

Prince William Times

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Covering Prince William County and surrounding communities, including Gainesville, Haymarket, Dumfries, Occoquan, Quantico and the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park.



Kept at bay

County board overseeing building near waterways hasn't met in a decade

By Daniel Berti
TIMES STAFF WRITER

In 2019, a McLean couple purchased two parcels of forested land totaling one and a half acres on the shoreline of Lake Jackson where they planned to build a new home.

But there was a problem; both parcels were almost entirely within Virginia's environmentally protected "resource protection area," or RPA – areas bordering streams and waterways in the Chesapeake Bay watershed where new construction is severely restricted. RPAs are often described as the "last line of defense" protecting the bay's water quality.

With very few exceptions, building new homes is banned within the RPA. And because of the two parcels' location there, the market value of each parcel was less than \$3,500, according to Prince William County land assessments.

But Tom Liljenquist and Erin Kilday pur-



PHOTO BY ROGER SNYDER

The shoreline of Lake Jackson, a manmade lake in Manassas, is part of the "resource protection area" protected from development under the 1990 Chesapeake Bay Act.

chased them anyway for a total of \$145,000. And as it turned out, building a home on the property was not a problem at all. Liljenquist filed a request for an exception from state environmental rules with Prince William County's public works department, and several months later, his request was approved by county staff.

It was a quick and easy process, Liljenquist

"In intensely developing areas, the Bay Preservation Act is even more important with all the land-use changes that are going on and the associated additional stormwater and runoff from those development projects."

PATRICK FANNING
Chesapeake Bay Foundation

told *Prince William Times*, and his new home will soon be under construction. But if Liljenquist had requested such an exception 10 years ago, he might not have been so lucky.

At that time, instead of receiving approval solely from the county government, such requests would have required an independent review and a vote by the Prince William County Chesapeake Bay Preservation Area Review Board – a five-member citizen panel tasked with approving or denying encroachment into the RPA.

See BAY, page 2

Love was in the air: Prince William County Clerk of Court Jackie Smith and her staff turned Valentine's Day into wedding day for 32 local couples, all of whom tied the knot in Old Town Manassas on Monday, Feb. 14. The couples included, clockwise from top right: Peta Gaye and Brian Barnett; Amber and Steve Sheets; Kate and Kris Ellingsen; and Natalie Lindgren and Andrew Bacenet.

PHOTOS BY DOUG STROUD



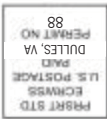
County budget pitches meals tax, property tax boost

By Daniel Berti
TIMES STAFF WRITER

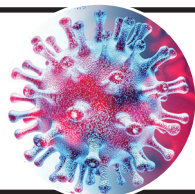
Local taxes could go up again in Prince William County in the coming year under a proposed \$1.48 billion budget proposed by acting-County Executive Elijah Johnson.

The budget – a \$140 million increase over the current year – would be funded by rising residential tax bills, an increase in the fire levy and a new, countywide meals tax of 4%. If approved, it will pay for 4% county employee pay raises, a \$61 million increase in local tax revenue to the county's public schools and across-the-board increases for local public safety and social services agencies.

See BUDGET, page 4



RESIDENTIAL CUSTOMER



COVID-19 Update
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Prince William County summer camps guide
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Elizabeth Fuentes and Cesar Rubio, both seniors at Potomac Senior High School kick it in their perfectly matched pastel pink and black ensembles during their school's May 7 prom at the Edward L. Kelly Building in Manassas. PHOTO BY DOUG STROUD

'We're just here to have fun'

Local high schools bring back prom after 2 long years

By Jill Palermo
TIMES STAFF WRITER

The girls donned long sparkly dresses and the highest of heels, while the boys wore traditional suits and tuxedos mixed with a few brightly colored jackets, some paired with ties and others with open collars and gold chains. Whatever their outfits, Potomac Senior High School juniors and seniors arrived at prom with a common goal: to have fun with their friends like normal teenagers.

"It feels like we're back to a new normal - like how it should be for kids our age," said Keyana Stewart-Lamprey, one of about 400 students who attended the May 7 event. "To celebrate and be together in a safe environment."

Over the last several weekends, Prince William County's 13 high schools have been making up for lost time when it comes to proms -- with fancy dances stretching from the Sweeney Barn and the Hylton Performing Arts Center in Manassas to the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Triangle.

See PROM, page 4



Tavarras Thomas and his girlfriend Alyssa Vasquez at Potomac Senior High School's prom.

On data centers: How much is enough?

Data show PWC is on track to overtake Loudoun in data center development

By Peter Cary
PIEDMONT JOURNALISM FOUNDATION

As debate rages over a plan to open 2,100 acres of rural land in the northern end of Prince William to a huge new data center industrial park called the Prince William Digital Gateway, much of it hinges on the claim that the county is running out of land for data center use.

Much of that conclusion hinges on how much land has been or can be developed inside the county's "Data Center Opportunity Zone Overlay District," an irregular blob of properties mostly in the county's center that offers access to the electric power, fiber-optic cable and other utilities and allows data center construction by-right. Not to be ignored, however, is the question of how much data center development is also underway outside the overlay district. Now, a new county report sheds light on those questions, suggesting that there is more data center space likely to be developed in Prince William County than was supposed.

See DATA CENTERS, page 6

Manassas City OKs \$271.6M new budget

Homeowners to pay about \$234 more in 2023

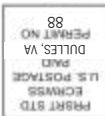
By Cher Muzyk
TIMES STAFF WRITER

The Manassas City Council passed a \$271.6 million budget for fiscal year 2023 on Tuesday that will result in an average \$234 increase in real estate tax bills for city homeowners next year.

The council reduced the existing real estate tax rate by 8.7 cents from \$1.222 to \$1.135 per \$100 in assessed value and kept the city's personal property and fire and rescue tax rates unchanged. The combined real estate tax and fire and rescue levy total \$1.342 per \$100 in assessed value. The tax bill increase is the result of rising property values.

The budget includes 5% raises for both city staff and teachers and staff at Manassas City schools.

See BUDGET, page 2



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Lifestyles: Native plant sales ring in spring, page 13



Forest Park High School students hold Suicide Awareness Walk, page 16



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PHOTO BY JOHN CALHOUN

Prince William County police surround a home in the 5200 block of Mansfield Court in Dale City late Monday afternoon after finding the bodies of two men and two women. All were victims of a domestic shooting, police said.

4 dead in Dale City, tenant charged

By Jill Palermo
TIMES STAFF WRITER

A 24-year-old Woodbridge man has been charged with four counts of murder in connection with the deaths Monday of his fellow tenants inside their Dale City home – an incident Prince William County Police Chief Peter Newsham described Tuesday as both “senseless” and “horrific.”

“I wish I wasn’t standing here before you this morning. This is horrific,” Newsham said during a morning press conference held outside the home where the shootings occurred at 5297 Mansfield Court in Dale City.

The victims were identified as Miguel Duran Flores, 44, and Kelly Victoria Sotelo, 42, and their daughter, Karrie Aylene Sotelo, 19. Also killed was Richard Julio Jesus Revollar Corrales, 36, a fellow renter in the home, Newsham said.

See SHOOTING, page 2



‘It’s really sad’: A candlelight vigil was held Tuesday, Oct. 18 for the four victims of the mass shooting. See page 2

Vega had \$96K in student loans, debts cleared in bankruptcy

Before decrying ‘reckless’ government spending, Vega asked a judge to clear thousands of her personal debts in 2009

By Cher Muzyk and Jill Palermo
TIMES STAFF WRITERS

Supervisor Yesli Vega, the Republican nominee for U.S. Congress in Virginia’s 7th District, has been critical of President Joe Biden’s student loan forgiveness plan and decries “reckless” government spending in a recent TV ad. Yet, Vega and her husband filed for personal bankruptcy in 2009 and had more than \$96,000 in debts discharged in the proceeding, including about \$46,000 in student loans, according to court records.

Vega, 37, and her husband, Rene Vega, were living in Fort Washington, Maryland, when they filed for Chapter 7 bankruptcy in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the District of Maryland, which has not been previously disclosed

Yesli Vega was in her early 20s, and the couple’s two children were 1 year old and 3 months old at the time, according to the couple’s bankruptcy petition. A year earlier, in 2008, Rene Vega lost two Dale City homes to foreclosure, according to Prince William County records.

Property addresses on the bankruptcy petition match addresses for the Vegas listed on Prince William County property records and publicly available directories.

See VEGA, page 4



PHOTO BY JOHN CALHOUN

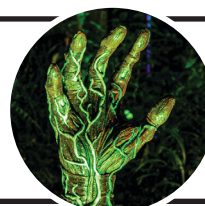
Supervisor Yesli Vega, the Republican nominee in Virginia’s closely watched 7th District congressional race, speaks to supporters at a June rally.



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Doves Landing to become county’s largest park, page 3



Haunting the ‘hood: Lake Ridge couple goes all out for Halloween, page 9



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