

# The Arlington Forester



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February 2015

## Big Changes Coming to Ballston Mall

This Wednesday's AFCA meeting -- February 18 at 7 PM in the Barrett Elementary School library -- will feature a presentation by Will Voegele and John Moore from the company Forest City which owns and operates Ballston Common Mall.

They will detail the coming revamping of the mall which will include demolishing Macy's Furniture Store and some other parts of the mall and replacing them with a 26-story, 393-unit apartment building and an open-air, town center-like plaza where the Panera Bread and Noodles and Company storefronts are currently located. Some mall tenants will change, with the mall becoming more restaurant and

entertainment-oriented. The ice arena and office tower will remain. To learn more and ask questions, come to the AFCA meeting.

Also at this month's meeting, the results of AFCA's online survey of options for features and programming at the new Lubber Run Community Center will be presented. See the article below for details on the survey. Meeting participants will also hear a brief update on the County Board's newly-launched year-long community facilities planning effort to build a consensus regarding the County's future funding and facility needs for recreation, education, public safety, and other purposes.

## Survey on Lubber Run Community Center

By John Naland

Arlington County will soon begin designing a new Lubber Run Community Center to be built starting in 2017. AFCA will provide input into the County's design process. Arlington Forest residents responding to AFCA's April 2014 informal survey on the future of LRCC overwhelmingly (91 percent) supported replacing LRCC with a "similar facility." Similar majorities opposed incorporating a housing development or large school into the design.

Now, to get a more detailed understanding of our neighborhood's preferences with regard to the new community center, AFCA sent a message to its listserv subscribers on February 1 to launch a new informal survey. (If you are not on the AFCA listserv and want to join, e-mail your address to [arlingtonforestva@gmail.com](mailto:arlingtonforestva@gmail.com) requesting to be added.)

The survey asks questions regarding site utilization, building size, and programming. Space is provided to add comments. Each adult in Arlington Forest is invited to complete

one survey (the input of residents outside of Arlington Forest will be sought later).

As of when this newsletter was sent to be printed, 189 responses had been submitted. The survey will remain open through midnight on February 16. The results will be reported at the February 18 AFCA meeting. To take the survey, go to [www.surveymonkey.com/s/RRTSQK2](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/RRTSQK2)

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*AFCA Meeting 7 p.m. February 18 at Barrett School Library*

## THE ARLINGTON FORESTER

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## Editor's Note

The *Arlington Forester* welcomes articles, news notes, letters, and photos focusing on non-commercial events or issues specific to our neighborhood. We publish eight times per year (Sept to Nov and Jan to May). Deadline for submissions is the first of the month. E-mail submissions of up to 400 words to newsletter@arlingtonforestva.org. Space often fills up before the deadline.

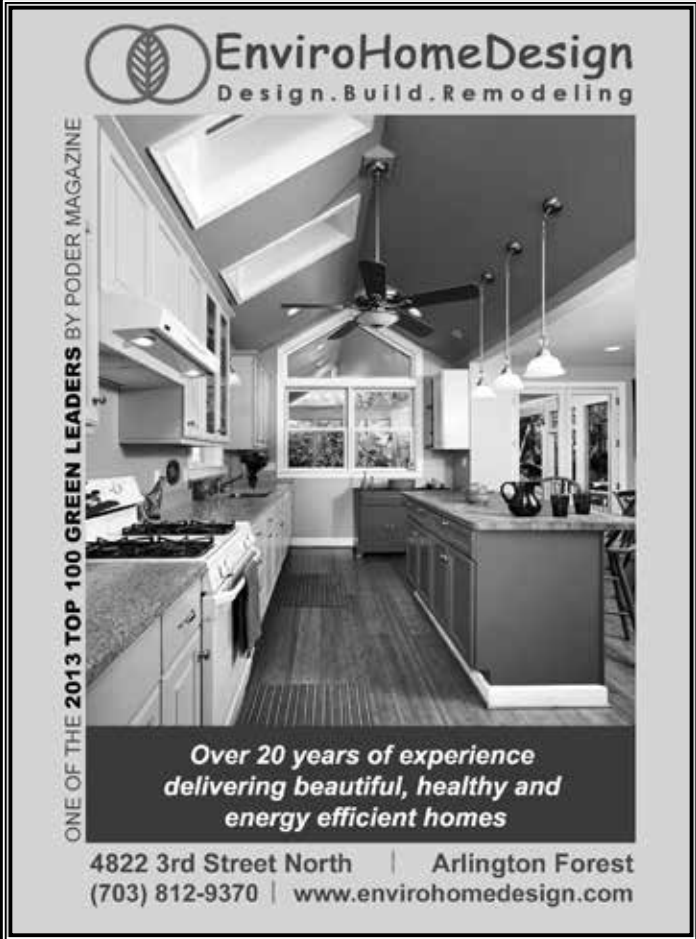
## Winter in Arlington Forest

By John Naland

In winter, our neighborhood takes on a different look. After the leaves have fallen from the trees along Lubber Run and Four Mile Run, it is possible to see right through the forest. Woodland trails that in summer seemed as though they might be deep in a large forest far from civilization now in winter reveal themselves to be bordered by houses and roads. As we realize the relative smallness of our parkland we can better appreciate what a precious asset it is.

Winter also impacts the wildlife with which we share our neighborhood. White tails of deer are easier to see bobbing through the leafless woods. Foxes are more visible as they hunt for their next meal.

Winter changes the appearance of our streets as well. It seemed like more houses than ever had outdoor holiday decorations last December. Our family joined in the fun by displaying a 42-inch tall figurine which, after being blown over and damaged in a wind gust, we jokingly referred to as "Rudolph the One-Eyed Reindeer" until we found the right glue to repair him. Hopefully, the rest of this winter will feature calmer weather.



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# U.S. Mail Delivery Problems

By John Naland



Arlington Foresters who attended the January AFCA meeting heard an informative briefing from two area U.S. Postal Service managers -- Postmaster of Arlington Walter Daniels and regional customer service coordinator Tony Prisco -- who discussed

delivery problems and what is being done to correct them. Here are highlights:

USPS nationwide operates under tight budget limits. For example, if you see a letter carrier who is wearing regular street clothes, that indicates he or she has fewer than 90 days on the job and thus is not yet eligible to be issued a uniform. The average USPS vehicle is 25 years old and when one breaks USPS sometimes must rent a car to get the mail delivered. Letter carriers are required to take the most direct route between mail boxes (unless the resident requests in writing that they not cut across their lawn) otherwise delivery routes would take twice as long to service and USPS would need twice as many letter carriers.

Delivery problems typically occur when your regular letter carrier is absent (for example, regular day off, sick leave, or annual leave). That is when new hires or other non-permanent employees deliver your route which is

unfamiliar to them. For example, a vacation delivery stop request that your regular letter carrier knows about may not be briefed on to the substitute letter carrier. Problems can also occur after your regular carrier retires or is transferred so that a series of temporary employees must cover the route for a time.

Another important fact is that almost all mail is now sorted mechanically and is given to your letter carrier pre-bundled, organized by house order, and ready to be delivered. Thus, any sorting errors that may be committed in a USPS facility hundreds of miles away will likely go unnoticed by your letter carrier. For example, you might get a letter addressed to your house number but with a totally different street name.

Those are some of the root causes of our neighborhood's recent mail delivery problems, but the two USPS managers acknowledged that they in no way excuse them. The managers emphasized their concern regarding improving customer satisfaction and their resolve to reduce errors. To assist them in that effort, they asked Arlington Foresters to report any future complaints or concerns with mail delivery directly to Mr. Daniels at [walter.m.daniels@usps.gov](mailto:walter.m.daniels@usps.gov) or 703-933-0075.

## FHA Loans - now more affordable!

President Obama wants to increase the ranks of first-time buyers in the housing market, now at a 27-year low. On 1/26/15, the FHA lowered the rate of the annual mortgage insurance premium paid on agency-backed 30-year fixed loans by a half percentage point from the current 1.35%, to 0.85% of the loan balance. The administration estimates that the decrease will trim a borrower's annual payment by \$900 and enable 250,000 people to buy their first homes during the 3 three years. The reduction applies only to new loans and refinancings insured by the FHA. That means existing FHA backed loans would need to be refinanced to receive the lower rate. Obama said the reduced premiums would spur home buying, lifting the market and home values. The FHA announcement followed a policy change recently announced by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to begin accepting mortgages with 3 % down payments for loans up to \$417,000. FHA will loan up to \$625,500 with 3.5% down payment.

Here is a comparison using FHA 3.5% down payment versus a conventional loan with 10% down payment for a \$600,000 home. A buyer using an FHA loan would need a total of \$34,800 at closing with a monthly payment of \$3,544 at the current interest rate of 3.25%. Using a 10% down payment on a conventional loan with a 3.9% rate, the cash needed would be about \$74,000 with a monthly payment of \$3,150. These figures assume a monthly tax payment of \$500 and insurance payment of \$75.

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# Around the Forest

**Native Plant Sale:** Want to improve your yard for local birds and butterflies? Then it's time to grow native! From now through April 10, our nearby Long Branch Nature Center is offering a great selection of plants that are accustomed to local climate and wildlife. They have natives for sun to shade, even deer resistant plants. Pre-order your favorites plants so you don't miss out (the order form is on the County website linked to the online spring newsletter The Snag). Here is some of what they have to offer: Dutchman's breeches, Virginia Bluebells, Spiderwort, and Whitewood Aster. They will have a wider selection to choose from at the event. Pick up Friday, April 24, 3-6 PM or Saturday, April 25, 10 AM-Noon at Long Branch Nature Center.

**Arlington Forest History Book:** AFCA is marking the 75th anniversary of our neighborhood by updating its history of Arlington Forest (last printed for the 60th anniversary). The book will be published this coming summer. Included will be previously-published remembrances by original

home owners documenting daily life in our neighborhood during the 1940s and 1950s. For the updated volume, we seek new items covering more recent years. For example, a short essay on neighborhood life in the 1980s or a photo of an AFCA family fun day event in past decades. To contribute an item, contact book editor John Naland at [nalandfamily@yahoo.com](mailto:nalandfamily@yahoo.com) by mid-March.

**Fire Safety:** A tragic fire in November took the lives of mother and her 7 year-old daughter in a house in Arlington's Columbia Forest neighborhood that did not have a working smoke detector. The Arlington County Fire Department reminds us that it is a good idea for everyone to take the following steps: Install smoke alarms on every floor, test smoke alarms at least twice a year by pushing the "test button", change the batteries in your alarms at least once a year, replace smoke alarms every 10 years, and ensure that every person in your home knows and practices your home escape plan which should include two ways out of every room.

**Move Me Festival:** The 6th Annual Move Me Festival, hosted by Bowen McCauley Dance, takes place at Kenmore Middle School on Saturday, March 21, from 1 to 5 pm. It is a free, family-friendly celebration of the arts and culture, promoting healthy lifestyles through movement and the arts. The event features 20 performances on two stages and 15 interactive activity sessions by local arts partners, including offerings in dance fitness, a Capella, physical theater, storytelling, arts and crafts, theatre games, and world dance styles. Two food trucks will serve the festival throughout the afternoon, which culminates in a performance by Arlington's contemporary dance company, Bowen McCauley Dance. For more info, go to [www.bmdc.org](http://www.bmdc.org)



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# Good Neighbor Profile: Chris Scheer

By Mary Ann Strawn

"I've never been on this end before," said Chris Scheer referring to the fact that he was being interviewed for this article. As a career journalist and editor of the Arlington Forester for 22 years, Chris is accustomed to asking the questions.

With wife Karen and new baby, Rachel, the family made a career move to Arlington from Atlanta in 1985. A friend advised, "Buy in Virginia and as close to a Metro station as possible." At that time the last Metro stop was Ballston. They bought their first home on South Aberdeen Street. Later when another baby was on the way, Jonathan, they began looking for more space and finally settled in their present house on North Granada Street.

As a new resident of Arlington Forest, Chris started

writing profiles for the Forester as a way of getting to know people in the neighborhood. That involvement grew into the editor's job in the fall of 1988 with Karen also putting in many hours each month producing and distributing the newsletter. Reflecting on his years guiding the publication, Chris is adamant about the importance of a community newspaper. "Not everyone goes to the meetings, but everyone gets the paper. It's the glue that holds the community together."

For several decades running, Chris and Karen have also organized the Arlington Forest Citizens Association's annual children's Holiday Party at the Lubber Run Community Center. Chris has also long served as grill master at AFCA's annual May membership picnic and helped coordinate

AFCA's annual community yard sale. He was also active in the successful effort several years ago to save the Lubber Run Amphitheater and he continues to help publicize the Amphitheater's schedule of performances each summer.

In 2010, Chris retired from the Veteran's Administration and passed on the Forester editorial duties to John Naland with Laura Smialowicz doing the layout. Thus, it took two people to replace Chris.

In retirement, Chris may have discovered his true vocation. He has been substitute teaching in elementary schools and sometimes middle schools. He prefers assignments close enough that he can walk or ride his bike. And he has found he loves physical education. "In my next life, I might like to be a PE teacher." He smiles talking about the wiggly, distracted kindergarteners he has recently had in the classroom.



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# Nature News

By  
Cliff Fairweather  
Park Naturalist,  
Long Branch  
Nature Center

**City Foxes:** Walking along the trails around Long Branch Nature Center, especially in winter, I sometimes catch a whiff of something that smells a little skunky. Rather

than a skunk, though, this is the calling card of a red fox. These scent marks are left when a fox urinates and contain messages about territory, readiness to mate, and dominance.

Winter is a great time to look for foxes and Arlington is home to more than a few of these urban adaptable canines. Although foxes are primarily nocturnal, it's not unusual to see one out hunting during the day in winter. Nonetheless, foxes are elusive and seeing one is an uncommon treat.

View them at a discrete distance, however, and move away if one is acting aggressively or seems unusually tame

– which can be a sign of rabies. Healthy foxes will usually run away or at just go about their business when they spot a human.

If you don't see a fox, you might well come across fox sign. In addition to scent marks, foxes often leave their scat (aka feces) in an obvious location, such as on top of a rock. As with scent marks, scat is a message to other foxes.

Fox scat is usually dark and often twisted to a point at

the ends and the contents reflect seasonal variation in fox diets. In winter, it is usually composed of hair from small mammals. Late-summer and fall scat contains seeds from fruit and summer scat often includes many insect parts. Never touch



any scat, however, as it can transmit disease and parasites.

Another fox sign to look for are tracks, especially in fresh snow. Fox tracks can be easily mistaken for those of a small dog, but there are clues that can help. Unlike your dog, foxes work for a living and don't have time to wander aimlessly about. Their tracks tend to run fairly straight and aren't usually accompanied by human footprints.

Following fox tracks might lead you to signs of hunting and even a kill. Foxes locate voles and other prey under the snow by sound and pounce, cat-like, when they detect their quarry. This leaves a hole in the snow and you might even see a little blood if the pounce was successful.

Vocalizations can also reveal the presence of foxes, especially during the mating season. They make a variety of barks and shrieks which sometimes sound like the scream of a woman or child. Fox pairs may also call back and forth with contact calls.

We have two species of fox in Arlington, red fox and the locally rarer gray fox. The latter are less adaptable to the urban environment but can still be found in some parts of the county, especially near the Potomac. Keep an eye, nose, and ear out for foxes in your neighborhood.



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# Backseat Drivers

By John Naland

Here is "food for thought" for our neighborhood's Soccer Moms and Dads as they drive around with children in the back seat: they are watching you.

Formal driver's education in Virginia begins at age 15 1/2 with a state-mandated program that includes 36 classroom periods, seven in-car driving instruction periods, and 45 hours of driving practice. But driver's education really begins more than 10 years earlier as the child watches their parents drive.

Are you signaling your turns? Are you coming to a complete halt at stop signs? Are you obeying the speed limits? Are you avoiding distracted driving? If not, then do not be surprised if your new driver fails to obey the traffic laws even after sitting through hours of classroom instruction on vehicle safety.

At the licensing ceremony at or after age 16 and three months, a stern Arlington County judge will tell the new drivers to obey the traffic laws and will show a Katie Couric-narrated video with the same theme. But, it all may go in one ear and out the other if a casual driving style has been modeled for them throughout their childhood.

*Next AFCA Meeting:  
Feb 18th, 7 p.m. at Barrett School*

# Community Calendar

**Next AFCA Meeting:** Wednesday, February 18. See page 1 for details.

**E-CARE:** Mid-April. Semi-annual recycling event at Thomas Jefferson Middle School.

**Neighborhood-wide Spring Cleanup:** Saturday, April 25. See next month's newsletter for details.

**Annual Yard Sale:** Saturday, May 16. Turn unwanted items into cash.

**Lubber Run Amphitheater:** Live entertainment under the stars resumes in June.

**Arlington County Fair:** August 5-9. Rides, food, displays, and racing pigs.

### Future AFCA Meetings:

March 18: Neighborhood Real Estate Trends

April 15: Public Parkland: Present and Future

May 13: Picnic and Membership Meeting

June to August: Summer break from Meetings



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# Barcroft School News

Students resumed school on January 6, despite the best efforts of Mother Nature to derail smooth operations with snow and ice. Highlights in January included week-long swimming lessons for third grade students at Wakefield. Students enjoyed a special humanities classical hip-hop musical performance on Wednesday afternoon, January 14. Second quarter report cards were distributed on January 21. A Family Fitness Skating Night at T.J. was held on January 24. Students celebrated the 100th Day of School with special math activities.

February highlights included the February PTA meeting on February 3, with a Q&A session conducted by **School Board member Barbara Kanninen**. Parents discussed overcrowding and academic performance, and weighed in on a variety of issues facing Arlington Public Schools.

Parent-Teacher conferences were held on February 4 to 6, with no school for students on February 5 to 6. On February 9, volunteers read stories to students during language arts classes to commemorate Black History Month. PTA after-school enrichment classes also began in chess, science, sports, hip hop, art, and Spanish Chorus.

The PTA held its first annual Father/Daughter and Mother/Son Dance on February 13 to celebrate Valentine's Day. There was no school on February 16 for Presidents' Day.

Students will be raising money for the American Heart

Association during the annual **Jump Rope for Heart** event held during P.E. classes from February 23 to 27. Sponsor a Barcroft student today!

Upcoming events in March include a special **Celebration of Dr. Seuss's Birthday** on Monday, March 2 where guests read Dr. Seuss books to students during language arts. Barcroft will be sending four student teams to the **Odyssey of the Mind** competition on Saturday, March 7. Good luck! The **Third Quarter Leonardo da Vinci Learning Night Open House** will be held on Monday, March 9, and will showcase student learning during the third quarter.

A **School Information Session** will be held on Tuesday, March 10 from 12:45 to 2:15 p.m. for parents interested in learning more about Barcroft Elementary. All are welcome!

**Early Release** for students is Wednesday, March 11. The **Last Day of the Third Quarter** is Thursday March 12, and there is **No School** on Friday, March 13 for Grade Preparation. Two weeks of **Spring Intersession** classes will be held from March 16 to 27, followed by Spring Break.



*Electronic versions of this newsletter are available:*  
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## *Your Neighbor in Arlington Forest*

If you are considering putting your home on the market, I would suggest that you begin getting your home ready as soon as possible. By having your home ready and in great shape for the new owners, the price that you get will be higher than if you don't prepare the home for sale. I have a list of things that owners should do in preparation to market their home. If

you would like to meet with me to see your home and give you some ideas on how to prepare it, please call me for a free, no obligation consultation. With the inventory low, it is an ideal time to sell your home. I look forward to meeting with you.

*Jim*



# Barrett School News

Happy Valentine’s Day to our Arlington Forest neighbors! On February 6, Barrett families, staff, and even a few teachers put their dancing shoes on and came out for the Valentine’s Day dance party, one of our most popular family events. A DJ played favorite songs for a gym packed with dancing and bopping students, while food sales and a raffle was held. All proceeds benefit PTA initiatives.

In an ongoing effort to promote safety and efficient use of the Barrett parking lot, Principal Dan Redding has instituted a policy whereby only Barrett teachers and staff will be able to park in the Barrett lot during core school hours. This change was needed due to the fact that commuters and construction workers too often make use of the lot, making it hard for teachers and staff to find parking. A few short-term (1 hour) visitor spaces will be designated in the lot, but for longer visits, the Lubber Run Community Center parking lot is available for visitors.

In early February, APS’ School Talk featured Barrett’s Digital Learning Showcase. You can see the APS-produced video, which features our students and staff at work creating iBooks, coding, and developing games using various technology tools, at <http://www.apsva.us/digitalAPS>.

Did you know that Kate Waller Barrett Elementary is 75 years old, making it one of the oldest elementary schools

in the county? Barrett opened its doors in 1939 when the county’s population was around 57,000. Students have been commemorating this event with various “spirit days” throughout the year. A spring celebration is planned.

If you have school-age children and would like to learn more about Barrett Elementary, please come to an upcoming school information session: Tuesday, March 10, 9:15-10:45 a.m. or Thursday, April 9, 12:45-2:15 p.m.

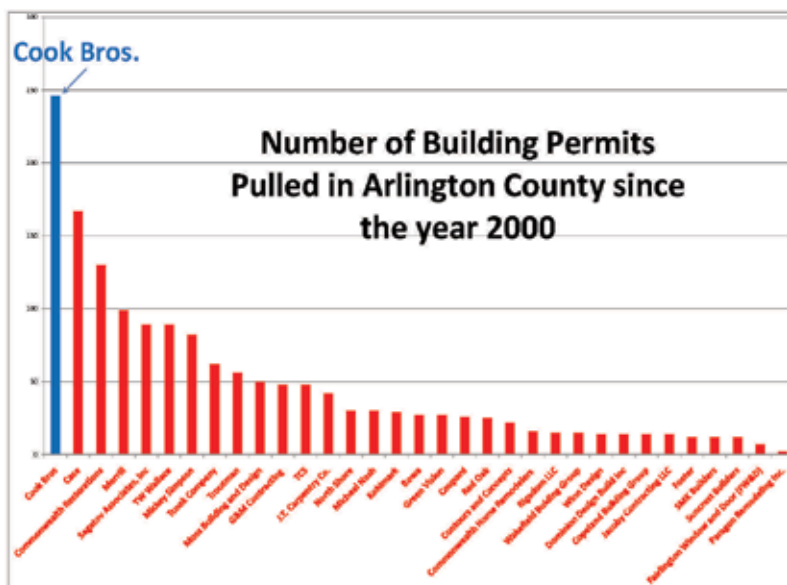


### *Upcoming Events:*

- Middle School Orientation**, Feb 17, 6:30-8 p.m.
- STEM & Science Discovery Night**, Feb 26, 6-8 p.m.
- No School / Parent-Teacher Conferences**, March 5-6

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# Kids for Hire

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## Southside:

- Daniel O'Mara, dog walking, pet sitting, leaf raking, [t.omara@LTwell.com](mailto:t.omara@LTwell.com), 703-769-3767
- Ethan O'Mara, dog walking, pet sitting, leaf raking, [t.omara@LTwell.com](mailto:t.omara@LTwell.com), 703-769-3767
- Sophia Polisar, babysitting (RC certified), pet sitting, [sophiapolisar@gmail.com](mailto:sophiapolisar@gmail.com), 571-429-2289
- Caroline Rogers, babysitting, pet sitting, dog walking, [carolinearogers@verizon.net](mailto:carolinearogers@verizon.net), 703-892-0226
- Julia Rogers, babysitting (RC certified), yard work, [juliaerogers23@gmail.com](mailto:juliaerogers23@gmail.com), 703-892-0226

## Greenbrier Section:

- Zephren Collinson, babysitting (references), pet sitting, dog walking, leaf raking, snow shoveling, tutoring, 703-528-3595
- Donna Corina, babysitting (RC certified), dog walking, pet sitting, leaf raking, snow shoveling, tutoring, 703-248-8885

- Mary Corina, babysitting (RC certified), dog walking, pet sitting, leaf raking, snow shoveling, tutoring, 703-248-8885
- Allison Ferrell, babysitting (RC certified), pet sitting, [Allisonrocket@aol.com](mailto:Allisonrocket@aol.com), 703-276-2840
- Ethan Hall, babysitting (RC certified), snow shoveling, leaf raking, pet sitting, dog walking, [k.hall.b@verizon.net](mailto:k.hall.b@verizon.net), 302-650-4428.
- Sarah Keyser, babysitting (RC certified), pet sitting, dog walking, [Stealers12@gmail.com](mailto:Stealers12@gmail.com), 703-243-8777

## Northside:

- Laura Brancati, babysitting, dog walking, pet sitting, [laura@barms.org](mailto:laura@barms.org), 703-243-1916.
- Daniel Brancati, yard work, leaf raking, snow shoveling, car washing (in your driveway), [daniel@barms.org](mailto:daniel@barms.org), 703-243-1916
- Riittisha Choudhary: tutoring, babysitting age 4-12, yard work, [riittishachoudhary@gmail.com](mailto:riittishachoudhary@gmail.com)
- Ely Constantine, pet sitting, leaf raking, snow shoveling, [cpconstantine@comcast.net](mailto:cpconstantine@comcast.net), 703-841-9229
- Sophia Constantine, pet sitting, dog walking, [srconstantine@comcast.net](mailto:srconstantine@comcast.net), 703-841-9229
- Fiona Hickey, babysitting (RC certified), 703-351-7013
- Sophie Hickey, babysitting, 703-351-7013
- Olivia Kennett, babysitting (RC certified), 571-277-4441
- Tenley Kennett, plant watering, dog walking (20 lbs max), 571-277-4441
- Alyssa Luz-Ricca, babysitting (RC cert), dog walking, pet sitting, [alyssa.luz.ricca@gmail.com](mailto:alyssa.luz.ricca@gmail.com), 703-740-6972
- Marika Mortimer-Lotke, babysitting (RC certified), house sitting/chores, 703-276-9046
- Allison Vernon, babysitting (references), pet sitting, [catharinevernon@aol.com](mailto:catharinevernon@aol.com), 703-522-9147

- Gabby Young, babysitting, mother's helper, pet sitting, dog walking, [merrywesing@yahoo.com](mailto:merrywesing@yahoo.com), 703-622-4229

## All Neighborhoods:

- Girl Scout Troop 5837 (a group of responsible Arlington Forest 8th graders), babysitting, mother's helper, pet sitting, dog walking, plant watering, leaf raking, snow shoveling, [gst5837@gmail.com](mailto:gst5837@gmail.com)



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