



The Arlington Forester

Vol. 67, Number 2

Arlington, Virginia

October 2025

Virtual AFCA Meeting—Arlington Forest as a Bikeable Community

AFCA invites you to join our monthly Zoom meeting on Monday, October 1, at 7 p.m. At the AFCA meeting in September, President Sal D'Itri announced that all future AFCA meeting dates would move forward by 2 weeks to the first Wednesday of the month to facilitate reporting by AFCA representatives to the Arlington County Civic Federation. At our October meeting, Tom Shannon, an Arlington Forester and the executive director of Phoenix Bikes in Arlington, will discuss opportunities to make our community more amenable to people of all ages who use bikes for exercise, commuting, and recreation. We will also discuss pedestrian safety along Carlin Springs Road.

To join the meeting, enter the following URL into your browser between 6:50 and 7 p.m. on Wednesday, October 1: <https://tinyurl.com/yckdzp5t>. (If you have never used Zoom, you can view a short tutorial at <https://zoom.us/resources> by clicking on Joining & Configuring Audio/Video.) Alternatively, you can dial in to the meeting at 301-715-8592, where you will be prompted to enter meeting number 816 5354 1733 and passcode 469609. You might also be prompted to hit the # sign one or more times. This call-in number will be active starting at 6:50 p.m.



How Do AFCA Dues Benefit You?

Your annual AFCA dues help get this newsletter delivered to your door as a service to you and the entire neighborhood, with information on trees and parks, trails and bridges, the Lubber Run Amphitheater and Farmers Market, traffic and pedestrian safety, and more. Dues pay for our annual picnic and Santa party and for donations to our neighborhood schools. Dues support the AFCA website (at www.arlingtonforestva.org), which contains a detailed neighborhood map, a history of Arlington Forest, back issues of this newsletter, and more. Please pay your dues promptly this year.

AFCA MEMBERSHIP DUES ANNUAL DUES \$20 PER HOUSEHOLD

Pay online on the AFCA website through PayPal or deliver this form and your check payable to AFCA to your respective AFCA section representative:

Greenbrier: Tom Smialowicz, 26 N. Granada St. 22203
Northside: Liz Grossman, 128 N. Columbus St. 22203
Southside: Julie Kirchhoff, 4828 Arlington Blvd. 22204

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AFCA Virtual Meeting 7 p.m. **October 1** Through Zoom

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The Arlington Forester is the official publication of the Arlington Forest Citizens Association, Arlington, VA. A nonpartisan, nonsectarian publication serving the residents of Arlington Forest, the *Forester* welcomes articles and photos focusing on issues specific to our neighborhood. We publish monthly from September to November and January to May. The deadline for submissions is the first of the month. Email your submission of up to 400 words—preferably with a photo—to newsletter@arlingtonforestva.org. Articles on controversial issues are welcome but do not necessarily reflect the views of AFCA and will be marked as opinion.

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AFCA September Meeting

By Janet Irwin and Char Mahoney,
AFCA Secretaries

AFCA President Sal D'Itri opened the new season of monthly AFCA meetings on Wednesday, September 17, with about 36 households in attendance via Zoom. He introduced Arlington Foresters Casey O'Neill and Paul Cachion, who are experienced local realtors, inviting them to discuss the local real estate market. Omar Sherzai is another Forester who is an experienced realtor; all three are available to anyone looking for a local realtor.

The housing market in Arlington has cooled this year but is still more vibrant than elsewhere in the Washington metropolitan area. Arlington's real estate market has remained resilient over the past 20 years, even through economic downturns. The median price for all types of housing in Arlington is up by about 11% in 2025 over 2024. Single family homes are selling for about 8% more than at the same time last year. The number of days on the market for single family homes has risen from 23 in August 2024 to 41 in August 2025, with slight a decrease in final sale price over listed price. Relatively few new single family homes are being built, but condominiums and townhomes have seen a lot of growth.

Those listening had numerous questions, some related to types of buyers. Both Casey and Paul said that real estate investment trusts have not been a major factor in the Arlington market. However, more homes are being sold either for cash or with huge (40-50%) cash down payments because interest rates have risen close to historic norms. Arlington Forest homeowners stay in their homes much longer than average, and when they move some decide to rent out rather than sell their Arlington Forest homes. About 10% of Arlington Forest homes are currently rental properties, often rented to military or foreign service families, with fewer group house rentals than in other parts of the county and region.

Sal announced that future AFCA meetings will move to the first Wednesday of each month to allow for more timely reporting by our AFCA representatives to the Arlington County Civic Federation. This change will also help to avoid conflicts that many have with PTA meetings and other commitments in the latter half of each month. We will also move to a "hybrid" model for AFCA meetings, continuing to use Zoom but also reserving a room at the Lubber Run Community Center for people to attend in person. AFCA is looking for new members of our pedestrian safety committee; if interested, contact Bev Johnston at johnston.beverley@verizon.net or Lora Strine at strine.lora@gmail.com.

Meet Virginia's Three Venomous Snakes

If you happen to see a snake along a trail or even in your own backyard, don't worry: there's typically nothing to fear. Of the 34 snake species and subspecies in Virginia, nearly all are harmless—including the intimidating yet nonvenomous eastern ratsnake (now called central ratsnake), which can grow up to 6 feet, making it the longest snake in Virginia. It's one of the most common snakes in our area, great for controlling rats and other rodent pests. Only three of Virginia's snakes are venomous: the eastern copperhead, northern cottonmouth, and timber rattlesnake.

The only venomous snake in Arlington is the copperhead, but—according to Alonso Abugattas, natural resources manager for Arlington—it is largely limited to the rocky area along the Potomac River in North Arlington east of Military Road. No copperheads are known to live in our local parks. Elsewhere in Virginia, you can find copperheads in forests and upland rocky areas, alongside streams, and in rock walls and wood stacks. Copperheads have dark bands across the back that look like hourglasses. They also have vertical pupils (if you happen to be close enough to see) and a triangular head. According to a webinar by Dr. Arianna Kuhn, assistant curator of herpetology at the Virginia Museum of Natural History, snakes typically use their venom only when targeting prey. Rather than bite, they tend to warn you away or slither off themselves.

You're not likely to encounter the venomous northern cottonmouth (sometimes called water moccasin) unless you live in southeastern Virginia. Like copperheads, cottonmouths are often confused with the harmless northern watersnakes you find along our local streams. The semi-aquatic cottonmouth lives in swamps, marshes, and rivers, often basking on shorelines. Cottonmouths are generally scared of people, according to Kuhn, and it's hard to get close enough even just to snap a picture. When irritated, a cottonmouth might tilt back its head and open its mouth wide to scare you off—behavior you'd never see in a watersnake.

The third venomous snake in Virginia is the timber rattlesnake, found in southeastern Virginia and the Blue Ridge. According to Kuhn, the rattlesnake is endangered because its range is fragmented and its habitat is shrinking. It prefers upland forests with ledges facing south in spring and fall; in summer, it prefers open woods and fields. The telltale rattle at the end of its tail starts out as a button, then grows over time. These snakes use their rattles to warn potential predators and distract prey. They prefer to eat small mammals but will also eat birds and frogs.

Snakes often get a bad rap, but they are important to the ecosystem. They help keep rodents in check and are food for larger predators. You're more likely to get struck by lightning than die of a snake bite; nationwide, only about five people die from snake bite each year. The best way not to get bitten by a snake is not to handle one.

Adapted from a piece by Colleen O'Hara



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Forester Chronicles: The Ghost of Arlington Hall

By the AFCA Historian's "ghost writer," Alice Burns

Arlington Hall, just a half mile from Arlington Forest, was constructed around the same time as Southside. In its nearly hundred-year history, it has served many purposes and holds many secrets. In honor of Halloween, let's explore some of that spooky history.

Dr. William Martin founded the Arlington Hall Junior College for Women in 1927. The rolling hundred-acre campus included a riding club, and the hall itself hosted dinners, teas, balls, and formal dances. In addition to conventional courses, students took lessons in speech, hygiene, and the "physical grace and charm" expected of young women at the time. The school had strict rules, including curfews, traveling only with groups or escorts, and no visiting cocktail lounges.

In 1942, the U.S. Army acquired Arlington Hall under the War Powers Act for use by the Signal Intelligence Service. The SIS was a dedicated Army code-breaking team, and its work was highly secretive. Originally focused on German and Russian codes, the SIS expanded after Pearl Harbor to include a large Japanese team. Most new recruits were women; by the end of the war, about 7,000 of the 10,500 SIS personnel were female. The "code girls," as they were called, achieved some of the greatest intelligence victories of WWII and the Cold War. They first deciphered the Japanese Army's cryptosystems, thereby shortening the war and saving countless lives. Their success spurred creation of a new Russian code-breaking unit. The Russians had a reputation for creating unbreakable codes, with undeciphered Russian messages accumulating in file cabinets for years. Recruitment for the new Verona project focused on women, with 90% of the team being female.

The Verona team achieved one of the greatest intelligence triumphs of the Cold War: cracking the Soviets' code and discovering that Manhattan Project secrets had been leaked. Their work continued for nearly 40 years, unmasking infamous spies, including Kim Philby, the British intelligence officer; Donald Maclean, the British diplomat; Klaus Fuchs, the German-born scientist; and Will Weisbord, a linguistic advisor to the Russian unit in Arlington Hall. Their work was so secretive that not even President Truman knew of it. Although women did nearly all the work, when Verona was declassified in 1995, most public credit went to men such as Meredith Garner, a linguist who deciphered names and words. Arlington Hall was part of the Department of Defense's intelligence operations until 1989, when its eastern part was transferred to the Department of State. In 1993, that portion became the National Foreign Affairs Training



Center. Arlington Hall is also home to Army National Guard Headquarters.

With its history of secrets and betrayals, Arlington Hall is said to be haunted by one of its earliest occupants, a young student named Mary. Mary supposedly became pregnant by a stable hand and committed suicide to avoid shaming her family. Since then, someone reportedly started walking unoccupied halls. When police arrived, they observed a female figure in a formal print dress who

repeatedly entered and exited an upstairs ladies' bathroom, pausing to stare in the mirror. State Department staff have also reported incidents of inanimate objects moving and glass breaking in unoccupied offices and of doors mysteriously locking in the women's restroom. It is said that if you walk down the hall alone, you might see Mary checking her makeup before vanishing.

Although civilians can't visit Arlington Hall to look for Mary, next time you are at the Arlington Hall playground or soccer fields, perhaps you will take a moment to reflect on the history and mystery of this neighborhood building.



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Why Are Oaks in Decline?

By Hutch Brown

A prolonged summer drought following an epic storm in July 2019 stressed and even killed many oaks across northern Virginia, especially in upland urban neighborhoods like ours. The dieback kicked off a period of “oak decline” associated with unusually dry weather that placed many urban trees under severe stress, particularly oaks. The stressful weather was likely linked to a changing climate due to greenhouse gases accumulating in the atmosphere. Oak decline is visible in trees along our streets and in our local parks, especially Arlington Forest Park (next to the shopping center), where more than a dozen large oaks died in 2019-20. Periods of drought in 2023-25, though halted this year by spring rains, placed our local trees under further stress. Late summer was again abnormally dry in Arlington, which had its fourth driest August in the past 131 years.

Why are oaks at particular risk? It’s complicated. Virginia’s oak-dominated forests evolved with frequent wildland fire ignited seasonally by lightning and people for thousands of years. Fires favored oaks and other trees that flourish in open fire-adapted landscapes. When public policy stopped the fires in the 20th century, Virginia’s forests became more dense, filling in with oaks and other fire-adapted trees of about the same age (now approaching a hundred years) and favoring their replacement by more shade-tolerant trees like maple and beech. Urbanization in northern Virginia has compacted soils and increased stormwater runoff, further stressing our aging oaks. Because deer feed on oak saplings, deer overpopulation in Arlington has reduced the ability of young oaks to replace their aging parents. Aging, urbanization, fire exclusion, and deer overpopulation have made our oaks more vulnerable to climate-related stresses and disturbances (such as storms and droughts) without the ability to fully regenerate. Stresses and disturbances undermine the natural defenses of oaks against boring insects and diseases like root rot, which ultimately kill them. Taken together, these factors amount to oak decline.



What can we do? During abnormally dry weather, watering trees can help. (I didn’t last year and lost two trees and a shrub.) During renovations, avoiding damage to tree roots is vital. Spreading mulch as far as a tree’s dripline can improve soils and nurture roots, so long as the mulch never touches the bark at the base of the tree (which can damage it). Recognizing that oak decline is inevitable in aging trees can also help. The signs start with dieback of outer branches due to root rot; such diseases are generally untreatable, as is insect attack against weakened trees. Consulting an arborist not affiliated with a tree care company (a conflict of interest) can help you assess your trees. You can find out more online at Oak Decline Arlington County; at Chamberlin Oak Decline in Virginia; and at ARMN What Is Killing Oaks (written by an Arlington Forest neighbor).

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Fall: The Best Time to Plant a Tree

Editor's note: The article is based on materials and emails posted by Arlington County Urban Forest and the Arlington Regional Master Naturalists.

As our trees and shrubs change from green to crimson, orange, and yellow and our evenings become cooler, it's a good time to think about planting a tree. It's no secret that trees are one of our best tools for capturing carbon dioxide, preventing stormwater runoff, reducing heat islands, and more. Doug Tallamy, the renowned professor of entomology at the University of Delaware, impresses on folks the need to plant native trees and shrubs. If we want insects, wildlife, pollination, and food, we need more native plants.

Fall is the perfect time to give up a bit of unproductive lawn and plant a native tree. Tree experts now recommend planting trees from October 1 through May 31. For bird lovers, if you plant two native shrubs next to your tree, you have created a bird sanctuary. Native understory shrubs provide habitat for birds and for the insects that are such an important part of their diet.

In the past, many urban planners limited the tree species chosen to a small number (such as elms, ashes, and maples). That can lead to disaster as the climate changes and invasive pests and diseases arrive: ecological resilience generally depends on diversity. Fortunately, researchers and urban foresters have been studying the issue for decades, swapping information on what species do best under what conditions. For example, they have noted big differences between what survives in urban parks

and what's best in residential yards and on median strips. Arlington County's list of recommended trees (online at Recommended Trees Official Website of Arlington County) is a good place to start when choosing a tree, so long as you plant the right tree in the right place. The list has changed over the years as Arlington's climate has changed. For example, Arlington no longer recommends planting sugar maple on a large scale, although it can survive in some yards if watered and sheltered from summer heat.

Of course, sugar maple is not a native local tree, but Arlington County sometimes plants out-of-range trees under urban conditions with highly disturbed ecosystems. In such locations, regionally native (as opposed to locally native) trees can be a good choice. Regionally native trees like baldcypress and Kentucky coffeetree grow naturally within 100-200 miles of Arlington. Under some conditions (though rarely), nonnatives like London planetree and ginkgo can be used.

If you're looking for screening, evergreens are a good choice. American holly, southern magnolia, and loblolly pine can make good specimen trees that grow big enough to double as screens. For hedges, northern whitecedar (*Thuja occidentalis*, sold commercially as Arborvitae) works well. It's a regionally native tree in our area, not to be confused with a nonnative tree also sold as Arborvitae, western redcedar (*Thuja plicata*), a major forest tree in the West.

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Tree Stewards Honored

The article is based on a news release by the Arlington County government.

Foresters active in the Tree Stewards of Arlington and Alexandria were among those honored last May 13, when Arlington County announced the Tree Stewards as the recipients of the 2024 Bill Thomas Park Volunteer Award. The award pays tribute to lifelong parks volunteer Bill Thomas by recognizing residents who show dedication to and support for Arlington's natural resources and public open spaces. The award was presented in recognition of the Tree Stewards' outstanding contributions to environmental stewardship, conservation education, and community engagement.

"The Tree Stewards are a model for what community-driven stewardship looks like," said County Board Chair Takis Karantonis. "Their dedication not only strengthens Arlington's tree canopy but also empowers residents to make their own meaningful impact for a greener, healthier future."

Since 2001, the Tree Stewards have been invaluable partners in Arlington's mission of protecting the county's trees. Their programming focuses on tree planting and maintenance, as well as public education. In 2024 alone, Tree Steward volunteers contributed 1,718 hours across a range of successful programs. Among their many initiatives is their Structural Pruning Program, which focuses on maintaining young trees to ensure structural stability. In collaboration with Arlington

County's Department of Parks and Recreation, the Tree Stewards pruned over 3,000 young trees, demonstrating their dedication to long-term tree health. Other efforts include their mulching projects, which improved soil health across four locations in the county; and their invasive species removals, which involved teaching others how to safely and effectively remove invasive plants from county parks and public spaces.

Within the last year, their educational efforts included a tree planting event with Marymount University, where they worked with students to plant 30 large trees in Fort Barnard Park, located in a tree equity area (typically a lower income area where the tree canopy is low). Their community advocacy has played a key role in supporting a complex survey associated with the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance, a collaborative effort with county staff and contractors to develop a guide for maintaining trees alongside solar panels and contributing to ongoing citizen science projects that analyze trends and help inform county policies.

The Tree Stewards' broad programming and contributions have improved environmental sustainability in Arlington. Their strong commitment to sustaining and expanding Arlington's tree canopy and the results of their outstanding work are felt across Arlington County. They are deserving recipients of the 2024 Bill Thomas Park Volunteer Award.



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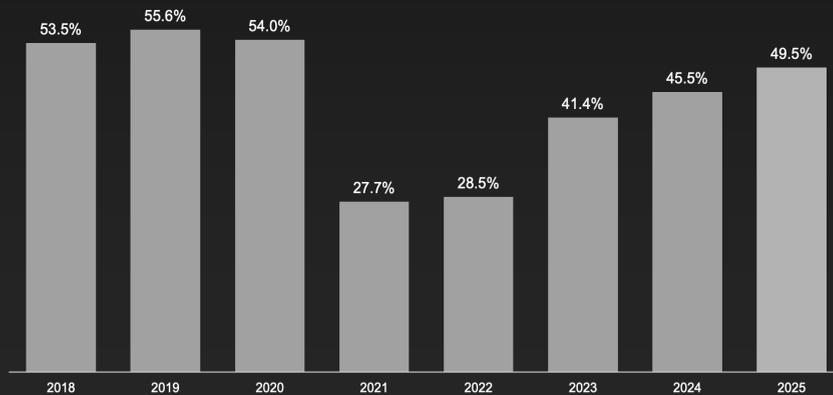
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Community Calendar

- Next AFCA meeting:** Wednesday, October 1, 7 p.m.
- Lubber Run Farmers' Market:** Saturday mornings at the Barrett Elementary School parking lot.
- Turnaround Day:** November 8
- Election:** November 4 (early voting underway)
- Santa Party:** A Friday in December at the Lubber Run Community Center (tentative)
- Annual AFCA Picnic:** Wednesday, May 6, 2026
- Annual Yard Sale:** A Saturday in May 2026
- Turnaround Day:** July 11, 2026

AFCA Meetings

- October 1, 2025:** Arlington Forest as a bikeable community
- November 5, 2025:** Aging in place in Arlington
- January 7, 2026:** *To be determined*
- February 4, 2026:** Spring gardening with native plants
- March 4, 2026:** Pest control issues (rats, wasps, mosquitoes, etc.)
- April 1, 2026:** Lubber Run Park issues
- May 6, 2026:** Neighborhood picnic

Copperheads in Lubber Run Park?

In the last (September 2025) issue of *The Arlington Forester*, a thoughtful and considerate neighbor wrote about picking up trash along the stream in Lubber Run Park ("There Is No 'Away' When You Throw It Away"). While cleaning up along the creek, he wrote, "I surprised a copperhead one morning!" The eastern copperhead is the only venomous snake in Arlington, so another neighbor with extensive knowledge of our local snakes questioned the author about his copperhead sighting, which appears to be an **unconfirmed report**. According to Arlington Natural Resources Manager Alonso Abugattas, copperheads in Arlington are generally limited to the rocky area along the Potomac River in North Arlington east of Military Road. There are no known copperheads in Lubber Run Park or Glencarlyn Park.

County Considers Banning Gas Leaf Blowers

The Arlington County Board is considering a possible ban on gas-powered leaf blowers following a similar ban in Alexandria. EcoAction Arlington and other advocacy groups have called for the ban to reduce noise and pollution, including carbon emissions, and to stop wasteful use of fuel. A public demonstration, in-person popups, and a webinar on the future of electric leaf blowers are all scheduled for this fall. Following public engagement, commission presentations are scheduled for fall and winter ahead of a county board vote.

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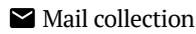
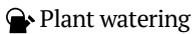
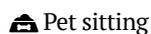
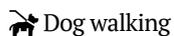


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	William Cordon		301-509-7915	✓	✓				✓		✓	Yard help
	Ady Lombardi		703-395-2063	✓	✓				✓	✓		
	Elsie Lombardi	eflombardi13@gmail.com	703-732-9316		✓		✓*			✓		
	Sol Mashkuri		571-643-5883	✓	✓							
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Paul Cachion, MBA

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CachionHomes@gmail.com

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