

The Arlington Connection

Raising Funds To Serve Record Number

PAGE 4

One-hundred-and-two-year-old Betty Ochenrider chooses a colorful pottery bowl for her soup at the annual Arlington Food Assistance empty bowls fundraiser.

J.D. Spain Announces for Board

PAGE 3

Gold Level Bike Friendly

PAGE 11

OPINION, PAGE 6 ♦ ENTERTAINMENT, PAGE 9 ♦ CLASSIFIEDS, PAGE 10

PHOTO BY SHIRLEY RUIHE/THE CONNECTION

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Tickets are sold out for two seatings at AFAC's Empty Bowls Sunday, Feb. 11 at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church.

Violin majors from George Mason University entertain the crowd at Empty Bowls. From left: Paige Sharkey, Annette Lee, Telah Harper and Alyssa Cabassa.

AFAC Fills Up the Empty Bowls

BY SHIRLEY RUHE
ARLINGTON CONNECTION

Betty Ochenrider is first in line again this year with her daughter and a friend at the annual Arlington Food Assistance (AFAC) fundraiser on Feb. 11. Ochenrider is 102-years-old and says she has been coming to the fundraiser for years. She hasn't yet decided which soup to try this year.

Each of the sittings at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church sells out early, and the regulars at this event have learned to show up early. For the price of a ticket Empty Bowls offers a selection of an original bowl from a table full of pottery produced by local artists. Each bowl can be filled with a soup donated by local businesses such as Brunswick stew from Sloppy Mama's BBQ, lobster bisque from Carlisle and lentil from Lebanese Taverna.

Each round table for eight is stocked well with a basket of breads, and a choice of many desserts follows including vanilla cupcakes, raisin filled oatmeal cookies, cream cheese frosted bites, vegan pecan bars and vegan gluten-free almond flour cookies.

Several violin majors from George Mason provide entertainment on a stage in the front of the room. Paige Sharkey says, "We'll be playing a mix of classical and popular songs today."

Volunteers dot the room in their green AFAC Volunteer T-shirts. Ryan Nargadon is a high school student who is there from Maryland with his job to make sure the tables are taken care of. "My dad works for TD bank, one of the donors for the event. He said 'get



First in line again this year are Betty Ochenrider with her daughter, Lisa Purrington (left) and a friend, Valeri Brock (middle).

ready at 9:30 tomorrow; you're coming with me." Bethany Panza is there from HB Woodlawn manning two tables for water, extra cups or whatever they need. She says she already has plenty of community service points, and this is her "carefree time."

Carol Burnett stands inside the front door waiting for whatever task is assigned. She comments that she used to be a reporter on a weekly newspaper in Sacramento. "I was a news reporter, editor, layout—you know you do everything on a small weekly."

Charles Meng, CEO of AFAC, provides the context for today's event. "During our last fiscal year that ended in June 2023, a total of 140,635 families came to one of our distribution sites, 6,586

unique families —16,003 individuals — 30 percent more families than the prior year. As a result we overspent our food purchase budget of \$1.3 million by \$600,000.

He says halfway through this year they have already served 88,000 families, 40 percent more than at the same time last year. "At this rate, we will once again overspend our nearly \$1.5 million food purchase budget by another \$1.2 million to serve nearly 180,000 families."

He explains that what is driving the 50-100 new families a month coming to AFAC's doors is inflation resulting in an increase in food prices of 25 percent in two years and the expiration of the supplemental benefits which families relied on that were given during

SEE AFAC FILLS UP, PAGE 12



AFAC offers a tableful of hand crafted pottery for each bowl of soup.



One-hundred-and-two-year-old Betty Ochenrider chooses a colorful pottery bowl for her soup. “I like it because it’s different. It’s happy.”



Lobster bisque seems to be a favorite at Empty Bowls although Alana Rafiee, AFAC Marketing and Communications Associate says, “I couldn’t wait to get another bowl of the Brunswick stew this year. I’ve been looking forward to it all day.”



Charles Meng, CEO of Arlington Food Assistance Center, describes the need for financial assistance with a record high number of low-income families coming to AFAC this year.

AFAC Fills Up the Empty Bowls

FROM PAGE 4
the pandemic. “Many are further behind than before the pandemic. Unfortunately it will be years before they can claw their way back.”

Meng thanked the generous community in Arlington that helps

support the AFAC mission and the 2,200 volunteers who last year gave 44,000 hours of service as well as the AFAC staff who receive and purchase the 5 million pounds of food—store, inventory, package and distribute it.

AFAC is a non-profit organization distributing free nutritious supplemental groceries to people in need weekly in Arlington. Currently they serve over 3,700 families a week including one-third children and 12 percent elderly.

AFAC distributed 5 million pounds of food to their families last year with the purchase of 3.5 million pounds of food and donated food of 1.5 million pounds from around the country. AFAC receives no Federal or state funding, and

92.7 percent of the budget is raised from donations and contributions; food drives held by faith groups, businesses, families, Scouts; and fundraisers such as Empty Bowls held throughout the year.

For more information: afac.org

Another Global Headquarters for Arlington

CoStar Group will move its global headquarters to Rosslyn. CoStar Group, a leading global provider of online real estate marketplaces, information, and analytics in the property markets, has purchased 1201 Wilson Boulevard, a 560,000-square-foot office building known as Central Place Tower, and will move into the location in late 2024. CoStar Group will occupy 150,000 square feet of commercial office space and employ 650 workers in Arlington. Included in the S&P 500 Index and the NASDAQ 100, CoStar Group employs over 6,200 people globally and is comprised of notable industry products and online marketplaces covering all aspects of real estate, including CoStar, LoopNet, Apartments.com, Homes.com and STR.

Earlier this week, Gov. Glenn Youngkin approved a \$1.25 million grant from the

Commonwealth’s Opportunity Fund to assist Arlington County with this project. The Governor also approved \$3.5 million in funds from the Virginia Economic Development Incentive Grant.

“Virginia’s a great choice for a new corporate headquarters location, and we are excited that CoStar Group ... sees the economic advantage in moving to the Commonwealth,” said Youngkin.

“The financially strategic acquisition of this building will provide the perfect home for the more than 500 employees at our current headquarter,” said Andy Florance, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of CoStar Group.

“CoStar Group’s outright purchase of the building signifies confidence in our commercial real estate market, which is key to our ongoing efforts to reduce office vacancies,” said Ryan Touhill, Director, Arlington Economic Development.

Expediting Improvements to Rosslyn’s Gateway Park

CoStar Group will pay \$13,951,900 to Arlington County to obtain sole use of the Observation Deck at 1201 Wilson Boulevard. With this payment, the County Manager will ask that the County Board act on CoStar’s land use applications and allow them exclusive use of the Observation Deck. In addition, the County Manager will propose that these funds be allocated towards the reconstruction of Rosslyn’s Gateway Park as part of the upcoming Capital Improvement Plan. The extra funding will allow for the entire Rosslyn neighborhood’s prized public space to be completed nearly a decade soon-

er than planned. The almost \$14 million in funding from CoStar Group will pay a significant portion of the design and construction of the park’s west end — a benefit for Arlington County and its residents. Once approved, Gateway Park’s east and west sides will be designed and constructed as one project informed by an upcoming community engagement process. Once the company submits the required land use applications and works through the public process, the County will take the necessary actions to vacate the Observation Deck easement.

CoStar Group joins businesses with headquarters of note in Arlington, including AES, Amazon, Boeing, Nestlé and RTX. Given CoStar Group’s real estate industry expertise, the decision to purchase 1201 Wilson Boulevard and remain in the region is a significant indicator of Arlington’s premier location.