



INSIDENOVA

PRINCE WILLIAM

\$1 MAY 13-19, 2021

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COVID-19 IN PRINCE WILLIAM

All numbers through Wednesday, May 12, and show changes since May 5.

50,606 (+296)

Total confirmed and probable cases

Prince William: **45,094 (+288)**

Manassas: **4,295 (+6)**

Manassas Park: **1,217 (+2)**

Statewide: **668,147**

(+4,609)

547 (+4)

Deaths

Prince William: **489 (+5)**

Manassas: **47 (0)**

Manassas Park: **11 (-1)**

Statewide: **10,934 (+90)**

4.6%

(down from 5.3%)

Average test positivity rate*

Statewide: **3.9%**

378,763

(+5,550)

Tests conducted

Statewide: **7.27 million**

78 (+8)

Outbreaks*

Statewide: **3,490 (+371)**

358,981

(+22,111)

Vaccine doses administered

Statewide: **6,876,455**

(+416,079)

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. Outbreak data was expanded last week to include outbreaks identified through antigen testing since Jan. 1, as well as those previously identified through PCR tests.

'Ghost town' no more

As restrictions ease, events return to Manassas

BY JARED FORETEK
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At this time last year, the events that Manassas partly relies on to bring money and tourists into its Old Town were being called off. First it was St. Patrick's Day, then First Fridays and finally the annual July 4 festivities.

"It was such a ghost town for so long," said Debbie Haight, executive director of Historic

Manassas Inn, the city's tourism arm. "It was really scary."

Fast forward a year, and city officials and business owners are expecting a boon from the return of these events, along with the full

INSIDE:

Occoquan debuts Artisan Markets, Page 15.

ON TAP IN OLD TOWN

Historic Manassas plans to bring back the following annual events this summer and fall, in addition to the monthly "First Fridays:"

- » **Manassas Heritage Railway Festival**, Saturday, June 5, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
- » **Manassas Jazz Festival**, Saturday, June 19, noon-7 p.m.
- » **Celebrate America**, Sunday, July 4, 3-10 p.m.
- » **Bands, Brews & Barbecue**, Saturday, Sept. 4, noon-6 p.m.
- » **Manassas Fall Jubilee**, Saturday, Oct. 2, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

MANASSAS RETURN >> PAGE 15

Oh, My!

Bees



» Swarm at Manassas school is all the buzz. Page 5

A Lobster



» Rare find at local restaurant saved from the pot. Page 5

Dinosaurs



» New drive-through attraction opens at Bull Run Regional Park. Page 21

PAUL LARA|INSIDENOVA

And...



Cicadas begin to emerge here

BY KARI PUGH
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They're here! The 17-year cicada brood is clawing to the surface from its long underground slumber. And while their numbers are small right now, the presence of the red-eyed, noisy, klutzy bugs is about to explode.

The Brood X cicadas started to emerge early this week around Alexandria, Loudoun County, western Fairfax County and parts of Prince William County, according to sightings from area residents, but they're still a bit drowsy and don't like the colder temperatures so much, experts say.

CICADAS >> PAGE 9

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PRINCE WILLIAM

\$1 APRIL 8-14, 2021

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COVID-19 IN PRINCE WILLIAM

All numbers through Wednesday, April 7, and show changes since March 31.

48,038 (+776)

Total confirmed and probable cases

Prince William: **42,655 (+721)**

Manassas: **4,207 (+48)**

Manassas Park: **1,176 (+7)**

Statewide: **629,155 (+10,179)**

531 (+6)

Deaths

Prince William: **474 (+6)**

Manassas: **45 (0)**

Manassas Park: **12 (0)**

Statewide: **10,415 (+163)**

9.1%

(up from 7.4%)

Average test positivity rate*

Statewide: **6.2%**

348,441

(+6,154)

Tests conducted*

Statewide: **6.61 million**

64 (+2)

Outbreaks*

Statewide: **2,921 (+49)**

195,680

(+40,901)

Vaccine doses administered

Statewide: **4,344,970**

(+644,360)

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SOURCE: Virginia Department of Health.

* -- Outbreaks, vaccines 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.

Wipe-Out!



Disinfectant wipes can gum up the machinery at the county's wastewater treatment plants. These wipes were removed from a sewage pumping station; the blue machine is a submersible pump.

PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY SERVICE AUTHORITY

Increased use of disinfectants gums up the works at county plants

BY JARED FORETEK
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Staff at the H.L. Mooney Advanced Water Reclamation Facility in Woodbridge could see the problem developing early in the pandemic.

Just months after schools and workplaces closed in March last year, workers were noticing more of a common foe for wastewater plants everywhere: the disinfectant wipe.

"We had been monitoring visually once per week, and we started visually seeing more and

more wipes in the sanitary sewer. And where you actually see them is at this pumping station where you're seeing the sewage," said Keenan Howell, director of communications for the Prince William County Service Authority, which operates the facility.

The problem was most visible at machines called channel grinder impellers. Effectively, pumps spin wastewater in a centrifuge, separating solids from liquids as a grinder cuts up any solids.

WIPES >> PAGE 5

Police seek to expand crisis unit Counselors join officers in de-escalation efforts

BY NOLAN STOUT
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Prince William County is hoping to expand its crisis-intervention services in the police department.

The county's new co-responder unit, which started Dec. 7, is looking to increase its services through the proposed budget for fiscal 2022, which starts July 1.

The program pairs emergency services clinicians with a police officer certified in crisis intervention to respond to calls of crisis throughout the county.

The program fits in a larger push nationwide to reform police responses and improve mental health services. Criminal justice advocates have been supporting measures throughout the country to divert people with mental health problems from the legal system.

"Our goal is to respond to anyone who is a person in crisis no matter what that crisis may be," said Heather Baxter, a licensed professional counselor with the unit. "We don't want to just pigeonhole this into mental health; it's any person who is in crisis."

The unit can respond to a variety of calls ranging from a crash to a mental breakdown.

"We're keeping it pretty broad," said Lt. Mike Day, one of the unit's

CO-RESPONDERS >> PAGE 7

INSIDE:

>> PAGE 3: County evaluates its brand, including the county seal.

>> PAGE 8: Murder at Manassas Mall.

>> PAGE 15: Gar-Field celebrates a memorable football season in an unusual year.

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PRINCE WILLIAM

\$1 MARCH 11-17, 2021

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COVID-19 IN PRINCE WILLIAM

All numbers through Wednesday, March 10, and show changes since March 3.

45,309 (+600)

Total confirmed and probable cases

Prince William: **40,115 (+545)**

Manassas: **4,060 (+48)**

Manassas Park: **1,124 (+7)**

Statewide: **509,375 (+2,117)**

513 (+20)

Deaths

Prince William: **459 (+18)**

Manassas: **42 (+1)**

Manassas Park: **12 (+1)**

Statewide: **9,849 (+523)**

6.8%

(down from 8.2%)

Average test positivity rate*

Statewide: **5.7%**

322,628

(+6,444)

Tests conducted*

Statewide: **6.08 million**

59 (+1)

Outbreaks*

Statewide: **2,697 (+50)**

90,627

(+14,083)

Vaccine doses administered

Statewide: **2,428,900**

(+366,497)

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SOURCE: Virginia Department of Health.

* -- Outbreaks, vaccines 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.

Mall Pall

Local shopping centers will have smaller tax bills as assessments plummet

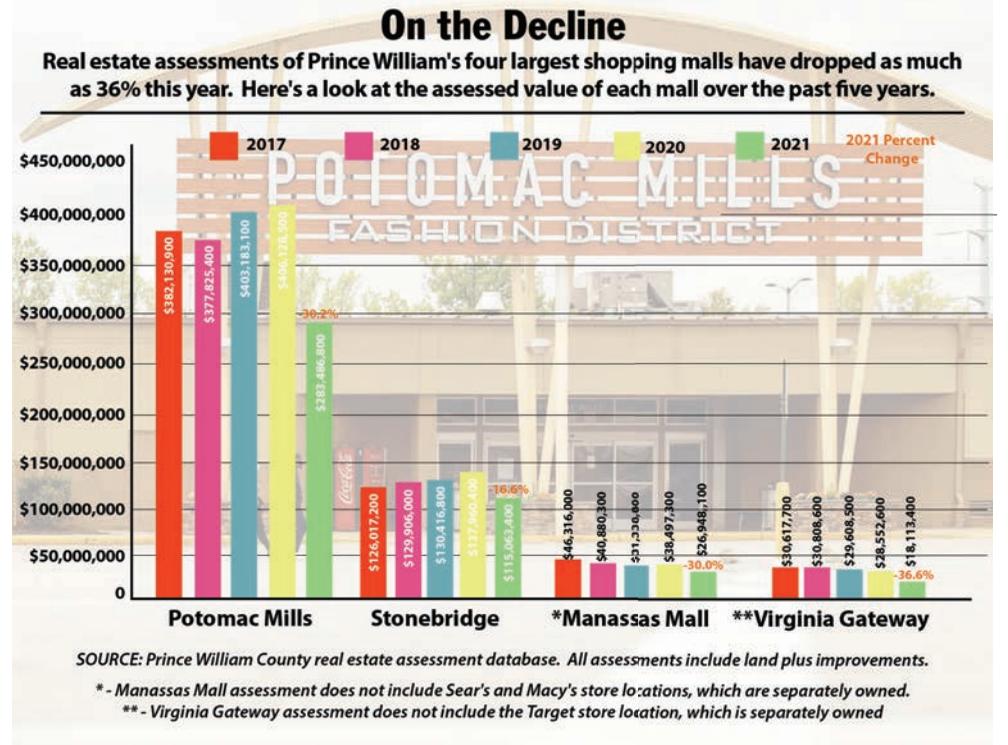
» BY JARED FORETEK
jforetek@insidenova.com

If you own a mall in Prince William County, the value of that asset is a lot lower today than it was a year ago, but so is your tax bill.

The combined value of the four largest malls in the county fell by more than \$167 million this year, according to recently released county assessments. The county's retail hubs are far from unique: Across the United States, big malls were experiencing declining sales and property valuations long before anyone heard of COVID-19.

But the pandemic has led to the steepest decline in mall values yet. According to a Bloomberg analysis of 118 retail-anchored property appraisals, U.S. malls have fallen in value by an average of 60%.

For the four biggest malls in Prince William – Potomac Mills, Stonebridge at Potomac Town Center, Manassas Mall and Gateway Center – the drop in assessments was smaller, but all told the four properties fell in assessed



value by 27.4% in one year. Assessments and appraisals differ in the scope and detail used to formulate a property's value, but both are attempts to get to the present value of a property in lieu of a sale.

In all four Prince William cases, the value of the underlying land remained largely flat

between 2020 and 2021 assessments, but the value of the land's improvements fell by more than half for both Manassas Mall and Stonebridge, in Woodbridge. The biggest mall in the county, Potomac Mills, saw its overall valuation slashed from \$406.1 million to \$283.4 million.

MALLS » PAGE 8

Manassas Christian student wins bee



Keona Thomas ponders her word during the final round at the 43rd Annual Prince William County Spelling Bee at Gar-Field High School.

13th word is the charm for Keona Thomas

» BY JARED FORETEK
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Keona Thomas of Manassas Christian School took home the top prize at Tuesday night's Prince William Spelling Bee, correctly spelling 13 words whose origins spanned three continents to advance to the Scripps National Spelling Bee this summer.

Thomas, an eighth-grader who lives in Manassas Park, outlasted 21 other contestants, all winners of their respective schools' spell-

ing bees, to take home the trophy. She became the third straight winner of the county bee from Manassas Christian after Devan Waghray won the 2019 and 2020 titles.

The spelling bee was presented by InsideNoVa/Prince William and the Bel-Air Woman's Club at Gar-Field High School Tuesday night, with participants and families masked and spread out through the auditorium. Sentara Northern Virginia Medical Center also sponsored this year's bee. Spellers representing elementary and middle schools – including

SPELLING BEE » PAGE 10

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