

Helping Alexandria's seniors who prefer to remain—independently—in their own homes

## It's Home Assessment Time

Alexandria has sent out its yearly property tax assessments — along with a plan that may help some homeowners. And, residents can compare their assessments with those of neighbors and request a review.

The City said residential values had an increase of 3.4 percent from last year and commercial values rose less than 1 percent.



For eight years, assessed values have increased in Alexandria, after two years of slight declines. Recent factors include Alexandria's relatively low unemployment, low interest rates, pent-up demand for homes, and area jobs that pay well. There is also Alexandria's location, inside the Beltway and with varied transportation.

The average single-family house is assessed at \$752,585, the City reported. More than two-thirds of residential properties increased in value, 10 percent were unchanged and the rest decreased.

"Commercial assessment increases in 2018 were found in the apartment and warehouse sectors," the City said. Those two categories had increases of nearly 8 percent and nearly 11 percent, respectively. The office market declined amid a "general lack of demand," the report said.

**March 15 is the deadline for requesting a review of assessment and the deadline for an appeal with the Board of Equalization is June 1.**

"If you have a question about your property's assessment, please come in or schedule an appointment to meet with a member of (our) appraisal team," the City said in a statement. The rate of tax on property will be set by City Council on May 4,

## The City Tax Relief Program

- For veterans—There is a full exemption for veterans who can prove a service-connected permanent and total disability. The residence for which a veteran is seeking exemption must be the veteran's primary residence and in the name of the veteran or spouse. Surviving spouses of a veteran killed in action should check the City Tax Services and Enforcement at 703-746-3901 or [taxrelief@alexandriava.gov](mailto:taxrelief@alexandriava.gov). The office has applications for the relief programs.
- For the elderly and disabled—Residents who are 65 or older or permanently and totally disabled by Nov. 15, 2018, may be eligible for real estate tax relief. A sliding scale of income determines the percentage of exemption. The household for which an exemption is sought may not have assets of more than \$430,000, excluding the house and one acre.

## Comparable Properties

Homeowners can go online and check other assessments in their neighborhood, to help decide whether to ask for review of their assessment. In some cases, assessments of similar properties vary.

Go to the City site [www.alexandriava.gov](http://www.alexandriava.gov) and click on Real Estate Assessments. Choose Popular Links and then click on Search Property and Sales Data. A little box will show "Search by Address." You need only fill in the name of the

the street. Then click "Search." Every address on that street will be listed.

One basis of a search is to find square footage similar to your home and then click "Property Details." That lists sales and assessments going back years. You may find houses, or plots, with comparable dimensions that are assessed at a different level from yours. An assessment official said Alexandria has sharply diminishing open land, a circumstance that may have a residence's land assessment increase more than the house assessment. On one Beverly Hills address with a half-acre lot, the land assessment increased \$19,000 but the home increased \$7,000



## A Matter of Balance Classes To Resume This Month

Board member Brenda Bloch-Young announces that the new series of Matter of Balance classes resumes March 14.

The classes, small by design, are on a first come /first served basis, at Cora Kelly Recreation Center. The dates for the spring resumption are eight Wednesdays, March 14 to May 2, from 10 a.m. 'til noon. There will be a nominal fee of \$20 for the eight-week session.

The first set of classes “graduated” 11 people last November as Mayor Allison Silberberg visited. Board members Chriss Nielsen and Babs Waters helped Bloch-Young manage the series.

“The important fact is that this is evidence-based training that actually has data supporting the fact that it works,” Bloch-Young said.

Prospective participants must submit an application. Contact or go by the At Home in Alexandria office to get one. Questions? Contact [bblochyoung@gmail.com](mailto:bblochyoung@gmail.com)



## Tech Tuesday Participants Learn All About Apps

Marketing Manager Jen Heinz guided an AHA audience through the complexities of the world of apps Feb. 20 in another of the series of Tech Tuesdays.

Heinz handed out a two-page list of apps—software applications—that are widely recommended, from dining to health to handling money to photos and many others.

Heinz said there are millions of available apps. Responding to the gasps of the class, she said users of smartphones only download a tiny fraction of the available number of apps, picking those most appropriate. “Not all play nicely with your device,” she said.

The attendees showed special interest in the apps for routes and maps, for entertainment and dining, for books and for handling photographs.



**Tech Tuesday participants, clockwise from left foreground: Jen Heinz, Tescia Yonkers, Ann Mazor, Sharon McBay, Janet King, Cele Garrett and Kathie Fricke**



**Lesley Israel (in red, on the couch) talks about being an election observer in numerous foreign countries.**

## Observing Elections The World Over

One would be tempted to ask Conversation With speaker Lesley Israel, jokingly, what she does in her spare time.

Israel, who entranced an AHA audience Jan. 28, has a résumé as long as your arm, observing and/or evaluating elections in countries from Armenia to Zanzibar, Albania to Tanzania, for the State Department and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Her career has included political consulting, campaign work for four candidates for U.S. president and enough other activities to land her in three “Who’s Who” books.

But what captivated the Conversation With audience, whose 15 members filled Marianne Ginsburg’s Alexandria House living room, was her observing multiple elections.

Israel said observers are just that—not trying to affect the outcome of elections, but rather observing and taking notes on how the elections are carried out. The United States sometimes welcomes observers from other countries, she said.

The American observers of other nations’ elections often find the host country is hoping for an international group’s endorsement of the way it handles elections.

In some cases, other nations have higher turnout for elections—some even require voting. It is not always easy to vote, Israel said: “I have seen people walking long distances to vote” in such countries as Azerbaijan, Ghana, or Kenya, for example.

Israel said she fully understands “how critical citizen involvement is—I have seen people in countries like Afghanistan literally risk their lives to vote.” Unlike in the United States, some nations make it illegal to campaign on election day and some require removal of campaign signs on that day.

In one election she observed, there were suspicions of fraud, but the vote count left the candidates only two votes apart. “If the election had been stolen, we think the candidates would have been farther apart,” Israel said.

## AHA Plans March 8 Program On Coping with Grief and Loss

Particularly in working with and helping senior citizens, one meets occasions of grief or loss.

Mary Ray, licensed clinical social worker, will speak to At Home in Alexandria about coping with our own grief and how, as volunteers and caregivers, we can help others who are dealing with loss and grief.

Her program is set for 10:30 to 11:30 a.m., Thursday, March 8, in the community room of Portner's Landing, 621 St. Asaph Street. (Someone will be at the front door to let guests in.)

Mary Ray has conducted workshops and classes on relaxation, creativity, improving relationships, stress reduction, yoga, Pilates and general wellness. She holds a bachelor's degree in sociology and a certificate in social work from St. Mary's Notre Dame. She received her master's degree from Indiana University.

**Please RSVP for the program by March 5.** You can phone the AHA office at 703-231-0824 or go online at [www.athomeinalexandria.org](http://www.athomeinalexandria.org). Click on the site and click on "Calendar of Events." Choose the February calendar and when you scroll down it moves to some March dates. Scroll to the March 8 date listing "Dealing with Loss and Grief," click on it and scroll to "Register for this event."

After her remarks, Ray will open a discussion period.

### A Tribute to Patsy Ticer

The Friends of the Alexandria Commission for Women and The Alexandria Commission for Women will host a "Tribute to the Honorable Patsy Ticer" Monday, March 19, 6:30-8:30 p.m. at the Washington Masonic Memorial

Ticer was the first female mayor of Alexandria, a state senator and a valued member of AHA. Tickets may be purchased at [www.friendsofalexwomen.org](http://www.friendsofalexwomen.org)



### Dine-Around at Curry House

AHA's dining group, above, is served in the orange, purple and red glow of the London Curry House décor. Ten people attended.



### "Drop-in" at Del Ray Café

Prospective members were invited to the gathering on February 14. The hosts were several AHA members who explained the AHA village. Pete Crouch, right background, compiled a list of longtime Rosemont residents to add to AHA's list of prospects for membership.

### Around the Board

Chair Jane King reported that AHA's new board members are already hard at work.

Governance Chair Pam Nelson held an education session on AHA for Susanne Adams and Babs Waters. Waters has been doing recruiting and follow-up in Cameron Station, in addition to coaching the Matter of Balance class at Cora Kelly.

Mary Jayne Swanson, Kathy Fricke and Wendy Driver are new "buddies" for members who require a bit more attention.

Jen Heinz fashioned a chart to help track membership recruitment and retention.

King reminded members that AHA's seventh anniversary is coming in May, and help is needed for planning and hosting.

Executive Director Cele Garrett reported that, under a new system of counting all memberships, the total stood at 204.

New associate members included Sandra Chizum, Carmen Raventos-Suarez and Nancy Kula. Ron Holder renewed as a full member and Jan Macidull renewed as an associate.

Treasurer Chriss Nielsen reported AHA's net assets through the end of January totaled 8.1 months of reserves.

The membership revenue chart, comparing 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018, showed "we are starting the year off well," she reported.

Garrett spread the word about AHA on two occasions: on Feb. 5 to the board of McLean Village and the next day to Long & Foster's staff meeting.

Garrett called the real estate group's gathering "a great opportunity to get in front of 35-plus real estate agents."

## What's Up With AHA Members, Associates and Volunteers

AHA's new chair, **Jane King**, has a new feather in her hat—in a new hat, actually. She is heading Alexandria's participation in the AARP/WHO (World Health Organization) Network of Age-Friendly Communities effort that has included Alexandria's admission into the network. It is the FIRST community in Virginia to have this designation. Now, the real "work" has begun by the Alexandria Commission on Aging to create the Development Plan that must be completed by 2020.

"I made it!" **Penny Roberts** exulted at reaching the Antarctic. We expect a fuller report when she returns to warmer climes.



**Penny Roberts** holds a sign declaring she had made it to the Antarctic Circle. Her AHA associates will insist on later data with some ice (see distant left background) and possibly some penguins to confirm her claim.

The **Thank God It's Friday** group had almost record attendance Jan. 26 (see photo below) of 14 people. The TGIFs with more attendance were occasions when **Bill Clayton** and the late **Tom Fitzgerald** said in advance that they would buy some drinks for the (AHA) house to celebrate their birthdays



## VOLUNTEER CORNER

A big Thank You to volunteer **Sarah Bobbin**, a real estate agent at Long & Foster, who invited AHA's **Executive Director Cele Garrett** to speak to her L&F colleagues at their weekly sales meeting.

"Word of mouth and informal presentations like this are the most effective ways we can promote AHA," Garrett said, "so if you have a civic group, faith community, or any other social group that you think could benefit from learning about AHA, please know that a board member or staffer is always available for a presentation."

Nice words from a member about a volunteer: The member, who asked not to be mentioned by name, was effusive in praise of volunteer **Courtney West**, in a phone call to the AHA office. The member said Courtney "was terrific...so caring and full of kindness. He kept my dignity intact and used total discretion when providing me transportation to the grocery store and to an appointment."

Have you been particularly pleased with what a volunteer has done for you? Just let AHA know your thoughts. We will mention the volunteer, of course (see above item), but will not use your name if you wish. Call AHA at 703-231-0824.



### THINGS WE DO:

**Bill Clayton** taking member **Ann Mazor** to an AHA event on Feb. 20. They both learned about apps for electronic devices.

The hugely popular "What's in the News?" program attracted 15 to the Royal Café Feb. 13.

Led by the hostess, **Brenda Bloch-Young**, the group "had a lively discussion with full participation," she reported.

The group was highly informed on a long list of topics.

That morning, they discussed among other things the volatility of the stock market, the Winter Olympics, spending legislation, Justice Department, the 2018 elections, and more. Bloch-Young prepares the list of topics beforehand and arrives ready to move the discussion along, but also to move to the next topic on the list.

"What's in the News," with its popularity but in limited space, is a testing ground for getting the "Please RSVP" word around to all in AHA. Sometimes less than half let AHA know they are coming, and the separate room becomes crowded.

## Envisioning a village for all

By Cele Garrett  
Executive Director

Three years ago, after careful thought and deliberation, AHA tried a new service on a small scale: subsidizing a yearly membership to a low-income Alexandria resident.

We determined an annual income qualification of \$50,000 or less and required that the member pay the first \$100 of the fee; a private donor funded the remaining amount. The following year, we opened this up to an additional member. Today, we have four scholarship members.

Scholarships are a big part of many village operations--with some organizations having as many as 25 percent of their members receiving a heavily discounted membership, based on economic need.

Often, AHA will learn of someone who would like our services but cannot afford a membership.

Up to this point, we have not actively promoted this program because we must continually evaluate our volunteer capacity before we accept additional scholarship members.

(Typically, someone who signs on as a scholarship member truly--and frequently--needs our services.)

If you know someone who could benefit from an AHA membership and who would wish to join but cannot afford the \$550 annual fee on their own, please contact me. And, we welcome contributions earmarked for this program in order to strengthen it.

[cele@athomeinalexandria.org](mailto:cele@athomeinalexandria.org)

## Chuckles and Chortles

Remember Burma-Shave? The shaving cream whose advertising signs beside highways had drivers all over the country reciting their couplets?

Increasing highway speeds and congestion—and the national debate about distracted driving—ended the era of Burma-Shave's serial signs on the highways.

Here are some examples from the heyday:

- Don't Stick Your Elbow  
Out So Far  
It May Go Home  
In Another Car.  
BURMA-SHAVE
- Don't Lose Your Head  
To Gain A Minute  
You Need Your Head  
Your Brains Are In It  
BURMA-SHAVE
- Passing School Zone  
Take It Slow  
Let Our Little  
Shavers Grow  
BURMA-SHAVE
- Brother Speeder  
Let's Rehearse  
All Together  
Good Morning, Nurse  
BURMA-SHAVE

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and Dara Surratt

## Juice, Anyone?

With new kitchen appliances and methods, getting juice out of fruits and vegetables is increasingly popular, the Mayo Clinic Health Letter notes.

But juicing is not a panacea. Juices have most of the vitamins, minerals and plant chemicals of whole fruits and vegetables. But not all. The whole items also furnish fiber, which is lost during juicing.

Fiber aids in digestion, Mayo says, and may also help improve blood cholesterol levels. Fiber also "helps you feel full, which can help with weight control," the report adds.

Juice can be "a fun and portable way to add nutrition to your diet. . . . However, juice should not be the only way to get these nutrients."

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