

EXTRA

12 no-fuss ways to add color to home

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THE ROANOKE TIMES

WHERE YOUR STORY LIVES

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HEATHER ROUSSEAU PHOTOS, THE ROANOKE TIMES

Azizgul Ahmadi, 29, makes sandwiches at Sub Station II in downtown Blacksburg on Nov. 8. Just over two years ago, she fled the fall of Afghanistan with her younger sister. In Afghanistan, Ahmadi was fighting the Taliban.

Building a pathway to US citizenship

Blacksburg woman working to help other fellow Afghan vets secure asylum

HEATHER ROUSSEAU
The Roanoke Times

Azizgul Ahmadi developed a taste for turkey subs while working at a Blacksburg sandwich shop.

She layered tomatoes, lettuce and cheese on a sub roll. They have so many breads in America, she would tell friends. Rye bread, wheat bread, hot dog buns. In Afghanistan, she only ate traditional Afghan flatbread.

"Anything else?" She asked a customer on the other side of the counter, a young woman who took her order and made way for the next person waiting in line at Sub Station II, where Ahmadi has worked since mid-2022, six months after she fled the fall of Afghanistan.

Ahmadi started out washing dishes and filling vinegar and



Shah Pari Ahmadi, 17, of Blacksburg, enjoys a sparring session with Virginia Tech student Kiran Marques, 21, at Blacksburg Boxing and Fitness on Sept. 30. Since fleeing Afghanistan and coming to Blacksburg in fall 2021, Ahmadi has embraced her new home in a new country.

mayonnaise bottles in the back, advancing quickly to making sandwiches at the front counter after she learned enough English to talk with hungry customers.

During a break from sub making, Ahmadi sat down to enjoy a meal of her own. A pile of jalape-

nos sitting next to her turkey sub. "I like spicy," she said. In Afghanistan she preferred chicken kabob.

Much has changed in two years. Instead of slicing bread and making sub sandwiches for Virginia Tech students, back

then Ahmadi was fighting the Taliban. She was a member of the elite Female Tactical Platoon, or FTP, working shoulder to shoulder with the U.S. Special Forces in Afghanistan.

Ahmadi and her younger sister fled Afghanistan in August 2021, when the capital of Kabul was overrun by the Taliban following the chaotic withdrawal of United States military forces. She and other FTP women came to the United States, where they have lived in a state of limbo ever since.

Ahmadi and fellow FTP veterans are making Blacksburg their home, but the majority of the women who served in the platoon have yet to have their asylum applications approved by United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, and they worry that they will be deported back to a county where they would most likely be killed or tortured by the Taliban, which rules Afghanistan.

After the U.S. military

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RAM fund has lent a helping hand

BETSY BIESENBACH
Special to The Roanoke Times

The cost of rental housing has gone up everywhere, and Roanoke is no exception. According to USA Today, in the past two years, median rents have increased by 18% due to would-be homebuyers being shut out of the market by high mortgage rates and a lack of inventory.

It's why Melissa Simmons, 54, has stayed in her Roanoke apartment, despite the degenerative disc disease and other ailments that make it hard for to go up the 16 steps to her apartment and the 20 more steps she must climb to reach her attic bedroom.

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Israel: 13 hostages, 4 others released

NAJIB JOBAIN, SAMY MAGDY
AND BASSEM MROUE
Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip — Israel began releasing 39 Palestinian prisoners on Sunday following Hamas' release of 13 Israelis and four foreigners in the second round of swaps under a cease-fire deal, the Israeli military said, after the militant group initially delayed the exchange for hours and claimed Israel violated the terms of a truce deal.

Hamas released a video showing the hostages appearing shaken but mostly in good physical condition as masked militants led them to Red Cross vehicles headed out of Gaza. Some hostages waved goodbye to the militants.

The Israeli military said the released hostages, including

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