

# Holiday Goes On, But with Chickens

**Arlington Food Assistance Center provides Thanksgiving chicken instead of the usual holiday turkey.**

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ARLINGTON CONNECTION

This year families with limited financial resources are lining up on the sidewalk at the Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC) for their Thanksgiving chicken instead of the usual holiday turkey. Charlie Meng, CEO of AFAC, says that turkeys for the almost 3,700 families served weekly were going to cost \$125,000 compared to the cost of chickens at \$25,000. And that was a price negotiated last spring. “I can’t imagine what they would cost now.”

And last year AFAC was serving 2,500 families at this same time of the year. So not only is the cost of food escalating but the number of families served has skyrocketed. Meng says, “Today alone we served 308 families at our Nelson Street

location and we have 15 other distribution sites. We’re adding 50-100 new families every month.”

Meng continued that last year he spent \$1.3 million on food purchases and overran his food budget by \$600,000. “I’m looking at another one million overspending this year.” He explains it takes \$10 million to run the AFAC program, and the County only contributes \$606,000 which is about 7 percent.

Despite the absence of turkeys this year, AFAC recipients will be able to take home the usual produce, milk, eggs and bread for their holiday dinners.

“This is the thing. Prices are up, and the economy is bad.” Meng says the economy has led to an increase in food prices of twenty percent. “These families can’t recover. You and I can make it up but they can’t.”

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PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED

Arlingtonians line up at AFAC for their holiday chickens on Nov. 17.

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Submit civic/community announcements at [ConnectionNews-papers.com/Calendar](http://ConnectionNews-papers.com/Calendar). Photos and artwork welcome. Deadline is Thursday at noon, at least two weeks before the event.

### ARLINGTON TRANSIT CELEBRATES 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF SERVICE

Arlington’s transit agency – ART – is rolling into a milestone 25th year of serving the community and providing reliable and sustainable bus service across the County.

The bus service, which first launched in 1998 with one route in Crystal City, was established to connect Arlington neighborhoods along with the growing regional transit network anchored by Metrorail and Metrobus. In its first year of service, the ART fleet served 118,156 passengers.

Today, a total of 78 ART buses serve 16 routes across Arlington, handling over 2 million passengers annually. In 2019,

ART had its highest ridership with 3.4 million trips and was on track to break that record before the COVID-19 pandemic. ART offers a safe, environmentally friendly way of getting around without generating the carbon footprint and congestion of multiple single occupancy personal vehicles.

In coming years, ART service hours will be increased 29% on weekdays, 66% on Saturdays, and 98% on Sundays, in response to feedback from passengers who said they would choose bus over driving if it ran earlier and later in the day and on weekends and more frequently throughout the day.

In 2022, ART demonstrated a pair of Battery Electric Buses (BEBs) on passenger routes to see how they handled Arlington’s roadways, including challenging hills. Based on the data, ART will be adding four BEBs to its fleet in 2025 after completion of the new ART Operations

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