

Betsy Clevenger's Mission to Fight Hunger in Her Community

by Gwen Jones, Department of Family Services

Betsy Clevenger is a deeply compassionate person. Despite the tough times she has experienced, her desire to help others has never faltered. After raising two sons as a single mom and teaching math to middle-school students for over 30 years, Betsy chose to skip a relaxing retirement. Instead, she is devoting her retirement years to volunteering five days a week at The Mission Center, a food ministry that provides groceries and other basics to families in need in Annandale.

Betsy Clevenger was born in Annapolis during World War II. Her father, who worked in construction, was employed building military barracks so the family moved several times during Betsy's early years, eventually settling in Pittsburgh, PA when she was seven.

Following high school, Betsy enrolled at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, studying to become a math teacher. After graduating, she got married and had

her first son. Her husband was in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program, so they moved often, eventually living in France for three years, where they welcomed their second son. Upon returning to the U.S., Betsy's husband was sent to serve in the Vietnam War. Not long after he came home, the couple divorced so Betsy raised her sons alone.

Betsy and her boys lived in Pittsburgh and Detroit before finally moving to Fairfax County. For 33 years, she taught math to middle school students in Arlington County. Betsy chose to teach children at this awkward age because of the deep empathy she felt for them, saying, "I think 13-year-olds are about the neediest people in the world." She also sought to help the befuddled parents of her students better understand the behavior and struggles of their middle-schoolers. In addition to teaching, Betsy served as the leader of her teacher team, mentoring new

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On a recent Thursday, the team of volunteers at The Mission Center took a break from their work to pose for a photo, including Betsy Clevenger (center, in the white cardigan).

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DON'T MISS A SINGLE ISSUE OF THE *Golden Gazette*!

The *Golden Gazette* is a free monthly publication published by the Fairfax County Department of Family Services. It covers local news-to-use and human interest stories for older adults and caregivers.

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Reasonable accommodations will be provided upon request. Call **703-324-5411, TTY 711**. The TTY number for all contacts in this publication is 711 unless otherwise stated.

It is our policy that all articles published in the Golden Gazette must be written by employees of Fairfax County agencies or partner organizations.

READER SUGGESTIONS FOR CONTENT TO THE GOLDEN GAZETTE

We'd like your feedback! What topics would you like to see in future issues? How can we make this publication even better?

Do you know a centenarian living in Fairfax County or an older adult who has given back in a significant way? We are always looking for interesting older Fairfax County residents to feature.

Email your suggestions to DFSGoldenGazette@FairfaxCounty.gov or call **703-324-GOLD**.

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teachers, guiding them to respond to the needs of their students to ensure that they were learning the material, rather than teaching by the book.

In 2007, Betsy retired after enduring a significant health challenge. Upon recovering, she pondered what God intended for her. After seeking counsel and praying with her minister, she knew she wanted to start a food ministry. Her church, Immanuel United Methodist Church, agreed to start the ministry under Betsy's leadership. A short time later, the congregation merged with Annandale United Methodist Church, but kept their old building to serve as the site of the food ministry and other charitable work.

Called The Mission Center, the food ministry started small with volunteers packing 60 bagged lunches a week for the Bailey's Shelter during hypothermia season. However, combatting hunger in the community where The Mission Center is located soon became their primary focus. Eighty percent of children who live nearby receive free lunch at school and attend a Title One school, so the need is great.

Betsy and her team of volunteers collected food donations that they gave to families in need in the community. They also worked with local schools to ensure that children and their families didn't go hungry over the weekend by developing "backpack meals." The backpack meals consisted of snacks and meals that were simple to prepare and light enough for children to take home in their backpacks on Friday after school.

Securing donations has been a big part of the center's work, but people and organizations in the community have stepped up to help. Annandale United Methodist Church members give food and monetary donations, as well as volunteering their time. During Lent, all the church's sacrificial giving goes to The Mission Center. The nonprofit Food for Others is a huge supporter, providing 1,000 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables

and 1,000 pounds of nonperishable food each week. Fresh produce comes from a variety of sources – Green Spring Gardens donates the extra vegetables grown during their gardening classes; and from May to October, farmers at the Annandale Farmers Market donate their unsold produce to the center. Additionally, The Swiss Bakery and several Panera Bread locations donate their unsold bread to the center.



Volunteers arrange bins of fresh produce in preparation for assembling bags of groceries.

Prior to the pandemic, The Mission Center was feeding about 75 families in the community. Families or individuals would visit the center to select needed items from the shelves. When the pandemic hit and schools closed, the demand for food in the community skyrocketed. Betsy also had to reevaluate their food distribution model to factor in social distancing measures. They decided to hand out bags of groceries once a week to anyone who lined up at the door. Each recipient was given two bags – one containing nonperishable food such as pasta and canned items, and the second containing perishable items milk, eggs, bread and produce. The number of

people lining up to receive groceries each week nearly quadrupled during the pandemic.

In addition to the groceries, volunteers also handed out 500 meals twice a week, prepared and donated by World Central Kitchen, the food relief program founded and led by Chef José Andrés. As rates of infection slowed and places began to return to normal, World Central Kitchen closed their Washington, D.C. operation and no longer provided the meals.

A local food truck operator filled the void by agreeing to donate burritos every Monday evening while Betsy and her team of volunteers continue to assemble and hand out bagged groceries once a week. All the grocery bags contain the same items, and they try to select items that suit all tastes.

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Every Thursday afternoon, volunteers gather at The Mission Center and work an assembly line to fill the bags. Later, the doors are opened and people who have lined up are given their two bags. Betsy is happy to say that they have never run out of food – everyone who lines up receives food each week.

The Mission Center has expanded their giving beyond food – handing out packs of diapers, feminine hygiene products, children's clothing, or adult diapers on a different Thursday each month. A children's clothing ministry has also been established at The Mission Center. Donations from church members and the community are sorted, bagged, and labeled by a team of volunteers.

Betsy credits the success of The Mission Center to the generosity of the community and her church, and to the hard-working volunteers who pick up donated food, sort vegetables, fill bags, and hand them out each week.

After 12 years of leading The Mission Center, Betsy is still going strong and loves what she does. "Gratification to me is knowing other people. Having a cheerful word and helping people," she said. Her favorite part of the work is connecting with people – talking to them as they wait in line and finding out what they need.

Betsy recalls the story of a young English as a Second Language teacher from a local middle school who brought his students to volunteer at The Mission Center. He told her that The Mission Center was important to him because the center helped his family when they first emigrated to the United States. He recalled the gratitude his family felt toward both their new country and the center, telling Betsy "America took us in, and you fed us." To Betsy, stories like his confirm that she is doing what she was meant to do, and she feels blessed that she has been given this opportunity.

To learn more about volunteer opportunities with The Mission Center, visit annandalechurch.com/missions. Donations of non-perishable food items, children's clothing, diapers, brown paper grocery bags, and children's books can be left in the donation boxes outside The Mission Center, located at 7901 Heritage Drive, Annandale, VA 22003. ☀

Mature Living – Planning for Retirement

The transition into retirement is an exciting time that offers individuals the opportunity to pursue hobbies and interests they may not have had time to enjoy during their working career. Being aware of healthcare costs and taking steps to ensure financial security can help individuals (and their families) as they transition to a new chapter of their lives.

Mature Living host Anne Hall talks with Bill Vaughan, a Volunteer Counselor with the Virginia Insurance Counseling and Assistance Program (VICAP), about healthcare options and costs, as well as how to navigate resources like Medicare. Denise Pitts, an attorney with Legal Services of Northern Virginia, shares information on the importance of estate planning, and *Mature Living* Producer Fran talks with Carolyn Armstead who shares her experience as a recent retiree, and how she prepared for the new phase of her life.

Mature Living can be seen on Channel 1016 on the following days and times:

- ◆ Sunday at 9:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m.
- ◆ Monday at 5 p.m. and 9:30 p.m.
- ◆ Tuesday at 4 p.m., 8:30 p.m. and 11:30 p.m.
- ◆ Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m.
- ◆ Thursday at 8:30 a.m., 4 p.m. and 11:30 p.m.
- ◆ Friday at 9:30 a.m., 3:30 p.m. and 9 p.m.
- ◆ Saturday at 9:30 a.m., 4 p.m. and 11 p.m.

This program can also be seen on your computer: FairfaxCounty.gov/cableconsumer/channel-16/mature-living

You can find information on services for older adults at FairfaxCounty.gov/OlderAdults or call 703-324-7948, TTY 711, Monday-Friday. ☀

Ring in 2023 with a Commitment to Healthy Habits

by the Fairfax County Health Department

With the new year just around the corner, it's time to make your resolutions. Here are some ways that you can prioritize your health in 2023.

- ◆ **Keep up with your check-ups.** Annual doctors' visits are for all of us. Regular check-ups can detect signs of illness or disease early.
- ◆ **Get screened.** Five health screenings are vital to maintaining overall health and fitness: eye exam, hearing test, blood pressure check, bone density scan, and cancer screenings (breast, prostate, and colon cancer).
- ◆ **Stay up to date on your vaccines.** Vaccines are important at every age and with advancing age, people become more susceptible to certain illnesses. Stay protected by getting the vaccines recommended for you. Flu shots, shingles vaccine, and pneumonia vaccine will help protect your health. Learn more about vaccines for adults at FairfaxCounty.gov/health/immunization/adult.
- ◆ **Stay up to date on COVID-19 vaccines.** Everyone 50 and older is eligible for a second COVID-19 booster dose. Get the primary vaccine series AND booster doses to stay protected against serious illness. Find a vaccine at vaccines.gov.
- ◆ **Stay active.** There are so many ways to stay physically active in Fairfax County. Visit a Fairfax County Park, swim laps or join a fitness group. Fairfax County Senior Centers also offer a variety of virtual and in-person indoor classes for residents over age 50. Learn more about eligibility and membership fees by visiting FairfaxCounty.gov and searching "Senior Centers." No time to drive to a center? No problem. The Park Authority's Healthy Strides program offers many virtual fitness classes via Zoom. Visit FairfaxCounty.gov/parks/healthy-strides for more information.

Stay connected: According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, loneliness and social isolation in older adults are serious public health risks that can



Getting your blood pressure checked regularly is vital to maintaining overall health and fitness as you age.

put them at risk for dementia, heart disease, depression, obesity, and other serious medical conditions. Although it's hard to measure social isolation and loneliness, data shows that many adults aged 50 and older are socially isolated or lonely. Recent studies found that:

- ◆ Social isolation significantly increased a person's risk of premature death from all causes, a risk that may rival those of smoking, obesity, and physical inactivity.
- ◆ Social isolation was associated with about a 50% percent increased risk of dementia.
- ◆ Poor social relationships (characterized by social isolation or loneliness) were associated with a 29% increased risk of heart disease and a 32% increased risk of stroke.
- ◆ Loneliness was associated with higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide.
- ◆ Loneliness among heart failure patients was associated with a nearly 4 times increased risk of death, 68% increased risk of hospitalization, and 57% increased risk of emergency department visits.

Need more information on how to stay connected? Find information and tips from the National Institute on Aging at nia.nih.gov/health/loneliness-and-social-isolation-tips-staying-connected. 🌟

Caregiving Over the Holidays

by Giuliana Valencia, Fairfax Area Agency on Aging

December can be a challenging month for many family caregivers, as it marks the beginning of the winter, and the start of different holiday celebrations. During this time, it is common for people to feel the pressure of hosting dinner parties, preparing special dishes, decorating, buying gifts, or traveling to visit family and friends. If you are feeling the stress of the holidays, here are some tips to help you take care of yourself:

- ◆ **Practice self-compassion:** during this season when things can feel more stressful, show kindness and compassion towards yourself.
- ◆ **Keep things simple:** don't spend all your time and energy trying to keep up with traditions. Prioritize and create new memories.
- ◆ **Ask for help:** ask your friends and family to help you and try to make your request simple and specific.
- ◆ **Create new memories:** sometimes leaving the home is just not possible. Invite friends, watch a movie, or have a potluck.
- ◆ **Connect with other caregivers:** attend a caregiver support group and connect with others who are going through the same experiences.
- ◆ **Make a list:** write down everything you want to do over the holidays. Then, reflect about what truly matters to you and how you want to spend your time and energy; finally, check off the list the items that you can do without.

Remember that the holiday season only lasts a few weeks, and if you are feeling overwhelmed, call the Aging, Disability, & Caregiver Resource Line and request to be transferred to the Virtual Friendly Visitor Program to talk to a volunteer about lighthearted topics, as well as share journeys/stories. To learn more, call **703-324-7948, TTY 711** or visit **FairfaxCounty.gov/familyservices/older-adults**.

Stroke Support Group

The Fairfax County Health Department offers a caregiver stroke group that provides a safe place for caregivers to honestly talk about challenges regarding a



beloved stroke survivor. Currently, the caregiver group is meeting in person at the Joseph Willard Health Center. However, anyone wishing to attend must contact Erica Wrenn, prior to attending to complete the COVID-19 screening questionnaire. Anyone who shows up without completing this step will not be allowed to attend the meeting.

This in-person support group meets every Friday from 1-2 p.m. To register, call **703-246-7151** or email **Erica.Wrenn@fairfaxcounty.gov**.

Mobile Crisis Unit

The Mobile Crisis Unit (MCU) is an emergency mental health program of the Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board that provides on-scene evaluation, treatment and crisis intervention in the community. The MCU specializes in providing these services to individuals who are experiencing a mental health emergency and who need, but are unwilling or unable to seek, mental health treatment, and who, as a result of a psychiatric condition, may be a danger to self- or others.

If you have a loved one who has been diagnosed with a mental health condition and wish to learn more about this service, visit **bit.ly/CrisisMobile**.

Fairfax Caregiver Alert Notifications

"If we can't reach you, we can't alert you." Now, family caregivers can receive weekly emails, text messages, and voice communication methods to learn about the latest news on caregiving supportive services. These programs include workshops, caregiver webinars, case management, in-home respite, and much more. Subscribe to the program, create an account (or if you already have one, sign into your account), and select Area Agency on Aging/Caregiving. Visit **FairfaxCounty.gov/alerts**. 🌟

Quality Long-Term Care in the Community

by Camden Doran, Long-Term Care Ombudsman

Do you or someone you know receive long-term care services in the community? The Northern Virginia Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (NVLTCOP) can assist in resolving care concerns and provide information about community based long-term care services such as home health, hospice, and adult day health care. Consumers can also search for information about these services on Medicare's website, www.Medicare.gov. There a consumer can locate services near where they live, read the most recent survey results, and compare agencies, to make an informed decision about their long-term care services.

As a mandated program under the Older Americans Act, the NVLTCOP is often called on to assist residents and consumers to advocate for their rights to ensure quality of care and quality of life. The NVLTCOP is a resident-directed program that is available to assist with concerns and to educate the community about long-term care services. For more information about long-term care services in the community, or nursing facility and assisted living concerns, please call the NVLTCOP at **703-324-5861, TTY 711**, or contact the Ombudsman Program by email at **NVLTCOP@fairfaxcounty.gov**. 🌟

Fairfax Area Commission on Aging

by Jacquie Woodruff, Fairfax Area Agency on Aging

The Fairfax Area Commission on Aging (COA) is an advisory board mandated by the Older Americans Act. Commissioners for the Fairfax Area Commission on Aging are appointed by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and the City Councils of the City of Fairfax and the City of Falls Church.

At the November 16 COA meeting, Andre Atkins, Director of Growth & Enrollment, presented about the Cherry Blossom PACE (Program for All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly) in Alexandria.

COA Meeting Wednesday, December 21, 1 p.m.

The meeting will be held electronically due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Join from PC, Mac, Linux, iOS or Android: **us06web.zoom.us/j/87171482674**. Access code: COA-m1234!

Live audio of the meeting may be accessed by dialing **888-270-9936** (US Toll Free) or **602-333-0032**; conference code: 231525.

For ADA accommodations, contact Ana Valdivia, **571-407-6960** or **ana.valdivia@fairfaxcounty.gov**; TTY services available via 711.

*Note: Meeting will be held virtually unless otherwise impacted by Fairfax County's State of Emergency Status due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Check website for meeting location updates: **FairfaxCounty.gov/familyservices/older-adults/fairfax-area-commission-on-aging/meetings**. 🌟

Winter Weather Preparedness

by Courtney Arroyo, Department of Emergency Management and Security

Winter weather includes ice, heavy snow, and extreme cold conditions. Pay attention to weather reports and warnings of freezing weather and winter storms. These can cause power outages and loss of heat and communication services – sometimes for many days. The greatest threat from winter weather is often from secondary impacts, such as traffic accidents on icy roads. Hypothermia and frostbite, which can result from prolonged exposure to cold, are also risks. Listen for emergency information and alerts.

Additionally, clean-up (shoveling) from winter weather events can be strenuous and may therefore pose a risk

for older adults and others with physical limitations. If you are concerned about your ability to shovel, reach out to your neighbors for help. If YOU need help, don't be afraid to ask a neighbor or friend for help!



Sign up for Fairfax Alerts so you can stay up-to-date on weather and traffic in Fairfax County. Sign up today:

FairfaxCounty.gov/alerts. ☀

Ensure a Happy Holiday Season by Protecting Yourself from Scams

by Melissa Smarr, Fairfax County Silver Shield Anti-Scam Campaign

The holiday season is upon us. It is estimated that people will be spending approximately \$800 billion during this time. However, scammers will be lurking to try and steal not only money, but also the gifts you are purchasing for family and friends.

Here is a list of common scams seen during recent holiday seasons:

- ◆ Fake order confirmations and shipping notices.
- ◆ Email scams.
- ◆ Websites made to resemble real websites.
- ◆ Packages stolen after delivery.
- ◆ Fake charities.
- ◆ Stories posted on social media or sent via text or email about friends or relatives in distress.
- ◆ Intercepted data.

To protect yourself from scams this season, we recommend following these dos and don'ts.

Do:

- ◆ Pay by credit card because most credit cards have a dispute capability if you do not receive an item, the item is damaged, or you experience any other problem with your order.

- ◆ Review your credit card statements to ensure there are no surprise charges.
- ◆ Ensure are ordering from the retailer's website if you shop online.
- ◆ Familiarize yourself with refund policies of retailers from where you purchase gifts just in case you have to make any returns.
- ◆ Carefully examine any gift cards you purchase for relatives and friends to ensure they have not been tampered with.
- ◆ Research before donating to a charity to ensure the money you are donating is actually going to the organization you are intending.

Don't:

- ◆ Buy anything online while using a public Wi-Fi network. It might not be secure.
- ◆ Make a purchase or donation if a website or caller seeks payment by wire transfer, gift card or prepaid card. This is like forking over cash.
- ◆ Purchase products from a retailer who does not have a return policy in the event you need to send it back.

Please use these helpful tips as you start or continue shopping for the holidays. Remember, stay safe and have a Happy Holiday Season. ☀

Little Free Food Pantries Remove Barriers to Food Access

by Gwen Jones, Department of Family Services

By now you are probably familiar with Little Free Libraries – small, informal lending libraries located on both private and public property, where anyone is welcome to take a book to read or leave a book to share. These small freestanding structures have popped up all over Fairfax County, allowing free and easy access to books.

This same model is being used to create Little Free Food Pantries. The idea behind little free food pantries is to provide easy access to unexpired, nonperishable food in communities with the greatest need. Residents of these communities are encouraged to “take what you need and leave what you can.”

Little free food pantries have been established outside houses of worship, nonprofit organizations, private businesses, community gathering sites and schools. One local leader in the creation of little free food pantries in Fairfax County is the 501(c)(3) nonprofit Be the Good, who has established over 20 little free food pantries at locations throughout Alexandria and Springfield. The pantries are maintained and restocked regularly by volunteers.

Earlier this year, Fairfax County Zoning Administration, in consultation with the Fairfax County Health Department, conducted a review of the little free food pantry and determined that “Providing access to nonperishable food is in the public interest. As such, a little free food pantry may be permitted.”

If you are interested in establishing a little free food pantry in your community, it must meet the following guidelines. No additional zoning approval or issuance of a building permit is required.

- ◆ On a nonresidential lot, there is a limit of one little free food pantry per lot. On a residential lot, there is a limit of one little free food pantry and/or little free library per lot. The box may be stocked with books and/or nonperishable foods.
- ◆ A pantry is not subject to minimum setbacks, but the structure may not encroach into the public right-of-way.
- ◆ The structure must be maintained in good condition and monitored to ensure that items are only placed inside the box and the food is unexpired, nonperishable, and in its original, intact container.
- ◆ Instructions about only leaving nonperishable, prepackaged food in its original container must be provided in the pantry.
- ◆ A pantry is limited to a maximum height of four feet. The size of each pantry box should not exceed approximately four cubic feet (measured on the exterior of the box), and a pantry should not be large enough for a person to enter the box.
- ◆ A pantry may not obstruct vehicular, bicycle, or pedestrian traffic, either physically or by a person utilizing the pantry. If located on a corner lot, a pantry is subject to the sight distance requirements in subsection 5100.2.D(4)(c)ii.
- ◆ A pantry may not obstruct access aisles or paths used by persons in wheelchairs or for ADA accessibility.

For additional information or questions, please contact Planning and Development’s Zoning Administration Division at **703-324-1314** or by email at **ORDAdmin@fairfaxcounty.gov**. 🌟

The Crisis Assistance Program Can Help with Heating Emergencies

by the Public Assistance and Employment and Training Division of DFS

Are you facing a “no heat” situation? The Crisis Assistance Program helps households overcome energy emergencies that cannot be met by other resources. An energy emergency is determined when a household has no heat or is in imminent danger of being without heat. The

open application period for the Crisis Assistance Program closes on **March 15, 2023**. Learn more and apply for the Crisis Assistance Program at **CommonHelp.Virginia.gov** or by calling **1-833-522-5582**. 🌟

Volunteer Opportunities in Your Community

by Tanya Erway, Volunteer Solutions Recruitment Coordinator

Volunteers are needed for the 2023 Tax Season! The **Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)** program needs: greeters, interpreters (including ASL), screeners and tax preparers. No tax training is needed for greeters and interpreters. Free training is available for screeners and tax preparers. Opportunities are available throughout Fairfax County, with flexible schedules. For more information go to **nvacash.org**. The VITA program offers free income tax preparation and filing services to individuals and families who earned less than \$60,000 in 2022.

Haven of Northern Virginia is committed to offering support, compassion, information, and resources to the bereaved and seriously ill. Volunteers provide individual and group support to those experiencing a loss. Please contact Haven at **703-941-7000** or **havenofnova@verizon.net** if you are interested.

Volunteer Solutions offers meaningful opportunities to provide support to older adults, adults with disabilities, and family caregivers. The following roles are needed (especially in the Alexandria and Falls Church regions): drivers for medical appointments and grocery shopping, social visitors, household organizers, and more. If you prefer group settings, senior centers have various needs for activity leaders, skilled instructors, entertainers, and assistants. Bilingual volunteers are needed, too! To learn more and register go to **bit.ly/FXVSVOL**, email

VolunteerSolutions@FairfaxCounty.gov, or call **703-324-5406**.

FACETS is a non-profit organization whose mission is, "Opening doors for people in need." Their volunteers support families and individuals in various ways, including afterschool homework help, food distribution, administrative support, and much more. Go to **FacetsCares.org** for more information. If you're interested in volunteering, email Suzanne Hough at **shough@facetscares.org** or call **703-352-5090**.

Northern Virginia Family Service (NVFS) needs friendly volunteers in different roles, at various locations. If you're organized, bilingual in Spanish and English, comfortable greeting people, answering phones, and providing administrative support, you're needed. NVFS is also seeking classroom assistants for Head Start programs, who enjoy interacting with young children. Thrift Shop Ambassadors are needed to sort and organize donations, tag items for sale, replenish items on the sales floor, process donations, greet customers, and more. Visit **NVFS.org** for more information or contact Samara Weinstein at **sweinstein@nvfs.org** or **571-748-2876**.

If you wish to advertise volunteer opportunities, email **Tanya at Tanya.Erway@FairfaxCounty.gov**. ☀



Domestic and Sexual Violence Services (DSVS) is Looking for a Few Good Volunteers!

Interested in volunteering?
Attend the
Domestic and
Sexual Violence

Services' (DSVS) winter 2023 orientation for prospective volunteers to learn about DSVS, who they serve and how you can help! There are several orientation dates; choose the one that's most convenient for you.

- ◆ Tuesday, January 10, 8:30 a.m.
- ◆ Wednesday, January 11, 6 p.m.
- ◆ Tuesday, January 17, 9 a.m.
- ◆ Wednesday, January 18, 6 p.m.
- ◆ Friday, January 20, Noon
- ◆ Monday, January 23, 6 p.m.
- ◆ Wednesday, January 25, 6 p.m.

For more information, contact Tanisha Cox at **tanisha.cox@fairfaxcounty.gov**. ☀

New Online System is a PLUS for Homeowners!

by Jeremy Dow, Fairfax County Land Development Services



Fairfax County has great news for homeowners who are looking to make renovations or other changes to their homes: the new Planning and Land Use System (PLUS). This modernized platform is your one-stop place for creating and submitting permit and other applications, paying fees, receiving electronic notifications and more.

PLUS replaces older systems and combines all land development-related transactions under one digital “roof.” Prior to PLUS, residents and developers had to learn multiple platforms and register for a separate account with each one, but now a single PLUS account allows them to conduct business across multiple county departments. If you’re planning to make any adjustments to your home, PLUS is the way to go!

If you wish to use the new PLUS system, you must register for a free account at this web page: tinyurl.com/n2wccb7v. If you have questions about home improvement projects requiring permits, please contact 703-222-0801 or ldsbuildingpermits@fairfaxcounty.gov.

For more information on PLUS, please visit the following webpages:

- ◆ What is PLUS? tinyurl.com/4rz9z9rj
- ◆ PLUS Help Center: tinyurl.com/3ksmfjwf
- ◆ Welcome to PLUS YouTube video: tinyurl.com/2utfcey3. ☀

Hiring a Contractor

If you are planning to make changes to your home, please note the following:

- ◆ **In some cases, a contractor must be hired.** Any project valued at \$1,000 or more must be performed by a contractor licensed to work in Virginia. For more information, visit tinyurl.com/yeyramaj.
- ◆ **Watch out for fakes!** Unfortunately, you may encounter someone who claims to be a licensed contractor but isn’t, or you may be the target of a scammer. Other signs of scammers include being reluctant to get a permit, soliciting door to door, and/or accepting only cash, just to mention a few. For detailed information about scams and how to avoid them, please visit the county’s Silver Shield Anti-Scam Campaign webpage at tinyurl.com/2uwc6w9p.
- ◆ **File complaints about a contractor’s work as soon as possible.** The Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code does not allow complaints about construction activity to be accepted if they are more than two years old.
- ◆ **Complaints about construction** in Fairfax County can be submitted via PLUS.
- ◆ **Complaints about the contractor** must be filed online at dpor.virginia.gov, or for any questions, call the Virginia State Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation (DPOR) at 804-367-8500, TTY 711.

Take a Moment: Pedestrian, Bike and Traffic Safety

by Fairfax County Office of Public Affairs

Whether you are walking, biking, or driving, keep in mind that safety is a two-way street and is everyone's job. Every year, the number of pedestrian and bicycle related fatalities and injuries continues to rise at an unacceptable rate. Between 2017-2020 there were on average 6,745 crashes in Fairfax County and 154 of those crashes involved a pedestrian. There are actions we can all take to help move those numbers in the opposite direction while also keeping ourselves safe.

How Drivers Can Help

- ◆ Slow down and avoid distractions while driving.
- ◆ Make eye contact with pedestrians and bicyclists.
- ◆ Do not pass other cars stopped in the street.
- ◆ Before turning right on red or at a stop sign, stop then look for pedestrians and cyclists: left-right-left-straight.
- ◆ Stay three feet away from cyclists and pedestrians when passing. Drivers may legally cross the yellow line in order to safely pass a cyclist or pedestrian.

Always stop for pedestrians in the street. Virginia law requires drivers to stop (not just yield) to pedestrians in marked and unmarked crosswalks until the pedestrian has cleared the lane. This includes all lanes and both directions at clearly marked crosswalks; regular pedestrian crossing (such as residential intersections) even if unmarked; or any intersection where the maximum speed limit is not more than 35 miles per hour.

Stay Safe While Walking

- ◆ Never assume drivers can see you.
- ◆ Use your phone's flashlight (or use a flashlight) when walking in the dark to increase your vision and visibility, and to signal bus operators.
- ◆ If there is no sidewalk, walk facing traffic and as far from traffic as possible.

To cross a road safely:

- ◆ Look both ways for the closest place to cross safely.



- ◆ Use a marked crosswalk if available, otherwise cross at a location with good sightlines in both directions.
- ◆ Wait for a safe gap in traffic or for all traffic to stop before crossing.
- ◆ Do not attempt to cross the street in front of an approaching vehicle or stopped bus.
- ◆ Look and make eye contact with drivers before you cross.
- ◆ While crossing, make sure to look out for other approaching vehicles in case they don't see you and won't stop for you.

Stay Safe While Biking on the Street

When riding on a street, you have the same rights and responsibilities as drivers. Ride with traffic and obey traffic rules, signals and stop signs; stay as close to the right edge of the road as possible. On very narrow roads, it is safer to ride in the middle of the lane.

- ◆ Ride with the flow of traffic; do not pass stopped vehicles.
- ◆ Avoid blind spots and never pass a vehicle on the right.
- ◆ Leave enough room between your bike and other vehicles.
- ◆ Be aware of your surroundings and don't assume other drivers can see you.
- ◆ Use lights and reflectors at night, twilight and in rainy conditions.

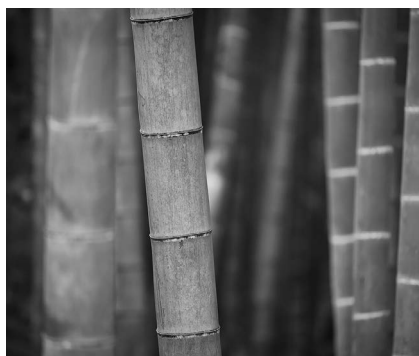
- ◆ Make eye contact with other road and trail users to ensure they see you before moving into their line of travel.
- ◆ Watch for turning vehicles particularly from side streets and driveways, and ride outside the door zone of parked cars.

- ◆ Be on the lookout for loose gravel, ice, sand, puddles, branches, broken glass and other road or trail hazards.

Finally, always be ready to yield. Although drivers must share the road, they may not always follow the law. To protect yourself, go slowly enough to stop or give the right of way at a moment's notice to avoid a collision. ☀

Running Bamboo Ordinance Begins January 1

by Gwen Jones, Department of Family Services



Starting January 1, 2023, a new ordinance regulating running bamboo will go into effect in Fairfax County. Property owners who have running bamboo growing on their

property must not allow it to spread from their property to any public right-of-way or adjoining property. Once a bamboo owner receives a Notice of Violation, failure to contain the bamboo may result in a civil penalty of \$50/day, up to a maximum of \$2,000 in a 12-month period. The ordinance does not prohibit planting or having running bamboo on your property.

Running bamboo is an invasive plant that can be destructive to native plants and trees. Its roots can be contained using a barrier made of certain kinds of high-density plastic or metal. It can also be managed through regular mowing and herbicide application. To learn more about how to remove or contain running bamboo, visit [FairfaxCounty.gov/topics/running-bamboo](https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/topics/running-bamboo). Fairfax County Master Gardeners are also a great resource. Visit their website at [fairfaxgardening.org](https://www.fairfaxgardening.org).

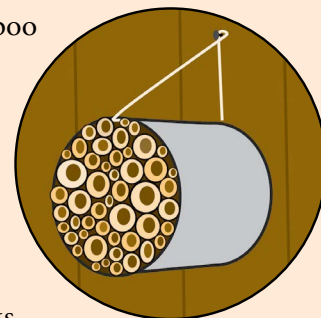
To file a complaint about uncontained running bamboo spreading to an adjacent property or right-of-way, please contact the Department of Code Compliance at 703-324-1300, TTY 711, or file a complaint online at [FairfaxCounty.gov/code](https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/code).

Build a Bamboo Mason Bee House

Although bamboo can be a nuisance growing in your yard, it can be useful for garden stakes and creating a border for flowerbeds. It is also a versatile material for crafts. One simple craft that utilizes excess bamboo and supports pollinators is a mason bee house. Mason bees are prolific pollinators who construct their nests in naturally occurring gaps, including hollow stems or holes in wood.

To make a mason bee house, you'll need:

- ◆ One empty tin or coffee can, label removed and washed
- ◆ Clean, dry, hollow bamboo stalks
- ◆ Nail and hammer
- ◆ Twine to hang the bee house



Directions:

1. Trim your bamboo stalks to fit into the can.
2. Using a nail and hammer, punch a hole in the bottom of the can to thread the twine through.
3. Thread the twine through the hole and knot it.
4. Pack the bamboo lengths into the can as tightly as possible.
5. Hang your mason bee house against a flat surface where it will be protected from wind, facing south or southeast for maximum sun exposure. ☀

Staying Safe on the Road: Resources and Technology that May Benefit Older Adult Drivers

by Gwen Jones, Department of Family Services

Driving in Fairfax County is challenging no matter your age. Roads are often congested, highway construction is never-ending, and aggressive driving is common. To that already intimidating mix, older adult drivers may also contend with slower reaction times, mobility issues, hearing loss and diminished vision. Making the decision to give up your car keys is difficult, and it may feel like you are giving up your independence. As you weigh the risks and benefits of driving, be aware of new technologies that are available to make driving safer and resources that can help you be a safer driver.

Driving Risks

As we age, our bodies become more fragile and susceptible to injury. Studies have shown that older drivers are less likely to survive severe crashes than any other age group. In 2020, the traffic fatality rate per 100,000 people was highest for the 80-to-84 and 85-and-older age groups, according to a National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) report. Drivers 75 and older are about four times as likely to die as middle-aged drivers when they're involved in a side-impact crash and about three times as likely to die in a frontal crash, according to a study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS).

One contributing factor is that older adults tend to drive older vehicles that lack advanced safety features. An IIHS study found that as driver age increased, their vehicles were less likely to be equipped with electronic stability control (ESC) and side airbags as standard features. Vehicles without ESC were associated with a 37 percent increase of driver fatality for drivers 70 and over, while vehicles without side airbags doubled the odds of an older driver fatality.

Why do older drivers drive older, less safe vehicles? One reason is that income is often lower in retirement, putting new vehicles out of reach of many older adults. A survey by the IIHS also found that drivers don't understand the value of the safety features and

underestimate the importance of a vehicle having good safety ratings. The IIHS evaluates vehicles on crashworthiness (how well a vehicle protects its occupants in a crash) and crash avoidance and mitigation (technology that can prevent a crash or lessen its severity.) To find out how your vehicle scored, visit [iihs.org/ratings](https://www.iihs.org/ratings).

Vehicle Safety Features

Some of the latest safety features that could benefit older adults include:

- ◆ Automatic Emergency Braking (AEB) – warns the driver or applies the brakes to avoid an impending collision.
- ◆ Lane departure prevention – returns the vehicle to its correct path if it veers out of the travel lane.
- ◆ Blind spot detection – warns the driver about vehicles that aren't visible in the side or rearview mirrors.
- ◆ Rearview camera – displays what is behind you, projecting a much larger field than is visible in mirrors or by looking out the back window.

Safety features in development include:

- ◆ Left turn assist – a camera and other sensors detect oncoming vehicles when the driver signals a left turn and warns the driver if a collision is likely.
- ◆ Intersection movement assist – allows vehicles to warn drivers of possible collisions with others approaching an intersection.
- ◆ Adaptive headlights - turn with the steering to increase the amount of roadway illumination; reduce the glare for other drivers by automatically adjusting between high and low beams.

According to a study from the IIHS, advanced technologies designed to help drivers navigate intersections could address a third of the crashes that cause older driver injuries and fatalities.

Resources for Older Drivers

Virginia GrandDriver

Virginia GrandDriver helps older drivers and their caregivers recognize the signs of declining driving skills. It also provides information for healthcare providers and law enforcement officers to assess mature drivers. Other resources include:

- ◆ Check lists of age-related changes and medications that can affect your driving.
- ◆ Options for alternative transportation if you choose not to drive.
- ◆ Educational events, publications and toolkits.
- ◆ Safety tips for pedestrians.

Visit their website at **granddriver.net** for more information.

CarFit

CarFit ensures that older adults fit their vehicles properly for maximum comfort and safety. During a CarFit event, trained technicians evaluate participants and their personal vehicles, making adjustments to ensure a good fit. Visit **car-fit.org** to find a CarFit event near you. For more information, email **info@car-fit.org**.

DMV Mature Driver Program

Drivers aged 75 or older must appear in person at a DMV customer service center to renew their driver's license and complete a vision screening. Once issued, the license will generally be valid for five years. You may have your vision screened at DMV or present a report (issued within 90 days) from an ophthalmologist or optometrist.



Mature Operator Safety Courses

A driver safety course can help refresh your driving skills and bring you up to speed on newer traffic laws. Fees for these courses vary. Classes may be available online or in-person, including:

- ◆ **AAA Roadwise Driver** (aaadriverprogram.com/midatlantic/road-wise) – online course designed to help you be a better, safer driver.
- ◆ **AARP Smart Driver™ Course** (aarp.org/auto/driver-safety) – this course teaches proven driving techniques to help keep you and your loved ones safe on the road.

For more information and additional driving courses, visit the DMV website at **dmv.virginia.gov/drivers/#mature.asp**. 🌟

Expect Plenty of Laughs and Groans with These Dad Jokes

by Gwen Jones, Department of Family Services

The holiday season is here and many of us will be spending time with our children and grandchildren, providing the perfect opportunity to tell some good, old-fashioned dad jokes! These jokes are guaranteed to get laughs from the little ones, eye rolls from the teens, and face palms from the adults.

1. What time did the man go to the dentist?
Tooth hurt-y.
2. Why don't seagulls fly over the bay?
Because then they'd be bagels.
3. What do you call a cow with no legs?
Ground beef!
4. What's Forrest Gump's password?
1forrest1
5. What do you call an illegally parked frog?
Toad.
6. What do you call a row of bunnies moving backwards?
A receding hare line!
7. Why can you never trust an atom?
Because they make everything up.
8. What condition does a noodle have when it doesn't feel like it's good enough?
Impasta syndrome.
9. How many tickles does it take to make an octopus laugh?
Ten tickles.
10. What happened to the exorcist's car?
It got repossessed.
11. How do you make a Kleenex dance?
Put a little boogie in it!
12. What did the horse say after it tripped?
Help! I've fallen and I can't giddy up.
13. What do Alexander the Great and Winnie the Pooh have in common?
The same middle name.
14. Why did the coffee call the police?
It got mugged.
15. Why shouldn't you play board games in the savanna?
There are too many cheetahs.
16. How can you tell if a snake is a baby?
It has a rattle.
17. After an unsuccessful harvest, why did the farmer decide to try a career in music?
Because he had a ton of sick beets.
18. What do you call a bundle of hay in a church?
Christian Bale.
19. What is a guitar player's favorite Italian food?
Strum-boli.
20. What do you call a wizard who's really bad at football?
Fumbledore.
21. What's an astronaut's favorite part of the computer?
The space bar.
22. How come the Hulk doesn't lose his pants when he transforms?
The experiment altered his jeans.
23. What's the best thing about living in Switzerland?
I don't know, but the flag is a big plus.
24. Why should you never brush your teeth with your left hand?
Because a toothbrush works better.
25. What did the buffalo say to his son when he dropped him off at school?
Bison. 🌟



Shepherd Centers Offer Free Transportation Services for Older Adults

The Shepherd Centers are a nonprofit organization sponsored by local area congregations, community groups, and individuals to serve adults 50 years and older. The centers offer free transportation for medical appointments and companion trips (e.g. grocery shopping) for adults 50 and older who live in the center's service area and are ambulatory. You must apply for this transportation service. Once accepted into the service, a request for a ride must be made five days in advance.

Individual centers also offer additional programs and services. Visit the website or call the center in your area for more information. Interested in volunteering at a Shepherd Center? Contact a center to learn more:

- ♦ **Annandale/Springfield**
703-941-1419, ShepherdsCenter-Annandale.org
- ♦ **Fairfax/Burke**
703-323-4788, SCFBVA.org
- ♦ **McLean/Arlington/Falls Church**
703-506-2199, SCMAFC.org
- ♦ **Oakton/Vienna/Dunn Loring/Reston/Herndon/Great Falls**
703-281-0538, SCNOVA.org
- ♦ **South County**
703-799-0505, SCSC-Transport@Verizon.net
- ♦ **Western Fairfax County**
703-246-5920, SCWFC.org ☀

Local Nonprofit Driving Programs

A medical appointment or trip to the pharmacy is a challenge if you no longer drive. Consider becoming a volunteer with one of these organizations:

- ♦ **Herndon Village Network**
703-375-9439; HerndonVillageNetwork.org
- ♦ **Mount Vernon at Home**
703-303-4060; MountVernonAtHome.org
- ♦ **Reston Community Center**
703-390-6198; RestonCommunityCenter.com/About-Reston/rcc-Rides ☀

Fairfax County Services for Older Adults

703-324-7948 |  **TTY 711**

**Monday–Friday
8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.**

**[www.fairfaxcounty.gov/
OlderAdults](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/OlderAdults)**

 Subscribe to **Golden Gazette**, **Access Fairfax**, and **The Update**

 Watch **Mature Living** on Ch. 16

 **facebook.com/fairfaxcounty50**



FAIRFAX COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF
FAMILY SERVICES



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DECEMBER COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Senior Planet by AARP Free Technology Classes

Wellness Center for Older Adults
4027B Olley Lane, Fairfax

Thursday, December 1, 9:15-10:30 a.m.

Understanding Ride Sharing Apps

Learn about ride sharing apps, including the two most popular – Uber and Lyft, and the pros and cons of both. RSVP at events.aarp.org/ **SPridesharing** or call 1-877-926-8300.

Tuesday, December 6, 1:15-2:30 p.m.

Shopping on Amazon

Learn how to search for products, compare prices, and evaluate product reviews. You'll also learn about shipping options, and the app for your smartphone and/or tablet. RSVP at events.aarp.org/ **SPamazon** or call 1-877-926-8300.

Holiday Open House

Saturday, December 3, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Oakton Library, 10304 Lynnhaven Place, Oakton
703-242-4020, TTY 711

Come one, come all to the Holiday Open House, a celebration presented by Oakton Library and The Friends of Oakton Library. This event will feature on-going activities, including music and entertainment. Light refreshments provided.

Concert: US Navy Band Brass Quintet

Sunday, December 4, 3-4 p.m.

Sherwood Regional Library, 2501 Sherwood Hall Ln, Alexandria; **703-765-3645, TTY 711**

The US Navy Band has many different musical ensembles and Sherwood is proud to present their Brass Quintet performing holiday music along with other classical favorites. Come early to ensure a seat as this concert will fill up fast!

Lifetime Learning Institute of Northern Virginia (LLI/NOVA) Registration Begins December 5 at 9 a.m.

LLI/NOVA invites you to be part of its exciting spring term 2023 (January 3-April 29) and to participate in our other activities, including monthly forums, day trips, unlimited classes, special interest groups and social activities. LLI/NOVA is located at the Northern Virginia Community College, 8333 Little River Tpke, Annandale. To learn more about programs, go to LLI/NOVA.org.

Fireside Café

Monday, December 19, 6:30-8 p.m.

Burke Centre Library, 5935 Freds Oak Road, Burke,
703-249-1520, TTY 711

Holiday Open House with the Robinson Orchestra and hot cocoa.

Please note that dates, prices, and times are correct at publishing. However, please confirm information by calling or checking using the phone numbers or websites provided.