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“Beware of developers bearing gifts”

—Fraser chides

Is a vote for Purcellville annexations welcoming a Trojan horse?

BY VALERIE CURY

During mayor and council comments at the Feb. 22 Purcellville Town Council meeting, Mayor Kwasi Fraser responded to people’s inquiries about the proposed Kuhn annexation request by referring to it and other potential requests as a “Trojan horse,” warning the council against “developers bearing gifts.”

The proposed annexation, named the

Valley Commerce Center, was formerly known as the Warner property. Owned by Chuck Kuhn, the 118.81-acre property is located at 17110 Purcellville Road.

Annexation takes a property under Loudoun County jurisdiction and brings it within the Town of Purcellville. Access to Town utilities and Town density are primary reasons a property owner seeks annexation.

Before the Town can annex a property located in the County, the property owner is required to go through a 17-step annexation process. If annexed by a majority vote of the Town Council, the own-

er then presents their change of zoning request and goes through a Comprehensive Plan Amendment and a Zoning Use Amendment.

This requires two public hearings: one at the Planning Commission level, and the other at the Town Council level. If a majority on the Town Council votes yes to the annexation request, this would change the low density use to a much higher density use, after a Comprehensive Plan and zoning amendment are also given a green light by a majority on the Town Council.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23 »



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VOTED BEST OF LOUDOUN

Celebrate St. Patrick’s Day with Irish soda bread, Irish stew— and Scotsman Sean Connery?

BY LAURA LONGLEY

Remember St. Patrick’s Day? That day once a year when everyone becomes Irish—except for the last two years, when COVID changed everything.

2022 must be our lucky year. It’s looking like we might go green again. Kids, back in school, can tape their drawings of rainbows up in the corridors. You can dress like a leprechaun, march in a parade down Main Street, drink green Guinness or McDonald’s Shamrock Shakes, and, to go with your Irish stew, bake a loaf of that sourdough bread you mastered in May of 2020.

Sourdough? Wait, don’t start the yeast “starter” yet. That early pandemic sour-

dough-baking craze was over within months. Besides, there’s nothing Irish about it; it was the Egyptians of 1500 B.C. who first used sourdough. Now is the time to try your hand at soda bread.

This one-hour wonder with its crumbly, golden-brown crust and dense, tight crumb inside actually was created by Native Americans. But when baking soda was introduced in Ireland in the 1830s, this quick bread soon appeared on every Irish family’s table.

To put it on your table this holiday, you might try your luck with “Grandma’s Irish Soda Bread.” (See the link to the recipe, below.) This cherished recipe by a real Irish granny— born on St. Pat-

rick’s Day, no less—comes to us from her granddaughter Sally McKenney, a best-selling author and YouTube baking show star.

McKenney explains why this quick bread is so much faster and easier to make than sourdough: It doesn’t require any yeast. “Instead,” she says, “all of its leavening comes from baking soda and buttermilk... Buttermilk and cold butter are the secret to its delicious success!”

There seems to something magical about it, too. If you slice the traditional cross on top, you’ll let fairies out.

Irish soda bread could be a meal unto itself. But how could you resist pairing it with corned beef or Irish stew



(two other foods of debatable Irish origin). Indeed, corned beef is likely a Jewish-Irish collaboration, the happy result of Irish immigrants buying most of their meat from New York’s kosher butchers. Irish stew supposedly traveled from America to Ireland in the early 1890s. There it was quickly adopted by those with little but leftover mutton, onions, and potatoes.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26 »

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Students, teachers, parents, friends, and the power of optimism

How Woodgrove's theater program survived the pandemic to produce *SpongeBob: The Musical*



In the pandemic, Woodgrove's *Oklahoma!* cast, above, and crew set the stage for this year's *SpongeBob: The Musical*'s success.

BY LAURA LONGLEY

'Tis the season for high school musicals—in person, without masks—at last. But it's been a rough road getting to this point for all of Loudoun's schools. But here we are, with student thespians ready to take the stage.

At Loudoun Valley High School, Theater Director Ike Stoneberger and his students are producing *Into the Woods*, the well-known and -loved

Tony Award-winning musical. In May, The Grove Theatre at Woodgrove High School will be introducing audiences to *SpongeBob: The Musical*.

Although casting began in February, it's fair to say the production began as soon as the pandemic closed Loudoun's schools on March 13, 2020. Ever since, an enthusiastic and committed community of students, teachers, directors,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 30 »

StageCoach Theatre Company presents *Steel Magnolias*

StageCoach Theatre Company presents the dramatic comedy play, *Steel Magnolias*. The show will be performed live on weekends from March 12 - 27. Saturday performances will be held at 7 p.m., and Sunday performances will be held at 2 p.m.

The performances will be held at StageCoach Theatre, 20937 Ashburn Road, Suites 115 and 120, Ashburn.

Steel Magnolias was written by Robert Harling. The show is produced by April Bridgeman, co-owner of StageCoach Theatre Company, and Sarah Hardy is director of the show. Ashley McGee is the assistant director. This show will feature the acting talents of Alex Aspiazu, Leah Daily, Caleigh Davis, Barbara Gertzog, Victoria Rose, and Echo Rue.

The action is set in Truvy's beauty salon in Chinquapin, Louisiana, where all the ladies who are "anybody" come to have their hair done. Helped by her eager new assistant, Annelle (who is not sure whether or not she is still married), the outspoken, wise-cracking Truvy dispenses shampoos and free advice to the town's rich curmudgeon, Ouiser, ("I'm not crazy, I've just been in a bad mood for forty years"); an eccentric millionaire, Miss Clairee, who has a raging sweet tooth; and the local social leader, M'Lynn, whose daughter, Shelby (the prettiest girl in town), is about to marry a "good ole boy."

Filled with hilarious repartee and not a few acerbic but humorously revealing

CONTINUED ON PAGE 30 »

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Just Like Nothing (else) on Earth: Oatlands Road

BY TIM JON

Mostly, I remember the diffuse quality of the sunlight coming in at strange, surprising angles; the early morning and quick changes in elevation can do that to you: am I going up or down, or are we 'on the level' here?



Yet another not-for-the-faint-of-heart country roads in Loudoun County; you'd think by now I'd have covered just about all of them – but, no – here I was again in uncharted territory – facing a disturbingly-narrow paved corridor – combined with the dawn light's playing tricks on my windshield – all while trying (in theory, anyway) to capture some arresting images on camera and etch down their memories somewhere in the spare room between the ears.

I would have expected a much more relaxed, ethereal experience from my first drive along Oatlands Road in the south-central part of the County. Some of these quiet mornings in primitive,



lonely country can provide a meditative, mystical, dream-like ride through Loudoun's farmland, history and the day's emerging moments.

Well, yes, some of those qualities entered into the mix as I meandered up and down, round the bends, in and out of the full glare of our nearest star; for the most part, though, I felt I needed to keep to the task at hand – which consisted of keeping my vehicle 'between the ditches' while trying to anticipate my alternatives upon encountering any oncoming traffic. And if you find the preceding descriptions in the least confusing, imagine the writer's feelings – at the time as well as in the attempted re-visitation.

I'm still taking deep breaths in thinking of the chances of running a tire off the pavement, or striking the nearly-ubiquitous stone fences accompanying the road, or bumping into one of the members of a forest of giant trees lining the route, or encountering some other insurmountable obstacle in that morning's path.

But, we made the entire length of Oatlands Road (Rt. 650) from its southern terminus off Snickersville Turnpike

in Aldie, up to the junction at Rt. 15 – closer to the historic plantation and mansion of the same name. And yes, fortune allowed me to pause at some of the right places along the way to collect what I felt might represent just a bit of the spirit of this country lane. And I was able to recall a general sense of my impressions from the morning, as well as a few of the particulars along the way.

My strongest memory – referred to at

CONTINUED ON PAGE 30 »

How to succeed at adulting

BY SAMUEL MOORE-SOBEL

"Our transition from college to adulthood is filled with challenges, disappointments, and a lot of uncertainty," Cate LeSourd writes in her new book, *Coming of Age*.



The book is comprised of chapters focused on the important themes of young adult life, such as establishing a career and navigating romantic relationships. This book serves as a sort of manual for young adulthood, inviting the reader to examine their own journey through a different lens.

LeSourd writes about her own experience but also includes the stories of others. "Over the course of several years, I sent out two questionnaires to over a thousand young adults across the nation

ranging from college seniors to those in their early thirties," LeSourd writes. The book will likely encourage anyone entering this stage. "I wrote this book because I often felt alone in my circumstances and overwhelmed with the uncertainties of my life, especially those related to my career," LeSourd writes.

LeSourd's journey included some crushing disappointments. "Before the age of twenty-six, I had experienced a layoff, a toxic work environment, a minimum-wage job, a rescinded offer, and multiple rounds of unemployment," she writes. Yet what emerges from her experience is a story of



CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 »

— Ask Dr. Mike —

By Michael Oberschneider, Psy.D.

COVID-19 Prevention: What's missing in the discussion

BY MICHAEL OBERSCHNEIDER, PSY.D.

Get vaccinated. Wear a mask. Wash your hands. Avoid crowds. Practice social distancing. These have been, and continue to be, the main directives from the experts when it comes to COVID-19 prevention.



Dr. Mike

For the past two years now, news and media outlets have blanketed us with precautionary messaging 24-7. What's missing from the discussion on COVID-19 prevention, is the limited attention experts and pundits have given to the importance of health and wellness.

COVID-19 is a very serious virus, especially if you are immunosuppressed or immunocompromised. Research has shown that if you have a weak immune system, you are not only at a greater risk of contracting COVID-19, but also at a greater risk of becoming very ill.

Recent research has also concerningly found that vaccines may not produce antibodies well enough for those with compromised or weak-

ened immune systems. With all of this in mind, I offer the following tips to consider to help you strengthen your immune system to protect against COVID-19.

Eat a balanced diet. A poor diet can impact your immune system. Chronic diseases, immunodeficiency disorders and autoimmune disorders occur at much higher rates for those who are malnourished or for those with high fat and high calorie diets lacking in essential nutrients.

Conversely, reducing or eliminating saturated or trans fats, increasing omega-3 fats and eating a balanced diet of nutrient rich foods are great ways to strengthen your immune system. The Mediterranean Diet is viewed by many as the gold standard to boosting immunity, and to having a healthy relationship with food.

Get enough sleep. Research has shown a troubling relationship between poor sleep and your immune system. More specifically, not getting enough sleep can weaken your immune system and make you more vulnerable to contracting a virus. A

CONTINUED ON PAGE 21 »

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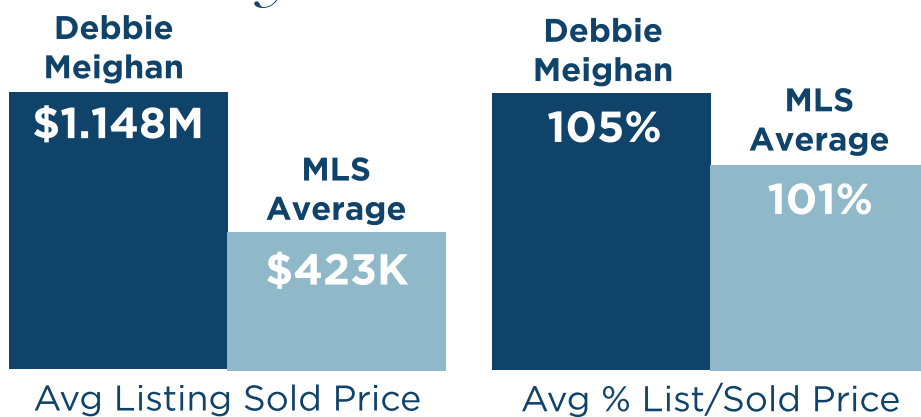
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Is that really a good idea?

BY CHARLES HOUSTON

I drove the new car down the entrance ramp onto the Greenway. A lot of horsepower was at the command of my right foot. I couldn't resist and the speedometer surged upward. Sixty. Seventy. Eighty. Why not ninety? And a bit more.

OPINION

Blue lights in the mirror. Oops. Maybe ninety-three was not such a good idea.

Some decisions are great, some aren't. Speeding like that was dumb. Decisions can be boneheaded. Unintended consequences show up.

What ideas are percolating here?

Traffic

The massive Rt. 15 widening project has not yet been approved, as an article in last month's paper pointed out. Long-

term relief for the Lucketts area would be illusory, anyway, due to the traffic engineering concept of "induced demand," where new traffic arises almost immediately and fills the added road capacity. Worse, new road capacity can stimulate new development, meaning even more traffic.

A curmudgeon might ask why Loudoun citizens should be taxed for hundreds of millions of dollars, while primarily benefiting Maryland commuters.

Political Pimping

Years ago, Georgia undertakers were losing business to cremations. They hired a powerful lobbyist and, presto, the state legislature passed a law requiring that corpses be embalmed before being created. A truly venal idea.

Loudoun just avoided something stupid and harmful. State senator John Bell

pimped for AT&T and its proposed tower atop Short Hill Mountain. More venality. Bell's constituents fiercely opposed the tower, and Bell's plan failed.

Affordable Housing

Many people support the egalitarian goal of providing affordable housing to residents who lack the resources to buy or rent housing at market rates. (The new term is "Attainable Housing.") The devil, though, lies in the details and I have questions.

First: The County's website says that its Affordable Dwelling Unit program "provides newly constructed housing for income-eligible citizens..." Why must this be *newly-built* housing? There are thousands of older houses, townhouses and apartments that should be perfectly adequate, often more conveniently located and available at prices below

the cost of new construction. Second: How do we get more affordable housing? The new zoning ordinance contains incentives for developers to build some affordable units. This might be a good idea.

Third: Who will be eligible for the affordable residences? New zoning text suggests that families with income up to the "average median income" (AMI) can qualify. The County uses an AMI figure that could benefit folks making almost \$130,000 a year. This seems like a bad idea, and I don't feel that generous.

Last question: County managers have proposed funding an affordable dwelling program with a property tax increase that would bring in almost six million dollars next year. In normal times that might be (or might not be) acceptable to taxpayers. In these parlous times of raging

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22 »

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The battle over Rt. 15: harbinger of things to come

BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF SAVE RURAL LOUDOUN

Angry interventions at the County Board of Supervisors meeting on Feb. 1 demonstrate why the County must act soon to reduce projected residential growth in Loudoun's rural areas.

In that meeting, a dozen or so residents of the recently built rural subdivisions surrounding Lucketts bitterly protested the traffic congestion and dangerous driving conditions on Rt.

OPINION

15 north of Leesburg and demanded that the County move forward immediately with the proposed \$400 million expansion project on that road. Any further delays, they said, would make County supervisors responsible for future traffic injuries or deaths. They condemned "special interests" who continue to raise concerns about the potential impacts of the project on the environment, local historic sites, and Lucketts' small businesses.

This is just the first of many such conflicts that are set to emerge in rural Loudoun in the coming years. The source of the trouble is clear: County zoning regulations allow too many new residences to be built in areas with narrow, low-capacity rural roads and other limited public infrastructure and services. The County estimates that each new rural residence generates an average of ten more vehicle trips per day on the local road system.

Between 2000 and 2015, the area

around Lucketts experienced the most rapid residential growth of all Loudoun's rural areas, more than doubling its population. Rt. 15 and connecting rural roads did not have the capacity to provide the same level of service to so many new residents, especially when the high volume of traffic from Maryland was also increasing.

This problem is rapidly expanding. In the past decade, residential growth has shifted to other parts of rural Loudoun. Between 2010 and 2015, northwest Loudoun accounted for 35 percent of all residential growth in rural Loudoun. Between 2015 and 2020, that share rose to 70 percent. As a result, similar conflicts have begun to emerge around Waterford, Hillsboro, Lincoln, Bluemont, Philomont and other small towns and historic villages.

The narrow rural roads around and through these communities are already heavily congested. Continued rapid residential growth, combined with large volumes of interstate traffic with Maryland and West Virginia, will make them even worse.

Based on current zoning densities, County staff project that "by right" residential development could add another 10,000 houses and generate 100,000 additional vehicle trips per day from Loudoun's rural areas alone. This does not include the anticipated growth within the incorporated towns of Hamilton, Purcellville, Round Hill, Lovetts-

ville, and Middleburg.

Everywhere in western Loudoun, the rural road system does not have enough capacity to maintain expected levels of service for the projected increases in new residences and traffic volumes.

The County government has two options. One option, the current status quo, is to do nothing more to slow residential growth in rural areas. If it stays on this path, the County will be forced to continually scramble to catch up with the inevitable demand for bigger roads and other public services, as it is currently doing in the Lucketts area.

The fiscal cost to County taxpayers of sticking with this option would dwarf the Rt. 15 project, amounting to billions of dollars. It would also spell the end of local farming, rural tourism, sources of clean water, carbon-absorbing woodlands, wildlife habitat, historic sites and scenery, and all the other benefits of Loudoun's remaining rural areas.

But it is not too late to take a different path. Loudoun's 2019 Comprehensive Plan states that the County's policy is to "limit residential development" in rural areas in order, among other things, "to minimize traffic impacts and reduce the demand for additional public facilities and services." The County government is currently in the process of reviewing and revising its entire Zoning Ordinance with the aim

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 »

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Del. LaRock announces House Budget Funding for State Park in Loudoun

Delegate Dave LaRock has announced that the House Appropriations Committee included in their recommended amendments to the budget, Del. LaRock's amendment providing funding to the Department of Conservation and Recreation for operations of the State Park in Northwest Loudoun County along Harper's Ferry Road.

GOVERNMENT

LaRock said, "I'm very pleased to see that we are moving closer to having a state park in Western Loudoun County. For a number of years, a team including Loudoun County staff, former Delegate Randy Minchew, Catocin District Supervisors Geary Higgins and Caleb Kershner, Joe and Tammy Bane, Destry Jarvis, Robert and Dee Leggett (who donated 600-acres of the total 881-acres) and the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship, Henry Stribling and the Old Dominion Land Conservancy, and my staff have been working hard to get us to this point.

"This year I think there is a realization that with relatively modest funding we will add this gem to the Commonwealth's park system. There are trails, a large pond, buildings, camping areas, and all the amenities already in place for a successful day-one opening of this newest State Park. I'm confident the public will see huge value as word gets out there is a new and exciting outdoor fun destination open to the public."

The State Park in Loudoun was first announced by Gov. Bob McDonnell in 2013, but property acquisition has taken several years, finally completed with the



Feb. 9, 2022 transfer to DCR of 281 acres purchased by Loudoun County. There is strong interest from the community, existing users of the site, local government and legislators in making the state park in Loudoun County more available to the public.

The decision to fund the park will become final when the budget is approved by the House and Senate on or around March 12, then signed by the Governor later in the spring. Funding will begin July 1, 2022.

The Park is currently being referred to as "Sweet Run State Park". A park master plan process, which takes about a year, including public input, will start in the next year will seek to identify any additional opportunities for public recreation, environmental education, resource management and future expansion.

LaRock's budget amendment funds four full-time employees: a Park Manager, Chief Ranger Law Enforcement, Park Ranger Maintenance, and Office Manager, as well as funding for routine operations of the park including utilities, wage staff, supplies and materials, resource management projects, environmental education programs and equipment, grounds and facility maintenance.

VSP investigating emergency aircraft landing in Ashburn

At 4:52 p.m. Tuesday Feb. 22, Virginia State Police responded to investigate a plane that had made an emergency landing in Loudoun County.

The single-wing 1977 Cessna was flying from New Jersey to the Dulles International Airport when it began experiencing mechanical problems. The pilot, Aaron Adams, 28, of Denton, Texas, notified Dulles of the problems, and attempted an emergency landing on a strip of private property in the 21,500 block of Megawatt Drive in Ashburn.

The pilot was able to land, but did not have sufficient space to stop, and the plane struck a dirt embankment.



Photo by Loudoun County Fire and Rescue

Adams was treated for minor injuries. He was the only one on the aircraft.

The FAA and NTSB were notified. The Loudoun County Sheriff's Office, Loudoun County Fire and Rescue and MWAA Police assisted at the scene.

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Gov. Youngkin signs day one game plan tax conformity bill

Governor Also Signed Election Reform Legislation

On Feb. 23, Gov. Glenn Youngkin signed HB 971 to conform Virginia's tax code to the federal Internal Revenue Code, in part to grant significant tax relief to Virginia businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through this bill, Virginia expanded and made retroactive tax benefits related to Paycheck Protection Program loans and Rebuild Virginia grants to ensure COVID-19 aid granted to businesses would not be treated as taxable income. Altogether, this bill will save Virginia individual and business taxpayers \$201 million in taxes.

After signing HB 971, sponsored by Delegate Kathy Byron, Youngkin issued the following statement: "The COVID-19 pandemic was one of the most difficult times for Virginians since the Great Depression. The federal government and the General Assembly came together to offer aid programs designed to keep businesses open and workers employed.

"While the worst parts of the COVID-19 pandemic are in the rearview mirror, many businesses are still struggling from the effects of unnecessary, forced economic shutdowns. This bill ensures programs designed to aid businesses don't transform into tax liabilities that hinder Virginia's economic recovery."

"Making our tax code more consistent with the federal government is not only the right principle, it is also good for busi-

ness and good for everyday Virginians," said Delegate Kathy Byron. "This bill will save taxpayers over \$200 million and provide much needed relief to small businesses. I appreciate Governor Youngkin and my colleagues in both chambers and in both parties working quickly to make these necessary reforms as tax season is underway."

Youngkin also signed bills designed to improve Virginia's elections process. HB 55, sponsored by freshman Delegate Karen Greenhalgh, requires the State Registrar of Vital Records to transmit to the Department of Elections a weekly list of decedents rather than monthly as previously required. This bill ensures Virginia's voter rolls are as up-to-date as possible when issuing mail-in ballots and when heading into Election Day.

HB 195, sponsored by Delegate Margaret Ransone, improves local elections by allowing the Department of Elections to issue a waiver and establish a polling place without meeting the current location requirements that a polling location must be within a precinct or within one mile of a precinct's borders. This bill helps rural localities with limited public building options hold elections.

Finally, Youngkin also signed HB 386, sponsored by Delegate Rip Sullivan, which adds the Arland D. Williams Jr. Memorial Bridge to the list of Potomac River bridges subject to the Potomac River Bridge Towing Compact. This bill improves traffic from Arlington County into the District of Columbia by facilitating the prompt and orderly removal of disabled and abandoned vehicles from the bridge.

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Zakia joins Fairfax Radiology Centers, LLC

Justin Zakia has joined Fairfax Radiology Centers, LLC as Chief Executive Officer. Zakia comes to FRC from OrthoVirginia, the largest musculoskeletal physician group in Virginia, where he served for approximately four years, most recently as Chief Strategy Officer.

A seasoned health-care executive with a progressive hands-on operational background, Zakia started his career as a flight officer in the U.S. Navy. After leaving the service, he worked in medical device sales before becoming an administrative director at Elliot Health System in New Hampshire.

He was later a practice group administrator at the George Washing-

ton University Medical Faculty Associates, before becoming Chief Administrative Officer of the Northern Virginia Region for OrthoVirginia in 2021.

"I am eager to embrace the challenges of this new role at Fairfax Radiology," Zakia said. "The medical expertise of the physician group is unequalled, the partnership with Inova is exciting, and the company is poised for tremendous growth."

Zakia earned his Master of Science degree in Healthcare Delivery Science from Dartmouth College, and his Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Technology from Cornell University.

He lives in the Vienna community and is the parent of three children.



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Grand opening for Sterling Community Center March 5

The Loudoun County Board of Supervisors and Departments of Parks, Recreation and Community Services and Transportation and Capital Infrastructure will celebrate the grand opening of the Sterling Community Center Saturday, March 5, at 10 a.m.

The public is invited to attend the opening ceremony. The center is located at 120 Enterprise Street in Sterling.

Following the ceremony, an open house featuring tours of the facility, program demonstrations and entertainment will be held until 12:30 p.m. The center will remain open until 5 p.m. The open house will continue Sunday, March 6, from noon to 5 p.m. Normal hours of operation and programming begin Monday, March 7.

The Sterling Community Center has been serving the community since 1975 with programs for all ages, as well as party packages, camps, drop-in sports and special events. Voters approved

general obligation bonds to renovate the 18,200-square-foot facility on the November 2014 referendum.

A construction contract to enlarge and fully renovate the facility was awarded to Forrester Construction Company in 2019. The project provided funding to renovate the Sterling Community Center as part of the Sterling Public Facilities Master Plan initiated by the Board of Supervisors.

The renovated center occupies 20,700 square feet of space at its current location. The extensive renovation project included:

- A main entry vestibule facing Enterprise Street.
- An entry vestibule from the parking lot.
- A new patio area for public seating.
- A lawn area for program services.
- A renovated pavilion.
- An outdoor amphitheater area around the existing pavilion.
- Public lobby, enlarged gym,



fitness room, computer room, kitchen, classrooms, administrative office and support spaces, and art room.

- A teen recreation and gaming room with garage door to a patio.
- Raising the split-level building to a single level.
- Expanding the gymnasium to be full-court high school size in length, width and interior clearance.

- A renovated and insulated exterior envelope.
- New roofing and clerestory windows for interior daylighting.
- New energy efficient geothermal mechanical system, new electrical and plumbing.

For information about facility hours, programs and rentals, visit loudoun.gov/prcs or call 703-430-9480. For more information about the grand opening, email prcs@loudoun.gov.

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Open burning restrictions: “4p.m. Law” has started

The Loudoun County Fire and Rescue Fire Marshal’s Office is reminding citizens that open burning is restricted in Loudoun County until April 30. The restrictions have been in effect since Feb. 15.

The regulations, which prohibit open air fires, or open burning as it is commonly referred to, between the hours of midnight and 4 p.m., are enforced by the Loudoun County Fire Marshal and the Virginia Department of Forestry.

Known as the “4p.m. law,” these restrictions are in place due to the potential for rapid fire spread across woodland and grassland areas as a result of dry outdoor fuels, high winds and temperature increases that are normally present in the late winter and early spring season.

During this period, residents may conduct open burning between the hours of 4 p.m. and midnight, subject to other restrictions. Open air fires for leaves, trees, brush, yard and garden trimmings generated on site are allowed between 4 p.m. and midnight, except in the town limits of Lovettsville, Middleburg, Purcellville, Round Hill, and subdivisions (“urban or built-up areas”) throughout the County and in the Town of Leesburg. Ensure that any permissible out-

door burning is conducted at least fifty feet away from any structure.

Persons conducting open burning must contact the Loudoun County Emergency Communications Center at 703-777-0637 prior to igniting a fire and at the end of the burning.

Fires may not be added to after midnight. Persons are responsible, at all times, to ensure the fire is maintained under control and that it is attended to by a competent adult, 18 years of age or older, with provisions immediately available to extinguish the fire.

The Loudoun County Fire Marshal may impose regulations, at any time, based upon complaint, atmospheric or other environmental circumstances, to restrict or extinguish any fire that is otherwise permitted according to these guidelines.

Any person who violates the fire code could be convicted of a Class 1 misdemeanor, which carries a penalty of a fine up to \$2,500.00 and up to a year in jail. If convicted, a person may be required to compensate the locality for the full costs of fighting a fire.

Questions regarding open burning regulations and the “4 p.m. law” should be directed to the Loudoun County Fire Marshal’s Office website www.loudoun.gov/firemarshal or by calling 703-737-8600.

GOVERNMENT

USDA implements new labeling for genetically modified foods

Consumers will soon see new symbols and QR codes identifying genetically modified and bioengineered foods as the U.S. Department of Agriculture implements new labeling rules.

Food manufacturers, importers and certain retailers must now comply with the National Bioengineered Food Disclosure Standard, which requires label-

ing foods that have been genetically modified. It also replaces the term genetically modified organism, or GMO, with bioengineered foods. These are defined as foods that contain detectable genetic material that has been modified in a lab and cannot be found in nature or created through conventional breeding.

“The rule is a victory for both farmers and consumers who want transparency

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24 »

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Supervisors advance Letourneau-Turner redistricting plan

Western Loudoun to lose one of its two districts

BY LAURA LONGLEY

Where do you draw the lines? That is the question Loudoun's supervisors, mayors, and engaged citizens grapple with every 10 years when, post-U.S. census, the County undertakes the onerous task of local redistricting. Their decision impacts the lives of present and future Loudoun residents for the next decade.

In 2011, when the County last redistricted, the process yielded six districts in eastern Loudoun and two in the west (one of them including the suburban community of Brambleton), plus a supervisor at-large. Last June, Loudoun County took up this exercise again, inviting all interested citizens to submit maps that would be measured by County staff against nine benchmarks, including equal representation and preservation of communities of interest.

Two maps surfaced for presentation to the Board on Feb. 15. One was proposed by the Coalition of Loudoun Towns (COLT), a second was developed by Supervisor Matt Letourneau (R-Dulles)

in collaboration with Supervisor Mike Turner (D-Ashburn). Named for them, the Letourneau-Turner map received the majority of supervisors' votes to move forward for staff tweaking and a public hearing on March 15. But the Board did not arrive at the decision without a struggle.

While Loudoun citizens have become accustomed to contentious School Board meetings, seldom do they hear supervisors begin so many statements with the phrase "with all due respect" before calling out actions and positions of the towns' mayors and colleagues on the dais. Battle lines formed around population distribution vs. communities of interest as the basis for district boundaries.

"By making sure districts have approximately the same number of people, redistricting can help to ensure residents have equal representation on the Board of Supervisors and School Board," the County's website explains. "It also affects for whom residents vote and where they vote, based on how the local electoral boundaries are drawn ...

"At its June 21, 2021, meeting," the site made clear, "the Board of Supervisors voted to retain eight local election districts. Given the county's 2020 population of 421,129, the ideal district size would be 52,641; since each district can be over or under the ideal size by five percent, the minimum district size will be 50,009 and the maximum number of residents in a district will be 55,273."

The Letourneau-Turner plan reflects this population distribution, which leaves western Loudoun with one district, not two.

Meanwhile, the seven mayors who make up the **Coalition of Loudoun Towns developed a plan around "communities of interest," focusing on western Loudoun's landmass—nearly two-thirds of the County—and the unique issues facing current and future residents of the rural policy area. Their aim: to maintain the two western districts, Catoctin and Blue Ridge.**

At the Feb. 15 Board meeting, Al Van Hyuck, one of the County's leading preservationists, made the "communities of interest" case. "I'm here tonight to ask

you to send both the COLT revised redistricting plan and the Letourneau-Turner plan together back to staff for the final tweaking so we end up with two majority rural development districts ...

"The rural policy area is over 200,000 acres," Van Hyuck continued. "It represents 30 percent of the economy of Loudoun County. It is the home to our tourist industry with breweries, wineries, and events centers that are so vital to our County. It's expected to absorb 11,000 new residential units according to the (2019 Comprehensive) plan, which represents 25 percent of all the residential growth that's going to be coming. It's the home of all the towns—except Leesburg—and 12 rural villages, all of which right now are trying to get village plans to protect themselves from inappropriate development."

Bridge Littleton, Mayor of Middleburg, laid out the case for popular support of the COLT plan.

"In all but one of the statistical and measurable categories, which were independently assessed by the staff, COLT's

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15 »



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REDISTRICTING PLAN, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

map either tied or exceeded the other two maps ...We broke down the data of the nearly 500 votes that were submitted by Loudoun citizens ... and neither of the other maps individually or combined achieved half of the support that the COLT map did. Countywide, the COLT map received 86 percent of the support, with the Letourneau-Turner map receiving 10 percent and the (Avram) Fechter map receiving 4 percent ... If we remove the two western districts from the tally, the COLT map still received 75 percent of the County support with the Letourneau-Turner map and Fetcher map receiving 17 and 8 percent respectively.

“Our request is that the Board consider this input from the staff and proceed to your next steps with the COLT map as a baseline. Then, using the best elements of the other maps, [staff could] tweak and make adjustments as needed for the best result.

“As a body,” Littleton concluded, “COLT would fully support and publicly endorse this approach with you here today and ... when it eventually goes to the [Virginia] Attorney General for approval.”

“In a word, that is hogwash,” said Supervisor Turner. “Absolute hogwash.” He went on, “[It is a] clear effort to mis-

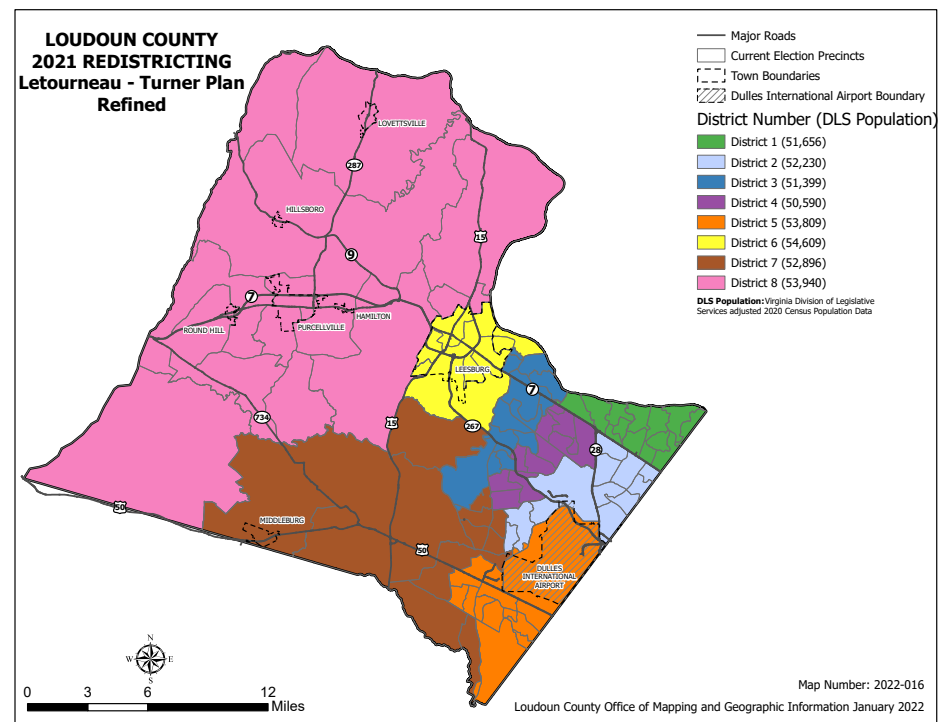
inform the public, [implying] that in a Countywide poll 86 percent of the people support the COLT plan, and that’s not true ...

“I find it very, very disturbing that all of the mayors and the two supervisors from the rural districts would actively promote this deliberate mis- and disinformation ... Five hundred people were coached to go into the system and make comments. There are 421,000 people in this County—500 people made comments. That is not the bulk of the County. So, let’s just dispense with that.”

“COLT outperformed all the others,” agreed Letourneau, “because it’s the only one that has had an orchestrated campaign going on for the last several weeks, including email to the Board in favor of it. I can assure all my colleagues that if you would get 500 emails in favor of the Letourneau-Turner plan, I could make that happen by sending out an email to my mailing list asking people to support that plan because it’s the best for my area. I’ve always said we cannot go simply by how many emails we get.”

It’s the numbers that count, Turner emphasized.

“Ten years ago, when I did this process, we had 45,000 as our benchmark, plus or minus 5 percent, and the east



was much less populous. The percentage of the population—that is, the one person-one vote theory, the basis of democracy—worked out to about 1.5 – 1.6 supervisors for the west, and we rounded up to get two supervisors, but we had to grab Brambleton to do that.

“The west has been saying for years now, ‘We don’t want more people out west.’ Well, there’s been an explosion in eastern Loudoun County, and now the percentages work out to almost exactly

12 percent of the population west of Rt. 15. Twelve percent of eight supervisors is one supervisor. If we believe in one person-one vote, the west only gets one vote. They only get one supervisor. The math is sacrosanct. In this whole drill, you can’t play with the math.” Turner concluded.

Chair Phyllis J. Randall (D-At Large) pointed out that with the Letourneau-Turner plan the west actually

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26 »



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Loudoun Nonprofits encouraged to provide input on ARPA Funding

Nonprofit organizations serving Loudoun County residents are encouraged to provide input on American Rescue Plan Act federal pass-through funding.

GOVERNMENT

Loudoun County will host five virtual 'office hours' listening sessions for nonprofit organizations to share their needs as the county begins planning for another round of funding.

Loudoun County encourages all nonprofit organizations to provide input, including those that have previously applied for ARPA funding or those considering applying for ARPA funding. Loudoun County nonprofit organizations that meet

the criteria to apply for ARPA funding are those that:

- Are in good standing with the Virginia State Corporation Commission.
- Provide proof of 501(c)3 status.
- Provide the last three years of IRS 990 forms and other financial documentation.
- Can demonstrate that services provided, or residents served, continue to be affected by COVID-19 with a focus toward recovery.

Office Hours Listening Sessions

The office hours listening sessions will

provide nonprofit organizations the opportunity to share additional input and discuss specific needs related to ARPA funding directly with county staff in an open meeting format. The purpose of these sessions is to discuss potential projects that may be included in ARPA funding programs, reporting requirements, and needs based on organizational COVID-related service levels. These sessions will be held virtually on Microsoft Teams at the following times:

- Wednesday, March 9, 1 – 2 p.m. - *Discuss 2022 ARPA Nonprofit Needs Assessment*
- Thursday, March 24, 10 – 11

a.m. - *Finalize 2022 ARPA Nonprofit Needs Assessment and Share General Input*

- Monday, April 4, 1 – 2 p.m. - *Discuss Feedback on Funding Programs*
- Thursday, April 21, 9:30 – 10:30 a.m. - *Discuss Feedback on Funding Programs*
- Wednesday, May 4, 9:30 – 10:30 a.m. - *Discuss Feedback on Funding Programs*

More information, including logon information for the upcoming input sessions, is online at loudoun.gov/grantopportunities.

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Opportunities

Warner and Kaine get over \$15 million funding for EV charging

U.S. Senators Mark R. Warner and Tim Kaine announced, on Feb. 10, \$15,745,244 in federal funding for Virginia to build electric vehicle charging stations. This funding is the first of five installments totaling \$106,375,132 for building EV charging stations across the Commonwealth over the next five years.

GOVERNMENT

The funding was made possible by the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act negotiated by Warner and strongly supported by Kaine. The landmark law included \$7.5 billion for EV

charging stations and \$5 billion for clean and electric school buses across the country.

"We're pleased to see Virginia will receive significant federal funding to build electric vehicle charging stations across the Commonwealth," said both Warner and Kaine. "This funding will encourage more Virginians to adopt clean vehicles and help ensure that families have access to reliable charging stations when they travel. Promoting electric vehicles is a critical step to address the climate crisis and protect public health."

Under the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Formula Program established by the bipartisan IIJA, each state must outline how the funding will be used and submit a plan to the Joint Office of Energy and Transportation before receiving the funds. Localities are also able to apply to the program directly if their state does not submit a plan.

In addition to this funding, states and localities will soon have the opportunity to apply for \$2.5 billion in competitive grants for EV infrastructure, including in rural and underserved communities.



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Loudoun ends mask requirement in all County government facilities

Loudoun County no longer requires members of the public to wear a face mask while inside Loudoun County-owned and-operated facilities. Additionally, the social distancing requirement inside county facilities is also ended.

GOVERNMENT

Loudoun County's lifting of the COVID-19 mitigation measures is based on new guidance issued Feb. 25, by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that updates the metrics used to determine the impact of the virus that causes COVID-19 on a community.

The CDC's updated list of U.S. counties showing community impact indicates Loudoun County is now experiencing a "low" level of impact. In accordance with the Board of Supervisors' Feb. 1 vote to follow CDC guidance regarding the use of masks inside county's facilities, the requirement is ended.

The CDC's updated guidance considers the number of new COVID-19

hospitalizations, hospital capacity and new COVID-19 cases to help determine the COVID-19 community level metrics. The CDC's COVID-19 Community Levels tool is intended to help communities and individuals make decisions based on their local context and unique needs.

The CDC recommends that individuals who are at high risk for severe disease due to pre-existing, chronic medical conditions, such as cancer, diabetes, and chronic liver, heart or kidney disease, seek additional guidance from their health care providers.

The end of the mask requirement inside county facilities generally does not impact county employees who are not fully vaccinated or who work in health care settings. The Virginia Department of Labor and Industry currently requires non-fully vaccinated employees to wear face coverings or surgical masks while indoors, unless their work task requires a respirator or other PPE.

Supervisors work on County budget

March is the month when Loudoun County's Supervisors begin crunching the numbers.

The County's proposed FY 2023 budget was presented to the Board of Supervisors by County Administrator Tim Hemstreet in early February, followed several weeks later by a series of three public hearings.

The proposed budget will set the tax rate at \$0.895 cents, or 5 cents higher than an equalized rate of \$0.845 cents, which would maintain the FY 2022 tax rate. The Board directed Hemstreet to aim for the higher rate.

The proposed budget includes:

- \$15 million in base budget adjustments
- An increase of \$15.1 million in total for employee compensation
- An additional 253 positions in 22 departments
- An increase of \$38.1 million to fund the debt service and

capital needs of the County government and Loudoun County Public Schools

- A year-over-year increase of \$53.7 million in the local transfer to LCPS

In the future, the County budget will also allocate a half cent, or approximately \$6 million, to the Loudoun County Housing Trust Fund to help finance affordable housing projects.

The School Board's adopted budget, presented to the Board of Supervisors in early February, requests a \$75 million increase in spite of enrollment decreases.

In the public hearings, citizens spoke for or against specific line items, some as small as traffic calming in Waterford, others as massive as the Loudoun County School Board's requested budget.

After a contentious year with school administrators and parents over the curriculum, mask requirements and student protections, the School Board budget of \$1.6 billion has come under

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26 »



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BRMS students ready *Mary Poppins Jr. Musical*

Students at Blue Ridge Middle School are busy getting ready to present Disney and Cameron Mackintosh's *Mary Poppins Jr.* this spring. It's a musical based on the beloved stories of P.L. Travers and the Walt Disney film.

COMMUNITY

An incredible cast and crew of 70 middle schoolers are bringing this production to life. The show is directed by Linda Cirba, with Dr. Sherry Montgomery as music director.

In the musical, Bert, a jack-of-all-trades, invites the audience into the world of London, England in 1910 — and, specifically, into the dysfunctional home of the Banks family. Jane and Michael, the young Banks children, have sent yet another nanny packing,



Diana Leskiv as Bert.

The magical Mary Poppins flies in on the wind with her parrot umbrella, bringing with her a combination of whimsy, magic, and disciplined common sense to the children's lives. Together, they go on memorable and magical adventures — and also learn the importance of a tidy nursery, and of taking the medicine they need (with a

spoonful of sugar, of course). Mary Poppins' transformational influence does not stop with the children — eventually, she teaches the grown-ups, as well, to open up and realize that "anything can happen if you let it." Tickets are \$10 each and go on sale March 1 at brmspto.org. *Mary Poppins Jr.* runs for one weekend only on the Blue Ridge Middle School stage, with performances on April 1st at 7:30 p.m., April 2 at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., and April 3 at 2 p.m. Performances will be held at Blue Ridge Middle School, 551 East A Street, Purcellville.



Photos Kelly Schober/BRMS PTO.

L-R: Lilly Tester as Mary Poppins, Kate Henry as Jane Banks, Levi Kneeland as Michael Banks and Charlotte Abbe as the Bird Woman in the BRMS Theatre production of *Mary Poppins Jr.*

spoonful of sugar, of course).

Mary Poppins' transformational influence does not stop with the children — eventually, she teaches the grown-ups, as well, to open up and realize that "anything can happen if you let it."

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Performances will be held at Blue Ridge Middle School, 551 East A Street, Purcellville.

Grace Heritage Site in Lincoln moves forward with restoration

The Grace Heritage Site is the former Grace United Methodist Episcopal Church, built by Freedman and other Black residents in 1885. Located in western Loudoun County, Virginia in the village of Lincoln, it was once a bustling center of community.

When the Black population began to dwindle in the mid- 20th century, the building was eventually abandoned.

Today, efforts are underway to restore the building and preserve this important symbol of Loudoun's rich Black cultural history. The project was awarded the Jean Brown Memorial Grant from the Loudoun Preservation Society in 2021. This award is funding the restoration of the retaining wall which was in ruin for decades.

The wall is being built by craftsman John Summers, who has ancestral ties to the building. The



John Summers

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26 »

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Youngkin announces 2022 Governor's Fellows Program

Gov. Glenn Youngkin has announced that applications are being accepted for the 2022 Governor's Fellows Program.

The Governor's Fellows Program is a prestigious opportunity for rising college seniors and recent graduates to get a firsthand look at the executive branch in action. Since 1982, fellows have worked alongside the Governor's Cabinet and staff, learning about state government and assisting in essential work for the Commonwealth.

"We are excited to welcome the next generation of leaders to kick off their careers with our administration," said Youngkin. "The Governor's Fellows Program is a unique opportunity for young Virginians and students to experience public service firsthand and gain essential work skills for their future."

"Through meaningful interac-

tions with the Governor's senior level staff, lunches with Cabinet members, trips around the Commonwealth, and projects both inside and outside my assigned Secretariat, I became fully immersed in Virginia government at the highest level," said Tommy Lukish, a 2012 Governor's Fellow. "In every way, those experiences amplified my appreciation for public service and helped my personal and professional growth."

During their time in service to the Commonwealth, Governor's fellows have the opportunity to learn from special guest speakers who are leaders in state government and beyond. Fellows also experience state government on the road, visiting state government agencies and historic sites that have shaped our past and are improving our future.

Qualified applicants must be rising college seniors,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24 »

DR. MIKE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

lack of sleep can also make it more difficult to recover from an illness.

The general recommended amount of sleep for adults is seven or more hours per night. Children and adolescents need more sleep with 3-to-5-year old's requiring 10 to 13 hours per night (including naps), 6-to-12-year old's requiring 9 to 12 hours per night, and 13-to-18-year old's requiring 8 to 10 hours per night.

Manage your stress. There is no denying that the pandemic has been stressful and overwhelming for many. Rates of suicide, substance abuse, alcoholism, depression, anxiety, and other mental health struggles and conditions have increased significantly over the past two years.

Research has repeatedly shown the benefits of both psychotherapy and psychiatric medications for those with mental health struggles and conditions. If you reluctant to get help for yourself when you need it, remember that mental health treatment is not a luxury but a necessity when it comes to managing your mental health struggles during the pandemic.

Exercise regularly. Exercise and physical activity play a significant role in strengthening your immune system. Exercise essentially causes changes in your white blood cells which help you fight against diseases.

Research on exercise and COVID-19 has shown that regular physical activity may help people who contract COVID-19 from becoming seriously ill. The American Heart Association recommends 150 minutes of moderate aerobic

activity per week or 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity per week, or a combination of the two.

Maintain a healthy weight. Obesity is a common, serious and costly disease that is linked to impaired immune function. The obesity rate in the U.S. is over 42 percent making us one of the most obese nations in the world.

People who are obese have a higher risk of severe illness when contracting COVID-19, and are three times more likely to require hospitalization when ill. This is a time to strive to maintain a healthy body weight. While obesity can be caused by several factors outside of your control (e.g., genetics, hypothyroidism), poor diet and a lack of physical activity/exercise – things that are within your control – are two main factors.

If you are severely overweight, make the time to meet with your doctor for an evaluation, and to formulate a treatment plan to combat the problem.

Don't smoke. Research has repeatedly shown that smoking increases the risk for several immune and autoimmune disorders, and so too does vaping. While quitting nicotine is extremely difficult to do, COVID-19 has been a huge motivator for many. And don't be discouraged if you fail in your attempts to quit. Research on smoking and vaping cessation has found that quitting is most often a process and not a single moment. According to The Centers

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24 »

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BRMS Students awarded Nature Camp Scholarship

Kam Woodall, Gabriel Davis, and Ella Stephenson, students at Blue Ridge Middle School, were each awarded fully-funded scholarships (\$975 each) to attend Nature Camp for two weeks in Vesuvius, Virginia this summer.



L to R: Gabriel Davis, Ella Stephenson and Kam Woodall

Every year, the Leesburg Garden Club (leesburggardenclub.org) awards scholarships for this “unique, academic, hands-on, residential camp for young people with a genuine interest in conservation, the out-of-doors, and the natural world.”

To be considered for the scholarship, each student had to write a short essay

on why they would like to attend camp, and were required to receive a science teacher recommendation.

“To me, the natural world is so inspiring, everything we have to this day comes from nature like computers, rocket ships, and even cell phones.” Woodall shared in her essay.

Stephenson wrote, “The knowledge that I can get from going to the LGC Nature Camp will help me be able to care about and protect nature better. I know from experience that the more I know about nature the more I appreciate it and want to protect it. This nature camp is a perfect opportunity for me to start thinking about my future career”.

Davis included, “I hope to share what I will learn with others.”

The students’ science teacher, Jackie Robertson, encouraged the students to apply to the camp. She said, “I am so proud of these students for taking the time to apply for this scholarship opportunity, and I’m extremely excited that they will be extending their knowledge about the world around them.”

HOUSTON, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

inflation and pending property tax increases, imposing *any* additional tax is a bad idea.

Here’s a better idea. Denver imposes a tax of \$0.66 per square foot on new residential units, and \$1.86 per square foot on new commercial projects. Let’s do that. Supervisors: A good idea, and also better politics than taxing voters.

OPINION

Plastic Bags

A nickel a bag? Our Supervisors do a good job, but this new tax shows that they are not perfect. New tax revenue will be negligible. Significantly, the bag tax is clearly regressive, which means our poorest citizens will get hurt the most.

Rural Commercialization

Some commercialization in the west has been good, but even B&Bs are now seeing some eyebrows raised about their appropriateness in certain areas. Wineries have generally been well-liked. Breweries are popular, but their neighbors are often apoplectic.

Future breweries and most new

commercial projects should require a zoning Special Exception from the Board of Supervisors to ensure legislative review to make sure we want them. (Existing breweries would not be affected by this requirement.)

Snyder’s Stadium in Loudoun

I’m sure to write more about this grotesque idea in the future.

Unpaved Roads

Preserving Loudoun’s network of unpaved roads is a good idea; a necessity really, if we want to preserve our heritage and comfortable ambience.

Unpaved roads can have more potholes, but they are softer-edged than the sharp-edged potholes on paved roads. These roads can get dusty in dry weather. On the plus side, there is usually less traffic on unpaved roads, and that traffic is slower and safer than it would be on asphalt. Some people complain about dust, but the dust on my car proudly proclaims, “I live in western Loudoun.”

Charles Houston developed more than six million square feet of office buildings throughout the south for an Atlanta-based firm. He lives in Paonian Springs.

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BEWARE OF DEVELOPERS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

At a Town Council work session on Feb. 22, Mayor Fraser chided his critics with a cautionary metaphor.

“Annexation — the Trojan horse — beware of developers bearing gifts,” he said, alluding to the Greeks’ duplicitous destruction of Troy. The ancient Greeks hid soldiers in a huge, hollow wooden horse and presented it as a gift to the unsuspecting Trojans, who gladly welcomed it within their gates and brought about their own downfall.

Fraser pointed out that no one annexes a property to retain the County zoning they already have. Usually, property bordering the Town is zoned JLMA-3, which means one house per three acres.

“They annex for densification or increased density,” Fraser explained.

“It has been said to me by prior Council Members that if we annex, we control our destiny. To the contrary, I have said that we control our destiny by controlling water and sewer. There are only two creatures that follow water and sewer.”

Fraser continued: “For example, we did not annex Jack’s Run [Silcott Springs Road and A Street], and we did not provide water and sewer to it, and in so doing we controlled what was built there — a beautiful community at our borders with County density. Those residents

still eat at our restaurants, contributing to meals tax, and water and sewer usage while dining out.”

“To annex with the goal of retaining the County zoning or Transition X zoning is silly and is equivalent to opening the gates of Troy to the Trojan horse. Beware of developers bearing gifts.”

Transition X zoning is the current lower dense zoning of a property when it is annexed into the Town of Purcellville.

Council Member Tip Stinnette initially weighed in on the proposed Kuhn annexation at the Feb. 8 Town Council meeting. “I would like to clearly address three points that should inform any discussion on this matter. They are water, process, and our comprehensive plan. Any discussion on bringing new land into the jurisdiction of Purcellville needs to be informed by our capacity to support its water requirements.”

“While we do have excess wastewater treatment capacity,” he said, “quite the opposite is true when it comes to source water capacity. At present we have what we need for as we are. Any new land discussion will need to be informed by this point.”

Stinnette added, “With respect to the second point, the town’s process for bringing new land into its jurisdiction is a 17-step process. Mr. Kuhn is on step number one, which is called community

briefing prior to application. While this process may be condensed or modified, it is designed to protect the interests of our community.”

“As to my third point,” he continued, “we forecast there will be new applications that will come before the Town and specifically wrote into the Comprehensive Plan, that any new land coming into the Town must come with its existing County land use.”

“If an applicant wants a different land use than currently authorized under the County as part of their application, then a change to the Town Comprehensive Plan will be needed. And that will require a public hearing and a vote by Town Council.”

“In short, the Comprehensive Plan adds an 18th step to the 17-step process,” Stinnette concluded.

“To be clear, I do not support a data center in the Purcellville environs, nor do I believe one is logistically feasible given our water constraints,” he clarified. “Moreover, I fully support the Town’s application process and the comprehensive plan, which requires community engagement and restricts changing County land use as part of the jurisdiction application process.”

Fraser said he sees the proposed Kuhn annexation before the Town Council as “a waste of time.”

“Why go through a 17- or 18-step process when the community does not support it?” he asked.

“I was recently told that there is another Trojan horse working its way to our gates, represented by a property adjacent to the O’Toole property by the Berlin Turnpike circle — the same property Council Member [Erin] Rayner’s campaign banner was on.”

Fraser said the annexation request was not about data centers.

Chuck Kuhn has said repeatedly in meetings that he has no intention of bringing data to western Loudoun.

Fraser countered, “The data center was brought up by my detractors to distract the citizens of Purcellville into raging a battle of the mind so that an annexation can slip in under the guise of other high-density, traffic-impacting uses, hoping that the people will choose the lesser. It’s almost Machiavellian, but I am no longer a political neophyte. After four terms as Mayor, I see these things in slow motion.”

“For the record, with Central Offices now being equipped with data center gear, the Central Office across from the Purcellville Library has data center functionality,” he added.

“Further, this Town Council recently approved an agreement that will allow

CONTINUED ON PAGE 25 »

Hello Neighbors!

As fickle as March weather can be, now might be a good time to try our online ordering and FREE same-day local delivery to take the hassle out of shopping for your pet family. (We may be biased, but we think it’s worth a try just to see the Pet Mobile.)

Start using Auto-ship and save money on your first order! Or call ahead and use our reserved parking spots for curbside pickup! (You call, we fetch.)

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DR. MIKE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

for Disease Control and Prevention, it can take eight to 11 attempts before permanently stopping.

When you quit your immune system improves; improvements occur just after 15 days after quitting, and your return to health will be close to normalizing entirely by three months.

Drink in moderation. Research has shown that excessive drinking over time and binge drinking can weaken your immune system, which makes it more difficult to fight off infections and viruses. But you may not need to quit drinking entirely. Research studies have also shown that drinking in moderation is less concerning and possibly beneficial to your health.

In fact, a recent study on drinking and COVID-19 found that consuming red wine, champagne, and white wine in moderation can be helpful in thwart-

ing the virus. Interestingly, that same positive finding wasn't found for those who drank hard alcohol or beer.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to roll forward, this is an excellent time to assess your relationship with alcohol, and to make changes if necessary.

COVID-19 is a marathon and not a sprint, but we will get through it, and life will eventually return to normal. In addition to all that we are doing to protect ourselves and our loved ones from contracting the virus, let's also make our personal health and wellness a priority.

Michael Oberschneider, Psy.D. "Dr. Mike" is a clinical psychologist in private practice. He can be reached at 703-723-2999, and is located at 44095 Pipeline Plaza, Suite 240, Ashburn.

USDA, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

in food marketing," said Ben Rowe, national affairs coordinator for Virginia Farm Bureau Federation. "It provides clarity to the marketplace so consumers can make informed decisions on the issues that matter to them, and protects the innovation that is critical to the sustainability and future of agriculture."

Consumers will see text, symbols, QR codes, phone numbers and website addresses on foods that are bioengineered or contain bioengineered ingredients. They can visit the website, scan the QR code or make a phone call to learn more about the food and its ingredients.

Additionally, the standard establishes a national disclosure model that avoids a complicated assortment of state laws for bioengineered foods that impede movement of products, confuse consumers and increase production costs, Rowe explained.

"Because of population growth, we need to use every tool in the toolbox to get higher yields," said Lynwood Broaddus, president of Caroline County Farm Bureau and a member of the VFBB Soybean & Feed Grains Advisory Committee. "Genetically modified crops are very important in that."

Broaddus explained that both producers and consumers benefit significantly from bioengineered foods, as they allow farmers to grow crops more efficiently and reduce the amount of inputs like insecticides and herbicides.

Only 13 crops and foods are available in bioengineered form, and more than 70 percent of harvested bioengineered crops are fed to food-producing animals.

"Billions of animals and millions of people have consumed genetically modified food without a single, recorded food safety incident," Rowe added. "These crops are repeatedly and extensively tested for consumer and environmental safety by both industry experts and independent organizations. Those tests are reviewed by the USDA, Environmental Protection Agency, Food and Drug Administration and similar organizations internationally."

YOUNGKIN ANNOUNCES, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

graduating seniors, or graduate students. All Virginia college and university students are eligible to apply. Virginia residents who attend out-of-state colleges and universities are also eligible. Both public and private college and university students are encouraged to apply.

The selection of fellows is based solely on merit. The Fellows Program does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, color, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, age, disability, or veteran status.

The deadline to apply for the Governor's Fellows Program is Monday, March 28.

Interviews will begin on March 30. Applicants will be advised on decisions beginning on April 18. The program runs from Monday, May 30, to Friday, July 29.

To apply, visit the Governor's Fellows Program website and send the required recommendation letters to: Governor's Fellows Program, Post Office Box 2454, Richmond, Virginia 23219. Questions can be emailed to: govfellows@governor.virginia.gov.

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BEWARE OF DEVELOPERS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23

for the development of a data center at the base of our soon-to-be-built cell tower number 2. So, Purcellville already has its unique version of a data center and has an edge data center coming.”

Mayor Fraser told the Blue Ridge Leader in a phone call that monetizing the Town’s assets is working for

the Town. He said the Town received over \$900,000 in net revenue for planting 100,000 trees on the 189-acre, Town-owned Aberdeen property.

Said Fraser, “We can have the County build the aquatic and recreational center without annexation, and still obtain revenue by providing water and sewer to it under a deal with the County” – referring to the

western Loudoun recreational center the County will build in the west.

“I do not view annexation as an asset monetization strategy. The larger Purcellville grows, the more services it needs in infrastructure, staff, water and sewer treatment costs, and public safety, to name a few,” Fraser concluded.

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The Blue Ridge Leader is pledged to the letter and spirit of Virginia's and HUD's Equal Opportunity Housing Policies. Virginia's Fair Housing Law makes it illegal to advertise any preference, limitation or discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, elderliness, familial status and handicap. This newspaper will not knowingly accept advertising for real estate that violates the Fair Housing Law. Our readers are hereby informed that all dwellings advertised in the paper are available on an equal housing opportunity basis. For more information about Virginia's Fair Housing Law, or to file a Fair Housing complaint, call the Virginia Fair Housing Office at 804.376.8530; toll-free 888.551.3247; for the hearing impaired: 804.527.4290; email - fairhousing@dporvirginia.gov; web: www.fairhousing.vipnet.org.

**ST. PATRICK'S, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1**

Dessert? With that hearty meal under your belt who'd have room for Bailey's Irish Cream Cheesecake? Why not binge instead on Irish movies— "Waking Ned Devine," maybe, or, for the children, "Darby O'Gill and the Little People"? This 1959 Disney classic will entertain your imps with lots of naughty leprechauns. Parents are more likely to get a laugh out of a certain Scotsman's miserable attempt at an Irish accent. But he would have the last laugh. Three years later, Sean Connery would make film history with just three words, spoken with an English accent: "Bond. James Bond." <https://sallysbakingaddiction.com/grandmas-irish-soda-bread/>

REDISTRICTING PLAN, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

would benefit from the Letourneau plan because "as it stands, you will have three people, three of nine, to cover parts—wholly or part of—western Loudoun County." She added, "The ironic part of the COLT map is it's the only map that will not require a supervisor to live in the west. How are you going to fight about the fact that the west is so important, but then you could have all nine supervisors living in the east?"

The Letourneau-Turner map is moving forward to a March 15 public hearing with the support of

seven supervisors: Juli Briskman (D-Algonkian), Sylvia Glass (D-Broad Run), Kristen Umstadt (D-Leesburg), Vice Chair Koran Saines (D-Sterling), and Letourneau, Turner, and Randall.

Two supervisors —Tony Buffington (R-Blue Ridge) and Caleb A. Kershner (R-Catoctin)—voted for the COLT plan.

That plan will now move forward to a Board of Supervisors public hearing on March 15, followed by staff refinement before the final plan is presented to the Board of Supervisors in May then sent on to the Attorney General. Implementation of the new map is expected by August.

COUNTY BUDGET, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26

particular scrutiny. The largest bottom line in division history, the LCPS request amounts to a 5.6 percent increase from the current year's budget despite a 7 percent drop in enrollment.

Loudoun citizens also discussed the budget increase in terms of the County's huge increases in home values — up 8.7 to 16 percent countywide — and the resulting huge increases in tax assessments.

At the same time, in light of 7.5 percent inflation across the economy — the largest inflation spike in 40 years — speakers pointed out the burden they are now carrying just to cover basic needs.

According to a study by Moody's Analytics, the average household is spending an additional \$276 a month because of inflation. They have seen food costs rise 12.2 percent. Energy has risen 27 percent and gas 40 percent, both of which are likely to go higher due to the war in Ukraine.

GRACE HERITAGE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

stones are all from the original structure. "We want to thank Mr. Summers for his excellent work," said Carol Morris Dukes, president, Lincoln Preservation

Foundation.

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MOORE-SOBEL, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

hope, healing, and resiliency. "Character is developed through trial and suffering," LeSourd writes.

Many of us have high expectations when we first set out on our own – we imagine securing the perfect job, finding the perfect mate, and building a successful life. But often, this doesn't happen right away (if at all).

"When we graduate college, we immediately put intense pressure on ourselves to find a job that aligns with our dreams and skills," LeSourd writes. "Unfortunately, that first job is more often than not a wake-up call to reality. You may dislike your first job, or even hate it."

I was miserable in my first job out of college. Stuck in a windowless room working as a government consultant, I spent days fielding calls from clients, trying my best to resolve their software issues. I felt alone during that first year out of school, living in my parents' utility room to save money. I felt like I had failed, especially in comparison to others I knew who were loving their first year out of school.

Thankfully, that wasn't the end of the story. My life has turned out better than I could have imagined. And while I would never want to repeat my early twenties, I did learn valuable lessons along the way, many of which I draw upon now. As LeSourd writes, "This tumultuous decade that required so much from us has provided a foundation to help guide us throughout the rest of our lives."

Our twenties are demanding, especially considering the number of transitions that happen in such a short period of time. "Most major events or

milestones, such as first jobs, frequent moves, career shifts, marriage, buying a home, and the start of parenting, occur within a span of ten years," LeSourd writes. These changes, while exciting, can produce negative emotions. "Due to all these changes happening in such a short period of our lives, it is normal to feel a heightened sense of stress and insecurity," LeSourd writes.

I wish I had been able to read this book when I was in my early twenties. I could have learned valuable lessons about work-life balance, setting boundaries, and perhaps worrying less about what the future held. But in reading this book, I was able to look back at those years with self-compassion – and choose to accept the past. "People often reflect on their twenties with fond memories – and we will look back on these years and see how we have grown – but it is a tumultuous time when you are in the midst of it," LeSourd writes.

No matter how your twenties turn out, you can rest assured that they won't necessarily determine how the rest of your life will unfold. "Hope comes when we remember that our life is a part of a greater, collective story," LeSourd writes. "We may not always see why or how things happened the way they did at the time, but we can move forward one step at a time, knowing it is not the end of the story."

Samuel Moore-Sobel is the author of Can You See My Scars? His book is available on Amazon. To read more of his work, visit www.samuelmoore-sobel.com To book him for a speaking engagement, visit <https://washington-dc.freespeakers.org/author/samuelmooresobel/>.

BATTLE OVER ROUTE 15, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

of bringing it into alignment with the County's policy vision.

This "zoning re-write" provides the Board of Supervisors with a last chance opportunity to fix the problem of over-development of rural areas and avoid future conflicts like the current

OPINION

battle over Rt. 15. As part of this process, the County can and should reduce the maximum residential densities permitted in new rural subdivisions to ensure that the rural population does not out-grow the available public infrastructure.

Of course, pro-growth interests will lobby intensely against this second option, arguing that it would deny large landowners' "right" to high-density rural development. They will continue to insist, in other words, on their right to impose huge new administrative and fiscal burdens on the County government and its taxpayers so that they can


reap more profits from the destruction of Loudoun's remaining rural areas.

Under this powerful political pressure, County supervisors would undoubtedly face a major challenge if they chose to decisively implement the rural policy adopted in the Comprehensive Plan. It would certainly be easier to avoid short-term controversy and pass along the inevitable costs to future supervisors and citizens.

For the sake of the County's taxpayers, of every citizen who values our farms, natural environment, history, scenery, and other rural assets, and of future generations, we hope they will stand up to the task of fixing the problem while it is still fixable.

This was submitted by John Ellis on behalf of the Board of Directors of Save Rural Loudoun. Save Rural Loudoun is a non-partisan, non-profit, grassroots organization that advocates for preservation of Loudoun County's rural heritage.


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WOODGROVE'S THEATRE PROGRAM, CON'T. FROM P.3

parents, local professional theater companies, a family drive-in movie theater, and a farm family with a big barn has been keeping Woodgrove's theater program alive.

Two of the key players have been Addie Schafer Benko, who took on the early challenges from March 2020 through June 2021, and now Beverly Pruzina, Theatre Arts and Film Studies Director.

Recruited to Woodgrove from Eagle Ridge Middle School by Schafer Benko, Pruzina is a career-switcher who brought to LCPS her 10 years of experience owning and running Richmond's Drama Kids International franchise, one of the company's original 10 franchises in the country.

With a journalism degree from Temple University in Philadelphia, Pruzina worked in radio and television in Richmond before she and her husband decided to step into teaching and coaching drama. When she finally decided to switch careers and teach in public schools, Pruzina enrolled at the Shenandoah Conservatory in Winchester, where she earned her teaching credentials.

"Then," she says, "a crazy principal at Eagle Ridge took a chance on me, and I've never looked back."

Getting her to look forward and switch from teaching middle school students to high schoolers was a tough sell, but she took up the challenge as Schafer Benko moved on to the head Virginia Thespian, the state's largest theater education organization with 2,700 members, 150 organizations, and 149 middle and high schools.

"When everything shutdown in March 2020," say Schafer Benko, "I began to get emails from the kids saying, 'Please, can we get back in?' But no one could access the school.

"So, we began to develop a program with playwriting groups and productions online. About 40 students participated. It was tough on the kids. Some were 'podding.' Some were driving 30 minutes just to get a connection to participate. I started looking into what was possible for us to get together. That meant getting signatures from parents and writing a proposal to start a film production. The proposal ran 40 pages, with 20 pages of COVID protocols.

Schafer Benko also made the most of her connections in the Virginia theater community. Because only nonprofits, such as churches, could gain access to schools, she turned to her friends at Ashburn's StageCoach Theatre Company. Under the wing of the nonprofit StageCoach Foundation, dedicated to increasing life-skill training through performing, she was able to gain school access for the high school's Grove Theater due to its nonprofit affiliation.

They chose StageCoach's own mystery play *Moonshine Murders* for their production. The students wanted to put their own artistic stamp on the play, however, and turn it into a film noir musical. With StageCoach's blessing, they added six scenes, increased the characters from 15 to 30, and wrote three original songs.

"Once we got a green light to work with StageCoach, we had to raise money because our school funding had been frozen. Parents stepped up and donated

\$2,000 to \$3,000. With those funds were able to buy three green screens to do Virtual Theater."

Back in the school building for rehearsals thanks to the StageCoach Foundation, Schafer Benko created safe workspaces with painter's tape, marking boxes 6–10 feet apart, one for each student.

Every planning period she would disinfect the space, and every day she steamed costumes and wiped down the entire facility. She also recruited parents, two of whom attended every meeting and rehearsal to ensure COVID protocols were met.

The next challenge was finding a way to present their musical after filming the production and editing it for screening. With the help of StageCoach, the Grove team identified a venue—the Family Drive-in movie theater in Stephens City. To a live, ticketed audience, they screened several performances. Then, moving online, the students livestreamed the musical play as ticketed, scheduled content.

By spring 2021, when the students were ready to perform *Oklahoma!*, they faced the same challenge: Where could they find a stage?

Enter Rebecca Baldwin Fuller, a former board president of Hillsboro Charter Academy who knew Addie Schafer Benko from her days as a third-grade teacher at the school.

Fuller offered the barn at her family's farm, WeatherLea, near Lovettsville. The farm provided the perfect setting for the musical, with its big red barn, horses in its corral, and sheep in nearby fields.

This spring—May 5, 6, 7—Woodgrove's

student stage managers, actors, singers, dancers, musicians, sound and lighting technicians, wardrobe and prop managers, stagehands and film directors, community relations and marketing teams—will finally put on a show in their own school auditorium.

"We have 78 students in the production," says director Pruzina, "and three of us in leadership positions—pit conductor Samantha Oakley and choral director Jessica Morgan.

"We go through rigorous application and audition processes," Pruzina explains. Talent counts, of course. But Pruzina is looking for more. "What I want in our students is the triple threat: attitude, attendance, and aptitude."

She'd got it with the students now cast for roles onstage and backstage for *SpongeBob: The Musical*.

"If you've never heard of it or listened to the music, you'll find it is not the Nickelodeon cartoon. The characters are from that show, including SpongeBob Squarepants, but the story is about the power of friendship and being the best you can be no matter the circumstances."

The innovative Tony-nominated musical is set under the sea in Bikini Bottom, where the inhabitants face annihilation of their world. Chaos erupts. Lives hang in the balance. And just when all hope seems lost, a most unexpected hero rises up and shows how the power of optimism really can save the world," she concludes.

"What a powerful message to send our community, especially in these times!"

TIM JON, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

the top – remains the dawn light creating bursts of blinding glare on windshield, spectacles and camera lens; combine this with sections of the road narrow enough to crowd a small family of rabbits, and I wonder how I remember much else of the trip. I still ponder the driving possibilities for the daily local residents – should they come upon each other at an unexpected blind curve; I shudder to think of an early-morning or late-afternoon school bus trying to simply negotiate the turns, much less avoid any other vehicles (or tree limbs, animals, bicycles or other obstacles). Those stands of mature trees I mentioned made their way into the picture catalog – both in the mind and camera – many joining in the morning sun's playful lighting effects.

There's a feeling I sense in and among old growth timber that always reminds me of a house of worship; perhaps it's the power and protection coming down through the ages – or at least my imagination of that phenomenon.

Breaking through the edge of the forest,

I negotiated my vehicle downhill toward more open cattle country; the early hour offered at least partial covering of the oncoming valley with a smoky blanket of fog, giving the scattered bovine herds an even more romantic quality. Some of the cows seemed to appreciate the early-morning visit, coming right in for a close-up as I got out to stretch the legs at one of the few turn-off areas. And, as I approached the end of the journey near Route 15, I was rewarded with an uncommon sight in this region – at least for me. Now, whether they were actual 'long-horn' cattle or simply cows with quite impressive headgear, I was instantly transported much further south – say, to the Lone Star State – as I stood along the fence and shared a bit of time and space with these formidable-looking creatures. Appropriate gate-keepers to Oatlands Road, I thought, getting back on the highway and onto more familiar grounds to face the rest of my day. So – my advice is: stay home, read the story and peruse the photos; I think I'll heed my own advice when it comes to another dawn's drive along Route 650.

STEEL MAGNOLIAS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

verbal collisions, the play draws on the underlying strength—and love—which give the play, and its characters, the special quality to make them truly touching, funny and marvelously amiable company in good times and bad.

Reservations for in-theater performances of *Steel Magnolias* are recommended. All guests are required to wear masks while watching the show. Reservations can be made online at <https://stagecoachtc.com/steel-magnolias/>, and ticket prices are \$25 per person.

Other shows currently in production at StageCoach Theatre include *Death of a Time-Traveler*,

a murder mystery written and directed by R. Aaron Thompson. Performances will be held in March and April at Oatlands in Leesburg with meals provided by Pure Perfection Catering, and at Old Ox Brewery in Ashburn and Effingham



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L-R bottom row: Caleigh Davis, Barbara Gertzog, Echo Rue.

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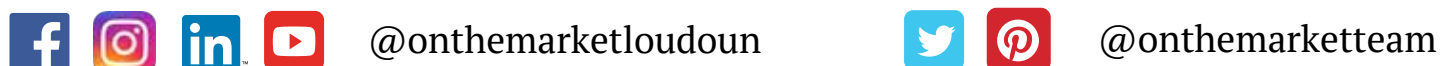


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