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No Fireworks at National Harbor but Lots of Fun Waterfront Activities July 4th Weekend and Continuing Through the Summer

Music, a veterans market, boating fun and more, National Harbor is the place to be for the Fourth of July Weekend and summertime fun!

By PRESS OFFICER
National Harbor

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. (June 23, 2026)—National Harbor does not have fireworks on July 4, but as the nation celebrates 250 years, National Harbor has plenty of opportunities to experience great entertainment, exceptional food and amazing activities all weekend.

"As part of our celebration of America's 250th birthday, we're excited to offer an extensive list of summer programming and activities," said Senior Director of Marketing at National Harbor, Deborah Topcik. "From shopping to dining to boating fun, our waterfront is a vibrant gathering place to honor our nation's history and celebrate July 4th all weekend long."

The July 4th weekend kicks off on Friday, July 3rd with Summer Sounds featuring National Harbor's own Bobby McKey's performing rock music from 6 to 8 p.m. on the waterfront plaza. The event is



PHOTO COURTESY NATIONAL HARBOR

Spirit Park at National Harbor is a modern tribute to the soul and spirit of the American flag. The park is open daily from sunrise until 10 p.m. The flag shown above is one of the largest on the east coast.

free. Actor and comedian De-Ray Davis will be performing at The Theater at MGM National Harbor.

On July 4, visitors to National Harbor can experience the 250th Veterans' Market showcasing veteran makers and artisans with handmade art, crafts, jewelry, home décor, gifts and specialty items. The market takes place from noon until 8 p.m., rain or shine in the Capital Canopy. Also on July 4th, School of Rock students from across the Washington, D.C. region will perform on the National Harbor Plaza Stage from 1 to 5 p.m.

Tanger National Harbor will stay open until 6 p.m. on the 4th. Shoppers are encouraged to visit www.tanger.com/nationalharbor for more details and store offers.

End the holiday weekend on Sunday, July 5 with Movies on the Potomac. Back to the Future will be showing at 6pm on

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Southern Maryland 250th Celebration Marks Defining Milestone for National Heritage Area

Sen. Van Hollen joined partners, previewed 10-year blueprint, and dedicated Maryland Liberty Tree at Thomas Stone National Historic Site

By PRESS OFFICER
Southern Maryland National Heritage Area

PORT TOBACCO, Md. (June 24, 2026)—As the nation approaches its 250th anniversary, the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area (SMNHA) hosted Southern Maryland 250: Liberty and Legacy, a milestone celebration honoring the region's role in the American story and charting a course for its future. More than 200 attendees gathered at the Thomas Stone National Historic Site for an event that marked SMNHA's most significant moment since its launch in 2023.

U.S. Sen. Chris Van Hollen, D-Md, the lead sponsor of the 2022 legislation that established the SMNHA, delivered the keynote address. In his keynote, Sen. Van Hollen traced Southern Maryland's outsized role in shaping American liberty—from Indigenous stewardship of the land to the first codification of religious freedom in 1649—and called on all Americans to tell that story fully and honestly as the nation approaches its 250th anniversary.

"Together, we celebrate this milestone for Southern Maryland as we look ahead to a bright future. We are proud to unveil the roadmap that will preserve and share the historic, cultural, and natural resources that make Southern Maryland one of the most remarkable places in the entire country," said Sen. Chris

Van Hollen in his keynote remarks. "This region's importance is not limited to the past. Southern Maryland continues to contribute through scientific research and innovation, environmental stewardship, military service, and economic development. Each of the heritage area sites tells these Southern Maryland stories, and together, this landscape tells a story unlike any other in the United States."

SMNHA partners also previewed a 10-year master plan that will guide the preservation of the region's historic, cultural, and natural resources, while expanding heritage tourism and driving economic growth across Calvert, Charles, St. Mary's, and southern Prince George's Counties. The plan was shaped in part by input from over 200 residents and community leaders who participated in a public forum last year, and by numerous public meetings and outreach over the past three years.

The SMNHA Master Plan is under Technical Review by the U.S. National Park Service and will be released this summer for public review and comment, allowing residents, business owners, and stakeholders to review the draft and directly influence its final priorities.

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New \$10M Gift From Smith Family Expands Legacy at University of Maryland

Longtime Benefactors Boost Support of Performing Arts, Business School

By PRESS OFFICER
University of Maryland

Robert H. Smith '50 was a famed D.C.-area builder, and his wife, Clarice, a celebrated artist. Their twin passions are imprinted across the University of Maryland campus, on the business school and performing arts center that bear their names and in the scholarships and programs there that they supported.

Now their son, David Bruce Smith, has made a new \$10 million bequest on behalf of the family's foundation to continue their legacy in advancing the performing arts and business education at Maryland.

The funds, split evenly between his late parents' longtime interests at UMD, will establish the Robert H. Smith Do Good Endowed Professorship in Business Leadership, Technology and Societal Impact, and the Robert H. Smith Endowed Faculty Fellowship in Business and Innovation, in addition to other support for the business school. At The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, the gift will enhance its productions and programming initiatives.

The arts and business, said Smith, "polish one another in the same way that my mother and father complemented each other."

His family's latest philanthropy is part of Forward: The University of Maryland Campaign for the Fearless, which is raising \$2.5 billion to expand access to UMD's world-class education, accelerate groundbreaking research and unite a global community to Do Good.

The Smith family is one of the largest benefactors of the Smith School, University Libraries and the College of Arts and Humanities, which includes The Clarice, the Michelle Smith Collaboratory for Visual

Culture and the Michelle Smith Performing Arts Library, the latter two of which are named for the Smiths' late daughter. Their generosity also established faculty chairs, funded scholarships for hundreds of undergraduate and graduate students, and pioneered other initiatives across the campus.

"You can't tell the story of the University of Maryland without the story of the Smith family, just as thousands of students, scholars and artists wouldn't have a home on campus without the landmark structures and institutions bearing Robert H., Clarice and Michelle Smith's names," said UMD President Darryll J. Pines. "We are incredibly grateful for their immense, multigenerational support, now stewarded by their son, David Bruce Smith."

A real estate developer and philanthropist, Robert H. Smith led the Charles E. Smith Companies, founded by his father, to become one of the region's biggest commercial and residential developers. One of his most significant professional accomplishments was spearheading the development of Crystal City, Va. Clarice Smith was known for her portraits, still lifes, landscapes, florals, stained glass, and equestrian and sporting scenes. Her work was exhibited at the National Museum of Women in the Arts and the Kreeger Museum in Washington, D.C., along with other galleries across the U.S. and abroad, including London, Paris, Zurich and Jerusalem.

"We are incredibly grateful to the Robert H. and Clarice R. Smith Family Foundation and to David Bruce Smith for their continued investment in the Smith School," said Robert H. Smith School of Business Dean Prabhudev Konana. "This generous gift enables us to expand an innovative portfolio of programs that serve thousands of students, shape future generations of leaders

and support impactful research. This commitment not only sustains a tradition of excellence but also ensures the Smith School remains at the forefront of academic research and business education amid significant uncertainty driven by intelligent machines and global realignment."

The new Do Good endowed professorship will allow, for example, a faculty member to explore work at the intersection of entrepreneurship and the public good. Possible areas for research include how AI might enhance transparency and accountability, sustainable business models and inclusive economic growth. The faculty fellowship will provide recognition to a junior faculty member who pushes the Smith School forward in innovative ways.

For 25 years, The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center has shaped the trajectory of theater, dance and music at the University of Maryland and beyond. The gift will support its groundbreaking productions, artist commissions and innovative programming initiatives, enriching opportunities for students, faculty, staff and the surrounding community.

"The Smith family was integral to the founding of The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, and Clarice's artistry and commitment to community remain inspiring to us all. Their legacy of philanthropy and support for the arts at UMD has been steadfast and ongoing," said Terry Dwyer, executive director of The Clarice. "This gift helps to secure The Clarice's future as a collaborative center of excellence in performance, community impact and boundless creativity. All of us at The Clarice are immensely grateful."

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Warrior Walkathon to Support Sickle Cell Disease Association of America

By PRESS OFFICER
Sickle Cell Disease Association of America Inc.

HANOVER, Md. (June 25, 2026)—The Sickle Cell Disease Association of America Inc., a national nonprofit membership organization that advocates for people affected by sickle cell disease, will hold the Warrior Walkathon on **Saturday, July 18**, from 9 a.m. to noon at Lake Montebello in Baltimore.

"SCDAA is excited to host our 13th annual walkathon, again in Baltimore," said Regina Hartfield, president and CEO of the association. "It's a great opportunity to make a difference. Join us to raise vital funds in support of a universal cure. Walk alongside sickle cell warriors, caregivers, families, friends, community organizations, sororities, fraternities, industry leaders and supporters of the sickle cell community."

For over a decade, the annual walkathon—formerly named Walk with the Stars—has raised more than \$500,000 to support improvements in the quality of health, life and services for individuals, families and communities affected by sickle cell disease.

The Warrior Walkathon will begin with a warmup followed by the walk and awards ceremony. Participants can create and promote personal fundraising webpages to raise money for the Sickle

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Hospice of the Chesapeake Welcomes 3 Distinguished Leaders to its Team

Governor Moore Announces New Workforce Partnership With RAISE US

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Shingles Raises Heart and Stroke Risk

"Shingles can be very painful and knock you down for weeks," said Eduardo Sanchez, M.D., FAHA, the American Heart Association's chief medical officer for prevention.

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TOWNS *and* NEIGHBORS

Brandywine-Aquasco by Audrey Johnson 301-922-5384

A CENTURY OF GROWTH

“Coppin State University boasts a rich academic history marked by continuous adaptation, expansion, and an unwavering commitment to serving its community. From its humble beginnings as a teacher-training program in the early 20th century to its status as a professions-focused baccalaureate small institution, Coppin’s academic journey reflects a dynamic response to educational needs and societal changes.” TALON Spring 2026 (The Coppin State University Magazine).

CLINTON VACATION VBS

Join Clinton United Methodist Church Vacation Bible School July 13–July 17 from 9 a.m.–Noon each day. PreK–5th Graders. Our Theme this year is Snowball Mountain Challenge: Find your Strength in God. Join us for our 10:30 a.m. church service July 19 for the Children’s Church VBS summary presentation. Rev. Melaina Trice, Pastor. Please register your child for VBS Registration 2026 on our church website: <http://cumcmd.org/> or call the church office number 301-868-1281. If you need a printed form please contact Audrey Johnson, VBS Director ajohnson12906@yahoo.com. Telephone 301-922-5384. Church address is 10700 Brandywine Road, Clinton, Maryland.

OUR GUEST SPEAKER

Nottingham Myers and Christ United Methodist Churches Cooperative Parish WOMEN’S DAY 2026 (Women, Chosen, and EMPOWERED. 1 Peter 2:9–10) Rev. Shemaiah Strickland, Pastor. Guest Speaker was Pastor LaTrelle Natosha Chase. She was born to be a TrelleBlazer! Hailing from our nation’s capital, Washington, DC, she is the proud daughter of Loretta Reed Pinkney and Victor Pinkney. She attended the historic Tuskegee University in Tuskegee, Alabama and later graduated from Cambridge College in Massachusetts. In August 2019, she received her Master of Education in Curriculum Writing from Fitchburg State University. Pastor LaTrelle has been married to her high-school sweetheart and love of her life, Pastor Tyrone Chase, Jr. for almost 30 years.

Pastor LaTrelle is a proud product of the United Methodist Church where she was raised in the fear and admonition of the Lord. She credits the United Methodist Church and her parents with her firm foundation and hunger and thirst for the Word of God. As a child and a teenager, her time at Gibbons United Methodist Church in Brandywine, Maryland under the leadership of the then Rev. Dr. C. Anthony Muse, ignited her passion for missionary work and the administrative work of the church. Pastor LaTrelle has served faithfully over the last 40+ years in many capacities of ministry. Her faithfulness continued as she relocated to Boston, MA. She was the first consecrated Associate Pastor of New Life Restoration Temple in Boston, MA under the leadership of her late spiritual father, Bishop Bernard N. Bragg. In 2022, she and her husband launched Everyday

People, Extraordinary God Ministries.

In her professional career, Pastor LaTrelle was a high school leader for over 11 years. She now serves as Exploratory & Cooperative Education Director. She is well respected not only in the Cambridge Public School System but as a master educator and accreditation consultant in the New England region. Pastor LaTrelle is an Adjunct Professor at Fitchburg State University. Additionally, she serves as a Commissioner for the New England Associate of Schools & Colleges as the sole African-American woman. She is also a multi-gifted entrepreneur. She owns TrelleBlazers International Hairport, She Who Dares Jewelry Boutique, and the TrelleBlazer luxury t-shirt line, all located in Hyde Park, MA. Desiring to defy the odds and stereotypes, and to be a positive role model for full-figured girls, LaTrelle was featured as the face for 2015 Covergirl contest. Pastor LaTrelle is an Amazon best-selling author. She is also a noted blogger and fashion and social media influencer. She was featured in Boston Voyager Magazine as an inspiring entrepreneur in Massachusetts. Pastor LaTrelle is a highly sought-after speaker both in church and secularly and freely shares her story of overcoming obstacles, boldly beating statistics and living a victorious life.

SPECIAL MOMENTS AT THE WOMEN’S DAY 2026

Special moments at Nottingham Myers and Christ United Methodist Churches Cooperative Parish Women’s Day 2026 were Lighting of the Remembrance Candles for Sis. Fannie Savoy and Sis Lillian Duckett. Recognition of 2026 Women of the Year: Terry Windsor, Christ United Methodist Church woman of the year for her dedicated service and Chantel Wright of Nottingham Myers United Methodist Church for her dedicated service.

53RD CHURCH ANNIVERSARY

Christ United Methodist Church, Aquasco, Maryland will celebrate their 53rd Church Anniversary on Sunday, July 19 at 11 a.m. Rev. Shemaiah Strickland, Pastor. Further details to be announced.

SOUL KARAOKE EXPERIENCE

Soul Karaoke Experience at Piano Keys Restaurant & Lounge every 2nd & 4th Thursday. Address is 7651 Matapeake Business Drive, Suite 104, Brandywine, Maryland 20613. \$0-428.67 multiple dates. Refund Policy-No refunds. Tickets-Eventbrite. Why do Karaoke when you can feel like a star? Sing your favorite song. Perform on stage with a live band. Let your friends record you. Feel like you’re in a real concert. Come early, sing big, be a star. Ages 21+. In person. Six Hours. Free Parking. Free admission all night. Doors open at 8 p.m. For reservations call 240-816-2211. Visit <https://pianokeyslounge.com>.

In & Around Morningside-Skyline by Mary McHale 301-735-3451

DJ turned security consultant

Tommie Kelley dies at 73

Lucy Thumtine “Tommie” Powell Kelley of Suitland, Md., died June 6 at the age of 73.

A native of the Norfolk-Portsmouth area of Virginia, Tommie was among the first students to integrate the Portsmouth public schools. She graduated from University of Virginia in the 1970s, and then worked for several years as a radio DJ in Charlottesville and Washington, D.C.

She earned a second bachelor’s degree from University of Maryland and launched a new career in computer operations and satellite systems. That job included a stint in Germany, where she founded Kelley Consultants International, a company which worked with US and NATO military forces across Europe and Asia. Along the way, she also earned master’s degrees from American University and Villanova University. After twenty-three years of running her company, she was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease and decided to retire.

Tommie enjoyed travel, reading, and the fine and performing arts, particularly music. She sang in church choirs for most of her life, from her father’s church as a child through to St. Philip the Apostle Catholic Church in Camp Springs, Md., in more recent years.

She’s survived by her husband of forty-six years, John Kelley, her sisters Naomi and Rebecca, and brothers James, Lewis, Caleb, and Reuben. Her funeral was at St. Philip the Apostle Church on June 20.

Town news

The Morningside Town Council had a busy meeting June 23, including the annual tax-rate and budget hearings.

The property-tax rates will remain the same for the upcoming year. The budget passed, with \$3,856,419 in revenue against \$3,762,666 in expenses, which gave the town the not-too-common opportunity to deposit \$93,753 into the rainy-day fund.

During the meeting, the council voted to renew their contract with the current trash-hauling company, at a rate of \$170,700 to collect trash and recycling from the nearly 450 properties of Morn-

ingside for one year.

They also contracted Morningside Tree Service to remove overhanging branches from around sidewalks and streets, to clear the way for pedestrians and vehicles.

The Morningside Police Department has received a donation of six Automated External Defibrillator machines. Two of them will be installed in the town hall; and the other four are portable models which police officers will be able to take with them.

A new red-light camera is coming to the intersection of Allentown Road and Suitland Road. Installation details are not yet finalized, but you may as well start practicing careful driving around that intersection (and everywhere else!) so you’ll be ready when the camera starts issuing tickets.

The next Morningside work session will be held Tuesday, July 14, at 7 p.m. The Town meeting will be Tuesday, July 21, also at 7 p.m.

Morningside’s 4th of July celebration coming up

Here’s the schedule of Morningside 4th of July events:

10:30 a.m. - Parade participants line up behind the fire house. New participants are welcome the day-of, but must be there by 10:30!

11:30 a.m. - The parade steps off from the firehouse and marches up Suitland Road, ending at the VFW. (If I’m in shape, I’ll be under the Baptist tree, as usual. Be sure to say “hi.”)

Immediately after the parade, until 3 p.m., there’ll be Family Fun at Patterson Park, with food, DJ, games and prizes.

At dusk there’ll be fireworks! (Morningside does a great job! Enjoy!)

Thumper Groom to be honored June 11 at Legion Post 238

Last week, I ran an obituary on Morningside Volunteer Fire Department’s former Chief Thomas “Thumper” Groom, who died June 11. I mentioned the family was planning a celebration of his life which would be open to the public.

That has been scheduled for July 12 from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. at American Legion

Post 238, 6265 Brandywine Road in Hughesville, Md.

The announcement notes this is not a memorial service—though there will be a prayer and a blessing. It will be an opportunity to gather and reminisce with Thumper’s friends and family.

Marlow Heights Med Center closing

Kaiser Permanente has announced they are closing the Marlow Heights Medical Center at 5100 Auth Way.

The final day of operations there will be September 4. Kaiser Permanente says the doctors and staff at that location will move to their other facilities in the area.

Members who use the Marlow Heights facility will need to change to another location after September 4. The closest option is Camp Springs Medical Center, 6104 Old Branch Ave.

If you have questions or concerns, you are encouraged to call 800-777-7902.

That’s a large building to suddenly go completely empty. I wonder what will move in there next.

Upcoming activities for August

Karate lessons will be returning to Morningside Town Hall in August. Full details are still being ironed out, but the rough plan is to hold classes Saturdays and Wednesdays. Anybody interested can call Morningside at 301-736-2300.

The spring cleanup event, which was rained out in May, has been rescheduled to August 8, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., and August 9, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. I’ll share full details as it gets closer, but they are still planning to include a low-cost shot clinic for pets.

Milestones

Happy Birthday to Pat Richardson Conlon, Sarah Booth, and Jack Hay II, July 3; Grace Carruth, Matthew Ryan White, and Nya Nichols, July 4; Jean Ihrig and Timothy Hollowsky, July 5; Chrissy Bennett and Marie Golihew, July 6; Father Kevin Cusick, Charles “Tony” Haley, Sue Richards, and Rev. Dr. Kelvin McCune, July 7; Jimmy Gromen and Anthony Curcio-Bobbitt, July 8; Karlyn Davis, John Anthony III, and my grandson Zachary Seidman, July 9.

Calendar of Events

Tanabata | The Japanese Star Festival

Date and time: Thursday, July 9, 2026, 5:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Description: Tanabata, the Japanese Star Festival, celebrates the legend of Orihime, the weaver princess, and Hikoboshi, the herder. These lovers, separated by the Milky Way, are allowed to meet just once a year on the seventh day of the seventh month. Listen to delightful music performed by the Washington Toho Koto Society, Explore the enchanting Japanese-style garden, Bring a blanket or lawn chairs from home and enjoy a picnic on the spacious Lunar Lawn. Sandwiches, drinks, and snacks are available for purchase from Merriweather To Go.; Create and decorate your own paper lantern to take home; Write poems and special wishes on colorful strips of paper, called tanzaku, to hang on bamboo, following the traditional Japanese custom to celebrate Tanabata; and more! No outside alcohol.

Cost: \$20; \$10 Hillwood and JASWDC Members; \$7 Student \$5 Child 6–18; Free for children under 6 Purchase tickets: <https://hillwoodmuseum.org/events/tanabata-japanese-star-festival-4>

Location: Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens, 4155 Linnean Avenue, NW, Washington, DC

Unfor-goat-able Adventures

Date and time: Saturday, July 18, 2026, 10 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Description: Our goats are some of the friendliest on the eastern seaboard—especially if you have treats! Spend some time hanging out with our lovable four-legged Ball family—Goofball, Snowball, Gumball, and Lucile Ball—and meet the team that takes care of our furry friends and their home. Laughter, learning, and unforgettable memories await!

Cost: \$20 per person or \$60 per group of 4. Children under 5, free. Tickets: <https://www.fergusonfoundation.org/event/unfor-goat-able-adventures-4/2026-06-13/>

Location: Alice Ferguson Foundation, 2201 Bryan Point Road, Accokeek, MD 20607

Contact: (301) 292-5665

Bike Maintenance Workshop and Helmet Fit Demonstration—Held Outside

Presented by the Washington Area Bicyclist Association

Date and time: Saturday, July 18, 2026, 11 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

Description: Got a bike that needs some TLC to get back on the road? Need tips on how to wear your helmet properly? Or maybe you could use a free bike helmet and lights? In this program, participants will learn basic bike maintenance, including a walkthrough of the ABC Quick Check—A for Air, B for Brakes, and C for Chain and Quick Release. You’ll also learn how to properly fit a helmet using the 2v2 method. *Twenty-five bike helmets and lights will also be given away to participants on a first-come, first-served basis.*

Register: <https://pgcmls.info/event/16278516>

Ages: Teen (13–18 yrs), Adults |

Location: Bladensburg Branch Library, 4820 Annapolis Rd, Bladensburg, MD 20710



PHOTO COURTESY UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND MEMORIAL CHAPEL

University of Maryland Memorial Chapel

All-Event Open Houses

Date and time: Saturday, July 18, 2026 from 12–2 p.m.

Description: The University of Maryland Memorial Chapel invites the College Park community and beyond to attend our upcoming All-Event Open Houses. Whether you are planning a wedding, a memorial service, or a special milestone celebration, our historic Chapel offers a serene and stunning backdrop for your most cherished moments. During these open houses, visitors are welcome to explore our beautiful sacred spaces, speak with our professional staff about event coordination, and envision how our venue can bring their unique visions to life.

Cost: Open house is free. We welcome you to make a tour appointment. We look forward to welcoming you to the Memorial Chapel and helping you begin the journey of planning your next meaningful event. For more information, please visit our website or contact the Chapel main office.

Location: 1101 Memorial Chapel, College Park, MD 20742

Contact: chapel@umd.edu, 301-314-9866, chapel.umd.edu

2026 Price Benowitz Back-to-School Carnival

Date and time: Wednesday,

August 19, 2026, 5–8 p.m.

Description: Join us for a free community event for local families. The event will provide free school supplies, family-friendly activities, entertainment, community resources, and opportunities for families to prepare for the upcoming school year.

Cost: Free. Register at:

<https://pricebenowitz.com/back-to-school-carnival/>

Audience: Students, parents, families, educators, and community members

Location: District Heights Recreation Center, 2000 Marbury Drive, District Heights, MD 20747

Contact: <https://pricebenowitz.com/back-to-school-carnival/>



COMMUNITY

Activities from A1

the Plaza Screen. Guests can elevate their visit with The Capital Wheel offers "Stars & Stripes" package.

Gaylord National Resort joins forces with DC this summer for a superhero adventure all summer long through Sept. 6. Super Hero Summer features interactive experiences, thrilling challenges and dazzling spectacles featuring iconic characters Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman—straight from the pages of DC comics. Gaylord's overnight stays provide exclusive resort experiences that let guests immerse themselves in Super Hero Summer featuring DC.

Visitors can get out on the water in the National Harbor cove and have some boating fun. The property's popular Freedom Ring Boat rentals are great for groups of up to 10 people. Participants are encouraged to bring a picnic. Or for smaller groups or independent adventurers, Adventures Unbound provides kayak, canoes and pedal boat rentals for those who want to explore the Potomac on their own.

For more information on National Harbor, visit www.NationalHarbor.com.

Situated on the banks of the historic Potomac River and just minutes from the nation's capital, National Harbor is a waterfront resort destination unlike any other. National Harbor is home to two of Maryland's Four Diamond rated hotels—Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center and MGM National Harbor. The vibrant Waterfront District features boutique shops, restaurants and entertainment options along picturesque promenades. The iconic Capital Wheel, a 180-ft observation wheel, Tanger National Harbor's 85 designer brands, and a robust calendar of events round out this destination that welcomes more than 15.2 million visitors a year. For more information, visit www.NationalHarbor.com.

Legacy from A1

A crown jewel of the university, The Clarice is home to artists and scholars who engage in meaningful scholarship and dynamic creative practices.

"We celebrate and nurture creativity everywhere—from classrooms to stages, studios to community spaces," said Stephanie Shonekan, dean of the College of Arts and Humanities. "We are so appreciative of this gift that will expand opportunities to think critically, expand empathy and explore what it means to be human—skills that matter now more than ever."

The gift reflects Clarice Smith's appreciation of the role of the arts in culture. "The humanities are a very good way of communicating," said David Bruce Smith. "You can't have a well-rounded education without the arts."

The University of Maryland (UMD) is the state's flagship university driven by a community of more than 50,000 fearless Terrapins. As a leading research university and top 20 public institution, UMD is proud to be part of the Association of American Universities. Dedicated to excellence and impact for the public good, the university is propelled by a \$1.4 billion joint research enterprise. UMD is the nation's first Do Good campus, and is consistently ranked for its innovation, research and top-tier academic programs. Located in the National Capital Region, the university offers an unparalleled student experience with federal internship opportunities, hundreds of academic programs and study abroad options, and top-ranked living-learning programs. Spurred by a culture of innovation and creativity, UMD's faculty are global leaders in their fields and include Nobel laureates, Pulitzer Prize winners and members of the national academies. Visit umd.edu

Summer Workshops and Support Groups Foster Healing After Loss

By ELYZABETH MARCUSSEN

Hospice of the Chesapeake

PASADENA, Md. (June 24, 2026)—Summer often brings opportunities to gather, reconnect and spend time outdoors. For those who are grieving, however, the season can also magnify feelings of loss and loneliness. Chesapeake Life Center offers a variety of workshops, support groups and special events throughout the summer designed to provide connection, comfort and meaningful opportunities for healing.

From nature-based experiences and creative expression to support groups, wellness programs and community gatherings, these offerings help participants navigate grief while connecting with others who understand. New programs such as Paws, Poses and Peace, which combines gentle yoga and therapy dogs, and Come S.I.T. Awhile, a daylong grief retreat for women, join longtime favorites like our Calvert County drop-in support groups and SoulCollage Studio.

With both in-person and virtual options available, the grief professionals at Hospice of the Chesapeake remain committed to helping individuals and families find hope, resilience and connection as they move through their grief journeys.

WORKSHOPS AND SPECIAL PROGRAMS

- **SoulCollage Studio:** Join others for a time to create unique collages reflecting and expressing loss and the journey through life. The group will meet from 2 to 5 p.m. on Mondays, July 6 and Sept. 14, at 9500 Medical Center Drive, Suite 250, Largo, Maryland. The supply fee is \$10.
- **Paws, Poses and Peace: Yoga and Therapy Dogs:** This event features guided meditation, soothing breathing exercises, gentle yoga postures and cuddle time with certified therapy dogs. Whether you're navigating grief, seeking stress relief, looking for a nurturing space to recharge, or simply love dogs and yoga, this event is open to everyone in the community. No experience, special ability or specific reason is required. Some mats will be available for use. It will take place from 6:30 to 8 p.m. on July 14 and Aug. 20 at the Center for Hope & Healing on Hospice of the Chesapeake's John & Cathy Belcher Campus in Pasadena. The cost is free.
- **Hope After Hours:** This workshop offers a relaxed, welcoming space for people navigating loss together. Come as you are, raise a glass to the ones you love, and find connection and understanding in community space. Both wine and non-alcoholic drinks will be available. Though individuals ages 18 and older are welcome, those wishing to consume alcohol must be age 21 or older and provide a valid ID. This will take place from 4:30 to 6 p.m., Wednesdays, July 15, Aug. 19 and Sept. 16, in

Hip-Hop as Healing: Graduate Students Advance New Therapy Research

By PRESS OFFICER
Bowie State University

Yohannes Girma and Caleb Floyd, third-year graduate students in the Mental Health Counseling master's program, are advancing emerging research that positions hip-hop as a powerful tool in modern mental health treatment. Their work explores how elements of hip-hop culture—particularly freestyle rap—can unlock new pathways for emotional expression, self-reflection and therapeutic engagement.

Building on foundational work introduced by psychologist and hip-hop therapy pioneer Edgar Tyson in 1998, Girma and Floyd examine how rap, dance and storytelling translate into clinical practice. Their research focuses specifically on freestyle rap, identifying it as an underutilized therapeutic technique that encourages spontaneous, unfiltered expression.

Through their findings, Girma and Floyd highlight freestyle rap's ability to help individuals articulate deeply personal experiences in ways that traditional talk therapy may not. Their research suggests that the improvisational nature of the practice fosters authenticity, lowers emotional barriers and creates a cathartic outlet for processing trauma and identity.

Their work contributes to a growing body of research that recognizes culturally responsive approaches as critical to effective mental health care, particularly for underrepresented and mar-



Yohannes Girma and Caleb Floyd

PHOTO COURTESY [HTTPS://BOWIESTATE.EDU](https://bowiestate.edu)

ginalized communities.

Girma and Floyd credit Bowie State with shaping their research lens and commitment to this work. Both students previously attended predominantly white institutions and say that studying at an HBCU has strengthened their focus on equity in mental health care.

Girma noted that the supportive environment has allowed him to grow both personally and academically.

"This is a space where most people look like me. We all have biases, but not having to face microaggressions based on race helped me learn and grow."

Floyd emphasized the role of faculty mentorship in refining both his research interests and professional path.

Walkathon from A1

Cell Disease Association of America Inc. and those affected by sickle cell disease.

The walkathon is free to attend, but registration is required. Participants who raise over \$25 receive a T-shirt. To learn more and register, visit bit.ly/SCDAWalk2026.

Sickle cell disease is a rare inherited blood disease causing red blood cells

to take a sickle shape, which leads to blockages that prevent blood from reaching parts of the body. As a result, people with sickle cell complications can experience anemia, jaundice, gallstones, stroke, chronic pain, organ damage and premature death. More than 100,000 Americans live with sickle cell disease, and 2 million Americans have sickle cell trait. No universal cure exists.

Sickle Cell Disease Association of America Inc. *advocates for people affected by sickle cell conditions and empowers community-based organizations to maximize quality of life and raise public consciousness while advancing the search for a universal cure. The association and more than 50-member organizations support sickle cell research, public and professional health education and patient and community services.* (sicklecelldisease.org)

from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. Thursdays, July 9, Aug. 13 and Sept. 10 via Zoom. The cost is free.

- **Loss of Life Partner/Spouse Virtual Support Group:** This is a group for those who have experienced the loss of a life partner or spouse. It will meet from 10:30 a.m. to noon, Tuesdays, July 14, Aug. 11 and Sept. 8 via Zoom. The cost is free.
- **Caregiving through Grief:** This virtual group is designed to support those who find themselves grieving while continuing to provide care and/or support to children or aging adults. Topics will include the loss of roles, caring when your reserve is depleted, supporting others in their grief and being intentional in your own. It will be held from 6 to 7 p.m. on Thursday, July 23, via Zoom. The cost is free.

MONTHLY GRIEF SUPPORT GROUPS:

- **Drop-In Grief Support Groups** are open to anyone grieving. Groups offer participants an opportunity to share their feelings and obtain support from others who are experiencing loss. There is no fee. These groups will meet in Calvert County as follows:
 - *North Beach Senior Center*, 9010 Chesapeake Ave., North Beach, Maryland, from 1 to 2 p.m. Wednesdays, July 1, Aug. 5 and Sept. 2.
 - *Southern Pines Senior Center*, 20 Appeal Lane, Lusby, Maryland, from 2 to 3 p.m. Tuesdays, July 14, Aug. 11 and Sept. 8.
 - *Calvert Pines Senior Center*, 450 W. Dares Beach Road, Prince Frederick, from 1 to 2 p.m. Tuesdays, July 21, Aug. 18 and Sept. 15.
- **Loss of Parent or Parental Figure Support Group:** This group provides space for adults ages 18 and older grieving the loss of a parent or parental figure to come together to feel supported in their grief. The group will meet from 6 to 7:30 p.m. Wednesdays, July 8, Aug. 12 and Sept. 9, on the John & Cathy Belcher Campus, 90 Ritchie Highway, Pasadena. The cost is free.
- **Child Loss Support Group:** This group is for parents grieving the death of a child, regardless of age or circumstance. It will meet at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, Sept. 28, in the Center for Hope & Healing on the John & Cathy Belcher Campus, 90 Ritchie Highway, Pasadena. The cost is free.

Unless noted, groups and workshops are intended for adults ages 18 and older. Except for drop-in groups, registration is required and can be completed by calling 1-888-501-7077 or emailing griefinfo@chesapeakelifecenter.org. For a complete listing of in-person and virtual groups and workshops for adults and children, visit www.hospicechesapeake.org/events.

Chesapeake Life Center, a program service of Hospice of the Chesapeake, serves hospice family members and the community with bereavement services and activities aimed at enhancing the quality of life for those grieving the loss of a loved one. For details, visit www.chesapeakelifecenter.org.

VIRTUAL GRIEF SUPPORT

- **Caring for the Caregiver:** This support group is available for family caregivers of any Chesapeake Supportive Care or Hospice of the Chesapeake patients or Partners In Care, Inc. clients. Topics will include the importance of self-care, effective coping skills and how to access local supportive resources. It will meet

BUSINESS AND FINANCE

Social Security Matters

Ask Rusty:

When Should My Wife Claim Social Security?

By RUSSELL GLOOR,
National Social Security Advisor at the AMAC Foundation,
the non-profit arm of the Association of Mature American Citizens

Dear Rusty: We could use guidance on optimum dates for my spouse to begin taking Social Security (SS). She doesn't have enough work credits on her own, so she will be using mine for spousal benefits. I was born in 1955, and I now get \$3,886 in monthly SS benefits. My wife was born in 1961. We currently receive about \$50,000 per year in royalties and VA disability payments that will stop upon my death.

So, with that in mind, can you suggest optimum dates for my wife to claim, based on my projected death in early 2027 or early 2030? My wife is very healthy and will likely live beyond 2040. Of course no one can predict their own passing; these are just random dates I came up with based on probabilities with my health issues.
Signed: Planning Ahead

Dear Planning Ahead: Life expectancy and financial need are primary factors for your wife to consider at this point, plus whether she is now working. Her full retirement age (FRA) for Social Security purposes is age 67 and, if she takes her spouse benefit before that, the monthly amount will be reduced (by about 8.3% for each year early), and she will also be subject to Social Security's Annual Earning Test which limits how much she can earn from working prior to reaching her FRA.

Statistically, your wife's life expectancy is about 87 (that's average longevity for a woman your wife's current age). Even though she isn't eligible for her own SS retirement benefits, she can still get a spousal benefit while you are both living and will get an even higher surviving spouse benefit when you die. That's because her spousal benefit (while both living) will be based on 50% of your full retirement age (FRA) entitlement, but your wife's surviving spouse benefits when you die will be based upon 100% of the benefit you were receiving at your death.

Generally, if you believe you will pass within the next few years, and your wife isn't working, her best option would be to claim her regular spouse benefit now. Although she will initially get less than 50% of your FRA entitlement, that amount will be replaced automatically by her higher survivor benefit when you pass. Depending on her age when you pass, she will get the full \$3,886 monthly amount you are receiving at your death (plus any COLA yet to be awarded). If that happens before she reaches her full retirement age, her monthly survivor amount will be actuarially reduced based upon how far before her FRA it is claimed. Generally, the survivor benefit reduction will be about 4.75% for each full year claimed early (about .396% for each month early).

So, to a large degree, your wife's options for spouse and survivor benefits are based on your expected longevity. If you have reason to believe you will pass within the next few years, then your wife should probably claim her spousal benefit now (while you are both living). Because she is a bit shy of 65 years old, her initial SS spouse benefit will be reduced (she'll get about 42% of your FRA benefit amount, instead of the 50% she would get if she claimed at age 67). She can collect that amount until you die, at which time she will receive her survivor's benefit as your widow. If she has reached age 67 when that happens, your wife's benefit will become the same as yours was when you died (the \$3,886, plus any COLA since awarded). And she will collect that higher SS survivor benefit for the remainder of her life which, from what you've shared, would likely be about 20+ years. Assuming her life expectancy is at least average, that is how your wife would get the most cumulative Social Security benefits over her lifetime.

As you have said, no one can predict how long they will live, but from the information you've provided, I expect that the above would likely be your wife's best Social Security strategy. And, for the record, I admire you exploring your wife's options in advance. I hope this answers your question, but rest assured we are always here if you need any further information.

This article is intended for information purposes only and does not represent legal or financial guidance. It presents the opinions and interpretations of the AMAC Foundation's staff, trained and accredited by the National Social Security Association (NSSA). NSSA and the AMAC Foundation and its staff are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Social Security Administration or any other governmental entity. To submit a question, visit our website (amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory) or email us at ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org.

The 2.4 million member Association of Mature American Citizens [AMAC] www.amac.us is a vibrant, vital senior advocacy organization that takes its marching orders from its members. AMAC Action is a non-profit, non-partisan organization representing the membership in our nation's capital and in local Congressional Districts throughout the country. And the AMAC Foundation (www.AmacFoundation.org) is the Association's non-profit organization, dedicated to supporting and educating America's Seniors. Together, we act and speak on the Association members' behalf, protecting their interests and offering a practical insight on how to best solve the problems they face today. Live long and make a difference by joining us today at www.amac.us/join-amac.

Hospice of the Chesapeake Welcomes 3 Distinguished Leaders to its Team

By ELYZABETH MARCUSSEN
Hospice of the Chesapeake

PASADENA, Md. (June 22, 2026)—Hospice of the Chesapeake is pleased to announce the appointment of three accomplished professionals to its senior leadership team: Shawn Essien as vice president of human resources, Donna Grande as chief transformation officer, and Melanie Gibson as regional director of hospice operations for its southern region. Together, they bring decades of leadership experience, a commitment to organizational excellence and a proven ability to drive meaningful change.

Essien joined the organization in June and brings more than 20 years of experience as a human resources executive and licensed employment attorney. Her career has been built at the intersection of employment law, labor relations and culture development in mission-driven organizations. She has extensive experience working in complex, highly regulated environments, including unionized workforces, collective bargaining, equal employment opportunity compliance and organizational development.

Most recently, Essien served as head of people and culture for the ACLU of Maryland, where she led initiatives ranging from human resources information system implementation to hybrid return-to-work planning. She partnered closely with executive leadership on workforce strategy, employee engagement and labor relations.

Essien holds a Juris Doctor degree and Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR) and Society for Human Resource Management Senior Certified Professional (SHRM-SCP) certifications. This unique combination of legal and human resources expertise allows her to approach people strategy with a deep understanding of the legal and organizational factors that shape workplace decisions. She is recognized for fostering high-performing, people-centered cultures built on trust, accountability and engagement.

As vice president of human resources, Essien will lead the organization's human resources strategy and team as Hospice of the Chesapeake continues its commitment to becoming an employer of choice in the communities it serves.

Grande joined Hospice of the Chesapeake last fall and was appointed chief transformation officer in January. She brings more than 30 years of executive leadership experience developing innovative programs, strategic initiatives and organizational transformations that deliver measurable results.

In her role, Grande partners with leaders across the organization to advance



COURTESY PHOTO

Shawn Essien, Vice President of Human Resources



COURTESY PHOTO

Melanie Gibson, Regional Director of Hospice Operations - South



COURTESY PHOTO

Donna Grande, Chief Transformation Officer

strategic priorities, strengthen operational effectiveness and support sustainable growth. Known for her collaborative leadership style and results-driven approach,

she applies evidence-based practices and innovative strategies to improve organizational performance and enhance outcomes.

Prior to joining Hospice of the Chesapeake, Grande held executive leadership positions with the American Medical Association, the American Nurses Association and the American College of Preventive Medicine. She also led national campaigns for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health and directed major strategic and philanthropic initiatives for organizations including The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the National Cancer Institute, the American Cancer Society and the Visiting Nurse Associations of America.

Gibson is a seasoned hospice and palliative care leader with more than 25 years of experience driving clinical excellence, operational performance and patient-centered care. She joins Hospice of the Chesapeake from AccentCare/Seasons Hospice and Palliative Care, where she served as senior regional director of operations overseeing inpatient hospice operations across multiple markets.

Throughout her career, Gibson has demonstrated a passion for developing teams, improving quality outcomes and ensuring compassionate care for patients and families. She has earned a Master of Healthcare Administration, a Bachelor of Science in Nursing and is a Certified Hospice and Palliative Nurse (CHPN). In her new role, Gibson will lead hospice operations in Calvert, Charles and Prince George's counties.

"We are thrilled to welcome Shawn, Donna and Melanie to our leadership team," said Becky Miller, president and CEO of Hospice of the Chesapeake. "Their combined experience, vision and commitment to mission-driven leadership will help strengthen our organization as we continue to grow and expand our impact throughout the communities we serve."

Hospice of the Chesapeake provides expert, compassionate care for individuals and families navigating serious advanced illness and loss. Care is built around a genuine partnership between skilled clinicians, healthcare partners and the patients and families we serve—centered on supporting quality of life at every stage. For more than 45 years, we have had the privilege of caring for more than 65,000 patients and more than 100,000 family members across the communities we serve. Hospice of the Chesapeake is proud to be a part of Chesapeake Health Partners, an organization focused on strengthening community-based care and support services across the region.

Governor Moore Announces New Workforce Partnership With RAISE US

By PRESS OFFICER
Office of the Governor

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (June 25, 2026)—Governor Wes Moore today announced Maryland's partnership with RAISE US, a national non-profit organization that partners with states, employers, workers, and educators to build workforce infrastructure that supports and trains workers to thrive in an AI economy. The partnership between RAISE US and the state will further the Moore-Miller administration's work in preparing Maryland workers, employers, and community organizations to succeed in a future shaped by AI and emerging technologies.

"Marylanders are concerned about how quickly artificial intelligence is moving, and they want to know what it means for their jobs, their families, and their future," said Gov. Moore. "That's why my administration is moving with urgency to empower and strengthen our workforce with the skills, tools, and resources they need to meet this moment. This partnership with RAISE US builds on our commitment to creating real pathways to work, wages, and wealth for all."

In Maryland, RAISE US will design and pilot new corporate incentives to retrain and redeploy workers, fresh approaches to support people through job transitions, and training models tied to real employer demand. The partnership will expand Maryland's Service Year Option pathways into sectors such as healthcare and education, launch a competitive fund for innovative career transition models, and create an accelerator that helps displaced workers pursue entrepreneurship.

"America has a technology strategy for leading the global AI competition. It does not yet have a people strategy—and we cannot lead without one," said Gina Raimondo, Co-founder and CEO of RAISE US. "If we build the best AI systems in the world and leave millions of Americans behind, we won't have won anything; we'll have automated our own decline. I believe AI will create new jobs and industries over time, but the transition could be disruptive, and it's already underway. We shouldn't fearmonger, but we can't pretend our training and worker support systems are ready, either. It's

time for innovative and practical solutions. This moment demands ambition, urgency, and creativity. We've assembled the country's leading companies, best economists, and philanthropy at a scale rarely seen—all to advance new ideas and incentives, pilot them with governors and business, and scale what works."

The Moore-Miller administration continues to directly invest in workforce development to prepare for and lead in the new AI economy, reinforcing the administration's dedication to Maryland's workforce.

The Prince George's Post

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HEALTH *and* WELLNESS

Shingles Raises Heart and Stroke Risk



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Protect Yourself with Vaccination

FEATURE IMPACT

Shingles isn't just a painful rash and nerve pain. It's also linked with a higher risk of serious cardiovascular events, including heart attack and stroke, especially in the weeks to months after infection. However, shingles is largely preventable with vaccination.

The world's leading nonprofit organization focused on changing the future of health for all, the American Heart Association, reminds eligible adults to protect themselves by getting vaccinated and staying on top of their heart health.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about 1 in 3 adults in the U.S. will get shingles in their lifetime. If you've had chickenpox, the virus that causes shingles, also known as herpes zoster, is already inside you. It can "wake up" years later, causing painful blisters and nerve pain that can last for months or longer.

After a shingles episode, one large study published in the "Journal of the American Heart Association" found the risk of heart attack and stroke was nearly 30% higher in the short term and may persist over time.

"Shingles can be very painful and knock you down for weeks," said Eduardo Sanchez, M.D., FAHA, the American Heart Association's chief medical officer for prevention. "It's also associated with a higher chance of heart and stroke problems afterward. If you're 50 or older, or have a weakened immune system, talk to your doctor or pharmacist about the shingles vaccine. It's a simple step that can keep you healthier."

Knowing your risk is the first step toward prevention. Age is the most important risk factor for developing shingles. As people age, their immune systems naturally weaken, making it easier for the virus to reactivate. People over 50, and especially those living with heart disease, diabetes or other chronic illnesses, are more likely to develop shingles.

The risk of serious complications from shingles increases:

- As you get older
- If you take drugs that keep your immune system from working properly, like steroids and drugs given after an organ transplant
- If you have medical conditions that keep your immune system from working properly such as certain cancers like leukemia and lymphoma, or HIV infection

Heart Health Made Simpler

In addition to ensuring you're up to date on your vaccines, talk to your health care professional about ways you can improve your overall heart health. According to the American Heart Association, heart disease remains the leading cause of death, taking more lives in the United States than any other cause.

Following healthy lifestyle guidance like Life's Essential 8 can make inroads toward preventing heart disease and stroke, and improving brain health. The set of four health behaviors (eat better, be more active, quit tobacco and get healthy sleep) and four health factors (manage weight, control cholesterol, manage blood sugar and manage blood pressure) are key measures for improving and maintaining cardiovascular health.

How to Get the Shingles Vaccine

1. **Check eligibility:** Recommended by the CDC for adults 50-plus and adults 19 and older with weakened immune systems.
2. **Find a location:** Most national pharmacies, many primary care and specialty clinics and local health departments offer it. Search your pharmacy's app or website, or call your clinician's office.
3. **Book it:** Make an appointment online or by phone. Same day or walk in options may be available at pharmacies.
4. **Bring what you need:** Photo ID, insurance card and a list of medicines and allergies. Wear a short sleeve shirt, if you can.
5. **Plan for two doses, 2-6 months apart:** When you schedule dose one, set a reminder or book dose two before you leave.
6. **Cost and coverage:** Many health plans, including Medicare Part D, cover shingles vaccination at low or no cost. Check your benefits or ask the pharmacy to verify coverage.
7. **After your shot:** A sore arm, fatigue, headache or mild fever are common and usually go away in 2-3 days. Call your clinician about severe or persistent symptoms.
8. **If you've had shingles before:** You can still get vaccinated after you recover. Ask your health care provider about timing.

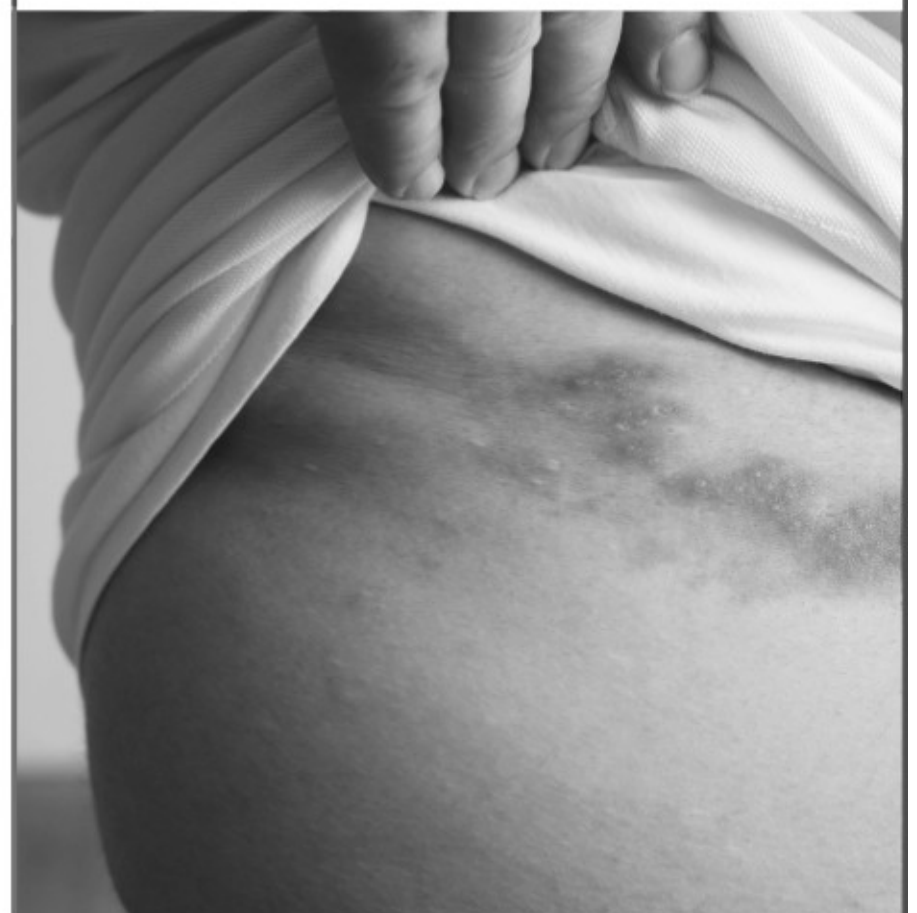
Learn more at heart.org/shingles.

Signs and Symptoms of Shingles

Symptoms to watch for: tingling, itching or burning on one side of the body or face; a stripe like rash that turns into fluid filled blisters; headache; fever; or chills.

Act fast: If you think you have shingles, contact your health care professional right away. Treatment works best within 72 hours of the rash appearing. If the rash is near your eye or you have eye pain or changes in vision, seek urgent care.

Lasting impact: The rash typically scabs over and clears within 2-4 weeks, but the pain in the rash area can last about a month. The duration of pain seems to increase with age.



Protect Yourself (and Others) from Shingles

If you have shingles, you can stop the spread by covering the rash and avoiding touching or scratching it. You should also wash your hands often, for at least 20 seconds, and avoid contact with people who may be at heightened risk until your rash scabs over, including:

- Pregnant women who never had chickenpox or the chickenpox vaccine
- Premature or low-birthweight infants
- People with weakened immune systems

EarthTalk® Q&A Polyester Clothing & Microplastics in Our Bloodstreams

By Alexander Birk | June 21, 2026

Dear EarthTalk:

Is it true that polyester clothing might be a significant factor in the microplastics in our bodies and bloodstreams?

—Steve Wilson, New York, NY

Plastic in the 21st century can be described simply: ubiquitous. We see it in food packaging and water bottles, but it is also present in cosmetics and clothing. The invention of plastic in 1907 ushered in a new era of convenience. A story in Life magazine from 1955, “Throwaway Living,” encouraged housewives to ditch chores and turn to single-use disposable kitchenware, and plastic use never looked back. In the past few decades, plastic production skyrocketed to 8.3 billion tons as of 2021. According to the United Nations, polyester production alone has increased 900 percent since 1980.

When reflecting on plastic pollution, co-founder of Stanford Medicine’s Plastics and Health Working Group, Desiree LaBeaud, put it perfectly: “Plastic never goes away—it just breaks down into finer and finer particles.” Polyester fibers are extreme offenders when it comes to shedding microplastics. The fibers from polyester and nylon easily travel through air and water making them difficult to avoid.

One shocking headline says that we consume a credit card’s worth of plastic each week, while a less eye-catching article disputed

that claim, estimating 23,000 years to ingest that amount. The reality of these vast differences is that there are no standardized methods to measure microplastics yet. When reviewing microplastics in 2022, The World Health Organization explained they could not come to a conclusion on their impact because of a lack of reliable data.

Nonetheless there is evidence that microplastics accumulate in the human body. We ingest it in our food and water, and it’s in our air. Per the Chair of Environmental Toxicology at City University in Hong Kong, small enough particles can even enter the body through the skin; not something you want to hear while wearing a polyester shirt. Initial observations suggest that microplastics may negatively impact digestive, respiratory, endocrine, reproductive and immune systems.

This is mostly observed in nonhuman animals thus far. Kara Meister, who studies microplastics’ roles in pediatric disease at Stanford Medicine says “probably within the next year or two we’ll have a couple more big landmark papers [which will inform us on the impacts of microplastics in humans].” Meister urges people not to succumb to “doomsday” thinking because we have plastics in our bodies. She instead encourages people to live a healthy lifestyle with good sleep, diet and stress management, saying “Giving your body the best shot to deal with whatever might come along is the best you can do.”



PHOTO CREDIT: PEXELS.COM.

Some researchers think microplastics may be accumulating in your body if you wear a lot of polyester.

CONTACTS: Microplastics and our health: What the science says, med.stanford.edu/news/insights/2025/01/microplastics-in-body-polluted-tiny-plastic-fragments.html.

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Milestone from A1

“As we celebrate the nation’s 250th, this is also a defining moment for Southern Maryland. We’re working to bring more visitors and investments to communities, main streets, and cultural sites across all four counties,” said Lucille Walker, executive director of the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area. “Today, we are letting people know that this Master Plan will be released for their input and ideas this summer, providing an opportunity to shape a plan that will carry Southern Maryland’s legacy forward.”

Walker added, “Southern Maryland’s story is central to America’s story, and we are celebrating that today.”

SMNHA partners also gathered for the dedication of a Maryland Liberty Tree, a tulip poplar—and living symbol of the nation’s founding—planted on the grounds where Thomas Stone, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, once lived. The tree is a direct scion of the last surviving Liberty Tree from the Revolutionary era, which stood in Maryland until 1999. The tree joins a network of 23 others being planted in each of Maryland’s 23 counties and Baltimore City in 2026 through the Maryland Liberty Tree Project.

The Liberty Tree dedication also acknowledged that Southern Maryland’s story begins long before the founding era. Chairman Francis Gray of the Piscataway Conoy Tribe reminded attendees that the role of Tulip Poplars evolved over time, and for the Piscataway people, provided resources to live and thrive as stewards of this land for millennia.

“Freedom, from a Tribal perspective, is to live under a process of self-determination,” said Francis Gray, Tribal Chairman of the Piscataway Conoy Tribe. “The ancestors of this sapling provided a space for the idea for one to exercise their voice. For the Piscataway, the Tulip Poplar gave itself entirely. Its bark covered our longhouses, its body provided the resources for our dugout canoes, and its blooms provided a reminder that Spring has arrived after a long winter. However, for its survival, for our survival, we must ensure that it’s respected and nurtured, symbolically and physically.”

The celebration featured early American musical performances by David and Ginger Hildebrand, live jazz by Ellington Carthan Quartet, and an exhibitor lane showcasing heritage, cultural, and conservation partners from across the region at the Thomas Stone National Historic Site. It is one of nine national parks and historic sites within the SMNHA, which are critical to attracting visitors, supporting local economies, and ensuring the region’s most significant stories are preserved and interpreted for future generations.

“National heritage areas are the National Park Service at its best. Especially as we’re heading toward the 250th anniversary of America’s independence, they bring people of all walks of life together to reflect on our long, sometimes beautiful, sometimes difficult history,” said Alan Spears, Senior Director of Cultural Resources, National Parks Conservation Association. “The Southern Maryland National Heritage Area, and its national parks and historic sites are now more important than ever, and I look forward to working with all the partners to continue preserving it for the future.”

The Master Plan represents more than a preservation strategy; it is an economic development plan. Statewide, the Heritage Area Program, which includes SMNHA, generates \$2.4 billion in annual economic activity and supports more than 40,000 jobs. More than \$5.1 million is returned directly to local communities each year through the program, a \$7 return for every \$1 invested. Today’s milestone positions Southern Maryland to capture a greater share of that impact for its small businesses, Main Streets, and rural economies.

Residents and stakeholders who wish to help shape the heritage area’s next chapter are encouraged to visit destinationsouthernmaryland.com/management-plan for updates on the upcoming public comment period.

As a newly designated National Heritage Area, the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area represents Calvert, Charles, St. Mary’s, and southern Prince George’s Counties with a mission to enhance the region through innovative heritage tourism experiences, comprehensive cultural and natural resource conservation, and excellence in educational opportunities. To learn more, visit our website: <https://destinationsouthernmaryland.com/>.

The Maryland Liberty Tree Project is a coalition of statewide leaders including the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area, the Maryland Heritage Areas Coalition, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Preservation Maryland, the Maryland Center for History and Culture, and the Maryland 250 Commission. Formed in 2025, the Maryland Liberty Tree Project aims to amplify Maryland’s legacy in shaping the American story and encourage the shared responsibility of democracy. Learn more about the coalition at www.mdlibertytree.org.

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