

# THE RESTON LETTER

## Eight Years in the Making: New Overpass Will Eliminate Traffic Danger on Bike Path

By Holly Weatherwax, Staff Writer

A bridge overpass that crosses Wiehle Avenue near Sunset Hills Road is the newest update to the W&OD Trail. Put in place overnight on April 13, the overpass is scheduled to be in use around June 15. The required additional work in the area, including closing the current traffic-level crosswalk, is anticipated for substantial completion by Aug. 24.

For many years, motorists, pedestrians, and bike riders have struggled with the W&OD Trail crossing. The trail, popular with bike riders and pedestrians, has many road crossings along its length.

The current street-level crosswalk, which covers six lanes and includes a center median, makes it difficult for drivers turning onto Wiehle from Sunset Hills; approaching the crosswalk, just after turning onto Wiehle often requires that drivers make the turn and then immediately brake for riders and pedestrians already in the crosswalk. The opening of the Wiehle Reston Metro station and the stores and restaurants surrounding it has



Curiosity about the construction and installation of the Wiehle overpass spans all ages of bikers, motorists, and pedestrians. Photo by Benjamin Burgess

increased traffic and made the crossing even more precarious.

Complicating the situation were motorist who either did not understand pedestrian crosswalk rules (must stop for pedestrians or bike riders in the crosswalk) or chose to ignore them. There were also bike riders and pedestrians who ignored the very visible stop signs

as the trail approached the crossing and proceeded into the crosswalk with little notice to motorists.

“The intersection is such a disaster, and anything they do will be an improvement,” said Susie Metz, a Reston resident and motorist.

Continued on page 2

## VIDA Fitness Anticipates May Opening

By Ellyn Wexler, Staff Writer

VIDA Fitness is putting the final touches on its brand-new luxury fitness and wellness center.

“We’re going through our various county inspections to get all the final permits we need to open,” said President Aaron Moore. “Right now, we’re projecting a late May opening. We hope to be in full swing by Memorial Day weekend.”

Everything VIDA has learned from experience in its six existing metropolitan area clubs has gone into making this seventh one outstanding in content, service, and ambiance. “We listen to our members,” Moore said. The facility consists of 50,000 square feet of meticulously designed indoor spaces on three levels, plus an 8,000-square-foot rooftop Penthouse Pool and Lounge that has a craft cocktail bar and a huge commercial kitchen that also hosts cooking classes.

VIDA’s hotel-like lobby features a full-service bar and café, with ample comfortable seating, free WiFi, and charging stations. Orders via the QR code are delivered throughout the building. This area is open to the public, as are hair services at the Bang Salon and massage, facials, and waxing at the Aura spa. IV treatments and cryotherapy are available in a hyperbaric oxygen treatment and recovery center.

Four group fitness studios are located on the second floor for classes including hot yoga, barre, mat and reformer Pilates, Les Mills Body Pump, Zumba, Focusmaster cardio boxing, and VIDA’s signature SweatBox high-intensity interval train-



With plenty of light and bird's eye views, VIDA will offer a unique fitness experience. Photo by Benjamin Burgess

ing.

The third floor boasts a seemingly infinite array of cardio machines, most facing floor-to-ceiling windows, as well as strength machines, free weights, and dumbbells. There are also six stations for Olympic weightlifting training. Two large turf areas provide space for bodyweight workouts and stretching, and members can borrow Theraguns and vibrating foam rollers from their charging station. Moore is delighted with the welcome VIDA has received in Reston.

“Residents here are committed to an active, healthy lifestyle and epitomize the

Live, Work, and Play mantra,” he said. “We’re grateful for our partnerships with Comstock Companies and the Greater Reston Chamber of Commerce. And Fairfax County has been a tremendous ally, offering unwavering support to deliver this project for the betterment of the community.”

VIDA validates three hours of parking on weekdays and eight on weekends in three parking levels below the building.

A limited number of Founding Member memberships are still available at \$189 per month. The regular rate will be \$249 per month.

### the bulletin



Upcoming art festival at Town Center, fourth annual Tour de Hunter Mill bike ride, community calendar

### sports



South Lakes track runners win big, Morgan’s Message, Lou Petersen award, high school baseball players work with youth ball players

### education



High school musicals “Big Fish” and “Fiddler on the Roof” inspire and astound, Montessori school owner remembered, Judy Singer making an impact

### lifestyle



Smart Home integration, a dentist for your special needs child, local optometrist’s inspiring calling, EAC monthly tips

### opinions

A letter from the Owner/Editor, and Restonian’s spring musings

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# THE BULLETIN

## Reston Jewelry Artist to Participate in Tephra ICA Arts Festival

By Ellyn Wexler, Staff Writer

Reston artist Annette Kramer will join the ranks of more than 200 contemporary artists and artisans from 32 states who will present their original handmade artwork at the annual Tephra ICA [Institute of Contemporary Art] Arts Festival on May 18 and 19 at Reston Town Center [RTC].

Tephra ICA's signature annual fundraiser, now in its 33rd year, "is all about the joy, wonder, and connection one can find in encountering interesting, high-quality artwork," Festival Director Hannah Barco said. "And even better, the artist who made that work will be in their booth ready to talk with you."

Kramer uses polymer clay "to create comfortable, wearable sculptural jewelry inspired by organic forms." With this "chameleon material, lightweight and tactile, I mold, carve, sculpt, screen, sand, drill, and polish everything to create my unique style," she said.

"I push the limits of the clay to create sculptural forms that leverage its inherent strengths including color retention, mixing, elasticity, shear strength and translucency," she explained. "Always, my desire is to infuse my work with a sense of fun, fantasy, and imag-

ination."

Kramer attributes her artistic inspiration to "the textures and forms of nature" she discovers during "long walks in the woods or through the neighboring parks" of Reston. "I am especially fascinated by the 'skeletons' that nature leaves behind: lacy leaves in decay; all kinds of seed pods, from magnolias to milkweeds; mushrooms and fungus that form on rotting stumps; a small shell," she said.

Although Kramer has "attended this festival faithfully for years," this is the first time she applied. "I am very pleased indeed to be part of the competitive and quality show I have so long admired," she said.

In addition to the artist booths [11 a.m.-7 p.m. Saturday; 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Sunday], the Family Art Park [noon-4 p.m. both days] will offer art-making activities for art enthusiasts of all ages in Reston Town Square Park. Free family fun – including face painting, balloon twisting, make-and-take floral arrangements, jump roping performances, and games -- will be available throughout the festival.

But wait, there's more. On Saturday, from 4 to 5 p.m., select artists will offer 10- to 15-minute demonstrations of their creative process. Regional arts

professionals will offer themed guided tours at 1:30 (Virginia artists), 3 (landscape artwork) and 5 p.m. (artists from diverse backgrounds) Saturday, and 11:45 a.m. Sunday (10 artist recipients of 2024 Awards of Excellence) from the Tephra ICA Boot at Mercury Fountain Plaza.

"Every year, Tephra ICA works to expand the festival experience and welcome new attendees," said Sofia Bloom, Tephra's Senior Manager, Gallery and Communications.

The Reston Town Center Association's [RTCA] Concerts on the Town summer series will kick off its season with a free concert by the rock and roll cover band Old Skool from 8 to 10 p.m. Saturday at the RTC Pavilion.

Reston Community Center will present "All Is In Motion, Is Growing, Is You," a site-specific textile installation and accompanying dance response by Arkansas-based multidisciplinary artist Danielle Hatch, at 1 and 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday at the Mercury Fountain.

The RTCA invites attendees to Sip & Stroll, grab a beverage from a Reston Town Center restaurant or a snack from a food vendor as you peruse the artist booths and/or listen to the concert.



Annette Kramer (top) and her piece "Anemone" (bottom). Kramer will display her jewelry at the art festival at Town Center on May 18 and 19

### Overpass, cont'd from page 1

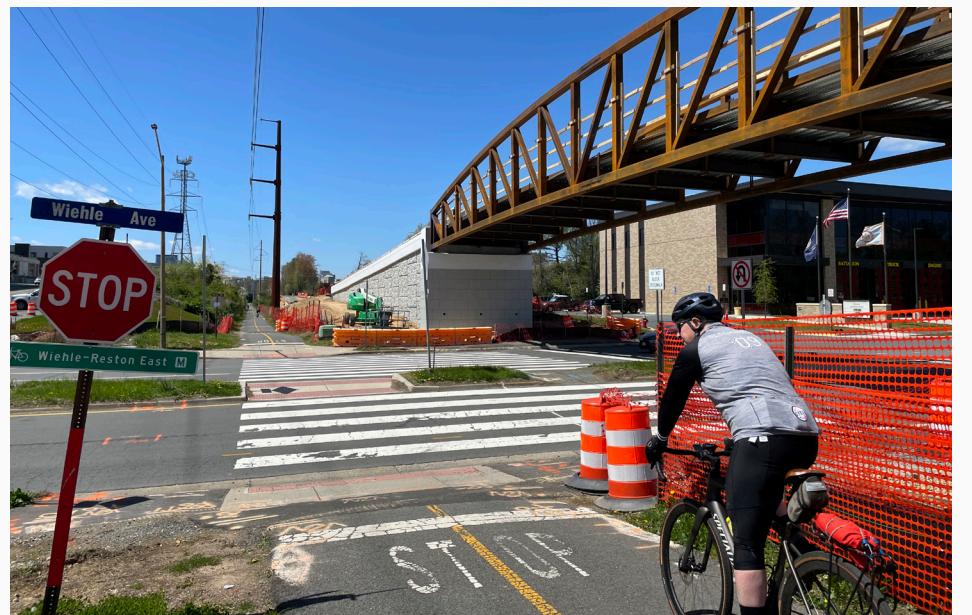
In 2016, Fairfax County held a public hearing to discuss an overpass that would allow drivers to continue unimpeded on Wiehle, and bikers and pedestrians to cross without dodging traffic.

Hunter Mill Supervisor Walter Alcorn stated that the project was complicated by the land acquisition process and the moving of both above- and underground utilities. He noted that a lot of time and attention were paid to the structure's aesthetics.

Originally slated for construction to begin in 2021, acquiring the land took longer than expected, putting the project seven months behind the original schedule, according to Sonia Shahnaj, who supervises the project for the Fairfax County Department of Transportation.

Funding for the project included \$500,000 appropriated by former state Senator Janet Howell, Transportation Safety programs, Pedestrian Improvement projects, and the Gas Tax through the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority.

Janet Sifer bikes the W&OD trail to commute to her office as well as recreationally. As she has found the crossing harrowing both on weekdays and weekends, she is excited for the "lovely" bridge to open. "As a member of the local cycling community, I want everyone to have a safe way to get to their final destination, and this is a great way to extend access."



Overpass plans that began eight years ago are coming into fruition, as bikers and drivers alike will enjoy the safety and beauty at the intersection in a matter of weeks. Photos by Brian Worthy (top) and Benjamin Burgess

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Elden Street Tea Shop celebrated its opening at Lake Anne in Reston on May 4, hosting its 2nd Annual Tea Festival. It was a chilly and rainy day, but many people braved the weather to meander the plaza among the 40 vendors to enjoy all things tea-- including tea-making workshops, Japanese tea ceremony, and tea-inspired accessories. Photo by Isadora Guerreiro



# THE BULLETIN

## Bikers Tour Hunter Mill District

By Peggy Hoover, Staff Writer

The Fourth Annual Tour de Hunter Mill (TdHM) was held May 5. Although the weather was gloomy, 67 enthusiastic bikers assembled for check-in at Reston's North County Governmental Center. Supervisor Walter Alcorn gave welcoming remarks and ride reminders. Bikers started the long ride at 8:30 a.m., and the short ride at 8:45 a.m. Both routes are loops, so rides ended where they began.

Since its start in 2021, the TdHM has featured new routes each year to offer riders a fresh view as well as highlight various bike-friendly areas of the Hunter Mill District. This year's routes (short, 16 miles and long, 27 miles) included a stretch on Fairfax County's portion of the W&OD trail as well as taking ad-

vantage of the newly opened shared-use path along the Route 7 Corridor.

Kelly Westenhoff of Reston Bike Club (RBC) once again designed the route.

Meadowlark Gardens in Vienna provided a rest stop with water and snacks between 9 and 11 a.m. Meadowlark Gardens and the W&OD trail are part of the Nova Park System.

Both Alcorn and Bruce Wright of Fairfax Alliance for Better Biking (FABB) said they would like to see people start biking as a means of transportation for work and running errands close to home. Attention has been given to developing bike lanes as well as developing new pathways. Plans to upgrade the bike lanes to make them safer is on their agenda.

The Tour de Hunter Mill was publicized through the county website with online registration, policy, and agenda information. Bikers were encouraged to use the Ride with GPS event software to have their phone tell them when to turn on the route. In a video, Alcorn encouraged bikers of all ages and skills to participate, stressing that this is not a race, but a fun event to bring the community together. Fairfax County Police and ride marshalls were on hand to help ensure a safe riding experience.

Supervisor Alcorn and his staff would like to thank the 2024 partners: Fairfax Alliance for Better Bicycling (FABB), Reston Bike Club, Reston Community Center, Nova Parks, and Fairfax County Police Department.



Supervisor Alcorn on Tour de Hunter Mill on May 5. Photo by Brian Worthy



### D1 Training Hosts Firefighters Appreciation Event

D1 Training Reston honored firefighters from houses #25 and #39 with a special workout and friendly competition on April 21. The workout session was not only a chance to break a sweat but also an opportunity to build bonds and foster a sense of community. This event was a small way of saying thank you and showing appreciation for the firefighters' unwavering commitment. Together, the local heroes and the D1 team celebrated the strength and resilience that define both groups.



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## Lake Anne Sizzles in the Summer

Washington Plaza @Lake Anne Village Center

CRAFT MARKET and FARMERS MARKET



Saturdays until Dec. 7  
8 a.m. - 2 p.m.

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Li'l Geneva Breakfast by the Lake



Saturdays until Dec. 7  
8 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Enjoy award-winning specialty Monta Coffee and scrumptious breakfast and lunch sandwiches with a spectacular view of Lake Anne and its Geneva-inspired fountain by the Art Gallery.

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Thursdays in June  
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**RA Members: Submit Your Ideas for the 2025 Budget**

WE WANT YOUR FEEDBACK

Reston Association is in the process of preparing its draft budget, and we're looking for your input. Let us know your budget priorities and/or any suggestions you may have by completing this feedback form on our website. Suggestions are being accepted until Monday, July 1. The draft budget will be presented this fall.

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## RCC'S 2024 SUMMER CONCERT SERIES

May 24 – August 30

Wednesdays: Lake Anne Plaza

Thursdays: Halley Rise

Fridays: Reston Town Square Park & Reston Station

Saturdays & Sundays: Reston Town Square Park

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SEE THE FULL SCHEDULE AT:  
[www.restoncommunitycenter.com](http://www.restoncommunitycenter.com)

# THE BULLETIN

## Restonian Wins Recreation.gov's 2023 Share Your Story Grand Prize

By Casey Menish, Staff Writer

Recreation.gov, the U.S. government's centralized travel planning platform and reservation system, hosted its third annual Share Your Story contest in 2023. The writing contest invites "adventurists of America's federal public lands and waters to submit stories detailing their experiences exploring the great outdoors." Tracy Long, a Reston resident for more than 20 years, won the first-place grand prize for her tale of whitewater rafting on the Colorado River through Grand Canyon National Park.

Long's journey in the Grand Canyon began with her group of adventure-loving friends (the self-named Angry Grouse Ski Club) within the larger Ski & Sports Club of Washington, D.C. One of Long's ski buddies had gone on the same whitewater rafting trip nearly a decade ago, and raved about it. Guided by Hatch River Expeditions, Long and about 20 of her ski club friends repeated the excursion.

The rafts they used could fit about a dozen people, and Long's favorite place to sit was in the front, which is nicknamed the "bathtub." When they would approach a rapid, their guide Eric would warn them of "a really spicy one." "It's the best log flume ride you have ever been on," Long said. "Like a bathtub of

50-degree water dumped on your head, I couldn't stop laughing."

When Long signed on for the Grand Canyon trip, she assumed she would be "looking at a lot of rocks ... but everyday was different," from the river conditions to the view of the canyon to the activities. She remembers "hearing the river rush by as you wake up, watching the sun come up and change the color of the rocks."

"The guides were spectacular (Eric, Tanner, and Caleb) ... They let us learn things on our own which is part of the adventure" said Long. "We had to figure out for ourselves how to set up our tents and cots, [while the guides] cooked the most amazing food. They were historians and naturalists, and taught us about the Grand Canyon."

Long had two favorite expeditions during their rafting trip, "One was a little grotto we went into, and we wound our way into the rocks. You think little fairies are going to live there, it is so magical. The water was cold, so you jump in and lose your breath," she recalled. Her second favorite was a hike where "the top was a stream that was coming down into the Grand Canyon. There was a massive, over 100-foot waterfall. At the bottom was a basin you could swim in, another magical space."

"I just loved it, I was smiling and laugh-



ing the whole time ... I'm so hooked on this adventure." said Long. Not only did she leave her adventure with cherished memories and a good story, she also walked away with the competition's grand prize: a hefty gift card to an outdoor retail store and an annual National Parks pass.

Closer to home, Long takes advantage of the Walker Nature Center programs, enjoying the "outdoors in our backyards" on Reston trails, and day trips to hike in Shenandoah or the George Washington & Jefferson National Forest.

Visit Recreation.gov/ShareYourStory to read Long's grand-prize winning story, "My Brilliant Whitewater Grand Canyon Adventure."



Photos contributed by Tracy Long

## COMMUNITY CALENDAR

<b>14</b> MAY	Music of Resilience	<b>16</b> MAY	Plant Swap	<b>18</b> MAY	Connections Concert, and Tephra ICA Arts Festival (details on pg. 2)	<b>19</b> MAY	Holistic Health Fair, and Tephra ICA Arts Festival (details on pg. 2)
<b>24</b> MAY	Happy Hour with Darden and Friends	<b>24</b> MAY	Fab Fridays Concert Series	<b>25</b> MAY	Reston Museum Walking Tours	<b>1</b> JUNE	Reston Pride
<b>6</b> JUNE	Take a Break Concert Series	<b>9</b> JUNE	Art in the Park	<b>12</b> JUNE	Sunset Concerts	<b>15</b> JUNE	Family Fun Entertainment Series

**Tuesday, May 14, 4 p.m.**  
**Music of Resilience**  
Community of Faith United Methodist Church  
Capital Harmonica will perform six compositions that include messages of hope, understanding, resilience and taking action  
Free to the public.

**Thursday, May 16, 6-7:30 p.m.**  
**Plant Swap**  
2025 Fulton Place  
Bring a pest-free houseplant to swap  
Register: <https://bit.ly/3vK7bVS>

**Saturday, May 18, 4 p.m.**  
**Connections Concert**  
Hunter Woods Community Center  
\$25- adults, \$18 seniors  
Register: <https://www.etix.com/ticket/e/1039318>

**Sunday, May 19, 11 a.m.-3 p.m.**  
**Holistic Health Fair**

Lake Anne Plaza  
Inaugural Holistic Health Fair, a pioneering event dedicated to holistic well-being for both people and the planet.

**Fridays, beginning May 24, 5:30-6:45 p.m.**  
**Happy Hour with Darden and Friends**  
Reston Town Center, Town Square Park  
Free for all ages.

**Fridays, beginning May 24, 7-8:30 p.m.**  
**Fab Fridays Concert Series**  
Reston Station  
Free for all ages.

**Saturdays in May, 10 a.m.**  
**Reston Museum walking tours**  
The Founding of Reston Tour will be offered May 18 and 25. While exploring Reston's earliest areas, tour goers will learn how Reston's

founding principles were implemented, establishing Reston as a place where we can live, work, and play today.

In the fall, Reston Museum will resume the Before Reston tour focusing on the Bowman and Wiehle era history. Keep an eye out for registration!  
Register for a walk at: <https://www.restonmuseum.org/copy-of-events>

**Saturday, June 1, noon-6 p.m.**  
**Reston Pride**  
Lake Anne Plaza  
Support and celebrate the Reston LGBTQ+ community!

**Thursdays, beginning June 6, 7-8:30 p.m.**  
**Take a Break Concert Series**  
Halley Rise, 2025 Fulton Place  
Free for all ages.

**Sundays, beginning June 9, 7-8 p.m.**

**Art in the Park**  
Reston Town Center, Town Square Park  
Free for all ages.


**Wednesdays, beginning June 12, 7-8 p.m.**  
**Sunset Concerts**  
Lake Anne Plaza

Free for all ages.

**Saturdays, beginning June 15, 10-10:45 a.m.**  
**Family Fun Entertainment Series**  
Reston Town Center, Town Square Park  
Free for all ages.

Community Calendar

Scan the QR code to access The Reston Letter's "Upcoming Community Events" calendar submission form and share your event!



# EDUCATION

## Remembering Eileen Minarik

By Alexis Davis, Sunset Hills Montessori School Administrator

Eileen Minarik stood as a beacon of commitment and innovation in the Montessori educational landscape for nearly half a century. Her journey through teaching, mentoring, and leading has left an indelible mark on the Reston community. A close friend of the late Robert E. Simon, founder of Reston, Eileen shared his vision of a community that was welcoming and accessible to everyone.

From her early years in Philadelphia, Eileen was immersed in a family that cherished education and community service. She first dipped her toes into the then-fledgling Montessori community of Northern Virginia in 1974, initially as a parent, then as a classroom assistant with encouragement from her child's teacher.

It didn't take long for Eileen to realize that education was her true calling. With her teacher training completed, she rose to a lead teacher position, igniting a deep interest in Montessori's methods. Her contributions extended beyond the classroom as she played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Montessori program at Green Hedges School in 1976.

In 1984, Eileen's unwavering passion

for education led her to establish Reston Montessori, operating out of her home. Two years later, she expanded her vision by taking on a partner, further growing the school. However, in 1994, she made the difficult decision to sell the school to her partner.

Undeterred, Eileen then founded Sunset Hills Montessori School (SHMS) in its original location on Isaac Newton Square. Her mission was clear: to provide a nurturing and stimulating environment for children to discover and learn, working closely with parents to prioritize the educational needs of children.

Eileen's commitment to quality education was further exemplified in 2003 when she purchased a former church on South Lakes Drive, transforming it into a thriving learning environment that expanded SHMS's capacity and facilities. Her ability to connect with students was profound; she taught multiple generations within families and integrated former students into her staff.

Eileen retired as a lead teacher in 2014, but remained a daily presence at SHMS. Her love for the school and its community was palpable, and she continued to greet children as they arrived each

morning with stuffed animals, often characters from familiar books and stories. She wove her passion for children's literature into the fabric of her teaching, creating lessons that danced off the pages of the books she adored.

Eileen's interests outside the classroom were as rich and varied as her educational methods. The lifelong voracious reader embraced both electronic and traditional books. Her love for the Harry Potter series was renowned; she was proud of her collection of the first book, which represented an impressive 14 languages. She often said, "I am just full of useless information!" But to those who knew her, Eileen's extensive knowledge of various subjects made her a captivating conversationalist, and her genuine interest in others left people feeling understood and valued.

Following her passing in November, Eileen's husband Joe remains deeply committed to continuing her legacy. He ensures that SHMS stays true to its founding mission and continues to serve as a vital part of the Reston community. Eileen's life and work reflect a dedication to education transcending time, nurturing thousands of young minds, and fostering a community celebrating edu-



Sunset Hills Montessori's founder Eileen Minarik left her legacy in Reston. Photo contributed by SHM

cation and equipping each student for a fulfilling life.

In April, a Sweet Bay Magnolia tree was planted on the SHMS campus in memory of Eileen. Students contributed to this tribute by decorating small stones that were placed at the tree's base, creating a vibrant and uplifting space that honors her memory and enhances the school's landscape.

### Making an Impact

## Judy Singer Supports and Serves

By Chuck Cascio, Author and Former South Lakes Teacher

Although Judy Singer, a 1987 graduate of South Lakes High School, left Reston for college at the University of Wisconsin, graduated, then lived in Istanbul, Turkey, St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands, and North Carolina, she reflected recently on the place where she grew up: "As a kid, I remember loving Terraset Elementary and RHOA day camp in the summers where I probably traversed every inch of Reston — its trails, underpasses, swimming pools, soccer fields, even row-boat-ing on Lake Anne and getting soaked under the fountain. Many of the kids I met are still good friends to this day! Those experiences helped shape my vision of what a thriving community looks like, and I have aligned my personal and professional goals toward building and improving communities to reflect that."

An accomplished trumpet player, Judy began as a music major at the University of Wisconsin, but says, "I quickly learned

I did not have the drive or dedication to sit in a practice room for hours on end. I'm a 'people-person' and always craved human interaction and socialization. I switched my major to psychology, and although I did not pursue it as a career, I find I use it daily!"

Judy has applied her need for "human interaction and socialization" at a grassroots level: "I have dedicated my career to working in the nonprofit sector supporting various causes." She served as a board member of the American Turkish Association of Washington, is a current board member of the Reston Museum, and an advisory council member for the Cathy Hudgins Community Center.

Judy worked for six years as senior director for Fellowship Square of Reston where, she says, "We made a significant impact on Reston's footprint, building the new Lake Anne House and renovating Hunters Woods Fellowship House which created and preserved homes for over 600 older adults with extremely limited incomes."

Now, as the newly appointed CEO at Habitat for Humanity, Loudoun, whose mission is "bringing people together to build homes, communities, and hope," Judy intends to expand her commitment to community service: "The lack of affordable housing in the D.C. area is a crucial issue affecting many individuals and families. As our region rapidly grows, housing costs have skyrocketed, making it increasingly challenging for lower- and middle-income residents to find affordable housing. My hope is that we can make a dent in this landscape."

Judy's passion for working as a community builder goes back to her early years in Reston: "My mother instilled in me a strong sense of community service. She was a volunteer with organizations committed to helping shape the Reston community as a place where folks from all walks of life could live and enjoy. I like to think I am following in her civically-minded footsteps."

Reston also provided what Judy refers to as an "idyllic childhood because of all



Judy Singer

that it had, and still has, to offer with its 'open community' feel – natural beauty, proximity to the mountains and ocean, nearby Washington, D.C., and numerous accessible small towns and rolling countryside spaces. "I feel compelled to 'support and serve,' fueled by my awareness of the countless individuals in need who share this planet."

## Herndon Brings Back Personalized Stadium Bricks

By Cid Ferrara, Herndon parent

Herndon High School has launched an ambitious fundraising initiative to enhance its stadium facilities. To help achieve this goal, the Boosters have revived a cherished tradition: their personalized stadium bricks. Renovations and the pandemic caused the program to be put on pause, but interest from alumni and current Herndon families have brought the program back and all proceeds will help fund the needed stadium improvements. Now current students, families, alumni, and community supporters have the opportunity to leave

a lasting — and personalized — contribution to support Herndon's efforts and to memorialize an honored connection with the school.

The funds raised will significantly impact the school's sports facilities. By investing in this project, supporters are helping to foster a sense of pride and unity within the Herndon/Reston community.

For more information on the fundraiser and how to purchase a personalized stadium brick, visit Herndon High School's Instagram page at @hornetboosters or contact the project coordinator at cidferrara@gmail.com.



Stadium bricks are a tradition at HHS Photo by Cid Ferrara

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# EDUCATION

## 'Big Fish' Soars at SLHS

Cappies Review by Mia Mortman of McLean High School

Gather round, dreamers! Smalltown America is looking for someone to do the Alabama Stomp, propel out of a cannon, and save a town from a flood. Come on down to South Lakes' production of "Big Fish School Edition" to "be the hero" of the night!

"Big Fish," a contemporary musical with lyrics and music by Andrew Lipa and a book by John August, takes place in an idealized 20th century Alabama. Based on the 1998 book and 2003 film of the same name, "Big Fish" premiered on Broadway in 2013. It follows the fantastical Edward Bloom as he battles mortality and relives his glory days where he "fight[s] the dragons" while his pragmatic son Will struggles to align Edward's tall tales with the reality that his father is an absent father figure, believing that there is a "River Between [Them]." With tap dance, bright colors across the stage, and a whopping five hundred daffodils, "Big Fish" mixes comedy, fantasy, and inevitable gut-punching reality to form two and a half hours of whimsical charm and introspective reflection.

August Rivers (Edward Bloom) seamlessly navigated the transition from the charismatic younger version of the character to the frail and fumbling older

Edward diagnosed with cancer. Rivers often walked onto the stage's extension to allow the audience a closer view of his crazed or endearing expressions. It-suko Scoville's performance as southern belle Sandra Bloom was sensational. It was a good thing that Sandra "doesn't need a roof," because her poignant ballad brought the whole house down. Her son, Will, was played by Henry Carter. Will journeyed through desperation and acceptance regarding his father's health, and Carter nailed both the highs and lows of his character.

Each character from Edward's stories brought another dimension to the show. Hadley Smith effortlessly navigated the switch between the flirtatious Mermaid and Edward's high school sweetheart Jenny Hill. Karl (Noah Kennedy) was quite literally larger than life, towering over everyone on stilts. The bass of Kennedy's voice was a perfect match for Karl's wise lines, often providing the most insight to the show. Josh Lewis played the eccentric and animalistic Amos Calloway, bordering delightfully on absurdity. Caroline Flood played the daunting Witch, revealing in alerting townspeople that they will lead "an uneventful life and then die."

Despite major star power from the leads and supporting actors, this show could not have succeeded without the



South Lakes Theatre Arts' production of "Big Fish" played to sold-out crowds on May 2, 3, and 4. The show received seven Cappies nominations. Photo by Josef Garcia

sheer dedication of the ensemble. Number after number, the ensemble worked to make the story feel more complete, singing and dancing their hearts out. They were helped by the immaculate choreography (Noah Kennedy, Anna Leo, and August Rivers), which brought energy to each number through thirteen different styles, notably tap and jazz.

In fairytales, even the smallest detail counts. The unit set (by Big Fish Scenic Design and Set Construction & Painting Crew) was clean and versatile, allowing the bulk of the scenic storytelling to be

done via projection. Edward and Sandra had differentiating hair and make-up for their looks as the older and younger versions of the character (by Isabelle Philippe and Mae Shaw). Costumes for characters such as the Witch and Karl were bold and bright (created by Logan Lin and Anna Schoenborn).

South Lakes' "Big Fish School Edition" was a rollercoaster ride of ecstasy, fantasy, and sorrow. While the cast may have revealed "How It Ends," the audience departed with hearts full of dreams and a renewed sense of possibility.

## 'Fiddler on the Roof' Brings Down House

Cappies Review by Allie Vargo of McLean High School

What is tradition? Is it the wisdom of ages passed? Does it provide the stability on which our world rests? Or is tradition just an outdated set of rules, devoid of value, preventing our society from changing for the better? An essential production which questions the nature of society's customs, Herndon High School's breathtaking production of "Fiddler on the Roof" tells the universal tale of change, love, and hope in the dawning of a new era.

The Tony-award winning musical, which premiered on Broadway at the Imperial Theatre in 1964, is set in the Ukrainian village of Anatevka in 1904. The story follows Tevye, the father and patriarch of his Jewish household, as he attempts to manage the lives and marriages of his five daughters. However, change is brewing across the land; and conservative Tevye, thrust into its midst, must grapple with his ability to adapt in the coming world.

As Tevye, Ethan Hardy's performance was mesmerizing. With a beautifully versatile voice, flawless comedic wit, and a naturally upbeat and grounded physicality, Hardy wholly and completely embodied the humorous, traditional, and hardworking nature of his character. When pictured with his daughters, Hardy's fond yet exasperated expressions were instant hallmarks of a doting father, which his passionate monologues debating the happiness of his daughters only served to emphasize. Similarly, Hardy's relationship with his wife Golde, played by Allie Steinhardt, was hilarious

yet heartwarming in every way. Despite fighting like cats and dogs, the underlying affection present in voices and movements of both Steinhardt and Hardy was completely captivating, making their married life feel entirely real.

Tevye's three oldest daughters, Tzeitel, Hodel and Chava, played by Emy Jimenez, Rae Weston, and Nora Blythe respectively, perfectly portrayed the challenges of growing up in a traditional community. Together, the trio's angelic voices and mischievous actions immediately depicted the girls' sisterly bond. Along with their chosen lovers, Motel, Perchik, and Fyedka, played by Will McClough, Mateo Pinover, and CJ Nemetz, the girls' young romances enthralled the audience in their honest and loving, yet scandalously modern, partnerships.

However, these young lovers did not woo everyone: Yente the Matchmaker, played by Gaby Bradley, was decidedly not impressed. The town gossip, Bradley skillfully had the audience in stitches with her scheming plots and gushing chatter. Her voice, easily recognizable over the chatter of the ensemble, carried with it the promise of rumor and intrigue, and drew the gaze of the audience to her performance. As the Rabbi, Bo Chatterjee was equally enthralling. His hunched back and witty remarks made him a total crowd favorite and coupled with his easy authority over the villagers of his congregation, Chatterjee cemented his role as not only an intellectual but also an incredible comedian.

Throughout the musical, the extraordinarily intricate and extensive set (designed by Charly Olsen and Carson Brownlee) thoroughly immersed the audience



The matchmakers sing their classic Broadway song. Fiddler earned 18 Cappies nominations. Photo by Michelle Blanchet

in the small shtetl of Anatevka. Further, the show's costumes (executed by Livie Godfrey and Maggie Growney) were not only accurate but also engaging, telling the story of the lovers and religion in fabric alone. Finally, the show's orchestra, titled the "Fiddler Orchestra," was completely breathtaking. Every melody and break in the score were perfectly executed, with the notes melding brilliantly with the voices and beats of the actors onstage.

A classically poignant story which resonates across time, "wonder of wonder, miracle of miracles" is too little to describe the absolute majesty that is Herndon High School's production of "Fiddler on the Roof."

"Over 100 students were involved in the cast, crew, and orchestra, that inspired younger students. "I liked how when the stage was dark, you couldn't see the stage crew moving the sets and that they had a lot of details. They even held up lights that looked like stars. It inspired me to want to direct plays or be in a stage crew when I'm older," said Armstrong Elementary 3rd grader, Ava Etter. "The cast was so good at bringing the scenes to life with their soulful songs, artistic sets, and silly dances!" added Lili King another third grader.

## Herndon High School Band Wraps Up Great Season

By Suzanne Worrell, Guest Writer

The Herndon High School Band traveled to Hawaii to represent Virginia at the Pearl Harbor Memorial Parade in December. The evening event took place under the lights and palm trees of Waikiki, and was broadcasted internationally. The HHS Band marched for nearly 45 minutes as parade unit 84. During the trip, students also met with veterans, visited the USS Arizona Memorial, and toured the island of O'ahu.

Band Director Kathleen Jacoby and key organizers Angela McCafferty, Marie Coleman and Treasurer

Lynne DeRoche as well as volunteers and the Herndon community gave their time and funds to help students experience this once-in-a-lifetime event.

Back in Virginia, the Band performed at the Reston Holiday Parade and the Herndon Tree Lighting ceremony, and gave many public concerts. The band hosted the 26th annual Showcase of Bands.

The band program includes Color Guard, Jazz Band, and Indoor Drumline. Color Guard is an exciting visual component, adding color, spectacle, and dance.

Continued on page 7

  
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# EDUCATION

## HHS Band, cont'd from page 6

During the winter, the Color Guard members practice fundamentals, including throwing and catching both flags and rifles, and learn and perfect the routine they will use for the season.

"The highlight for me this year will be going to the Hampton Coliseum to compete at Finals," member Teagan Kohles, said. "We have had several local competitions, which were great fun. I'd encourage rising freshmen and other high schoolers to join Color Guard because it's really enjoyable and you can make great friends. We work hard and really encourage each other to improve."

Jazz Band is another important part of the band program. "Jazz is just cool," said baritone sax player Quinn Reda. "I love the music, love the feeling. Jazz is one of my pas-

sions. You get to do solos and improvise."

The jazz band program was so popular this year the musicians had to be broken into two groups. Their music ranges from Miles Davis and John Coltrane tunes to modern, innovative pieces. Performing at the Chantilly Jazz Festival is on their May calendar.

Keeping everyone in time, the Indoor Drumline runs a clinic after school on Thursdays. Students get to try all the drums, and learn rhythmic pieces called cadences. Pandora Grisson plays bass drum and snare. "I'd never done any band activity before. I love it, it's so varied, we get to try everything," she said. "Plus I'm looking forward to performing at the Spring Concert. We're playing a new cadence which is really groovy."

Indoor Drumline is seeking more members. "Please join us," Grisson said. "It's really fun, the rhythm is awesome!"



Section leaders for the band with Band Director Ms. Jacoby Photo by Suzanne Worrell

## Crossword Corner

By Reston crossword constructor, Joe O'Neill

Joe O'Neill, a 40-year Reston resident, is a retired former 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 tenth crossword puzzle creation, made specifically for The Reston Letter readers!

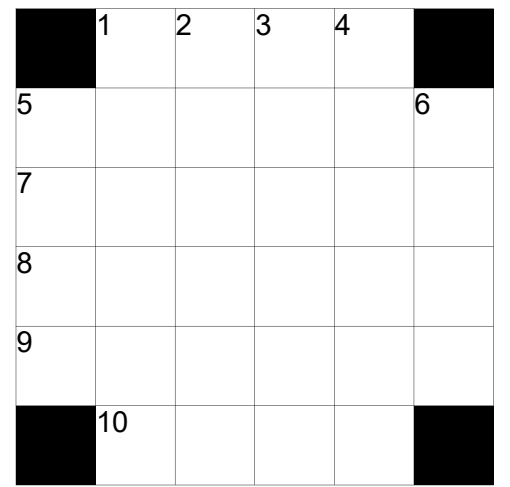
### Swirls and Girls

#### ACROSS

1. Flubbed
5. Zigag on the slopes
7. Hat that's also a canal?
8. Swirls in streams
9. 1930s-'40s Actress/Singer Durbin
10. Hauls into court

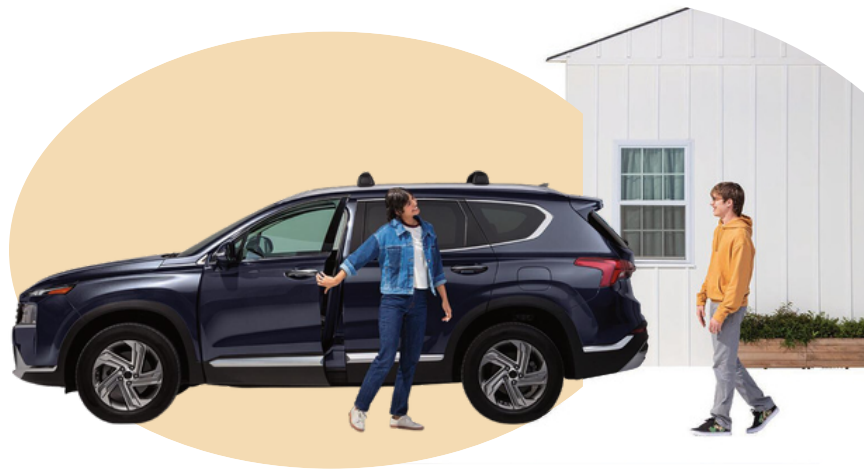
#### DOWN

1. Grass units
2. Martin of "Mission: Impossible"
3. Jerry's former girlfriend on "Seinfeld"
4. \_\_\_ Lib (2nd-wave feminist movement) or Loo
5. Raced
6. Pupusa dough



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# SPORTS

## Stick Stars: HRYL Lou Petersen Award Honorees

By Laurie Dornak, South Lakes Boosters Club

The past two weeks have been filled with final VHSL regular season spring sports games/meets before the local high school teams launch into post-season play. At four special senior night lacrosse games, two Hornets and two Seahawks were honored with the Herndon-Reston Youth Lacrosse (HRYL) club's Lou Petersen Memorial Award for their positive impact both on and off the field.

HRYL (established 1996) is a non-profit youth lacrosse program for boys and girls from kindergarten through ninth grade that serves the Herndon and Reston communities for student athletes living in the Herndon and South Lakes high school pyramids. To celebrate the dedication and spirit of Louis M. Petersen, former Commissioner (1996-2013) who led the club with great passion, HRYL honors exceptional individuals with this annual award.

"The Lou Petersen Memorial Award is given annually to athletes who embody the virtues Lou valued most: perseverance, hard work, team spirit, and wholehearted dedication to the sport and the community. This award isn't just about recognizing talent; it's about acknowledging those who, like Lou, uplift others and foster respect both on and off the field," as described on the HRYL website (<https://hrylax.com/>).

Lou's influence is described as remarkable with a simple philosophy: "respect for one another is paramount, and sportsmanship is just as crucial as scoring goals." The awards are presented to Herndon and South Lakes high school seniors who have shown exceptional spirit and leadership in our community.

On April 25 and May 1, the following honorees were recognized prior to their senior night games for their contributions to the local lacrosse community as

a testament to the values Petersen championed.

**Xavier Legler**, four-year varsity letterman at South Lakes, exemplifies the qualities of a true leader and a defensive powerhouse. Team captain for the past two years, Xavier led his team strategically and inspired them through his commitment and performance. He is recognized for his exceptional defensive skills, accumulating 117-caused turnovers and 138 ground balls over his high school career. Off the field, Xavier contributes to the community as a volunteer coach for elementary school basketball and youth lacrosse programs. Xavier embodies the spirit of HRYL through his leadership, sportsmanship, and ongoing commitment to promoting lacrosse among youth in the community

**Bree Lizama**, determined and focused on the lacrosse field, combines her high lacrosse IQ with speed, agility, and endurance to be a menace to opponents. Bree has a strong field presence and takes command of the offense with an uncanny ability to juke, dodge, and shoot. She has been a committed member of her club team and engages with future Hornets by helping with HRYL girls teams. Bree's most vital attribute is respect for her teammates, opponents, referees, and coaches. She is a true pleasure to coach and is highly regarded by her teammates.

**Brenna Settar**, four-year Varsity letterman at South Lakes, began playing lacrosse in kindergarten at HRYL. Team captain for the past two seasons, she earned First Team All-Region honors and set the SLHS Draw Control record as a junior. Brenna volunteers as an assistant coach and supports instructional clinics. She also served as the team captain of the Varsity Field Hockey team; was a state qualifier for track and field, and played Varsity Seahawk Basketball.



Left to right: Steve Lacoursiere, Xavier Legler, and South Lakes Head Coach Brian Gilman. Photo taken by Jenny McArthur.



Left to right: Bree Lizama, HRYL Commissioner Ann Duffey. Photo taken by Herndon High School Athletics.



Left to right: South Lakes Assistant Coach Makayla Hutchinson, South Lakes Head Coach Erin Kinney, Brenna Settar, South Lakes JV Head Coach Myah Robinson and HRYL Commissioner Ann Duffey. Photo taken by South Lakes Athletics.



Thatcher Swinton and his family. Photo taken by Herndon High School Athletics.

Brenna will attend the University of Tennessee in the fall where she will pursue a degree in nursing, and continue playing lacrosse.

**Thatcher Swinton**, four-year letterman and team captain for the past two years at Herndon High School, started playing HRYL lacrosse at age 5 and truly "respects the game" and embodies the passion, leadership, and grit that have become hallmarks of this award. Thatcher exemplifies sportsmanship on the field, citizenship off the field, and leadership in all endeavors. These characteristics have helped him earn the respect of his teammates and coaches alike. He is also a captain and three-year starter on the Varsity Football team. Off the field, he has taken on an instrumental "leader" role at home as the oldest of six siblings and in his church community. Thatcher maintains a 4.3 GPA and will attend BYU in the fall where he will continue his lacrosse career.

HRYL is a member of the Northern Virginia Youth Lacrosse League (NVYLL). Lacrosse is primarily a spring sport with registration opening in late November. The season starts in January, running through the end of June. HRYL also runs fall clinics/scrimmages.

## SL Brings Home a Penn Relays Wheel

By Laurie Dornak, South Lakes Boosters

The 2024 Penn Relays, the event's 128th edition of the event held April 25 to 27, welcomed more than 15,000 athletes from all over the world and all ages and skill levels (high school, college, Special Olympics, professional/elite and Masters). South Lakes High School Outdoor track team sent 19 athletes who qualified to compete at the historic Franklin Field.

### 4x100m Boys Relay:

Finn Middleton, Marcus Coker, Blake Jackson, Miles Jackson

### 4x400m Boys Relay:

Marcus Coker, Finn Middleton, Cliff Trapp, Miles Jackson

### 4x800m Boys Relay:

George Hood, Jason Raffel, Cole Casey, Manuel Auquierre-Martinez finished 52nd with 8:14.56

### 4x100m Girls Relay:

Melanie Velasco, Sireen Hall, Anna Dooley, Sofi Pehrson

### 4x400m Girls Relay:

Ella Laban, Precious Mensah, Anna Dooley, Sofia Pehrson

### 4x800m Girls Relay:

Aya Ryan, Catalina Simon, Caroline Elliott, Bella Harsanyi (finished third with 8:50.89)

Girls 4x800m Relay teams (four heats) battled for one of the coveted 12 spots in the Championship of America (COA). The Seahawks qualified, finishing first in their heat in 9:11.06, each leg a first place time.

The Seahawks took third place behind Edwin Allen (Jamaica) by .13 seconds. With that, the Seahawks set a new PR, a new school record, and a new Virginia state record. Beyond excited Seahawk families formed a victory tunnel for the team when they left the field.

The legs were run in order of Ryan, Simon, Harsanyi, and Elliott on anchor. Harsanyi passed multiple runners during her leg of the race, closing the gap. Then, Elliott dueled the Jamaican runner down the straightaway which pushed them, taking eight seconds off their own state record and 27 seconds from their 2023 Penn Relays time. The Seahawks were incredible with multiple PRs combining to run 8:50.89, which is now the 12th US time.

The Seahawk finish earned them one of track and field's most revered awards, a Penn Relays 'Wheel.' The winning team of the college and high school relay Championship of America is awarded a 32-inch version of the wheel.

Since the 1980s, the wheel has been produced in plastic, rather than bronze. Winners of the other relay events, including high school, Olympic development,



Proud families of the Seahawk 4x800m Girls Relay team. Photo shared by Kelly Harsanyi

and special Olympic relays, receive smaller plaques. The wheel depicts Benjamin Franklin, seated on his library chair and holding an olive sprig, shaking the hands of a winning relay team.

"We may have broken the high school track hug record," said Shanen Elliot, summing up the day. "It was a very special and emotional day. My heart was so full, a total energy rush of pride and there weren't too many dry eyes among the parents and families."



# SPORTS

## Game Changers: SL Morgan's Message Club

By Laurie Dornak, South Lakes Boosters

In this Mental Health Awareness Month of May, a one-year-old club at South Lakes High School, Alliance on Mental Health (Morgan's Message®), shines the light on the topic. The club creates "activities and events to normalize the conversation for mental health, builds a community by and for student-athletes, and provides a platform for advocacy."

Senior Keira Duggan was the founding student leader who worked with the Assistant Director of Student Activities to establish the club last spring. Joining Keira were her teammates and friends, Brenna Settar and Abbey Henry, who form the club's core ambassador team. While started within the student-athlete community, the club is all-inclusive to South Lakes students.

The club leaders or ambassadors liaise with Morgan's Message®, a "501(c)(3) that strives to eliminate the stigma surrounding mental health within the high school and collegiate student-athlete community." The Seahawk club embraced these ideas to expand the dialogue on mental health by normalizing conversations, empowering those who suffer in silence, and supporting those who feel alone through their club activities and dedication games.

The club works with Morgan's Message® Education Program Liaison Annie (Foster) Rodgers, a South Lakes and East Carolina University alumna. Through this connection, the club receives information for organizing dedication games; content for club meetings and Morgan's Message® materials to share at both. Last spring, the club successfully worked with the South Lakes and Herndon Varsity

Girls Lacrosse teams to host their first dedication game at the spring season opener.

"While the topic is somewhat tough, the response to the club has been positive," says Duggan. "Last year, we had one dedication and club meetings that focused more on de-stressing and less about lessons. This year was a year of growth as we increased the number of dedication games to three that included the Varsity Boys Basketball and Lacrosse teams."

At these games, the teams dedicate the game to the memory of Morgan Rodgers, former Duke University Lacrosse student athlete who died in 2019 after battling mental health struggles. The teams and fans take a moment of silence in remembrance of Morgan before the game begins.

At the May 1 South Lakes Varsity Boys Lacrosse game, the Morgan's Message® butterfly stickers were on full display on helmets worn by both teams. South Lakes and Herndon high school clubs are in good company with other FCPS schools such as James Madison, Westfield, Lake Braddock, and Centreville that support similar clubs to bring this message forward to their communities.

"It has been exciting and a lot of work to form, develop, and grow a club like this one," said Duggan. "It is important to know what this [mental health struggles] is - that it is OK to not be OK - and that there is help. For athletes or any student doing something at a high level, it's OK to take breaks."

Now that she's about to graduate from South Lakes, Duggan hopes to pass along her legacy to underclassmen who will continue this important club and expand it from where she left off.



South Lakes vs Madison Varsity Boys Lacrosse Senior night and Dedication game. Players opted to don Morgan's Message® logo butterfly stickers on their helmets. Photo by Jenny McArthur



Play ball! The Reston/Herndon community high school baseball players are active with our youth leagues. Teams from all age divisions marched through Town Center on Reston Herndon Little League's Opening Day Parade, where they got to meet the South Lakes and Herndon High baseball players. Photos by Isadora Guerreiro



South Lakes players helped on opening day in the snack shack, in the press boxes announcing, and on the fields umpiring. Both South Lakes and Herndon high schools also hosted Youth Baseball Nights, where kids from the the two local baseball leagues get in free and get to go on the field with the players

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# OPINIONS

## Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

Thank you for your loyal readership and kind words of encouragement as I have navigated starting and growing this community newspaper. Many of you know, but plenty of you don't know, that I am a full-time local high school English teacher, who saw a need for a unifying publication for Reston and decided to take a chance at starting one. Our first issue was published in January of 2023.

I've loved getting to know people in so many facets of Reston, from government officials and RA members, to small business owners, artists, writers, historians, non-profit leaders, administrators and teachers, church members, PTA members, community club members, coaches, youth sports league volunteers, the list goes on and on. What a wonderful community Reston is!

When holding the mission statement next to what the paper looks like today, I am proud to say that we have not strayed from it: "The Reston Letter seeks to inform the Reston community of local events- upcoming and past- highlight local groups' and individuals' accomplishments, and, secondarily, to provide a platform for residents to weigh in on local topics relevant to the majority of readers."

My strategy was and is straightforward. Find people who love Reston- who want to write about and take pictures of it. Make and maintain connections in every space in our community who can share their news and events. People love to see themselves, their kids, their neighbors, and the events they're passionate about publicized in their community. Thankfully, no one loves Reston more than Restonians, and I often get kind emails that keep me going.

The next part is also about finding people- finding business owners whose target audience is also in Reston.

With printing nearly 20,000 copies each month and distributing them to mailboxes, businesses, and other community locations, we are quickly becoming an excellent way to get exposure for area businesses in a targeted niche. At the same time, our product has improved in quality because of having a budget to pay a brilliantly skilled layout designer and some great social media and



Dawn Crosson is the owner and editor of The Reston Letter  
Photo by Isadora Guerreiro

graphics contractors to add to The Reston Letter's staff of volunteer writers, editors, and photographers.

In order for every household in Reston to get a free copy of The Reston Letter each month, we need to bring in more money, and to bring in more money each month we need advertisers and/or sponsors to support us. We will launch a new website soon, and will be selling advertising on our website, as well as publishing articles on their own, instead of only a PDF of the print version.

And if monetary help is out of the question for you, we can always use more volunteers to write, edit, photograph, design, and organize. We've started a book club and a podcast, and have more ideas on the horizon. Please consider doing what you can to encourage community support for this little publication that has brought the Reston community so many smiles over the past year and a half.

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### Restonian

## Reston, We Can Have Nice Things!

By Restonian, Reston Blogger

Only decades in the making, our fancy new pedestrian bridge over Wiehle Avenue will soon allow spandex-clad local cyclists to finally achieve their dream of whipping unimpeded through our plastic fantastic planned community at Mach 2. But why should they have all the fun? We're Reston, after all, and we should Think Big about our Live, Work, Play lifestyle! Let's put to use some of that sweeet tax revenue coming from all those new oddly-angled buildings and gated communities that had county planners' eyes pop out of their sockets and turn to dollar signs like in a 1930s cartoon. The options are limitless!

Even as high rises stretch towards it, it's still painfully obvious that the Reston Town Center Metro station is closer to Target than... Reston Town Center. So why not use some of those tax dollars to build an underground people mover not unlike the one at Dulles, with the TSA checkpoint replaced by an easy-to-understand kiosk explaining parking options? Speaking of which, the parking garage near the Reston-Wiehle Metro station is great, except maybe for the endless circling to get down to level G-96. Imagine a giant, appropriately earth-toned bouncy

slide to speed your way down to your car after a long day of drudgery strapping bombs to dolphins, or whatever, at work!

Our lakes, too, are untapped resources, only suitable for leisure craft like kayaks and booze boats. But after just a couple of decades of dredging, we could have ferries plying their way between Lake Anne and Lake Thoreau in half the time it currently takes to cross the Toll Road in a car at rush hour (which isn't saying much).

And then there's the "play" part of Live, Work, Play! Mt. Reston isn't what it used to be, what with climate change and all, but in its earliest days, advertising for Reston (really) advertised a "ski slope with tow." Why not go all in, and build a gondola lift to whisk the East Coast Aspen crowd up the dizzying 45-foot slope, with apres-ski activities in the church parking lot behind it? And of course, Reston originally had a stable to attract the horsey crowd, but why not go all in and build a giant, appropriately earth-toned, steeplechase? Mint juleps, of course, would have to be replaced with something more appropriate, like an (Off) White Russian.

Or we could be *really* ambitious and build another bridge over the Toll Road, and maybe a few new sidewalks and traffic lights to keep up with the traffic that's already here! Now, let's not get crazy here, money doesn't grow on trees, keep clapping and maybe we can start site planning in 2045 and maybe have a nice rendering of an (unfunded) bridge flanked by some fanciful concrete bollards by 2060, the end.

## Share a Graduation Announcement in The Reston Letter

Fill out the form by May 30!

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"The Reston Letter was the single most successful marketing campaign we ran to build brand awareness for our new VIDA Fitness flagship location in the Reston market. They have engaged readers who are truly invested in the Reston community." -Aaron Moore, President, VIDA Fitness/Urban Adventures

RESTON LETTER

VIDA Fitness Plans Spring Opening at Reston Row

By Eliza Weber, Staff Writer  
VIDA Fitness is not a gym. Rather, it's a community. It's a place where members can gather to socialize, eat, drink, work, relax, recover, and live healthy.

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# LIFESTYLE

## Tips For Selecting a Pediatric Dentist For Your Special Needs Child

By Rishita Jaju, DMD, Smile Wonders

Finding a good pediatric dentist for any child requires research, but when you're looking for a dentist for a child with differing abilities and some special needs, that decision is even more important. Not every dental practice has the experience, skill, and knowledge to work with children, let alone children that need advanced training, understanding, and experience.

**Step 1:** Read reviews and websites, and gather as much information as possible. Consult friends and family, as well

as other families dealing with similar challenges, local special needs programs, and community-based resources. Once you have some names, narrow down the field further or prioritize choices by doing some online research.

**Step 2:** Interview potential dentistry teams before setting an appointment. A good pediatric dental office will be happy to talk with parents and create a plan for a successful visit. During your conversation, ask some questions: How do you handle sensory issues? Is your practice confident in handling special needs children? Why?

Are parents allowed to be present during exams? Are you flexible with appointments so my child can be there when they are at their best? How do you maintain consistency for special needs children.

**Step 3:** Address potential issues. Children with special needs may have very specific issues. Talk to your prospective dentist about them. For example, many autistic children have sensory challenges. They may not like certain movements or parts of their bodies being touched or moved in a certain way.

**Step 4:** Have a few quick and easy vis-

its to build trust between your child and the dentist. It will also allow your child to get used to the setting and what happens there.

**Step 5:** The whole team should have excellent communication skills. They will signal what they are about to do and communicate it effectively, and explain what they are about to do before doing it.

Prepare for the visit. There are things you or your occupational therapist can do before a dental visit – like teach them to open their mouth wide and hold it open, or sit in a reclining chair.

## 5 Smart Home Integrations to Elevate Your Living Experience

By Synergy Design & Construction

As we celebrate National Home Remodeling Month, we are excited to highlight smart home integrations.

Technology is revolutionizing the way we live, and transforming our interiors in ways we couldn't have imagined just a few years ago. Here are five examples of how smart integrations are reshaping interiors and enhancing functionality in the home.

### Lighting and Ambiance

Smart lighting not only saves energy and money, but also transforms your space through different types of illumination. Adjust your lights with remote controls to create the perfect ambiance for any occasion, whether it's a cozy family movie night or an elegant cocktail party. Smart lighting also can be programmed to mimic natural daylight patterns, promoting well-being and turning your home into a wellness haven.

### Health and Wellness Monitoring

Speaking of wellness, smart home integrations directly play a role in monitoring your health and wellness. For instance, smart beds can track your sleep patterns and adjust firmness accordingly. With all these new technologies, there are more options than ever to transform your home interiors into a space that actively contributes to your well-being and lifestyle.

### Smart Speakers

By using smart assistants like Amazon Alexa or Google Home, you can control various aspects of your interiors through voice commands. This includes adjusting temperature, controlling lighting, or even closing curtains. With these assistants, you can change so many elements in your home without even lifting a finger.



Photo contributed by Synergy Design & Construction


### Technology-Enabled Appliances

Given all the innovations in technology, it's important to recognize what you really need and what will make your life easier. Keep in mind that different people have different priorities. For example, you may love the ability to turn off your kitchen lights while you're at the office, but it may not be as crucial for your fridge to track the items you are running out of. Choose your appliances with the intention to enhance your day-to-day life.

### Energy Efficiency

Not only are new appliances becoming more efficient, but people are making their homes eco-friendlier with Energy Monitoring Systems. These systems track your energy usage in real-time, allowing you to identify areas to reduce consumption. Examples include smart thermostats that learn your heating and cooling preferences, as well as lighting systems with motion sensors.

Inspired by the evolution of smart home integrations? Celebrate National Home Remodeling month with us and check out how we can help at [RenovateHappy.com!](https://www.RenovateHappy.com)



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## Local Optometrist Provides Truly Beyond Eyecare

By K Scarry, Staff Writer

Dr. Sami Khaldieh traces his passion for his profession to his childhood. He remembers leaning forward from the back seat of the family car to ask his mother the time. Concerned that her 5-year-old couldn't see the clock from where he sat, she took him to an optometrist. That was the start of twice-a-year appointments, a pair of thick eyeglasses, and projections that his vision would get worse.

The experience colors the way he operates Beyond Eyecare, the optometry practice the area native opened in August 2023. “What happened to me doesn't have to happen to other kids,” he said. “I imagine it's me in the chair, and my mom sitting and watching.”

In addition to state-of-the-

art dental equipment, Dr. Khaldieh's office is people friendly. There's a vending machine in front, well-researched toys, snacks that are organic, gluten free, and vegan, and a scent machine. Staff members have their own space. “We pride ourselves on the fact that when you come to our practice, you don't have to choose between quality, customer service, and the best technology,” he said. “It's important that people feel like they can bring their child or their elderly parent here, and trust they'll be taken care of.”

In an examination room drawer, Dr. Khaldieh keeps his glasses from when he was 8 years old, along with a photo of himself in a homemade, foam frame, ready to share them with patients as an act of empathy and connection.

“Kids don't know what they should be able to see, and there are no pain sensors in the back of the eye, so regular checkups are a must,” he said. The American Eye Academy recommends having an examination before age 1, again between ages 3 and 5, and yearly thereafter.

As the body's weakest blood vessels are in the eyes, comprehensive imaging will allow the optometrist to see damage first when there is a problem with brain health or blood health. “Retinal imaging is the equivalent of bloodwork; the eye is a window to the body,” Dr. Khaldieh said.

There are interventions that will slow myopia, or nearsightedness, up to 70 percent, he added, noting that 38 percent of U.S. children are nearsighted, and the numbers are

projected to grow to 50 percent by 2050.

Dr. Khaldieh advises patients on preventive medicine, including how much time to spend outside, and how to take regular breaks from screens, as well as what contacts or eye drops might be the best fit.

Dr. Khaldieh also invests in the community by providing a service to recycle contacts, making donations to the local organizations, and raising awareness. “I can't see every patient, but if I can contribute to raising a standard of care in my community, people will have awareness of what they really need, and have the tools to advocate for that. Excellent care is what our community deserves,” he said.



# LIFESTYLE

## Every Critter Counts

Contributed by Reston Environmental Advisory Committee

Annual wildlife counts can be an important piece of the puzzle when managing open space. These counts produce data that can be used to track trends, both positive and negative. Most importantly, they help establish baselines against which those trends can be viewed.

Each year, Walker Nature Center staff lead citizen science initiatives that include four wildlife counts to monitor local wildlife populations.

Two of those counts record bird species. The winter bird count in early January logs birds that live in Reston year-round, as well as the winter visitors that breed in northern climes during the summer. The summer count is conducted in early June. This timing avoids counting migrants passing through, and focuses instead on both year-round species and those that breed in Reston during summer.

We also count two insect groups, butterflies and dragonflies. The but-

terfly count is led in early July. In addition to keeping our own records, we contribute to the North American Butterfly Association's annual count. We lead the dragonfly count in early August.

These wildlife groups are important environmental indicators. The diversity of species present can reflect habitat quality and vegetative diversity. Butterflies depend on a diversity of plants, for their host plants (caterpillar food) and nectaring as adults. Since dragonflies start their lives as aquatic nymphs, they depend on clean aquatic systems. Adult dragonflies depend on clean terrestrial habitats to find the insects they eat. Birds depend on high-quality habitat for proper nesting space and the right types of foods (native plants, insects that eat those plants).

Records for all four of these counts now span multiple decades, which has produced a rich data set. Staff pair each count with a class that teaches basic natural history and identifica-



Great Blue Skimmer caught during one of Reston's annual Dragonfly Counts. Photo by Ken Rosenthal

tion tips for local species. These classes and counts are opportunities for the public to be involved in our wildlife counts and contribute to the increasing knowledge base we have. As we get closer to summer, you can find more information and sign up here: <https://bit.ly/RestonWildlifeCounts>.

### FIRST MEET-UP



The Book Club

THURSDAY, MAY 30

6 P.M.  
(NEW TIME)



BOOK: MURDER WITH PEACOCKS  
BY DONNA ANDREWS



at Elden Street Tea Shop  
Lake Anne

## Outtaman Offers Safety Essentials in Style

By K Scarry, Staff Writer

It all started over a couple of drinks between friends, the perfect setting for an idea to emerge. Reston resident Brian Lester and his friend Jon Oemcke were doing just that when they chatted about the things people consider during a home inspection process.

“When moving into a new home, you think about changing locks, you think about painting walls,” Brian said, “but you rarely think about safety plans.” The reality is there are about 1,000 home fires and seven fire-related deaths that occur in the U.S. every single day.

The long-time Reston residents, both fathers of young children, were thinking out loud about how it's not just owning safety essentials, like a fire ladder or fire extinguisher, but where you store them. In Brian's case, their essentials were buried in the back of his son's closet, still in

the original boxes. It was unlikely that anyone in the home would know where to find them quickly if they were needed.

Brian and Jon realized this problem was far too common and began thinking about how to make safety tools easily accessible, such as having an escape ladder right next to a window. A Google search revealed that nobody else had such a product, and thus, the Outtaman was born. The Outtaman helps you get 'outta' the house in an emergency.

Outtaman's goal is to ensure people have “the right safety essentials, in the right place, at the right time.” The Outtaman is a complete set of safety tools stored and organized in a stylish ottoman that can be put anywhere in the home. There are first, second, and third floor versions, each containing some combination of items like fire blankets, a fire extinguisher, a flashlight, a first aid kit, and a fire ladder. Also

included is a reusable home escape plan and safety checklist – perfect for the whole family to practice and reinforce ongoing fire safety.

The duo built their first prototype around Thanksgiving last year, and have spent the months since refining their products and process: sourcing materials, learning branding and marketing, figuring out the best way to ship these so they can expand nationally.

They now have big plans for expansion and are considering a next wave of targeted marketing toward homeowners, Airbnb owners, and 55-plus communities.

“We would consider it a success if just a small portion of the population raises their awareness about fire safety,” Brian said.

You can learn more about the Outtaman product line at [www.outtaman.com](http://www.outtaman.com). Use code Reston50 to receive \$50 off an Outtaman purchase through 6/15/24.



Brian and Jon with Brian's son "Fireman Wyatt" and their Outtaman. Photo by Isadora Guerreiro

### Answer Key

#### Swirls and Girls

B	L	E	W	S	L	O	M
P	A	N	A	M	A	E	D
D	E	A	N	N	A	S	U
S	U	E	S	E	D	D	I

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