

‘Look at the World through a Different Lens’

Artful Living event benefits families in need.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

An evening filled with original artwork, live music, gourmet food and socializing is in store for attendees of Artful Living. A fundraiser for Fairfax-based Britepaths – which helps local families in need – it’s set for Thursday, May 19, from 7-10 p.m., at the Country Club of Fairfax, 5110 Ox Road in Fairfax.

The juried art show will feature 54 works by 38 local artists. Works on display will include oil, acrylic and watercolor paintings; photography; mixed media; sculpture and textiles. They’ll be judged before the event by area residents Lynne Garvey-Hodge, Daniel Johnson and Jessie Whitten, who also served as judges in previous years. Artists include GMU student



“Everything is Connected,” by Fairfax’s Camille Kouyoumdjian, is in Artful Living.

Nadya Steare, a recipient of the 2020 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Fellowship; Fairfax’s Camille Kouyoumdjian, who’s most inspired by “the symbiosis of human cultures and the natural environments that nurture them;” Jennifer M. Allevato, whose art and design work

have been shown and sold in the U.S. and abroad; and Maria Francisca Roura, a street photographer and portraitist who moved to the U.S. from Chile.

Ribbons and cash prizes will be awarded for Best of Show and Best of Medium. In addition, through-



“Circle Dance,” a collage by GMU student Nadya Steare, may be purchased at Artful Living.

out the event, guests may vote for the work they believe deserves the “People’s Choice Award,” and the winning artist will receive a ribbon. The art is also available for purchase; each artist sets the price and splits the sale proceeds 50/50 with Britepaths.

The theme of both the event and art show is “Connected,” and it’s especially meaningful to Britepaths’ Executive Director Lisa Whetzel. “It feels very special to be able to gather at Artful Living this

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Fairfax City Adopts FY 23 Budget

Real-estate tax rate reduced 6.5 cents; average tax on Fairfax City home will increase \$127.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

Fairfax City’s newly adopted FY 23 budget fulfills City Council’s goals and directives. But more important for the residents, it reduces their real-estate tax rate by 6-1/2 cents.

When City Manager Rob Stalzer unveiled his proposed budget in February, he initially recommended trimming that tax rate from its current \$1.075 per \$100 assessed valuation to \$1.035. But the figure adopted last Tuesday, May 3, reduced it even further to \$1.01.

Because of the 8.75-percent rise in assessed values in calendar year 2022, the average residential tax bill will increase 2.2 percent. That means the owner of an average Fairfax City home valued at \$588,964 will pay \$127 more in real-estate taxes – less the \$274 it would have cost had the tax rate remained at \$1.035.

“The [real-estate] tax rate strikes the right balance between the quality of life our citizens expect and the [rising property assessments],” said Councilmember Joe Harmon.

Stalzer explained that the reduction was made possible due to “an

estimated \$500,000 surplus” the City will receive because of Fairfax County’s recently updated FY22 school-tuition cost estimate.

In addition, the average, annual, commercial real-estate tax bill will decrease by 4.2 percent. The personal-property tax rate remains at \$4.13 per \$100 assessed valuation. However, the personal-property tax rate on vehicles was lowered from 100 percent of fair-market value to 86 percent. (The tax rate for machinery and tools will remain at 100 percent).

The overall FY 23 budget contains \$193,908,167 for all funds and \$162,157,744 for the General Fund. “[These] expenditures continue the significant progress made over the past several years,” said Chief Financial Officer David Hodgkins. “The adopted budget contains the necessary personnel, operating and capital resources to support economic recovery and grow the City’s commercial base in an impactful and sustainable way.”

The General Fund spending plan also provides the financial investment required to support the City’s FY23-27 CIP of \$11 million, which was adopted last week, as well. It includes 116 projects and is fully funded at \$80,409,389 for FY 23.

The FY23-27 CIP total amount is \$309.1 million, and its projects address many of the City’s current and future needs.

The FY 23 General Fund budget is \$7.2 million higher than it was in FY 22 – an increase of 4.6 percent. The total FY 23 budget of nearly \$194 million for all City funds – General, Wastewater, Stormwater Utility, Transit, Old Town Service District, Cable, Transportation Tax, Capital and American Rescue Plan Act Funds — reflects a 5.3-percent increase over the FY 22 amount.

It reestablishes the Old Town Service District tax rate at 4 cents per \$100 of assessed value (a 4-cent increase from the previous \$0.00 rate). And it raises the City’s required 12 percent undesignated fund balance to 15 percent, further bolstering Fairfax’s AAA bond rating.

But the City’s enterprise utility funds for wastewater and stormwater will operate without General Fund dollars, while remaining financially sustainable.

The new budget fully funds the City School Board’s \$53,480,000 FY 23 contract with FCPS. And it includes a 3.5-percent merit increase and a 2.6-percent market-rate adjustment to City em-

ployee pay scales. The goal is to ensure greater parity within the Northern Virginia region and aid the City’s recruitment and retention efforts. It also provides for the transition of public-safety compensation plans from pay ranges to a step system, effective Oct. 1.

The budget funds a net increase of 9.75 full-time equivalent positions to address the growing needs and support initiatives in the departments of Economic Development, Human Services, Fire Code Administration, Fleet Maintenance, Information Technology, Finance, Public Works, Wastewater and Stormwater Utility.

During discussions last week, prior to adoption of the budget, it was obvious that not everyone was on board with it. “These are decisions none of us take lightly,” said Councilmember Tom Ross. “I’m concerned about reducing the tax rate. I understand our revenues have increased and tax assessments have to.

So this is an opportunity to [use the increased income] to invest in the community. I hope we don’t have to increase the [real-estate] tax rate next year.”

Councilmember Sang Yi, however, believed the real-estate tax

rate should have been reduced further. “I just felt like we could do a little bit better, considering the increased property assessments,” he said.

“And with inflation, the cost of gas and food have gone up 8-10 percent – and not everyone gets a COLA [cost-of-living adjustment in their pay],” he continued. “That’s why I can’t support the \$1.01, but I appreciate all the hard work that [City] staff and my colleagues have put into this budget.”

Meanwhile, Councilwoman Janice Miller – who made the motions to approve both the budget and the real-estate tax rate – explained why she did so. “This budget fully funds the City services and provides an increase in compensation for our dedicated and hardworking staff, and it funds the CIP,” she said. “By lowering the tax rate, we [still] funded the stormwater utility. And this budget is fair, reflects our values and preserves our funding plan for FY 23. I’m happy and proud to support the changes we made tonight, and I believe there’s enough flexibility in the budget to provide for the coming year.”

Ultimately, the budget passed with a vote of 4-2, with just Ross and Yi voting no.

Artful Living Event Benefits Families in Need

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year, after more than two years apart,” she said. “But being at this event has always felt special to me because you can really feel the energy of our community’s commitment to helping its neighbors.”

Providing the music will be local, Latin-jazz band Batida Diferente. Its name means “a different beat,” and this group fuses Brazilian and American influences into a unique blend of jazz and pop.

The Country Club is preparing a special menu of appetizers, beer and wines. The appetizers will include top sirloin and dinner rolls, fig and caramelized-onion tarts, beef empanadas, vegetable spring rolls, coconut shrimp, spinach-and-artichoke dip, artisan cheeses and an assortment of Mediterranean grilled vegetables. For dessert, there’ll be cakes by Nothing Bundt Cakes and chocolates by Cameron’s Coffee & Chocolates.

Among the items up for bid during the live auction are:

- ❖ A private, wine tasting for six guests in the historic, Watergate complex in Washington, D.C.;
- ❖ A beer tasting for eight guests in downtown Washington, D.C.;
- ❖ A Carolina Beach vacation-house rental accommodating 12 people;
- ❖ An Ocean City condo rental for six guests;
- ❖ A private and secluded, vacation rental home that accommodates six guests in Fauquier County and is close to hiking, wineries and restaurants in Delaplane.



This photograph, called “The Moment of Connection,” by Maria Francisca Roura, is in the show.



Also on display will be “Still Life with Tulips” by Jennifer Allevato.

During the evening, attendees will also be able to bid via a silent auction for an assortment of special packages of goods and services offered by local businesses, including Alya Salon & Spa, Merrifield Garden Center, Twins ACE Hardware and

The Wine Reserve at Waterford.

Live-auction items are available for preview on the event-registration page. Silent-auction items may be previewed a few days before the event. To see them, go to <https://britepaths.org/event/artful-living> and click on “Register.”

Looking forward to Artful Living, Whetzel said the art show, plus the opportunity to mingle with some of the artists, also make the evening special. “Art has the

ability to transform, which we feel speaks to our mission to empower those among us who’ve been struggling but working so hard to improve their lives and thrive in our expensive area,” she said. “They’ve faced even more setbacks during the pandemic, and we’ve been heartened by the outpouring of support Britepaths has received these past two years – but there’s still so much more to do.”

In 2021, Britepaths served 8,573 Northern Virginia households, impacting the lives of 12,722 people. So event proceeds will benefit Britepaths’ programs to provide financial education, coaching and mentoring, job-readiness supports and training, emergency food, financial aid and seasonal assis-

tance to working families struggling to make ends meet. And attendees will also hear stories of resiliency from clients working toward financial self-sufficiency with the help of Britepaths’ staff and volunteers.

Admission to Artful Living is \$100. Tickets may be purchased at <https://britepaths.org/event/artful-living/> or at the event. Call 703-273-8829 or email events@britepaths.org for more information.

“The funds we raise that evening will enable us to provide more food and financial assistance at a time when the need is so critical,” said Whetzel.

“They’ll also help us broaden our reach with our Financial Em-

powerment and Workforce Development programs that offer vital tools for people to improve their financial futures. We hope everyone will join us for this unique event that offers us an opportunity to lift up our neighbors and look at the world around us through a different lens.”

Artful Living is made possible by sponsorships from: Human Touch LLC; Anthem HealthKeepers Plus; MBH Settlement Group; MainStreet Bank; Ken and Linda Kozloff; Apple Federal Credit Union; Printing Ideas; Nothing Bundt Cakes, Fair Lakes and Vienna; Christine Hisson, Positive Pathways to Resolution & Success; and Miller Consulting Group.

Language Skills Valuable for Two Franconia Police Officers

Quick thinking earned them title as “Officers of the Month” for April.

BY MIKE SALMON
THE CONNECTION

Two police officers from the Franconia district station used their multi-language skills to solve a robbery case and make arrests, earning them the title of “officers of the month,” for April.

According to police: Shortly after noon on April 9th, officers from the Franconia Station responded to a call about a potential shooting on Skyles Way in Springfield. The caller reported that his wife had been shot. First-responding officers, which included officers Jennifer Umazor-Amaya and Kevin Garcia Rosa, arrived to find a chaotic scene. A male subject was lying on the grass with what appeared to be a gunshot wound to

his left shin, police said.

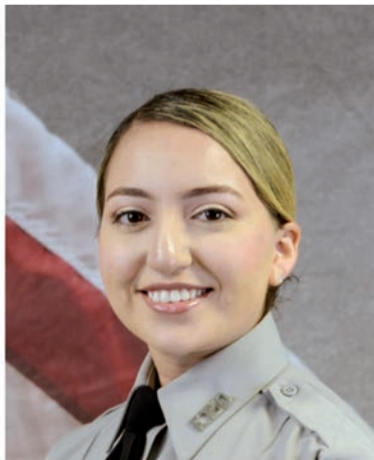
The officers rendered aid, while simultaneously securing the scene and making it safe. Units immediately located and identified a female victim who was the target of an armed robbery. The victim is a local jewelry dealer who has done business in the area for many years. While visiting the Skyles Way address to present her jewelry for a potential sale, she was robbed of her purse at gunpoint by two subjects. They also attempted to steal her jewelry bag but were unsuccessful. The victim had a visible laceration to her head that was initially thought to have been a gunshot graze wound.

Officers Umazor-Amaya and Garcia-Rosa separated individuals at the scene and began to work their way through a series of inter-



Officers Jennifer Umazor-Amaya and Kevin Garcia Rosa.

views and translations, according to police. Both officers are fluent in Spanish and nearly all involved parties and witnesses were Spanish speaking only. The composure,



command presence, and investigative focus of both officers were noted by other officers, supervisors, and responding detectives, the police said.

They interviewed several people on the scene and determined that the male subject lying in the grass was one of the robbery culprits. He had not been shot but, in fact, sustained a compound fracture of his shin as he fled from the building after the robbery.

No bullets had been fired at or in the direction of the robbery victim as was initially suspected. Her injuries were a result of being pistol-whipped with a handgun as the suspects attempted to rob her, the FCPD said.

The Major Crimes Bureau detectives who responded to the scene immediately and were able to decipher the crime scene due to the initial work performed by Officers Umazor-Amaya and Garcia Rosa, police said.

PHOTOS BY THE FAIRFAX COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT