

WHAT'S INSIDE:

RPCA Summer Hiring Makes a Splash in the Community

Giving Back and Second Chances

Providing More than Shelter

Enthusiasm Builds Among Alexandrians for Effort Against Food Waste

"I Can Go to the Grocery Store and Don't Have to Stress About It"

Leaving No Child Behind



CITY COUNCIL PRIORITIES

FALL 2023 UPDATE

RPCA Summer Hiring Makes a Splash in the Community by Jael Zeballos

PRIORITIES: COMPENSATION PHILOSOPHY, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, YOUTH & FAMILIES

On a scorching summer day, an 8-year-old girl at Nature Camp holds a lizard for the first time, gently caressing its scaly tail. A week later at Tiny Chefs Camp, a boy of 10 eagerly flours the surface of a counter to roll out a sheet of pastry dough. Giggles erupt across the room when some of the flour gets in his hair. During a tennis lesson at a local recreation center, a coach encourages out-of-breath children with an enthusiastic shout of "Love!"



Lasting memories like these would not have been possible without the summer hiring efforts of the [Alexandria Department of Recreation and Cultural Activities \(RPCA\)](#). It led to the recruitment of 92 seasonal team members, including lifeguards, recreation leaders, and other essential summer staff.

"We know that parents rely on us to give their kids a place to be safe and play for the summer, and our staff are an invaluable part of providing that experience," said Laura Durham, Deputy Director of RPCA.

Continued on page 2

Giving Back and Second Chances

After Learning to Transcribe Braille While Behind Bars, Deborah Adams Built a Business Doing Good in Alexandria

by Lauren Sanchez

PRIORITY: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

A prison sentence became a second chance for Alexandria's Deborah Adams. After learning to transcribe Braille at the Virginia Department of Corrections, Adams sought to give other inmates the same new lease on life.

Adams spent the majority of her life in and out of the criminal justice system. After two decades of addiction and nearly three decades of legal trouble, a 160-year prison sentence for embezzlement to be

Continued on page 5

Order Up! Five Guys Relocating to Alexandria "Feels Like Coming Home"

Founded in 1986 near the Arlington/Alexandria border by Jerry and Janie Murrell — along with their five sons — Five Guys set out to revamp the fast-food landscape with made-to-order burgers and hot dogs.

Back page for more



RPCA Summer Hiring Makes a Splash in the Community (Cont.)

The Strategy Behind RPCA's Summer Hiring Success

RPCA adopted a dynamic and innovative method in targeting its audience, ensuring that it reached potential recruits where they were most likely to discover and engage with summer job opportunities. It initiated the recruitment process well in advance and collaborated closely with the [Department of Human Resources](#), the [Workforce Development Center](#), and various partners to showcase the enticing prospects of summer employment.

"You've seen the national news where some aquatics facilities weren't able to open because of a lifeguard shortage. And when I talked to my peers in the field, that is not my experience at all," said Debbie Woodbury, Regional Program Director for RPCA and hiring manager for the aquatics program this summer. "We were actually able to hire lifeguards, fully staff our pools, and attend to any special events that came up that required additional hours."

Woodbury observed that employees who were not going away to school agreed to stay on and work weekends or evenings or when they were available. She especially credits the competitive pay (lifeguards were paid \$17.41 per hour, recreation leaders started at \$17.71, and pool operators earned \$18.22), bonuses for employees who stayed the whole summer, and word of mouth for being able fully staff the aquatic facilities.



"We actually have a family of three siblings that work with us," Woodbury said. "We have another set of brothers too. Word of mouth — especially for high schoolers — is very effective, and the money in addition to other workplace factors make a difference."

“ Parents rely on us to give their kids a place to be safe and play for the summer... ”

- Laura Durham





Durham outlined other approaches that made RPCA successful:

- **Leveraging Handshake:** To connect with college students and recent graduates, RPCA utilized Handshake, a popular online portal for connecting students with potential employers.
- **Use of Social Media:** City staff harnessed the power of social media tools such as Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and Facebook to reach out to potential recruits.
- **Multichannel Promotion:** RPCA advertised in program guides, issued eNews releases, promoted opportunities through flyers at all facility locations, and organized job fairs at local schools and City facilities.
- **Community Engagement:** RPCA's leadership took a hands-on approach by actively participating in community meetings and events, including City boards and commissions, to highlight summer hiring needs.
- **Lifeguard Certification Promotion and Expanded Training:** RPCA promoted free lifeguard certification for new recruits, contributing to its success in attracting and retaining aquatics staff. In preparation for the recent summer, RPCA expanded its training program by offering additional classes.

To prepare for the fall season, RPCA will continue its dynamic recruitment strategy to meet program and hiring goals. "We all have a shared leadership approach where we know, if there is a need, we are all empowered to fulfill that need," Woodbury said of takeaways. "It makes us very proactive and work well together because we know we are serving the same demographic."



Providing More than Shelter

How the Auxiliary Grant Program Serves Some of the City's Most Vulnerable Residents

By Jael Zeballos

PRIORITIES: HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Steve Gurney, a respected advocate for older adults, began his keynote speech at [Northern Virginia Aging Network's](#) Legislative Breakfast on September 20, 2023, like this: "Let's say you need assisted living care. You need a room, meals, homemaking, help with activities and daily living, 24-hour supervision, and medication management. You look around. You are shocked to learn that there's a higher cost to this. The median monthly cost for assisted living is \$6,900 in the Northern Virginia area and \$5,200 across the rest of the state.

"You thought the government would help. You are alarmed to learn Medicare does not pay for assisted living, and while some other states use Medicaid to cover some costs, Virginia does not. You are in need of care. You feel stuck. However, there is a public source. It's called the Auxiliary Grant"

Gurney, founder of [Positive Aging Community](#), an organization dedicated to making choices about aging easier and more accessible, set the stage for a stark reality faced by an increasing number of older adults and their families in our region. This reality revolves around the staggering expenses associated with assisted-living care and the pervasive uncertainty that accompanies planning for the future.

Thankfully, the City of Alexandria — along with partners like the Senior Services of Alexandria, Commission on Aging, and other nonprofits — are actively advocating for the needs of elderly Alexandrians and making a profound impact on the daily lives of community members through the Auxiliary Grant (AG) Program.

Beyond Housing

The typical monthly cost of assisted living in the region can range from \$6,000 to \$8,000 or more, placing it out of reach for many older adults. Through the AG Program, income-eligible elderly, blind, or disabled Alexandrians can access housing and care that would otherwise be unattainable.

"When you study the values the City has, we are a community that is here to serve," said Cheryll Elliott, Family Services Specialist III/Coordinator for the [Department of Community and Human Services \(DCHS\)](#) and liaison to local assisted living facilities. "Part of our service is not just providing day-to-day things in the home. Some service goes beyond just housing. These individuals have functional and financial needs that are being met by this program."

Over the past eight years, 12 AG units in private assisted living facilities (ALFs) have been secured through the development process. Three of these AG units will become available at the city's newest assisted living community — [Benchmark at Alexandria](#) — in Spring of 2024. Securing these AG units means that clients under the AG program are able to receive care for the current AG rate in Northern Virginia of \$1,934, instead of the regular cost. In conjunction with the resident's resources, the AG program covers the cost of room, board, and care in an ALF. This positively impacts participants' lives because they require assistance with one or more activities of daily living, such as bathing,



and dressing, using the toilet, medication administration, doing laundry, housekeeping, and meal preparation.

The AG "program really impacts individuals who are in a gap in terms of their assistance and really makes a difference in terms of a client's overall safety," said Elliott, who meets with ALFs regularly to check on AG participants. "I think facilities are

doing a good job at being inclusive. One of the great impacts and things we

“Facilities are doing a good job at being inclusive”
- Cheryll Elliott

continue to advocate for is that our clients are not treated differently than private pay individuals. We want to ensure clients financial status is not a factor and should be afforded all rights as privately paying clients."

AG units in assisted-living facilities are designed to serve individuals with limited resources averaging approximately 10-20% of the area median income (AMI) and assets no greater than \$3,000 depending on household size. Individuals must have an income of \$1,878/month or less (as of 2022) to qualify for the AG program. Income from all sources is considered, including Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, retirement, and pension payments.

At the state level, the program is administered by the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services. Locally, it is administered by DCHS's Division of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS), which helps market Alexandria AG opportunities as they are available and maintains a waiting list of interested people. Eligible city residents are assessed by DAAS social workers to

Giving Back and Second Chances (Cont.)

served at Fluvanna Correctional Center for Women (FCCW) was a turning point. She recalls the moment vividly. “One of the promises I made to myself was that any of the skeletons in my closet that were lies I had been telling in my life, I would make the truth,” she says. “One of them was my schooling. I was very smart, but I lied about being educated.”

While incarcerated, Adams worked toward her associate degree and was selected for the FCCW transcription program. There, her passion for helping the blind was kindled. “We call it the “Braille bite.” You either get bit or you don’t,” said Adams, who went on to earn the prestigious U.S. Library of Congress certificate in literary Braille while still in prison.

Adams was released after serving 10 years of her sentence and soon began working as a contractor with the Virginia [Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired](#). “I am a perfect example of how the system can allow you to change and become a better person,” said Adams.

She spent five years in Kentucky helping inmates get their own fresh start after leaving prison by connecting them with the [American Printing House for the Blind](#). In 2015, she founded her own company, DOT Over DOT, when she returned to her

“ The opportunity to be able to have a website for free and then to be supported for a year is a tremendous gift ”

- Deborah Adams

home in Alexandria because she understood how powerful second chances can be. DOT Over DOT employs formerly incarcerated people to translate books and textbooks into Braille.

“I realized that people aren’t going to receive the same benefits and opportunities I did, so I opened up DOT Over DOT.” Adams only hires formerly incarcerated individuals with Braille certification from prison, helping them to re-enter society and become self-sufficient within 30 days.



As Adams worked to grow her business, she sought out the help of the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership’s small business team, which is working with her to write, build, and host [a new website](#) — free of charge.

“The opportunity to be able to have a website for free and then to be supported for a year is a tremendous gift,” she said.

DOT Over DOT has grown to a team of 18, with a core group of seven that work together to transcribe K-12 textbooks. Currently, the staff is working on translating a Russian dictionary. It can take anywhere from nine months to a year to finish one book.

Adams has also been exploring ways to help those with substance abuse issues as a certified peer recovery specialist and integrated forensic peer recovery specialist. She hopes to guide others with her own personal experience. “At this point in my life, I am so blessed to be where I am today,” said Adams. “I will be celebrating 10 years of no crime and 21 years of no drugs in my life.”

To follow along on Deborah Adams’ journey, or provide support for DOT Over DOT, visit her website at [DOTOverDOT.org](#).

Providing More than Shelter (Cont.)

determine if they meet the functional criteria. Residents apply for the Auxiliary Grant subsidy through the [DCHS Eligibility Division](#). Currently, the state funds 80% of AG payments, with the remaining 20% covered by the City.

The Forgotten Middle and What the Future Holds

During his keynote address, Gurney highlighted “The Forgotten Middle,” a group comprising adults aged 55 and older with an income above the Medicaid threshold but without substantial personal savings, according to [NORC at the University of Chicago](#). A significant portion of this demographic will struggle to meet the financial demands of essential health care, personal care, and housing services. In fact, nearly three-quarters of middle-income seniors in 2033 are expected to be financially unprepared for assisted living should the need arise.

The City is not overlooking this matter. City staff remain committed to expanding opportunities for housing and care for a broader spectrum of incomes and continues to champion the needs of older adults.

Elliott, as a liaison for the City, underscores the importance of this support. “We can advocate to ensure that older adults are continually seen, continually heard, and that we are making decisions about facilities being built within the City,” she said. “We have to continue to form partnerships and relationships with assisted living facilities and educate the general population about the needs of our elderly community. We need to ensure that (facilities) are able to provide us with auxiliary grant beds. It is vital because the need is there. The need is there.”

Enthusiasm Builds Among Alexandrians for Effort Against Food Waste

By Nick Zazulia

PRIORITY: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Americans discard over [100 million tons of food](#) each year, or about a third of the food supply, with [up to 48% of that coming from homes](#), according to data from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and sustainable food nonprofit ReFED.

Composting – the process of converting food scraps into nutrient-rich soil – can cut methane gas production from [decomposing food by 95%](#), helping to fight climate change. A [2014 study by the National Waste and Recycling Association](#) found that only 28% of Americans compost, but local governments across the country have been helping to boost those numbers as they add curbside composting services to their waste collection programs.

Alexandria became an active participant in March 2023, when the City launched a [curbside composting pilot program](#) under the management of the [Department of Transportation and Environmental Services \(T&ES\)](#). With the support

of federal funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), up to 1,300 homes along with 100 low-income homes will receive a full year of free service – though both the caps and the length of free service may be adjusted based on participation and community feedback, which has been overwhelmingly positive.

“We love this program!” said Del Ray resident Sarah Koch on a feedback form sent to program participants by (T&ES) in late July 2023. “We have significantly reduced our trash each week because we’re able to compost so many food items. Thank you for organizing this pilot and including us!”

“Without this, I’m not sure I would have moved forward with composting, but now that the household has the hang of it, it’s easy,” Dina-Maria Deringer of Rosemont said in her submission. From April 2023 through September 2023, the City collected over 125,000 lbs. of food waste from an ever-growing list of participants. In the first month of collection, 354 people

supplied 2,800 lbs. of food scraps. The list is up to 915 as of September 2023, and the contribution peaked at more than 30,000 lbs. in August 2023.

The curbside composting pilot is only one part of the City’s sustainability equation. While the pilot is exclusively for standalone dwellings that receive City waste collection service, [the City’s farmer’s market composting drop-off stations](#) – which T&ES has been hosting since 2013 – are an additional option for all residents for free, including those who live in apartments.

In March, the City added a sixth location to its farmers’ market composting drop-offs: the Southern Towers Apartment Complex in Alexandria West. Between the City’s six weekend farmers’ market locations, residents have made nearly 20,000 drop-offs this year, contributing another 126,000 lbs. of food scraps so far this year.

Using the latest month’s curbside numbers as a guide, these figures



“ We have significantly reduced our trash each week because we’re able to compost. ”

- Sarah Koch

“ We are very pleased with the program and share it with everyone we know! ”

- Bethany LaMois



Food Waste cont.

would put Alexandria on pace to divert approximately 485,000 lbs. of food waste annually from landfills to composting. That is enough to [avoid 145 tons of CO₂-equivalent greenhouse gas emissions](#). Alexandria's total waste diversion rate, or the percentage of all waste diverted from landfills, was 53.4% in 2021. As of 2018, the EPA put the national rate for the [U.S. at 32.1%](#), with individual cities ranging from [below 10% in Chicago](#) to above 80% in San Francisco, according to those cities' governments. Many cities are working toward long-term low-percentage or zero-waste strategies, of which composting is a key part.

Composting also creates fertilizer that can be used by residents and community gardens to grow new produce, promoting sustainability. Of the 240 respondents to this July's curbside composting feedback form, 176 (73.3%) expect to request a bag of finished compost. The City's plan to make composting convenient engages the community and empowers residents to get involved in

sustainable practices that can make a difference. In addition, the City has partnered with local community gardens and beds to distribute finished compost. Over 65 cu. yd. of finished compost was applied throughout Alexandria.

On the July 2023 questionnaire, 230 (95.8%) respondents reported being very satisfied or satisfied with the pilot program, with 214 (89.2%) reporting that collection service has been consistent and met their expectations.

Perhaps the most important evaluation of a pilot is whether participants commit long-term. On the feedback form, 158 (65.8%) respondents were extremely or very likely to do so, with a further 47 (19.6%) reporting a moderate likelihood.

Composting programs are a popular initiative across the country and in the Washington metropolitan area. San Francisco pioneered this style of government-led curbside pickup

program nearly three decades ago, but investment in the model has seen a jump in recent years. To launch its program, the City of Alexandria received \$300,000 in federal funding as one of 45 municipalities [selected by the USDA](#) in 2022. It was the only one from Virginia that year, joining Richmond (which received \$90,000) from 2021 and Prince William County (which received \$88,270) from 2020.

The pilot is slated to last two years. In the effort to promote the program, T&ES continues to execute a communications campaign that includes informational webinars, program outreach alongside the Alexandria Library, social media advertising, and mailers. The goal is to build community enthusiasm for sustainable practices.

Brookville-Seminary Valley resident Bethany LaMois is happy to do her part. "We are very pleased with the program and share it with everyone we know!" she reported. "Thank you for providing a green solution to reduce waste."



“I Can Go to the Grocery Store and Don’t Have to Stress About It”

A 6-month update of the ARISE Guaranteed Income Pilot Program

By Jael Zeballos

PRIORITIES: COVID-19 RECOVERY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The [Alexandria Recurring Income for Success and Equity \(ARISE\)](#) program began in January 2023 with the random selection of 170 City of Alexandria residents from a pool of over 4,100 applicants. This guaranteed-income pilot study provides a \$500 monthly payment to the selected participants for 24 months with “no strings attached,” leaving to them how to spend the added financial support.

The City is using this program as a learning opportunity, both about the outcomes for the participants in this project and as part of a larger nationwide effort to produce evidence on the effectiveness of providing direct funds to people who experience economic challenges.

On Wednesday, September 20, [the Department of Community & Human Services \(DCHS\)](#), in partnership with community foundation [ACT for Alexandria](#), hosted the ARISE Basic Income Day of Action Event to celebrate the pilot study’s six-month milestone.

Julie Mullen, Economic Mobility Program Officer for DCHS, shared her insights at the event, saying, “Anecdotally, based on conversations we’re having with participants, they are experiencing a boost in the quality of life, a sense of dignity, increase in their mental health and well-being. Just this sense of, ‘I can go to the grocery store, and I don’t have to stress about it. I can pay my rent and I don’t lose sleep over it.’ A lot of lifting of mental weight.”

ARISE Pilot Overview

- A \$500 monthly cash payment is given directly to 170 individuals for 24 months.
- Eligibility criteria: Alexandria City residents, 18 years or older, with a household income at or below 50% or the area median income (AMI).
- As of 2023, the AMI in the City is \$106,500 for a single-person household and \$152,100 for a family of four, according to Housing Alexandria.
- The program is unconditional, which offers participants flexibility and autonomy.
- The additional income supplements existing social safety support programs and services, rather than replace them.
- Participants still have access to supportive services available to the community.



“ Participants are experiencing a boost in quality of life, a sense of dignity...”

- Julie Mullen

ARISE: Alexandria in a Microcosm

To comprehensively assess the impact of ARISE on its participants, the City is conducting a randomized controlled trial evaluation of the 170-person treatment group and a control group of 210 participants. [Abt Associates](#), an experienced consulting and research firm, was selected to oversee the research after a competitive request for proposal.

Dr. Anna Jefferson and Dr. Randall Juras, principal investigators for Abt Associates, are leading the ARISE evaluation effort, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative analyses. They have adopted a community-based approach to the study and are training and mentoring two research fellows – paid City residents, who serve as local points of contact for program participants.

When asked what distinguishes Alexandria from other cities engaged in similar studies, Jefferson said, “Alexandria is such a diverse community. It’s also a very high-cost city to live in. The unique pressures of raising a family in a very high-cost area can’t be overstated. The amount you spend on rent is such a huge factor for families that makes it hard to make ends meet – even if you’re working two or three jobs. It’s harder to reduce poverty in a high-cost area. The money doesn’t go as far.”

Mullen shared how an integral component of studying a program like ARISE is analyzing why poverty still exists, who it impacts, and what should be done. She shared a striking observation made during

the onboarding of participants: the program represented a full cross-section of Alexandria residents.

“You could walk into a Harris Teeter and grab 10 people, and that’s who was showing up as our ARISE participants,” Mullen said. “It was elderly people, it was families, it was young people just trying to start out in their careers. One woman has an Ivy League degree and can’t quite get her financial footing in the world. It was a diverse microcosm of everyone in our community.”

Jefferson and Juras acknowledge that ARISE is part of a broader effort across the country. It marks Abt Associates’ eighth involvement in a guaranteed-income pilot study. They are also working in close collaboration with partners at the Center for Guaranteed Income Research at the University of Pennsylvania. The University is evaluating between 10 to 20 additional pilots that use nearly identical surveys and research methods so they can learn as much as they can from the broader portfolio of cities.

The full results from the ARISE study will not be known until the two years of the program are complete in January 2025. Even then, a survey will be conducted 6 months after the final payment to gain a full understanding of its impact. However, in the nearer term it will be possible to identify shifts in service delivery approaches as well as policy initiatives that could improve support for residents’ economic mobility.

Read bonus content for this article on the city’s website



Demographics of the ARISE program:



Average household size: 2.8 people



Median household income: \$20,400



Average age: 43 years old



Gender: 68% female, 32% male

Leaving No Child Behind

How Alexandria's Youth Support Network is Avoiding Coverage Gaps and Boosting Efficiency Through Cooperation

By Nick Zazulia

PRIORITIES: YOUTH AND FAMILIES, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In the fall of 2020, ACT for Alexandria started the Youth Support Network (YSN) in partnership with the City of Alexandria, the Frank and Betty Wright Foundation, and Alexandria City Public Schools. The goal was to coordinate efforts across Alexandria and spend resources more efficiently to ensure there are no gaps and no unserved children.

While schools have always played a big role in serving young people, research has found that out-of-school time (OST) or expanded learning programs — programs that engage students outside of and in addition to their traditional school time — is a crucial piece of reaching and supporting young people.

"All the providers, all the players are at the table, and we are talking on a consistent basis," said Randy Gore, Senior Director of Out-of-School Time Programs at the Campagna Center, an Alexandria nonprofit that offers educational and social development programs for children, teens, and adults. Gore also serves on the YSN's executive committee, which he joined in early 2022, though the Center has been part of the YSN since its inception.

OST can support academic achievement, foster good social behaviors, and may even play a role in reducing health disparities, according to [the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A 2014 meta-analysis](#) of studies by the Department of Education's Regional Education Laboratory Appalachia found that it can be particularly impactful for students from low-income backgrounds and students of color. Those studies all found that to be effective, OST programs must be conducted according to best practices. That's where the YSN comes in. It helps ensure programs serving youth across the city are supported through initiatives, priorities, opportunities, and training.

One Alexandria, One Purpose

Gore says it can often feel like different nonprofit organizations are in competition with each other for the same grants, but working through the YSN has helped to reframe those relationships. "That feeling that we're all competing for the same bucket of funding is (gone)," he said. "We're working together to meet the needs of the community. The Network has helped us to have a greater focus on seeing youth in the community thrive versus seeing our individual programs thrive."

That's because participating organizations can leverage each other, refer youth to each other, and work together on initiatives in ways that weren't realistic in the past. Gore provided an example of looking for a dance provider to work with. There was already one in the Network, and they were trying to gain a better foothold in the schools. The Campagna Center, the dance provider, and Alexandria City Public Schools worked together in a way that helped everyone.

"I went in thinking this was a chance for us to all work together, but I wasn't expecting to build relationships, and that was unique," Gore said. "I wasn't expecting for there to be such good communication, but there is."





That was echoed by Rev. Dr. Barbara “Bobi” Wallace, Director of the Shiloh Cares Counseling Ministry at Shiloh Baptist Church and a day-one member of the YSN executive committee. She pointed to the value of having educational, spiritual, and activity-based enrichment programming all in the same room working together.

“They can do hiking, go mountain climbing, ride horses, and teach them how to enjoy the outdoors – things that the average youth doesn’t get to experience, especially when you live so close to the inner city,” Wallace said. “There are dancing outlets; a child might want to be an opera singer or a ballerina; there are low-cost or no-cost programs that parents can get their children engaged or involved in. What that does is give people the opportunity to see what’s out there to help support them.”

Wallace points to the ability to make decisions for themselves as a major benefit to OST. “Students need to learn to be a little autonomous and experience

the country operate. The YSN has been well-received. In May 2023, its executive committee presented at a Forum for Youth Investment conference. Caitlin Brown, the Youth Network Support Manager for ACT for Alexandria, serves on the Leadership Advisory Council for the Virginia Partnership for Out-of-School Time.

Looking Forward

Members have seen benefits during the YSN’s first three years, during which time, membership grew to over 80 participating organizations, but big things are still planned. The Network aims to formalize a program quality initiative – and to put more tools and resources in place to help organizations achieve it.

“It’s a learning experience and not a ‘gotcha’ experience,” Gore said. “Sometimes when we talk about program quality as a provider, there’s concern, but we’re talking about it as a professional development tool that will

“ They can do hiking, go mountain climbing, ride horses, and teach them how to enjoy the outdoors – things that the average youth doesn’t get to experience, especially when you live so close to the inner city ”

- Rev. Dr. Barbara “Bobi” Wallace

what it’s like to make decisions and know there’s someone who is going to stand up behind them even when the decision wasn’t the right one,” she said. “So they understand that that wasn’t a failure, it was an opportunity to learn.”

Early Returns

Being part of the Network provides access to straight-from-the-source information on the City’s priorities and keeps organizations in the same room to coordinate, but it also provides other benefits. For instance, working with the YSN means knowledge of and access to no- or low-cost training opportunities funded by the City and the Frank and Betty Wright Foundation. Wallace said she’s attended trainings and immediately realized that many Shiloh volunteers would benefit from the same experience. Coordinating through the YSN and other partner organizations can make that training available to providers at no cost, improving the level of service at organizations across the city.

In 2021, The Forum for Youth Investment, a national nonprofit focused on empowering young people, selected the YSN to be part of its [Build Forward Together](#) initiative. This provided free technical support and insight into how expanded learning intermediaries and networks around

increase program quality over time.”

A year-long Landscape Study led by Weber Moore Partners is wrapping up with a report due out in December. Focused on the hopes and needs of, and barriers encountered by, youth, families, and providers, it will make recommendations to help guide the Network’s future development.

The group also has plans to develop a Program Locator tool to help people find Alexandria programs that might interest them. The Network aims to have the Locator set up by the summer of 2024 to help with fall programming.

These additional tools and guidance will help make sure quality is high and young people across the city can find organizations that fit their interests – an important part of engaging them and keeping them engaged.

“If students don’t like what we’re doing, they show us with their feet. They don’t come,” Gore said. “We’re constantly filling gaps, and the Network is helping us to do it in a cohesive and coherent manner.”

Order Up! Five Guys Relocating to Alexandria “Feels Like Coming Home”

Chief Marketing Officer Molly Catalano shares how moving the company headquarters to Carlyle has given employees more commuting options and a thriving local community

By Lauren Sanchez

PRIORITY: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Juicy burgers and crispy hand-cut fries aren't the only items on the menu at Virginia-based [Five Guys](#). The popular franchise is also looking to serve the local community as it relocates its corporate headquarters to the heart of Alexandria.

Founded in 1986 near the Arlington/Alexandria border by Jerry and Janie Murrell — along with their five sons — Five Guys set out to revamp the fast-food landscape with made-to-order burgers and hot dogs. Nearly 40 years later, you'd be hard-pressed to find anyone who doesn't know the red-and-white checkered establishment.

Since opening its first restaurant, Five Guys has grown to more than 1,500 franchise locations while remaining a local favorite. When its corporate office lease ended in Lorton, the search for a new headquarters led the company back to where it all began.

According to Chief Marketing Officer Molly Catalano, the selection process for the new location was intensive. “This was an opportunity to really evaluate where we should be and what we need in this space,” she said. “We looked at Tysons, Reston, Arlington, and Alexandria. We were evaluating where we should go, and it ended up that Alexandria seemed to be a target area.”

“We are all excited because it feels like we're going home in many ways,” adds Brooke Blankenship, Public Relations and Marketing Coordinator.

But Alexandria offered a lot of benefits beyond nostalgia. As its office transitioned to a hybrid schedule, moving into an area with an

easy commute and enhanced visibility was crucial. The new headquarters in the Carlyle Crescent building at 1940 Duke Street — across from the King Street Metro station — features a new “Five Guys” marquee, making it both accessible and visible for employees and visitors.

“There's the ease of transportation,” Catalano says. “We have a lot of people who are flying in for training from far away. For our employees locally, there are options. There are metro stops nearby, parking's easy, and we're right off I-495.” The arrival of the new [Potomac Yard-Virginia Tech Metro station](#) this past May only added to the city's allure.

The new headquarters is within walking distance of the Five Guys restaurant at 725 King Street, but exploring the many other neighboring small businesses has been an added treat for the 250 employees. Finding an area with an active community was key for staff, says Blankenship.

“Five Guys is a family and community brand, and now we're in a location where we can practice that,” she says. “Before, we were a little bit isolated, but now we can tie back in with the community and bring our community to us.”

