Volume 4 Issue 11 November 2026

THE RESTON LETTER

Reston welcomes autumn, more changes



Change on the way: Leaves and landscapes are changing around town. Photo by Benjamin Burgess

Reston: Large housing developments on all points of the compass

A series of reports on the future of "New Town" as a new town

By Gene Powell, staff writer

If you've thought "housing developments are everywhere" in Reston, you're right.

More than 60 years ago, Reston was founded as an innovative "new town" with a guiding motto: "Live, work, play." The town debuted as a diverse Washington, D.C., suburb with multiple housing options, centralized locations for offices, light businesses and mixed retail operations, as well as open green spaces.

In 2026, large development projects are transforming that idyllic vision through projects on all points of the compass, many of them replacing office and professional buildings with townhomes, apartments and condominiums.

As Reston's transformation continues, from lightly occupied farmland to the 1960s "New Town" to what some today call "Silicon Valley East," concerns include crippling traffic increases, huge surges in school-age populations, potentially inadequate power, sewer and water infrastructure, and the loss of open

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London, Gander, Reston, Rexton: 25 years of Operation Yellow Ribbon

By Sophia Shelley, guest writer

Twenty-five years ago, in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, a small Canadian town put its own lives on hold to help thousands of stranded travelers.

Following the attacks, 38 aircraft bound for the U.S. were diverted to Gander, Newfoundland. Once an important refueling stop for transatlantic flights, the town of about 9,000 residents suddenly faced an influx of 6,600 passengers and crew from around the world—an increase of nearly 70% of its population.

Over the next five days, Gander residents worked nearly around the clock as passengers waited for U.S. airspace to reopen. They prepared meals, provided shelter, helped travelers contact their families and did whatever they could to assist people caught in an extraordinary situation.

Out of the tragedy came remarkable stories of compassion. In 2017, many of them were brought to the stage in the Broadway musical "Come From Away." The title refers to the nickname given to the stranded travelers: "come-from-aways." The musical recounts Operation Yellow Ribbon, Canada's effort to accommodate diverted flights, while bringing to life the personal stories of kindness that emerged from the crisis.



Mark and Karen Thibeault helped 6,600 unexpected visitors in their small town of Gander, Newfoundland after the 9/11 attacks. Photo contributed by Sophia Shelley

In November 2025, production rights to "Come From Away" became available to theater groups in the U.S. and Canada. The timing gave high school theater companies an opportunity to add the musical to their seasons as the 25th anniversary of 9/11

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bulletin



Reston Chorale turns 60, our Kids section editor wins at Chalkfest, Fellowship Square's seasonal drive, more development plans

education



Homecoming parades, elementary school's "Walk in My Shoes" event, HHS academic team wins big, Making an Impact column

sports



Seniors and friends break high school records at South Lakes, and Herndon, HOF inductees, HHS girls golf wrap-up

lifestyle

Corsica Wine Bar review by Phantom Foodie, Reston author wins book award, Inside Art column, Teen Feed: a guide to holiday conversation

opinions

AI is not your therapist, and how to work on a healthy gut this season

info@therestonletter.com

The Reston Letter, LLC

@therestonletter therestonletter.com

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THE BULLETIN

Mission Statement:
he Reston Letter seeks to inform the Reston community of local events and services, highlight local residents' accomplishments, and to provide a platform for residents to weigh in on local topics relevant to the majority of our readers.

Fellowship Square helps Reston's older adults remain independent

By Ellyn Wexler, staff writer

For seniors living on limited incomes, paying for housing, food and health care can be a constant challenge. As those costs rise, finding an affordable place to live becomes increasingly difficult.

In Reston, Fellowship Square addresses some of those challenges through two affordable housing communities: Lake Anne House and Hunters Woods Fellowship House. Together, the properties have 464 apartments and nearly 600 residents, according to Zach Cummings, the organization's director of philanthropy and community outreach.

The Rev. Dr. John Scherzer founded Fellowship Square in 1960 to provide affordable housing and supportive services to seniors in the Washington, D.C., area. Since then, the organization has developed and maintained 670 affordable apartments across four properties.

Lake Anne House, the organization's founding property, opened in two phases, in 1971 and 1976. The current building opened in 2022. The other Reston property, Hunters Woods, serves a diverse population whose residents speak 11 different languages.

Fellowship Square housing is available to people 62 and older who meet income and asset requirements set by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). At Hunters Woods, the average annual resident income is $10,668. Both Reston properties have waiting lists of three to five years.

Affordable housing is only part of what Fellowship Square provides. Each property has resident services coordinators who help older adults navigate the challenges of aging, connect with health care and other resources and advocate for their needs.

At Hunters Woods, two coordinators assist with everything from Medicare and Medicaid enrollment to arranging visits from medical specialists. They also conduct annual assessments to identify residents' needs and determine what assistance might be helpful.

When residents need help beyond what Fellowship Square can provide, the coordinators work with them and their families to locate resources through public and private organizations.

The properties also offer opportunities for residents to socialize and stay engaged, including monthly birthday celebrations and bingo. Health-related programs and visits from medical professionals are particularly valuable, especially when they address needs that might otherwise go unmet.

Dental care is one example. Many residents lack dental coverage or cannot afford routine care. Without the means to pay for treatment, some go without needed services.

Through a partnership with the Fenwick Foundation, Fellowship Square arranges free dental services, including cleanings and fillings. During the past year, the foundation visited Hunters Woods three times and plans to return.

The need for affordable senior housing continues to grow. People are living longer, often on fixed incomes, while the costs of housing, groceries, prescription drugs and health care continue to climb.

"The biggest challenge facing seniors in the Reston area is affordability," Cummings said. He cited rising costs for housing, health insurance, prescription drugs and groceries as particular burdens for people on fixed incomes.

Food costs present another challenge, making it harder for some residents to afford nutritious meals. To help address that need, Fellowship Square developed Fellowship Fresh, a program that connects residents with healthy, nutrient-rich food. It relies on hundreds of volunteers and community partners, including the Capital Area Food Bank.



Residents at Hunters Woods Fellowship House receive fresh food during a weekly distribution supported by the Capital Area Food Bank. Photo contributed by Fellowship Square

At Hunters Woods, residents receive weekly food distributions through a partnership with the Capital Area Food Bank and a monthly delivery through the USDA Brown Bag program. Local organizations, community groups and individuals provide additional donations between deliveries. A food pantry, walk-in freezer and refrigerator also allow residents to access food when they need it.

Distributions typically include fresh fruits and vegetables, shelf-stable items such as spaghetti noodles, tomato sauce and canned vegetables, and frozen meat. In 2025, Fellowship Fresh received the first-place Best Practices Award from the Commonwealth Council on Aging.

Fellowship Square is also looking to the future. The organization is in the early stages of developing a 72-unit affordable senior housing building in Loudoun County and plans to continue improving services at its existing properties.

Reston residents and businesses can help by volunteering at food distributions and resident activities or contributing financially. HUD provides rental assistance for the buildings, while donations from individuals, businesses and organizations help fund supportive services.

The organization also welcomes partnerships with local groups interested in sponsoring resident programs and activities.

For more information, visit fellowshipsquare.org.







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THE BULLETIN

Reston Chorale celebrates 60th season with new works and old favorites

By Heidi Kibirsky, guest writer



Reston's founder wanted the arts to bring the community together. He helped establish The Reston Chorale in 1966. Still going strong, The Reston Chorale is celebrating its 60th year. Photo by Mike Olson

When Reston founder Robert E. Simon Jr. planned his new community, he envisioned the arts as a way to bring people together. In 1966, that vision inspired the founding of The Reston Chorale.

Now in its 60th season, the Chorale performs a wide range of music, from classical works and Broadway favorites to popular songs and new compositions.

A musical legacy

In the summer of 1966, Simon recruited Dr. James Christian Pfohl, an experienced music educator and conductor who had led the Brevard Music Center in North Carolina, to establish a musical presence in Reston. Pfohl founded the Reston Music Center, which included a summer music camp, a children's chorus, a chamber orchestra and The Reston Chorale.

The Chorale made its debut Dec. 11, 1966, at Lake Anne Community Center. A week later, singers performed in "Christmas in a New Town," an outdoor concert at Washington Plaza. WETA filmed the performance, which aired across the Washington area and was distributed nationally.

The group pursued ambitious programming from the start. In 1967, it premiered "Vespers," a work by American composer Robert Evett commissioned for the first anniversary of Reston's dedication. Two years later, it launched the New Town Concert Series, presenting choral and chamber orchestra performances.

Over the decades, the Chorale has performed major works such as Mendelssohn's "Elijah" and Fauré's "Requiem," collaborated with regional orchestras and explored popular music. In 2022, it joined the Piedmont Symphony Orchestra and a rock band for "Music of Queen (and Friends)" at Capital One Hall.

After performing "Elijah" in March 2020, the Chorale shifted to a virtual season during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2024, D.C.-area choral directors voted the Chorale "Best Municipal Chorus" in the Greater Washington, D.C., Area Choral Excellence (Ovation) Awards.

Artistic Director David B. Lang, who has led the Chorale since 2009, oversees a repertoire that welcomes singers with varied backgrounds and experience.

Anniversary season

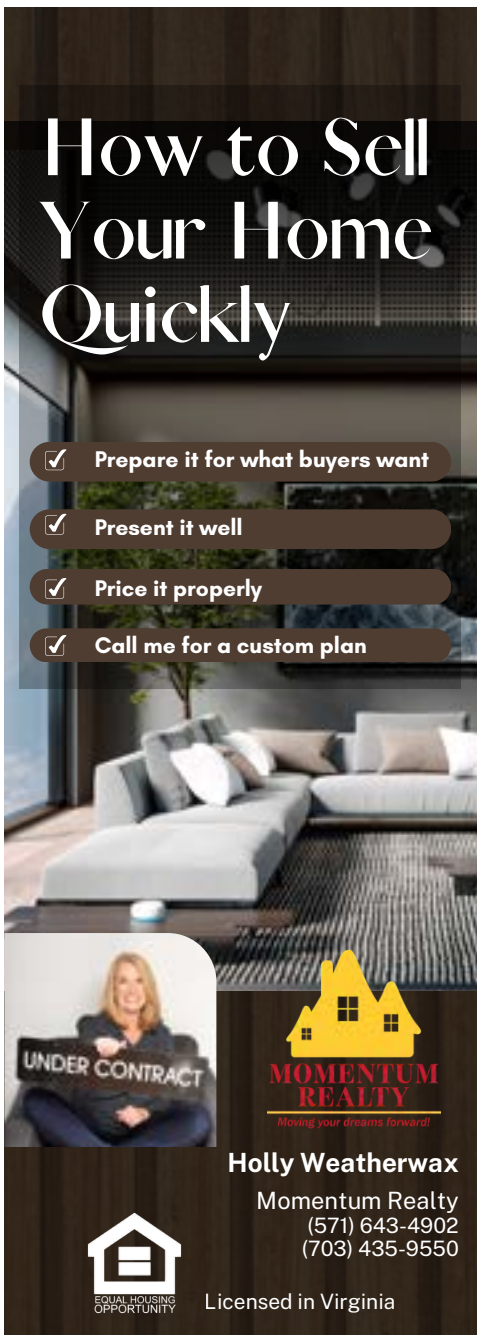
The 2026-27 season, themed "A Tapestry of Voices: 60 Seasons of Harmony," combines holiday traditions and Broadway favorites with new choral works.

"Threads of Joy," the Chorale's holiday concert celebrating its 60th anniversary season, will be performed Saturday, Dec. 5, at 4 and 7 p.m. at Reston Community Center Hunters Woods. Members of the Virginia Bronze Handbell Ensemble will join the Chorale.

Attendees who bring toiletries or nonperishable food for the South Lakes High School Pantry will receive $5 off admission to the Dec. 22 sing-along of Handel's "Messiah," scheduled for 7:30 p.m. at St. John Neumann Catholic Church. A clean, new or gently used child-size coat or jacket also qualifies for a $5 discount. Organizers particularly need coats for elementary and middle school students.

On Sunday, Feb. 21, soprano Jacquelynne Fontaine-Isaac, a veteran of the national tour of "The Phantom of the Opera," and Helen Hayes Award-winning tenor Alan Naylor will present "Broadway Favorites with Jac-

Continued on page 4



Bob Welland: The artist behind our Kids section

By Dawn Crosson, owner



The Reston Letter's Kids section editor, Bob Welland, works on his award-winning chalk drawing. Photo by Carla Brown

Bob Welland has been The Reston Letter's Kids section editor since February. Originally from Halifax, Nova Scotia, he has lived in Reston for the past 25 years, working as an IT consultant for Accenture while raising a family with his wife. After retiring, Welland was looking for something new to pursue.

"I've admired journalism since I was the editor of my high school newspaper. Since I retired, I've been pursuing creative outlets. So when I heard about the Kids section editor opening, I jumped at the opportunity."

Now, he has another reason to look forward to each issue. "I like getting each issue in the mail or walking by a stack of them in the library. It's nice to see all our combined work in print and being able to hold it in my hands."

For the Kids section, Welland draws on his experience as a den leader for his son's Cub Scout troop. "I always liked to think of silly ideas for den meetings to keep them entertained. I try to make the Kids section something that kid-me would have liked, a cross between Highlights and MAD magazines." His goal each month is simple: "I hope kids get a laugh and have some fun doing a puzzle."

Welland recently won second place in both the amateur and People's Choice categories at Reston Town Center's Chalkfest in October. He has entered chalk festivals in Stafford and Reston for three years, refining his techniques for blending and matching colors. As with his work for the Kids section, he starts with a grid and focuses on each small square until the whole picture comes together.

Whether playing pickleball at Autumnwood, recreational ice hockey at SkateQuest or enjoying Reston's trails, Welland is always thinking up ideas for the Kids section. His latest creation has already delighted younger and older readers alike. "I've just started making comic strips about Reston's fuzziest superhero, Fair-Fox. I'm looking forward to inventing new adventures and side characters each month."

THE RESTON LETTER

CREATIVE TEAM

Sabine Soltys — Casey Menish
Josh Haug — Lia Reynolds

REGULAR CONTRIBUTORS

Restonian — Louise Yale
Katy Keffer — Scott Parkin
Hayley Sherwood — Phantom Foodie

PHOTOGRAPHY

Benjamin Burgess
Isadora Guerreiro
Patricia Kovacs

LAYOUT DESIGN

Samantha Baker
Kailyn Kohler

STAFF WRITERS AND EDITORS

Terri Wright — Matthew Reider
Bob Welland — Gene Powell
Maria Walkup — Kaydence Smith
Chuck Cascio — Ellyn Wexler
Sarah Golden — Holly Weatherwax
Ava-Grace Satterfield

OWNER/EDITOR

Dawn Crosson

GUEST WRITERS

Emma Kingkeo

THE BULLETIN

Housing developments, cont'd from page 1

spaces, small-business locations and recreational opportunities.

Perhaps most devastating to the goal of town founder Robert E. Simon, who envisioned Reston as a diverse, mixed-income community, are housing prices. Many single-family homes are valued at more than $1 million, while "affordable housing" can mean a one-bedroom condominium priced at $350,000.

The civic response to those proposals, concerns and prices is split among a diverse combination of private and public entities and centered on a comprehensive plan, updated periodically, that aims to balance protecting Reston's original vision with recognizing contemporary realities.

Among the major developments proposed, seeking county approval or being built are:

- **Commerce Metro Center:** The 16-acre development is west of Wiehle Avenue, between Sunrise Valley Drive and the Dulles Toll Road, adjacent to the Wiehle-Reston East Metro station. It also borders the Reston Association communities of Wethersfield Cluster, Harborside Cluster, Hunters Green Cluster, Hampton Meadows and Upper Lakes Drive. A county Planning Commission hearing is set for Nov. 17 on a proposal that includes office, hotel and retail uses, as well as 540 new residential units. Reston Association's Board of Directors is concerned about associated light and noise pollution and is asking that a proposed 21-story building be reduced "to mirror the Google building opposite the site." The board also wants the residents to join the association.
- **East Link:** On Reston's western edge, along Sunrise Valley Drive near the Herndon Metro station, the most recent plan would place multifamily and stacked housing on 35 acres now occupied by three office buildings. A public hearing is set for Dec. 9 before the county Planning Commission.
- **Reston East Planning Study:** This 39.6-acre area south of the Dulles Toll Road extends from Upper Lakes Drive to Hunter Mill Road. Office buildings could be replaced by as many as 2,000 townhomes. On Oct. 27, county planners posted public comments from a July meeting noting concerns about traffic congestion, housing affordability and the impact on the adjacent W&OD Trail. A second community meeting is expected in December.
- **Town Center North:** A long-planned extension of the existing Town Center, the project could take 20 years or more to complete. It includes a mix of public and private projects, including the relocation of existing library and shelter buildings, new park space and a recreation facility.
- **Lake Fairfax Business Park:** On Reston's eastern side, along Sunset Hills Road and the W&OD Trail, south of Lake Fairfax Park, the proposed development would contain 1,250 housing units and some retail options on 49 acres of the 76-acre site. An existing hotel, fitness center and data center will remain.
- **Isaac Newton Square:** In the heart of Reston, a few blocks north of the Wiehle-Reston East Metro station, portions of this original Reston office park are being transformed into what ultimately could be 2,100 housing units.
- **Reston Crossing:** A 24-acre concept immediately south of Metro's Reston Town Center station and the Dulles Toll Road. County planning documents describe it as a "cohesive seven-block, transit-oriented mixed-use urban development." Some plans for the site call for several high-rise buildings and more than 1,200 residences.
- **Reston National Golf Course:** A long-debated proposal would revise or replace at least part of the golf course on Reston's southern edge with townhomes. Some county officials have called the controversial proposal the "poster child" for future changes to Reston's original mix of residential, business, retail and recreational uses.



The Commerce Metro Center project is located on Centennial Park Drive and Commerce Park Drive, including the Wiehle Reston-East Metro station, just west of the intersection of Wiehle Avenue and Sunrise Valley Drive. The site is 15.95 acres and encompasses multiple parcels and buildings. The proposal includes more than 2 million square feet of new development with retail, hotel, and office uses, in addition to 540 new residential units, parking spaces, and pedestrian improvements.

Reston's skyline has already changed dramatically with the 40-story Skymark apartment building near Metro's Town Center station and multiple high-rise buildings at the Wiehle-Reston East Metro station. A 2022 Reston Association environmental study forecast future population growth as high as 120,000, an estimate already challenged as too low.

Residents also will see other physical changes. New bridges or underpasses across the Dulles Toll Road are planned or under discussion as extensions of Soapstone Drive, South Lakes Drive and Town Center Parkway. A major developer floated the idea in 2025 of a trolley line connecting retail areas and existing office centers from Wiehle Avenue to Plaza America. The possible sale of at least part of the U.S. Geological Survey campus in Reston also was included in a 2026 listing by federal agencies of potentially disposable sites.

The town's future also will be shaped by outside forces: the rapidly changing economic and business environment along the corridor stretching from Tysons and the Capital Beltway to Dulles International Airport and beyond. Loudoun County's status as the data center "world capital," combined with other strong growth along the Dulles Toll Road corridor, will place new pressures on electrical and water resources and could negatively affect adjacent residential neighborhoods.

Next: What makes Reston and the Dulles corridor in general so attractive to developers?



Reston Chorale, cont'd from page 3

que & Alan" at 4 p.m. Lang will accompany the singers at Reston Community Center Hunters Woods. Presented by Music with the Maestro's Jeffrey Dokken, the concert will benefit the Chorale.

The spring concert, "Colors of Harmony," will take place Saturday, March 20, at 4 p.m. at Heritage Fellowship Church. The program will feature choral classics from the past six decades and the world premiere of a commissioned work by composer Michael John Trotta.

The season concludes Saturday, May 8, with "A Tapestry of Song," featuring a new choral arrangement by composer and conductor Dr. Allan Laiño, a former associate director. Performances are scheduled for 4 and 7 p.m. at Reston Community Center Hunters Woods. The date is subject to change.

Community events include two activities on Wednesday, Nov. 11. A small group of Chorale members will sing "The Star-Spangled Banner" in Herndon at 11 a.m. That evening, Musical Bingo, a fundraiser, will run from 6:30 to 9 p.m. at Lake Anne Brew House. The event will feature four rounds of music-based bingo and prizes, with food and beverages available for purchase.

On Sunday, May 23, 2027, the Chorale and the Brass Band of Northern Virginia will present "A Star-Spangled Salute," a free patriotic concert from 4 to 5:30 p.m. at the Reston Town Center Pavilion. Attendees can bring lawn chairs, make thank-you cards and donate care-package items for deployed service members.



Reston Chorale 1966 Concert at Washington Plaza. Photo by Arville Daniels for The Reston Times

Investing in the next generation

Board President Ruth Ann Pinkman said the anniversary recognizes the singers, audiences, volunteers and supporters who have sustained the Chorale across generations.

The organization also invests in young vocalists through the Robert E. Simon Jr. Music Scholarships, which support up to eight high school and college students each season. Recipients receive financial awards to help with educational expenses and gain experience performing with the Chorale and professional musicians.

Six decades after its founding, The Reston Chorale continues to connect the community through music while preserving its history and introducing audiences to new works.

For concert details, tickets and season updates, visit RestonChorale.org.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Submit your event to our online calendar at therestonletter.com/events

13-15 NOV — Our Town
Herndon Theatre's fall play

Details on page 9
Herndon High School

18 NOV — A Spirited History: The Bowman & Bourbon Story
7-8 p.m.
Discussion of Reston's role in Virginia distilleries
Reston Community Center Lake Anne
Free

18-21 NOV — Come From Away
South Lakes Theatre's fall musical

Details on page 9
South Lakes High School

21 NOV — The Ultimate Christmas Show abridged
Presented by Reduced Shakespeare Company
3 p.m. and 7 p.m.
The Leila Gordon Theatre
Reston Community Center Hunters Woods
$25-$35

26 NOV — Turkey Day 5K and 1-mile runs by Potomac River Running
5K: 8 a.m.
Tot Trot: 9:10 a.m.
1-mile: 9:15 a.m.
South Lakes High School
Sign up prraces.com

27 NOV — Christmas tree lighting
6 p.m.
Lighting, Santa, horse-drawn carriages
Reston Town Center pavilion





5 DEC — Gifts from the "HeART"
10 a.m.-3 p.m.
Hoilday craft sale: artwork, jewelry, ceramics, etc. by local artist
Reston Community Center Lake Anne

5 DEC — "The Wonder of the Season"
4 p.m. and 7 p.m.
Reston Chorale's holiday concert
Reston Community Center Hunters Woods
$25-$35
Tickets online or box office

6 DEC — Sea Glass Christmas Tree Workshop & Wine Tasting
2-4 p.m.
Craft glass Christmas trees and taste wines
The Wine Cabinet
$89 register online

12 DEC — Jingle and Mingle
10-10:45 a.m.
Holiday sing-along
One Hunters Woods
2310 Colts Neck Rd
Free

13 DEC — "Holiday Sparkle"
2-4 p.m
Holiday-themed reception of artists' collective
Reston Art Gallery and Studios
Lake Anne Plaza
Free



LIFETIME

Finding local aging in place resources

By Scott Parkin, staff writer

Four years ago, longtime Reston resident Sharon Canner and I met online during the pandemic and decided to work together to build a nonprofit organization focused on educating and informing residents about aging in place. Through our work with Reston for a Lifetime (RFL), we became neighbors helping older neighbors remain independent as long as possible.

From previous community listening sessions, we knew that very few people were aware of the resources available to help them age in place.

During my long career in communications for national aging organizations, I learned that breaking through the "I don't want to hear about it (until I need to)" barrier was, and remains, a challenge.

However, hundreds of local and national government and nonprofit programs can help older Reston residents remain at home, particularly when faced with a serious health crisis.

Fairfax County offers dozens of programs to help older residents, but finding information about them online used to be challenging. In two focus groups I attended as part of the county's research for its current aging plan, SHAPE, the Future of Aging, access to online information for older adults was frequently cited as a serious problem.

That has changed. Fairfax County's Department of Family Services Adults and Aging Division now offers an Older Adult Services portal that makes it easier to navigate the many resources available through the County. Its home page includes links to programs that can make life easier for family caregivers and individuals. The website is https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/familyservices/older-adults.

Whether the subject is healthy aging, housing, caregiving, transportation, legal issues or planning for aging in place, RFL seeks to provide unbiased information about local and national resources on its website and in its free monthly newsletter. We also partner with other organizations to offer educational programs to the Reston community on key aging-in-place topics.

If aging in place is important to you, I recommend visiting the County's portal and the RFL website and signing up for our free monthly newsletter as well as the County's.

Scott L. Parkin is co-founder of Reston for a Lifetime (www.RestonforaLifetime.org), a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating and informing residents about aging in place.



EDUCATION

Lake Anne Elementary promotes empathy through 'Walk in My Shoes' program

By Holly Weatherwax, staff writer

The "Walk in My Shoes" program helps Lake Anne students understand the challenges others face and learn ways to be more inclusive.

On Sept. 25, the school held three assemblies for grades four through six. Students were assigned numbers from one to six and placed in groups with classmates across their grade level. Teachers participated to familiarize themselves with the lessons. Each student received a "passport" and earned stickers for completing each station.

This year's program focused on six challenges: movement disorders, vision impairment, asthma, dyslexia, sensory sensitivities and color vision differences. Students spent eight minutes at each station in what the program calls an "empathy muscle-building circuit."

At the color vision differences station, students received a stuffed bear and clothes. They were asked to dress the bear in specific colors, but all the items were black and white.

At the asthma station, students paired up to plan a playdate, choosing activities such as playing soccer on a grassy field or sledding in cold weather. They then learned about their friend's asthma triggers, which could include exercise, cold weather or grass pollen. The pairs discussed whether they could follow their original plan safely or adapt it so their friend could participate.

These hands-on activities help students understand how everyday situations can challenge others and how small changes can make activities more inclusive. Parent volunteer Dana Yasek said the stations connected to students' daily lives, sparking thoughtful conversations and teaching them ways to include their friends.









This is the second year of the "Walk in My Shoes" experience at Lake Anne Elementary. Photos contributed by LAES.

The final two minutes at each station focused on how students could apply what they learned to include classmates facing similar challenges.

Lake Anne is offering the program for the second year, using an assembly format. Other schools have incorporated it into classroom instruction or counselor meetings.

Walk in My Shoes (WIMS) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded by Margaret Behrns, who serves as president and program director. She began developing the program while volunteering at Floris Elementary School, where she ran it for 10 years. Behrns recognized the need for empathy education and found support for the concept in Michele Borba's book "UnSelfie."

"In today's world, empathy equals success, and it's what I call the Empathy Advantage that will give our children the edge they need to live meaningful, productive and happy lives and thrive in a complex new world," Borba said.

The program has been used at schools in Fairfax County and beyond. WIMS brought it to Lake Anne through a grant for Title I schools, with support from former PTA President and current Vice President Rebecca Samba and parent volunteer Dana Yasek.

WIMS has another grant available this school year for an additional Title I school. For more information, visit www.walkinmyshoesprogram.com or email walkinmyshoesprogram@gmail.com to inquire about the grant.

Students experienced six simulated challenges: movement disorders, vision impairment, asthma, dyslexia, sensory sensitivities and color vision differences.

South Lakes Culinary students shine



Photo contributed by Maria Walkup

Guests gathered in support of the South Lakes High School Culinary Arts Program, where students prepared and served the meal under the direction of culinary arts instructor Chef Cynthia Stowers. Pictured, from left, are Jessica McInerney, Suzanne Bruens, Amy Shaw of the SLHS Pantry, Maria Walkup of the Reston Letter, Shannon Steele, CEO of Cornerstones, and Roberta Gosling, co-founder of the SLHS Pantry.



Operation Yellow Ribbon, cont'd from page 1

approached. South Lakes High School is performing the play Nov. 18-21. For one local, the story has a particularly personal connection.

Reston resident Tom Shelley was aboard Virgin Atlantic Flight 21 from London to Washington, D.C. A British national, Shelley was traveling alone ahead of his move to Northern Virginia. About four hours into the flight, the pilot announced an unscheduled landing in Canada. It was only after landing in Gander that Shelley began to realize something was wrong.

With the small airport unable to accommodate so many passengers at once, many travelers had to wait nearly 24 hours before disembarking.

While Shelley waited, Gander residents were already mobilizing. Earlier that morning, music teacher Mark Thibeault had used a free period at Gander Academy to pick up supplies for his classroom. While at the store, Thibeault watched the attacks unfold in New York on the TV and immediately returned to school to alert the principal.

"I don't know why, but I said it may be significant for us in Gander," Thibeault recalled.

He was right. Shortly after he returned, school staff learned that Gander Academy would be converted into temporary shelters for passengers from the diverted flights.

That afternoon, bus drivers suspended an ongoing strike to help transport passengers and get children home safely. The military mobilized at the school to move desks and set up sleeping cots, while teachers and residents, including Thibeault, gathered supplies for thousands of unexpected guests.

Shelley was given an airplane blanket and a place to sleep on the floor of the academy's art room. Thibeault and his wife, Karen, a third-grade teacher, joined the effort to help passengers in whatever ways they could.

After his first day at the school, Shelley approached a volunteer and offered to help. The volunteer directed him to Thibeault, and the two began working together as "gophers," picking up supplies and driving around Gander in Thibeault's old Pathfinder. At the end of the day, Thibeault invited Shelley to his home for a shower and a cup of tea.

What began as a practical gesture of hospitality developed into a lasting friendship. The generosity Shelley encountered during Operation Yellow Ribbon has stayed with both men 25 years later.

Thibeault has since moved to the village of Rexton, but he vividly remembers the generosity shown by Gander residents. One encounter, in particular, remains with him.

"We were asked to go to this apartment building. We walked up the stairs and into the corridor and there was the smell of baked bread. We went into this woman's apartment and it was very plain, but she had 12 loaves of bread with butter glaze on the tops. She said, 'I've made these for the passengers.'"

"She didn't really have much to give," Thibeault said. "But that [generosity] was the epitome of what this was all about."

For Shelley, whose journey to Northern Virginia began with an unexpected detour, the experience remains a lasting reminder of human kindness.

"In a moment of great anguish for so many people, the hospitality that was shown by the people of Gander was such a counterpoint to the reason that we were there. A nation and a culture under attack, and yet we saw the true good in people from the lengths that they went to to make these complete strangers feel loved. Thank you."

EDUCATION

Making an Impact

Jai Cole

By Chuck Cascio, author and former South Lakes teacher

As a child fascinated by marine biology, Jai Cole drew a picture of herself snorkeling and studying fish for a fourth-grade assignment, even though she had never done so. Living near Lake Fairfax Park and frequently visiting on her own to study nature helped fuel that fascination. She also fell in love with sports on Reston's courts and fields, playing field hockey, basketball and softball at South Lakes High School. She later earned a full scholarship to play basketball at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where she played for four years while majoring in biology.

Jai Cole's story takes many turns, but one element remains constant: her commitment to whatever challenges she faces, whether academic, athletic or work-related. For the past five years, the 1993 South Lakes High School graduate has served as executive director and CEO of the Fairfax County Park Authority, overseeing more than 423 parks, 23,000 acres of green space and more than 325 miles of trails.

"I fell in love with nature at Lake Fairfax Park and had the adventures that led me to become an ecologist," Jai says. "Reston and Fairfax County had such a significant influence on who I am that I jumped at the opportunity to lead, preserve and enhance my childhood park system."

Her childhood was deeply influenced by her parents' decision to move to Reston before she started elementary school. "Reston founder Bob Simon had created a middle-class Black mecca in the 1970s, and my parents were attracted to the community because it was a place that was welcoming and inclusive, regardless of your race or income. My family found a community here."

After college and graduate school, Jai returned to live with her family in Reston while looking for work. She found a temporary job at the Reston Community Center, "punching passes at the pool, and then I moved up to be the assistant director of adult programs." Eventually, she became director of adult programs, but "that's when everyone was like, 'Whoa, what are you doing? Get in your field!' which was supposed to be marine biology."

That advice led her to become a freshwater ecologist for the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission's Montgomery Parks department.

"That move was also supposed to be temporary," she says, "because I didn't expect to fall in love with parks, but it's a love affair that continues to this day."

That love of parks aligns with Jai's fascination with water, the outdoors and recreation, all of which fuel her determination to maximize the impact of her work. As CEO of the Fairfax County Park Authority, she says, "I can save something tangible in my community by stewarding streams and forests that I can see, touch and appreciate. That gives me an immense amount of purpose!"



Jai Cole

As her experience in parks and recreation has grown, Jai has become increasingly aware of another way her work can make a difference. "I saw new opportunities to help bring communities together and to break down social, racial and cultural barriers. I saw how I can help reduce childhood obesity rates just by putting a playground in a lower-income community and upgrading fields to ensure that the same kinds of sports opportunities I had while growing up in Reston were open to all kids."

As she pursues her goal of expanding access to county parks and recreation programs, Jai points to a major obstacle: the funding model. The park system "is publicly funded, but the recreation system is 100% user-funded. Our revenue fund is completely fee-based, including the toilet paper, staff salaries, the chlorine for the pool, Parktakes Magazine and more. Everything is paid for through user fees, not through tax funding."

As a result, Jai says, "our fees are higher than many people in our community can afford, which skews our users to be wealthier than the overall population of our county." She is working with the Board of Supervisors to change the model so that "access to recreational amenities like rec centers, camps and swimming classes, all of which are essential to what makes Fairfax County great, are available to all of our residents."

Jai's commitment to expanding access to parks and recreation has deep local roots. "My experiences growing up in Reston had a profound influence on my life and my journey. Many of the same families I grew up with still live in Reston and our ties are very tight. There is definitely a camaraderie to growing up in Reston."

That camaraderie is something Jai Cole wants to extend to everyone.

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. He is also a published poet.

Joe's puzzles have appeared in the New York Times and Wall Street Journal. This is O'Neill's 39th crossword puzzle creation, made specifically for The Reston Letter readers!

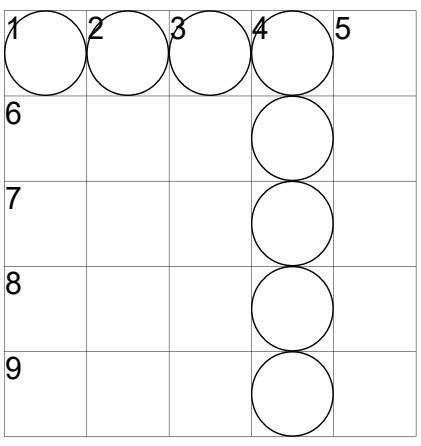
Business Jets & a Blind King

ACROSS

1. It's more than a short story and partly (when combined with 4-down) a nervous time for turkeys
6. Japanese cartoon art
7. Peach ___ (dessert)
8. Scientist who developed "math's most beautiful" theorem
9. Practices hooks and jabs

DOWN

1. Roll call elements
2. Do a bit better than
3. Mexican revolutionary Pancho ___
4. Leftover bit of burned coal
5. Company jet and tragic Shakespearean king



Herndon High School team wins academic quiz show

Miki Djokic, Herndon High School

Herndon High School has won a match on the televised quiz show "It's Academic" for the first time since the 1990s, defeating teams from George C. Marshall High School and Walter Johnson High School.

Three Herndon students competed in the Oct. 20 match: Peter Hester, Miki Djokic and Matthew Wacek. The team earned 500 points to secure the victory.

Founded in 1961, "It's Academic" features high school students from throughout the Washington metropolitan area competing in a televised test of general knowledge. Recognized by Guinness World Records as the world's longest-running high school television quiz show, the program challenges students with questions covering a wide range of subjects.

Although three students represent each school during a televised match, Herndon's full It's Academic club includes 11 students. David Lubinsky, an art history teacher, and J. Spies serve as the club's sponsors.

Students prepare for competition through regular practices, building their knowledge and sharpening their ability to respond quickly under pressure. The club also gives students opportunities to challenge themselves and learn alongside classmates with similar interests.



Herndon's team at the center desk: (left to right) Miki Djokic, Peter Hester and Matthew Wacek. The Hornets team took first place in "It's Academic" in October. Photo by David Lubinsky

The victory earns Herndon an invitation to return for the show's spring playoffs, according to the school. The team will have another opportunity to compete against area schools as the season progresses.

For Herndon's team, the win marks a significant milestone after years of coming close to victory.

Wishing your family a Happy Thanksgiving

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FIRST COURSE · CHOOSE ONE

Traditional Butternut Squash Soup

Mixed Green Salad
Apple cider vinaigrette, cranberries, goat cheese, roasted walnuts, shaved apple

Caesar Salad
Parmigiano Reggiano, croutons

DESSERTS · CHOOSE ONE

Pumpkin Pie · Pecan Pie · Apple Pie
served with vanilla ice cream

Layered Chocolate Cake · Pumpkin Cheesecake

MAIN COURSE · ALL YOU CAN EAT

Roasted Turkey, Honey Baked Ham, or Grilled Salmon
Served for the table: house-made stuffing, sweet potato purée, roasted Brussels sprouts, whipped potatoes, cranberry sauce and house-made gravy

Vegetarian Option: Heirloom Squash Risotto
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Shrimp Cocktail	$21
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Parker House Rolls with whipped butter

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DINNER

Whole Roasted Turkey
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from fresh cranberries

Mashed Potatoes and Sweet Potato Purée

Choice Of
Roasted Brussels Sprouts or Green Beans and Almonds

DESSERTS · CHOICE OF TWO

Apple Pie · Pumpkin Pie · Pecan Pie Layered Chocolate Cake · Pumpkin Cheesecake

À LA CARTE · PER PERSON

Traditional Butternut Squash Soup	$10
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Shrimp Cocktail	$15

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THE SIMON

EDUCATION

Homecoming parades march through Reston, Herndon



Herndon High School Theatre's float was one of many that made their way through Old Town Herndon for the traditional parade. Photo contributed by HHS Theatre





South Lakes Theatre's homecoming parade float promoted their upcoming fall play. Photo contributed by SLHS Theatre

StudyHouse pairs tutoring with coaching in study skills

By Kaydence Smith, staff writer

Students who struggle with assignments, time management or organization may need more than traditional tutoring. StudyHouse combines academic instruction with executive function coaching to help students manage their schoolwork and responsibilities.

Founded in 2019 by educator Colton Turner, StudyHouse began as a one-person operation offering in-home tutoring and sessions at Patrick Henry Library in Vienna. Turner previously worked at another local tutoring center. As demand grew, he hired and trained additional instructors.

Along with one-on-one tutoring, StudyHouse helps students develop executive function skills, including time management, planning, organization, flexible thinking and self-monitoring. These abilities help students manage competing responsibilities and recognize when they need help.

"The key to academic success is more than just understanding what you're learning," Turner said. "It's also the ability to produce and organize and do it efficiently so you don't burn out, and that's really where we're trying to help students."

Instructors help students practice these skills while completing schoolwork. A student might learn to prioritize assignments, develop a backup plan after forgetting homework or balance several deadlines. Rather than teaching organizational strategies separately, instructors incorporate them into daily academic work.

Turner said these abilities take years to develop and require consistent practice.

One of StudyHouse's programs is an adapted classroom, a small micro-school for students who have difficulty accessing traditional school settings. The program serves about 13 students annually and focuses on academic instruction and organizational skills. Its goal is to prepare students to return to a traditional classroom when appropriate.

StudyHouse serves students from kindergarten through college, with programs tailored to different ages and needs. Younger students receive individual tutoring in subjects such as math and language arts. The organization also offers enrichment activities that encourage creativity and critical thinking.

Middle and high school students can enroll in the Launch program, which combines academic tutoring with executive function coaching.

Families begin with a conversation by phone, video conference or in person to discuss a student's needs and determine appropriate services. Instructors then establish goals with the student. They may also communicate with classroom teachers to share observations and reinforce challenging concepts.

StudyHouse bills families by the hour rather than requiring them to purchase packages or commit to long-term programs. Students can change the type of support they receive as their needs evolve.

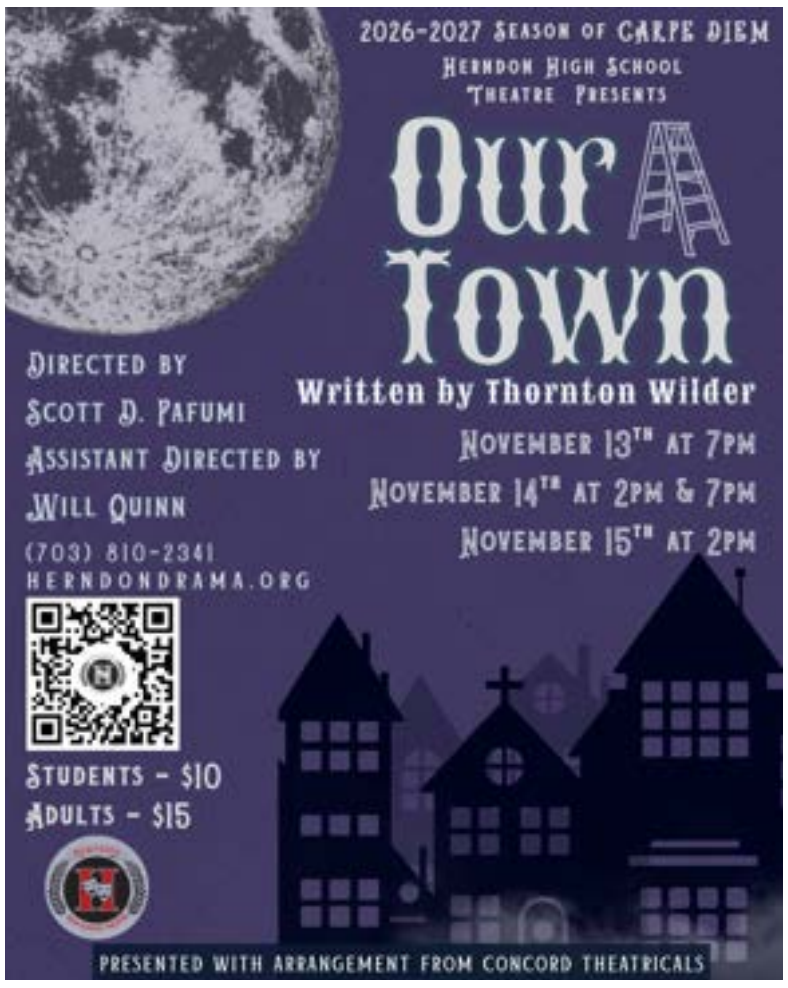
After opening its first physical location in Vienna in March 2023, StudyHouse began reaching out to families in the Reston-Herndon area. Turner hopes to build relationships with local families and expand the business through referrals.

Turner's own experience with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder informs his approach. Diagnosed after college, he said he understands the challenges students face when their organizational skills do not keep pace with their academic abilities. Looking back, he believes he could have benefited from this kind of support during middle school, high school and college.

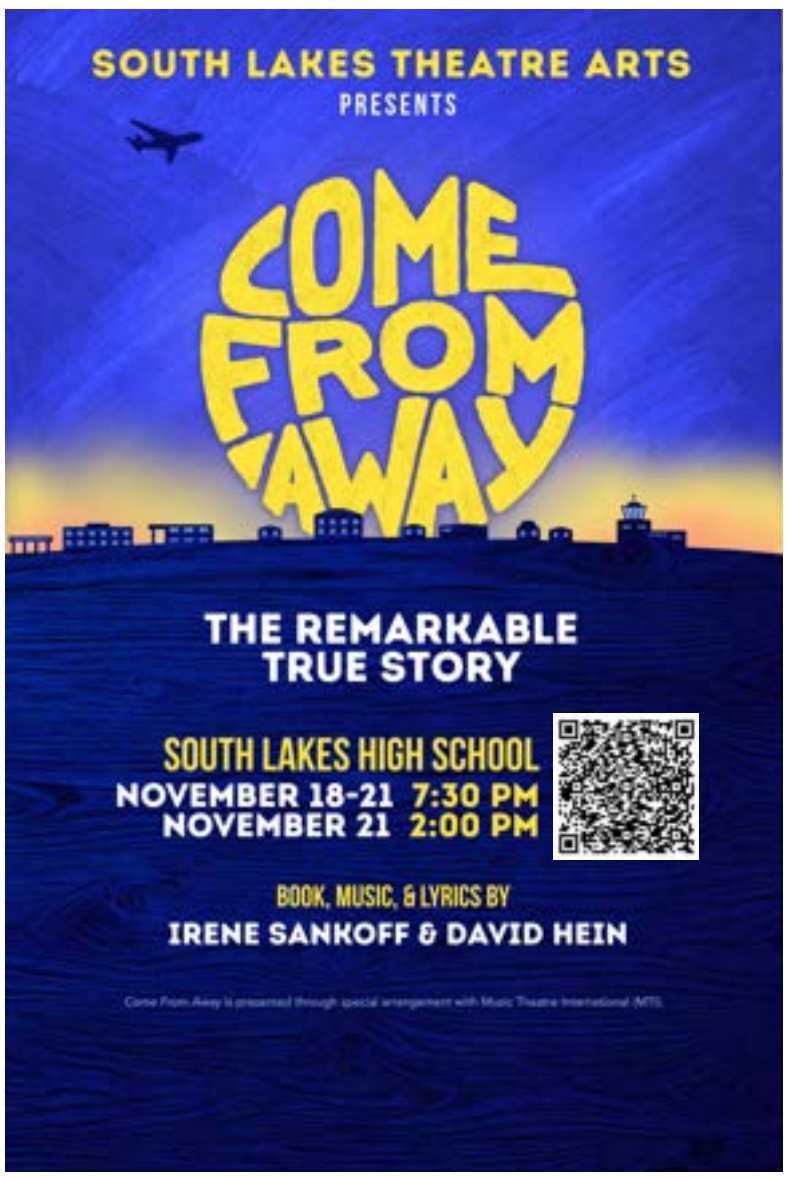
Turner wants students to understand that difficulty keeping up with schoolwork does not reflect a lack of intelligence or potential. Developing strategies to manage assignments and responsibilities can help them make better use of their abilities.

More information about StudyHouse's services is available at studyhouseeducation.com/services.

Herndon High's fall play



South Lakes High's fall play



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The Reston Letter gives away 606 coloring books



Donovan is a happy little Lake Anne Dolphin crayon artist. Photo by TRL

All 606 Lake Anne Elementary students received coloring books created by a Reston Letter staff member as part of a project launched last year. The books feature illustrations of Reston landmarks, festivals, schools, mascots, swim team names, lakes, restaurants and other local subjects. Another Reston school will also receive copies. The books are available for purchase at therestonletter.com.

Northwest Federal Credit Union Foundation opens scholarship applications

Contributed by NWFCU Foundation



Aspire Higher Scholarship Program is open for applicants. Photo by NWFCU Foundatio

The Northwest Federal Credit Union Foundation is accepting applications for its Aspire Higher Scholarship Program, which provides financial assistance to local high school seniors and college freshmen pursuing higher education.

Since 2004, the Foundation has awarded more than $2.6 million in scholarships to more than 500 students. In 2027, more than $185,000 will be distributed through four scholarship programs: the Ben DeFelice Scholarship, Horizon Scholarship, Richard W. Dubreuil Scholarship and Burton Gerber Scholarship.

The Richard W. Dubreuil Scholarship was established through a family gift honoring Dubreuil's achievements and service with the CIA. The Burton Gerber Scholarship was established by the Central Intelligence Retirees' Association (CIRA). The Foundation administers both scholarships on behalf of CIRA.

The Foundation's broader efforts to support young people include mentoring, financial education, assistance with basic needs and access to educational opportunities.

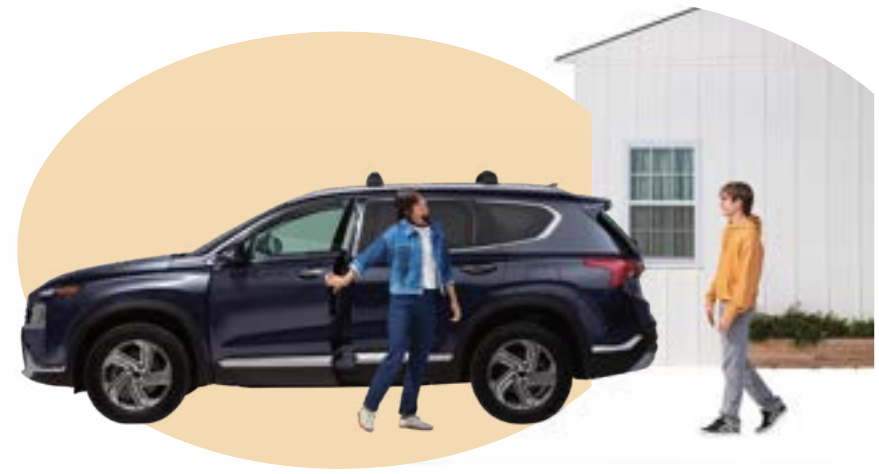
"Behind every scholarship is a student with goals, potential and a vision for their future," said Taralyn Tharp Kohler, vice president and foundation director.

Application details

- **Eligibility:** Scholarships are available to eligible high school seniors and college freshmen. Eligibility requirements vary by scholarship, and applicants should review the individual criteria before applying.
- **Deadline:** Jan. 15, 2027. Applications may close earlier if an individual scholarship program reaches its application cap.
- **How to apply:** Visit nwfcufoundation.org for eligibility requirements and application instructions.

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SPORTS

Herndon High School honors athletic legends at 2026 Hall of Fame Induction

Contributed by Herndon High Athletics

Herndon High School honored nine inductees during its 2026 Athletic Hall of Fame ceremony, held during Homecoming weekend.

This year's inductees include the 2012 Cheer Team and eight former student-athletes: **Mark Brown** (Class of 1981), **Shane Young** (Class of 2004), **Mason Walsh** (Class of 2003), **Mike Zakrzewski** (Class of 1998), **John Pugh** (Class of 1996), **Christian McLaughlin** (Class of 2008), **Kwaku Adu-Gyamfi** (Class of 1990) and **Mark Nepivoda** (Class of 1975).

The 2012 Cheer Team was recognized for its accomplishments and contributions to Herndon's athletic tradition. The individual inductees represent graduating classes spanning more than three-decades.

The Hall of Fame recognizes former student-athletes whose achievements and contributions have helped shape the school's athletic history.

Herndon Girls Golf builds a new team

By Coach Reid Kiser

Herndon High School launched its first girls varsity golf team this season, bringing nine players together to build a program from the ground up and introduce more young women to a sport they can enjoy for a lifetime.

My daughter, Addison Kiser, a junior, helped recruit players from other sports to join the team. Her enthusiasm also renewed my own connection to golf and inspired me to help create an opportunity for girls at Herndon.

The team includes seniors Ashley Shea and Samara O'Byrne; juniors Addison Kiser, Samantha Culver, Fiona Gallardo, Noelle Peter and Aubrey Fineberg; and freshman Prisha Sharma. Most had never owned golf clubs before last summer. Prisha was among those learning the game, while Addison and Samara brought some experience from their participation in the Junior PGA program.

Addison developed into one of the team's strongest players, regularly shooting in the low to mid-40s over nine holes. She qualified for the Zone 4(A) qualifier for the Virginia High School League Girls Open State Championship but did not advance. Five players, including both seniors, competed in more than three nine-hole matches and at least one 18-hole tournament. They are the first girls on the team to earn varsity letters.

The season has shown how much room there is to grow the program. Both seniors said they wished they had tried golf earlier in high school. Reaching girls in middle school and during their freshman year will be important to building a lasting team. My goal is to attract eight to 12 players each year.

Golf presents some unique challenges for girls in high school. The VHSL designates team golf as a coed sport, and most teams are made up primarily of boys. Addison and Samara initially hesitated to try out when they saw that about 30 boys were competing. Establishing an all-girls team gave them and other players a more comfortable way to get started. I hope our team will continue to grow and eventually compete successfully in the coed format.



Coach Kiser with daughter Addison and Fiona Gallardo. Photo contributed by HHS Athletics

Herndon Centennial Golf Course and Hidden Creek Country Club provided places for the team to practice and play. The players practiced or competed four days a week, with guidance from Jeff Culver and Claudine O'Byrne. Coed golf coach Chad Collie and assistant coaches Dan Lombardozi, Tyler Butler and Joseph Griffin shared their experience and helped the players develop their skills.

I am working with South Lakes High School coach Kevin Anderson to expand opportunities for girls golf in the area. More participation at both schools could help build interest and create a stronger foundation for the sport.

This first season has been about more than scores and tournament results. It has given girls a chance to try something new, gain confidence and discover a sport they can continue playing long after high school. We hope the team will keep growing and that more Herndon girls will see golf as a sport they can call their own.

Senior quarterback and wide receiver break school records

The standout local athletes were preschool friends

By Reston Letter staff

This fall, South Lakes High School senior wide receiver Nick Picarelli set several school records. After four years as a Seahawk, he holds the career records for receiving yards (1,919) and receptions (162). He also set the school record for the longest touchdown reception with a 99-yard catch in 2024.

Head coach Jason Hescock has coached Picarelli throughout his high school career.

"Nick is one of the guys who is always early to practice and late to leave the field, perfecting his skills after practice," Hescock said.

The South Lakes Seahawks begin regional playoffs Nov. 13 against Washington-Liberty. Picarelli hopes to add to his record-setting totals.

Just north of South Lakes, Herndon High School senior quarterback Max Fox also set two school records, despite missing four games this season. He holds the single-season records for completions (167) and passing yards (1,604), which he accumulated in six games.

"Max has shown his character and resiliency as he had to fight through an early-season injury to lead our offense this season," said new Herndon head coach Adam Shaker. "Having to learn a brand-new scheme is a challenge for any quarterback, so for Max to not only learn but excel in our system in just six games shows the kind of person he is."

Before facing each other on the football field, Picarelli and Fox met at Beth Emeth Early Childhood Center in Herndon, where they became close friends.



Seniors Max Fox (left, photo by Karl Majer) and Nick Picarelli (right, photo by Maia Lucier) both broke school records this year.

Herndon High School proudly recognizes its senior football players as they take the field for their final season as Hornets:

Shan Ahmed	Timothy Fouche	Luke Sangine
Mathieu Allado	Max Fox	Jonathan Segura
Youssef Bousaidi	Drew Hull	Evan Soliah
Ethan Braxton	Muhammad Hussain	Caleb Torgerson
Aamin Diaz	Artemy Rudnev	Jacob Watt



Families join their players on senior night. Photo contributed by HHS Athletics

KIDS

Time flies with Stinky Pinky and Squiggle Game

By Bob Welland, Kids Section editor

It's sooo boring waiting in doctor offices, airports and long car rides. Here are two games you can play with other kids (or even a silly adult) that don't require any planning or technology.

Stinky Pinky

Here's a clue: "Smelly finger." The answer is the name of the game. ***(Stinky Pinky)***

Stinky Pinky is a game where the answer is two words that rhyme. The clue is made of different words that have the same meaning. So a clue could be "strange goatee" and the answer is "weird beard." Working out the answer in your head is a way to enjoyably pass time. ***(Great Wait)***

Part of the fun is that you don't need a list of riddles on hand because you can always make them up yourself. **(Invent Content)** You think of the answer first, like "fat cat." Then you make the clue by swapping in similar words, like "chubby kitty." That's all it takes to make a riddle that challenges any of your goofball friends. ***(Stumps Chumps)***

One time my family was on a very bumpy airplane ride and we were getting scared. We played the game to distract us from our fear ***(Less Stress)*** and help us calm down. ***(Suppress Distress)*** So play Stinky Pinky to expand your mind ***(Gain Brain)*** and maybe become braver. ***(Fight Fright)***

Squiggle Game

You can stimulate your artistic side with the Squiggle Game. It can be played with two or more people; they just each need a paper and pencil. Everyone spends only two or three seconds making some random squiggles on their paper. Then pass your paper to someone else. Now everyone spends five minutes drawing over and expanding that squiggle to turn it into a picture of an animal, person, or scene.

Some people might worry they can't make a nice picture, but no one should stress out because it started as a scribble. Whatever picture comes from it will be distorted, or weird, or funny-looking. That's the fun part of the game: sharing the results with each other and having a laugh.

To help you to find inspiration, look at the squiggle from all sides, even upside down. Squint your eyes, too. Try doodling in one area of the squiggle and see how the scene might expand from there. Also, human beings are very good at **pareidolia**, which is seeing faces in random shapes like clouds, trees, and electrical outlets. So chances are there's a face in that scribble looking back at you.

Stinky Pinky Riddles

(Answers are two rhyming words)



1. Circular Dog
2. Silly Rabbit
3. Wimpier Shoe
4. Phoney Dessert
5. Stone World
6. Grouchy Youth
7. Candy bars stuck on a wall
8. Sweet found in a sweater
9. Tiny Labubu



Make up your own!

The Squiggle Game



Nibble Riddle

What are the most famous sodas?



(Each can has one wrong letter. Put the wrong letters in order below)

Answer: _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _



KIDS

Sage Greene and the Thanksgiving Kitchen Mysteries

Mystery Fiction by Arthur Semicolon Doyle



It's Thanksgiving Day, and middle school sleuth Sage Greene works on a jigsaw puzzle with her father and her brother, Dan. Dan says, "I'm craving something sweet. Have you got any candy, Sage?" She groans, "Ugh, no more sweet stuff." Their father says, "Don't spoil your appetites, kids. Be like me—I haven't eaten anything all day so I can pig out on tonight's amazing dinner."

From the kitchen, Sage's mother yells, "Thanksgiving dinner is ruined!"

They hustle to the kitchen. Sage asks, "What's wrong, Mom?" "Everything!" she replies. "The eggs for my deviled eggs appetizer are missing, the cranberry jelly is spoiled, and a mouse got into the cupboard!"

Dad asks, "What do you mean the eggs are missing?" Mom says, "I had six boiled eggs on the counter last night, but now they're gone." Dad comforts her. "I saw them there, so I put them in the refrigerator, back in the egg carton." They pull out the carton, and it has twelve eggs in it. Mom asks, "Which ones are hard-boiled and which are raw?" Dad says, "Uhh, I don't remember," and he starts shaking each egg by his ear. "I can't tell which is which. They all feel and weigh the same."

Dan asks, "What's wrong with the cranberry jelly, Mom? That's my favorite. I like it when it's all one jiggly cylinder with the bumpy sides." Mom sighs, "It might be spoiled because I don't trust the can. The label is upside down, so there must be something wrong with it."

Sage says, "I'm more concerned about the mouse." Mom throws a bag of mini marshmallows on the counter. One corner is torn open. "A mouse nibbled through the bag, and some marshmallows are gone. That's so nasty. I'm not using that now, so no topping for the sweet potato casserole!"

Dan and Dad take that news hard. They agree that Thanksgiving dinner is ruined. "Wait! Dinner is not ruined," Sage comforts them. "I can tell which eggs are hard-boiled. The can of cranberry jelly is fine. And I know there isn't a mouse."

How does Sage know?

Find 8 Differences: Autumn at the Mercury Fountain





Solutions

Stinky Pinky: 1) Round Hound, 2) Funny Bunny, 3) Weaker Sneaker, 4) Fake Cake, 5) Granite Planet, 6) Mean Teen, 7) Snickers Stickers, 8) Hoodie Goodie, 9) Small Doll

Sage Greene Mystery:

Sage picks up the eggs, one by one, and spins each one on the counter. She says, "The raw eggs are liquid inside, so they spin slower and wobblier than hard-boiled eggs." She quickly identifies the best six spinners as the boiled eggs.

She picks up the can of cranberry jelly and says, "The label is supposed to be upside down because they want the pop-top lid to be on the bottom. When you store it like this, there will be a little bit of air above the jelly in the can, so it's easier for all the jelly to slide out in one piece." Dan adds, "Just the way I like it!"

"And about the mouse…" Sage announces, "There's no mouse." Mom waits for a moment and then asks, "And?" Sage says, "I just know there isn't a mouse." Mom and Dad look puzzled and unsatisfied.

"Ah-ha!" Dan shouts. "It was you, Sage! Dad and I haven't eaten, but you were squeamish about sweets. I think you've been nibbling on the marshmallows." Sage confesses, "Yes, I had a handful. So the rest of the bag is fine to use."

Later, a hearty Thanksgiving feast is enjoyed by Mom, Dad, Dan, and a slightly guilty Sage Greene.

Find 8 Differences: Left to Right: 1) Railing missing, 2) Star-shaped opening, 3) Pink flowers missing, 4) Dinosaur statue, 5) Orange & yellow leaves switched, 6) Extra pumpkin on ground, 7) Man missing, 8) Sign says South

Nibble Riddle: Pop Stars

OPINIONS

Ask Doctor S.

AI is a convenient companion, not a therapist

It is 2 a.m. Your thoughts won't quiet down, and your therapist's office is closed. More and more people are opening an app and typing to an AI chatbot. I recently attended a training session on artificial intelligence in mental health and left convinced that everyone should understand what these tools can and cannot do.

A nationally representative survey in June 2026 found that about 1 in 5 Americans ages 12 to 21 (19.2%) had used an AI chatbot for mental health advice, up from about 13% the previous year (McBain et al., 2026). That is close to the percentage of young people who receive counseling from a mental health professional. The trend is easy to understand. A chatbot is free or inexpensive, available around the clock and never has a waitlist. For someone embarrassed to say something out loud, typing it into a device can feel safer than telling another person.

There is also early evidence that a carefully designed tool can help. In the first randomized trial of a generative AI therapy chatbot, adults with depression, anxiety or risk of an eating disorder who used "Therabot" for eight weeks reported a meaningful reduction in symptoms compared with a waitlist group (Heinz et al., 2025). However, Therabot was designed and trained by psychologists and psychiatrists, and the research team monitored conversations so members could intervene in a crisis. Even its developers have said that AI is not ready to be used in mental health care without human oversight. The general-purpose chatbots most people use were not developed with those safeguards.

Research has identified several concerns:

1. Inconsistent responses in a crisis. Researchers asked three major chatbots 30 suicide-related questions, 100 times each, and compared their responses with clinicians' ratings. The chatbots handled the clearest low-risk and high-risk questions reasonably well, but their answers to questions in between, such as what to do when experiencing suicidal thoughts, varied from one attempt to the next (McBain et al., 2025, "Psychiatric Services").
2. Stigma and missed warning signs. A Stanford-led team tested popular chatbots against the standards therapists are expected to meet. The chatbots showed more stigma toward conditions such as alcohol dependence and schizophrenia than toward depression. They sometimes reinforced delusional thinking rather than gently questioning it and occasionally failed to recognize indirect references to suicide (Moore et al., 2025). Newer, larger models did no better.
3. Telling users what they want to hear. Chatbots are designed to be agreeable and keep users engaged. But a trusting therapeutic relationship sometimes requires the opposite: a caring professional who recognizes a pattern and challenges it.
4. Dependence and isolation. In a four-week study of approximately 1,000 adults, frequent daily chatbot use was associated with greater loneliness and emotional dependence on the chatbot, as well as less time spent with other people (Fang et al., 2025).
5. Secrecy, especially among teens. In one survey, nearly two-thirds of young people who used AI for mental health advice had not told anyone (McBain et al., 2026). Parents, teachers and friends cannot offer help if they don't know someone is struggling.

Therapy involves more than conversation. Licensed therapists assess risk, make diagnoses, develop treatment plans and adjust them as circumstances change. They notice what patients don't say: the pauses, shifts in tone and stories that keep returning. They are trained, bound by confidentiality laws and accountable for their professional decisions. Decades of research also show that the therapeutic relationship, built on trust between a patient and therapist over time, is one of the strongest predictors of successful treatment.

OAK HILL
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SERVICES PLLC
T. 703-214 4924 • F. 703-214-4925
frontdesk@oakhillpsychological.com
drsherwood@oakhillpsychological.com
Visit our website!
www.oakhillpsychologicalservices.com
2579 John Milton Drive, Suite 210, Herndon VA 20171

I'm not suggesting that everyone delete their apps. Used thoughtfully, AI can be a place to organize thoughts, learn about a condition or practice a skill a therapist has taught. A few guidelines can help:

- If you have been struggling for more than a couple of weeks, contact a mental health professional.
- In a crisis, call or text 988, the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, or go to the nearest emergency room.
- Parents can ask teens, without judgment, whether they use AI to discuss their thoughts and feelings and what the chatbot tells them.
- Remember that most general-purpose chatbots are not covered by the confidentiality laws that protect conversations with therapists.
- If you use AI between therapy sessions, tell your therapist. The conversations may provide useful material for your work together.

AI can be a convenient companion during a difficult moment, but it is not a substitute for being understood and helped by another person.

Have a wonderful holiday season! Psych'd to see you next month! - Dr. S.

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

GreenFare

The best gift is a healthy gut

During my brother's college experience at the University of Illinois, my family were all given t-shirts featuring corn for Christmas. My dad also had efficiency down to a science: we would all get the same book on self-improvement; one year, "How to Prune."

When it comes to food shopping, efficiency is top of mind: how to buy the right amount at the
best price at the closest store. The other side is effectiveness, which is buying foods that will
support and boost our long-term health. Think organic, eat the colors of the rainbow, and load up on fiber. It can be better to invest in foods that help to prevent or even reverse chronic illness and avoid a delayed cost of pain and medication later.

According to the CDC, more than a third of American adults eat fast food on any given day. The drive-through is the ideal of efficiency: quick and cheap, with not a lot of waste. But we all know by now that highly processed food, with lots of salt, oil and sugar, takes a toll on our health.

Research consistently links eating a wide variety of fiber to a lower risk of multiple cancers, especially colorectal cancer. Good sources of fiber include fruit, greens, whole grains, seeds (hemp, chia, flax), aromatics (onion, garlic), beans, mushrooms, sea vegetables and sprouts, plus fermented foods for beneficial bacteria. There is no fiber in animal products.

Try counting the variety of plants you eat every day. The American Gut Project found that people who eat 30 or more a week have a more robust gut microbiome. Plan your shopping trip to include a variety of these foods and avoid the food ruts that are easy to fall into, like Cheerios and a banana for breakfast every day. That's easy and efficient, but not as effective as a multigrain cereal with seeds, cinnamon, ginger, and berries.

Your gut bacteria respond to what you eat within a day or two, and scientists are exploring whether they even influence what we crave. Every food choice builds momentum to support or harm, so small choices make a difference. The healthier your gut, the more energy you'll feel. At GreenFare, we routinely see people who want food that's fast and good for them.

GREENFARE
healthy people, healthy planet
408 ELDEN STREET, HERNDON, VA

Focusing on filling your plate with high-fiber, organic foods will bring the reward of better sleep, more energy, and stronger defenses against the bugs that circulate this time of year. Roar up to the end of the year with a strong constitution and be ready to start the new year with a bang.

Gwyn Whittaker is the founder of GreenFare Organic Cafe in Herndon.

LIFESTYLE

Inside Art

By Louise Seirmarco-Yale, Reston artist



October offered a final extravagance of color before winter. Nature seemed to abandon restraint. Pumpkins, costumes, decorated houses, changing leaves and dramatic sunsets surrounded us. The month seemed all about color, celebration and exaggeration, resulting in a naturally abundant display of art.

With November comes a gradual stripping away of October's decorations. The leaves disappear, branches become visible and the spaces between things begin to matter. The question then becomes, "Can removing something make what remains more beautiful?"

That abundance makes the coming emptiness more striking. Beauty does not require abundance. A single remaining leaf can be as visually compelling as an entire forest in full color.

Art then exists in what is missing. The spaces between bare branches are shapes in their own right. The changing landscape teaches us to see what isn't there. A brilliantly colored autumn landscape and a nearly colorless one can each feel perfectly balanced. The means are different, but the visual satisfaction can be equally powerful.

Balance is an important concept in art. What seems to be negative space balances positive form, offering comfort to the eye. Balance means stability, calm, reassurance and security. The past month gave us fullness; the coming season introduces emptiness. Perhaps the most valuable lesson is that our ability to recognize beauty does not have to diminish when the world becomes less colorful. November simply requires us to see differently. The landscape becomes quieter as much of the season's visual excitement disappears, but our homes often become warmer and more intimate.

The Thanksgiving table is especially interesting. A grandmother's serving bowl may matter more than the food it holds. Choosing a slightly mismatched collection of chairs can communicate warmth and hospitality more effectively than a perfectly coordinated dining room.

The person who chooses a beautiful scarf, places a sprig of rosemary beside a dinner plate or decides where to hang a string of lights is making a personal aesthetic decision. They aren't necessarily trying to make art; they are trying to make something feel right.

When someone adds a wreath to a perfectly functional, ordinary door, it isn't to make the door work better. It is to make the entrance say, "Welcome!" Something functional has been given emotional meaning, which is remarkably close to what artists do.

A beautifully set table can say, "You matter to me." Without a word, it says, "You belong."

We don't have to wait for an artist to bring art into our lives. We can bring it into our lives ourselves, daily. Art is always within us.

The visually reduced landscape influences our everyday aesthetic decisions. Notice what you are noticing as art. Celebrate being human together; enjoy the daily human art experience together. Art is part of us and we are part of art. Thankfully.

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." Download the book for free at www.peopleneedart.com. It is also available on Amazon. Find her on Facebook and Instagram at @louise_seirmarco_art.

Reston author's Dust Bowl novel wins three awards

By Ellyn Wexler, staff writer



Alyssa Colman's book "Where Only Storms Grow" is about a young girl with scoliosis during the Dust Bowl.
Photo contributed by Alyssa Colman.

During a recent school visit, Reston author Alyssa Colman met a girl who had just learned she has scoliosis, a condition in which the spine curves sideways. The student had picked up Colman's novel "Where Only Storms Grow" because she enjoyed Lauren Tarshis' "I Survived" series, which brings historical disasters to life through young characters.

Set during the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression, Colman's novel centers on twins Joanna and Howe Stanton, whose family's Oklahoma farm is threatened by drought and dust storms. Joanna also has scoliosis, giving the student a personal connection to the story.

The student's teacher later told the author that the girl hoped to become an author herself. Diagnosed with scoliosis in second grade, Colman drew on her own experience to create Joanna, a character determined to prove her physical strength despite the condition. Meeting a young reader who shared that experience reinforced the personal significance of her story. "I feel proud to have scoliosis," Colman said. "Now I get to be an ambassador for the community."

The novel earned the American Library Association's 2026 Schneider Family Book Award in the middle-grade category, which recognizes books that embody an artistic expression of the disability experience. It received the Virginia Library Association's 2026 Cardinal Cup Award, which honors a distinguished book in biography, historical fiction or American history for young people. Bank Street College's Children's Book Committee selected it for the 2026 Josette Frank Award, which recognizes fiction in which young characters face difficulties realistically and grow emotionally and morally. The novel appears on several state reading lists.

Colman did not set out to write about the Dust Bowl. In early 2020, while researching masks for her family during the COVID-19 pandemic, she came across a Johns Hopkins article that drew parallels between the Dust Bowl and the pandemic. She read about enormous dust storms that darkened skies across entire states and dust pneumonia, a lung disease that sickened and killed many people. She also learned about the masks people used to protect themselves from the dust.

At the time, Colman was developing a story about twins, one with scoliosis and one without. The two ideas merged into a novel about surviving circumstances beyond one's control.

A school nurse first identified Colman's scoliosis during a routine screening in second grade. Her parents initially questioned the finding, but a specialist confirmed the diagnosis. During the next five years, she spent much of her time at medical appointments, undergoing MRI scans and X-rays.

Every night, her parents strapped her into a Charleston Bending Brace that extended from her armpits to mid-thigh. The brace overcorrected her spine in the direction opposite the curve, helping to reduce it. Colman experienced frequent pain that led her to leave sports and dance, activities she had enjoyed as an active child. The pain also made her doubt her physical abilities.

She regained confidence in middle school, when a doctor helped her find the right physical therapy program.

Joanna grows up in the 1930s, when treatment options differed from those available to Colman. Unlike Joanna, whom others force to give up sports and dance, Colman made that decision herself because of pain. Her experience helped her portray the physical and emotional challenges of scoliosis in a different era.

"I hope young readers realize that disability does not define who a person is inside," Colman said. "We are all multifaceted and find strength in different ways."

Colman's first two novels, "The Gilded Girl" and "The Tarnished Garden," came out during the pandemic with little fanfare. The response to her latest book has surprised her, She has received invitations to visit schools around the country.

Although she had always wanted to write for children, Colman did not begin writing until her early 30s. She took classes through UCLA Extension and completed a first novel, which she jokes will never be published. When she tells students about that manuscript during school visits, they are often surprised to learn that authors also have to practice. She tried again, and her second novel became "The Gilded Girl," which sold in a three-way publishing-house auction.

Colman and her family moved from Los Angeles to the Reston area in 2021 to be closer to her mother. She enjoys the area's trails and visiting locally owned businesses such as Scrawl Books.

Colman's next novel, "Loyalist, Patriot, Spy," is scheduled for publication in September 2027. Set during the American Revolution, it follows a Loyalist boy and a Patriot girl as they track a real-life spy through British-occupied New York. Codes, mysteries and high-stakes horseback rides drive the story.

Colman is already researching another project and often visits the Reston library to check out history books. She welcomes school-visit requests from teachers through her website, www.alyssacolman.com.



LIFESTYLE

TRL Teen Feed

Tips for breaking the ice with relatives this holiday season

By Meg Marsh, Reston neighbor

Seeing relatives for the first time in months or years can provoke social anxiety. Teens might feel they have nothing to talk about, while older relatives may wonder why they aren't starting conversations. The generation caught in the middle may feel responsible for helping everyone interact.

As a teen, you'll probably be asked how school or sports are going. You might have plenty to share, but more likely, you'll say, "It's good." If you don't want to elaborate, that's fine. Instead, ask a grandparent or other relative how they're doing. You may already know something about their hobbies, such as tennis, pickleball, chess, writing, gardening or traveling. Choose one and ask how it's going. They may be happy to talk about something they enjoy. If they go on for a while, remember that they might be nervous, too.

One easy way to connect is to ask if anyone needs anything. Make sure everyone has a glass of water or another drink, offer snacks or collect dirty dishes after a meal. Small acts of kindness can quickly ease awkwardness. Need a break from socializing? Offer to wash the dishes while everyone else visits. (Adults have been doing this for centuries.) It's OK to step away from conversations and return later. Especially during visits that last several days, breaks can help everyone settle into a more natural rhythm. When you rejoin the group, start a conversation by asking someone a question.

Maybe you feel most comfortable using your phone when everyone is gathered. Depending on your household rules, you could turn it into a way to connect. Find a funny video to share with a grandparent, invite everyone to play a game such as Heads Up or Imposter, or show a relative photos of something fun you've done recently. Try to use your phone to engage with family rather than avoid them. Show everyone a funny photo filter, and you might spark a conversation or discover that an older relative has a hilarious video or photo to share. Laughter is one of the quickest ways to bond.

Games are another way to bring everyone together. Rummikub, Scrabble and card games with simple rules give relatives of different ages an easy way to participate. You'll likely talk and laugh more while creating memories you can cherish for years.

These shared experiences strengthen family relationships and give you something to talk about on your next visit or during phone calls and texts between visits. One final idea: Exchange phone numbers with extended family members. Staying in touch with aunts, uncles, grandparents and other relatives you've connected with can be rewarding. Send a follow-up photo or video related to something you discussed, and keep building relationships with family members who can be part of your life for years to come.

Apéro hour: Corsica Wine Bar

By Phantom Foodie

In European apéro culture, the hours around dinner are the main event, with a good glass of wine and a few small plates to share. Corsica Wine Bar in Reston Town Center is built around that concept, and we went to see how it translates to a fall evening in Reston. It's been a year since Corsica took over the space formerly occupied by Mon Ami Gabi.
We were greeted with a smile and seated quickly in the dining room, although the inviting bar nearly made us reconsider. The room was dim enough initially that a few diners used their phone flashlights to read the menus until the staff turned up the lighting. Our server walked us through the seasonal menu, making ordering easy.
Warm sourdough is often a benchmark for the rest of the meal, and this one set the bar high. The bread arrived fresh and soft, but the cultured butter was the real star. It's the kind of small detail that tells you the kitchen cares. The fall salad was excellent. Ribbons of squash are pickled, and the pickling liquid becomes the dressing. It's strong but delicious, a taste of what's to come.
The lamb arrived with peperonata, a mixture of tomatoes, onions and red peppers finished with a green spice. It also appears on the vegetable menu, making it an easy side to add if you want more.
The lemon bucatini packed a peppery punch. I love anything lemon-pepper, and I was still glad I ordered the smaller portion. There's plenty of flavor in every bite.
The grilled chicken thighs surprised us. They were outstanding, and the sauce added even more flavor. Ms. Foodie also enjoyed the savory meatballs and shrimp with capers, so the table was happy all around.
Plan on two to three items per person, and don't be shy about taking leftovers home, as we did. Plates were cleared as we finished them, a touch that felt attentive but never rushed. We skipped dessert, but everything on the menu looked good, so save room. Corsica Wine Bar is warm and welcoming, with friendly, polished service and food worth a visit.

Corsica Wine Bar
11950 Democracy Drive
Sunday-Thursday: 11:30 a.m.-11 p.m.



Grilled shrimp and grilled chicken thigh.

Friday-Saturday: 11:30 a.m.-1 a.m.
Happy hour: Monday-Friday, 4-6 p.m.
Brunch: Saturday-Sunday, 11:30 a.m.-3 p.m.
Half-price bottles: Sundays
Gift cards and private dining available

Disclaimer: 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.



Fall salad. Photos by Phantom Foodie.

Answer Key

S	R	A	P	S
R	E	L	U	E
A	B	L	E	M
E	M	I	N	A
L	E	V	O	N

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