

# End of Hunger Month

But not the end of Hunger in Arlington.

BY SHIRLEY RUHE  
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

It is the end of Hunger Month but not the end of hunger or of Arlington Food Assistance (AFAC) events highlighting the need for food assistance. Robin Ngo and Lus Sawicki, both first time AFAC volunteers, stand beside AFAC boxes located outside the David M. Brown Planetarium on Saturday morning, Sept. 30 for a “stuff the school bus” event.

It is two hours into the event and the school bus remains empty. Ngo says no one has shown up yet. She says, “I think these events do better when they are located right outside the Giant like the ones earlier this month so people can just

easily drop off a few things.”

But AFAC has been active and successful all month bringing attention to the need to mobilize the public to take action on the issue of hunger including its library exhibits in five Arlington branches. In addition, there has been the volunteer opportunity to glean produce at JK Community Farm in Purcellville. Fashion Center at Pentagon City held a CANstruction canned-creation build by local DMV architectural firms with the cans of food donated to AFAC.

In addition, pets get hungry, and AFAC paired with the Animal Welfare League at Lubber Run Farmer’s Market to expand the food drive to include food for pets owned by families in need. And the Annual Golf Tournament at Army Navy Country Club, the big fundraiser of the year, was held Sept. 16.

The Hunger Museum created by MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger offered a virtual tour to educate on the last 100 years of

hunger policy in the United States.

The need is great. Charlie Meng, CEO of AFAC, points out even though Arlington has one of the highest median household incomes in the country, hunger affects vulnerable populations within the county borders. He says, “We are now serving 3,450 families each week and last year we saw a 30 percent increase.” Meng was also bracing for the might-have-been shutdown that could have come on Monday, but now has been averted until at least November.

The opportunity to contribute goes well beyond Hunger Month with AFAC food boxes located in most libraries, various businesses, county offices including the Parks Dept. and the County Building and soon in apartment building lobbies, and volunteer opportunities exist to organize your own food drive.

There are many ways to donate, including donating financially online at <https://afac.org/>



PHOTO BY SHIRLEY RUHE/THE CONNECTION

Lus Sawicki and Robin Ngo stand outside a school bus at an Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC) “stuff the bus” event Saturday, Sept. 30.

# Now You See It—Now You Don’t

BY SHIRLEY RUHE  
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Charlie Gaylord raised \$470 for the plexiglas, plywood, nails and screws needed to build his vision of a Little Free Pantry in November 2020. Gaylord said he had seen a similar concept in Tennessee at a farmer’s market and wanted to try it in Arlington for his Eagle Scout project. It took Gaylord and several other scouts in Troop 106 six hours to construct the project but about 50 hours of planning.

His project hit smack in the middle of the pandemic which was just the right time to meet the need but made the details of the approval process and the completion of the project more difficult. The original intent of the pantry was to serve as a collection point for nonperishable contributions and to donate them to the Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC). But over time the pantry has gone further than expected and come to serve its own unique population of homeless and food insecure individuals in Arlington and no longer has a connection with AFAC.

Since it was installed the pantry has been sitting right outside the back of the library next to the “Plot for Hunger” garden lining the sidewalk and growing produce for the

Arlington Food Assistance Center. Regulars to the pantry come and go, checking the shelves for the cans of beans and corn, boxes of cereal, cooking oil, bags of rice and occasional chocolate bar.

Over time the winter months have taken their toll as the doors of the pantry have been buffeted by wind, and the deadbolts holding the doors have been warped by the cold, necessitating some minor repairs. But the pantry always seemed to get back in operation.

Now on Sept. 27 during Hunger Month (and banned book week) a notice from the library appeared on the front door of the pantry announcing the pantry would be taken down Friday, Sept. 30. The notice was a surprise and gave no reason. Reactions ranged from anger to disappointment to curiosity.

The notice listed alternate sites where free food would be available and indicated there is an AFAC food collection box inside the library for those library patrons who wish to continue donating food.

The notice said, “If you are hungry there are many places in Arlington to help. To name a few: St. George’s Episcopal Church on Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 12-1 pm, AFAC with varying hours Monday- Saturday and Mt.

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PHOTOS BY SHIRLEY RUHE/THE CONNECTION



Charlie Gaylord built a Little Free Pantry for his Eagle Scout project in the midst of the pandemic in November 2020 and installed it outside the Central Library with their permission.



The Library unexpectedly removed the Little Free Pantry on Sept. 30, 2023, leaving only the wooden stubs remaining. They had posted a sign a few days before indicating their intention.

# Now You See It— Now You Don't

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Olivet United Methodist Church on the second Saturday of every month.

But the regulars say it's just not the same as being able to stop by the Little Free Pantry whenever you want to pick up some supplementary food. "You could go every day if you want. You could go at midnight or four in the afternoon. What if you're hungry on Thursday? There were no restrictions. And what are we supposed to do finding out at the last minute when we couldn't plan and we have no transportation to go somewhere else."

The Connection was unable to reach Diane Kresh, Director of Libraries, for comment but Anneliesa Alprin, Communications Manager for the Public Library, released this explanation. She says since the Little Free Food Pantry was built and installed it has been maintained and stocked by community members, the Friends of the Arlington Public Library and library staff.

"Post-COVID the Library can no longer support the Little Free Food Pantry. Several factors contributed to making this difficult decision. The Library's inability to monitor the Pantry to ensure its structural stability, food safety of its contents, public health standards in keeping it rodent and pest free and appropriate usage.

"The library does not have the staff capacity, expertise or knowledge necessary to maintain an effective food pantry program that meets best practices and is sustainable."

Alprin says, "The County Board and the County Manager were made

aware of this decision as well as leadership at the Department of Human Services and AFAC. The Library Director also notified the family of the scout whose generosity of spirit and concern for the welfare of others led to the Pantry's creation. Libraries was involved due to the fact that the Director, Diane Kresh, was one of the leaders addressing food insecurity during the pandemic."

In addition, she explains that the Food Security Strategic Plan for Arlington adopted in October of 2020 didn't identify the immediate area surrounding the Central Library as a neighborhood with unmet needs that would need increased food access.



AFAC collection boxes are located inside the Central library and most branches as well as businesses and county offices. AFAC also posted Hunger Month information inside five library branches.

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The pandemic has been a bear, financially and otherwise. Revenue plummeted at the beginning of 2020. Some beloved advertisers have stayed the course supporting us throughout, and many more have done what they can. In the fall of 2021 we saw the return of some advertising for events and Grand Openings, but now omicron clouds the horizon in so many ways. Revenue still remains short of expenses despite our greatly curtailed costs.

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## Certain About Burton



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

The little dog, affectionately referred to as, recently celebrated his first birthday. And as I anticipated when I wrote my initial column about him/me having gotten a puppy for the first time in 28 years or so: "Burton For Certain," he has been everything a dog owner could want. He's a sweet and loving golden retriever (it's rare that the breed is anything else) who still believes - at almost 75 pounds, that he's a lapdog. Have you ever tried eating off a snack table with a big dog sitting on your lap and sniffing your plate/fork? It's not easy. Part of what brings me joy about Burton is the story of how and why he was christened, so to speak, with his name. I'm always interested in pet names and their stories, if any, which people are only too happy to share about their pet's given name. And Burton, as with Brandy and Bailey before him (both liquor-related), has a good backstory which I will now share.

My wife, Dina surprised me with puppy-Burton on a Saturday morning in early October one year ago. Dina was helping a neighbor, or so I was told, that morning, when she got up at 6 am to drive four hours to Lexington, Va. What little did I know?: As Sergeant Schultz said so often on "Hogan's' Heroes" so too did "I know nothing." Of course, I didn't have a dog name at the ready since I was clueless what Dina had started planning three months earlier in June when she first met the breeder in Harper's Ferry on a Saturday when we took a day trip with some friends. Fast forward, when she arrived home later that afternoon, puppy in tow, with the associated puppy paraphernalia, some of which had been spread around the neighborhood - to maintain the surprise, I was nearly speechless at the sight of him. He was adorable and lovable. Dina placed him in my arms, and I very nearly started to cry. I really hadn't thought much about a puppy. Ever since I was diagnosed with cancer, I had always thought that with the indeterminate issues with my health and life expectancy, especially factoring in the side effects - and demands of chemotherapy, that adding to the family when we might be subtracting from it was a risky proposition. Nevertheless, here I was back in the dog business for the first time in 14 years. Having not considered a canine addition, given the cancer diagnosis and the five cats we already had in house, I was not thinking expansion. As such, I was totally unprepared for Burton emotionally (physically I could mostly manage, although occasionally a little challenging on some days when I felt the effects of 14 years of chemotherapy), and since I had no inkling as to what Dina was planning, I certainly didn't know what to call him.

For the next day, we struggled to give him a proper name. We did agree that his name should begin with the letter "B," given the names of our two previous goldens, but other than that, we were stuck. The only name we could produce was "Buddy," but other than the "B" part, we weren't all that enamored, particularly Dina. I can still see her sitting on our living room couch that morning, cellphone in hand, scrolling pet name lists on the internet, as we tried to resolve this pet-naming dilemma. Frustrated by the choices we were considering; we were temporarily at a loss. Then, out of the blue, as I'm sitting in a wingchair perpendicular to the couch, I get a text from Dina's father in New York - who rarely texts. He knew about the puppy surprise but had no idea that we were focused on finding a name at that moment or were as stuck as we were, struggling to find a suitable name and beginning quite frankly to get a bit frustrated. Granted, it was barely a day, and we hadn't had much time to get our arms - and head around the changes to our life (me more so than Dina obviously since she was the "surpriser"), but we wanted to call him something other than "puppy." And until we had a name, it's almost as if the surprise wasn't quite finished and therefore, we couldn't move on and/or plan for our new future as dog owners once again.

Then I hear my phone-text ring, look down on my lap, and see a text out of the blue/unsolicited, from Dina's father. I click on his name and read the message. I immediately smile and look over to the Dina on the couch, still scrolling/researching names. I snicker and say, "Dina, your father has just come up with the dog's name: Burton." And since we live in Burtonsville and live in the Isaac Burton House and the name begins with "B," we had found/been given Burton's name. And when I said so, Dina smiled back at me and chuckled: "Perfect," and so he was officially named. Soon thereafter, his AKC registration confirmed it: "Sir Isaac Burton of Burtonsville."

Kenny Lourie is an Advertising Representative for The Potomac Almanac & The Connection Newspapers.

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