



NEWSLETTER

Volume 16, Number 1

January 2026

A Community of Members Age 55+ Helping One Another to Lead Safe, Active, and Connected Lives

WELCOME TO OUR NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

by Alan Dinsmore, AHA Board chair

After a thoughtful search process for a new leader to take At Home in Alexandria into our next stage of growth and impact, Jamie L. Ciesla was approved by the AHA Board of Directors as our new Executive Director.

Jamie brings a rich background in both nonprofit leadership and development with particular experience in supporting innovative, collaborative, and results-oriented teams in the delivery of public health initiatives in Asia, Africa and Caribbean nations. These initiatives included managing donor engagement performance. Jamie's extensive experience will be instrumental in furthering our strategic goals as she begins her service on January 5, 2026. In the coming weeks we are looking forward to sharing more about Jamie's background and view for our future.

The search committee was chaired by Alan Dinsmore. Members were: Victoria Almquist, Ray Biegun, Christena Nielsen and Karen Streich. We thank the search committee for their dedication.

At Home in Alexandria's Board and members want to express their deepest gratitude for the special gifts that Cele Garrett brought to AHA through 12 years of service. Cele's leadership leaves AHA well positioned to meet the opportunities and challenges of being a community leading organization in the delivery of the unique services of At Home in Alexandria.

A FOND "SEE YOU SOON"

by Cele Garrett, AHA's outgoing executive director

I couldn't possibly write "farewell" in the header since I know I will remain involved with AHA. I began my first day of work in early March 2013 and cannot believe how quickly the years have ticked by. I have been lucky to have wonderful colleagues alongside me in the office every step of the way. Our volunteers have been so generous with their time, often stepping in at a moment's notice when the unexpected happens. Our AHA members have been grateful and accommodating. And, I could not have asked for a more supportive board of directors during my time here. I'll be working alongside Jamie Ciesla, the new executive director, for the next few weeks.

After all these years, it may be hard to train my car not to automatically drive to 3139 Mount Vernon Ave in the mornings, but eventually it (and I) will adjust to a new routine. See you soon!

January 2026 Calendar

Please note that the programs in this calendar may be scheduled via Zoom or in person. The AHA office will send you the Zoom link after you have registered for a program. The link will allow you to join Zoom. Movie Group is on hiatus for the month.

Thursday, January 1	AHA Walk at Mason Neck State Park. Details on page 4.	10am
Tuesdays, January 6, 13, 20, 27	AHA Yoga at The View in Alexandria House. Spaces may be limited. *Mat Yoga 9:30-10:30; Chair Yoga 11am-12 noon.	9:30am - 12pm*
Tuesdays, January 13 and 20	Weekly Scrabble at the home of Jeff and Donna Gathers. Limit of 3.	1:30pm
Tuesday, January 13	Ladies' Night Out at Northside 10, 10 E Glebe Rd. Limit of 10.	5-7pm
Wednesday, January 14	Dine Around at Corso Italian, 4024 Campbell Ave. Limit of 8.	6-8pm
Thursday, January 15	Tech Thursday Managing Email. AHA office. Limit of 10.	1pm
Thursday, January 15	Men's Night Out at Aldo's Italian Kitchen, 2850 Eisenhower Ave. No limit.	5-6:30pm
Saturday, January 17	Happy Hour location TBD.	5-7pm
Monday, January 19	Lively Arts Discussion at Marie Cataffo's home. Limit of 10.	10am
Wednesday, January 21	Third Wednesday Book Club on Zoom. "An Unfinished Love Story: A Personal History of the 1960's" by Doris Kearns Goodman	7pm
Thursday, January 22	Lunch Around at Smyrna, 7588 Telegraph Rd. Limit of 10.	12pm
Monday, January 26	Morning Brew at Panera, 3201 Duke St. No limit.	10am

TO REGISTER

Please call or email Veronica Ferris at AHA@AtHomeInAlexandria.org or at (703) 231-0824

AHA'S COVID GUIDELINES

AHA no longer requires, but **highly recommends**, COVID vaccines for members attending in-person events. If you don't feel well, please test prior to attending AHA events.

DONORS HONOR OTHERS WITH THEIR AHA GIFTS

by Cele Garrett

As I write this on December 29, AHA has received contributions from 90 donors at year's end. We are beyond grateful for the collective generosity from this community, in the midst of an uncertain time for many people. For me, one of the most poignant aspects of this annual campaign is reading the notes from our donors who wish to honor others with their gift. Below are the names of those who have been named:

In memory of...

David Browning
David Butler
Barbara Christopher
Lisa DelNegro
Lee Gurel
William R. Hahn

In honor of...

Dr. Judith K Jones
L Liddle
Richard Moose
Mabel Sisk
Tom Solak
Leander Wick

Susanne Adams

Ruth Arnold

Cele Garrett

Ernie and Montsie Lehmann

BUILDING BETTER BRAIN HEALTH

Join us for Goodwin Living's *StrongerMemory*, a program to help improve your ability to retrieve memories. Past participants have noticed improvement in their ability to focus, find misplaced items and remember conversations. A new session of *StrongerMemory* is kicking off on February 4. All sessions will meet on Wednesday from 3 – 4 pm. You will be given a workbook to guide you. For 12 weeks, you will be encouraged to spend just 20 to 30 minutes a day reading aloud, writing and quickly completing simple math problems in the workbook. You are also invited to join weekly meetings on Zoom where you can share your experience with others, give and get encouragement, and gather practical advice from one another. The facilitator for the program is Roberta McGregor, EdD, MSN, RN, a Registered Nurse with over 30 years' experience in acute care education and academia.

To register, contact the AHA office: 703-231-0824 or aha@athomeinalexandria.org. If you have questions, contact Roberta at rmcgro13@comcast.net or (703) 598-1390. You can also read more about the program at <https://goodwinliving.org/strongermemory-the-fight-against-cognitive-decline/>



SCOTTISH WALK CHRISTMAS PARADE

AHA "showed up and showed out" at the 2025 Annual Scottish Walk. Clockwise from top left: The whole gang gathered for a team photo as the Walk began. Teddy McBay brought along her son and grandchildren. John Veldhuis and Mila Mateu cruised along in John's vintage Mustang. And Lisa Ramirez-Branum, Brett Sanders, and Chriss Nielsen headed up the AHA contingent.



CAN IT REALLY BE TIME FOR SPRING SEMESTER????

The Spring Semester for Encore Learning is right around the corner. Encore will be having a Course Preview on Thursday, January 29 from 9:30 am to 12 noon. During the Preview, you will hear from their instructors about their classes and spring semester highlights.

Encore Learning is a nonprofit adult learning community with about 1,000 members mainly in the D.C. metro area. Membership is open to anyone over the age of 50. You must be a member to enroll in courses. They have many exciting courses planned this semester, as well as a variety of clubs and many special events. For the course preview, you can join them virtually on Zoom or watch the presentation with others live at Van Metre Hall at George Mason University. Go to <https://encorelearning.asapconnected.com/-CourseID=320635> to learn more.

AHA THIRD WEDNESDAY BOOK CLUB

by Dena G. Stoner, AHA member and Book Club host

In October, AHA launched a new Zoom-enabled book club which meets the third Wednesday evening of each month. While originally sponsored by the Duncan Library, this book club is now sponsored by AHA. The next date for the book club will be held on January 21 at 7pm on Zoom. The upcoming books are:

January 21, 2026: *An Unfinished Love Story: A Personal History of the 1960's* by Doris Kearns Goodman with Mary Peet leading the discussion.

February, 18, 2026: *The Briar Club* by Kate Quinn with Mary Busse leading the discussion.

March, 18, 2026: *The Name* by Florence Knapp with Lisa Ramirez-Branum leading the discussion.

Register to Veronica Ferris at 703-231-0824 or at veronica@athomeinalexandria.org.



Welcome New Members: Paul Branum, Lisa Ramirez-Branum, and Isaac Johnson

Welcome New Volunteers: Shea Harden, Denise Napolitano, Zach Gamza, Sophia Cain, Michelle Tober, Mark Watson

AHA APPAREL

AHA now has its own tee shirts, hoodies and more for sale at the [Bonfire online store](#) or at www.bonfire.com/store/at-home-in-alexandria/



UPCOMING WALKS

Join new AHA Board Member and hike coordinator for the Capital Area Chapter of American Pilgrims on the Camino, **Jim Larocco**, for walks sponsored by the Capital Area Chapter. One of 46 chapters nationwide, their local chapter is devoted to fostering health in body and mind for those who consider walking a camino – in Spain and many other countries, including the U.S. This all-volunteer organization sponsors these free events (unless there is an entry fee for a park walk) and everyone is welcome. In 2026, all walks will help mark the 250th anniversary of our nation. Please join one of the two nearby walks planned in January. On January 1 at 10 am, there will be a First Day Walk at Mason Neck State Park in Fairfax County. On January 10, the walk will be held at Great Falls Park (Maryland) to honor George Washington who advocated for the C&O Canal and Towpath. More details on both walks – and future walks -- will be posted on the AHA calendar.

RESILIENCE AND RENEWAL: CAREGIVER WORKSHOP

Senior Services of Alexandria (SSA) kicks off 2026 with another in its Senior Living in Alexandria Speaker Series. On January 21 at 10 am at the Beatley Library (5005 Duke Street), SSA is hosting a special workshop designed to empower family caregivers with practical tools, expert advice, and local resources. A panel of local experts will guide you through essential strategies for maintaining your own well-being while providing the best care for others.

BOARD UPDATES

Ruth Arnold, Ray Biegun, Alan Dinsmore, Gretchen Klimoski, Karen Streich, John Veldhuis, and Jim Woolwine were all elected to another term. Alan, Jim, and Ray continue as our Chair, Treasurer and Secretary, respectively. Pam Nelson will transition to an Emerita non-voting member of the Board. Kathie Fricke stepped down from the Board. She has been an outstanding member of the Board, serving as Treasurer for three years where she expertly guided AHA's finances.

The Board welcomed three new members whose terms are effective January 2026:

Board of Directors

Alan Dinsmore, Chair	Victoria Almquist, Vice Chair
Jim Woolwine, Treasurer	Ray Biegun, Secretary
Ruth Arnold	Bob Eiffert*
Jenny Elrod	Jane King**
Gretchen Klimoski	James Larocco
Roberta McGregor	Pam Nelson *
Lisa Ramirez-Branum	Karen Streich
John Veldhuis	

*Non-voting emeritus member ** Voting Emeritus Member

Executive Director, incoming
Jamie Ciesla

Executive Director, outgoing
Cele Garrett

Marketing and Membership Manager
Veronica Ferris

Member and Operations Manager
Tegan Cohen

Editor: M. Laurie Cammisa

Advisory Council

Laurie Blackburn	Pete Crouch
Louise Kenny	Jessica Lefevre
Ernie Lehmann	Mitch Opalski
Vicki Vasques	

Lisa Ramirez-Branum has a Master of Science in Social Work and Public Policy. She recently retired from MITRE Corporation as the Principal Healthcare Analyst where she assisted federal healthcare agencies. She currently volunteers as a driver for AHA and loves it.

James Larocco has had a long career in Foreign Service, ultimately serving as Ambassador to Kuwait. In his retirement, he serves as Chair of the Alexandria Emergency Food and Shelter Program and hike coordinator for the Capital Area Chapter of American Pilgrims on the Camino. He has invited AHA members to join him on these walks (see above).

Roberta McGregor is known to many AHA members in her role facilitating Goodwin Living's StrongerMemory program (see page 3). She has over 30 years' experience as a Registered Nurse as a staff nurse, nursing instructor, and educator. She has been a volunteer with AHA and currently chairs the member services committee.



— AT HOME IN —
ALEXANDRIA

3139 Mt. Vernon Avenue
Alexandria, VA 22305

Special Days in December

January 1	<i>New Year's Day *AHA closed</i>
January 15	<i>Martin Luther King's Birthday</i>
January 19	<i>Martin Luther King Day Observed</i>
January 19	<i>National Day of Service</i>



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CONTACT US

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