

# THE RESTON LETTER

## Debating democracy: A young voice challenges America's oldest document

By Ellyn Wexler, staff writer

At 18, Tori Mayfield-Brown is challenging audiences to rethink the Constitution—one sharp, fearless performance at a time.

In Reston Community Players' production of "What the Constitution Means to Me," Mayfield-Brown plays the Debater, a teenager who brings urgency and humor to questions that have shaped America for centuries.

Her age, director Rikkie Howie says, is part of the point.

"Having a young performer at the center makes it immediate," Howie said. "It reminds the audience this isn't a settled conversation. It's a living debate."

If that sounds heavy, Mayfield-Brown insists it isn't.

"I was shocked at how funny it was," she said of her first read-through. "I assumed it would be rehashed politics without real emotion. Instead, it completely changed my view of the Constitution."

### From Pride festival to center stage

Mayfield-Brown's journey with Reston Community Players began not in a



Tori Mayfield-Brown performs in Lopez Studios' "The Little Mermaid." Photo contributed by Mayfield-Brown family

rehearsal room but at Reston Pride in 2022.

"I had just started getting into theater and was excited to learn we had a local company," she said. "I decided once I was satisfied with my training, I'd give RCP a

try—and here I am."

### The homeschool advantage—and the hustle

Homeschooled and self-directed from a young age, Mayfield-Brown cred-

Continued on page 4

## RA board candidates discuss collaboration, development and spending at forum

By Gene Powell, staff writer

Candidates for the Reston Association board of directors participated in a public Q&A session Feb. 24. Residents may vote by mail or online through March 31.

There are multiple candidates for two of three seats on the nine-member board, which sets association priorities, oversees personnel policies and approves a biennial budget of \$23 million for one of the nation's largest homeowners' organizations.

### Candidates:

#### At-Large Director (3-year term):

John Farrell, Greg McCandless, Daton Lynch

#### Lake Anne/Tall Oaks District Director (2-year term):

Georgina Cannan, Ramon Pardo, Nathen Phillips

#### Apartments Owners' Representative (3-year term):

Margaret Perry

Candidate profiles and statements are available online at the RA Board of Directors Election page. Six of the seven candidates delivered brief statements at the opening and closing of the forum. RA officials said McCandless was chairing a condominium board meeting at the time, and his written opening statement was read to the audience.

At least 10 percent of the association's 63,000 members must cast ballots for the election results to be valid. Voting began at 5 p.m. Feb. 27 and all ballots must be received by 5 p.m. March 31, RA representatives told the forum.

In opening remarks and in responses to pre-submitted questions, all candidates pledged fiscal responsibility, opposed a proposed casino project in Fairfax County, and supported preserving Reston's two existing golf courses.

All favored strategies to encourage residents of new developments to join RA, noting that current and future residents within Reston's general boundar-

ies enjoy amenities without paying annual RA fees.

On RA fees, most candidates called for the annual charge to remain flat per residence. Quarterly payments were mentioned but not prioritized.

Board functioning was a frequent topic. Candidates and audience members noted long meetings and a need for better coordination among members. Suggestions included clearer distinctions between board and staff responsibilities, improved preparation for meetings, and avoiding personal attacks or emotional exchanges.

Proposed residential development on Reston National Golf Course was identified by several candidates as the greatest threat to property values. Other concerns included over-development, strengthening the community's relationship with Fairfax County, and increasing resident involvement in budgeting and decision-making.

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### education

Dawn Garcia makes an impact, Girl Scouts event, artist-in-residence at Hunters Woods Elementary, robotics club, fourth-grader writes a book, student club rallies for bone marrow registrants

### sports

South Lakes track & field success and first rowing team, Herndon High basketball awards, youth hockey winners, local Olympian inspires young figure skaters

### lifestyle

Hosting a brunch, Phantom Foodie reviews The Simon, Inside Art, note from Reston roofer

### kids

Find the differences, all things spring, word puzzles, grocery groaners, mystery of missing cupcakes

### opinions

What Reston Association should bring to the community and how you can help, bright JW Marriott light bothering neighbors

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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.*

## Pulte proposal would replace three office buildings with townhomes, condo buildings, east of Reston Station

By Gene Powell, staff writer

Traffic, parking and building placement were among the concerns raised at a Feb. 9 public hearing on a proposed residential development that would replace three 1980s-era office buildings several blocks east of the Reston Station Metro area.

Pulte Homes is proposing 158 residences—46 “stacked” townhomes and 112 condominiums in three multi-story buildings—on a three-parcel tract bordered by Sunset Hills Road to the north, Reston Station Boulevard to the south, and centered on Samuel Morse Drive. The site is immediately east of The Lofts at Reston Station.

The development would include a nearly half-acre “urban park” within the interior, featuring an open lawn, seating, and a playground, according to Brian Winterhalter of DLA Piper, the law firm representing Pulte.

During the online public hearing conducted by the Fairfax County Department of Planning and Development,

attendees—including representatives of nearby homeowner associations—questioned the project’s impact on what they described as already inadequate parking.

The proposed multi-family buildings would rise five to six stories, with under-building parking garages built into a slight hill on the south side. Plans call for 108 single spaces in the garages, 28 tandem spaces, plus 26 surface visitor spaces—exceeding zoning requirements.

Parking for the townhomes would include one space per unit, for a total of 46 spaces, plus 14 visitor spaces. Some units would also have driveway parking, though those spaces are not included in the official count, Winterhalter said.

Speakers also expressed concern about potential traffic and congestion from new residents and commuters if Easterly and Reston Station boulevards are extended to Sunset Hills Road, as Pulte proposes.

The placement of the townhomes along Sunset Hills Road was another topic. One resident suggested “flipping” the plan and situating the multi-family buildings

along that corridor instead.

In an interview with The Reston Letter, Winterhalter said the site’s 10-foot slope toward Sunset Hills Road allows under-building parking to be largely concealed by integrating it into the higher ground along Reston Station Boulevard. He added that the multi-story buildings would face similarly scaled residential structures across the street, aligning with broader urban design principles.

Pulte representatives said pricing will not be determined until the first residences near completion—potentially by mid-2029—assuming county plan and zoning approvals are secured by midyear and construction proceeds on schedule.

An extension of Easterly Boulevard to Sunset Hills Road would not occur until work can be coordinated with an adjacent property owner. Pulte would provide the county with half the funding required for the extension. Until construction begins, the developer’s portion of the future roadway would remain landscaped as green space.

## Reston attorney focuses on estate planning for local families

By Ellyn Wexler, staff writer

After more than a decade as an environmental attorney with the U.S. Department of the Interior, Reston resident Sean Joyner returned to his hometown with a new mission: helping Northern Virginia families plan for the future.

Joyner launched his estate planning practice in Reston in October, focusing on a task many families postpone despite its significance. “Estate planning is one of the most important things people can do for their families, and it’s also one of the most commonly ignored,” he said.

Before opening his firm, Joyner spent 13 years in federal service working on complex environmental enforcement and compliance matters, including haz-

ardous substance cleanups that often stretched on for years. His work involved negotiating tens of millions of dollars in settlements with responsible parties and managing cases that remained ongoing when he left federal service last April.

While Joyner said he strongly believes in the mission of preserving natural resources, the nature of the work—and the incentive structures surrounding it—eventually led him to reconsider his career path.

“Much of my work involved cleaning up damage after the fact,” he said. “I also saw how hourly billing could create incentives for delay rather than resolution.”

Joyner’s connection to Reston spans decades. He lived in the community from 1972 to 1990 and returned in 2009.

He and his wife, Anna Warburton, have raised their two children in Reston. Their son is a sophomore at the University of Mary Washington, and their daughter attends Langston Hughes Middle School.

“When I left federal service, I wanted to make a real difference in the lives of people in my own community,” Joyner said. “Estate planning allowed me to do that in a very direct way.”

That shift in perspective is reflected in how Joyner structures his practice.

Joyner describes his approach as “relational, not transactional.” Unlike traditional law firms that bill by the hour, he works on a flat-fee basis agreed upon in advance, allowing clients to call or email with questions without worrying about unexpected charges.



Sean Joyner’s new law practice is helping his Reston neighbors. Photo by Benjamin Burgess

“I wanted to remove the friction that keeps people from asking questions,” he said. “Better communication leads to better planning.”

Joyner also emphasizes follow-through. Every client receives a review of their estate plan every three years, along with a check-in to account for life changes such as births, deaths, new assets, or shifting priorities.

Much of Joyner’s work involves fixing—or preventing—common estate planning mistakes.

One of the most common problems he sees is an estate plan that exists on paper but not in practice. Assets are often not properly transferred into a trust, leaving families vulnerable to probate despite having signed estate planning documents.

Probate is the court-supervised process used to validate a will, pay debts, and transfer assets to heirs. For Reston residents, probate cases are handled by the Fairfax County Circuit Court. The process is public, can be costly, and often takes more than a year to complete.

An even bigger issue, Joyner said, is having no plan at all. In those cases, Virginia’s intestate laws determine who

Continued on page 4



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# THE BULLETIN

## Advantage Physical Therapy expands to Reston

By Ellyn Wexler, staff writer

Advantage Physical Therapy has opened a new office in Reston, expanding its Northern Virginia presence and making specialized rehabilitation services more accessible to patients with complex and often underserved conditions.

The practice has served patients from its Falls Church location for 17 years, and Clinic Director Dr. Sarah Sheridan said the decision to expand was driven by both growth and access. In recent years, the clinic added physical therapists with advanced training in specialty areas, increasing demand for space while also revealing how geography was affecting patient care.

“We began to outgrow our Falls Church office,” Sheridan said. “But just as important, we realized that distance itself was becoming a barrier. We had patients traveling long distances for care, which can be especially challenging for individuals managing chronic or autonomic conditions.”

Reston emerged as a natural next step. Its central location and active population offered an opportunity to serve patients who previously faced lengthy commutes.

“Reducing travel time isn’t just a convenience,” Sheridan said. “For many patients, it directly affects their ability to participate consistently in therapy.”

That focus on access aligns with Advantage Physical Therapy’s identity as a specialty-focused private practice.

### A specialty-focused model

Sheridan describes the practice as specialty-focused, noting that this distinction is critical for patients whose conditions do not respond well to standard rehabilitation approaches.

Clinicians develop deep expertise in specific areas, she said, allowing patients to work with providers who understand complex or uncommon conditions.

The team treats a wide range of patients, including those needing oncological rehabilitation, pediatric care, women’s health services, and support for complex neurologic and autonomic disorders.

“Many of our patients have overlapping diagnoses and don’t fit neatly into one category,” Sheridan said. “Having clinicians with distinct specialty areas allows us to collaborate internally rather than sending patients from office to office.”

According to Sheridan, many of the conditions the practice treats are underserved because they require time, education, and specialized knowledge that traditional care models often struggle to provide.

### Understanding Dysautonomia

One of Advantage Physical Therapy’s distinctive areas of expertise is the treatment of dysautonomia, a condition that remains poorly understood by the general public.

“Dysautonomia occurs when the au-

tonomic nervous system—responsible for regulating heart rate, blood pressure, and temperature—does not function properly,” Sheridan said. Symptoms can include dizziness, fatigue, overheating, brain fog, and difficulty tolerating everyday activities such as standing, showering, climbing stairs, or running errands.

Because autonomic regulation is impaired, many patients experience exercise intolerance and abnormal vital sign responses.

“Traditional exercise programs assume the body’s regulatory systems are working normally,” Sheridan explained. “For patients with dysautonomia, that assumption can worsen symptoms.”

The practice uses a carefully graded exercise approach tailored to each patient’s physiology. Treatment often begins in a flat or reclined position, below the patient’s symptom threshold, with minimal heart-rate demands. Upright activity is introduced gradually, and progress is guided by physiologic response and symptom improvement rather than a predetermined timeline.

### Redefining success

For patients with dysautonomia and other complex conditions, success in physical therapy often looks different from typical orthopedic rehabilitation.

“Progress isn’t always measured in strength or speed,” Sheridan said. “It may look like standing without dizziness, returning to school or work, or walking around the block without experiencing symptom flare-ups afterward.”

She has seen patients move from being nearly bed-bound to re-engaging in daily life. “These experiences are powerful reminders that progress doesn’t have to be dramatic to be life-changing,” she said.

### Education as empowerment

Education is central to the practice’s approach, particularly for patients with autonomic disorders that are often long-term or lifelong.

“Our goal isn’t just short-term symptom relief,” Sheridan said. “We want patients to develop the skills and understanding they need for long-term independence and self-management.”

Patients learn what is happening in their bodies and why, along with practical strategies to manage symptoms, including skeletal muscle activation to support circulation, pacing activity, and managing factors such as hydration and salt intake.

“Knowledge gives patients agency,” Sheridan added. “When people understand their condition, they’re better equipped to advocate for themselves and make informed decisions about their care.”

### Looking ahead in Reston

The new Reston office is designed to



Advantage Physical Therapy Clinic Director Dr. Sarah Sheridan and Physical Therapist Dr. Kaelie Walsh. Photo contributed by APT

serve as a resource for patients and the broader community—supporting local physicians, schools, and families with evidence-based care for complex conditions.

“We’re very interested in expanding specialty services and community education efforts at the Reston location,” Sheridan said. “Increasing awareness and understanding of these conditions remains one of the biggest gaps in care.”

As Advantage Physical Therapy settles into its new home, its mission remains unchanged: thoughtful growth, reduced barriers to care, and a commitment to helping patients reclaim their independence—one carefully guided step at a time.

For more information, visit [www.myadvantagept.com](http://www.myadvantagept.com).

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# THE BULLETIN

## Fairfax County Casino Bill set to reach governor's desk

By Reston Letter staff

On March 4, SB 756, known as the Fairfax County Casino Bill, passed the Virginia House of Delegates by a 64-32 vote. Three members of the House and three members of the Senate will discuss the bill as a committee before it will land on the governor's desk for either a signature or a veto.

Reston Association Board President Travis Johnson shared: "Reston Association remains opposed to a casino in our community. Unlike any other Virginia jurisdiction targeted for a casino—our community has not asked for this, and the passage of SB 756 disregards local governance and land-use planning as well as the wishes of the vast majority of our members. We will do everything we can to mobilize the people of Reston to oppose this legislation."



Reston Station was the proposed site for a casino in Reston when it was up for approval two years ago and was fought off by a grassroots organization. Photo by Benjamin Burgess

**To share your views on a casino in our community, contact the governor at: [Abigail.Spanberger@governor.virginia.gov](mailto:Abigail.Spanberger@governor.virginia.gov).**

### Democracy, cont'd from page 1

its that independence for shaping her stage presence.

"I have to learn how to catch myself and make corrections when things aren't working," she said. "Getting notes during rehearsals or hearing audience reactions feels like someone doing my homework."

Her mother, Bernice Mayfield, describes the discipline behind the scenes as intense.

"Homeschooling gives her time, but she still has to do the emotional lifting," she said. "I see the stress, the doubt and the fears she fights to overcome for every role."

That vulnerability surfaced after Tori once landed a major part and quietly asked, "Why do they think I can do this?"

"She doesn't just rely on talent," her mother added. "She works incredibly

hard."

### A debate that hits home

In "What the Constitution Means to Me," Mayfield-Brown's character brings a present-day teenage perspective to constitutional questions. One moment in particular resonates.

Her character references the 13th Amendment, which abolished chattel slavery but still permits forced labor as punishment for a crime.

"I have family members who come from many walks of life," she said. "Incarcerated individuals deserve rehabilitation. They deserve health care. They deserve to be treated as human, not as profit or statistics."

Howie said she knew she had found her Debater at the audition.

"The role is written for someone high school age, so I trusted the play," Howie said. "But when she auditioned, the improv piece she inserted made me call her the next Ketanji Brown Jackson. We were blown away."

### More than a hobby

While theater is her foundation, Mayfield-Brown hopes to pursue film and voiceover work, particularly in video games. A self-described film and video game junkie, she is building a résumé that includes acting, writing, filmmaking and music.

Her accomplishments include a summer writing intensive at Yale University, poetry readings at Northern Virginia Community College, and recognition as one of 30 national finalists for the Black Girl Film Camp Future FilmmakHERs Collective.

Community theater, her mother says, is where those talents converge.

"It builds both skill and character," she said. "Community theater provides the stage for these talents to come together."

### Sparking the "hmm"

Howie chooses projects with a simple test.

"If a piece doesn't make you go

'hmm' at least a little, I'm not interested in directing it," she said. "With this show, we get to make people go 'hmm' more than a little."

Mayfield-Brown hopes audiences leave thinking critically—not just about the Constitution, but about the systems that shape daily life.

"Where do they stem from? Who do they impact most? How do they affect things in unexpected ways?" she asks.

Howie agrees. "I hope it opens space for young people to be seen not just as the future, but as the present—capable of insight, leadership, challenge and truth right now."

"What the Constitution Means to Me" will be performed at 8 p.m. March 26, 27 and 28; 2 p.m. March 28 and 29; and 5 p.m. March 29 at Reston Community Center's Leila Gordon Theater, 2310 Colts Neck Road. Tickets range from \$26 to \$36. Visit [www.etix.com/ticket/online/viewPerformanceGroup.jsp?group\\_id=2874](http://www.etix.com/ticket/online/viewPerformanceGroup.jsp?group_id=2874)

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The Reston Letter is not endorsing any candidate. This is paid for by John Farrell.

### Joyner, cont'd from page 2

inherits assets and who is responsible for minor children. "These are rigid, one-size-fits-all rules that often produce results families never would have chosen," he said.

Joyner also pushes back against the idea that estate planning is only for the wealthy. In an affluent area like Reston, he said, many homeowners with retirement accounts and children already have significant estates, whether they realize it or not.

"Estate planning isn't about being rich," Joyner said. "It's about protecting the people you love and making sure your family isn't left with confusion, court involvement, and unnecessary expense."

After years spent addressing environmental damage once it had already occurred, Joyner now views his work as preventative.

"I used to deal with toxic cleanups," he said. "Now I help families avoid a legal and emotional cleanup by planning ahead and keeping those plans up to date."

More information about Joyner's practice is available at [joynertrustlaw.com](http://joynertrustlaw.com).

# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

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

<p><b>14</b> MARCH</p> <p><b>Diva Central Shopping Event</b></p> <p>11 a.m.-3 p.m. 12-18 years old Style dresses, shoes, and accessories at RCC's unique boutique event. free, open to middle and high school students. RCC Lake Anne</p>	<p><b>14</b> MARCH</p> <p><b>Jimmy's Old Town Tavern</b></p> <p>Irish food, music and a high-energy performance by Foley Academy dancers at 4 p.m. 697 Spring St., Herndon</p>	<p><b>15</b> MARCH</p> <p><b>Lucky Leprechaun 5K</b></p> <p>A festive St. Patrick's-theme run through Reston Town Center, featuring green gear and post-race celebrations. 11900 Market St., Reston <a href="https://runsignup.com/Race/VA/Reston/LuckyLep5k">https://runsignup.com/Race/VA/Reston/LuckyLep5k</a></p>	<p><b>20</b> MARCH</p> <p><b>VIDA Fitness - Reston</b></p> <p>St. Patrick's-themed workout followed by a casual social hour. 1800 Reston Row Plaza, Reston <a href="http://www.vidafitness.com">www.vidafitness.com</a></p>
<p><b>22</b> MARCH</p> <p><b>Women Giving Back Prom Boutique Donation Drop-Off Event</b></p> <p>12-5 p.m. The Wine Cabinet</p>	<p><b>22</b> MARCH</p> <p><b>Health &amp; Wellness Fair</b></p> <p>2-5 p.m. Learn about healthy living in Reston RCC Hunters Woods</p>	<p><b>25</b> MARCH</p> <p><b>Senior Movie Day</b></p> <p>Downton Abbey: Grand Finale Doors open at 9 a.m. and movie starts at 10 a.m. LOOK Cinemas in Reston Town Center</p>	<p><b>25</b> MARCH</p> <p><b>Discussion of art in the Reston space</b></p> <p>7-8:30 p.m. Tephra, Public Art Reston, Reston Art Gallery and Studio, and League of Reston Artists: how to get involved. Jo Ann Rose Gallery RCC Lake Anne</p>
<p><b>26</b> MARCH</p> <p><b>Opening night What the Constitution Means to Me</b></p> <p>Reston Community Players 8 p.m. Tickets \$26-\$36 Leila Gordon Theatre RCC Hunters Woods</p>	<p><b>28</b> MARCH</p> <p><b>Eggnormous Spring Festival</b></p> <p>10-11:30 a.m. Infant- 8 years old Free, must register. Rain or shine RCC Hunters Woods</p>	<p><b>29</b> MARCH</p> <p><b>EatLoco Farmers Market opening day</b></p> <p>Sundays 9 a.m.-1 p.m. New weekly outdoor market Parking lot of Halley Rise (by Wegmans)</p>	<p><b>11</b> APRIL</p> <p><b>Green Reston</b></p> <p>10 a.m.-12 p.m. Resources, programs, tips for going green Hunters Woods Plaza</p>
<p><b>18</b> APRIL</p> <p><b>Celebrate Reston!</b></p> <p>12-4 p.m. Community festival in honor of our founder's birthday Lake Anne Plaza</p>	<p><b>18</b> APRIL</p> <p><b>YMCA Kids Day</b></p> <p>10 a.m.-1 p.m. Interactive stations, resources, community partners, discounts on enrollment YMCA Reston</p>	<p><b>25</b> APRIL</p> <p><b>Friends of The Reston Letter MindShift Gym Experience</b></p> <p>11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Free to subscribers MindShift Gym</p>	<p><b>25</b> APRIL</p> <p><b>Reston Farmers Market opening day</b></p> <p>Saturdays 8 a.m.-12 p.m. Lake Anne Plaza</p>

## LIFETIME

### What is home?

By Scott Parkin, staff writer

*Move to Reston for the kids and stay for the parents. And that it be possible for anyone to remain in a single neighborhood throughout his (her) life, uprooting being neither inevitable nor always desirable.* — Robert E. Simon

For many Americans, "home" means a single-family house. Culture often reinforces that expectation. But Robert E. Simon envisioned something different for Reston. He designed a suburban community with a range of housing options—not rows of detached houses stretching to the horizon. Today, Reston includes more than 130 townhome communities alone.

If you haven't watched "Another Way of Living—The Story of Reston, Virginia," a video produced by the Reston Community Center, it's worth your time. The film explains what sets Reston apart and why its mix of housing was so innovative.

Simon's planning allowed many of us to choose options that once seemed unusual in suburbia. My family started in a small townhouse in South Reston, moved to a larger one nearby and later to an even larger home in North Reston as our budget allowed. Today, we live in an apartment—and we consider it home.

So what defines home for you? In his book "The Good Life,"

Dr. Bill Thomas asks questions that resonate, particularly for older adults:

- Are you living where you want to live?
- Are you living how you want to live?
- What is the best thing about your home?
- What is the most challenging aspect?
- When do you feel safest?
- When do you feel least safe?
- If you could describe your home in one word, what would it be?

For many older Restonians, the answers center on independence, the ability to live life on their own terms. Safety also ranks high, especially for those who hope to age in place.

If you are 65 or older and haven't talked with your spouse, family or close friends about what home means to you, consider starting that conversation now.

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

### The habits of people who stay active for life

By Taruna Rijhwani, Health Watchers PT

Through years of working with individuals across different stages of life, I've noticed a consistent pattern: those who remain active after 50 rarely rely on luck or genetics alone. They practice intentional habits that preserve mobility, reduce pain, and support long-term independence.

One of the most important lessons they embrace is that "motion is lotion." Movement isn't something they turn to only when they feel stiff or sore; it's what helps prevent stiffness and soreness in the first place. They prioritize mobility and regular activity because they understand the body is designed to move. Whether it's daily walks, gentle stretching, or simply avoiding long periods of sitting, they know that consistent motion is often the secret to feeling good.

Another shared trait is their willingness to invest in their health. They view their bodies as their greatest asset. Time spent exercising, recovering properly, or seeking professional guidance isn't optional; it's essential. They understand that showing up for their health today allows them to continue doing what they love tomorrow, from traveling and hobbies to keeping up with family and friends.

Mindset also plays a powerful role. The most active people I work with carry a sense of optimism. That doesn't mean they never experience pain or setbacks; it means they believe improvement is possible. They recognize that mindset is half the battle when it comes to health and wellness. Rather than assuming discomfort is inevitable with age, they stay curious, engaged, and proactive about caring for their bodies.

They are also attentive listeners, especially when it comes to early warning signs. Instead of ignoring stiffness, recurring aches, or subtle changes, they pay attention. Small symptoms become useful information, not inconveniences to push through. Address-

ing issues early often prevents them from becoming larger, more limiting problems later on.

Finally, people who stay active for life are strong self-advocates. They don't accept "it's just your age" or "you'll have to live with it" as a final answer. They ask questions, explore options, and take ownership of their mobility and well-being.

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# EDUCATION

Making an Impact

## Dawn Garcia: At home in the classroom

By Chuck Cascio, author and former South Lakes teacher

From her childhood in the Bronx to her teen years in Reston, Dawn Garcia knew she wanted to become a teacher. However, when she graduated from Marymount University with a degree in English and a license in secondary education, she felt the need to broaden her work experience before pursuing her long-term goal. “I was not ready to transition from being in the classroom as a student to being in front of a class as a teacher,” Dawn says. “I wanted some life experiences outside of school, so I took different jobs, including retail management, government contracting, and event planning.”

After five years of exploration, she was ready. “I knew all roads would lead back to teaching, and when I finally stepped into a classroom as a teacher, it felt like coming home.”

Dawn began her teaching career at George Marshall High School, then moved to Falls Church High School before transferring to South Lakes High School in 2011, where she has worked ever since. A 1997 graduate of South Lakes, she recalls that when her multiethnic family (her father is Filipino and her mother is Chinese/European) moved to Reston in 1993, just before her first year at the school, she was unsure of what to expect. “I thought starting high school far from my Bronx comfort zone would be extremely challenging, so I expected a culture shock,” she says.

The reality, however, was different. “What immediately struck me about South Lakes and Reston was how welcoming and diverse the community was. I made friends easily, and the diversity of Reston felt very similar to what I was accustomed to in the Bronx.”

Dawn’s appreciation for diversity shapes her approach to teaching. She is keenly aware of changes in

how students learn, think, and express themselves. As a result, she has adjusted her instructional methods while maintaining her primary goal: “to stimulate critical thinking.” Having seen the evolution of students from the pre-social media era to today, she believes it is more important than ever to teach them how to approach information with a discerning eye for truth.

Dawn has always sought to instill a love of literature in her students and to use it for multiple purposes. “My primary focus was to foster a deep love and appreciation for literature, especially multicultural literature,” she says. “My goals were to help students learn to read deeply and to find their own voice.” In today’s constantly evolving social media landscape, she has refined those objectives. “I now see literature as a way to help students learn about themselves and the world around them in the hopes of building empathy and understanding.”

That refinement includes one significant addition to her work: exposing students to current events. “I worry that a lack of awareness about what is happening in the world leads to apathy. I want students to be more involved.”

To that end, Dawn has incorporated monthly current events units to cultivate interest and engagement in real-world issues. She has also developed a unit on social media to help students examine its impact on themselves and on society. “Students always feel like they learn so much from that unit. It often causes them to reexamine their relationships with social media.”

Dawn points to Elie Wiesel’s classic book “Night” as an example of how she uses literature to prompt layered personal and societal reflection. “Students must understand that genocides like the Holocaust did not happen in isolation, and as much as we would like to believe such atrocities could never happen again, they have continued to occur.”

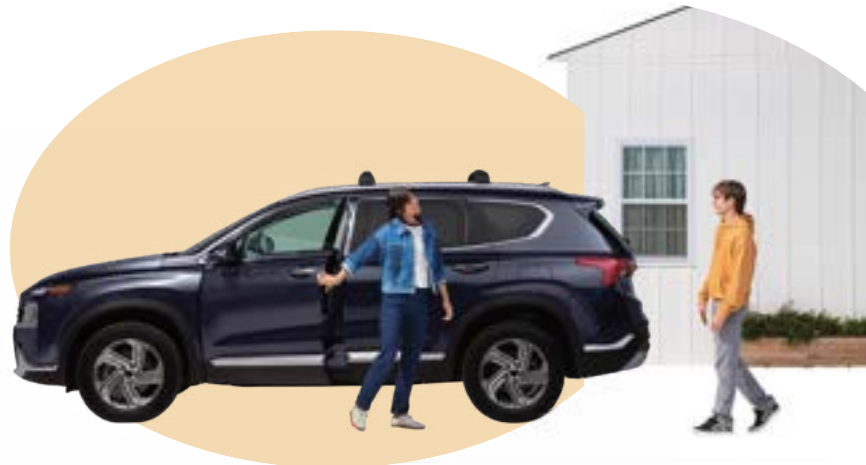


Photo contributed by Dawn Garcia

Reston has been important in Dawn’s life for many reasons. She briefly dated Clint Sigmon at South Lakes, but when his family moved to Thailand, they lost touch for 10 years. They later reconnected online, went on a dinner date at Clyde’s Reston in Reston Town Center, and now live in Reston with their two children—a daughter who is an eighth-grader at Langston Hughes Middle School and a son who is a sixth-grader at Terra-set Elementary School.

“The way this community celebrates diversity reminds me of the potential of our country,” Dawn says. “I knew I wanted to raise my own family here. It feels like Clint and I have started something of a legacy in that regard.”

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# EDUCATION

## Hunters Woods sixth-graders leave their mark through artist-in-residence program

By Steven Brasley,  
FCPS Office of Communications

An artist-in-residence program has shaped generations of students at Hunters Woods Elementary School for the Arts and Sciences. The tradition stretches back more than two decades, even before the current principal's tenure. Each year, with funding from the Hunters Woods PTA, the graduating sixth-grade class partners with a local artist to create a permanent installation that leaves a lasting imprint on the school.

Every class chooses a different medium and location, transforming campus spaces in creative ways. Students have designed vibrant mosaics that greet visitors at the entrance, built colorful birdhouses for the outdoor classroom, and painted murals that brighten the library

walls. Together, these works give Hunters Woods its distinctive personality and tell the story of the students who passed through its halls.

This year, sixth-graders have teamed up with artist-in-residence Penny Hauffe to bring a pond ecosystem to life through a richly textured tapestry. They are creating the piece with dyed and hand-stitched fabric, and when finished, it will hang in a hallway near the art classrooms.

From the start, students took ownership of the project. They chose which pond creatures to create—dragonflies, slugs, frogs, koi fish and lilies—and sketched their designs directly onto fabric. Hauffe then led them through the dyeing process, helping them mix and apply colors that would make their creations shine.

As the weeks progressed, students



Sixth-graders gather around artist Penny Hauffe as they begin work on their ecosystem tapestry. Photo by Steven Brasley

layered in even more detail. Hauffe showed them how to stitch sequins onto wings, petals and scales so each creature catches the light and stands out. With her classroom sessions complete, Hauffe

will assemble the individual pieces into one cohesive tapestry, a vibrant collaboration that reflects both the ecosystem it portrays and the young artists who created it.

### 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 32<sup>nd</sup> crossword puzzle creation, made specifically for The Reston Letter readers!

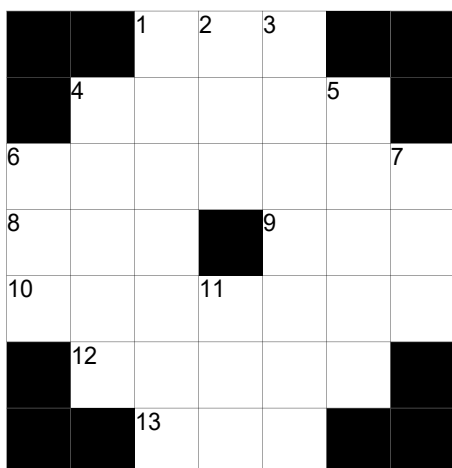
#### Mm, mm Good!

##### ACROSS

1. Madrid soccer team, on scoreboards
4. Rude or insensitive persons
6. \_\_\_ Stone, inscribed in Greek and Egyptian
8. Army insect?
9. To be, in Tijuana
10. Webster's "wordy" pal?
12. Dressed fancily (up)
13. NCAA Div. 1 B'ball "madness" mo.

##### DOWN

1. Pulpit or platform
2. "Curley's" pal
3. More sophisticated, as some painters or musicians
4. Crammed (up)
5. Stand in good \_\_\_
6. Male sheep
7. Equip, as with a weapon
11. Daily dose, per a dietician, say (abbr.)



## Local Girl Scouts celebrate World Thinking Day

By Sarah Golden,  
staff writer

Reston Girl Scouts celebrated the 100th anniversary of World Thinking Day in February, joining troops around the globe in honoring the diversity of the international sisterhood.

Troops based in Reston each selected a different country to study, exploring traditions, food and culture. At an event at Forest Edge Elementary School, Scouts presented what they learned to fellow troop members and families. Countries highlighted included Australia, Austria, Costa Rica and France. Scouts also performed skits, building public speaking skills, while older Scouts led the program.

A power outage at the

school forced the event outside to the parking lot, but Scouts adapted quickly, using cellphone flashlights and continuing the presentations despite the cold.

The local troops operate entirely on a volunteer basis through the Girl Scouts of the USA. After a slowdown during the COVID-19 pandemic, membership interest in the Reston area is growing, and Service Unit 51-5 is seeking additional adult volunteers.

Unit managers Kaitlin Collier and Melissa Hess can be reached at [gs.sum51.5@gmail.com](mailto:gs.sum51.5@gmail.com). Those interested in joining, volunteering or starting a troop can visit the Girl Scout Troop Catalog at <https://mygs.girlscouts.org/search?type=TROOP>.



Reston Girl Scouts gather on World Thinking Day. Photo by Elizabeth Witter

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# EDUCATION

## Hornets vs. Cancer students rally community to boost bone marrow registry

Contributed by Hornets vs. Cancer club

Last year, high school students from Reston and Herndon formed a club with a mission: raise awareness and support for people impacted by cancer.

Hornets vs. Cancer has partnered with two Reston-based nonprofits—the Barnett-Searing National Cancer Foundation and Hopecam—on projects that include assembling care packages for women undergoing cancer treatment and creating cards of encouragement for children with cancer.

“I joined the cancer club because strength grows when people stand together,” club member Xavier Carter said. “If they can be brave every day, the least I can do is stand beside them.”

The club’s newest campaign

focuses on raising awareness and funds for bone marrow donor registration through NMDP, formerly known as Be the Match.

For many patients with blood cancers, a bone marrow transplant offers the best chance for survival. But finding a compatible donor can be difficult. Donors must be between ages 18 and 35 because younger donors typically provide better outcomes for patients. That limited age range makes high school and college students especially important to the registry.

Students also aim to dispel outdated misconceptions. Bone marrow donation is not the major surgery many people remember from decades past. In most cases today, doctors collect stem cells through a process similar to donating blood.

Joining the registry begins with a simple cheek swab, takes only minutes and costs nothing—but it can one day save a life.

The club encourages community members, 18 and older, to join the registry and invites those younger than 18 to pre-register to receive a reminder on their 18th birthday.

“My mom’s best friend (Lisa Langer) has leukemia and needs a bone marrow transplant to save her life,” said club president Max Fox. “When I learned how simple it is to join the registry, I knew other students would want to step up.”

Lisa Langer has been active in the Reston community and Herndon Middle and Herndon High PTAs for many years, and after her diagnosis, the club’s mission has become even more personal as they’ve learned from



Hornets vs. Cancer club holds care packages they made: Pictured left to right are: David Snowwhite, Max Fox, Jaxson Blaisdell, Dylan Swery, Xavier Carter, Ethan Braxton and Jacob Watt. Photo by Brett Fox

her experience.

“Being told you have leukemia makes everything else fade away. You immediately start thinking about your family, your future, and whether there will be a cure,” Langer said. “For many of us, a bone marrow transplant is the only thing that can save our lives.”

Members of the club are now working with renewed urgency to help find a donor match for the mother of a classmate.

Community members who would like to support the students’ efforts can learn more at <https://fundraise.nmdp.org/participant/HornetsvsCancer>.

## Fourth-grader turns big feelings into a book—and a gift to others

By Holly Weatherwax, staff writer

“Everyone needs help sometimes—and you can do this!”

It’s simple advice, but it is also the inspiration behind “My Mindful Minis,” a book written by local fourth-grade author Amaya Samba.

Amaya, a Spanish-immersion student at Lake Anne Elementary School, loves to doodle and draw. Like many children, she has also experienced moments of feeling upset or anxious. Wanting to better understand and manage those emotions, she created a small book for herself, something she could carry in her backpack. Whenever she felt stressed or overwhelmed, she would flip through its pages to help calm her thoughts.

It worked. She found that it truly helped.

Soon, Amaya began to wonder if her book might help other students—and even adults—who feel anxious at times. She decided to publish it as a “mini book.” The size is intentional: 4-by-6 inches, about the size of a postcard or standard photograph. It fits easily into a backpack or purse. Soft-sided and lightweight, it’s designed to be carried every day and flipped through whenever needed—at school, at work or during everyday life.

The project took about a year and many drafts before Amaya felt it was ready to share. With the support of her

family, the book was self-published, and her mother, Rebecca, began spreading the word to friends on Facebook. It was an exciting time for everyone.

Much to their surprise, the book quickly gained attention and began selling steadily. Before long, Rebecca realized that the sales had generated a meaningful amount of money.

That led to an important conversation: Was there a charity Amaya might want to support with her earnings?

Because Amaya believes it is hard to learn when you are hungry, she chose to support an organization focused on student hunger. The South Lakes Food Pantry was a natural fit. The pantry serves local students and their families, and Lake Anne Elementary is part of the same school pyramid.

Through a mutual connection, Amaya connected with the pantry. On Jan. 15, she donated \$500 from book sales to support its work.

Founded in 2017, the South Lakes Food Pantry now serves approximately 500 students and families each week. Amaya’s generosity delighted the leadership team—Roberta Gosling, Amy Shaw, Abbe Pascal, Andy Sigle, Holly Vanderhoof, Laurie Asmussen, Mazie Barcus and Sherri Pudner.



Amaya Samba aimed to help calm people with her book. Photo by Chrissy Kelley

What began as a small, personal project to manage big feelings has grown into something larger: a book helping others and a gift supporting families in the community.

For more information about “My Mindful Minis,” contact Rebecca at [Mymindfulminis@gmail.com](mailto:Mymindfulminis@gmail.com).

## Langston Hughes' robotics team advances to regional championships

By Rachel Singer, LHMS

Langston Hughes Middle School’s FTC robotics team, Technosaurus Rex, earned a spot in this year’s Regional Championships after their success at the qualifier in Laurel, Maryland, on Feb. 8. Out of 28 mostly high school teams,

the hard-working Langston Hughes team was one of six to advance to the FIRST Chesapeake Regional Championships, which combine teams from D.C., Maryland and Virginia.

Team 6633 Technosaurus Rex Roboteers includes Chris Hung, Kai Breitbarth, Devin



Team Technosaurus Rex Photo by Rachel Singer

Tanis, Thomas Hills, Ian Wood, Sachith Phulluke and Shreyansh Paudel.

The team is coached by Paul Davis and supported by Club Director Franklin Kyle, Assistant Principal Dwayne Braxton and Principal Dr. Herman Mizell. They also collaborate with their sibling team, Team 14052 Nerdy Narwhals.

Funding for the team comes in part from hardship grants provided by the DEKA Foundation, Bosch Community Fund, Timken Company and Jabil Cares Foundation.

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# SPORTS

## South Lakes Seahawks double up at Northern Region 6D Indoor Track & Field Championships

By Shanen Elliott, guest writer

The South Lakes Seahawks delivered when it mattered most, earning clutch points down the stretch to capture both the Boys and Girls Northern Region 6D Indoor Track and Field titles.

After sweeping the Concorde District championships, Coach Scott Raczko's teams repeated the feat at regionals, adding to the program's legacy with its ninth regional championship for the boys and seventh for the girls.

### Boys pull away late

The Seahawk boys tallied 75 points, pulling away from runner-up Chantilly Chargers (63.33 points) in the closing events.

Senior Alex Guthrie accounted for 28 points with a dominant all-around performance: first place in the 300 meters, second in the 55 meters, third in the long jump, and fourth as part of the 4x200-meter relay. Earlier this season, Guthrie set a school record in the 55-meter dash with a time of 6.31 seconds, a mark that currently ranks 12th nationally.

Senior Blake Jackson added 22 crucial points, winning both the long jump (22 feet) and triple jump (45 feet, 9 inches)—the latter by an impressive four-foot margin. Jackson then sealed key team points with a fifth-place finish in the 300 meters to help secure the regional title.



SLHS Indoor Track and Field team captured both the Boys and Girls regional titles

### Girls dominate with depth and relays

The Seahawk girls combined balanced scoring with relay dominance to amass 105 points, comfortably ahead of Chantilly's 85.

South Lakes swept the relays, earning a perfect 30 points with first-place finishes in the 4x200, 4x400, and 4x800.

Sophomores Tia Tuffour and Collins Han delivered standout performances. Tuffour captured the regional title in the 55-meter hurdles, while Han narrowly missed first place in the 55-meter dash, finishing second by less than one-hundredth of a second. The Seahawks placed three runners in the top five in that event (second, fourth, and fifth). Han later added another second-place finish in the 300 meters and ran the anchor leg in the victorious

4x200 relay.

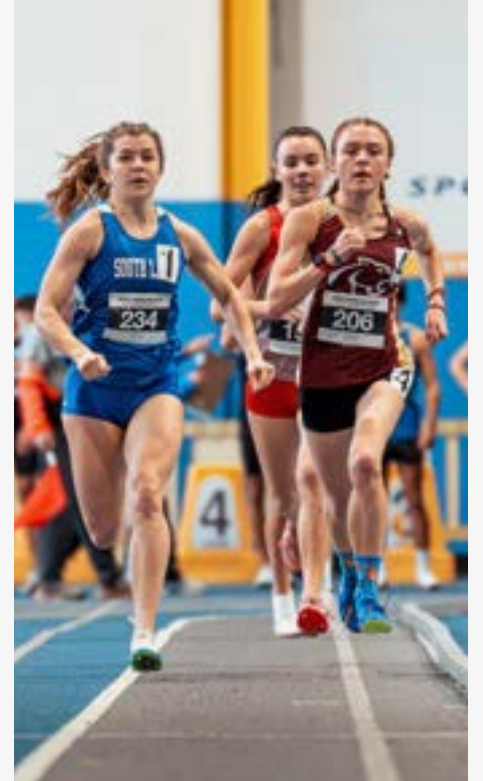
Senior leaders Caroline Elliott and Aya Ryan once again paced the team, each contributing 30 points. Elliott won both the 1600 and 1000 meters, breaking a 25-year-old Northern Region record in the 1000 with a time of 2:51.77. Ryan claimed her first individual regional title with a dramatic victory in the 500 meters, winning by just six-hundredths of a second.

The duo also anchored two relay victories, with Ryan closing out the 4x800 before handing off to Elliott for the meet-ending triumph in the 4x400.

### Eyes on the state meet

Next up, the Seahawks travel to the Virginia Beach Sports Center for the VHSL Class 6 Indoor Track and Field Championships.

The girls will look to extend their



Caroline Elliot winning the 1600 meter race. Photos by Brooks Ross, rossvisualzz

dominance in the 4x800 relay, where they have won three consecutive indoor state titles and hold the Virginia state record. Elliott aims to defend her back-to-back state championships in the 1600 and 1000 meters (2024 and 2025), while Guthrie will chase the 55-meter sprint crown.

The Seahawk boys enter the state meet motivated after a narrow runner-up finish at last year's championship.

## Reston Raiders 16U ice hockey team advances to nationals

By Reston Letter staff

The Reston Raiders 16U ice hockey team defeated their counterparts from Capitals Hockey Academy (Arlington, VA) in a white-knuckle brawl to win the Virginia state championship tournament, which was held at SkateQuest in Reston. The win punched the Raiders' ticket to the USA Hockey National Championship tournament in Anaheim, CA later this month. The Capitals, victorious against the Raiders in all three previous meetings this season, scored a late goal to tie the game and force overtime, but the undaunted Raiders brought home the Virginia crown with a thrilling sudden death goal on a wild scramble in front of the opposing goalie.



Photo contributed by Reston Raiders



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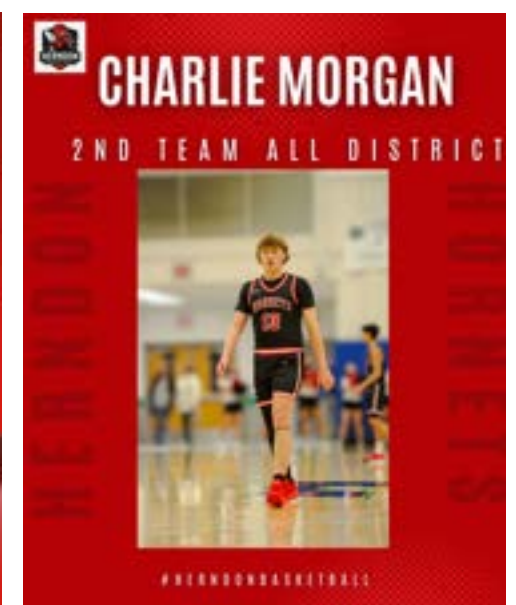
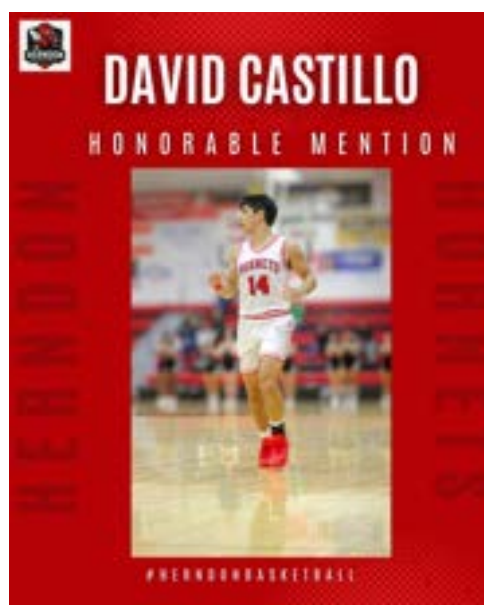
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- 3-5 years: Me & My Ball
- U6-U10: House League
- U11-U19: NCSL-Rec

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- Spring Break Camp
- Summer Break Camps



Contact: registrar@gfrsoccerclub.org



Herndon varsity boys basketball team qualified for the regional tournament for the first time in eight years. It was Coach Austin Hamilton's first year as coach for the Hornets. Grant King, Charlie Morgan, and David Castillo were recognized in the district and region. Photos by HHS Athletics

# SPORTS

## South Lakes High launches first crew team

By Matt Reider, staff writer

Amateur rowing, or “crew,” began in the late 18th century when British public schools formed boat clubs to compete against each other. In Fairfax County, crew has long been a recognized sport. The Virginia Scholastic Rowing Association (VASRA) was chartered by five schools in 1979 and now includes more than 40 teams.

This spring, South Lakes High School is fielding a crew team for the first time. Tryouts were held the week of Feb. 23, including on-land rowing and a swim test at Reston Community Center. The previous Friday, during a “green day,” a lecture hall held eight rowing machines, or ERGs, where five boys and six girls rotated through 1,000-meter pulls. They were led by first-year coach Erich Hoefler, a Georgetown rowing graduate, while parent and booster Konrad Huppi assisted. The team is still seeking a dedicated coach, but Erich stepped in to launch the inaugural season.

Crew has been a family affair for the Huppis. Konrad’s oldest son, John, rowed at Tulane University and now serves as head coach of Tulane’s men’s and women’s teams while teaching in the School of Architecture. His younger brother, Ryne, took up crew in Loudoun County but had no spring high school team at South Lakes—until now.

In 2025, the Westfield High School crew dissolved, freeing storage space at Bull Run Marina. With guidance from VASRA President Dorothy Lazor, Langley High Crew coach Kevin Bedell, and South Lakes Athletic Director Andrew Duggan, the South Lakes Crew was formed. The booster club expects more than 20 students



Members of the first-ever South Lakes crew team practices in the lecture hall at the high school. Photo by Stephen Reider

to participate this spring, fielding both boys’ and girls’ varsity eights (eight rowers plus a coxswain).

Launching a crew team presents challenges. The Fairfax County School system purchased used ERG machines for winter workouts, and established teams have loaned oars, launch boats and motors. The novice team will practice three days a week, shuttling 30 minutes to Bull Run Marina for on-water training before its first competitive regatta.

Ryne Huppi, one of the few team members with prior rowing experience, has helped recruit students and

sees crew as a path to collegiate opportunities. His twin sister, Kyra, serves as team manager and social media coordinator, while other parents and boosters will support regattas, which will be held nearly every weekend in the spring on the Occoquan River at Sandy Run.

South Lakes now joins other Fairfax County schools—Langley, Lake Braddock, Oakton and Fairfax—in offering crew. Rosters, schedules and volunteer opportunities will be posted as the Seahawks take to the water for their inaugural season.

## Reston-trained Olympian inspires local skaters

By Dawn Crosson, owner and editor

Step into Reston’s SkateQuest rink and a mural of Ilia Malinin winning his first World Figure Skating Championship greets visitors in the entryway. The image celebrates the hometown skater who has trained there since he was 6 years old.

Now 21, Malinin has become one of the most electrifying figures in men’s skating. He is widely recognized for pushing the sport’s technical limits, most notably as the first skater ever to land a quadruple Axel in competition. This February, he helped Team USA win gold in the team figure skating event at the Winter Olympics in Italy.

Malinin entered the Olympics as a favorite for gold in the men’s event but finished eighth overall. While the result fell short of the lofty expectations that followed him to Italy, his Olympic



Ilia Malinin’s mural is in the entryway at SkateQuest. Photo by Dawn Crosson

appearance has only heightened excitement close to home.

During the Games, SkateQuest hosted watch parties for Malinin’s performances and displayed handmade good-luck cards from throngs of young skaters. Many pause their own lessons just to watch the Olympian train, a reminder that elite talent sometimes shares the same ice where they practice their first jumps and spins. Seeing a world-class athlete

up close can make their own ambitions feel more attainable.

For Reston, having a world-class competitor train at the neighborhood rink is more than a point of pride. It’s a reminder that extraordinary achievements can begin on familiar ice.

Later this month, Malinin will attempt to win his third World Figure Skating Championship—and the skaters at SkateQuest will be watching closely.



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# KIDS

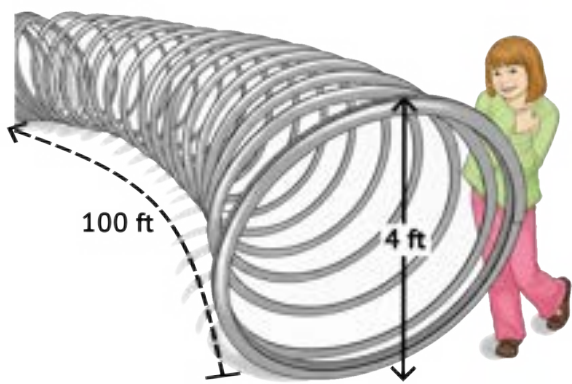
## Welcome to Spring Time

By Bob Welland, Kids Section Editor

Everyone loves Spring Time, when we appreciate the bouncy coils inside mattresses, pogo sticks and cars' suspensions. Squeeze them or stretch them, they always come back, like a season of the year. Let's expand our minds and celebrate springs big and small.

### Big Springs

The famous spring toy, the Slinky, was invented 83 years ago. The **world's largest Slinky**, located in Oaks, Pennsylvania, is 4 feet in diameter and can stretch to 100 feet



long.

Skyscrapers are so tall that side-to-side motion from wind or earthquakes can cause major damage or even collapse. A solution is **mass dampeners**. On a high floor, a block weighing hundreds of tons is attached to big springs. If the building sways one direction, the springs let the heavy block stay mostly in place. This creates an opposite force that reduces the building's movement.



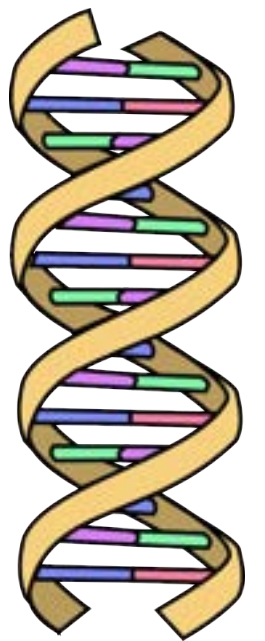
### Small Springs

Click! **Retractable ballpoint pens** were a big hit when they came out in the 1950s because you didn't need to fiddle with a cap. There's a little spring inside that's only an inch long. But can we go smaller? Yes.

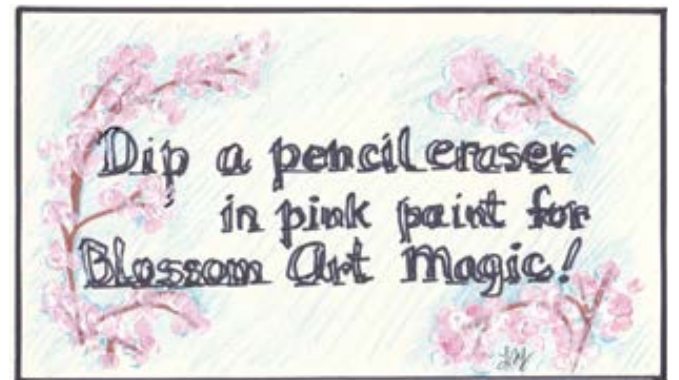


Your phone knows when you hold it in portrait or landscape because of a tiny device called an **accelerometer**. A microscopic weight is held by elastic silicon beams. The beams are not coiled, but they are springs that bend when you move your phone. They're 30 times thinner than a human hair.

Let's go 1,000 times even smaller! The **DNA** inside your cells are shaped as a double-helix. That's a spring! This saves a lot of space. If you straightened out a chromosome, it would be 10,000 times longer. Its springiness allows it to be unzipped as needed to keep your cells working. With trillions of them in your body, it's Spring Time all year round.



## Find 8 Differences: W&OD Trail at the Herndon Caboose



**GROCERY GROANERS**

Where does Jack buy beans for his magic beanstalk?  
Giant

Where should I get bagels, donuts and swiss cheese?  
Hole Foods

Which stores sell good toupees?  
Wigmans and Hairy Teeter

Carrying groceries home, I come to a fork in the road. Should I take the path with the hungry wolf? No, take the Safe-Way.

These riddles stink! Where can I swap them for good ones?  
Trader Jokes

# KIDS

## Sage Greene and the Mystery of the Missing Cupcakes

Mystery Fiction by Arthur Semicolon Doyle

Family Fun Night in the elementary school gymnasium is chaos. Children run around between activity stations of hula-hoops, obstacle courses, dancing and more. Middle-school mystery solver, Sage Greene, stands in the middle of it looking around nervously.

"22... 23!" shouts a man in the corner. A boy screams, "22! That's me!" and runs past Sage so fast it spins her around. She comes face to face with her elderly friend Mrs. Gray, who asks, "Aren't you a little old to be here, Sage?"

Flustered, Sage says, "I'm babysitting my neighbor Cassie because her parents couldn't come. But I've lost sight of her." Mrs Gray comforts her, "Don't worry, I'll help you find her." As they look around, Mrs Gray says, "I'm a little old to be here too. This is my grandson's school so I donated 24 of my famous cupcakes for the giveaway."

"And finally 24!" yells the man. Mrs Gray says "That's Mr. Rash. He gave out my cupcakes to kids with numbered tickets." They find Cassie by a wall, looking gloomy. "What's wrong?" asks Sage. "I didn't get my cupcake and he's all done now," says Cassie, handing Sage her

ticket with six written on it.

They hustle over to the give away table. Mr. Rash is

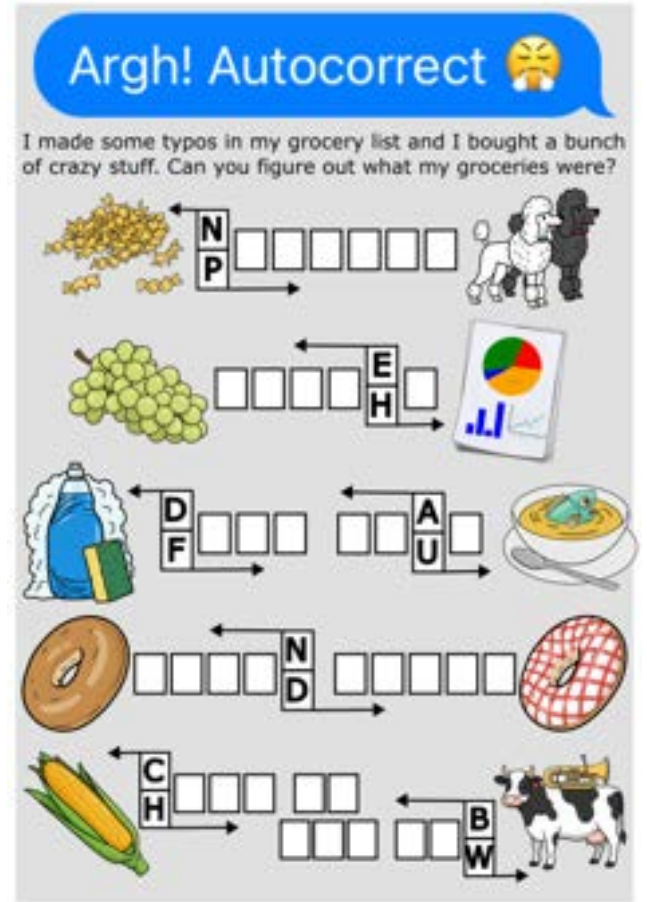
putting on his coat in a hurry. Sage asks him,

"Excuse me—" but gets interrupted by a little boy. "Mr. Rash, you're looking very Skibidi today!" Mr. Rash loses his temper. "Uggh! You kids and your meaningless sayings! I can't take it anymore!" Mr. Rash storms away. Before leaving the gym, he barks at Mrs. Gray, "Your cupcake container is in the corner."

Sage is stunned, until she hears a kindergarten girl sniffing beside her. She shows her ticket to Sage and cries, "I'm s'posed to get a cupcake."

Looking at the ticket, Sage says, "Oh, I see what happened. Don't worry, girls. Your numbers got skipped but I think your cupcakes are in Mrs. Gray's container right now." Mrs. Gray opens the container and two cupcakes are there. She asks Sage, "How did you know?"

**Why did Mr. Rash skip the girls' numbers?**



### Solutions

**Find 8 Differences:** Left to Right: 1) Missing stripes on shorts, 2) Upside down triangle, 3) Statue on bench, 4) Extra smokestack, 5) Training wheels, 6) Extra window on building, 7) Five Guys, 8) Dinosaur

#### Sage Greene Mystery:

Cassie and the girl cheer with joy as Mrs. Gray hands them their cupcakes. Sage holds up the two tickets. "The tickets are for six and seven. Mr. Rash didn't want to yell out 'six-seven' in the gym." "Why?" asks Mrs. Grey.

The little boy interrupts again. "Did you say six-seven?" A nearby boy repeats "Six-Seven!" waving his hands up and down. Like a virus, the catchphrase spreads around the gym until most kids are shouting "Six-seven! Six-seven. Six-seven!"

Raising her voice over the hub-bub, Sage says to Mrs. Gray, "I think Mr. Rash had a point."

**Argh! Autocorrect:** 1) Noodles, 2) Grapes, 3) Dish Soap, 4) Plain Bagel, 5) Corn on the Cob

### Little Hands, Big Muffin Bites

By Alexis Estep, mom, chef, Restonian



Quinn is ready to mix up muffins!

March Madness! Are you going a little crazy with all these snow days we've had? We like to build snowmen and sled as much as the next person but we're ready for more sunshine and warmth. That's why we are so excited for it to be March with the promise of more time outside, spring sports, and trees and flowers blooming. Speaking of spring sports, are you a budding athlete and need constant fuel and snacks? If you are in a bind, make these muffins to tide you over!

#### Greek Yogurt Muffins adapted from [yummysmallerfood.com](http://yummysmallerfood.com)

- 3/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 3/4 cup protein baking mix, such as Kodiak Cakes
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup whole-milk plain Greek yogurt
- 1/3 cup maple syrup
- 1/4 cup oil, light olive oil or canola
- 2 eggs (lightly beaten)
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract

#### Optional Add-Ins (Choose one)

- 1 cup mini chocolate chips
- 2 cups finely diced strawberries (add 1 tablespoon fresh lemon zest if desired)
- 2 cups blueberries (add 1 teaspoon cinnamon if desired)
- 1/4 cup sprinkles and 1 tsp almond extract

#### Instructions

- Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. Grease a 12-cup standard muffin pan with nonstick spray or line with muffin liners.
- In a medium bowl, stir together the flours, baking powder, baking soda, and salt.
- In another bowl, stir together the yogurt, maple syrup, butter, eggs, and vanilla.
- Gently stir the yogurt mixture into the flour mixture.
- Stir in your desired add-in. (optional)
- Put 1/4 cup of batter for each muffin in the pan
- Bake for 16-18 minutes, or until the edges are lightly golden brown and a cake tester inserted into the center comes out clean. Remove from the oven, and cool before serving.

# OPINIONS

## Reston Association Board elections: A call to participate

Contributed by Past RA Board Presidents:  
Caren Anton, Cathy Baum, Julie Bitzer,  
Kathleen Driscoll, Andy Sigle

Reston Association Board of Directors elections are underway. Voting ends at 5 p.m. on Tuesday, March 31, and a 10% quorum is required to validate the election of two new directors: one Member-at-Large and one Tall Oaks/Lake Anne district representative.

Reston's quiet strength has always been its clarity of purpose—knowing what it is, and what it is not. That clarity traces back to founder Robert E. Simon and his vision of thoughtful planning, shared responsibility, and community self-governance within the broader framework of Fairfax County.

That perspective matters as a newly elected Board takes shape and prepares to guide the Association through important financial, infrastructure, and community decisions in the years ahead.

At its best, the nine-member Board sets direction and policy. Directors ask thoughtful questions, weigh competing priorities, and safeguard the organization's financial health and long-term mission. The Board governs, and the RA CEO and professional staff manage day-to-day operations and implementation. When those roles are clearly defined and respected, accountability is stronger, staff can operate effectively, and the entire community benefits.

Reston needs directors who understand that distinction and who can work collaboratively, at least collegially, on the major issues facing our community, including:

- How to responsibly renovate and modernize amenities to meet evolving interests—from pickleball to disc golf—while respecting existing users and budget realities.

- How to ensure residents can remain active and connected at every stage of life.
- How to improve equity and accessibility across programs and facilities.
- How to maximize the long-term value of RA's assets for a diverse and multigenerational membership.

These questions affect long-time Restonians on fixed incomes who value stability and predictability, as well as young and growing families seeking opportunity and access. Good governance requires balancing these interests within a roughly \$23 million annual budget, planning for capital reinvestment, and maintaining fiscal discipline that protects both current

Board leadership also extends beyond RA itself. Effective directors must engage constructively with Fairfax County and the Hunter Mill District Supervisor. Demonstrating credibility and partnership, the RA Board of Directors can re-build productive relationships, and advocate thoughtfully for Reston's interests. Collaboration does not mean capitulation; it means showing up informed, prepared,

and solution-oriented. Reston does not operate in isolation.

At the same time, RA's role is clear. As a homeowners association, its responsibility is to serve residents, and steward shared assets, while upholding Reston's founding principles and values of equity, economic diversity, environmental sustainability, and our open space and dark skies. Broader land-use and development decisions involve multiple established civic channels, including the County and its planning bodies. Respecting those roles strengthens Reston's voice rather than diluting it.

Robert Simon believed in governance structures that empowered people while maintaining clarity of responsibility. That principle remains relevant today. A strong Reston depends on directors who focus on policy, steward resources carefully, think long-term, and collaborate effectively, leaders who understand that fiduciary responsibility and community vision go hand in hand.

The future of our community depends on participation. Please take time to vote.

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## Smart development should include smarter lighting

By Connie Hartke, Reston resident

I grew up with dark skies. I remember the quiet beauty of a landscape lit only by moonlight and the awe of watching a meteor shower streak across a moonless night. Even here in Reston, I've experienced moments of true darkness. One early morning in 2003, I watched the Perseids meteor shower at Baron Cameron Park. I've walked at 3 a.m. along the path near the Gary Braithwaite soccer field with my granddaughter, using a red flashlight to spot glowing firefly larvae along the ground. Over my 21 years in Reston, however, I've noticed fewer fireflies lighting summer evenings.

As Reston grows, our night skies are steadily brightening under artificial light.

### When urban lighting becomes 'light trespass'

Last summer, a brightly illuminated rooftop sign for the JW Marriott was installed atop a tall building at the Wiehle–Reston East Metro station. Residents in south Reston raised concerns about its intense brightness and blue-white color, visible three-quarters of a mile south of the toll road.

This is a classic example of light trespass—light spilling beyond its intended property, intruding into neighboring homes and public spaces. While

the sign received a Fairfax County permit, many feel it conflicts with local lighting guidelines, which call for outdoor lighting to be shielded, directed, and unobtrusive.

### Light pollution, wildlife, and Observatory Park

Most bird migration along the eastern seaboard occurs at night, when cooler temperatures and calmer winds make flight easier. Bright, blue-white lights on tall buildings can disorient birds, drawing them off course or increasing collision risk.

In March 2025, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors endorsed a "Lights Out for Birds" pledge, calling for:

- Turning off nonessential lights from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. during peak migration
- Dimming lights that must remain on
- Turning off decorative landscape lighting
- Shielding and directing lights downward
- Using warmer-colored lighting whenever possible

The first and fifth recommendations are particularly relevant to the JW Marriott sign. Additional light contributes to regional skyglow reaching Observatory Park at Turner Farm, about 3.5 miles north in Great Falls. The park, dedicated to public astronomy and dark-sky education, was designated the nation's first Urban Night Sky Place in January. For many residents, the concern is not development itself, but how growth can occur while still protecting shared environmental resources like the night sky.

### Community input and what comes next

During a Jan. 14 Planning Commission hearing, the public asked that the JW Marriott sign be dimmer, warmer in color, and turned off during peak migration. A Comstock representative said she would relay the concerns.

Soon after, the sign was modified to a reduced illuminated area with white-on-black lettering. The visible glow lessened to the south, marking an im-



Since its installation this fall, the JW Marriott sign has concerned some residents in the area with its brightness.

Photo by Benjamin Burgess

provement. However, the bright white light remains visible from long distances and is more intrusive than warmer wavelengths. Whether the sign will be turned off during migration hours remains unclear. Residents hope the JW Marriott brand and Reston Station partners will continue refining the rooftop sign by:

- Further reducing brightness
  - Shifting to warmer-colored lighting
  - Turning the sign off during peak migration periods
- A special-exception application for additional signage at Reston Station is expected March 16 at 7 p.m. Those interested can follow updates from Supervisor Walter Alcorn or contact [info@RCAReston.org](mailto:info@RCAReston.org).

Protecting dark skies is not about nostalgia. It is about health, ecology, science, and community character. Even in a growing community like Reston, the night sky remains a shared resource — and one worth preserving.

Connie Hartke is a director on the board of Reston Citizens Association, president of RescueReston.org, on the Steering Committee of No Fairfax Casino, and a Reston Realtor®.



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# LIFESTYLE

## Effortless elegance: How to host a memorable brunch

By Noelle Sharbaugh, High Heeled Hostess

Brunch is the ultimate crowd-pleaser and one of my favorite ways to gather people around the table. It strikes the perfect balance between relaxed and celebratory, with natural light that lifts the mood—and gives everyone a little extra glow. Best of all, brunch can feel polished without putting unnecessary pressure on the host.

Whether you're planning a casual weekend get-together or a seated affair, these simple strategies will help you host with ease.

### Keep the Menu Simple

Brunch shines when the menu is uncomplicated. Choose items you can prepare ahead of time so you're not tied to the kitchen once guests arrive.

A few reliable options:

- Overnight casseroles such as French toast bakes or egg strata
- A frittata or quiche that reheats beautifully
- Fresh fruit, yogurt parfaits, and pastries from your favorite bakery

From a build-your-own casserole bar to a plated presentation, you have plenty of flexibility. Keep it casual or elevate it depending on the occasion.

### Create a Self-Serve Drink Station

A brunch drink station sets a festive tone and frees you from refilling glasses all morning. Offer one or two fun options alongside the basics so everyone feels considered.

Two simple, high-impact ideas:

- A mimosa station with sparkling wine and juices like orange, grapefruit, or peach
- A Bloody Mary bar with tomato juice, garnishes, and seasonings so guests can adjust the spice level

Add coffee, tea, sparkling water, and a non-alcoholic option so guests can help themselves while conversation flows.

### Set a Bright, Inviting Table or Buffet

Brunch is wonderfully flexible. Use your kitchen island for a casual, help-yourself spread, create a buffet table for easy flow, or set a seated table for a more traditional gathering.

Incorporate a few thoughtful touches to elevate the atmosphere: a table runner, bright napkins, your favorite china, or a mix of pieces for a relaxed look. Finish with flowers, greenery, or candles to ensure guests feel welcomed the moment they arrive.

### Keep the Atmosphere Relaxed

The best brunches feel unrushed. Play soft background music, serve food family-style if it suits the

setting, and allow guests to graze and linger. If children are attending, set up a simple activity and offer kid-friendly options so adults can relax and enjoy the conversation.

Brunch doesn't need to be complicated to be memorable. Thoughtful details, an easy menu, and a welcoming table go a long way.

### Make It Your Own

Brunch remains a favorite because of its flexibility. It can be casual or elegant, buffet-style or seated, savory or sweet—or anything in between. It beautifully combines the best of breakfast and lunch, giving guests plenty of choices. The magic lies in creating an atmosphere that encourages ease, unhurried conversation, and genuine connection.

### The Final Touch

A fabulous brunch isn't about perfection—it's about creating a moment where good food and good company come together naturally. When your table feels welcoming and your guests are at ease, you've done it right. With a bit of planning and a few thoughtful touches, you can create memories that linger long after the plates are cleared.

For more seasonal inspiration and entertaining ideas, visit [www.highheeledhostess.com](http://www.highheeledhostess.com) and follow along for updates and exclusive content.

*Noelle Sharbaugh, the High Heeled Hostess, is a published and award-winning tablescene designer dedicated to helping others transform dining experiences into unforgettable events. For more tips, tricks, and hosting inspiration, visit [www.highheeledhostess.com](http://www.highheeledhostess.com) or email [noelle@highheeledhostess.com](mailto:noelle@highheeledhostess.com).*



Fresh spring florals and a layered plate stack create an elegant brunch table. Photo contributed by High Heeled Hostess



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**Where: 2310 Colts Neck Rd, Reston, VA, 20191**

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Register to be a Vendor with the QR code above.

Contact: 703.476.4500 or LaTanja Snelling at [latanja.snelling@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:latanja.snelling@fairfaxcounty.gov)

Special thanks to Samantha Marshall of **Studio 151 Photography** as the event photographer and sponsor.



A spring mimosa bar cart with champagne, fresh juices, and seasonal garnishes. Photo contributed by High Heeled Hostess

## Spring note from a Reston roofer

By David Michaelson, MRI

Spring is usually when people start noticing their roof again. The light changes, the trees fill in, and after a winter of wind and rain, something about it just feels worth a second look.

Having grown up in Reston and now working on roofs here every day, I've learned that our homes tend to age quietly. We rarely see the dramatic storm damage reported in other parts of the country. Instead, it's the small things, like loosened flashing, worn sealants and drainage issues, that slowly add up over time.

I often suggest to neighbors that they simply get to know the condition of their roof before a problem arises. Spring is an ideal time for that—no urgency or pressure, just an opportunity to understand what's there and what might need attention down the road.

One caution I share is to avoid letting too many people walk on the roof after storms. Not every storm causes damage, and unnecessary inspections can sometimes create more questions than answers. When you already have a clear sense of your roof's condition, it's easier to make calm, informed decisions later if something really changes.

Most of us think about our roof far less than almost anything else in our home, even though it protects everything beneath it. A little springtime attention, unhurried and thoughtful, can go a long way toward avoiding surprises later.

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# LIFESTYLE

## Inside Art

By Louise Seirmarco-Yale,  
Reston Artist



Want to know how much a tiny flower can influence a society in an artful way? Consider the attraction of the National Cherry Blossom Festival in Washington, D.C. Cherry blossoms are beautiful. Like all art, they make us feel good.

On March 27, 1912, Japan presented 3,020 cherry trees to Washington, D.C. First Lady Helen Taft and Viscountess Chinda, wife of Japanese ambassador, planted the first two trees along the Tidal Basin. That moment became the foundation of the festival that unfolds every spring.

Sharing art, gardens, and traditions was seen as a peaceful bridge between nations. Cherry blossoms came to represent renewal, beauty, mutual respect, and a shared appreciation of nature. Cherry trees often bloom almost simultaneously. The entire landscape shifts at once. People gather to walk among the trees and celebrate the blooming season, known in Japan as sakura.

The Tidal Basin offers a setting where seasonal blooms create a dramatic public experience. Clouds of pink blossoms are visually juxtaposed with the monuments. The fragility of the petals set against the endurance of stone and marble is striking.

It is not just the blossoms that make sakura art. The clarity of spring's blue sky provides a contrast, making the experience even more emotionally potent. There is a subtle lift in our mood — another gift of powerful art.

Cherry blossoms appeal to us because soft, pale pink tones are often associated with calmness, renewal, and gentleness. These clouds of color offer relief from winter fatigue as daylight increases and temperatures rise. As with meaningful artistic moments, we feel renewed energy. The blossoms become symbolic markers of emotional reopening.

They are fragile, yet powerful — moving us from winter to spring, from dormancy to emergence, from quiet stillness to energy. These moments resonate because they mirror our own psychological transitions: beginnings, endings, and personal change.

To artists, cherry blossoms suggest abundance. Their softness contrasts with the strength of dark branches. They bloom suddenly, reach peak beauty briefly, and then fall within days. Many artists are drawn to this final phase, when drifting petals create movement, atmosphere — poetry. Falling petals stir emotion because we are deeply sensitive to transience. We place greater value on what is fleeting. The awareness that “this won't last” intensifies the experience. Like art, it is powerful precisely because it is temporary.

In Japan, cherry blossoms have inspired centuries of poetry. The rare female haiku master Chiyo-ni (1703–1775) wrote of suspended time in sakura: “Blossoms at dawn — even the sky seems to pause.” Haiku so often captures art's quiet effect on us.

This year's blossoms are expected between March 20 and April 12. It is our annual invitation to recognize the power of a tiny flower as art. Look up!

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.” Email her at [hello@peopleneedthis.com](mailto:hello@peopleneedthis.com).

## The Simon says...elite dining has checked in

By Phantom Foodie

When a restaurant carries the name of Reston's founder, expectations come built in. The Simon, tucked inside the gleaming new JW Marriott at Reston Station, has generated buzz since opening in September. Just off the main dining room, its adjoining Schar Bar draws cocktail enthusiasts with an amaro-driven program and rare bourbon list, heightening anticipation before dinner even begins.

We arrived early to experience the bar first, settling in as the room began to fill and a jazz trio set an easy rhythm. Schar Bar is named for Dwight Schar, a driving force behind the development of Reston Station, while the restaurant honors founder Robert E. Simon. Aside from cocktails such as The Simon Old Fashioned, The Lake Anne Smoke and the Simon Martini, however, the space feels largely disconnected from Reston's heritage—a missed opportunity to introduce visiting hotel guests to the town's character.

The expansive circular bar anchors the room, ringed with high-top seating, while intimate tables line the perimeter. The wine list leans upscale, with selections such as Veuve, Schramsberg and Jordan offered by the glass at \$16 to \$28. We chose the Jordan chardonnay (\$22) and a mocktail. Service at the bar was prompt and engaging, and watching the mixologists craft their theatrical creations added to the experience.

After cocktails, we moved from the energy of the bar into the main dining room, where the mood softened and we were seated in a cozy semicircular booth. Our server asked whether we had dined there before but offered little additional guidance. A traditional menu and tasting insert arrived printed in tiny type on black cards under dim lighting—difficult to read and quickly set aside.

An amuse-bouche from the pastry chef—a blueberry compote tart topped with shredded cheese—provided a sweet and creative start.

Starters included the Burrata Salad with baby beets, charred kale and hazelnuts, and the Baby Gem Caesar with anchovy dressing, butter-toasted breadcrumbs and Parmigiano-Reggiano. The burrata was excellent, but the balsamic-heavy kale overpowered its creaminess. The dish skewed salty and would have benefited from crusty bread for balance.

The house bread, arriving mid-course, proved worth the wait: warm rolls glazed with lavender honey that melted in the mouth. Sticky fingers are inevitable.

Entrées followed: Pan-Seared Local Tilefish and Hanger Steak Frites, along with a side of Oven-Roasted Cauliflower. The tilefish, served skin-on with a crisp



House bread rolls, Tilefish, Hanger Steak Frites, Baby Gem Caesar Photos by Phantom Foodie

sear, paired beautifully with celeriac, baby leeks, mussels and sauce vin jaune. The cauliflower, advertised with cloth-bound cheddar, butter-toasted panko and chives, arrived without the promised cheese. The hanger steak met expectations, served with bordelaise, watercress salad and hand-cut fries rather than classic thin frites. A few bites were intentionally reserved for steak and eggs the next morning.

Dessert was the highlight of the evening. The Schar Arrowhead, layered with crème fraîche cream, almond caramel crumble and a delicate caramel arrowhead, disappeared quickly. Chocolate lovers should not miss the Chocolate Cake, whose cocoa sponge and double-steeped cocoa cream espresso delivered a deeply satisfying finish.

A candid note: prices are steep, and a few service-timing missteps suggest the team is still finding its footing. Although the posted dress code is smart casual, guests wearing baseball caps appeared at nearby tables. At this price point, details matter. Cheese selections should be shared proactively, plates cleared more efficiently and crumb sweeping handled with a proper tool rather than a napkin.

The Simon is a welcome addition to Reston's growing dining scene, and we hope it thrives. For a restaurant carrying the name of Reston's visionary founder, the bar is set high. With refinement and attention to detail, The Simon has the po-

tential to become a destination worthy of its name.

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Mm, mm Good!

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