

INSIDENOVA

PRINCE WILLIAM

Prince William Today

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MEMBER:



Matt died in his tent last week

I knew Matt, but not that well. He was one of the unsheltered homeless living in a tent in the woods in Prince William County.

Matt used to stand on the median of Shoppers Best Way where it intersects with Prince William Parkway near Potomac Mills Mall. I'd chat with him now and then and give him a \$5 McDonald's gift card. I keep gift cards in my truck for the unsheltered homeless. Matt used those gift cards to buy specialty drinks at the McDonald's next to his panhandling spot.

Matt's body was found in his tent on May 4.

There are angels in Prince William County who quietly take care of our unsheltered homeless any way they can. Joyce Entremont is one of those angels. She remembered Matt well. The best obituary Matt will get is her post on Facebook: "Matt was a gentlemanly type, and was always very respectful. He had so much potential, and was pretty darned smart. Look how handsome he could be when he was cleaned up, and shaven! This might just be the greatest loss (to me) of all the deaths out there."

Entremont remembers at least 10 deaths in the woods over the past few years.

Those who know Entremont know she works hard to get people whatever help they need. She feeds her friends in the woods, clothes them, helps them find a place to live, lines up furniture, gets them to the medical help they need and raises money when necessary. She also helps those with substance abuse issues get into rehab, makes sure they stay there, shows up when they graduate and makes sure they don't relapse. Entremont has helped 50 people enter rehab. She can't save everyone, but she tries.

Prince William does provide a number of services for the unsheltered homeless. The county's budget for fiscal year 2022, which begins in July, will expand homeless services, including



AL ALBORN

providing new case management services in the Sudley corridor and developing an equity and inclusion program.

Several private groups also provide services. Streetlight, HUGS, the Dar Al-Noor Islamic Community Center, Manassas Hunger & Homeless Outreach (MH&HO) Ministries Inc., Helping Neighbors in Need, ACTS and SERVE are groups I've worked with over the years. There are many

others. There is a good chance any faith-based or secular organization you are affiliated with has an unsheltered homeless outreach program.

If I missed one, feel free to add it to the comments on this column online. I hope those lucky enough to enjoy abundance in our community find ways to give a little to the program of their choice.

Many of our unsheltered homeless are just regular folks with jobs who are down on their luck and can't afford housing. Others may have drug abuse or mental health issues that, without proper treatment and medication, may prevent them from seeking the help they need. A few, for complicated reasons we may never understand, simply prefer to live in the woods.

My own experience is that folks who have lived in the woods for a long time are reluctant to ask for help and need assistance re-integrating into the community. There is no "one size fits all" solution.

Matt was a gentle soul with a problem. He had a lot of friends. I like to think I was one of them. There are more like Matt out there. We may not be able to help them all, but we can try. Until we figure that out, I'll keep a stack of those McDonald's gift cards in my truck.

Al Alborn is a political and social activist in Prince William County. His column appears every other week. You can learn more about Al at www.alborn.net and LinkedIn.

READERS REACT

BIDEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN WOULD BE BOON FOR VIRGINIA

The bold, \$2 trillion infrastructure plan unveiled by the Biden Administration has the potential to yield huge dividends for Virginia, driving economic growth while addressing the climate crisis and safeguarding our coast, advancing equity and helping secure a clean energy future.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to take the strong action we need to ward off the worst impacts of climate change, while reducing the pollution that threatens public health and disproportionately impacts communities of color in the state.

The American Jobs Plan (AJP) also builds upon progress we've already been making at the state level to address climate change and advance clean, renewable energy. If adopted by Congress, it would help us go even further, filling in critical funding gaps that will help electrify the transportation sector, safeguard low-lying and flood-prone communities, and help us build the infrastructure we need to grow a clean energy workforce and supply chain.

Coupling the AJP with support for legislation putting a price on carbon such as HR 2307, The Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act, might just be enough to give us a chance to meet President Biden's very ambitious goal to

achieve 50-52% greenhouse gas emissions reduction from 2005 levels by 2030.

I call on you to join me in contacting our member of Congress, U.S. Sens. Mark Warner and Tim Kaine, and your congressperson, to ask them to seize this opportunity to not only help our economy recover, but to address the looming climate crisis that affects us all. We can make sure that we're ensuring a livable climate, built on a better sustainable economy, supporting a more just society, all at the same time.

- Bill Hafker, Oakton

Tim Bauckman, owner of the popular Tim's Rivershore Restaurant and Crab House, settled with his landlord in court Friday for one last season on the Potomac after a dispute over the non-renewal of his lease (see article, Page 7). Readers on InsideNoVa's Facebook page had a lot to say about the final days of the restaurant, which has operated on the Cherry Hill peninsula near Dumfries for 28 years.

"Everybody WANTS something better, something better blah, blah, blah. Unless the developer plans to build a footbridge over CSX tracks doesn't matter what they put 'better' there. Because you know someone will complain about the train traffic or having to walk a footbridge drunk"

- Terry Lee Jones

"Sad ... family businesses getting steamrolled by out-of-state developers. Glad they'll have a final season."

- Bradley Caricofe

"Glad they are open through the summer though. Maybe one more Aquapalooza ... that would be awesome"

- Ashley Rose

"Sad, I think a lot of it is a view that a crab house is not suitable for the new Potomac Shores residents."

- Steven Friend

"Surely three sides to this story..."

- ErinMichelle Owens

"I am sorry to hear Tim's Rivershore is closing. It will be missed."

- Alice Back

"What could be more muddy toes real deal than Tim's...!!!! Nothing can be better than that."

- Charlene Hamly

"Hopefully, they put something better there."

- Mickey Satija

"At least they gave him through summer, so he can recoup some of the loss from COVID."

- Joyce Entremont

"God doesn't like ugly!! This shows exactly who was right and wrong in that situation!! So happy for Tim and Jamie!!"

- Amber Leigh

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MEMBER:



The end of the 'rail' is a good sign

On April 17, 2020, we began running what we call "rail" down the left side of Page 1 every week with the latest COVID-19 data for Prince William County, Manassas and Manassas Park.

We did that because we thought it was an effective way to update the latest local statistics without writing a new article every week. At the time, of course, we didn't realize we would still be running that rail some 58 weeks later. But then, we all thought it was just "14 days to flatten the curve."

Well, it now appears we have finally flattened the curve. And so the rail that appears on this week's front page is the last one (we hope). We'll obviously continue to update you on the latest COVID-19 numbers and trends, both in print and online, but only as dictated by significant developments.

Looking back at that first set of statistics is remarkable. At the time, more than a month into the pandemic, the Prince William Health District (the county plus the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park) had reported only 603 confirmed cases of coronavirus. (As we know, there were probably far more cases then, but testing capacity was limited, and test results were delayed up to two weeks.)

Today, the health district has reported a total of over 50,000 cases - meaning about 1 in every 9 local residents has had COVID-19.

Then, the health district had reported exactly 11 local deaths related to the virus. Today, that total is over 550 - meaning that about 1 out of every 100 positive cases resulted in a death.

More importantly, about 1 in every 4 coronavirus tests that were conducted then (only 2,800 in total) were coming back positive. Today, as few 1 in 50 are positive - and the health district is still conducting more tests than that most weeks.

And nearly half of the area's population has received at least

one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine - a number that will only increase as vaccines are approved for younger children.

All that said, we're not declaring victory. The pandemic is not over. All we need to do is look to India or Japan to see what can happen if we let our guard down. But new cases in our health district are down to fewer than 25 a day; in fact, on two days recently, no new cases were reported in Prince William County.

So as the state's COVID restrictions end (tomorrow), events resume and schools reopen, we can hope and pray that coronavirus will become like the flu and the common cold - a treatable, manageable illness.

In the meantime, if you haven't already, get vaccinated! Don't make us bring the rail back.



The COVID-19 "rail" debuted in the paper on April 17, 2020, and has run on the front page in every edition since, with the exception of election week in November.

AL ALBORN | AROUND PRINCE WILLIAM

Where can I buy some pot?



AL ALBORN

I am not and never was a "pothead." That's perhaps unusual for a child of the '60s who was a soldier in Asia in the '70s.

I only "sorta" smoked a joint in 1968. I was a private at Fort Huachuca, Ariz., attending advanced individual training. Pot was everywhere. Our barracks sergeant was the dealer. He took a couple of us on a hitchhiking trip to Phoenix to sneak into a Joan Baez concert.

We didn't make it in, so we headed back to Huachuca and spent the night in a culvert under Interstate 10. Sarge pulled out a joint, lighted it and passed it around. Who was I to refuse the Sarge? I really didn't know what to do with it, so I'm not sure it counted as actually smoking a joint.

I quickly joined a lifetime career in and out of uniform hallmarked by frequent background investigations, an occasional polygraph and random urine tests. That discouraged further investigation of the world of weed.

Regardless of my own interest in partaking, I always wondered why a country where alcohol and tobacco are legal made smoking this weed a crime. I often

mused with visitors to my front porch about this apparent contradiction. A couple of my guests and I agreed to light up as a matter of principle if it were ever legalized in Virginia - and as of July 1 it's legal to light up in the state. So, where can I buy some

pot? Medical cannabis is already legal in Virginia. As long as you have a valid government-issued ID, a medical cannabis card issued by the Virginia Board of Pharmacy and a printed copy of their unexpired written certification to one of four dispensaries open in the state you can buy a range of products for your aches, pains or whatever. I checked one of the dispensaries, Dharma Pharmaceuticals, and found a lot of interesting products. None of them is intended for recreational use.

As of July 1, I can smoke pot; I just can't buy pot. That sounds like a great premise for a "Saturday Night Live" sketch. I can legally possess up to 1 ounce of marijuana as long as I don't intend to distribute it. The problem is nobody can actually legally sell it to me.

Gardeners will be pleased to know they

can add four marijuana plants on their property. I have a nice spot all picked out and am hoping Virginia Cooperative Extension gives us gardeners tips on how to get the most out of this plant. The problem is I can't legally buy the seeds.

It will be legal to buy pot for recreational use in 2024. This gives the state time to establish the Virginia Cannabis Control Authority as the regulatory structure for the manufacture and sale of marijuana and marijuana products. I assume taxing pot will be part of the authority's agenda. I wonder if anyone computed the tax revenue lost by delaying legalization and taxation for three more years. I hope my friends and I live long enough to toke on a joint when that happens.

Anyone who has some pot laying around or is already cultivating may gift up to an ounce to others. If you fall into that category and are feeling generous, I'll be on my front porch perhaps with a couple of friends. You can even join us! If you are the shy type, just leave it on my steps where I'll find it later.

Al Alborn is a political and social activist in Prince William County. His column appears every other week. You can learn more about Al at www.albournet.com and LinkedIn.

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MEMBER:



Lessons from a former Afghan evacuee



SOPHIA SEXTON

In September, I volunteered as a translator for Afghan evacuees at Northern Virginia Community College's Annandale campus. A couple and their two young children caught my attention. They were huddled in a corner, shaking from shock and trauma.

When I told them they were being transferred to an area near the airport, they panicked. "They are sending us back to Afghanistan, aren't they?" they asked nervously.

I'm a former Afghan refugee, so I reassured them in their native language as I helped carry the plastic bags containing their few belongings to the bus. I wondered how they would fare in this new country, especially once the news cycle passed. Immigrants fleeing trauma and war are resilient, but the path is difficult. I want our Afghan allies to have an easier road than the one I traveled.

Virginia is a welcoming place. We have more than 98,000 refugees and the second largest Afghan population in the country behind California. So, I wasn't surprised that resettlement agencies, nonprofits and local volunteers sprang into action to assist the recent evacuees. They helped organize everything from temporary housing to prayer rugs and headscarf donations. But watching these families arrive in such distress also triggered painful déjà vu.

My family fled Kabul in 1981 after the Soviet-Afghan War began. We lived as refugees in Pakistan, then were resettled in Virginia when I was 13. We had no case manager because none spoke our language. My dad got a job as a busboy, but money was tight. Eleven of us lived together in a roach-infested, unfurnished two-bedroom apartment.

We gathered our household items from a neighbor's trash. We weren't connected to English lessons, so we had to find other ways to learn. I began volunteering at a nearby nursing home; in exchange for my companionship, the residents became my language tutors. I improved enough to land a part-time job at Burlington Coat Factory and later a cashier job at Kmart.

Even so, the pressures of our poverty and outsider status sent me into deep depression. I had no idea mental health care existed

let alone how to access it. Luckily, my mother realized I was suffering. She encouraged me to write down my feelings. This simple act sparked a deep love of literacy and a desire to succeed. It shaped the rest of my life.

Our family was very strict; even in America, our culture discouraged education for women. It was a huge deal when I told my father I wanted to attend college. Eventually he gave me his blessing, and I earned dual bachelor's degrees from James Madison University and graduate degrees from Virginia Tech and George Mason University. I've dedicated my career to educating future generations as a speech and language pathologist, reading specialist, literacy coach and associate professor of English at NVCC.

I know the Afghans evacuees resettled here will find their place in America as I did. Of the nearly 2.5 million refugees who already call the U.S. home, 96% are employed, according to New American Economy. Many work in sectors facing employee shortages, like the healthcare and service industries. More than 85,000 are entrepreneurs. After 25 years in the country, the median income of a refugee household is \$67,000, higher than the average American household income of \$53,000.

But true integration requires more than housing and food. Evacuees need time to learn American culture. They need us to really see them. When I was struggling with situational depression, I wish my teachers would have approached me from a place of empathy and pointed me toward the school counselor. I wish a case manager had spoken our language and helped provide my parents the clear, precise guidance they desperately needed. Help, not handouts – we'd never take that.

I hope that frightened family from a few weeks ago will find peace here in Virginia. I also hope they know where to turn with questions and concerns in the months ahead. With the right knowledge, I know they will realize their potential. They will rebuild the lives they lost.

Sophia Aimen Sexton is a professor of English at Northern Virginia Community College's Annandale campus.

AL ALBORN | AROUND PRINCE WILLIAM

Maybe we should rethink public comment time



AL ALBORN

Former Coles District Supervisor Marty Nohe remains one of my mentors regarding local politics. When I decided to share my thoughts about public comment time, he was my first call for a little background.

Nohe shared some history regarding what used to be called "citizens time." He joined the Prince William Board of County Supervisors in 2004. That was before social media or many other ways we use today to easily communicate were available. Next to sending a letter, citizens time was the easiest way for residents to talk directly to the board. Maybe someone needed a stop sign erected, a street light repaired or a pothole patched. Perhaps it was a complaint about some policy.

That was then. Things have changed. The Prince William School Board recently experienced what public comment time looks like these days. It wasn't pretty. Similar scenarios have plagued other public bodies in the region. The events of Jan. 6 plus the lingering shadow of COVID-19 and disagreements about mitigation measures linger in everyone's mind. People on both sides of the dias are a little jumpy.

I chatted with School Board Chair Babur

Lateef about public comment time. Lateef understands the public's desire to speak directly to the board and is working to accommodate public comments while also conducting School Board business. He shared that the best way to communicate with elected officials is via email or a written letter. Board members often read, ponder and reference each written communication they receive.

What many don't understand is that public comment time before any government body in Virginia is a privilege, not a right. Before 2020, there was no legal requirement for public comment time, except when a public hearing was required on a specific issue. The 2020 General Assembly added this language to the state code: "the governing body shall provide members of the general public with the opportunity for public comment during a regular meeting at least quarterly."

No elected body in Virginia has an obligation to conduct public comment time more than once every three months. People often bring up the First Amendment and the right to free speech, but that is not an absolute right.

Reasonable limits may be placed on most

rights and freedoms. There are many other ways to express one's opinion. Anyone with a smartphone can weigh in directly on any board agenda item directly via SpeakUp! Prince William. The school system offers the same option via a public comment form. And emails to either board have no limits on comments or attachments.

Citizens comment time has no legal impact on the supervisors or the School Board. Board members are well aware that a small group of vocal citizens do not speak for the almost 500,000 people they were elected to represent. Those people who don't show up are leaving decisions to the boards. Either board could simply do away with citizens comment time if it becomes burdensome to the conduct of county business (other than the "once every three months" rule).

Considering the direction citizen comment time has taken lately, this might be a good idea. I, for one, don't particularly enjoy seeing the theatrics of a few cause the business of governance to be delayed until the wee hours of the morning.

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