Santa Stops By

Steven Hernandez, held by mother Sonia Hernandez of Alexandria, was awestruck on Dec. 14 by a visit from Santa Claus at INOVA Fairfax Hospital for Children. This marks the 25th year the Fairfax County Police Motorcycle Squad and cooperating law enforcement agencies have held “Santa’s Ride for Children” to assist Santa in his effort to make sure that sick children experience holiday cheer.

Photo by Deb Cobb/Gazette

More photos, page 3.

Sunshine and Tax Incentives

General Assembly to consider exposing the secret world of tax incentives.

By Michael Lee Pope
The Connection

Every year, a host of special interests descend on Richmond to lobby for tax credits. Recent years have seen a proliferation of tax credits, creating incentives for everything from creating green jobs to producing biodiesel. This year will be no different, as legislators will face pressure to support an ever-increasing list. For the individuals and businesses that receive the tax preference, it’s money in the bank. For the state, it’s an economic hit during difficult times. Perhaps the most surprising thing about the phenomenon is what you don’t know about it. Virginia law shields the names of businesses and individuals who

See Tax, Page 17

Holiday Heroes

Firefighters Toy Drive grows to serve 4,000 children.

By Jeanne Theismann
The Gazette

It was supposed to be a one-time event, a toy drive to help 50 struggling families in the Gum Springs community along the Route 1 corridor. But that was 14 years ago. Today, the Firefighters and Friends annual toy drive serves more than 4,000 children in need throughout Northern Virginia.

“I never expected it would grow like this,” said toy drive founder Capt. Willie Bailey. “But businesses and people in the community have really stepped up to help fill what is a growing need in this area.”

See Toy Drive, Page 12

Firefighters and Friends founder Capt. Willie Bailey reviews toy request lists during distribution day Dec. 19 at Fire Station 11.
Santas Rides for Children

Santa Claus traded in his sleigh for a Harley Davidson motorcycle on Dec. 12-14 in an effort to bring holiday cheer to deserving children. The Fairfax County Police Motorcycle Squad, in cooperation with the Fairfax County Sheriff’s Office, Fairfax City Police, Town of Vienna Police, Falls Church Sheriff’s Office and Virginia State Police, escorted Santa on the 25th Santa’s Ride for Children, the capstone event of a three-week long toy drive organized by the Motorcycle Squad.

Police stations, government offices, nine Fairfax County public elementary schools — Mount Eagle, Bush Hill, West Springfield, Woodburn, Navy, Churchill Road, Crossfield, Union Mill and Forestville — and several local businesses and individuals collected toys for the drive.

On Monday, Dec. 12, the toys were collected from all sites, on Tuesday Dec. 13, students from the Robinson High School Criminal Justice program sorted the toys by age group while Santa Claus and his entourage, including Mrs. Claus, “Merry” Claus, Frosty and Rudolph visited seven of the schools that donated toys to the drive, escorted by the police.

On Wednesday, Dec. 14, and Thursday, Dec. 15, Santa Claus hopped back on the Harley and delivered the toys to patients at INOVA Fairfax Hospital for Children and the Georgetown Hospital Lombardi Cancer Center.

“For us to be able to put a smile on these kids’ faces is something great ... to make them happy for just a little bit, so they don’t think about their pain,” said Officer David Pierce who coordinated the event.

Toys are also given to several local charities, including the Ronald McDonald House and the Reston F.I.S.H. (For Immediate Sympathetic Help).

At VIC-HOP, Greeting the Homeless with a Friendly Smile

These nights leading up to Christmas and on into March, Sherry Edelkamp transmits infectious good cheer as she welcomes the homeless nightly to the hypothermia shelter at Rising Hope Mission Church known as VIC-HOP.

“This is my ‘for fun’ job. I actually enjoy it. I enjoy the people that are here and our guests that come in. People say I maybe ought to find another way to have fun,” she said with a laugh. “I’m just committed to this program. It’s kind of like my baby.” She also works a day job with a car dealership.

She signs the homeless in at 6:30 p.m. in a register book as they file inside bundled up against the cold day-after-day. She’s generous with her smile and laughter, and they in turn look cheered and encouraged as they settle in for a 7 p.m. hot dinner followed by a warm evening indoors with maybe a checker game or a movie then a safe night’s sleep. It’s proof that the world is determined to show a kind face after all.

It’s been seven years now since two homeless men were found frozen to death and area churches rallied to form Ventures in Community and start the Hypothermia Outreach Program in collaboration with New Hope Housing and Fairfax County. They took just 20 days to organize and recruit volunteers to prepare dinner nightly, serve it and chaperone until everyone leaves by 7 the following morning. There have been no deaths by freezing since.

Edelkamp, who’s a member of Aldersgate United Methodist Church, was one of those first volunteers, coming in every other Thursday night throughout the winter. After two years volunteering she became a New Hope Housing staff member charged with recruiting and supervising volunteers to run the shelter from Dec. 1 to March 31.

**See Volunteers, Page 4**
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Volunteers Needed at Shelter

It's a big responsibility.

“In order to stay open all night we need a minimum of three chaperones and typically we’ll have two or three people who will help serve dinner. But we can get by without food. We can get food from anywhere. I just need overnight volunteers. I have to have a minimum of three.”

The chaperones divide the night into shifts so that each gets a little sleep.

“Volunteers maybe get three hours sleep," she said. “It’s a sacrifice for them. But their sacrifice of losing one night’s sleep will save 25 people from having to sleep outside in this freezing weather. It’s worth one night of lost sleep to do that.”

Rising Hope, which provides the space, has room for just 25, but no one is turned away to suffer through a freezing night. They’re given a ride to an overflow facility at the Kennedy Shelter about four miles south on Route 1.

Edelkamp’s impressed by the good spirits of VIC-HOP’s guests. “It’s been interesting for me to watch them become like a family here. They always keep each other in line. They’re harder on themselves than I could ever be. We have some guests that have returned at least a couple of years. You get to know them and they know you.”

Edelkamp’s succeeded in staffing the shelter for December and January, but needs help after that.

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‘Tis the Season! Expecting company for the Holidays?

Volunteers Needed at Shelter

From Page 3.

Volunteers needed Monday nights and three Saturday nights. Individuals can also volunteer; they don’t have to be church members. Her email is VICHop2010@yahoo.com.

Socks, hats and gloves are needed too.

The Rev. Keary Kincannon, pastor of Rising Hope, is full of praise for the community effort.

"Many of the people that have come through VIC-HOP are now in permanent supportive housing," he said. "It helps the churches who are involved with us understand the plight of the homeless. Many have jobs but just can’t afford a place to live. We live in a community that really cares."

Like Kincannon, Edelkamp cautions against stereotyping the homeless.

“A lot of people have this perception that homeless people when they walk up to you they’re going to ask for something," she said. "They actually walk up to you and thank you for being there. Most of them are very appreciative of having a warm place to go and a hot meal, and feel safe for the night.

“It’s really cold outside and they’ve spent the whole day out there,” she said. "I can’t imagine the whole entire day. I know it’s got to be exhausting and wear you out."

She has faith her needed volunteers are certain to come forth.

"We have a great community here," said Edelkamp. "God always seems to provide for whatever I need whether it’s overnight chaperones or anything else. God is definitely shining down on this program."
Taking Care of the Defenseless

Local author calls on all to become animal rights activists.

By Montie Martin
The Gazette

When Allie Phillips first heard that 95 percent of all cats were euthanized on the island of St. Croix, she knew someone had to do something about it.

Individuals who take a stand in defense of animals is at the core of her new book, “Defending the Defenseless: A Guide to Protecting and Advocating for Pets.”

Phillips, who works at King Street Cats in Alexandria, identifies a range of ways ordinary people can fight against animal cruelty.

“Animals are experimented on for commercial products, or euthanized because there are no homes available for them,” said Phillips. “People will come up to me all the time and say they love animals, and that they wish there was a way to help, well here’s a book that explains how.”

People can donate to their local shelters, train in animal rescue services when emergencies strike, walk a shelter dog or even pur chase cruelty free products.

Geoff Tarka, a sales associate at the Pro Feed Pet Nutrition Center in Belle View, noted that many of the euthanasia cases were the result of people not spaying or neutering their pet. “It’s not the animals’ fault they were born in a litter, but then they go to high kill shelters.”

People who care deeply about the fate of shelter animals can find proactive ways to help, including starting a campaign of their own. Phillips heard about the St. Croix “Pets from Paradise Program” when she visited the U.S. territory three years ago. Because the human population is limited, Phillips helps cats from St. Croix find new homes in the mainland.

Miney Moe, the 36th cat from St. Croix, will be six months old on Christmas Eve.

Allie Phillips helps cats from St. Croix find new homes in the mainland.
Holiday Gift Guide

Last Minute Gift Ideas

Photos by Louise Krafft/The Gazette

Charlie Brown and Snoopy are available at Kathy’s Corner in the Belle View Shopping Center.

An armful of plush wildlife at Kathy’s Corner in the Belle View Shopping Center.

Wine cozies ready for a holiday party at Initial Impressions in Hollin Hall.

Pirate hats for your favorite canine at Initial Impressions in Hollin Hall.

English soaps available at The Virginia Florist in Hollin Hall and the Belle View Shopping Center.

Jewels by Queen Bee Design at the Virginia Florist in Hollin Hall and the Belle View Shopping Center.

A selected of knit stockings are available at the Virginia Florist in Hollin Hall and the Belle View Shopping Center.

Hugglehounds are available for dogs who love to play at ProFeed in the Belle View Shopping Center.

Miney Moe, a brown tabby on view for adoption from King Street Cats at 25 S. Dove Street in Alexandria.

"Defending the Defenseless," by Allie Phillips is available at ProFeed in the Belle View Shopping Center.

Cans of Snow available at The Virginia Florist in Hollin Hall and the Belle View Shopping Center.

Needlepoint stockings at Initial Impressions at 7910 Fort Hunt Road in Hollin Hall.

Holiday gift bags are available at Kathy’s Corner in the Belle View Shopping Center.
What are the most stressful things about the holidays?

As people scramble to shop, cook, clean and meet family expectations, the holiday season can be a stressful event at times. So what are people doing that is so stressful, and how do they overcome that stress?

— Montie Martin

“I’m stressed about last minute shopping, and I’m always working. I unwind by relaxing and listening to Christmas music.”

— Ruby Szlagi, a sales associate at Kathy’s Corner, Cards & Gifts

“Trying to please everyone, to get that heart-dropping gift is pretty stressful. During the holidays you think about all of the family not around anymore, it brings up memories. It’s nice to have a little eggnog though.”

— Virgie Lindsey, with the Salvation Army

“The shoppers are stressed. Guys are always worried they will get the wrong things, so the ladies come in and tell us to write the items down on business cards and we let them know.”

— Alexa Lastantian, a sales associate with Belle Vue Jewelers

“It’s always stressful having enough time to get meaningful gifts, dealing with the stress of others, with crowded stores and parking. It’s important to take a break and think about how grateful I am for the people I’m getting presents for.”

— Nancy Kaplan, Middle School

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Viewpoints

Defenseless

From Page 5

of the 3,500 cats on the island nearly 95 percent are euthanized.

“The cats from St. Croix are gorgeous, they have a unique Siamese look but they need homes,” said Phillips. “I learned there was no organization that transported the cats from St. Croix to the mainland, so I started my own.”

The St. Croix cats are sent to areas of the country where there is a shortage of animals, including New England where the spaying and neutering program has been almost too successful.

“The people in St. Croix are so happy with the program, it’s given them such hope,” said Phillips. “They just cry they are so happy.”

— Dr. Dora Adamopoulos

December 22-28, 2011

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Mount Vernon Gazette  December 22-28, 2011  7
Share Your New Year’s Resolutions

What were top events, accomplishments of 2011 in your opinion?

This is the last regular edition of the Mount Vernon Gazette for 2011. Before the New Year begins, and New Year resolutions can be written, we’ll deliver the Children’s Gazette, an annual tradition, with pages filled with the artwork and writing of local students.

Meanwhile, we are preparing for the first issue of 2012, sharing views of what were the most important happenings of 2011 and what to look for in 2012. We’ll also share a variety of New Year’s resolutions. We invite our readers to help in this endeavor.

For some, local elections were likely the top event of 2011. For advocates of families of the fallen, like the Tragedy Assistance Program (TAPS), the end of 2011 brings the end of the Iraq war and the complex emotional and practical issues that come with EDITORIALS that. For non-profits and charitable organizations, 2011 brought greatly increasing numbers of people in need. For your family, the top events of 2011 might have included the birth of a child or a graduation or the completion of a marathon.

Share your joys and milestones with us, not only from the year that’s past, but also your expectations of 2012. Answer one or all of these questions:

1) What were the (one, two or three) most significant happenings of 2011 for you in your community? Why?
2) What do you think our readers should know to watch for in the coming year (up to three issues)? Or what do you think the top (one, two or three) happenings of 2012 will be locally? Why?
3) What is your New Year’s Resolution? (Feel free to share more than one)

Please include your home address with your responses, we’ll only print your town name. And we’d also love to have a photo of you, your family and/or events or places in your community that you reflect upon in your answer.

Free, Safe Ride Home from Holiday Celebrations

Once again, the Washington Regional Alcoholic Program will provide a safety net for those who might celebrate the holiday season with alcohol and unexpectedly need a safe ride home.

WRAP’s 2011 Holiday SoberRide program will operate each night from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. The program began Friday, Dec. 16, and will continue until Jan. 1, 2012.

To receive a free cab ride home (up to a $30 fare), call 800-200-8294 (TAXI). You must be 21 or older to use the SoberRide service. All requests for SoberRide service must be called in and dispatched from 1-800-200-8294. Callers will be responsible for any amount over $30.

WRAP’s SoberRide has helped to ensure local residents have a safe way home on high-risk holidays, keeping likely impaired drivers off the roads. Since 1993, WRAP has provided nearly 53,000 safe rides home. SoberRide operates during the December/January holiday season, St. Patrick’s Day, Independence Day and Halloween.

For details, see http://wrap.org/soberride

A Nonpartisan Redistricting Opportunity

By Scott A Surovell
State Delegate (D-44)

I have repeatedly advocated nonpartisan redistricting. I believe that our current redistricting system is at the heart of political gridlock in Washington and Richmond. Thanks to power software, today politicians pick their voters instead of voters picking their politicians. We also have a system designed to minimize public input and maximize incumbency protection. However, in January, a federal judge will have an unprecedented opportunity in Virginia.

Most people wouldn’t know it, but the General Assembly is actually still in session, but just in recess while we “consider” redistricting. The Governor signed legislation redistricting the General Assembly on April 29, 2011, but Congressional redistricting was never completed.

The last time we were actually physically in the State Capitol for a session was July 29, 2011. The House and Senate had previously approved competing bills regarding redistricting. On July 29, 2011, neither party had reached an agreement. Nothing was passed. We still sit today starting each other down with lame duck members of each chamber in office until Jan. 6, 2012.

The House of Delegates approved legislation that was effectively proposed by the incumbent congressmen (“the Republican Plan”). Most observers believe it would endanger Congressman Randy Forbes. I have not carefully analyzed them, but it is my understanding that competitive seats are largely absent from both plans. In terms of the 44th Delegate District, both plans would put the entire 44th District inside the 8th Congressional District. If you would like to see the plans, you can view them on the Division of Legislative Services Redistricting Website which you can access through Google or my blog.

Article II, Section 6 of The Constitution of Virginia requires redistricting to occur “in the year 2011 and every 10 years thereafter.” The Constitution does not state what happens if it does not happen “in the year 2011.” From my point of view it is an unprecedented opportunity.

The following is expected. First, we will return to Richmond on Jan. 6, 2012 and all be sworn in. Then, the Senate will meet to approve its rules and committees and will deadlock 20-20 on “organizing” themselves. The Lieutenant Governor will vote to break the tie and give the Republicans a working majority in the Senate. The Democrats will complain and say that is illegal.

The House and Senate will then pass the Republican Plan and the Governor will promptly sign it. All that will occur in about 10 days. Then, it will go to court and a federal judge will then need to rule:

1) Whether to adopt the Republican Plan (assuming it meets the requirements of the Voting Rights Act of 1965); or
2) Whether to have a three-judge panel adopt its own plan.

From my point of view, this is an unprecedented opportunity. Many of us have endorsed the concept of non-partisan redistricting. Although the State Senate has passed legislation and it was nominally endorsed by Governor McDonnell during his campaign, it has died every year committees. This situation presents an opportunity for a federal judge to actually do congressional redistricting on a non-partisan basis.

The work has already been done. Several Virginia Colleges held The Virginia Redistricting Competition last fall designed to produce maps created to maximize competition or simply focus upon non-political criteria. Fifty-five teams of students submitted entries. Four different teams were given awards for the Congressional District maps. (They don’t look anything like the present maps).

Governor McDonnell also created a Bipartisan Redistricting Commission. It even included a Mt. Vernonite — former State Board of Elections Chairman Jean Jensen. It produced three possible congressional district maps. The bottom line is that the work has been done. If the Court wants to take a step that was truly in Virginia’s best interest, they should reject the legislatures’ partisan self-interested work product and adopt one of the independent proposals. That is the only action that would be in Virginians’ best interest.

You can email me at scott.surovell@gmail.com. You can also stay informed by reading my blog, The Dixie Pig, at www.scottsurovell.blogspot.com. It is my honor to serve as your state delegate.
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Toy Drive Grows To Serve 4,000 Children

Bailey’s 2011 drive culminated Dec. 19 at Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Station 11 on Richmond Highway in Alexandria, where volunteers helped representatives from schools and nonprofits pick out toys for the children they serve.

“This is so overwhelming,” said Charlene Braxton, who picked up bags of donated toys, coats and gift cards for Community Lodgings families. “Because of this drive, one of our little girls will even be getting her first bike for Christmas.”

Joining Bailey in distributing toys were retired firefighters, soldiers from Fort Belvoir and Scouts from Troop 1865.

“The boys worked hard to raise thousands of dollars to buy toys and gifts cards,” said troop leader Eric Severeid, whose son Mikael raised $2,000 alone this year. “They didn’t ask for money, they earned it all doing odd jobs so they could help give back to those less fortunate.”

In partnership with Operation Warm, more than 500 new coats were also distributed as part of this year’s drive, adding to the distribution of more than 2,500 during a fall coat drive in October.

“A lot of people in the community don’t have the resources to provide for their families,” said Lee District Supervisor Jeff McKay.

“Station 11 really is the ‘Pride of the Highway’ and I am proud to represent this county and the firefighters who give back so much to those in need.”

In addition to the toy drive, Bailey’s Firefighters and Friends nonprofit has grown to include the fall coat drive and August backpack and school supplies drive.

“When we’re not running 911 emergencies, we’re trying to find other ways to give back to the community,” Bailey said. “I didn’t have much growing up but have been very blessed in my life. Now it’s my turn to give back in whatever small way I can.”

Retired firefighters (front) Joe Bertoni, Bill Barton, Ricky Pry and Steve Hartman and (back) Doug Emerson, Tom Wolfe, Walter Brown, John Harris and Elliott Rubino assembled more than 60 bikes as part of this year’s Firefighters and Friends annual toy drive.

Ruth and Grant McIntosh as Mr. and Mrs. Claus pause for a photo with Scout Troop 1865 members Cory Hamilton, Josh Van Holtz, Sam Green, James Silience and Jack Baker.

Sergeant Brad Scott and Specialist Wesley Sage, stationed at Fort Belvoir, pick out toys for area children as part of the Firefighters and Friends distribution day Dec. 19.

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Questions? E-mail: goinggreen@connectionnewspapers.com
Newlyweds Suzanne Runyon and David Weschler ring in the New Year during last year’s First Night celebration.

As New York City drops the ball in Times Square on New Year’s Eve, Alexandria will drop 6,000 balls on revelers as lasers lights crisscross the sky and club music moves people to dance and sing at the First Night Alexandria finale on the lawn of the George Washington Masonic Memorial. The finale warms up with a dance party on the Memorial lawn beginning at 10 p.m. with tunes by DJ Ray Casino. At 11:30 p.m. the show goes multimedia, with video, music, and a spectrum of colorful lasers, culminating in a midnight countdown and ball drop. Party-goers will want to snap a ball so they can enter to win prizes. On Jan. 1, participants who go to First Night’s Facebook page and post a photo of themselves with a ball and First Night badge will discover if they are a winner.

First Night Alexandria is a mega mix of live musical acts and entertainment with 100 performances at 18 indoor venues throughout Old Town Alexandria, Swing, Argumentean tango, Cajun, rock, blues, jazz, and entertainment for kids, are just some of the acts ringing in the New Year. With these performances, plus a comedy magic show, interactive kids’ activities and the all-ages, Fun Hunt, First Night Alexandria is the largest family-friendly and alcohol-free New Year’s Eve event in the region. Your ticket for the event is a First Night badge which gives you access to entertainment and activities at spots all around Old Town. This year’s First Night headquarters is the Durant Arts Center, 1605 Cameron Street, just blocks from King Street Metro Station. Starting at 7 p.m., with your First Night badge and schedule in hand, stroll Alexandria’s streets among venues, or hop on and off the free King Street Trolley to catch your favorite acts. Check out entertainment at venues including the Torpedo Factory Art Center, the Little Theatre of Alexandria, historic Christ Church, and the Lyceum. Museums, public buildings, and retail shops are turned into performance venues to showcase talent. Make a night of it with dinner at one of Old Town’s restaurants, pop into a warm, inviting pub, or grab a bite to eat at designated First Night venues.

First Night Scavenger Hunt designed by T.C. Williams senior.

By Maya Horowitz

S tart New Year’s Eve with a George Washington-themed fun hunt around Alexandria, designed by T.C. Williams senior Lauren McCracken.

“What people who are thinking about doing it should keep in mind is that it’s great for a family activity,” said Ann Dorman, executive director of First Night Alexandria. “There’s a lot of history in it because all the clues center around places that were important to George Washington. It’s really walkable. It’s a fun way to spend New Year’s Eve afternoon.”

The fun hunt is now in its third year. It was designed by board member Denny Auld, who wanted to create a low-cost lead up to the annual First Night festivities. When Auld retired, Dorman had to find someone else to write the clues. She turned to Ruth Reeder, education coordinator at Alexandria Archaeology. Reeder suggested T.C. Williams senior McCracken.

McCracken had made a scavenger hunt previously for the archaeology museum so she was a natural choice. She was given guidelines and studied hunts from previous years to create this year’s map. She chose George Washington as a theme.

“If at first I really didn’t know where to start, when they showed me the list of sites, I really didn’t have any ideas,” said McCracken. “But I started to realize, ‘Wow George Washington really has something to do with each one of these. George Washington would be a good theme.’ It just all came full circle. We wanted to make this fun because a lot of families might be staying in hotels in Old Town. For people who live in Alexandria, we wanted to teach them some things they hadn’t learned before, and definitively for people coming out of town, there’s so much you couldn’t possibly know until you see it yourself.”

It took McCracken a week or two in August to create the hunt and they did a test run in October to make the final edits.

There are three different routes with about eight clues/stops on each. Teams can pick up their clues at 1 p.m. at the Durant Center and they have until 4:45 p.m. to be back at the Durant Center with their completed answer sheets. The routes take about 45 minutes. Time has been allowed for teams to relax at shops and restaurants in Old Town between clues.

“When we did the test run, I went with a family that was super competitive,” said McCracken. “They ran the whole thing. They probably did it in like 20/30 minutes, which was amazing to me. Other families that got confused or it was difficult for them, it took them over an hour. We really want people to take their time and stop in shops. Take in the holiday time.”

All the clues can be found outside and the routes are about a mile.

“What I like about it is that it’s suitable for all ages,” said Dorman. “You can do it as a family or if there are a group of adults that want to do it. It’s multigenerational. It’s all walking distance. It’s not a timed event, so you can do it as quickly or as casually as you want to do it.” Everyone that correctly completes the hunt clue sheet by 4:45 p.m. is eligible to win prizes. Fun hunters must be present at the First Night kick-off at 5 p.m.

Answer sheets are drawn randomly from a box for first-, second- and third-place. Prizes include cash, treats from Bittersweet, Potomac Riverboat Company passes and assorted gift certificates from establishments in Old Town.
Making a Statement

Winners of Old Town Walled Garden Club Door Decorating Contest

The winners of the Old Town Walled Garden Club’s 44th annual holiday door-decorating contest were selected on Dec. 15, after the judges spent the morning wandering the streets of Old Town looking at the many candidates. The winners are:

❖ First place: 630 South Fairfax Street;
❖ Second place: 612 South Fairfax Street;
❖ Third place: 207 South Royal Street;
❖ Second place: 612 South Fairfax Street;
❖ Third place: 207 South Royal Street;
❖ Honorable mention: 206 North Columbus Street;
❖ Honorable mention: 414 South Royal Street.

Winners were selected based on use of natural materials, homeowner construction, and how well the decorations enhanced the beauty of Old Town.

The first-place winner will receive a framed print from Old Town artist Todd Healy at Gallery Lafayette, 320 King Street. The second-place winner’s prize is a gift certificate at La Bergerie Restaurant, at 206 North Columbus Street. The third-place winner’s prize is a gift certificate at La Bergerie Restaurant, at 206 North Columbus Street. The Grape & Bean, at 118 South Royal Street, has contributed a prize for the third-place winner.

Photos by Louise Krafft/Gazette

At left: 414 South Royal Street, honorable mention

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ENTERTAINMENT

DECEMBER

Trees, wreaths at Sandburg Middle School. Buy your holiday greens and trees while supplies last. Choose from a great selection of fresh Fraser Firs and Scotch Pines, decorated or undecorated wreaths, three types of garland and "Kissing Balls." Your purchase will help fund West Potomac High School athletics. At Carl Sandburg Middle School, 8428 Fort Hunt Rd., until sold out — weekdays, 5-8 p.m., Saturday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday, noon to 5 p.m.

NOW THROUGH JAN. 6

Christmas at Mount Vernon. 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. recurring daily. Holiday visitors will enjoy themed decorations (including 12 Christmas trees), a gingerbread replica of the Mansion created by former White House pastry chef Roland Mesnier, children’s make-believe demonstrations, and a rare opportunity to tour the third floor of the Mansion. In 1787, George Washington paid 18 shillings to bring a camel to Mount Vernon for his guests’ enjoyment. During Christmas at Mount Vernon, visitors can meet Aladdin the camel. At George Washington’s Mount Vernon Estate, 3200 Mount Vernon Memorial Highway, Mount Vernon. Christmas at Mount Vernon admission is included in general admission: $15/adults; $7/youths. Call 703-780-2000.

WEDNESDAY/DEC. 21

Swing Dancing. Admission is $10. With Scott Rammingher and the Crackitwicks. At Nick’s Nightclub, 642 South Fairfax St., Alexandria.

THURSDAY/DEC. 22

Light Painting Community Art Event. 5 to 7 p.m. Bring a flashlight. New being unwrapped toy or book donation. At Art at the Center, 2801 Sherwood Hall Lane, Alexandria.

FRIDAY/DEC. 23

Christmas at Mount Vernon. 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. throughout Old Town Alexandria. Admission: $10. With Scott Rammingher and the Crackitwicks. At Art at the Center, 2801 Sherwood Hall Lane, Alexandria.

SATURDAY/DEC. 24

Water Skiing Santa. 1 p.m. Santa is back on the banks of the Potomac with his knee boating reindeer, flying elves, jet skiing Grinch and Frosty the Snowman in a dinghy. At the National Harbor, 137 National

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TUESDAY/DEC. 27


**Back to the Drawing Board.** 7 p.m. Printmaker Carolyn Romano will describe and demonstrate her creative thought process using her photographs. At Grant Museum, 1017 Washington St., Alexandria. Call 703-549-3312 or visit grant@stpaulsalexandria.com.

**FESTIVAL/DEC. 30**

**Wee Ones Storytime.** 10:30 to 11 a.m. Free. Explore the exciting world with some of favorite stories and songs. Ages 2 and under. At Hoozy for Books, 1555 King St., Alexandria. Call 703-548-4902 or visit www.hozyaybooks.com.

**First Night Alexandria.** This annual New Year’s Eve bash takes over Old Town Alexandria with 100 live performances at 18 indoor venues, plus the Third Annual Fun Hunt, children’s face painting and games, and a multimedia finale spectacular at the George Washington Masonic Memorial. Performances start at 7 p.m. throughout Old Town Alexandria. Admission: $15 before Dec. 21, $20 after. Performances at 7 p.m. at venues throughout Old Town Alexandria. Multimedia Finale at George Washington Masonic Memorial, 101 Callahan Drive, Alexandria. Call 703-746-3301 or visit www.firstnightalexandria.org.

**BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD.** 7 p.m. Printmaker Carolyn Romano will describe and demonstrate her creative thought process using her sketch diaries to explain the genesis of her work. At Morrison House, 116 South Alfred St., Alexandria. Visit www.morrisonhouse.com or call 703-838-8400.

HOLIDAY HOURS

• 9 am–8 pm: Fri. 12/23
• 9 am–6 pm: Christmas Eve
• Closed Christmas Day • 9 am–6 pm: New Year’s Eve
• Closed New Year’s Day

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Sports

Experienced Wolverines Aiming for Regional Berth

Thompson, Voorhees lead West Potomac to win at Mount Vernon meet.

As a freshman, West Potomac gymnast Marien Voorhees qualified for regionals on the bars, but the Wolverines fell more than eight points shy of earning a team berth.

Last season, Voorhees finished third in the Patriot District all-around competition, punching her ticket to regionals in all four events — bars, floor, vault and beam. West Potomac drew closer to Lake Braddock and Woodson, but the Wolverines missed a team berth by less than two points.

This season, Voorhees leads an experienced West Potomac group in search of an elusive trip to the Northern Region meet. The Wolverines return each of their primary postseason contributors and hope to oust the Bruins or Cavaliers as one of the top two in the district.

“arlier, I was so nervous. Now, it’s a lot of fun and I’m calm and confident about my routines.”

— West Potomac junior Marien Voorhees

West Potomac won a meet at Mount Vernon, defeating the Majors, Lee, Thomas Jefferson, Hayfield and Edison.

“When I was a freshman, I was so nervous,” Voorhees said. “Now, it’s a lot of fun and I’m calm and confident about my routines. … The first season you compete in you’re always the most nervous. The girls [who] are coming back for their second year are getting used to competing and their routines.”

Voorhees has been limited of late due to aggravating a past Achilles tendon injury. On Monday, she limited her floor routine and did not compete on the vault. She placed second on the bars (8.6), tied for third on the beam (8.3) and finished seventh on the floor (8.55).

Meanwhile, West Potomac sophomore Monica Thompson finished second in the all-around with a score of 33.7. Lee senior Katie Stewart (35.6) finished first. Thompson placed third on the beam (8.3), fourth on the vault (8.5), fifth on the bars (8.4) and eighth on the floor (8.5). Thompson qualified for regionals on the bars and beam as a freshman.

“I feel like I definitely know what’s going on more,” she said, “and I think our team has improved a lot since last year.”

Junior Amanda Trenchard and senior Monica Bell are also key contributors for the Wolverines. Bell finished sixth in Monday’s all-around. Trenchard placed second on the floor (8.9), sixth on the bars (8.4) and 10th on the beam (6.2).

West Potomac finished first as a team with a score of 128.25. Lee (126.8) finished second, followed by Mount Vernon (101.55), Hayfield (99.85), Thomas Jefferson (98.05) and Edison (30.8).

“As long as they keep working hard, I think we have a shot to go for regionals,” West Potomac head coach Pete Novgrod said. “I think it’s going to be a tight fight. … If we can get into the 130s like we were last year, I think we have a shot.”

West Potomac will compete in a meet at Thomas Jefferson on Jan. 10. The Patriot District championships are Feb. 2.

West Potomac Football players John Henderson, Colin Gregory, Hunter Dennis and Alex Amico warm up by the fire at the annual sale.

West Potomac Hosts Tree and Wreath Sale

West Potomac High School’s Athletic Boosters and Crew Team are selling holiday trees and wreath behind Carl Sandburg Middle School through Dec. 22. The trees and wreaths are from Sutherland Christmas Tree Farm in Elk Creek, Va.
Trying To Unveil State Tax Incentives

FROM PAGE 1

receive the tax credits, building a wall of silence around an ever-increasing list of beneficiaries of taxpayer largesse. What’s more, a recent report from the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission shows that many tax incentives don’t achieve the goal they were intended to create. Two income tax credits have been adopted to slow the decline of Virginia’s coal employment and production, yet it’s only served to reduce tax bills of unnamed corporate interests. Those names could become public this year. Del. Scott Surovell (D-44) will be introducing legislation in the upcoming General Assembly session that would make all recipients of tax credits worth more than $1,000 a matter of public record.

“A lot of times the people or the entities that are benefiting from these things are very wealthy,” said Surovell. “And I think a lot of taxpayers would object if we were writing a $4 million check to Steven Spielberg.”

Yes, that Steven Spielberg. One of the recently credits was created specifically to lure Spielberg to Virginia as the location for his newest movie about Abraham Lincoln. It worked, and the feature film is now being filmed in Richmond. But the casting call worked, and the feature film is now being filmed in Richmond. But the casting call was creating a $2.5 million Virginia Motion Picture Tax Credit program.

Republican Governor Bob McDonnell kicked in $1 million from the Governor’s Motion Picture Opportunity Fund as well as $1.1 million in-kind contributions, including use of the governor’s office. That puts Virginia taxpayers on the hook for about $4.6 million to support a film produced by one of the wealthiest men in Hollywood.

“Film production means job creation,” said McDonnell in a written statement. “Here in Virginia, we are committed to partnering with the film industry to bring more productions to the commonwealth in order to create more good jobs for our citizens.”

THE ONLY REASON taxpayers know how much money was spent specifically to lure Spielberg is that the tax incentive in question was designed specifically for him. Other recipients of tax credits lurk in the shadows, with the state code acting as a shield to hide their identity. Nobody knows who is benefiting from the green jobs tax credit, for example, or the land preservation tax credit. Although the Virginia Department of Taxation keeps careful records about which corporations and individuals are receiving the tax preferences, Virginia code section 58.1-3 forbids state officials from allowing the public or the press to follow the money. “We can give general information about how many credits have been issued for a given category,” said Joel Davison, public relations manager for the department. “But we can’t give you specific information about individuals.”

That means that billions of dollars are given out each year to special interests in untraceable amounts, with recipients hiding behind the veil of the Virginia tax code. In 2008 alone, taxpayers forked over $12.5 billion in tax incentives to special interests — almost as much money as the $14.3 billion in revenue collected under those taxes. And nobody is minding the store. No process currently exists to evaluate the effectiveness of tax preferences. As a result, the General Assembly is not provided with information needed to take appropriate action in order to improve, revise or eliminate the tax credits once they are created. Moreover, it’s all done outside of public view.

“People should know who’s receiving these tax credits,” said Del. Charniele Herring, adding that she’ll be voting in favor of Surovell’s legislation. “Disclosure is an important part of open government.”

VIRGINIA OFFERS almost 200 tax preferences in the form of exemptions, deductions or credits. And the list grows each year. Frustrated by the lack of oversight in this process, Del. David Englin (D-45) introduced legislation back in 2010 that would have created a tax expenditure report detailing how many credits are being issued, how much money is involved and whether or not they are achieving their intended goals. Englin said he hit a wall of resistance, and that the bill only passed after being “watered down” to the extent it did little to shed more sunshine on this dark corner of the commonwealth’s finances.

“There are a lot of corporate interests who do not want sunshine on the tax credits they receive,” said Englin, adding that he’ll support Surovell’s legislation. “The problem Scott is going to run into is this notion of tax privacy, so it’s going to be very difficult to pass something like this.”

In the meantime, Englin is drafting what he calls a “transparency and accountability amendment.” Any time a tax expenditure is being considered, Englin plans to suggest this amendment to the measure. He says it would create a sunset after five years and require the Department of Taxation to report on how many times the tax preference was used and how much money was spent. It would also include a statement of the original purpose of the tax preference so lawmakers could come to their own conclusions as to whether or not it accomplished what it was supposed to accomplish. “We are hemorrhaging money,” said Englin. “And these tax expenditures need more scrutiny.”
Employment

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All written comments must be received by close of business on Wednesday, January 11, 2012 to be included in the record of the public hearing.

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For Boosters Club
Mount Vernon-Lee Chamber president Michael Gailliot shows trees at the Mount Vernon Athletic Boosters Club holiday tree sale at the school on Saturday morning, Dec. 17.

Crime Report
Activities reported by the Mt. Vernon police department through Dec. 16.

Obituary
Donald R. Rogers
Donald R. Rogers, 78 of Woodford, raised in Mount Vernon, formerly of Woodbridge, died Monday Dec. 12, 2011. He had retired after 38 years as chief electrical supervisor at Ft. Belvoir and then retired again from Prince William County, as an electrical inspector. He also served as a Prince William County Sheriff Auxiliary Deputy for many years. He enjoyed drag racing and had won numerous races and trophies.

Correction
In “Mother Condemns Death Penalty” [Mount Vernon Gazette, Dec. 15-21], Steve Northrup, executive director of Virginians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, described Montana, Colorado and Kansas as being among the states with strong abolition movements that could be successful in the near future. They did not abolish capital punishment as stated in the story.