomed to.

Metro. The only thing better than a nonexpress, 50-minute train to downtown D.C.? A 75-minute one.

One Loudoun, which is mathematically one better than Reston Town Center (no numerical value).

Spring vibes. Thinking that the Loudoun lifestyle would be an improvement is like living April 1 every day. The end.

—Restonian is a Reston blogger



CELEBRATE YOUR GRADUATE!

Send in a picture and short write-up about your graduate to be printed in the June issue of The Reston Letter and/or on their social media accounts.

SPECIAL MESSAGE TO THE GRADUATE!

TO: CAROLINE AYRES

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LIFESTYLE

Raw take: Kusshi Sushi

By Phantom Foodie

This month, in the spirit of the cherry blossoms and 10 years since first experiencing the culinary delights across the island of Honshu, Japanese cuisine seemed in order. With its entry into Reston Town Center, the regional chain Kusshi has opened its eighth location in the D.C., Maryland and Virginia region. Known for its expansive modern Japanese menu, Kusshi covers everything from traditional nigiri and innovative specialty rolls to ramen, donburi and curries.

Walking in, I expected the aesthetic of traditional sushi dens but was pleasantly surprised by the buzzing, urban izakaya feel in a modern, contemporary space. The impressive bar is center stage, boasting a large selection of Japanese sake and craft whiskey.

Also impressive is the wraparound sushi bar, where much of the magic happens. Moderately busy for a weekday night, the after-work crowd was imbibing specialty cocktails, while nonalcoholic Sapporo is an option for dry diners.

The menu took some time to digest, with an overwhelming number of items to choose from, so I leaned on the classics: pan-fried gyoza dumplings with pork; tuna (maguro) and salmon (sake) nigiri. The quality of the fish was premium and the rice properly compressed. Teriyaki chicken with stir-fried vegetables and steamed rice was predictable. Udon noodle soup with shrimp and vegetable tempura was well executed, complete with fish cake.

Price points are moderate to high, but the portions are generous and delicious. Service was friendly, knowledgeable, timely and attentive. As a finishing touch—and something I always appreciate—tableside tap-and-go checkout is available via a Toast handheld.

Going with a group? Opt for an Instagram-worthy sushi boat, or maybe just the Kusshi Canoe for Two. Try to snag a seat at the sushi bar to watch the chefs work; it's the best show in the house. I will be roll-ing back very soon.

Kusshi
11909 Democracy Drive
571-777-1992
Happy Hour Mon-Fri 3:30 to 6 p.m.
Online ordering for delivery or pickup
Gift cards available



Top: Udon Noodle Soup with shrimp and vegetable tempura
 Bottom: Teriyaki chicken. Photos by Phantom Foodie

Inside Art

By Louise Seirmarco-Yale,
 Reston Artist



You probably never thought of yourself as an art collector, but chances are you've bought flowers for one reason or another. You have been collecting beauty all your life without hesitation.

Flowers succeed where art struggles because they are socially preapproved. They do not require any defense of taste. They are experienced as “emotion-first,” not “judgment-first,” so buyers feel they can choose what they like and be right.

People trust their judgment about floral “personalities” because there is no penalty for being wrong. Flowers do not live long, so our choices represent low risk. Art decisions are not permanent either.

We seem wired to assign personality to visual forms, especially when those forms resemble faces, like daisies or sunflowers, or gestures, like drooping tulips or upright lilies. This is much the same way we respond to abstract art. We read mood or emotion into landscapes through simple line, shape and color. We are always participants as viewers, whether enjoying nature or art.

Colors also suggest mood or temperament. Red might suggest assertive, direct expression, while white might seem more restrained and formal. Yellow, like sunflowers, may feel outgoing or social. Think of a field of sunflowers. Along with daisies, they suggest optimism: open, friendly and uncomplicated, with faces outward and nothing hidden. Sunflowers feel easy and approachable—and that feels good. Art can feel that way too if we drop unnecessary expectations and simply enjoy it.

Sometimes we project a backstory onto flowers, such as roses expressing love or lilies symbolizing reverence. Roses seem comforting and are often chosen when feelings need to be felt, not explained, much like art. Choose what feels good in the moment when it comes to art, just as you do with flowers. Is that arrangement connected to a favorite memory? Art tells stories, too.

In a recent conversation with Rachel Rinaldi, store operator and lead designer at Blooms Reston Floral in South Lakes Plaza, it became clear that when a designer lays out a range of possibilities, it frees the buyer to trust their artistic instincts and choose what feels right. Rachel prompts each client to uncover the personality—the feel—of an event and match it with the right flowers, whether soft and romantic or clean and modern. She designs with the event's intention in mind. For 13 years, she has helped customers express artistic instincts through floral design. Experts like her, who listen and deliver satisfying results, are worth consulting. Then you decide.

You have been choosing floral beauty all your life. It was never that hard. No rules. Just instinct. What if we approached art the same way — choosing what simply feels good?

Trust yourself. You know what you like. You always have when choosing flowers. 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”. (Amazon) or as a free download at www.peopleneedart.com; email her: hello@peopleneedart.com, FB/IG @ [louise_seirmarco_art](https://www.instagram.com/louise_seirmarco_art)

A story from Reston’s spring housing market

By Roxanne Watts, Reston Realtor®

As spring returned to Reston and the cherry blossoms dazzled along Reston Parkway, Anne Marie readied her home for sale. She and her family had filled the house with a lifetime of memories during her 40 years as its original owner. Two years ago, as an empty-nester, Anne began to envision a lifestyle with less upkeep and easier maintenance. With guidance from her realtor, she formed an intentional plan to downsize, navigating mixed feelings about leaving the home she loved. Along the way came an estate sale and, in the last month, a transformation from deeply personal spaces to a market-ready home that excites today's buyers.

Because new listings attract the most attention, the home was held open the first weekend on the market, welcoming about 20 groups each day—a typical turnout. By Monday, Anne had three offers to choose from, two with escalation clauses above the asking price. Financing and appraisal contingencies were waived. Some buyers opted for pre-inspections, others waived inspections entirely.

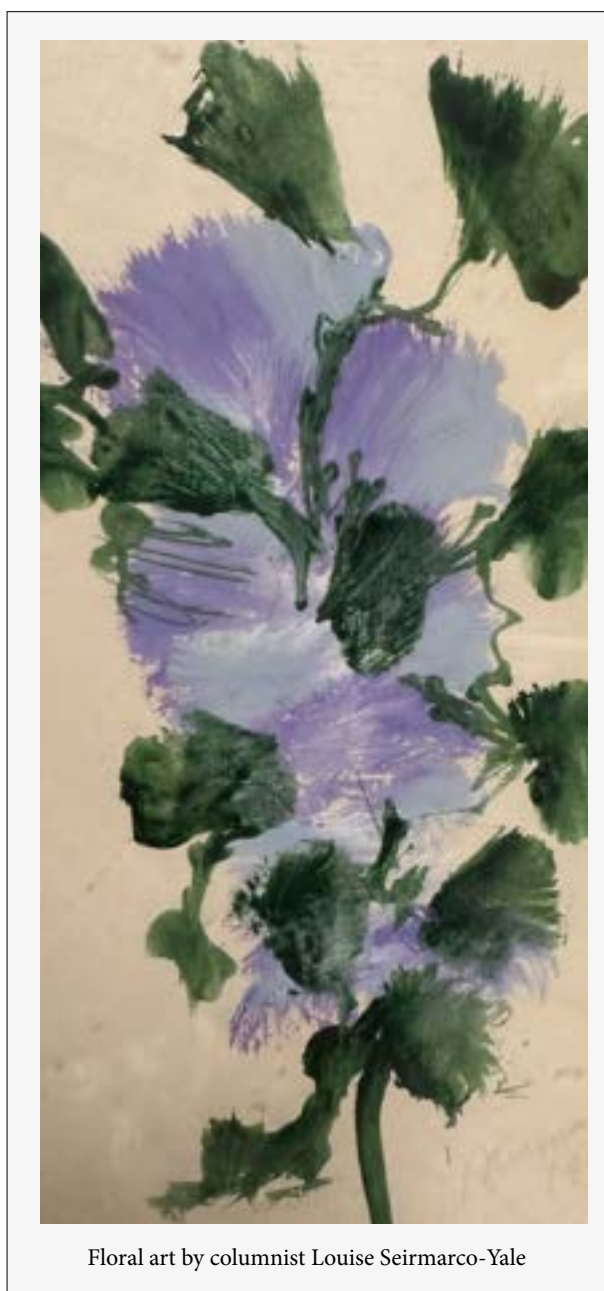
“New” isn't always necessary, but “fresh,” “pristine,” “immaculate,” “light-filled” and “open” are words that add value, I tell my clients. Wallpaper, like clothing, is extremely personal and, with few excep-

tions, is best removed. Anne's experience is common in today's fast-moving Reston market. The median number of days on the market is just six, meaning many homes go under contract within a week. Sales in the first quarter of 2026 (246) remain similar to the first quarter of 2025 (251), and new listings are steady, with 202 this year compared with 208 last year. While the press reports increasing inventory nationwide, Reston's available homes have held steady for now.

Interest rates briefly dropped to 5.99%, prompting price increases this month. Many homeowners also saw their tax bills rise about 4%, or roughly \$350 per year, reflecting last year's price gains. More detailed pricing trends will appear in the next article.

As this tax year closes and Earth Day approaches, consider this a reminder to clear space, lighten your load and let go of items you no longer need—just as Anne Marie did.

Community Shred Event
 Secure Shredding Onsite
 Please limit to 5 Banker's Boxes
 PLUS Make-A-Wish Bake Sale
 (Student Fund-Raiser)
Saturday, April 18, 9 a.m. - noon
1700 Reston Parkway4
Oakbrook Church - Across from
Home Depot
 Co-Sponsored by Raf Traboulsi,
 State Farm and Pruitt Title



Floral art by columnist Louise Seirmarco-Yale

LIFESTYLE

Home design tips bring more light into your space

Contributed by Reston's Synergy Design & Construction

Natural light has a powerful impact on how a home feels. It enhances architectural details, makes spaces appear larger and creates a sense of openness that supports everyday living. In many Northern Virginia homes, original layouts can unintentionally limit how light moves throughout the space.

Increasing natural light does not always

require an addition. With thoughtful planning and strategic design decisions, it is possible to improve how bright and connected a home feels. Here are five design-build approaches to consider.

1. Evaluate and expand your windows

Windows are the most direct way to increase natural light. During a remodel, it is worth assessing whether existing window size and placement are effectively serving the space. Expanding a kitchen window, replacing divided panes with larger glass panels or lowering a window to capture more outdoor views can brighten a room.

2. Improve sightlines within your layout

Sometimes the issue is not a lack of windows. Light may not travel freely. Dated homes often feature segmented rooms or partial walls that block natural light. Removing nonstructural walls, widening door openings or incorporating interior glass panels can help light move from one

area to another.

3. Choose finishes that reflect light

Materials play an important role in how light behaves in a space. Lighter-toned flooring, neutral cabinetry, reflective backsplashes and quartz countertops can help distribute light more effectively. Even paint sheen matters. Satin and eggshell finishes reflect more light than flat paints.

4. Introduce overhead natural light

For areas that lack exterior walls such as bathrooms, hallways or interior kitchens, overhead solutions can make a noticeable difference. Skylights bring daylight into darker areas without requiring an addition. In basements, enlarging window wells or adding egress windows can improve both light and livability.

5. Layer artificial lighting thoughtfully

Natural light changes throughout the day. A well-designed lighting plan helps maintain brightness after sunset. Layering recessed lighting, under-cabinet lights, sconces and dimmers adds flexi-



Photo by Synergy

bility and warmth.

Bringing more light into a home is not always about adding square footage. Careful reconfiguration within the existing footprint can often have a significant impact.

If you are considering ways to create a brighter, more open home, working with an experienced design-build professional can help guide the process. For more information, contact Synergy Design & Construction at www.RenovateHappy.com or 703-766-6333.

Answer Key

© RedHand Assocs.

O	T	N	E	L
T	R	A	E	H
D	E	C	R	A
E	N	I	A	M
L	R	P	A	F

Forested Wasteland

TRL Teen Feed

Teens on the go: Students ride free all over Reston



Middle school students hop on the bus at North Point to go to Reston Town Center.

Photo by TRL

By Meg Marsh, Reston neighbor

A few years ago, our oldest daughter taught us how the Reston Internal Bus System (RIBS) works for students. As parents, we hadn't realized how useful this transportation option could be. From our house, it's just a two-minute walk to a Fairfax Connector (RIBS) bus stop. Before she could drive, our daughter routinely hopped on the bus with friends to get to Reston Town Center, South Lakes High School extracurriculars, and neighborhood meet-ups. Now, our eighth-grade daughter can take advantage of the same system.

Middle and high school students in Fairfax County can ride free on the Fairfax Connector bus system. We have found it to be a safe and practical way for our daughters to become comfortable with public transit. While students can ride multiple routes, the

RIBS routes and stops are a convenient way to explore Reston and learn how local transit works.

To ride free, students can apply for a bus pass through the Fairfax County Public Schools website: <https://www.fcps.edu/sites/default/files/Free-Student-Bus-Pass-Agreement-Plus-Metrobus-2025-26.pdf>. Once you have a pass, you can explore the five RIBS routes to map the closest stop to home or your destination: <https://linkrtc.org/local-transportation-links/bus-schedules-with-maps/>.

Our older daughter uses an app called Transit, which covers the Fairfax Connector and RIBS as well as other U.S. cities. For students planning college or a career in a metro area, this is a great way to learn public transportation. Mistakes happen—getting on the wrong route is part of the learning experience—but it teaches teens how to navigate and get back on track.

ChalkFest returns to Reston for eARTh Day celebration

Contributed by Public Art Reston

Public Art Reston will bring ChalkFest back to Reston Town Square Park on Saturday, April 25, as part of the annual eARTh Day celebration hosted by the Reston Town Center Association.

The outdoor event, set for 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., invites artists of all ages and skill levels to create chalk murals in designated squares throughout the park. Categories include professional and amateur artists, families and children, along with a people's choice award.

Chalking begins at 11 a.m. and judging at 4 p.m.; winners will be announced at 5 p.m.

Visitors can watch the artwork take shape throughout the day, with designs inspired by nature and environmental themes. The event will also feature live music, free face painting and

other family-friendly activities.

Winning entries from Public Art Reston's poetry contest will be featured during the event.

Artist registration is open, with details available at publicartreston.org.



ChalkFest will be at Town Center April 25. Photo by PAR

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Foley Academy of Irish Dance	703-375-9369
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Sunset Hills Montessori School	703-476-7477
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