

Drum & Strum students make YouTube debut in virtual concert

By Angela Roberts
SPECIAL TO THE FAUQUIER TIMES

Wearing a hot pink nightgown and cradling a ukulele, the tiny star peered nervously into the camera on the laptop balanced in front of her. From a window on her screen, her instructor, Donna Britton Bukevicz, beamed at her.

“Hello, I’m Amelia Grace, and I’m 8 years old,” the little girl said in a hurry before diving to hide behind her mother, who was seated beside her.

“And we’re a little shy,” her mom said, laughing. With some persuasion, Amelia Grace emerged and plucked out “Hot Cross Buns” for her virtual audience.

As of last month, students at Warrenton’s Drum & Strum Music Center can once again meet with their teachers face-to-face. With the coronavirus pandemic still an ongoing threat, though, Britton Bukevicz said she’s not sure when the center will be able to resume in-person concerts.

With restrictions in place, she arranged for her students to showcase their talents for family and friends over Zoom last week in Drum & Strum’s first virtual recital. As they strummed on ukes and debuted songs they’d written themselves, Britton Bukevicz recorded the video call. She then premiered the video Wednesday night on YouTube.

“Music is a super powerful tool. It’s a super powerful medicine,” she said. “Doing this concert with them. ... It’s just been another way to help them get through a really troubled time.”

For some students, it wasn’t just their first virtual recital — it was their first recital, period. Amelia Grace, for one, was a bit nervous. As the days ticked closer to the concert, Britton Bukevicz said one student was so worried that she stopped sleeping.

After performing, another student announced that she had made everyone leave the house before the recital began. “They went on a walk,” the student explained, getting a laugh out of Britton Bukevicz.

Holding a virtual recital is something other teachers had been discussing for a while, said Drum & Strum owner Tim Dingus. Britton Bukevicz was the first to plan one. Dingus was encouraged by what he watched: “After I saw her do it, I was like, ‘Golly, everybody should be doing this!’” he said.

From March to June, all lessons at the center were held virtually, as teachers connected with their students over platforms such as Zoom, FaceTime and Google Hangouts. However, with Fauquier’s often

shoddy internet access, it was easier for some students than others to follow through with their studies.

Amelia Gray Myers, 13, for instance, lives about 10 minutes away from Old Town Warrenton and doesn’t have a reliable internet connection. To keep up with her ukulele lessons, she said she occasionally called Britton Bukevicz over FaceTime while sitting in her grandfather’s truck, which has access to the internet. However, most of her lessons happened over a phone call, with Britton Bukevicz emailing her chords and songs to practice each week.

Sometimes, though, even Gray Myers’ cell service proved spotty. For her first remote lesson, she climbed a big oak tree with her instrument to make sure her call would go through.

“It was a little difficult,” she explained. “I’d have to hold my phone on my shoulder or put it between two branches and hope it doesn’t fall. I think back on it a lot. The important thing is that it worked. And I got through with the lesson.”

Learning virtually was also tricky for some of Britton Bukevicz’s youngest proteges. To keep one of her 5-year-olds engaged, she had Daisy and Rufus — two puppets — talk to her at the end of each lesson. At the recital, that student happily plunked away at the keys as she sang “Merrily We Roll Along.”

But now Gray Myers, along with two other Britton Bukevicz students, have resumed in-person lessons. To safeguard against the transmission of COVID-19, both student and teacher wear masks during their lessons — something Gray Myers said can make singing especially difficult. The center also has a bottle of hand sanitizer stationed in each lesson room, as well as at the front desk.

If there’s one thing Britton Bukevicz misses, it’s hugging her students, she said. Recently, one of her 5-year-old musicians stopped by the center for an in-person lesson for the first time in months, and all Britton Bukevicz wanted to do was give her a hug. “I went, ‘I can’t do this!’” she said. But she knows that the precautions are for a good cause.

“You do what you gotta do to support your students and nurture their souls and help them through a tough time,” she said.

Angela Roberts is a summer intern from the University of Maryland’s journalism school. Her internship was made possible by the Piedmont Journalism Foundation and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

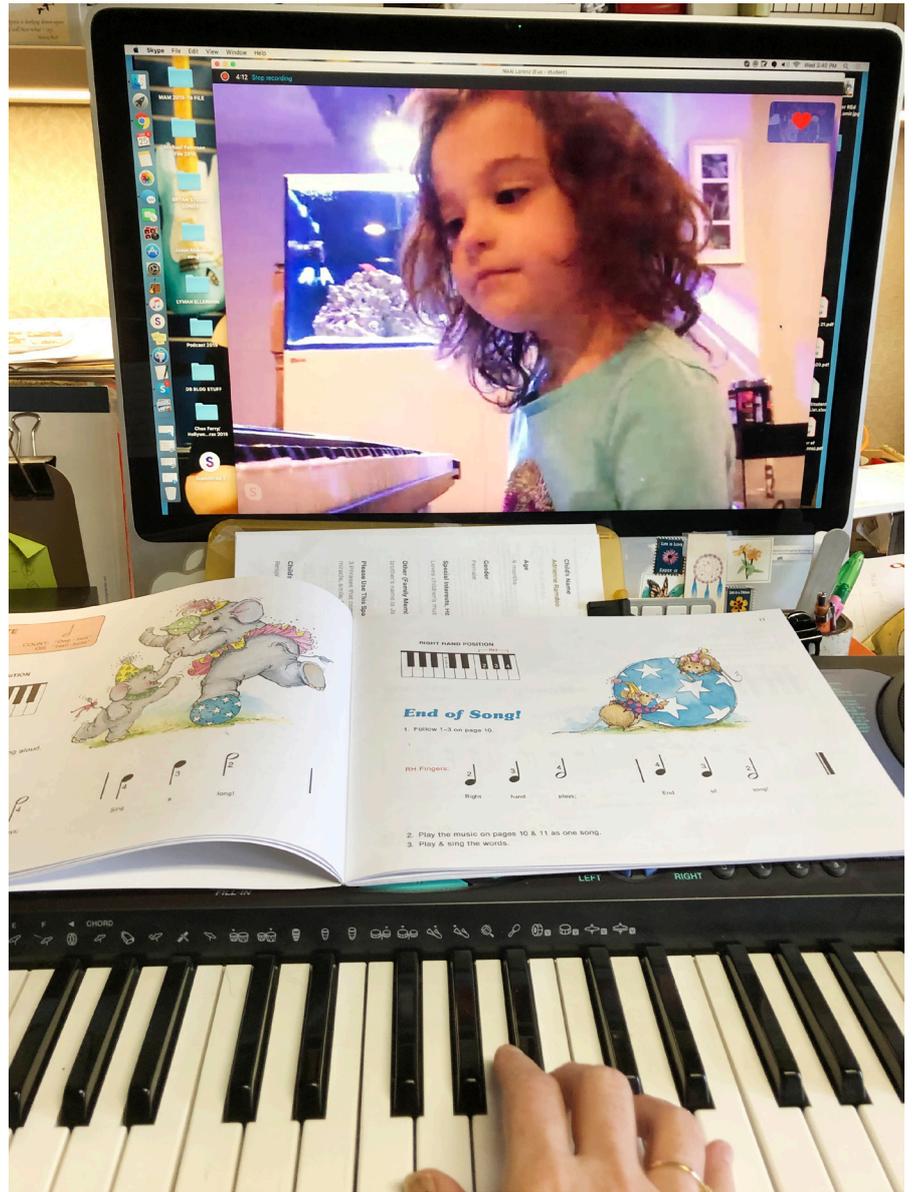
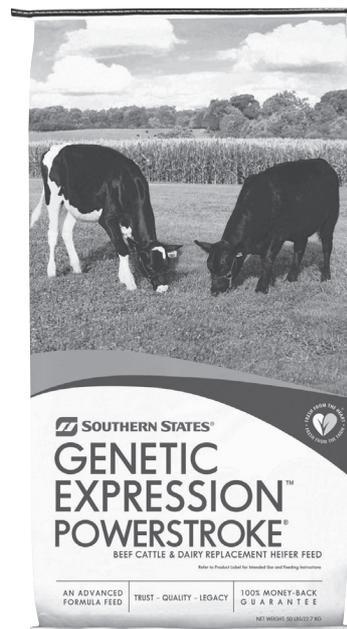


PHOTO BY DONNA BRITTON BUKEVICZ
Budding musician Eva Lorenz, 5, plays “Merrily We Roll Along” on the piano during Drum & Strum’s virtual concert Wednesday.

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ANGELO'S LIST:
HIGHLAND'S BRIZZI HAS
HOOPS OFFERS FROM
ARIZONA, VILLANOVA,
MICHIGAN.
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Caitlin Reams, RN, Piedmont Urgent Care TIMES STAFF PHOTO/COY FERRELL



Doctor: 'No test is 100% reliable'

False negatives in coronavirus tests a concern

By Coy Ferrell
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Testing for the novel coronavirus has become exponentially more accessible since the pandemic began.

In Virginia, 43 times more tests were performed during the most recent week than in mid-March. Getting tested before traveling or returning to work has become a routine part of life during the pandemic; some

universities are requiring proof of a negative test result from students before they return to campus this fall.

As of Monday, more than 1 million tests for the virus that causes the COVID-19 disease have been con-

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Former bank manager accused of taking \$100,000 from customers

Staff Reports

A former branch manager of The Plains branch of The Fauquier Bank has been charged with 36 felony counts after allegedly forging withdrawal slips and taking a total of more than \$100,000 from bank customers.



Susan Woolston Wright

On multiple dates from May 2019 to February 2020, Susan Wright of Upperville allegedly forged withdrawal slips from four customers' accounts and removed a total of \$103,573 from those accounts, according to criminal complaints filed July 8 by a Fauquier County Sheriff's Office deputy.

Wright is charged with 16 felony counts of forgery, 16 counts of false uttering and four counts of obtaining money by false pretenses.

Wright turned herself in on July 11 and was released on a \$25,000 secured bond, according to a sheriff's office spokesperson. She will appear in Fauquier County General District Court for a preliminary hearing on Oct. 7. If convicted, Wright could face up to 10 years of prison time for each count.

Her attorney, Joseph Pricone of Mark B. Williams & Associates in Warrenton, said that the law firm will conduct its own investigation of the case and review evidence to best form a defense strategy before the October hearing.



Kayden, 9, of Warrenton, does an ollie at the WARF skate park July 15.

TIMES STAFF PHOTO/COY FERRELL

Students cope with a socially distanced summer

As restrictions relax, young people tiptoe back into some activities

By Angela Roberts
SPECIAL TO THE FAUQUIER TIMES

David Mayfield, 13, must wear a mask inside the Boys & Girls Club of Fauquier in Warrenton. When he goes outside to throw a football with friends, they have to

put on gloves. And when he and his buddies decide to play a game of Knockout, they're only allowed to touch their own basketballs.

Still, he's happy to be at camp. Before it began, he was staying up all night playing video games and sleeping during the day. Camp,

which starts at 9 a.m., has given him back a regular schedule.

"It feels great," he said. "I'm finally seeing sunlight. It's been a long time."

Mayfield has been coming to

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Students cope with a socially distanced summer

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the camp since he was 6 years old, and normally there are a hundred other children there too. This year, because of the novel coronavirus, there are 18.

With school out in the middle of the pandemic, school-aged children everywhere have had to cope with canceled summer camps, online summer classes, lost internships and postponed vacations. That includes about 12,000 students in Fauquier, the vast majority of whom attend the county's 20 public schools.

Online summer school at public schools is running through July 24, on a Monday through Thursday schedule.

As Virginia opens back up for business, some children are visiting friends for the first time in months, while others are still hanging back at home.

Recently, 10-year-old Bryce Hendrix's mom and other parents in his neighborhood began to allow their children to play together. The rising fifth grader has been able to have friends over to jump on the trampoline and play video games.

But he has spent most of his time with his older sister, Samantha, who will be studying dance at Old Dominion University in the fall. "I will be sobbing my eyes out," he predicted.

Samantha said her time watching movies, painting and staying up late talking with Bryce, whom she calls



Campers at the Boys & Girls Club of Fauquier keep themselves busy, dancing outside at a distance -- and especially loving it in the rain.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BOYS & GIRLS CLUB OF FAUQUIER

her best friend, has been one good side effect of quarantine.

After graduation, Samantha and her friends were supposed to go to Disney World, but health concerns forced them to cancel the trip. As restrictions have lifted, they have organized a trip to Ocean City.

Graduated senior Ella Irvin and her friends enjoyed a vacation in Virginia Beach, where they spent the week reminiscing about high school. They even went out to dinner one night, and sat outside.

"It's definitely hard being a senior and having all this going on, because we're not going to see our friends again and this is our last chance to hang out with them and be together," she said.

Anna Bryant, 15, busses tables and works in the kitchen from time to time in the small restaurant

her grandparents own in Colonial Beach, Virginia. But this summer she's at home babysitting her three younger siblings because their summer camps were canceled and their mom works.

She's hoping as restrictions lift, she will still be able to help her grandparents, even though the restaurant's small dining area is only able to sit half as many customers because of remaining coronavirus restrictions.

"I'm hoping by the end of the summer I can go down," said Anna, who is a rising sophomore. "They are good people down there."

For students like Nathaniel Borgstrom, a rising ninth-grader, the summer hasn't been too different from previous ones, he said. He usually stays inside and plays video games or reads.

This summer, Nathaniel has cooked dinner for his family every Monday night and recently spent five hours making pork dumplings for them. He also made a cake with yogurt instead of eggs and vegetable oil, he said, dissolving into giggles. He ate almost all of it himself.

His biggest wish is that virtual classes end and students will be able to return to the classroom in the fall. "I really hope it's not online," he said emphatically. "I really hope it's not online!"

Meanwhile, at the Boys and Girls Club, Kaylee Stewart, 8, and her friend Hope, 9, whose parents preferred not to give her last name, were goofing around in the dining area. Nearby, Assistant Unit Director Sarah Hundley wiped down the chairs and tables with a bleach solution and kept an eye on the girls, occasionally reminding them to keep a distance from each other: "Six feet apart, girls!"

The girls said they've been practicing cartwheels, singing, comparing scrunchie collections and dancing a lot at camp -- even in the rain, Stewart said.

While the camp has brightened their summer, attending it has come with one painful trade-off for Hope. She isn't allowed to hug her grandparents because she is now exposed to people outside her family. The restriction was especially sad, she said, when she visited her grandpa for his birthday recently and had to tell him no when he asked for a hug and a kiss.

"I was like, 'Oh my gosh.' I was so sad," she said. "And he had a sad face."

Kids adapt to wearing masks – for safety's sake

Eight-year-old Tucker Biegler knows just what to do to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus.

His voice muffled under a galaxy-splattered mask, he ticked down the list on his fingers as he stood in Warrenton's Food Lion parking lot: "One: Social distancing; Two: Wear a mask; Three: Hand sanitizer." Plus, he said, masks can be comfortable — but not if they're worn upside down.

"It basically provides a safe environment," Tucker said, cocking his head from side to side. "It helps me and my community stay safe!"

For two months now, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has recommended that everyone over the age of 2 wear a face mask in situations where staying 6 feet away from others is tricky.

That means kids have had to get used to a new accessory when running errands with their parents. Most chain stores have begun selling child-sized masks.

Making this adjustment has been easier for some than others.

Nine-year-old Gannon McClung's blue surgical mask hung loosely below his nose as he helped his mom grab a shopping cart at Food Lion's entrance. He doesn't like wearing it too much, he said. It makes him hot — especially on days like Monday, when temperatures sailed up in the high 80s.

But he knows it's important. "It protects you," he said softly.

Wyatt Utt, a rising fifth-grader, has found wearing a mask generates other difficulties, besides making a hot day seem even hotter: When he put on his sunglasses, they fogged up real fast. The bottom of the mask can also get uncomfortable on his chin, he said.

Still, he said he straps one on any time he goes into a store — like the Walmart he stood outside of Monday — "to keep other people safe from my germs."

Gabriela Warhurst, 11, doesn't mind wearing a mask. It's not terrible or even uncomfortable, she said. So, when she sees people walking around town or in stores without wearing one, she's confused.

"It's not that hard to just put on a mask," she said.

Her sister Gretel agreed. She actually likes wearing a mask — it makes her feel safe.

"It feels good to wear a mask because it protects me from getting germs that way," said Gretel, who is 9. "Also, I don't spread any other germs to any other people."

Back in the Food Lion parking lot, Tucker's sister Leigh, 11, says masks can be comfortable to wear although they can get pretty warm sometimes. Nonetheless, she likes wearing them.

"It makes me feel that I'm keeping others safe," she said.

Angela Roberts

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Summer school 2020 included more than 1,000 students

Remote teaching techniques informed by lessons learned since March

By Angela Roberts
SPECIAL TO THE FAUQUIER TIMES

When Fauquier County Public Schools opened up summer school registration to all students a few weeks ago, more than 1,100 middle and high school students signed up.

Normally, summer school is only available to middle- and high-schoolers who need to retake a course in order to graduate. The usual number of summer school students is about 35.

“Everybody was very worried about students not having been in school since March,” said Blaire Conner, assistant principal of summer school. “It’s not that our students are behind ... but it’s that we wanted them to have the opportunity to continue learning in this current unique situation [caused by COVID-19].” Summer school 2020 started on July 6 and will end July 23.

To meet the demand for the summer program, the county hired 81 staff members instead of the four or so it typically brings on. To accommodate students with no or poor internet access, the district gave out 300 electronic devices and 200 internet hotspots so students could connect to the internet; those numbers were enough to serve every student who requested the equipment, said Conner.

School buses with hotspots continue to be parked throughout the county as well, and Hodge says the bandwidth of Wi-Fi at schools has been expanded so that students can access the internet from their parking lots.

The federal CARES Act, enacted to stimulate an economy brutalized by the coronavirus pandemic, has helped the school district cover the cost of the hiring blitz, as well as the hotspot devices.

Learning how to teach remotely

All instruction this summer is happening remotely for the first time. The result is a large, living laboratory for teachers and administrators to discover what works and what doesn’t as they finalize logistics for the coming school year.

Allyson Martin’s kindergarten class is one such laboratory, with a jam-packed hour of education four days a week via computer. Since the



Teacher Allyson Martin works with kindergarteners remotely.

COURTESY PHOTO

second week of July, the class has talked about shapes and patterns and learned the spelling of different words, with lessons on manners and patience thrown in, too.

“They’re so cute to see on the screen,” said Martin, who teaches second grade at James G. Brumfield Elementary School in Warrenton. “Oh my gosh, it makes my teacher heart so happy.”

Summer school has been more rigorous than the instruction that happened virtually from March through May, Martin said. She expects her first-graders and kindergarteners to pay attention. She’s also introducing concepts that may be new to them.

When schools went online in the spring, the school district made assignments and expectations flexible to avoid adding more stress to the already disrupted lives of families. It distributed “choice boards” to families — a tic-tac-toe-like listing of educational activities to keep students busy. Martin said she taught a few “mini lessons” via video, but she mainly concentrated on reviewing basic concepts.

Brittany Hundley, who will be teaching third grade at Greenville Elementary School in Nokesville in the fall, agreed that the summer school experience is more demanding.

She and another Greenville teacher are sharing responsibility for a group of 85 students between kindergarten and fifth grade who are able to work more independently than Martin’s students. Hundley and her colleague mainly interact with their students over Google Classrooms rather than over video chat.

“It’s been really, really cool to see what the kids are creating and how they’re taking ownership and they’re learning and showcasing their strengths,” she said.

Hundley also helped create the curriculum for this year’s summer school program. Starting in the spring, a committee composed of teachers and

administrators planned how the virtual program should be run, incorporating lessons learned from what didn’t work online between March and May.

For instance, summer school principal Michael Hodge said the biggest concern the school system heard from families was that there was too much variation in the way lessons were taught across the district. During summer school, he said, the school district has been trying to establish a common way of teaching across all grades.

Summer school teachers have also used their virtual teaching experience from the spring to make improvements, said Hodge, assistant principal for Southeastern Alternative School in Midland.

“Having that experience in their back pocket, and using that experience — along with feedback that they had been given at their own schools and by their own students — helped them to [decide] ... how they would set up their virtual learning experience during the summertime,” he said.

Last week, the Fauquier County School Board approved a plan for the fall that will allow students to attend school in person two days per week and learn from home the other three, but Martin pointed out that much of the future remains unknown. What if there’s another surge of the coronavirus? What if Virginia’s governor shuts down schools again?

If this happens, Martin says her experience teaching summer school has prepared her to teach her students remotely.

“If a kindergartner or first-grader can sit for an hour, I know my second-graders can sit for an hour,” she said. “I can still do things I did in the regular classroom with them over the computer.”

At last week’s meeting, school Superintendent David Jeck said any schoolwork assigned on days students aren’t in the classroom, they will be able to be complete “with or without technology support” — a recognition of the spotty nature of internet access in the county.

Martin has learned to handle the county’s glitchy internet. When one of her student’s video connection would drop, Martin and her class just waited for the student to come back online.

Martin promised parents she will do whatever it takes to help her students, even if that means delivering lessons by phone.

“I’m not gonna leave a kid who doesn’t have access out just because they’re not there,” she said. “I will go beyond for any of my kids — no matter what.”

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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costly water and wastewater expansions to accommodate a 2.3% annual growth rate. The mismatch suggests an intention to recruit new populations from surrounding jurisdictions to achieve a growth rate well above the town’s projected growth.

Furthermore, rather than do the difficult work of recycling failed strip mall development along U.S. 29, the plan proposes a bypass, through conserved land, around the western side of Warrenton by building out the Timber Fence Parkway and acquiring land for a new “Southern Parkway” from Va. 211 down to U.S. 29. The town seems to want residential growth without regard to the consequences in costs for services. And, if its ambitious growth goals are not realized, after investing in water and

wastewater expansions and a new bypass, existing taxpayers will be burdened with those costs.

These are some of the bigger issues in the plan that deserve thoughtful and transparent discussion.

The Piedmont Environmental Council calls on the town to slow down this process and consider that this major planning decision is being made during a pandemic. Times like these require the town to actively pursue public input, which takes additional time and effort. Doing so will not only increase community buy-in, but will also ensure the plan truly reflects the community’s desires. The plan will be improved through the process, and Warrenton will be better for it.

JULIE BOLTHOUSE
Piedmont Environmental Council
Warrenton

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anxieties are our obligations to the children -- who are watching us and looking to their elders for reassurance.

We know that many children who don’t go to school and learn in a classroom will suffer intellectual, physical and emotional hardship. Online learning doesn’t work with young children. They need in-person interaction with their teachers and their classmates. If this doesn’t occur, they will be denied an opportunity to grow and fulfill their God-given potential.

I am grateful for the devotion and care provided to all of us in this time by our health professionals, first responders and law enforcement officers. I am also so very grateful to the many brave essential workers who are transporting food and other necessities and stocking and staffing our grocery stores and pharmacies. Teachers should also be considered essential workers. I hope they will find a way to continue our children’s education, full time and in person.

JOAN CATON ANTHONY
Warrenton

Letters to the Editor

The Fauquier Times welcomes letters to the editor from its readers as a forum for discussion of local public affairs subjects.

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