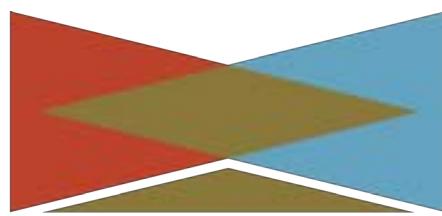


# THE RESTON LETTER



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## New leader brings fresh vision and deep community focus to Reston's arts scene

By Ellyn Wexler, Staff Writer

By the time Jonell Logan became Executive Director and Curator of Tephra Institute of Contemporary Art in October 2024, she had already been impressed by the organization's history and ambition. Tephra's 50-year legacy, strong exhibitions, and committed board drew her in, as did its mission to deepen engagement with contemporary artists while serving as a cultural connector.

"Now that I am here, I've learned even more about the amazing leaders and artists who have been a part of Tephra ICA," she said. "I'm glad to be a part of this organization."

Reston's longstanding embrace of the arts also resonated with Logan, who said the idea that the arts have always been central to community life here is both "exciting and inspiring." That sense of connection aligns closely with how she views Tephra's role in the region. Logan sees the organization as a place where artists, neighbors, and visitors can engage with contemporary art in accessible, meaningful ways.

"This work can be challenging, both thematically and visually," she noted. "But Tephra ICA is committed to making it more approachable, one visitor at a time." That commitment to approach-



Jonell Logan serves as Executive Director and Curator of Tephra Institute of Contemporary Art in Reston Town Center. Photo courtesy of Tephra ICA

ability hasn't limited the organization's reach. Tephra routinely links Reston with the broader art world, often presenting artists who later exhibit internationally or receive major awards.

The months ahead will further that momentum. In January, Tephra will host its first regional artist residency with Abdulrahman Naanseh, who will transform the gallery into a working studio where visitors can watch new pieces take shape. In the spring, an exhibition will pair painter Janet Loren Hill with ceramicist Andrew Casto, creating a dynamic dia-

**Continued on page 2**

## Reston homicide fans Department of Homeland Security-Fairfax County immigration enforcement conflict

By Gene Powell, Staff Writer

A Dec. 17 homicide in Reston has sparked the latest in sharp exchanges between the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and Fairfax County officials over the county's policies on DHS immigration efforts.

Marvin Morales-Ortez, 23, faces charges including second-degree murder in connection with the shooting death of his reported former roommate, Marvin Ernesto Morales, 40, at a home in the 12300 block of Fan Shell Court. DHS has described Morales-Ortez as a "criminal illegal alien" from El Salvador.

Morales-Ortez was arrested following an intense two-hour police search that caused two Reston area schools—

Hunters Woods and Dogwood—to go into lockdown. In online statements and news interviews, federal and county officials provided various versions of events surrounding Morales-Ortez' release from county detention a day before the killing.

The incident fans a long-running conflict involving a 2021 "Public Trust and Confidentiality Policy" adopted by the county Board of Supervisors in response to Trump administration immigration policies. DHS wants the county to honor its request for detention, but the county's policy requires a judicial warrant.

A DHS press release on Dec. 19 said local officials "have blood on their hands" because the county did not honor a Sept. 14 DHS arrest detainer. The department

also said Morales-Ortez had been released Dec. 16 without notifying federal immigration officials. "If Fairfax County would have...honored our detainer, then this tragedy may never have happened," federal posts said.

Fairfax County Sheriff Stacey Kincaid said in a statement that her office "follows all local, state, and federal laws when determining whether a person is subject to release from the Fairfax ADC (Adult Detention Center)."

Both DHS and Kincaid referred to earlier criminal charges against Morales-Ortez. He had faced "malicious wounding" and "brandishing a firearm" charges in a September incident, as well as charges for "assaulting law enforce-

**Continued on page 3**

**SHE KILLS MONSTERS** by Qui Nguyen

A Dungeons & Dragons Quest for Sisterhood and Self-Discovery

January 16 - February 1, 2026

[RestonPlayers.org](http://RestonPlayers.org)



### bulletin



Reston Community Players open "She Kills Monsters," former Seahawks and pro football player gives away hundreds of gifts, how Instagram unites our community, a Reston author's new book

### education



Broadway Night presented by SLHS Chorus coming soon, SLHS robotics club, Making an Impact column, crossword, new summer adventure camp opens registration

### kids



New look for kids! puzzles, a mystery, find the differences, artwork idea, recipe for energy bites

### lifestyle



A Restonian's 3D design business, report on 2025's Real Estate market in Reston, upcoming Friends of Reston gala

### opinions

Restonian's 'What's In and What's Out' take on 2025/2026, Dr. S. on handling disappointment

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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.*

## Dominion Energy's W&OD Trail tree and brush removal enters Reston

By Gene Powell, Staff Writer

Dominion Energy's tree removal and brush-clearing work along the Washington and Old Dominion Park Trail will enter the Reston area beginning Jan. 20.

The next phase will cover about 2.7 miles, from the W&OD Trail at Hunter Mill Road to Old Reston Avenue, and is expected to last two to three months, the company said. The work includes removal of 19 large "hazard trees," identified as dead, dying or diseased, as well as the selective removal of undesirable tall-growing brush.

The energy company's trail work began in November 2024 east of Vienna and initially drew complaints about unnecessary "clear-cutting" and the unilateral voiding of a long-standing agreement with NOVA Parks.

Although the trail property is owned by NOVA Parks, Dominion holds an easement—a legal right-of-way—to operate and maintain its power lines within the linear park, which runs from the Shirlington area of Arlington County west through Reston to Purcellville in Loudoun County.

As work has moved west along the 45-mile trail, Dominion said recent phases have included advance walk-throughs of affected areas with NOVA Parks representatives.

Dominion has said the tree removals, pruning, and vegetation clearing are necessary to protect its overhead, high-voltage power lines, and supporting towers, which run alongside the trail to the Leesburg area, and to remove potential hazards to trail users.

Both Dominion and park officials have said the company will do some replanting. An agreement on future maintenance and reforestation remains under discussion.

## Reston resident Bill Brazier hopes to revive civic discourse

By Lincoln Patience, Staff Writer

Civic participation has always been central to Bill Brazier's life. The son of a political science professor in Boston, Brazier grew up steeped in conversations about government, public service, and civic duty. As a young adult, he worked behind the scenes of Massachusetts politics—keeping company payment records current with the Secretary of State's office, calling voters, and helping organize party caucuses and conventions when his boss ran for re-election. "That was both fulfilling and frustrating in so many ways," Brazier said.

Brazier went on to earn a degree in Soviet Studies at Columbia University before moving to Arlington, where he worked as an analyst for the Committee on U.S.-Soviet Relations during the final, turbulent years of the Soviet Union. While energized by the democratic changes unfolding in Russia, he ultimately decided to change course. "I thought it would be difficult to have a family and work for the Foreign Service," he said.

By 1993, he and his wife had welcomed the first of their two children and had settled in Reston, drawn by its open spaces and engaged community life. Brazier began teaching at Loudoun County High School before moving to Stone Bridge High School, where he later chaired the social science department. Over nine years in the classroom, he found particular joy in teaching electives. "I considered myself very lucky because I got to teach the electives," Brazier said. "They gave me the chance to explain a lot of ideas that I hadn't really explored before."

Philosophy was one of those areas. Brazier returned to school at George Mason University, earning a master's degree and deepening his engagement with the discipline. "I think the questions philosophy raises are foun-

dational to us as human beings," he said. "We can't set up a society for human beings until we have an answer to what human beings are."

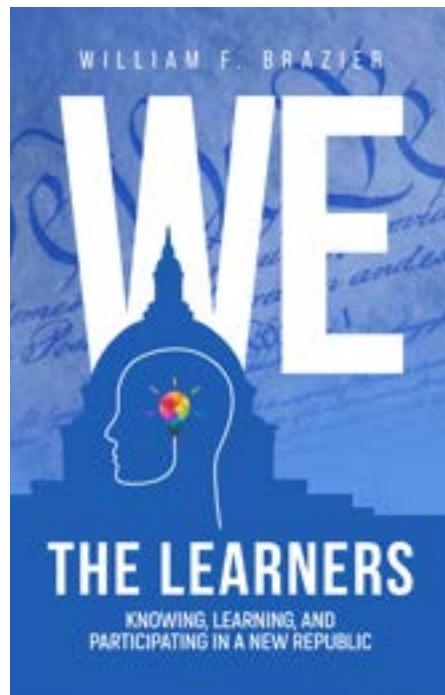
Those ideas form the backbone of his new book, "We, the Learners: Knowing, Learning, and Participating in a New Republic," which traces the development of Western philosophy through thinkers including Locke, Kant, Berkeley, Nietzsche, and others.

In 2003, Brazier became Supervisor of Social Science and Global Studies for Loudoun County Public Schools, a role he held for 15 years. A 2020 district Facebook post announcing his retirement credited him with helping replace certain Standards of Learning tests with performance assessments, an approach later reflected statewide when Virginia eliminated five SOL tests in 2014. Known for clear communication and a commitment to best practices, Brazier also encouraged students, including his own daughters, to study foreign languages.

Public service runs deep in the Brazier family. His older daughter has done healthcare work in Guatemala. His younger daughter is a family services attorney in Portland, Maine, working with immigrants and refugees, many from French-speaking Africa. His wife spent 40 years as a special education teacher in Washington, D.C.

At the core of Brazier's worldview is intellectual humility, a principle that guided his work developing equity and inclusion training for the State of Virginia and the U.S. Capitol Police, an area that has grown increasingly politicized. Brazier describes his approach as educational rather than ideological.

"If you have people who are willing to adopt a disposition of intellectual humility, it works better," he said. "People know their egos aren't involved. If you have that disposition,



you're going to have more productive humans, more productive work, and more productive outcomes."

After earning their trust, he would tell police officers, "Nobody has all the answers. We have to find the answers together."

That search for shared understanding—and for a collective public will—now shapes Brazier's political thinking. In the concluding chapters of his book, he proposes constitutional modifications inspired by the fictional city in Plato's "Republic." While the specifics may spark debate, Brazier said his larger aim is not sweeping reform but renewed civic conversation.

"Learning is the center of who we are," he said. "When we lose that, or when we have a society that doesn't promote it, we're all off-kilter."

Ultimately, Brazier hopes to move policy, and the discussions that shape it, out of congressional gridlock and presidential fiat, and back into the hands and minds of informed citizens. "I think Reston is the kind of place where that conversation can begin," he said.

## Tephra, cont'd from page 1

logue between materials, scale, color, and gesture. A fall show, soon to be announced, will explore how technology can bring communities together.

Accessibility remains central to Logan's priorities, and Tephra ICA maintains free admission to ensure that anyone can walk in and explore. Programs such as Slow Looking mornings, hands-on workshops, and artist demonstrations are designed to welcome visitors who may feel unsure about contemporary art.

"Contemporary art is simply art that is made today," Logan said. "You don't have to 'get' it. You just have to give yourself space to consider it." Partnerships with organizations including Reston Community Center, BXP, Capital One Hall, Reston Town Center Association, Langston Hughes Middle School, and NextStop Theatre help ex-

tend that sense of openness throughout the community.

Looking further ahead, Tephra is guided by a newly completed three-year strategic plan that focuses on increasing visibility, expanding support for regional and national artists, and strengthening its financial foundation. Logan hopes these efforts will lay the groundwork for a renovated or expanded physical space within the next five years. "My ultimate goal is for Tephra ICA to feel like that smart, cool friend you want to hang out with—accessible, inspiring, and a desired destination in Reston," she said.

For Logan, settling into Reston has already brought the small, meaningful moments that make a place feel like home. "My dog Zuri—who is also the Tephra ICA gallery dog—now has dog friends here. That's huge," she laughed. "And running into people I know at the



Reston artist Marco Rando created these doors to Tephra ICA's main gallery. The site-specific installation was part of Tephra ICA's "IMPRINT 2.0" exhibit that celebrated the organization's 20 years in its current space. Photo courtesy of Tephra ICA

library—those moments make you feel at home."

Residents who want to get involved can visit the gallery, attend programs, become members, or support the year-end giving campaign that helps ensure

exhibitions and programs remain free. Collectors can find artwork at the annual Tephra ICA Arts Festival, in rotating exhibitions, or at the Alloy Project fundraiser and auction. More information is available at [tephraica.org](http://tephraica.org).

# THE BULLETIN

## Reston Community Players brings fantasy, family, and heart to the stage

Contributed by  
Reston Community Players

Reston Community Players (RCP) kicks off the new year with an action-packed and unexpectedly heartfelt comedy, "She Kills Monsters," running Jan. 16 through Feb. 1 at the Reston Community Center's CenterStage.

Written by acclaimed playwright Qui Nguyen, "She Kills Monsters" blends humor, fantasy, and grief into a story that resonates with longtime theatergoers and first-time Dungeons & Dragons fans alike. The play centers on Agnes Evans, a high school teacher struggling to understand the sudden death of her teenage sister, Tilly. When Agnes discovers a D&D campaign Tilly created, she steps into a vivid fantasy world filled with warriors, demons, and mythical creatures—learning along the way that the game reveals far more about her sister's life, friendships, and identity than she ever knew.

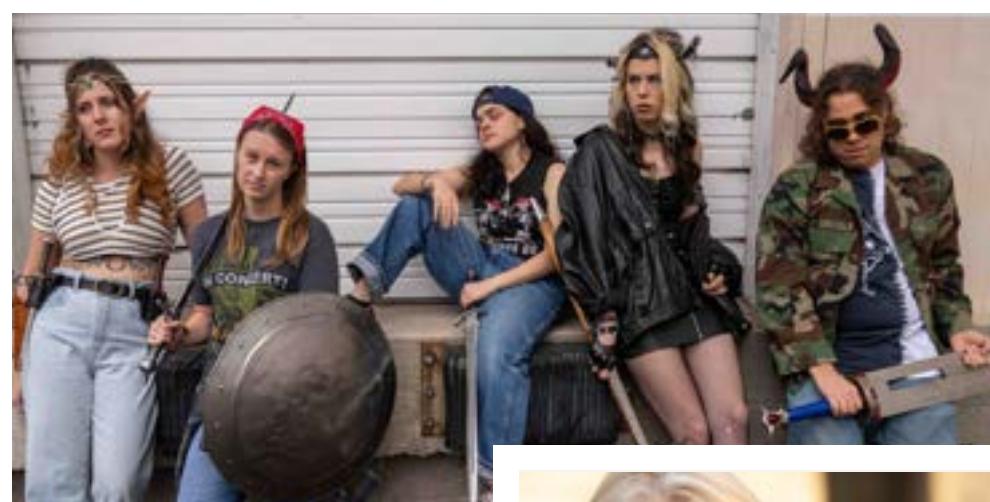
What unfolds is both a thrilling adventure and an emotional exploration of loss, connection, and the ways stories help us survive difficult moments. Since its debut, "She Kills Monsters" has become one of the most frequently produced plays in American theatre, celebrated for its inclusive storytelling, pop

culture references, and powerful emotional core.

RCP's production is directed by Joshua Paul McCreary and features stage combat choreographed by members of The Noble Blades, a group of professional stage combat artists. Audiences can expect fast-paced fight scenes, inventive puppetry, bold visuals, and a cast drawn from the region's deep pool of local talent.

"Continuing our season exploring issues of identity and freedom, 'She Kills Monsters' is a perfect companion to last fall's 'The Rocky Horror Show' and our upcoming productions of 'What the Constitution Means to Me' and 'A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum,'" said RCP Board President Michael Barret Jones. "We're excited for audiences to experience the joy, humor, and heart that 'She Kills Monsters' brings to the stage."

The production holds special meaning for Producer Laura Mills, whose personal connection to the material deepened during rehearsals. "I recently lost my brother in November, and he played D&D, Magic: The Gathering, and live-action role-playing when we were growing up," Mills said. "While the sadness and anger of my grief can mirror that of Ag-



The cast of She Kills Monsters poses for some shots during the weeks leading up to their performances. Opening night is Jan. 16.

Photo by Chip Gertzog

nes and her friends, the laughter and love I feel when watching rehearsals is all the more powerful because of the wonderful cast and crew. I know audiences will enjoy this adventure, and I hope they will walk away feeling inspired and ready to fight their own monsters."

Performances take place at the Reston Community Center's CenterStage, 2310 Colts Neck Road. Shows start at 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, Jan. 16, 17, 23, 24, 30, and 31, and at 2 p.m. Sundays Jan. 25 and Feb. 1. There is no performance on Sunday, Jan. 18.

Tickets may be purchased online at [restonplayers.org](http://restonplayers.org) or through the Reston Community Center Box Office by calling (703) 476-4500, Press 3.



## New Year, New House!

It's a great time to begin planning for a home sale or purchase. To those who trusted me this year to help buy or sell, I look forward to being a resource for you and your referrals in 2026.

Best wishes for the holiday season.



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## First annual Zachary Parker Christmas Drive gives away hundreds of gifts to local kids



Zachary Parker, who grew up in Reston, played at South Lakes and then professionally, organized his first annual Christmas giveaway to local kids, as a way to give back to the community who helped him as a child. Photo (left) by Benjamin Burgess (top) contributed by Zachary Parker

By Reston Letter Staff

Zachary Parker, a Restonian and former South Lakes Seahawks football star and professional football player, hosted a Christmas giveaway event on Dec. 23. After his time at South Lakes, Parker received a full ride football scholarship to Liberty University, was invited to the Washington Redskins rookie camp in 2018, then went on to play in the Canadian and Arena football leagues.

At the event, Parker gave away 500 toys, over 100 pieces of sports equipment, 15 pairs of brand new shoes, and fed all the kids and families who came to the Reston Community Center at Hunters Woods. "I want to give back to the community because they have supported me so much since I was young. Northern Virginia is the best place in the world and I love being from here," he said. Parker plans to make his giveaway an annual event for the Reston community.

**THE RESTON LETTER**

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# THE BULLETIN

## More than homes: Realtor uses Instagram to celebrate community

By Sarah Hickner,  
Staff Writer & Book Club President

From hidden gems to hot homes, Kathy Tracey's @greaterrestonliving shows what makes Reston and Herndon special. In 2025, the @greaterrestonliving Instagram account racked up more than 6 million views across 74 videos and carousels. For locals, Kathy Tracey's social media has become the go-to source for what's new, what's happening, and what's worth exploring in Reston and Herndon.

Which Reston parking lot is the worst? Was there really a nudist colony in south Reston? Where can you grab a rooftop drink? And, of course, what are the hottest new homes on the market? These are just a few of the topics Tracey covers with her upbeat, engaging videos.

What began as a way to share her love for the community has grown into a trusted resource for thousands of residents eager to stay connected.

Tracey's story with Reston began long before she became a realtor. She and her husband Graham moved from

New Jersey in 1996, starting in a small condo in Chestnut Grove Square. "It felt like everything was right outside our front door," she recalls. Their children were both born at Reston Hospital, and over nearly three decades, the couple has watched the community grow and evolve. "For us, it's more than a house. It's about how you want to live your life," she says.

That philosophy guides her work as a realtor. She enjoys helping buyers who assume homeownership is out of reach. "I talk to so many people who think buying a home isn't possible, but knowledge is power," she says. "Some have moved into their new home just a month after we first talked."

When residents must leave the area, Tracey helps them sell their homes while preserving the lifestyle that drew them in. "Most of them have a little sadness about leaving," she notes, "but they're glad we're able to sell the Reston lifestyle they fell in love with."

Her Instagram content reflects that

lifestyle. Posts cover new businesses, urban myths, nature spots, and local history. "Everyone loves a pretty or unusual home, but they also want to know what's outside their front door," Tracey says.

With lakes, distinctive architecture, proximity to D.C. and the Shenandoah, and small businesses that give the town character, she believes Reston offers a fuller way of living. Only 20% of her content is real estate-related; the other 80% celebrates the community itself. "Know me before you need me," she says.

Tracey's favorite Reston views include lakes at sunset, Glade Drive in peak fall color, the rooftop at SYN, a beer on the deck at Lake Anne Brew House, dinner at Red's Table, and the Van Gogh Bridge during cherry blossom season. Her favorite moments on Instagram? When someone stops her in public to say they learned something new from her videos.

Through @greaterrestonliving, Kathy Tracey is building more than a following—she's knitting the community together one reel at a time.



Kathy Tracey is bringing Reston and Herndon closer with her personality and her Instagram account. Photos contributed by Kathy Tracey

## BodyBar Pilates brings a fresh approach to fitness

By Ellyn Wexler, Staff Writer

When Joyce Ko opened BodyBar Pilates Reston/Herndon, a locally owned studio within the national BodyBar Pilates franchise, in September 2024, she combined a proven brand with a personal connection to the community.

Ko, who grew up in Fairfax County, has long been drawn to fitness and movement. After working in studios throughout Northern Virginia, she said the Reston-Herndon area stood out as the right place to open her own franchise location. "I had taught everywhere else," she said. "The location, the demographics and the timing all lined up. It felt right to build something here."

Before discovering Pilates, Ko explored a wide range of movement disciplines, including Thai kickboxing, judo, and jiu-jitsu. While she enjoyed the intensity of martial arts, the physical wear and tear eventually led her to look for something more sustainable. Pilates first caught her attention through social media. "It looked hard and fun," she said. "And I knew it was something I wanted to try."

Her interest quickly deepened. Ko took a front-desk job at a Pilates studio, then trained as an instructor, teaching for three years before deciding to open her own studio. When it came time to choose a business model, she selected the BodyBar Pilates franchise, drawn by

its structured approach, training support and emphasis on accessibility. Her mother played a key role in helping her open the studio.

As part of the BodyBar franchise, the Reston-Herndon studio follows a consistent class format while allowing local owners flexibility to serve their communities. The studio features 12 fully equipped Pilates stations, including reformers, chairs with split pedals and towers with push-through bars—equipment that allows for a wide range of exercises and skill levels.

"Accessibility was huge for me," Ko said. "I wanted a product that really helps people and offers enough variety for beginners, athletes and people rehabbing injuries, without being intimidating or out of reach."

That philosophy carries directly into the classroom. Instructors move continuously through each class, cueing proper positioning and form, offering verbal encouragement and providing hands-on corrections when appropriate, helping clients engage the correct muscles safely and effectively. The focus, Ko said, is not just on completing exercises but on understanding how the body moves.

Ko emphasizes that reformer-based Pilates complements nearly any fitness routine and is often misunderstood. Reformer Pilates uses a specialized piece of equipment—a sliding carriage attached to adjustable springs—to provide resis-

tance and support at the same time. Exercises can be strengthened, assisted, or modified based on a participant's experience level, mobility, or injuries.

Unlike high-impact workouts or heavy weightlifting, reformer Pilates focuses on slow, controlled movements guided by breath and precise alignment. "The main point of reformer Pilates is controlled spinal movement in all directions," Ko said. "Most strength training or sports keep the spine rigid. The reformer allows you to build strength while still moving the spine." The spring-based resistance challenges balance and stability while reducing strain on joints.

BodyBar Pilates Reston offers classes seven days a week, with morning classes daily and evening options Monday through Friday. The schedule continues to expand as membership grows. Ko currently works with a team of four instructors, all trained through the BodyBar franchise's formal education program. She also provides one-on-one mentorship and ongoing professional development to ensure consistency across classes.

Despite common misconceptions, Ko said reformer Pilates is designed for everyone, from people new to movement to high-level athletes. While she has worked with elite athletes, including NFL players, Ko said the majority of her clients are regular people in their 30s to 50s. Classes can be modified for knee, hip, shoulder and back issues, particularly in lower-in-



BodyBar Pilates owner/instructor Joyce Ko and her dog Cora hold a teaser pose on a reformer.

tensity offerings such as Power Tower, Classic and Stretch & Balance. Reformer and Mixed Equipment classes move a bit faster, but also can be modified.

Community engagement is a core part of Ko's approach as a franchise owner. She seeks out partnerships with local schools, PTAs and businesses, contributing to silent auctions, teacher appreciation events and other initiatives. "Being a franchise doesn't mean you're disconnected," she said. "This studio is very much part of the local community."

Looking ahead, Ko hopes to open at least one additional BodyBar franchise location and eventually help other owners bring the brand to more Northern Virginia communities. Her broader goal is to help people move with confidence and consistency, while also working toward becoming a master trainer within the franchise.

Ko studied music at George Mason University and trained as a singer, an experience she said influences her teaching. "Breath, control and awareness all matter," she said. "Those skills translate directly to Pilates."

"At the end of the day," Ko added, "I love that I get to run my own business while being supported by a national brand—and still create something that feels local."

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

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# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

8 JAN	Ice Skating at Reston Town Center Pavilion  11:30 a.m. Closing times vary Rentals available. Open daily (weather permitting) Reston Town Center Pavilion	9 JAN	Rock the Rink  7 p.m. Capitals Watch Party Discounts on skate rentals Reston Town Center Pavilion	10 JAN	New Year Reset: Deep Yoga Integrative Practice  2 p.m. MindShift Gym 11501 Sunset Hills Suite 100	11 JAN	“From Wood to Water”  2 p.m. Watercolor by Don Janus exhibit reception Reston Community Center at Lake Anne Plaza
13 JAN	Taproom Theology  6:30 p.m. Lake Anne Brew House	14 JAN	Reston Plays Games  Wednesdays 5 p.m. Bring your board game! Reston Community Center at Hunters Woods	16 JAN	“She Kills Monsters” Reston Community Players  Jan. 16-Feb. 1 Various dates & times Leila Gordon Theatre RCC Hunters Woods	17 JAN	Community Service Projects  9 a.m. To honor Dr. King's legacy Reston Association Headquarters 12001 Sunrise Valley Drive Contact Ha@reston.org to sign up
17 JAN	Managing back and sciatica limitations  10 a.m. Health Watchers PT & Wellness 11150 Sunset Hills Rd. Ste. 304	17 JAN	Winter Fitness Festival  11 a.m. free, sign up online MindShift Gym 11501 Sunset Hills Ste. 100	17 JAN	“Tribute to Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.”  4 p.m. Reston Community Orchestra honors Dr. King RCC Hunters Woods	19 JAN	MLK Birthday Celebration for Youth  10:30 a.m. Activities based on history, lunch served while parents listen to keynote speaker Ages: 6 - 12 years old registration required RCC Hunters Woods
19 JAN	MLK Birthday Celebration Keynote Address and Community Luncheon  11 a.m. RCC Hunters Woods	23 JAN	Broadway Night  7 p.m. Featuring area elementary and middle schools South Lakes High School	25 JAN	Private wine-tasting & shopping event Friends of The Reston Letter subscribers only  Noon-2 p.m. The Wine Cabinet	5 FEB	Reston Letter Book Club meet-up  6:30 p.m. Join us in a discussion about Goddess Games by Erica Rue Elden St. Tea Shop Lake Anne Plaza

## LIFETIME

### New artwork outlet installed at The Kensington

By Chuck Cascio, Staff Writer

At The Kensington, a senior-living community in Reston, staff members are always looking for ways to provide creative outlets for residents, including on-site concerts, cooking programs, and various other life-enrichment activities. One recent unique initiative involved installing a weather-proof box called a Free Little Art Gallery (FLAG) outside the building near a patio with benches and a sculpture of an older man playing chess with a child on a park bench.

"My hope is that this FLAG will result in an ongoing, multi-generational art exchange between Kensington residents and members of the greater Reston community," Shari True, assistant living life enrichment coordinator at The Kensington, says. "Anyone from neighborhood children to retired artists to working professionals can contribute fun-sized art, and anyone can take a tiny artwork from the FLAG and leave one of their own behind."

A similar type of exchange that in-

volves books has been part of Reston for many years, but True recalls that the installation of a FLAG at The Kensington was inspired by one she found herself visiting regularly in her walks around Waterview Cluster. "It made me think that having a FLAG here at The Kensington would be another way to actively and regularly engage our residents."

True has seen first-hand how residents of The Kensington are inspired by various types of creative endeavors, and the FLAG gives them another opportunity not only to display their creativity but to exchange it with others. "Participating in creative and artistic endeavors contributes toward improving older adults' quality of life and well-being, from better cognitive function, memory, and self-esteem to reduced stress and increased social interaction," True says. "I believe this will provide them with a sense of purpose and satisfaction."

Jacqueline Mills, assisted-living manager and certified Positive Approach to Care trainer, adds, "Many of our residents are not initially from the Reston community. They come to The Kensington

ton because they have loved ones living in Reston. One of the benefits of the FLAG is that it allows our residents to help make the connection to Reston as their community, too."

Both True and Mills encourage residents of The Kensington and everyone in the Reston community to enjoy seeing the creativity inside the FLAG and to deposit some artwork of their own. Doing so can be an inspiration to everyone who visits, and to residents of The Kensington in particular.

"I have seen that even for individuals who have a hard time expressing themselves, drawing, coloring, painting, or sculpting can be a powerful tool in helping them work through their emotions," True says. "We create opportunities for residents to share their talents, experience purpose, and bring joy to others--honoring their individuality, dignity, and quality of life every day which will, in turn, provide them with a sense of purpose and satisfaction."

For True and others on The Kensington staff, the FLAG will provide another way of achieving those goals.



The Kensington assisted living community has a new way to share art with Reston.



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# EDUCATION

## Raising '90s kids in 2026: Calleva Summer Camp

By Sarah Golden, Staff Writer

With a dusting of snow on New Year's Day, it may be hard to imagine that summer is only months away. Still, some Reston parents are already beginning to think about summer camp plans. Calleva Summer Camp, now with a new Great Falls location, is an option for curious, outdoors-loving children and for parents interested in a throwback, '90s-style summer—outside and screen-free.

Calleva, which has locations in Dickerson, Poolesville, McLean and, most recently, Great Falls, is an outdoor adventure camp for children as young as 4. Campers are grouped by age and focus area, giving them opportunities to learn new outdoor skills, go rock climbing and kayaking, create crafts, and do what many children rarely get to do today: spend time outside and get their hands dirty.

The Fraser Camp in Great Falls borders the Potomac River, offering campers access to wetlands where they can explore and learn about local wildlife. The property, acquired by Calleva in February, includes a large main lodge, bunk rooms, a commercial kitchen and a climbing wall. Fraser offers camps for 4- and 5-year-olds, called VA Cubs, and for children ages 6 to 9, called VA Explorers. A fishing and ecology camp is also available for older preteens, with a focus on lure selection, fish identification and conservation.

In addition to its range of programs, Calleva takes a fully unplugged approach. The camp enforces a no-screens, no-phones policy, and staff members use digital cameras instead of phones to limit distractions. The goal, organizers say, is to help children reconnect with the out-



Calleva campers learn about the outdoors and how to love them at an adventure camp in 2024.

Photo contributed by Calleva

doors rather than with a screen.

Calleva's ultimate aim is to spark a sense of wonder while helping campers build confidence through independence and exploration. Campers are given space to learn, explore and get messy, an approach Calleva describes as "organized chaos." Organizers say children consistently thrive in that environment.

Registration for returning Virginia campers opened Jan. 6, while new campers may register beginning at noon Monday, Jan. 12. Camps are offered in one-week increments, and families may choose individual weeks or enroll for the full season. In addition to on-site drop-off and pick-up, Calleva offers transportation from several area locations, including Ashburn Library and Dulles Towne Center.

Additional information, including registration details, is available at [calleva.org](http://calleva.org).



Registration for Calleva adventure camps opens for new families on Jan. 12.

Photos contributed by Calleva.



South Lakes High School's Seahawks Robotics Club, now in its third year since restarting after COVID, recently placed 12th out of about 35 teams at an FTC qualifier. The team advanced past alliance selections to compete in the finals and earned the Sustain Award for its summer camp, which offers younger students hands-on experience in robotics, engineering, and STEM. Judges also recognized the Seahawks' innovative drive train design, a reusable and adaptable wheel base for their robot. Photo contributed by SLHS Robotics

## 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 30th crossword puzzle creation, made specifically for The Reston Letter readers!

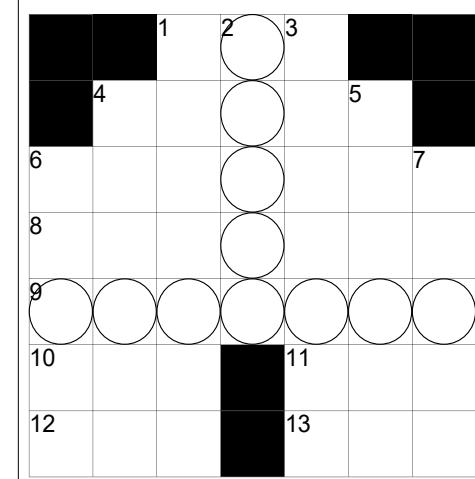
### Greetings!

#### ACROSS

1. Vietnamese noodle soup
4. Fertilizer made by bats and sea birds
6. Muscle strain reliever
8. Learn to live with
9. With 2-down, greeting heard a lot this time of year
10. DOJ branch that deals with drug traffickers
11. Santa \_\_\_, California
12. Snoop ... or mole
13. "Star Wars" villian Kylo

#### DOWN

1. Eat, often a lot ... or clean-up, as one's toys
2. See 9-across
3. Doing well, as AI stocks lately
4. Hit a homer ... or throw a long TD pass
5. Gas station fuel type number
6. "Look, ma, no \_\_!"
7. Sacred text of Islam (variant spelling)



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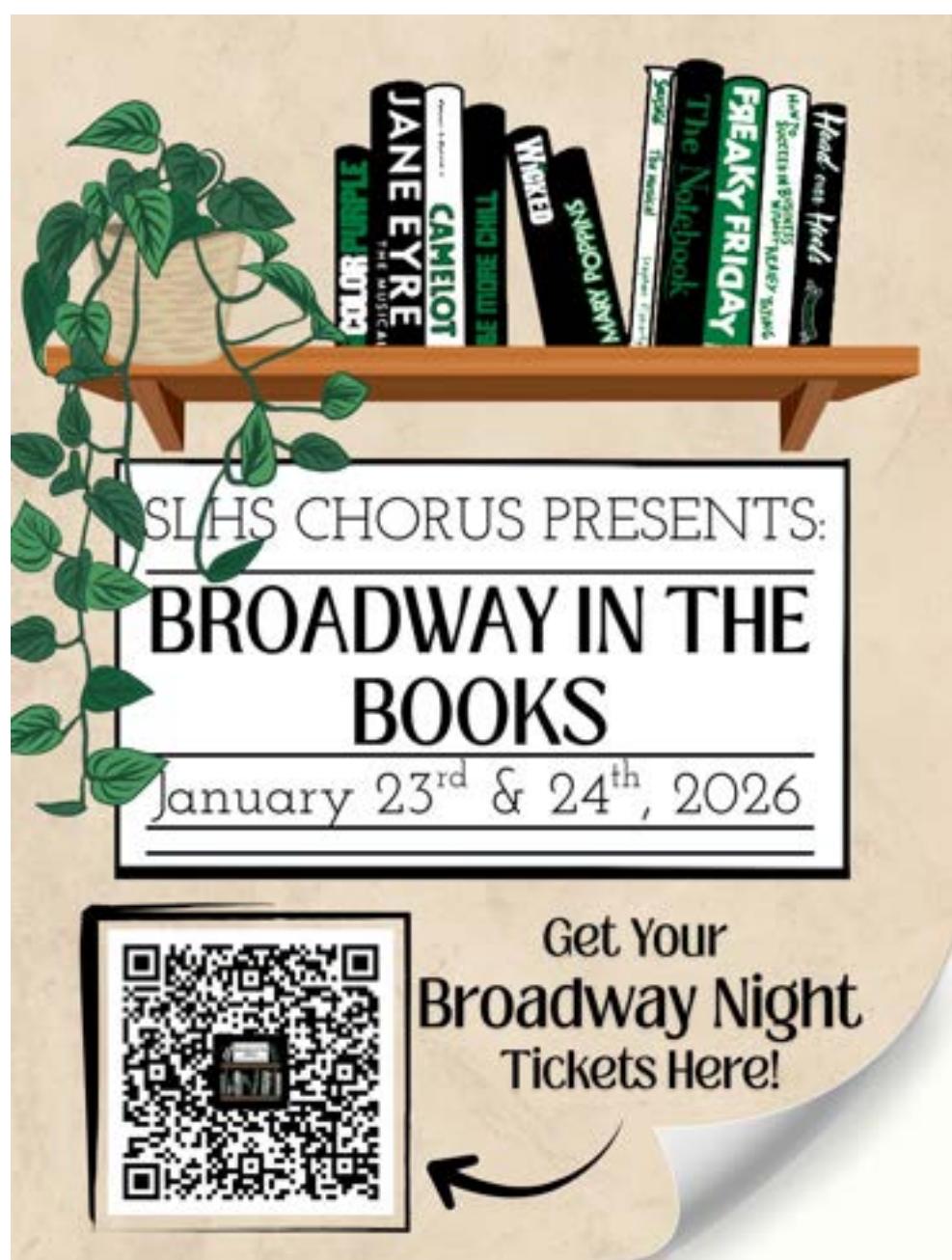
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# EDUCATION



## South Lakes Chrous presents 'Broadway In The Books'

Contributed by SLHS

South Lakes High School Chorus will present Broadway Night 2026, a showcase of talent and music. This year's theme, "Broadway through the Books," features songs from beloved book-inspired musicals including "Wicked," "Les Misérables," "Mary Poppins," "Phantom of the Opera," and "Seussical," performed by fifth- through 12th-grade students from Forest Edge, Fox Mill, Hunters Woods, Lake Anne, Sunrise Valley, and Terraset elementary schools, Langston Hughes and Rachel Carson middle schools, and South Lakes High School. Shows start at 7 p.m. Jan. 23, and 2 and 7 p.m. Jan. 24. Tickets are available at [www.tinyurl.com/SLHSBWN2026](http://www.tinyurl.com/SLHSBWN2026).



Elementary students rehearse for Broadway Night, an event that incorporates all South Lakes High School's feeder schools. Photos contributed by Jennifer Glynn



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# EDUCATION

## Making an Impact

## Ellen Bernard Smith

By Chuck Cascio, Author and Former South Lakes Teacher

Ellen Bernard Smith admits that her path to being an author and supporter of the arts has been atypical. As the title of her book, "Memoirs of a Suburban Troublemaker" confirms, Ellen often took a different approach to life's decisions. For example, when asked when she graduated from South Lakes High School, her response is, "Well, that depends on how you define 'graduated'."

In fact, Ellen says, "SLHS and I had a messy breakup four months before graduation, so I graduated from Chantilly High School in 1993." However, as a "troublemaker," she says various lessons "taught me that I needed to find a way to get along with teachers and everyone else in order to succeed." She acknowledges "bright spots" in her years at South Lakes, including having teachers such as "my choir teacher Mrs. Stammer, history teacher Mr. Ruffin, biology teacher Mr. Baird..." and others. "They were among the ones who threw me crumbs of belief and oxygen." And there were positive experiences that continue to influence her: "I sang in every choir South Lakes offered: Concert, A Cappella, Madrigal, Jazz-making music with students from every race, religion, identity, and income level. That is what I love most about Reston—it's beautifully diverse community didn't just exist, it thrived, and we proved it when we lifted our voices together."

Ellen admits that her self-described "troublemaker" status was due to her "questionable judgment." Still, she remembers the pride of going to Terraset Elementary School, "the first underground elementary school with solar panel electricity and heating," and then to intermediate school at Langston Hughes: "I have always been proud to have gone to a school named for a Black poet who fought for civil rights. Plenty of schools teach his

works, but very few are actually named for him."

Pulling her early life experiences into focus, Ellen graduated from the University of Tennessee in Knoxville in 1998. "I majored in psychology because I was really just trying to figure out my own issues," she says. "I certainly learned a lot; however, years later, writing my book was probably the most therapeutic and cathartic experience of my adult life."

"Memoirs of a Suburban Troublemaker," published in the summer of 2024, was Ellen's first attempt at a major piece of writing. Consistent with her life's experiences, the road to publication was by no means direct: "In the summer of 1998 after my college graduation, I was faxing résumés from ads in the classifieds page." Reston's proximity to D.C. and my complete lack of imagination, pigeonholed me into fields like human resources, tech, and defense contracting."

Ellen says she hated her first job out of college as a human resources generalist, so she "did what any confused twenty-something would do. I moved to New York to chase my dream of becoming a famous singer and to work in what I thought was the fun side of HR, recruiting. The job was fast-paced, misogynistic, and relentless...but I thrived, tripling my income, and becoming a top recruiter."

However, when her ongoing pursuit of a singing career in New York "fizzled," she returned to Virginia, took a job in defense contracting, and eventually wound up at Amazon Web Services. There she took a "professional writing course that changed everything—with active voice, data, and clarity, I became the go-to editor for any document headed to leadership." In 2023, Amazon was offering buyouts, which Ellen took "and decided to write something fun. I'd been journaling since childhood. 'Memoirs of a Suburban Troublemaker' is in many ways the grown-up version of that first journal."



Ellen Bernard Smith

Writing, singing, and the arts were consistently engrained in Ellen's life: "I stayed drawn to creative spaces even when I couldn't live in them." In January 2025, Ellen decided to fulfill her pursuit of the arts by becoming the art liaison at the Workhouse Arts Center, which was once the historic Lorton, Virginia, prison and is now dedicated to displaying and pursuing art in a variety of ways. "The Workhouse connects history and humanity through world-class arts education, galleries of professional artists, and the powerful Lucy Burns Museum, which tells the story of the suffragists who fought for women's right to vote," Ellen says. "The Workhouse is a creative playground for all ages with art-inspired mini golf, live theatre, and the region's best seasonal events. It's a place to learn, connect, and be inspired—a masterpiece built from its past, thriving in its present, and open to everyone with free admission."

Ellen sees irony in the fact that she has engaged with the Workhouse Arts Center: "I spent much of high school convinced I was headed for jail, which now feels poetically appropriate given that I work at a former prison." She pauses and adds, "For the first time in my life, I feel like I have permission to live a creative life," a life the mostly reformed troublemaker shares with her husband, Dan, and their two daughters, ages 10 and 11.

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# EDUCATION



Herndon Middle School Band performed a Winter Concert on Dec. 5 with performances by beginning, intermediate, and advanced band, and the help of some high school volunteers. It was directed by HMS band director, Dr. Nye.

Photo contributed by HMS



Brett Fox, a volunteering community member, read a book about Hanukkah and played the dreidel game with Armstrong Elementary students in December. Photo by Catie Shivers



Hunters Woods Elementary Chorus sings at their winter concert. Photo by HWES parents



Terraset Elementary was one of many local schools that sponsored a Christmas tree at Reston Association's Winterfest. After Winterfest was over the trees were donated to families in the community. Photos by Jane Derrick



Hunters Woods Elementary School student Abby Gallen prepares for her strings concert in December. Photo contributed by HWES parents



The South Lakes High School Chorus A Cappella groups sang at a Kendra Scott fundraiser in December. "Their talent, professionalism, and enthusiasm truly represented our program in the best way. I'm deeply thankful for the community that continues to support our kids and our chorus program, and especially grateful to Kendra Scott for providing such a welcoming space for our students to shine," said Kristin Sunderman, SLHS Chorus Booster President



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# SPORTS

## Herndon's Swim and Dive team focuses on bonding and learning

By McAllister Pearce-Biney,  
Student Writer

The Hornets Swim and Dive team has a new coach this season. Neal Travis, a longtime Herndon resident, stepped into the role after his son, a freshman at Herndon High School, encouraged him to apply when the position opened. Travis emphasizes teaching fundamentals first, instilling the value of hard work, and views winning as a bonus rather than the goal.

Travis hopes the lessons students gain from swimming extend beyond the pool. He believes the bonds formed with teammates—and the shared trials and challenges of the season—are central to why students participate in the sport. The memories built through hard practices and competitions, he says, matter most when a team works through them together. Staying connected and feeling like family is what Herndon is all about, and the team embraces that mindset.

"What keeps me going is the team's chemistry," said senior Rafe Baez. "It's more than just wins and losses. I look forward to team dinners and hanging out because bonding is what it's all about for me." Baez motivates others, leading by example and reminding teammates that the sport extends beyond what happens in the pool, particularly given swimming's physical demands.

Senior dive captain Ryan Collie encourages younger swimmers and underclassmen to try new things and challenge themselves every day, noting that a growth mindset carries benefits far beyond swimming or diving. "You learn life lessons through sports," he said.

Senior diver Jamie Daly said that overcoming fear is one of the sport's biggest challenges. "With diving, there's always the fear of hitting the board or smacking the water if a dive goes wrong," she said. "Getting past that comes from perfecting the dives I know and learning



Herndon's tight group of swimmers and divers are building memories and taking lessons from their season to apply to life. Photo from Instagram

new ones." She added that diving is as much a mental challenge as it is physical, especially when balancing academics with daily practices.

Herndon's Swim and Dive program has produced significant talent over the

years, with many Hornets going on to compete at the collegiate level. This season, under new leadership, the team's seniors are rising to the challenge of change by focusing on building strong bonds and a unified team culture.

## MindShift Gym will host free Winter Fitness Festival

Contributed by MindShift Gym

MindShift Gym will hold a community-wide event, Winter Fitness Festival on Jan. 17 to showcase its partnerships with local businesses and wellness providers, and offer free introductory classes to the public for ages 6 to 99.

While most January fitness resolutions focus on repetitive cardio or weightlifting, MindShift Gym is launching a month-long functional fitness initiative based on the idea that the most effective way to build a resilient body is through "novel movement," the kind found in parkour, aerial silks, and circus arts.

While the 'extreme sport' aspects of parkour may appeal to some, MindShift is working to highlight how parkour's "play-based" fundamental movements can benefit people of all ages and abilities. Inspired by research noted in Caroline Williams' "Move" and Dr. John Ratey's "Spark," while focusing on the fun, play, and community aspects of the movement, the goal is to provide programs that build the proprioception, mobility, and cognitive health required for a lifetime of activity, regardless of a person's starting point.

MindShift has partnered with local business donors (including Craftsman Autocare of Reston and Alloy Personal Training Reston) to ensure these benefits reach beyond the traditional gym demographic.

For more information and to sign up, visit [www.mindshiftgym.com](http://www.mindshiftgym.com).



Herndon's varsity basketball team earned runner-up in the Mount Vernon Holiday tournament. Senior Guard Grant King earned first team all tournament averaging 19 points per game in three games leading his team to the championship game.

Photos contributed by Herndon Athletics



South Lakes Indoor Track and Field team placed first at the Ocean Breeze Freedom Games in New York over the Jan. 3-4 weekend. Photos contributed by SLHS



Herndon's Payton Harrison goes up for a shot against South Lakes' defense when the two schools met on Dec. 15.  
Photo by Karl Majer



On Dec. 20, Herndon's Laurdes Rollins tied the Herndon school hurdles record at her first winter meet in Alexandria.  
Photo by Karl Majer

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# SPORTS

## Two Reston hockey players represent at Washington Capitals Youth Hockey Night

By Matt Reider, Staff Writer

The Washington Capitals have supported youth hockey since their inception in the 1970s, and those efforts have long included an annual street hockey extravaganza, high school and college games, and other events designed to grow the sport locally. In recent years, Youth Hockey celebrations have expanded into a full weekend, featuring learn-to-play sessions, equipment donations, and both ice and inline hockey opportunities.

On Jan. 3, the Capitals hosted Youth Hockey Night ahead of their game against the Chicago Blackhawks at Capital One Arena, part of Youth Hockey Weekend in the nation's capital region.

Reston was represented at Washington Capitals Youth Hockey Day by players selected from both inline and ice hockey teams. Stephen Reider, a Herndon-South Lakes varsity high school player, and Paxton Worthy, a 14U player from the Reston Raiders, were chosen to participate. Each youth player was paired with a Capitals player to escort them into the locker rooms, where the NHL player donned a matching jersey before walking the hall together for photos and videos. Local youth who serve as on-ice officials were also included and introduced later in the evening.

Earlier in the afternoon, the players were led down the stairs into a newly renovated area of Capital One Arena by Andrew Nash, manager of youth hockey development for the Capitals. Nash oversees off-ice programming, school initiatives, and grassroots events, and also coaches multiple youth teams. A Bethesda native, he was joined by staff members wearing gray "Capitals Youth" quarter-zip sweaters as they chatted with players and families.

Around the room, youth participants wore their team jerseys, with more than 20 teams represented. Several play in the Capitals Inline Hockey League (CIHL), a co-ed league sponsored by Capitals Youth Hockey and now in its third year. The league was created to provide a unified structure for inline hockey players and competes at rinks throughout the region, including the Lake



Capitals Defensemen Matt Roy is escorted by South Lakes' Stephen Reider as the player arrives at the Youth Hockey Night game on Jan 3rd. The photos on the wall are Capital's players photos as youth. Photo by Washington Capitals photography

Fairfax Inline Skating Rink. The rink—Fairfax County's first inline facility—was built in partnership with the Capitals and opened in May 2024. Ice hockey teams from both the Potomac Valley Amateur Hockey Association and the Northern Virginia Scholastic Hockey League were also represented.

The youth players then moved to the parking garage, where they waited in folding chairs for their NHL counterparts. Capitals forward Ethan Frank arrived first for photos, followed by defenseman John Carlson. Tom Wilson appeared shortly after, followed by defenseman Matt Roy. Roy was paired with Stephen Reider, a Reston resident representing the Herndon-South Lakes High School team. Reston Raiders forward Paxton Worthy escorted Capitals defenseman Rasmus Sandin.

Following the walk and photo sessions, players and families headed to Section 407 to watch the game. During the first intermission, the Piedmont Predator mites took the ice for the popular "Mites on Ice" segment. Additional youth participants appeared in intermission activities, with photos and videos displayed on the arena's big screen.

The Capitals and Blackhawks finished regulation



Reston Raider 14U player Paxton Worthy was paired up with Capitals player Rasmus Sandin. Photo by Washington Capitals Photography

and overtime tied 2-2, with Chicago earning the win in a shootout. While the result may not have thrilled local fans, more than 20 area youth hockey players and their families left with memories that will last a lifetime.

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# KIDS

## Hurray for the snow day

By Bob Welland, Kids Section Editor

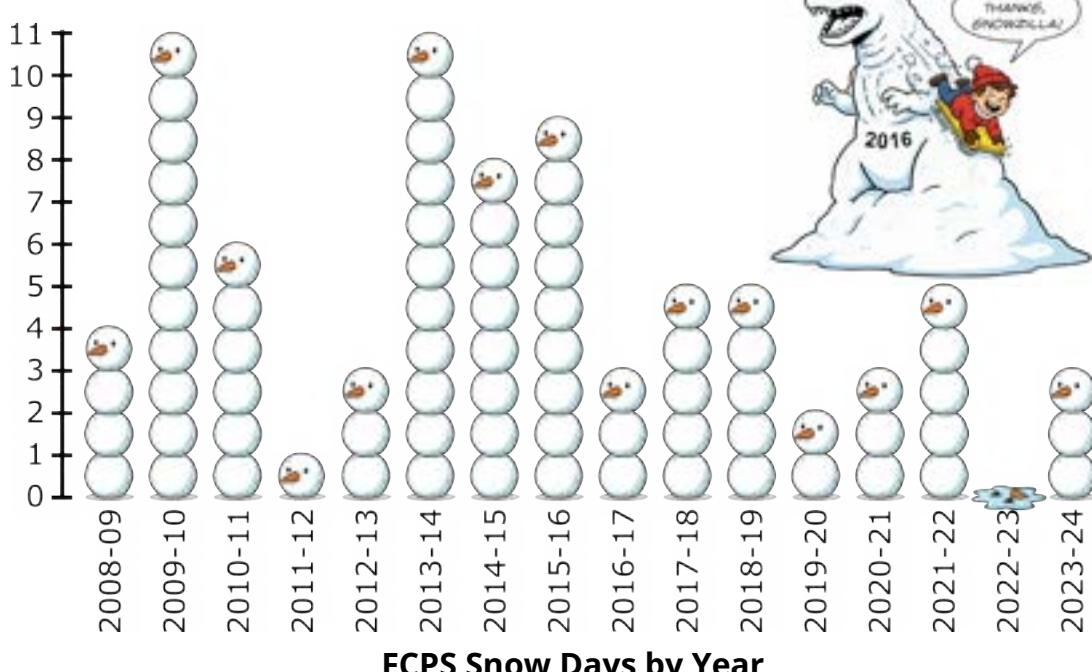
Aren't snow days great? Bonus holidays that randomly come out of the sky. Instead of school, you can build a snowman, go sledding or just flake, if you catch my drift. Is there anything better than a snow day? Yes, a **snow week!**

In February 2010, Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) closed for a whole week for two massive storms back-to-back. It was called "**Snowmageddon.**" It was the snowiest winter on record. FCPS had 11 snow days that year.

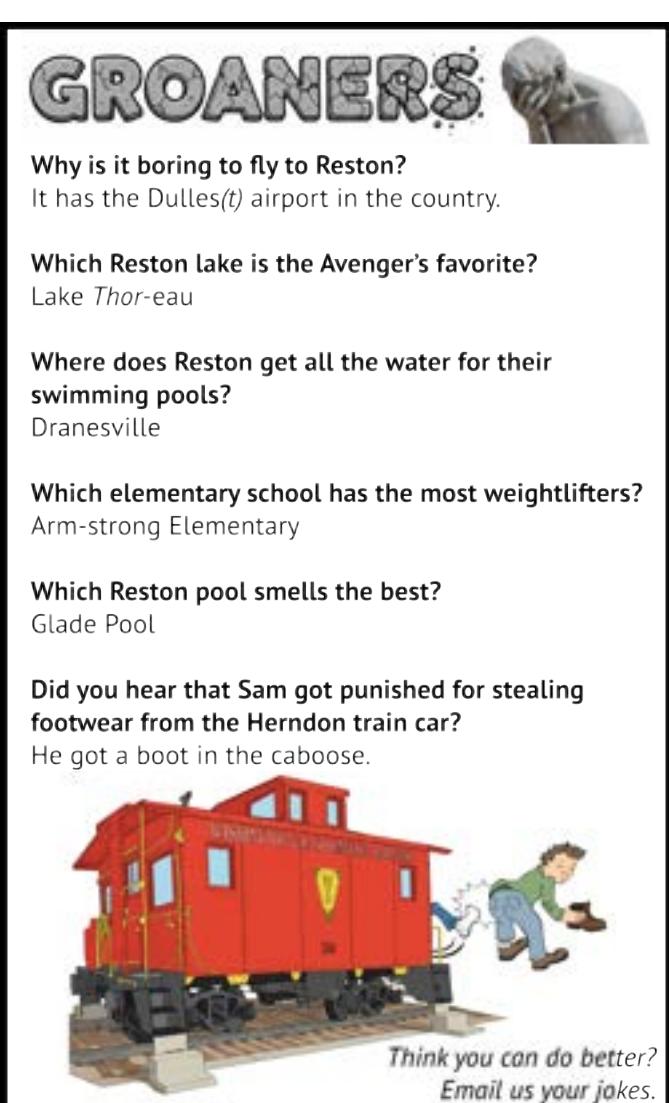
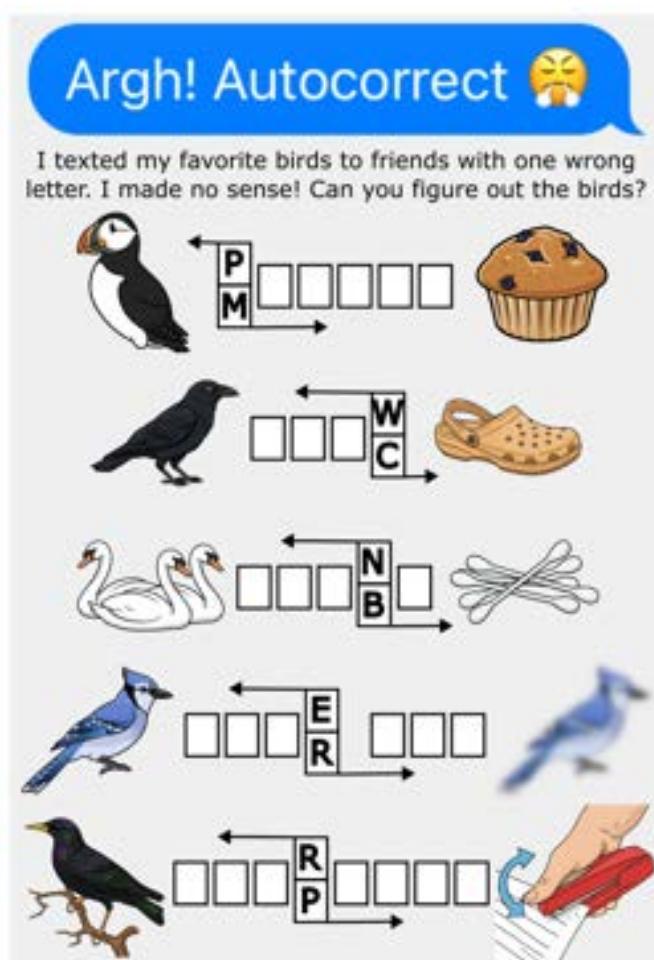
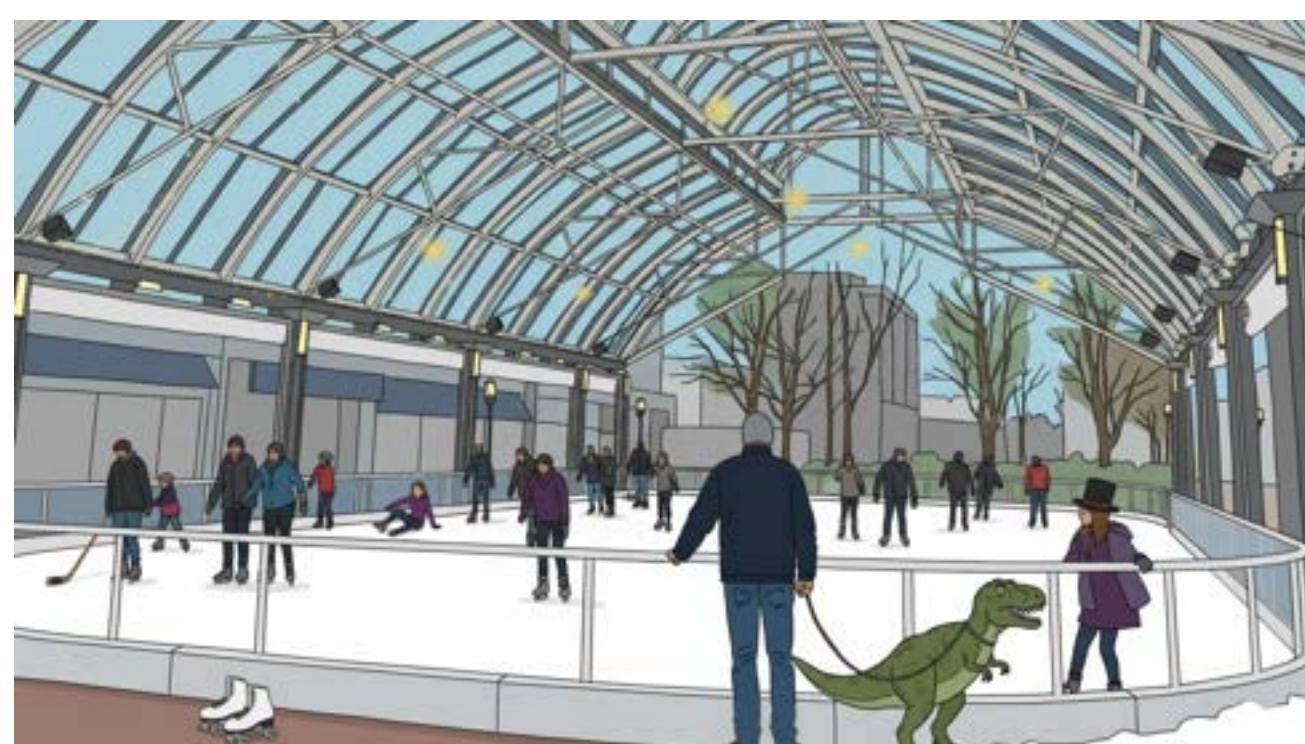
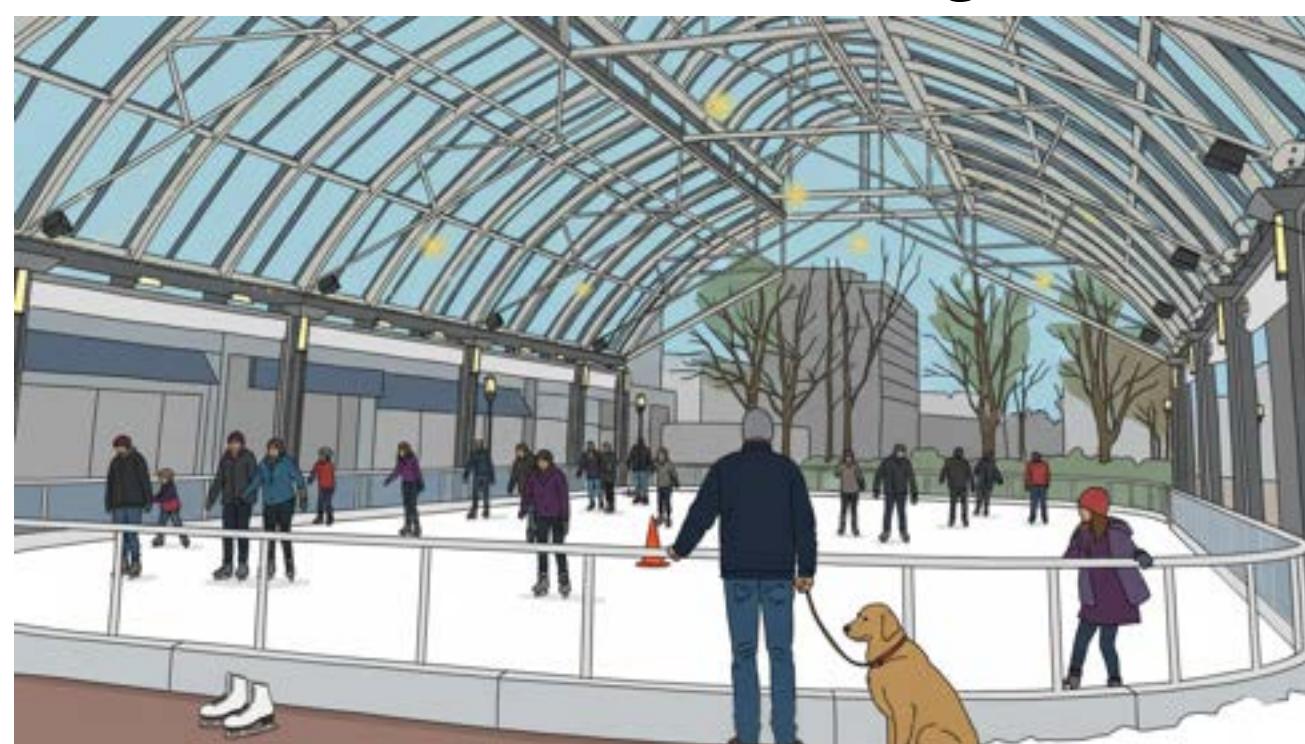
Another school year with 11 snow days was in 2013-2014, and included the first time FCPS closed school due to extreme cold. In January, a "**Polar Vortex**" trapped arctic air over the country. Temperatures were so low, it wasn't safe for students to wait outside for buses that might not even start. Kids spent that snow day inside.

In third place with 9 snow days, the 2015-2016 school year had a big January storm called "**Snowzilla.**" Nowadays, they always give big storms silly names! But what if there are no storms and zero cancelled school days? That happened in 2022-2023. If you love snow days, then that year was your "**Warmageddon.**"

How many snow days do you think there will be this year? We won't know for a while because snow storms can come as late as March.



## Find 8 Differences: Reston Town Center Ice Skating Pavilion



# KIDS

## Sage Greene and the mystery of the snowy cars



**Mystery Fiction by Arthur Semicolon Doyle**

It snowed for an hour, covering Reston with an inch of fluffy snow. Middle-schooler Sage Greene walks to Mrs. Gray's house with a shovel over her shoulder. Sage likes to clear Mrs. Gray sidewalk to be helpful.

Sage smiles. She can't resist a mystery. She peeks at the doorbell but it's not the kind with a camera. She looks at the path she cleared of snow. If she hadn't shoveled, she could have matched the footprints with one of the daughters' shoes. She asks Mrs. Grey who owns which car.

Sage arrives to see two cars parked at the curb, and Mrs. Gray's house all lit up inside. She surmises that she has visitors. Sage likes to surmise things because her favorite hobby is solving mysteries.

As she shovels along the path to the house, she sees one set of footprints leading to Mrs. Grey's front door. No footprints lead away so the visitor has entered but not left yet. After Sage clears the last of the snow at the doorstep, she looks back at the two parked cars on the street. Why only one set of footprints?

"A-ha!" she thinks. One visitor arrived before it started snowing. Suddenly a hand lands on her shoulder and Sage yelps in surprise. "Shh," whispers Mrs. Grey, "I have a mystery for you."

Mrs. Grey's daughters, Paula and Kat, came to her house while she was napping. When she woke up, they had cooked her dinner. One daughter made lasagna from scratch and the other made parfaits for dessert. They asked their mom to guess who made each dish. Mrs. Grey bragged that she knew for sure because a mother's intuition can detect the unique love that each daughter imparted in their dish.

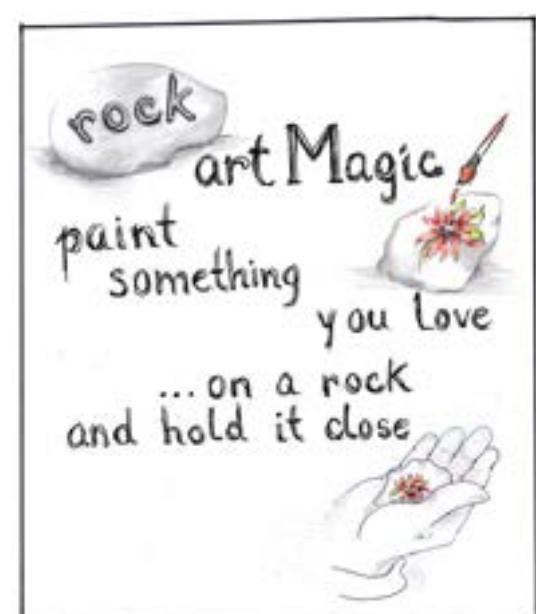
"Wow, that's so nice," says Sage. "Uh.. except I made that up," confesses Mrs. Grey. "I have no idea who made what. But I do know lasagna takes more time to make than parfaits, so whoever got here first made lasagna. I can't ask them or the jig will be up. Can you help me?"

"The blue Tesla belongs to Paula. Kat drives the red Civic," she replies. Sage walks to the cars, saying, "The car that arrived after it started snowing will have snow underneath." She crouches by the Tesla to look. The pavement under it is bare. She peers under the Civic, but there's also no snow under it. Sage didn't expect that.

"What about on top of the cars?" asks Mrs. Grey. Both cars have snow on them, except the red car's hood is mostly clear. "That's it!" exclaims Mrs. Grey. "Kat's red Civic had a warm engine that melted the snow, so she arrived more recently. Thanks, Sage!"

Mrs. Grey happily opens her door but Sage feels something doesn't add up. "Wait!" she shouts. "It's the other way around! The red car came first!"

### How does Sage know?



## Solutions

**Argh! Autocorrect:** Puffin, Crow, Swans, Blue Jay, Starling

**Find Differences:** Left to right: 1) hockey stick, 2) roller skates, 3) fallen skater, 4) missing rail post, 5) missing cone, 6) building lines, 7) dinosaur, 8) top hat

### Sage Greene Mystery:

Sage catches up to Mrs. Grey at her door. "Paula drives an electric car. Their hoods don't warm up like gas cars. They get warm underneath, by the batteries. So both cars were warm enough to melt snow: on the hood for the Civic and on the ground for the Tesla. But there was no snow under the Civic because it was parked before it snowed."

Mrs. Grey is so impressed, she invites Sage to meet her daughters. She correctly declares that Kat made the lasagna and Paula made parfaits, but admits that Sage figured it out. The daughters still think their mom has great intuition for making such a helpful friend.

Later, Sage walks home with her shovel in one hand, and containers of lasagna and parfait in the other.

## Little Hands, Big Energy Bites

By Alexis Estep, mom, chef, Restonian



The Estep kids had a fun time dipping bites using Leif's new chocolate warmer that he got for Christmas.

The new year is a great chance to set new goals or start new adventures. Whether you want to get outside more or read more books, you'll need energy! These Spiced Energy Bites (adapted from [Grounduppx.com](http://Grounduppx.com)) are a simple no-bake activity that our kids loved. Store them in the refrigerator until you need a boost to fuel your greatness.

### Ingredients:

- 3/4 cup almond flour
- 2 scoops (35g) vanilla protein powder
- 1/2 cup Salted Eggnog nut butter (Ground Up brand), or half almond/half cashew
- 1/4 cup maple syrup
- 1 tbsp non-dairy milk
- 1/2 tsp vanilla extract
- 1/2 tsp cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp nutmeg
- 1/8 tsp salt
- 8 oz white chocolate

### Directions:

1. Line a sheet pan or plate with parchment paper.
2. Put all ingredients (except chocolate) in a medium bowl.
3. Using a wooden spoon, mix until dough forms a smooth, thick paste.
4. Use your hands to roll dough into 1-inch balls, and transfer each bite to the parchment-lined pan.
5. Using a double-boiler or microwave, melt the white chocolate. Remove from heat.
6. Use a toothpick to dip the bites, one by one, to coat in white chocolate. Drizzle any leftover chocolate on the dipped bites.
7. Put in the freezer until the chocolate hardens (20 min). Store in the refrigerator.

# OPINIONS

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

Ask Doctor S.

## Handling disappointment: Are you willing to do the work?

As the holidays wrap up and the New Year approaches, I often find myself reflecting on patterns I've observed over the past year. One that consistently stands out is how often people seek therapy for a very human reason: they need a safe place to talk through and learn how to cope with disappointment.

Disappointment exists on a continuum. It may stem from a celebration, such as a holiday, birthday, or anniversary, that didn't unfold as hoped. It may come from a personal or professional setback, such as an injury that prevents competing in an athletic event, a breakup, or being passed over for a job or promotion. It may also arise within relationships, including romantic, familial, professional, or social ones, when someone important behaves in ways that feel hurtful, stressful, or unacceptable.

Whether at the start of therapy or many sessions in, people often arrive after another person or external event has generated enough disappointment, frustration, hurt, and other intense emotions that they decide they can no longer carry it alone.

A quick spoiler alert: there is no magical "lightbulb" moment in which someone walks into therapy weighed down by heavy feelings and walks out fixed. In fact, if that is the expectation, disappointment is almost guaranteed. Therapists do not have

magic wands or Willy Wonka-style machinery that allows people to instantly let go of difficult emotions.

The work of therapy in these situations almost always involves grief. This is the grief that comes from realizing a person or situation is not who or what you expected it to be. Grieving is deeply uncomfortable, and if you are doing the work, therapy will be uncomfortable at times. Insightful "a-ha" moments are rare because working through grief, especially when the people or situations involved are still very much present, is slow and painful. Many people leave therapy prematurely and conclude it didn't work because they are unwilling or unable to sit with that discomfort.

But if you can tolerate the discomfort long enough, and the timeline is different for everyone, something begins to shift. You work through the grief and eventually reach acceptance. Acceptance is not resignation. It is the realization that the only person you can truly change is yourself. This idea may be overused on social media, but actually living it, working through the twists and turns and landing there honestly, is often the true therapeutic breakthrough.

You can change your attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, feelings, reactions, and choices. You cannot

change another person, an external event, or a situation outside of you. A helpful rule of thumb is to adjust expectations so that you expect people to show up as they consistently do, rather than as you hope they might. While we cannot control illness, injury, or misfortune, we can choose to be in relationships with people as they are, not based on their potential to become someone else.

Take care. Take charge of you, and only you.

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

*Dr. Hayley B. Sherwood is a longtime Clinical Psychologist in Reston/Herndon. To learn more, please visit her website at [www.oakhillpsychological.com](http://www.oakhillpsychological.com). Please visit the About Us section on our website to learn more about our team of therapists.*



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[www.oakhillpsychologicalservices.com](http://www.oakhillpsychologicalservices.com)

2579 John Milton Drive, Suite 210, Herndon VA 20171

Restonian

## The biennial What's Out/What's In list for Reston

Back by (semi-)popular demand for the first time since 2024, here's our (semi-)annual list for what's out and what's in for our plastic fantastic planned community:

OUT	IN
Jet-age lake cooled AC	Brownouts from jet-age wiring
Office parks becoming homes	Team huddles in the breakfast nook
DRB citations for Mocha Mousse trim (PANTONE 17-1230)	DRB citations for Cloud Dancer trim (PANTONE 11-4201)
"Civic plazas" (Reston Station)	"Central greens" (RTC North)
Dark sky lighting	Blinding motel LEDs
Planner-proposed roundabouts	Planner-proposed runarounds
Vowel-free apartment buildings (RIP VY)	Vowel-free cold plunges
Boozin' at RTC	Booz Allen in RTC
Paid parking	Gated communities
Bears in Herndon	Karens in Loudoun
Pedestrian bridges over Wiehle	Pedestrian bridges between office buildings
Wondering when Taco Bell will reopen	Wondering when pools will close
Invasive plants	Invasive developers
Tired "web log" listicles	Wired newspaper listicles

## Fiber is in!

By Gwyn Whittaker,  
Owner, GreenFare Organic Cafe

Happy New Year! According to The Washington Post's "Out and In" list for 2026, the obsession with protein is out—and fiber is in. If you've attended any of our classes, you know that while protein is essential, most Americans are deficient in fiber and consume far more protein than they need.

As Yale University's David Katz recently noted: "As for protein, plant-exclusive diets can, and do, deliver the protein needed even for the outer limits of human performance—not only in stamina, but also strength. That should come as no great surprise; the greatest muscles on land belong to herbivores."

I recently had the opportunity to talk about this on FOX 5.

Although the segment was billed as a cooking class, I took the IBM approach—answering the question I wanted to be asked—and focused on how to maximize plants in your diet. After all, fiber comes only from plants (and mushrooms).

My personal breakfast recipe is shared here:

I cook four grains—oat groats, wheat berries, rye berries, and farro—in a rice cooker on the porridge setting, with goji berries and raisins. I add chia seeds, flaxseed meal, hemp seeds, walnuts, diced fresh gin-

ger, cinnamon, and cocoa nibs. Everything is organic and not frozen, so the protein remains intact. On top, I add a relish made by pulsing cranberries with a cored apple and orange.

That's 16 plants in one meal.

Add a spring-mix salad (15 greens) with grated carrots, beets, cauliflower, and avocado for lunch, plus a GreenFare meal for dinner, and you can easily reach 40 to 50 plants in a single day—a magnificent boost for your microbiome and immune system.



**GREENFARE**  
*healthy people, healthy planet*

408 EDEN STREET, HERNDON, VA

# LIFESTYLE

## Friends of Reston presents 'An Evening with Friends' fundraiser

Contributed by Friends of Reston

Friends of Reston invites the community to "make Reston your valentine" at An Evening with Friends, a celebration of local spirit and generosity, on Wednesday, Feb. 11, from 6 to 9 p.m., at Red's Table, 11150 South Lakes Drive in Reston.

Proceeds support Reston Association initiatives, including camp scholarships for underserved youth, free monthly movies for senior citizens, and scholarships for high school seniors. Funds also

support community programs such as the Walker Nature Center Spring Festival, Totally Trucks, and the Enchanted Forest at WinterFest, ensuring benefits reach neighbors of all ages and backgrounds.

Guests will enjoy a cocktail hour with heavy appetizers, followed by dinner and seasonal Valentine's Day desserts. Tickets are \$75 for dinner with one beverage, or \$100 for dinner with three beverages.

"An Evening with Friends is an opportunity to come together, celebrate, and

make a real difference," said Maggie Edwards, president of the Friends of Reston Board of Directors. "Your participation enriches the Reston community and reflects Robert Simon's vision of an inclusive Reston."

Tickets for the fundraiser dinner and silent auction are now available and expected to sell quickly. For tickets and information, contact [friendsofreston@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofreston@gmail.com) or visit [www.friendsofreston.org/events](http://www.friendsofreston.org/events).

## Reston's real estate future is looking up for 2026

By Roxanne Watts, Reston Realtor®

In early 2025, Jack and Amelia arrived in Reston with their six-month-old baby and Amelia's transfer letter from Google, one of Reston's major employers whose workforce continues to support the local housing market. The home they fell in love with already had two serious buyers preparing offers. To compete, the couple scheduled a pre-inspection at 8 a.m. the morning they submitted their contract. Their agent wrote a clean, full-price offer with a quick closing, included an escalation clause, and attached a strong lender approval letter. By the end of the day, they had secured the property.

Stories like theirs were common across Reston last year. Buyers stepped up, and well-priced homes—particularly those in move-in condition or close to transit, shopping, trails, and amenities—sold quickly. While the average days on market rose to 37, sellers who priced strategically were often rewarded with fast contracts.

Employment will remain a pillar of the local housing market heading into 2026. Reston-based CACI International, one of the region's largest federal contractors, recently announced a \$2.6 billion cash acquisition of ARKA, supporting its expansion into national security and aerospace work and bringing an estimated 1,000 additional jobs. As these programs scale, workforce growth is expected. Even with some remote positions, the expansion reinforces Reston's role as a corporate hub, and employers of this size tend to increase housing demand through relocations, direct hires, and the broader ripple effect of support industries.

Sales data tells a similar story. In 2025, Reston recorded 1,005 home sales: 184 detached homes, 403 townhomes, and 418 condominiums. That total sits just below 2024's 1,023 sales, when 191 detached homes, 401 townhomes, and 432 condominiums sold, representing a year-over-year dip of about 2%. The modest decline reflects limited inventory and the impact of mortgage rates rather than a lack of buyer interest. Throughout 2025, the median sale price generally ranged from the mid-\$580,000s to \$625,000, with appreciation of roughly 2%. Homes typically spent 30 to 37 days on the market—longer than during the pandemic surge, but still indicative of steady, qualified demand.

Population trends also play a role. Reston's growth has remained steady at about 1 to 2% annually, consistent with mature communities in Fairfax County. Even modest population increases place pressure on a market with constrained supply, contributing to continued price appreciation.

While Reston has long been known for its lakes and leafy neighborhoods, the rental landscape has expanded significantly near the Silver Line stations. Around Wiehle-Reston East and Reston Town Center, new apartment communities—including high-rise buildings such as Skymark, Signature, The Avant, and BLVD Reston Station—have added well over 1,000 modern rental units in recent years. These developments attract young professionals, federal contractors, and technology employees who value Metro access and can afford rents ranging from \$2,200 to \$3,800. Many eventually transition into homeownership once they decide to stay.

As 2026 approaches, indicators point to measured activity, stable pricing, and informed decision-making on both sides of the transaction. Inventory remains the key storyline. While supply has improved from the extreme lows of recent years, it still trails pre-pandemic norms.

Mortgage rates also will shape the year ahead. Many buyers in 2025 chose to recalibrate rather than postpone their plans. If borrowing costs ease, more



This event benefits the charitable, educational and environmental programs of Reston Association.



Wednesday, February 11, 2026  
6-9 p.m.  
Red's Table  
11150 South Lakes Drive,  
Reston, VA 20191



RSVP by January 28, 2026  
<https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/evening-with-friends-annual-gala>

homeowners may decide to sell, releasing long-awaited inventory into the market.

New construction will add to the housing supply as well. The long-planned Isaac Newton Square will deliver approximately 2,100 residences, including apartments, condominiums, and townhomes, with townhome pricing expected in the mid-\$900,000s to low \$1 million range. Sunset Station offers new townhomes with rooftop terraces priced between \$900,000 and \$1.3 million. At Wiehle Station, the JW Marriott includes 93 luxury condominiums priced from \$1.4 million to \$3 million. Other major developments include Reston Next, a 22-acre mixed-use district where the AC Hotel has opened, and Halley Rise, a 36-acre project next to Wegmans that is transforming former office land into a vibrant residential and commercial neighborhood.

For homeowners, the takeaway is reassuring: Reston remains desirable and resilient, supported by employment, infrastructure, and quality of life. For buyers, motivation, preparation, and flexibility continue to matter.

And for the couple who began their Reston chapter with a dawn inspection and a carefully structured offer, that contract has now become evening walks on the trails, coffee at local shops, and the comfort of belonging to a community where they are building a future they love.

Come Join Our  
**BOOK CLUB!**  
February 5th @6:30pm

Location: Elden St Tea Shop  
Book: The Goddess Games  
by Erica Rue

For book club suggestions or to be added to our email list and receive book club updates, please email [therestonletterbookclub@gmail.com](mailto:therestonletterbookclub@gmail.com).



# LIFESTYLE

## Inside Art

By Louise Seirmarco-Yale,  
Reston Artist



January arrives quietly. After the brightness, obligation, and noise of the holidays, it offers something many of us crave without quite naming it: space. Fewer expectations. Fewer performances. More room to notice what is actually around us.

That makes January an ideal time to return to art—not by learning more about it, but by trusting yourself again. Many adults believe they don't "get" art. The issue is rarely a lack of intelligence or exposure. More often, it's the habit of withholding permission to enjoy our own reactions. Somewhere along the way, many of us learned to doubt our instincts, to search for the correct response, the expert explanation, the reason we should admire something even if we don't actually enjoy it.

So let's try something simpler. Give yourself permission to like what you like.

Instead of asking whether something is important, meaningful, or technically good, ask one honest question: Do I like this? Not "Should I like it?" Not "What does it mean?" Just: Do I like this?

Enjoyment doesn't begin with understanding. It begins with noticing your own response. A color may catch your eye. A shape might feel calming or unsettling. A photograph may leave you completely unmoved. All these reactions are valid. None require explanation.

January is a good month to practice this kind of noticing. The season itself is quieter. Trees are stripped to their structure. Light moves differently across rooms. The visual world feels less crowded, making it easier to observe without judgment.

Once a day, pause in front of something visual. It doesn't have to be a painting in a museum. It could be a book cover, a window display, a child's drawing on the refrigerator, a pattern of shadows on snow, or bare branches crossing a winter sky.

Pause briefly and ask yourself: Do I like this? Then trust the answer. No defense. No explanation. Move on.

This small act does something important. It restores confidence in your own perception. It reminds you that art is not a test to pass, but a relationship to enter. Over time, these moments of trust accumulate. Looking becomes easier. Museums feel less intimidating. Beauty appears in unexpected places. Art doesn't return all at once. It returns quietly, the way January unfolds.

You don't need permission from a wall label or a voice of authority. You know what you like. You always have. Give yourself permission to trust it. Your art journey begins again the moment you do.

*Louise Seirmarco-Yale is a Reston artist, speaker, teacher and author of "Art. You Be The Judge. Reawaken Your Instincts and Enjoy Art On Your Own Terms." It is available on Amazon or for free download at peopleneedart.com. Email her at hello@peopleneedthis.com.*

## Debole 3D: A way to see your remodeling, construction ideas as you plan

By Gene Powell, Staff Writer

Debole 3D offers homeowners and builders an innovative means for taking a remodeling or building project from an idea to a detailed set of drawings, renderings, or virtual tours. The goal for the Reston-based company's "design visualization" work is "to help homeowners and designers to recognize their vision," said owner Joe Debole, a Reston resident.

The company provides homeowners with services ranging from "renderings of a not-yet remodeled kitchen space to a virtual tour of an entire home that doesn't exist yet," he said, adding that its technology "produces imagery for any kind of design concept, which allows it to be understood, estimated, and often built" resident.

"I help them to visualize their ideas by producing renderings and/or virtual tours, then I document the designs by creating drawings that can be handed off for reviews and to get bids from contractors and builders," Debole said.

The company's website, Debole 3D – Design Visualization | Renderings, Animation, Drawings, notes that "design projects rely on clear visual communication. Without it, they can easily get bogged down in misunderstandings that delay approvals and introduce costly mistakes."

"We produce visuals that are easy to understand and created with your project goals in mind. They take the guesswork out of designs and make communication easy and effective."

The company's services are available nationwide. Debole noted a client in Florida wanted mockups of various options for a new home, even though the person already was working with an architect. The "design visualizations" also can be used for advertising, brochures, signs, and such, he said.

Debole said another benefit from the service occurs when people are planning a project and "one can have an idea and the other just can't visualize it." By producing a detailed rendering, both can see what the idea would look like as a finished project. The firm also works with interior designers. Cost for Debole 3D services depends on the size and nature of the proposed project.

Debole previously had a lengthy career in computer technology, working in Northern Virginia and Florida. "I was always in front of a computer, building things," he said. In 2021, he left the corporate world in search of a more creative path.

Debole said he plans in 2026 to make presentations at local

events in the Reston and Great Falls area beginning in 2025. The company can be reached at [info@debole3d.com](mailto:info@debole3d.com).

If you can see it, you can make it happen!  
We help you visualize design ideas before you build.

DEBOLE3D

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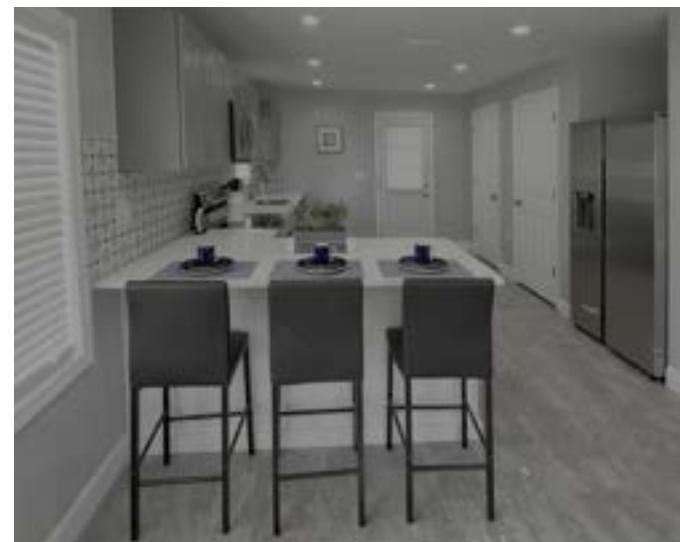
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1). This shows the kitchen area prior to renovation of one of Debole 3D's projects..

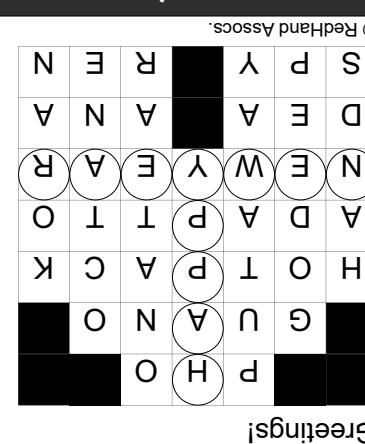


2). This is a rendering of the kitchen design that a Debole client chose.



3). This is the photo of the kitchen after renovation, using Debole 3D's services. Photos by Joe Debole

### Answer Key



### The Reston Letter's January Sponsors

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Sunset Hills Montessori School

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