



INSIDENOVA

PRINCE WILLIAM

\$1 OCTOBER 22-28, 2020

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COVID-19 IN PRINCE WILLIAM

All numbers through Wednesday, Oct. 21, and show changes since Oct. 14

16,387 (+450)
Total confirmed and probable cases
 » Prince William: 13,731 (+424)
 » Manassas: 2,018 (+20)
 » Manassas Park: 634 (+6)
 » Statewide: 168,772 (+7,162)

257 (+8)
Deaths
 » Prince William: 222 (+6)
 » Manassas: 27 (+2)
 » Manassas Park: 8 (0)
 » Statewide: 3,515 (+134)

6.0%
(up from 5.5%)
Average test positivity rate*
 » Statewide: 4.9%

140,822 (+5,911)
Tests conducted*
 » Statewide: 2.43 million

24 (+2)
Outbreaks*
 » 17 long-term care facilities
 » 5 congregate settings
 » 1 child care setting
 » 1 correctional setting
 » 586 outbreak associated cases (+13)
 » 816 cases in health care workers (+31)
 » Statewide: 1,188 outbreaks (+51)

 For daily updates, visit InsideNoVa.com and sign up for our email newsletters and breaking news alerts.

SOURCE: Virginia Department of Health.

* - Outbreaks and diagnostic test data are reported for the Prince William Health District, which consists of the county and the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park. An outbreak is defined as two or more cases in one setting.

Testing Times



About 70 people were tested for COVID-19 during a free event offered by Prince William County on Oct. 16 at the Woodbridge Senior Center. Similar numbers were seen across the county at SplashDown Waterpark, but that is much less than the number of tests conducted at free events earlier in the pandemic.

PAUL LARA | FOR INSIDENOVA

As COVID-19 cases rise, so does 'pandemic fatigue'

» BY JARED FORETEK
jforetek@insidenova.com

As new cases of COVID-19 increase in Prince William County and across Northern Virginia, experts are expressing concern about the winter and the onset of "pandemic fatigue."

According to updated Virginia Department of Health data released Monday, Northern Virginia is back up to a "moderate" level of community transmission for the virus that causes COVID-19.

In addition, the Prince William Health District - which encompasses the county as well as the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park - has the highest test positivity rate in the region at 6% as of Wednesday.

Other indicators of the virus' spread, such as hospitalizations and ventilator usage, are down from highs in the spring. In its most recent weekly report, the University of Virginia's COVID-19 model showed the Prince William district in the "slow growth" category, below "in surge" but above "plateau."

 **Return to school plans updated**
 Prince William County Schools Superintendent Steve Walts prepared a plan to present to the School Board on Wednesday night that shows middle-school and high school students returning to in-person learning in a hybrid format in late January and early February.
 » For the details and other updates from the board meeting, visit InsideNoVa.com.

In all three variations of its model, the report predicts an increase in weekly confirmed cases statewide from now through the end of the year but expects that no region in Virginia will exceed its hospital capacity.

Amira Roess, a global health and epidemiology professor at George Mason University, said she's seeing "pandemic fatigue" and a growing aversion to being tested. At the same time, she said, a fall and winter surge in cases is almost inevitable.

"As we move into the colder months we will likely see a surge in cases and an increase in demand for testing. This may lead to shortages

COVID » PAGE 10

Baseball league, city to discuss plans for fields

Current Manassas site eyed for redevelopment

» BY JARED FORETEK
jforetek@insidenova.com

The Greater Manassas Baseball League is raising concerns about the future of youth baseball in the city as its current fields are eyed for redevelopment, but officials say there's no need to worry.

The league and the city both acknowledge that eventually the league will probably have to move from the six fields it uses at the city-owned E.G. Smith Complex, and the city has scheduled a work session next month to discuss alternatives.

But despite assurances that any sale of the land would come with a plan to relocate the league, known as GMBL, some are worried that the city's commitment to its future is waning.

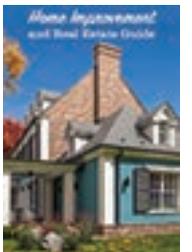
» **INSIDE: See an aerial photo of the site, Page 5.**

Donald Hollar, a member of the league's board of directors, said people connected to the league have recently been hearing "rumors" that replacement baseball fields are not a sure thing in the event that the E.G. Smith complex, at Route 28 and Godwin Drive, is bought and redeveloped. The fields are next to the Micron Technology Inc. plant, which is undergoing a \$3 billion expansion.

GMBL » PAGE 5

» INSIDE THIS WEEK

» **Fall Home Improvement and Real Estate Guide** (special pullout): Tips for upgrading your home and a look at some of the most expensive houses that sold recently in Prince William.
 » **NOVA Jobs (Pages 19-21):** Looking for work? These companies are hiring.



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in supplies and delays getting test results,” Roess told InsideNoVa this week.

“I fully expect cases to rise because as the weather gets colder, people will move to socialize and to eat out,” she added. “We know that eating out at restaurants is linked to cases and we will likely see more people eating indoors. ... During the holidays, we have many indoor gatherings, and we know that indoor gatherings are also linked to outbreaks.”

The level of COVID positivity in the health district is crucial to the question of school reopenings. Prince William County Public Schools plans to phase in a return to in-person classes in a hybrid format for elementary school students starting Nov. 10, with middle and high schoolers expected to follow in late January or early February, but the school system has emphasized those plans are subject to change. Students and their parents can choose to remain in remote learning.

Manassas City Public Schools has not announced any plans for a return to in-person learning for the vast majority of its students.

At a joint meeting between the Prince William Board of County Supervisors and the school board Oct. 13, School Board Chair Babur Lateef said more testing would help to encourage school reopenings by driving down the county’s positivity rate.

“In Fairfax ... they give [testing] out like candy,” Lateef said. “I’m asking you guys to help us do more testing.”

But by all accounts, there’s more free

Hardest-hit Zip codes		
The Prince William Health District has five of the top 11 Zip codes in Northern Virginia in terms of number of COVID-19 cases reported to date per 100,000 population.		
Rank	Zip Code	Cases per 100,000 people
1	20164 - Sterling	477.2
2	20110 - Manassas	462.4
3	22305 - Alexandria	456.9
4	20109 - Manassas	446.3
5	22306 - Alexandria	433.2
6	22191 - Woodbridge	422.7
7	22150 - Springfield	407.1
8	20111 - Manassas	400.5
9	22311 - Alexandria	393.2
10	22041 - Falls Church	377.3
11	22193 - Woodbridge	369.7

SOURCE: Northern Virginia Regional Commission. Data as of Oct. 19.

public testing available in the county than there is demand, a shift from the late spring and early summer when public testing sites ran out of tests before they were scheduled to end.

Last Friday, with a half-hour left for public testing at SplashDown Waterpark outside Manassas, Prince William County Fire Department employees and health-care workers stood idly with nobody in line for free tests. One worker said that in almost three hours, they had conducted only about 70 tests, a far cry from the over 200 they would give per session in the summer. Likewise, at the Woodbridge Senior Center on Friday afternoon only about 70 tests were conducted.

Alison Ansher, director of the Prince



Officials at the Woodbridge Senior Center COVID-19 testing site last Friday had some down time between tests. PAUL LARA | FOR INSIDENOVA

William Health District, said the district has tried to direct its free testing toward the most vulnerable people, such as those in congregate settings and those living in the hardest-hit areas, namely Manassas and Manassas Park. The two cities contain the second, fourth and eighth highest numbers of cases per 100,000 population in Northern Virginia.

After a slow start, contact tracing in the state has ramped up significantly from just a few months ago, Ansher said. But while the health district had set a goal to hire 145 tracers, it has experienced high turnover among tracers and currently has just over 100.

If a big fall surge does occur, it could be a heavy lift for tracers trying to contain outbreaks in real time.

“Initially we had a lot of help from school nurses, and they’re going back to school,” Ansher said. “And I think some people all over the state signed on because, whether their job was not functioning and then went back to work, or because they were in college or graduate school and went back to school. So it’s sort of been an ongoing hiring. But I think we’re at a point where we’re stable.”

Ansher also said tracing efforts can be more efficient than they were earlier in the pandemic. It’s now known that a large percentage of cases are attached to “super-spreader events,” in which someone in-

fects a big group of people at a gathering who then go on to spread the disease in their communities.

“When you look at what happened in the White House, we’d be better to address those super-spreader events more heavily, as opposed to each individual case. It would give us a bigger bang for the buck so to speak,” she said, referring to the Rose Garden event in late September at which President Donald Trump announced the Supreme Court nomination of Amy Coney Barrett.

The updated U.Va. model, released Oct. 16, predicts that cases statewide will peak the week ending Nov. 22, just before Thanksgiving. The previous statewide weekly peak occurred during the first week of August, although Northern Virginia’s numbers peaked in late May.

“This upward trend coincides with national trends, and trends in Europe,” the report states. “While too early to be certain, this may suggest that concerns regarding the onset of cold weather were founded.”

Dr. Lillian Peake, Virginia’s state epidemiologist, told the Virginia Mercury that it’s too soon to tell whether the recent uptick is part of a bigger trend.

“It’s premature to say now things are increasing,” she added. “We really have had quite a bit of increase over the summer. And that’s been generally going down. Now we are seeing a little bit of increase, but it’s small and we need to see what happens with that.”

New owners, new look for Dale City Long John Silver’s

The Long John Silver’s restaurant in Dale City has been around since 1980. Now it has new owners and is getting a new look.

Fredericksburg residents Khawar and Samina Mian recently bought the eatery at the corner of Minneville Road and Dale Boulevard, and they are planning a complete overhaul.

The location is closed until later this year while renovations are underway to everything from the exterior to the interior deck, said John Halley, Long John Silver’s brand designer.

When complete the restaurant will have a new top-of-the-line kitchen to optimize flow for faster service to customers. The new dining room will deliver splashes of new finishes, natural textures and modern nautical vibes.



Rendering of the new Long John Silver’s restaurant exterior in Dale City. PROVIDED

The new Dale City owners also plan to open two new Long John Silver’s in Fredericksburg.



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NOVEMBER 26 - DECEMBER 2, 2020

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COVID-19 IN PRINCE WILLIAM

All numbers through Monday, Nov. 23, and show changes since Nov. 18

19,877
(+737)

Total confirmed and probable cases

- » Prince William: **16,962** (+679)
- » Manassas: **2,216** (+45)
- » Manassas Park: **699** (+13)
- » Statewide: **221,038** (+12,205)

268 (+2)
Deaths

- » Prince William: **232** (+2)
- » Manassas: **28** (0)
- » Manassas Park: **8** (0)
- » Statewide: **3,942** (+82)

10.7%
(down from 10.8%)
Average test positivity rate*

» Statewide: **7.2%**

173,495
(+8,326)
Tests conducted*

» Statewide: **3.16 million**

28 (0)
Outbreaks*

- » 17 long-term care facilities
- » 8 congregate settings
- » 2 child care settings
- » 1 correctional setting
- » 642 outbreak associated cases (0)
- » 929 cases in healthcare workers (+14)
- » Statewide: **1,492** outbreaks (+39)

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SOURCE: Virginia Department of Health.

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GMU helping those who help

COVID-19 research targets frontline health-care workers

» BY JARED FORETEK
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With the large-scale distribution of a COVID-19 vaccine not expected until next spring at the earliest, experts expect that accurate and widely available rapid testing will be crucial in getting some people back to work, and an ongoing research program at George Mason University is hoping to help that become a reality.

The \$150,000 pilot program – funded in part by a \$100,000 GO Virginia Economic

Resilience grant – has multiple objectives, all generally aimed at allowing frontline health-care workers and others to safely return to the workplace as early as possible.

That doesn't mean, the researchers say, that the goal is to create a sense of superficial safety defined simply by increased sanitization and distancing. It's instead to improve rapid testing methods and antibody testing to better understand who might be asymptomatic but COVID-positive and who might likely be immune. While the

scientific community has not reached consensus on whether COVID antibodies make one immune forever, there is strong evidence that they convey immunity for some time.

Another component of the pilot program, led by epidemiology professor Amira Roess and systems biology professor Lance Liotta, looks to help those frontline workers deal with the stress and anxiety of working during



LANCE LIOTTA



AMIRA ROESS

GMU COVID » PAGE 10

HOLIDAY REMINDERS



Laurie Strickland with the Semper Fi Fund (left) and U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Col. Randy Turner (right) weigh bags of holiday ornaments before mailing more than 17,000 of the gifts Sunday to service members, veterans and their families wounded or injured since 9/11. The ornaments were prepared and mailed from VFW Post #1503 in Dale City. The annual distribution is funded and organized by the non-profit Semper Fi and America's Fund. Each ornament is meant to serve as a reminder to service members that America's Fund honors their service and will be with them every step of the way.

PAUL LARA | INSIDENOVA

Yes, Northern Va., Santa will still appear in this unusual year

Masks and acrylic shields among precautions at malls

» BY GIANNA JIRAK
For InsideNoVa

Every year, when the weather turns cold, one thing children across Northern Virginia look forward to is meeting Santa Claus and his elves.

And while COVID-19 case counts are rising and new restrictions are being imposed, Santa will still be making appearances at many area shopping malls and other events. The experience of visiting with him will look different, though, due to a variety of social distancing and sanitary measures.

Potomac Mills Mall in Woodbridge is hosting socially distanced pictures and visits with Santa starting Friday, Nov. 27, and continuing through Christmas Eve.

During the event, Santa and his elves will all be wearing masks, and visitors are asked to do the same. The mall said advance reservations are strongly encouraged, and can be made at its website: simon.com/potomacmills.

SANTA » PAGE 4

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Former Army Green Beret pleads guilty to conspiring to spy for Russia

A former Army Green Beret from Gainesville pleaded guilty last week to conspiring with Russian intelligence operatives to provide them with U.S. national defense information.

According to court documents, from December 1996 to January 2011, Peter Rafael Dzubinski Debbins, 45, of Gainesville, a former member of the U.S. Army, conspired with agents of a Russian intelligence service. During that time, Debbins periodically visited Russia and met with Russian intelligence agents. In 1997, Debbins was assigned a code name by Russian intelligence agents and signed a statement attesting that he wanted to serve Russia.

"Our country entrusted Debbins with the responsibility and training to protect it from its adversaries," said G. Zachary Terwilliger, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia. "Debbins betrayed that trust and betrayed his fellow service members by conspiring to provide

national defense information to Russian intelligence operatives."

From 1998 to 2005, Debbins was an active-duty officer in the Army, serving in chemical units before being selected for the U.S. Army Special Forces. The Russian intelligence agents encouraged him to join and pursue a career in the Special Forces, which he did, where he served at the rank of captain.

"Debbins today acknowledged that he violated this country's highest trust by passing sensitive national security information to the Russians," said John C. Demers, assistant attorney general for national security. "Debbins betrayed his oath, his country, and his Special Forces team members with the intent to harm the United States and help Russia."



RAFAEL DEBBINS

During the conspiracy, Debbins provided Russian intelligence agents with information that he obtained as a member of the U.S. Army, including information about his chemical and Special Forces units, the prosecutors said. In 2008, after leaving active duty, Debbins disclosed to the Russian intelligence agents classified information about his previous activities while deployed with the Special Forces.

Debbins also provided the Russian intelligence agents with the names of, and information about, a number of his former Special Forces team members so that the agents could evaluate whether to approach the team members to see whether they would cooperate with the Russian intelligence service.

Debbins is scheduled to be sentenced on Feb. 26. He faces a maximum penalty of life in prison.

Georgia man convicted in 2017 gang murder

A Georgia man faces life plus 60 years in prison after a jury found him guilty last week in the 2017 abduction and murder of a Fairfax teen whose body was found in Nokesville.

Prince William County Commonwealth's Attorney Amy Ashworth said Hector Armando Gamez Amaya, 31, was found guilty Nov. 18 of first-degree murder, abduction, criminal gang participation, conspiracy to commit murder, conspiracy to commit abduction, stabbing in the commission of a felony and unlawful concealment of a body.

The jury recommended he serve a life sentence in prison, plus 60 years.

The remains of 18-year-old Miguel Ruiz Carrillo were discovered Aug. 22, 2017, by Prince William and Fairfax police searching near Nokesville Road and Fauquier Drive. He was last seen Aug. 3 of that year and had been reported missing by family.

In all, six people were charged with abduction and gang participation in Carrillo's death.

Amaya's trial was the first jury trial in Prince William since the state enacted COVID-19 restrictions earlier this year. Since March, the COVID-19 epidemic has created a sizable backlog of cases for trial and the courts are working to decrease the backlog by setting one jury trial a week in accordance with the plan approved by the Virginia Supreme Court, Ashworth said.

The Special Investigations Unit of the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office handled the prosecution of the case.

POLICE BRIEFS

WARRENTON MAN SUFFERS MEDICAL EMERGENCY, CRASHES IN MANASSAS

A 57-year-old Warrenton man died Nov. 18 after suffering a medical emergency and crashing his car in Manassas, police said.

Police were called to the 9000 block of Westchester Drive at 10:51 a.m., where they found a 2006 Lexus RX400 that had crashed into an embankment.

The driver, Scott William McCormick, 57, of Warrenton, appeared to have suffered a medical emergency that caused the car to veer off the road, said Prince William County police spokeswoman Renee

Carr. A passing motorist observed the vehicle off the roadway and contacted the police. Rescue personnel responded to the location and pronounced the victim deceased.

MAN WANTED IN MANASSAS ROAD RAGE INCIDENT

Police are searching for a driver who brandished a gun during a road rage incident last week on Prince William Parkway near Liberia Avenue.

On Nov. 18 at 8:20 a.m., the victim, a 27-year-old man, reported to police that while traveling on Dumfries Road, he saw two vehicles driving erratically. The

victim drove past the two vehicles before encountering them again at the intersection.

A driver of one of the vehicles, a GMC Yukon, approached the victim's vehicle while brandishing a firearm. When the traffic light changed, the victim was able to leave the area without further incident, Prince William County police spokeswoman Renee Carr said. No shots were fired.

Police identified the Yukon's driver, Travis Demetrius Banks, 31, of Washington, D.C., and obtained warrants charging him with brandishing a firearm, Carr said. Attempts to locate Banks have been unsuccessful.

GMU COVID » FROM PAGE 1

the pandemic.

According to Roess, the pilot study should be wrapped up by the end of the year, but researchers are seeing in real-time the impact of a dramatic fall wave of COVID-19 cases, with the expectation that the numbers will only get worse following Thanksgiving gatherings.

"We're seeing a lot more nurses reporting exposures, reporting symptoms. We did a survey early in the summer and another one now and you're seeing a big difference in the results now," Roess told InsideNoVa.

For everyone involved, the situation in Virginia's hospitals is rapidly worsening once again. According to the Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association, 1,512 patients were hospitalized with the virus in the state as of Monday, nearing the high-water mark of 1,625 in early May. Only a month ago, fewer than 1,000 people in the state were hospitalized with COVID-19.

But preliminary findings from the GMU researchers are also showing that health-care workers have a significantly increased probability of past infection in comparison with the general public. At the same time, they're also reporting

"We are hearing a lot about the challenges of working in this prolonged pandemic. The stress this has placed on nurses in the early part of their careers cannot be understated."

— DR. CHERYL OETJEN,
GMU NURSING SCHOOL PROFESSOR

"very high" stress levels, according to Roess.

"There's a lot of stress associated with this. The other thing that we're seeing is a little bit of fatigue and maybe some [post-traumatic stress disorder]," Roess said. "Nurses, frontline workers got hit really hard earlier in this pandemic and now they're getting hit really, really hard again, and the long-term impacts of this, I don't think we're really prepared for it. They need our support."

The GMU team hopes their work will ultimately lead to better ways to help frontline workers through the stress and

anxiety brought on by the pandemic, and possibly the lingering emotional and psychological effects.

Forty graduates from Mason's School of Nursing in Fairfax County, Prince William County and elsewhere have been the first to participate in the program, which will ultimately increase to 80 students, each of whom will be given rapid self-testing kits, swabs and biweekly antibody testing.

Roess said the researchers are analyzing data on a number of competing rapid testing kits, comparing them with results from the more reliable, but slower, PCR tests. Zeroing in on the most accurate

rapid tests could affect workplaces well beyond hospitals.

"It's such an important step in building confidence in our community and preparing our region for safely getting back to work," Prince William County Director of Economic Development Christina Winn told GMU's news service.

But the researchers say the core focus is on what the program will mean for hospitals and those who work in them. Central to that effort is nursing school professor and longtime nurse mentor Dr. Cheryl Oetjen. She is helping to manage the graduates in the study, who are getting early emergency experience none of them ever envisioned, or wanted.

"We are hearing a lot about the challenges of working in this prolonged pandemic. The stress this has placed on nurses in the early part of their careers cannot be understated," Oetjen said.

"We do need to seriously address the long-term health impacts, both physical and mental, on these critical workers. We are hearing from frontline workers outside of this study about the difficulty in balancing their personal lives ... protecting their loved ones at home with doing what a lot of them consider is their professional obligation."



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NOVEMBER 12-18, 2020

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COVID-19 IN PRINCE WILLIAM

All numbers through Wednesday, Nov. 11, and show changes since Nov. 4

18,254 (+690)
Total confirmed and probable cases

» Prince William: **15,462 (+629)**
» Manassas: **2,116 (+47)**
» Manassas Park: **676 (+14)**
» Statewide: **196,506 (+10,670)**

263 (+5)
Deaths
» Prince William: **227 (+4)**
» Manassas: **28 (+1)**
» Manassas Park: **8 (0)**
» Statewide: **3,741 (+64)**

8.1%
(up from 7.3%)
Average test positivity rate*
» Statewide: **6.2%**

159,601 (+6,423)
Tests conducted*
» Statewide: **2.84** million

26 (0)
Outbreaks*
» **17** long-term care facilities
» **7** congregate settings
» **1** child care setting
» **1** correctional setting
» **630** outbreak associated cases (0)
» **896** cases in healthcare workers (+29)
» Statewide: **1,372** outbreaks (+55)

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SOURCE: Virginia Department of Health.

* – Outbreaks and diagnostic test data are reported for the Prince William Health District, which consists of the county and the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park. An outbreak is defined as two or more cases in one setting.

Welcome Back!

Masked up, county's youngest students return to classrooms

» BY KARI PUGH AND PAUL LARA
info@insidenova.com

The halls of Occoquan Elementary School were quiet Tuesday, but not for lack of children. About 20% to 30% percent of the students returned, navigating the new world of school in a pandemic.

Traditional desks were placed far apart, while some classrooms had circular desks with plexiglass dividers to minimize the spread of the COVID-19 virus. In the cafeteria, 12-foot tables sat mostly empty, with just two pupils sitting at opposite ends of each to eat lunch.

Across Prince William County, masked up and colorful backpacks in place, about 6,000 of the youngest students are heading back into classrooms this week for the first time since March.

Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students are the first to return under a 50/50 hybrid model approved by the School Board last month, with about 3,000 each attending on assigned days. First-graders are expected to follow, as long as coronavirus numbers allow it, on Dec. 1, with the remaining grades on staggered return schedules through early February.

Students are attending two alternating days



» Hallie Copenhaver works on assignments masked and behind plexiglass shields at Occoquan Elementary School on Tuesday.

PAUL LARA
INSIDENOVA

a week. Parents can still opt to keep their children home, learning remotely, and about 40% plan to do so.

The decision to bring children back to in-person learning is based on health metrics for Prince William, which remains in a moderate to high risk for the transmission of the COVID-19 virus in schools, according to the Virginia Department of Health.

Staggering students' return is based on

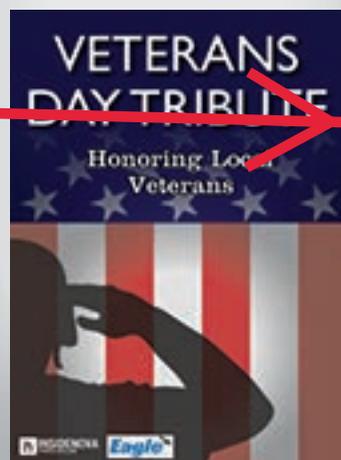
RETURN TO SCHOOL » PAGE 4



Students at Occoquan Elementary School practice distancing with only two sitting at each 12-foot table during lunch on Tuesday.

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» INSIDE Our salute to veterans



Election night parties: Safe or not?

Manassas Democrats call GOP event irresponsible

» BY JARED FORETEK
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At Monday night's Manassas City Council meeting, City Manager Patrick Pate gave a sober update on the new surge in COVID-19 cases across Northern Virginia.

"It is unfortunately, going in the wrong direction," Pate said, as he encouraged residents to wear masks, practice social distancing, and avoid gathering in large groups. "Those kinds of things are what [experts] encourage every-

one to do."

But less than a week before Pate's message to the council, which did not differ much from what he's told the governing body before, two very different kinds of election-night parties were held, and Democrats and Republicans are pointing fingers at each other over how they were handled.

On election night, city Republicans – including all but one of the party's local candi-

ELECTION PARTIES » PAGE 3

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dates, as well as outgoing Mayor Hal Parrish – packed into a room at the Old Towne Sports Pub. As observed by an InsideNoVa reporter, few of the dozens of people in attendance wore masks, and no social distancing occurred. No outdoor space was allocated for the party.

Democrats, on the other hand, took their party outside the city limits into Prince William County. “The Great Hall” at 2 Silos Brewing Company, they claimed, could provide adequate space for a gathering. Masks were almost universally worn, with revelers temporarily removing the coverings to sip their drinks but then putting them back on. Tables were spaced out, and many people also gathered at a distance in the brewery’s outdoor area, still wearing masks.

The party there really got going when the Virginia Department of Elections website updated showing that all of the city’s precincts were reporting, with Democratic Councilmember Michelle Davis-Younger besting Republican Councilmember Theresa Coates Ellis for mayor, and Democrats winning all three of the council seats up for grabs.

Before her win was announced, Davis-Younger criticized the Republicans for setting a bad example and acting irresponsibly. Manassas has consistently outpaced most of the region in terms of cases per capita and has long been considered a “hot spot” by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. When she first found out she had won, an emotional Davis-Younger briefly took her mask off and embraced her husband before quickly

putting her mask back on.

“That’s going to be a super-spreader event,” Davis-Younger told InsideNoVa about the Republican party. “No, it’s not responsible. That’s why I did it here, and they raked us over the coals for having it here in the county and not supporting Manassas business. And I said, ‘Hold up, we’re doing it there because we can space apart and be safe.’ People can be outside, we’re not trying to create a super-spreader event.”

One week later, Republicans say no outbreaks have been associated with their event.

On election night, Parrish, who is retiring after three terms as mayor, described the proceedings as “bittersweet.” When asked whether he thought the way the party was safe, he replied, “I hope so.”

“I think everybody has to deal with it the way they feel like they should,” Parrish said. “...You tell me. Is it OK to sit at a restaurant and not have your mask on? ... I don’t know.”

Parrish, 69, said in general he’s tried to be cautious about the virus, and noted that he’s of the age where he should be concerned.

Amira Roess, a professor of global health and epidemiology at George Mason University and part of a team working on testing initiatives at the university, said she doesn’t think crowding indoors is safe.

“Eating indoors at restaurants is linked to cases and outbreaks because when people are eating they are releasing aerosols that may carry infectious virus that can then infect others,” Roess said. “[Personally], I prefer to avoid that risk and so I will eat outdoors rather than in a restaurant.”



On Election night, Manassas Republicans gathered at the Old Towne Sports Pub, with few wearing masks and little room for social distancing. JARED FORETEK | INSIDENOVA



Democrats celebrated at 2 Silos Brewing Co., just outside the city limits. PAUL LARA | INSIDENOVA

After the election’s dust settled, Republican Councilmember Ian Lovejoy, who narrowly lost his bid for a third term on the council, said Democrats were just trying to deflect from criticism that they had patronized a business in the county rather than the city.

“I think that they’re trying to cover their behinds because they chose to have their event outside the city, and they’re getting a lot of flak ...,” Lovejoy said. “They chose to spend thousands of dollars outside of the local economy that they’ve been elected to lead and instead of admitting they made a mistake, they want to reflect on the nature of the party that we had... Peo-

ple are allowed to make their own choices and how they operate and that’s OK.”

Vice Mayor Pam Sebesky, who was re-elected to council, just said that wearing masks should not be political.

“I can only speak for myself in saying that, as you saw, people were wearing masks. It was important to me as a health-care provider that wearing masks and the coronavirus is not political. It’s a health-care crisis,” Sebesky said. “It is extremely important that people recognize that when they choose not to wear a mask, they are putting everyone around them in danger... Unfortunately it seems to have been made more of a political issue.”