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Masks still on ... for now

Youngkin triggers renewed debate about use in schools

» BY JARED FORETEK
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Prince William County and most other Northern Virginia school districts say they will stick with requirements that students and teachers wear masks in classrooms, despite an executive order issued by Gov. Glenn Youngkin on his first day in office.

Youngkin's order, which goes into effect Jan. 24, said

parents could opt out of having their children wear masks in schools without needing to provide any explanation.

However, a state law passed last year requires public schools to follow COVID-19 mitigation guidelines "to the maximum extent practicable" as propagated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and those guidelines currently include wearing masks in schools.

The dispute is already headed to the courts, as a group

of parents from the city of Chesapeake in southeastern Virginia filed suit against Youngkin on Tuesday.

Officials from Prince William Public Schools and Manassas City Public Schools announced Monday that their universal masking policies will remain in place. The Arlington, Alexandria, Fairfax, Fauquier and Loudoun school divisions have done the same.

"COVID-19 mitigation measures remain unchanged

MASKS » PAGE 9



As COVID-19 cases hit a record of over 7,900 in Prince William last week, the county health district opened a testing center at the Pfitzner Stadium Complex in Woodbridge. The center is open every day except Fridays. Tests are free, but appointments are required. The center has the capacity to conduct 500 tests a day and had administered more than 1,500 tests in its first four days, according to a health district spokesman.
PAUL LARA | INSIDENOVA

HOW TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT

- » **ONLINE:** vase.vdh.virginia.gov/testingappointment
- » **BY PHONE:** (877) 829-4682
- » Appointments are available two days in advance

Ferry to D.C.? New analysis underway

Boats would travel from Woodbridge to Washington

» BY JARED FORETEK
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The plans for a commuter ferry taking riders from Woodbridge to Washington are moving forward again after being put

on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a new study on the way that should detail a full understanding of how the proposed system would operate.

The ferry has been under consideration

in some form or another for more than 12 years, with a number of crucial details still to be worked out. But the general idea is for a commuter boat to travel on the Potomac River from Woodbridge (possibly from Occoquan or Belmont Bay) to Washington, with stops at the National Harbor

in Maryland, Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling and other spots along the riverfront.

Last month, the Northern Virginia Regional Commission reached an agreement with Nelson/Nygaard Consulting

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Meet this month's Amazing Kids from around Prince William
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KIDS BAKING CHAMPIONSHIP



Finley Sheers (back row, third from left) was one of 12 contestants in Season 10 of the Kids Baking Championship on the Food Network.

ROB PRYCE | FOOD NETWORK

BAKING UP A CAREER

Local girl appears on Food Network show

» BY JAMES JARVIS
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Finley Sheers said that before the pandemic she never really baked other than for family holidays and events. But in the days after school closures across Virginia in spring 2020, Finley had a moment of inspiration.

“I was getting a lot more bored during the pandemic, because there was not like any school to keep me busy,” said Finley, a fourth-grader at Churchill Road Elementary School in McLean. “So, I asked my mom if I could bake something from the pantry, because we used to have [dessert] box mixes.”

From there, Finley’s new hobby snowballed. Vanilla cupcakes made from a mix soon turned into homemade red velvet cupcakes with meringue buttercream. Her mother, Kelly Sheers, said Finley couldn’t get enough and was constantly researching how to make different desserts from scratch using online recipes or watching prominent bakers on YouTube.

“Then I found this baker, his YouTube channel is ‘Preppy kitchen,’ and I just thought that his YouTube channel had many random desserts that you could make,” Finley said. “And they looked very delicious...it was just a good lesson that was helping me a lot.”

Finley started taking baking classes with her mother, principal of West Springfield Elementary, at Fran’s Cake &

MORE INFORMATION

» Follow Finley on Instagram at @finleybakes to keep tabs on her latest creations.

Candy Supplies, where she met her mentor, pastry chef Dawn Alston.

Alston said she was so impressed with Finley’s raw talent that she invited the young culinary artist to take a cake-decorating class typically reserved for adults and gave her private lessons.

“Finley always liked to add her own spin on the recipes and a lot of the things that we did together,” Alston said. “She is definitely just a wonderful, wonderful student with a creative mind.”

Alston, who previously competed on the Food Network’s “Wedding Cake Championship,” said she regularly receives messages from the cooking channel’s representatives who are looking for people to audition for their shows, including the Kids Baking Championship. This year, when the network contacted Alston, without hesitation she recommended Finley.

“I knew that she would do well,” Alston said.

And after much convincing from her mother as well, Finley decided to audition. “And I went through a series of inter-



Finley Sheers was eliminated in the second episode of Kids Baking Championship.

ROB PRYCE | FOOD NETWORK

views, and I actually got to the final 12 and just getting into that show is a big accomplishment because many people apply... and have not gotten in,” Finley said.

A spokesperson for the Food Network told Inside NoVa that about 800 kids from across the country applied for the show.

Finley said she didn’t go into the interview process with high expectations, and she was just flattered to be considered. But round after round, Finley continued to impress the show’s producers with her baking skills and bubbly personality.

“It was like a boot camp just getting to know your personality, more than just your baking,” Finley said.

Eventually, Finley was invited onto the show, along with 12 other contestants

“

“She is definitely just a wonderful, wonderful student with a creative mind.”

— PASTRY CHEF DAWN ALSTON, TALKING ABOUT FINLEY SHEERS

from around the country. She flew to Knoxville, Tenn., with her mother to film in the studio over several days in August.

“It was really fun to meet more people just like me who love to bake and have a huge passion about baking,” she said.

The show began airing Dec. 27, but Finley was eliminated in the second episode. Despite that, Finley said, she’s excited to keep pursuing her baking career and someday open her own bakery in Northern Virginia.

Finley said that if she had any advice for other aspiring young bakers it would be to persevere.

“If you take up the hobby of baking, something might go wrong, but just keep on going and hope it might turn out better than you imagined,” Finley said. “I think that’s good advice.”

BASES COVERED



Connor Knox is a key member of Colgan's deep and experienced pitching staff.

BILL KAMENJAR|FOR INSIDENOVA

Colgan has the experience and depth to win states

» BY DAVID FAWCETT
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On the first day of Colgan's baseball practice, head coach Mike Colangelo gathered his players in front of him to highlight a few noteworthy items.

After telling the players to take a knee, Colangelo introduced the revised coaching staff that includes new additions Derek Justice, Logan Farrar and Mike Meadows. Colangelo brought all three in specifically for this season to motivate and connect with the players.

Former college standouts and pro players, Justice and Farrar (a Woodbridge High School graduate) bring youth to the staff. Meadows, a former Gar-Field head baseball coach, brings experience.

After the introductions, Colangelo then touched on some other relevant subjects. He reminded the players this is the first full varsity season for all but two of the seniors after the COVID-19 pandemic canceled the 2020 campaign and shortened the 2021 season.

He told them turnout had dropped at some other neighboring Prince William County high school baseball teams, but Colgan remains in good shape. In their sixth year since the school opened in 2016, the Sharks had a program-best 46 players come out, including a high of 18 freshmen.

Finally, he mentioned the ultimate goal this season: winning a state title. He did not elaborate why he said it – nor did the players visibly affirm their coach's proclamation.

Everyone understood.

The Sharks return all but three players from last season's 15-1 Class 6 state finalist that lost to Madison 2-1. Eight of those returners are committed to college baseball programs, including six at the Division I level.

The arrival of newcomer Carter Newman from Woodbridge High School only bolsters the lineup. A senior shortstop, Newman is one of Colgan's four Virginia Tech commitments.

With all this depth and experience, it's easy to see why Colgan has high expectations.

COLGAN BASEBALL THROUGH THE YEARS

Year	Overall record	Overall finish
2017	5-16	Conference 4 Tournament quarterfinals
2018	12-11	Regionals (second round)
2019	11-12	Regionals (first round)
2020	No season due to COVID	—
2021	15-1	Class 6 state finalist

Ranked fourth in the mid-Atlantic Region by Baseball America, Colgan is in prime position to become Prince William's first state baseball champion since 1995 and perhaps join the 1983 Potomac team as the county's only other high school baseball program to finish the season undefeated. The Panthers went 21-0-1 that year to win the Group AAA state title.

But Colangelo mentioned none of this

COLLEGE-BOUND

Nine players on Colgan's roster have made college commitments

SENIORS:

- » Evan Blanchard (George Mason)
- » Brandon Cassidy (Christopher Newport)
- » Ryan Kennedy (Virginia Tech)
- » Connor Knox (George Mason)
- » Carter Newman (Virginia Tech)
- » John Stansbury (Paul D. Camp Community College)

JUNIORS:

- » Jae'dan Carter (Dayton)
- » Brett Renfrow (Virginia Tech)
- » Matthew Westley (Virginia Tech)

on the opening day of tryouts.

Avoiding any "rah, rah" speeches, he urged his players "to finish the job," and moved on.

The group then broke up. With their field still requiring work, the team stayed indoors with freshmen and sophomores going to the basketball gym, while the

BASEBALL » PAGE 25