

INSIDENOVA

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MEMBER:



# Trash Talk

## We have a problem, and it reflects poorly on our county

Go to almost any parking lot in Prince William County and invariably you will see discarded gloves and masks, littered reminders of the pandemic we all lived through.

Litter tells others what the people in a community think about where they live. If someone walked into your home and there were chip bags scattered on the floor, a week's worth of fast food containers piled in the corner, ripped-up notebooks in the sink and a few tires sitting next to the couch, it would make an impression – and not a very good one. The same is true for our community.

Litter comes from a variety of sources. There is, of course, the irresponsible person who throws trash from a car window or drops a soda bottle along the sidewalk, but a lot of the garbage that we see strewn about comes from other sources. Unsecured items in cars and trucks easily find their way onto the side of the street; anyone who lives along Route 234 near the landfill has seen evidence of this phenomenon.

We've all seen overfilled trash cans and recycling bins lining neighborhood streets from which a stiff breeze can blow items out onto the road. And if it's not the wind, it's animals looking for food who leave a trail of wrappers in their wake.

Much of this refuse does not stay on the roadside but gets carried into our waterways. Last fall, the Friends of the Occoquan pulled 168 bags of garbage and recyclables out of the river. Everything from iron beams to soccer balls was separated, categorized and refurbished, recycled or taken to the landfill. The litter is so problematic that volunteers must conduct this clean-up twice a year.

Likewise, the Belmont Bay Paddlers clean the waterways they use and participate in the Adopt-a-Stream program. Finally, last spring, the Prince William

Trails and Stream Coalition did a clean-up of Marumsco Creek and Veteran's Park that yielded 119 bags of trash, 15 tires, a road construction barrel, an office chair, a trash bin on wheels, a cooler, several stacks of 5-gallon buckets, a television and a plastic car bumper.

The litter problem in this county has clearly gone far beyond the stereotype of a few lazy people throwing things out of car windows.

Litter is not just an eyesore; it affects our quality of life, the environment and our economic viability. First, litter has a fantastic ability to attract more litter. Once a

place like a playground, shoreline or parking lot begins accumulating trash, it signals to others that littering in that area is accepted by those who live there. Ergo, a few forgotten water bottles become a landscape of debris.

Also, litter can be full of toxic substances that poison our wildlife, leach into our water supplies and present other hazards to human health. Rotting food attracts vermin, and containers in which rainwater can accumulate provide a perfect breeding ground for mosquitoes and other disease-carrying bugs.

Furthermore, litter limits where people



**MORE INFORMATION**

The photos on this page were all taken around Prince William County in the past few months.



can go for recreation or to enjoy nature. The

smells emanat-

ing from garbage-lined waterways or overflowing garbage cans in area parks make visiting those areas unpleasant.

Lastly, litter affects the economic viability of our county by creating a community aesthetic that drives away potential financial investment and high-paying jobs.

There is a silver lining: This is a problem with a solution in which we can all do our part. Residents can participate in one of the many spring clean-ups around the county, or organize one for their neighborhood.

To keep our community clean, we can ensure that litter ends up where it belongs. Public trash cans outside of offices and stores can be emptied regularly to prevent a build-up of garbage that can spill onto the ground. Likewise, we can crush cans and bottles

and break down oversized items to ensure our own garbage cans are not so overfilled that lids cannot close.

Loose items, like boxes, should be broken down, bundled and tied to keep them from blowing away. If something doesn't fit in the trash can, take it to the county landfill instead of dumping it.

Together we can keep Prince William clean and healthy for everyone.

*Kristina Nohe is a political activist, adoption advocate and homeschooling mom who is proud to be from Prince William County.*



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**MEMBER:**



# Couple leads the way down a rocky road

After traveling down the rockier roads of life, some are able to return and crush the stones to gravel for those who follow.

Evelyn and Heidi BruMar, co-founders of Casa BruMar Foundation, know all too well the sharp rubble and seemingly impassable boulders that can affect members of the LGBTQ+ community.

When Evelyn came out as a lesbian, she lost her family, community and church, suddenly disowned and homeless at 19 years old. Heidi served in the Navy before and during the era of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” a policy designed to allow members of the LGBTQ+ community to serve their country without discrimination but which, in Heidi’s experience, forced many to hide their true identity for fear of retribution.

The couple was together seven years before they could have a public commitment ceremony, which they did four hours after Heidi retired from the military after 20 years of service. It wasn’t until 2015 that they could be legally married after the Supreme Court’s decision in Obergefell v. Hodges.

After two decades together and a lifetime of having a front-row seat to the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights, the BruMars have dedicated themselves to helping the current generation coming up and coming out.

Casa BruMar Foundation was born out of a desire to help connect the LGBTQ+ community to resources available in Prince William County. With their focus on education, social services and human dignity, the foundation sponsors the Rise Up Scholarship, which is open to LGBTQ+ youth and straight allies.

The nonprofit also helps young LGBTQ+ adults find housing, obtain a GED and connect with a supportive community. The couple has worked to provide not only a hub for younger members of the LGBTQ+ community but

**MORE INFORMATION**

» For details on the Sept. 9 symposium, visit casabrumarfoundation.org.

also a haven for those of any age forced into the closet by their careers, living situations or social stigma. The group’s long-term goal is to buy land and build the first LGBTQ+ community center, emergency shelter and self-sufficient temporary housing.

But Evelyn and Heidi understand their work must extend beyond the confines of the LGBTQ+ community.

Evelyn pointed out, “We help our allies and the general public to understand the negative impact our community faces and help them reduce their biases and misunderstanding that contribute to it.”

Toward that end, Casa BruMar Foundation has participated in crisis intervention training with the Prince William Police Department and the Sheriff’s Office, equipping them with skills they may need should they encounter a member of the LGBTQ+ community in crisis.

The foundation has also given queer diversity, equity and inclusion presentations to various federal departments, the town of Haymarket, and the county Library System. Furthermore, it has shared its message of inclusion by participating in a community services fair organized by the Prince William Library, hosting an annual in-person “meet and greet” at Centerfuse in Manassas and partnering with other local nonprofits.

Intending to connect the straight and LGBTQ+ communities, Evelyn BruMar knew when the foundation was founded in 2019 that she wanted it to host an LGBTQ+ symposium. However, the COVID-19 pandemic delayed those plans until 2022. Following the success of last year’s event, the nonprofit



Heidi (left) and Evelyn BruMar founded the Casa BruMar Foundation to help the LGBTQ+ community in Prince William County.

is hosting its second annual LGBTQ+ Symposium, “Building Bridges 2023,” on Sept. 9 at the George Mason University Science and Technology Campus in Manassas.

“We have developed an LGBTQ+ symposium to get many agencies, government resources and community partners together so we can help uplift and support our community,” Evelyn said.

Topics discussed at the symposium will range from self-defense to legislative updates and financial planning to education. In addition, the Prince William Clerk of Court’s “Seals on Wheels” will be available to help residents with various services, including filing marriage license applications, notary applications and concealed handgun permits.

Evelyn and Heidi BruMar remember how hard they had to fight to protect the life they built together. Through Casa BruMar Foundation and with the help of many volunteers who give their time, treasures and talents to the organization, the BruMars are working to ensure that the LGBTQ+ community can live with the peace, prosperity and protection afforded to everyone in Prince William and the commonwealth of Virginia.

*Kristina Nohe is a political activist, adoption advocate and homeschooling mom who is proud to be from Prince William County.*



KRISTINA NOHE

READERS REACT

A story about Prince William County school officials considering policy changes to student cell phone use (page 1, Aug. 24-30 edition) created quite a bit of discussion on InsideNoVa’s Facebook page. Here’s what some readers had to say.

“We know that our students are hooked on their phones. They can’t put them down. Well...yeah. They never should have been allowed in schools.”

– **Bradley Caricofe**

“Phones for kids are meant to be for emergencies only while the kids are in school and on [the] school bus. Phones should be kept in a book bag until there’s an emergency.”

– **Basma Holler**

“Draconian bans aren’t going to address the issue of distraction, and requiring phones to be locked in magnetic pouches throughout the day will at the very least create massive bottlenecks during the start and close of school that will cut into instruction time. This is a teaching opportunity.”

– **Sean Ylinen**

“So we want to put the kids’ cell phones up, but what about the teachers that use theirs, too? But the kids can still use computers, instead of going back to paper and pen. So still electronics are a problem! The school board and superintendent are to blame. My child will put his cellphone in his book bag. It will not be taken because if there is an emergency at school, he will be able to get ahold of me.”

– **Crystal Thompson**

“Kids can’t learn if they have phones on them during class.”

– **Tara Sayani**

“If this comes to fruition, ban them on buses as well. The things kids watch and do on their phones while on the bus is crazy.”

– **Erika Robinson Martin**

“That isn’t safe at all. Blame the parents of the kids who are being disrespectful and not following the rules. Don’t blame the kids who keep their phones in their backpacks. I feel sorry for the kids who walk and may need their phones for emergencies.”

– **Hank Nun**

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# Democracy demands more debates

In 1858, Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas held the most famous debates in U.S. history.

In 1960, Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy had the first televised presidential debate, which changed the trajectory of that election.

In 1965, African-American writer James Baldwin and white conservative commentator William F. Buckley debated at Cambridge University on the issue of race in America.

There is only one commonality among all three debates: The participants held strikingly different views.

Margaret Thatcher once said, "I love argument, I love debate. I don't expect anyone just to sit there and agree with me; that's not their job."

A debate is the best tool to give voice to different viewpoints. Those involved do not necessarily reach a consensus. In the debates above, no one convinced their opponents to change their position, but that was not the point. They weren't trying to convince their opponent; they were trying to convince the audience, which brings up the most crucial aspect of civil debates: the public.

While the rest of the country has moved on to the 2024 presidential race, this year's election will have a far more significant impact on Prince William County. It will affect everything from public safety to public schools, land use to the landfill, and social services to social justice.

If no one mows the grass at the soccer field, if the landfill shuts down and garbage piles up on the street, or if a house in your neighborhood catches fire, no one calls the President of the United States to deal with it. Local government directly affects almost every aspect of our daily lives, so we deserve to hear from those who want to run it.

The leaves have not begun changing from green to gold, but mailboxes are already filling with mailers from candidates. Advertising can't replace debates, because mailers and commercials make unchallenged claims.

Candidate A can make an assertion about themselves or their opponent, but there is follow-up only if the voter fact-checks it. Likewise, while Candidate B may include a side-by-side platform comparison, complete with a grainy, unflattering

picture of their opponent, the issues and wording are written with bias favoring one side. Voters get a reliable comparison only when candidates face off in a public forum with a skilled moderator.

Candidates often cite a hostile environment, biased organizers or a packed calendar as their reason for not accepting invitations from groups wanting to host debates. None of these is a legitimate excuse. A candidate is running to represent all the people in that district, not just the ones who are conciliatory. Once in office, citizens' time, town halls, public events and social media make it impossible to avoid members of the public with whom elected officials disagree.

How open a candidate is to engage with people with whom they disagree during a campaign informs voters about who that candidate will welcome to the table after they are elected. Furthermore, if a candidate cannot make time to debate when asking for people's votes, those same voters will know how much time candidates will be willing to dedicate to constituents once elected.

A lack of debates also informs voters what that candidate thinks of them. Do candidates think voters are smart enough to discern bias, or do they believe they need to control the narrative for people? If their opponent takes the dialectic low road, do they think voters are so easily manipulated? Or do they think the public will not listen to them if more than one microphone is available and, therefore, more than one opinion can be voiced?

The lack of debates is troubling, not just for the 2023 election, but because it sets a precedent. After the 1960 Nixon-Kennedy debate, there would not be another presidential debate until 1976. On the other hand, Buckley called his debate with Baldwin "the most satisfying debate I ever had," and the Lincoln-Douglas debates helped to crystalize the public's view on slavery.

Early voting has already begun. The time for debates is running out, and that's a disservice to our democracy.

*Kristina Nohe is a political activist, adoption advocate and homeschooling mom who is proud to be from Prince William County.*



KRISTINA NOHE

## READERS REACT

### VOTE FOR ROSIE'S TO SAVE ON PROPERTY TAXES

As a City Council member and lifelong resident of Manassas Park, I have spoken with many of my fellow community members. They care about this community and want to see it prosper, just as much as I do.

For decades, Manassas Park residents repeatedly faced one of the highest real estate tax rates in Virginia. These residents have continually asked me and other city leaders to reduce their financial burden. New tax revenues from the expanding gaming industry in Virginia could make a huge difference.

Keep in mind that gaming machines already exist in a number of Manassas Park's convenience stores and restaurants. Unfortunately, our residents receive zero tax revenue or other benefits from these machines.

With the possible infusion of \$1.5 million in annual tax revenue from the proposed Rosie's, Manassas Park residents could benefit from reduced real estate tax bills, with unofficial estimates showing at least a 4% potential decrease.

Rosie's would be part of a wave of

commercial revitalization in Manassas Park. The growth will prompt people throughout the region to visit our city and the new Rosie's as well as spend time at the revitalized Manassas Park Shopping Center and our in-progress downtown, Park Central.

Rosie's anticipates creating 100 jobs within a short driving distance for Manassas Park residents and exploring ways to support Park Central's restaurants, movie theater and other commercial entities.

Ultimately, Manassas Park voters will make the final decision whether to allow Rosie's to operate in our city: an example of democracy in action. Their ballots during early voting and on Nov. 7 will determine every Manassas Park resident will see an infusion of tax revenue, the nearby employment opportunities and other benefits from this new business.

So, I am encouraging all of my fellow residents to vote yes for pari-mutuel wagering, vote yes for Rosie's and vote yes for Manassas Park.

– Laura Hampton  
Manassas Park

*Laura Hampton is a member of the Manassas Park City Council.*

### DIGITAL GATEWAY WOULD CONTRIBUTE TO BUSINESS GROWTH

So many candidates promising so much this year.

Some support lower taxes.  
Some support more affordable housing.  
Some support business growth and more jobs.

But while many of the candidates can't agree on much, what they should all agree on is that the PW Digital Gateway can deliver lower taxes, more affordable housing, more business growth and more jobs.

How?  
Tax revenue from the Digital Gateway can be used for both lowering taxes and offsetting the lower tax revenue from more affordable housing. It can also provide more jobs, including construction jobs as it is being built, tech jobs as it ramps up and more.

By doing that, it can contribute to a stronger business environment for Prince William County. Who doesn't want that?

– Craig Whitmore  
Woodbridge