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Bowie State Men's Basketball Gives Back Through Community Service With Brighter Bites

By PRESS OFFICER
Bowie State University Athletics

BOWIE, Md. (Nov.1, 2026)—The Bowie State University men's basketball team took time away from the court to give back to the community, volunteering with Brighter Bites.

Brighter Bites is a nonprofit organization serving the D.C. metropolitan area that works to improve health and wellness by increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables. The Bulldogs, alongside head coach Bryan Wilson and assistant coach Anthony Carpenter, supported the organization's efforts by preparing fresh produce and goods for distribution to local families.



PHOTO COURTESY BOWIE STATE UNIVERSITY ATHLETICS

The Bulldogs supported Brighter Bites' efforts by preparing fresh produce and goods for distribution to local families.

Community service is an important part of the Bowie State Athletics experience, providing student-athletes with opportunities to make a positive impact beyond competition. Through initiatives like this, Bulldogs student-athletes can connect with the communities they represent, support families in need, and understand the value of using their platform to serve others.

For the men's basketball program, the afternoon was about more than volunteering. It was an opportunity to demonstrate teamwork, leadership, and a commitment to making a difference. While success on the court remains a priority, the Bulldogs recognize that representing Bowie State also means being active, engaged members of the community.

Bowie State Athletics is proud to support organizations like Brighter Bites that are working to create healthier communities and provide meaningful resources to local families. For the most up-to-date information on Bowie State Athletics and its 14 varsity sport teams, please visit BSUBulldogs.com and follow the Bulldogs on social media.

PGCPS and Health Department Join Efforts to Address Illnesses in Schools

Prince George's County joint task force coordinates response to increased illness-related absences and shares steps to protect students, staff and families

By PRESS OFFICER
PGCPS

CAPITOL HEIGHTS, Md. (Nov. 5, 2026)—Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) and the Prince George's County Health Department (PGCHD) have formed a joint task force to address recent increases in illness-related absences among students and staff at several PGCPS schools and strengthen efforts to prevent the spread of communicable illnesses.

The task force brings together representatives from PGCPS School Health and Communications and PGCHD Environmental Health and Communications. The partners are coordinating their response to current concerns and developing a framework for addressing similar situations in the future.

"It was important for leadership in both organizations to address this issue head-on and create a best practice for how similar issues will be addressed moving forward," said Dr. Naomi Tomoyasu, Deputy Health Officer for the Prince George's County Health Department. "With cold and flu season approaching, this collaboration can help protect our school communities for years to come."

In an October 30 memorandum to employees, PGCPS Superintendent Shawn Joseph, Ed.D., emphasized that influenza-like illness, COVID-19, gastrointestinal illnesses and other communicable diseases can spread quickly in school settings.

The PGCPS Office of School Health is monitoring illness trends and urges employees to

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Flippo Construction Earns Fifth Dig Smart Award for Utility Damage Prevention

By PRESS OFFICER
Flippo Construction Company

FORESTVILLE, Md. (Nov. 3, 2026)—Flippo Construction Company has received the Dig Smart Award for the fifth time, earning the 2025–2026 honor from the Miss Utility DC/MD Damage Prevention Committee for their work in Washington, D.C. and their commitment to underground utility damage prevention.

Presented annually to underground utility contractors in Washington, D.C. and Maryland, the Dig Smart Award recognizes excellence in damage prevention. Winners are selected by a panel of industry experts following a review of each nominee's damage prevention procedures, employee training programs, and enforcement of damage prevention laws.



PHOTO COURTESY FLIPPO CONSTRUCTION COMPANY

Accepting the Dig Smart Award is from left, Josh Flippo, Vice President of Flippo Construction Company, Gary McClanahan, Risk Manager for Flippo Construction Company, and Kevin Woolbright, MD/DC Damage Prevention Chairman for Miss Utility.



Flippo's Risk Manager, Gary McClanahan, accepted the award at the annual Greater Chesapeake Damage Prevention & Training Conference in Ocean City, Md. McClanahan thanked "all of Flippo's hard-working employee-owners for making this award possible."

"At Flippo, damage prevention is more than simply following procedures. It requires planning, communication, attention to detail, and a commitment from every employee involved in the excavation process," said John Morgan, President of Flippo Construction. "Those efforts protect not only our employees and existing infrastructure but also the communities we serve. I am extremely proud of our team's commitment, and it is especially rewarding to see their hard work recognized."

Flippo Construction Company is a 100% employee-owned underground utility and structural concrete contractor based in Forestville, Maryland, serving Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Northern Virginia. The company recently celebrated its 55th anniversary.

Governor Moore, Lieutenant Governor Aruna Miller and Maryland State House Trust Unveil Monument Honoring Black Revolutionary War Soldiers

By PRESS OFFICER
Office of the Governor

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (Nov. 2, 2026)—On Nov. 2, Governor Wes Moore, Chair of the State House Trust Lieutenant Governor Aruna Miller, and the other members of the Maryland State House Trust unveiled the first major addition to the State House grounds in over a century with a monument honoring more than 150 Black Marylanders who served in the Revolutionary War.

Commissioned by the State House Trust in 2023 in recognition of the 250th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the monument cements the legacy of service and selflessness for the soldiers whose existence and contribution have been largely unknown in Maryland's public history.

"Today, we honor the patriots who sacrificed everything, for the hope of us," said Gov. Moore. "This statue will remind everyone that the freedoms we enjoy today are built on the backs of the brave Black soldiers who fought in the Revolutionary War. It is also a promise to continue the work of patriotism, inspiring us to build a brighter tomorrow for future generations."

The unveiling ceremony featured a rendition of Lift Every Voice and Sing performed by Delegate Malcolm Ruff, followed by remarks from the Maryland State House Trust. Governor Moore was joined by Lieutenant Governor Aruna Miller, House Speaker Joseline Peña-Melnyk, Senate President Bill Ferguson and the First Lady Dawn Moore to officially unveil the monument. The sculpture was created by artist Branly Cadet, who was selected by a Monument Advisory Committee following a nationwide call for artists that generated more than 50 proposals.

"These Black patriots risked their lives for freedoms they themselves were denied," said Lt. Governor Aruna Miller. "They fought not just for the America of their time, but for the America that could be. This monument ensures their sacrifices will never be forgotten. And the greatest way to honor their legacy is to continue what they started—widening the circle of freedom and building a more just America for generations to come."

"In Maryland, we proudly celebrate our rich

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PHOTO COURTESY MARYLAND GOVERNOR'S PRESS OFFICE

Governor Wes Moore and Lieutenant Governor Aruna Miller unveiled Acts of Agency, the first major addition to the State House grounds in over a century with a monument honoring more than 150 Black Marylanders who served in the Revolutionary War. The artist Branly Cadet is second from right.

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TOWNS and NEIGHBORS

Brandywine-Aquasco by Audrey Johnson 301-922-5384

CHRISTMAS BAZAAR

Vendors wanted for our Christmas Bazaar to be held at Christ Episcopal Church, 8710 Old Branch Avenue, Clinton, MD on Saturday, December 5, 2026, 9 a.m.–4 p.m. FEE: $40 per table space (you must provide your own table). Contact: Lucille Belgrave 240-326-3637 christepiscopalchurchclinton@gmail.com.

WOMEN'S DAY PROGRAM

You are invited to join Clinton United Women in Faith at their Annual Women's Day Program (Unstoppable Women in Christ Philippians 4:13). Sunday, November 15, 2026, at their 10:30 a.m. worship service. Melana Trice Pastor. Please include shades of green in your Sunday attire. Hats and fascinators are encouraged. Clinton Church address is 10700 Brandywine Road, Clinton, Maryland.

HOLIDAYS AT NATIONAL HARBOR

The holiday season comes alive at National Harbor with festive events, memorable experiences, delectable bites and gifts for everyone. Nightly Tree Light Show runs every half hour from sunset to 9 p.m. beginning November 7. Watch our 60-foot RGB tree come to life nightly. The breathtaking light show dances alongside a holiday medley recorded by the United States Air Force Band. Festive Fireworks: Join us Saturday nights from November 7–December 26 at 5:30 p.m. for a spectacular fireworks display following the tree lighting show.

Experience So Much Christmas and Ice! At Gaylord National November 14, 2026–January 3, 2027. A beloved holiday story comes to life in ice! Featuring "How the Grinch Stole Christmas!" Journey through captivating tunnels, zip down two-story ice slides, and see your favorite characters including the Grinch, Cindy-Lou Who, Max, and more all intricately carved out of 2 million pounds of ice. Race down towering slides made of pure ice, standing as tall as a basketball hoop. Total time the artisans spend to create our signature Christmas attraction is 12,000 hours. 1.4M attendees visited Ice in 2025 across six locations in the United States. Colorful Chemistry. The vibrant colors in the ice sculptures are specially created by a chemist with a proprietary formula to ensure it closely matched each character's specific colors and to maintain its bright color for the entire season.

Expert Artisans: Traveling over 6,000 miles from Harbin, China (known as "Ice City"), 40 artisans use their master sculpting skills passed down through generations to carve ice! Over six weeks. Weighing in at a total of 2 million pounds, Ice! Featuring "How the Grinch Stole Christmas!" includes elaborate scenes sculpted from 6,700 massive blocks of ice. Crafty Tools: The carvers use chisels, chippers, tongs, handsaws, grinders, and even chainsaws to bring the experience to life. Some artisans have collected custom made tools to perfect the irregular shapes and achieve the highest level of detail. The Design: The artisans follow a 300-page design book filled with hand-drawn, to scale sketches and blueprints to create every sculpture featured throughout the 19,000 square-foot frozen attraction. Carver's Showcase: Once the completed masterpiece is open for guests, a few artisans stay onsite at the exhibit to preserve the icy designs and perform daily, live sculpting demonstrations to showcase their craft.

No time limits. Enjoy the self-guided experience at your leisure. Cool, controlled temperatures keep the icy designs intact at 9 degrees Fahrenheit. All ages. Entertaining for both kids and adults. Come for the day or make it a Christmas vacation with one of our overnight ice packages and enjoy the splendor of the holiday season at Gaylord National, 201 Waterfront Street, National Harbor, Maryland. Phone: 1-888-376-9286.

CLINTON UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

"We gathered Sunday morning November 1, 2026, at our worship service between memory and hope carrying love that cannot erase. We came remembering those who have gone before us. Saints whose lives still shine among us. Though grief may linger and tears may fall. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. Encouraging us, strengthening us, walking with us still. In this sacred space, we name, we remember, we give thanks and we trust that love is stronger than death. Let us worship the God of light, who holds us in every season."

November 1, 2026, at our morning worship service the Saints remembered were Barbara Washington, Francis K. Powell, Sylvia Blackwell, Frederick D. Harrod, Sr., Marcus Barnes, Delores Atkinson, Valeria Collins, Gracie Marshall, Jerry Johnson, Sr., Marion Gibson, Gloria Scott, Ophela Snow, Arthur McGill, Donnie Ray Lewis, Harvey Lewis, Pete Nesmith, Michael Scott, Richard Allen Jones.

AMERICA RECYCLES DAY

Get ready to celebrate America Recycles Day! Small actions can lead to big impact! Each year on November 15, millions of Americans come together for America Recycles Day all about spreading the word on how recycling helps us reduce waste.

CELEBRATE NATIONAL RECYCLING DAY

In recognition of National Recycling Day, the Prince George's County Office of Community Relations invites residents to join us for a tour of the County's Materials and Recycling Facility. Learn more about the County's recycling process, explore how recyclable materials are handled, and discover how recycling supports a more sustainable and circular economy. This is a great opportunity to gain a better understanding of how residents can help reduce and protect our environment. Event Details: Date: Monday, November 16, 2026. Time: 12 p.m. Location: Prince George's County Materials and Recycling Facility. Address: 1000 Ritchie Road, Capitol Heights, Maryland. Space is limited and you need to register. We look forward to seeing you there as we work together toward a cleaner, green Prince George's County.

Monument from A1

history and will always honor those who served this country," said First Lady Dawn Moore. "Thanks to the work of the State House Trust and with our administration's support, we are carrying forward the legacy of these brave Marylanders and creating a space where the next generation can be inspired by their service to our nation."

"It has been an honor to work with all the public servants, authors, historians, reenactors, landscape and other design professionals, installers and construction crews to help bring this early American story back to life," said artist Branly Cadet. "I hope our efforts honor the legacy of the Black Patriots who risked so much for a better future."

In conjunction with the unveiling, the Maryland State Archives launched a new webpage (https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/main/html/blackpatriots.html) with additional information on the service of Black Patriots from Maryland and the monument's creation.

Approximately 5,000 Black soldiers fought on the American side during the Revolutionary War. Although some were restricted to noncombatant roles, many served in regular infantry units alongside white soldiers. In Maryland, free Black men began enlisting in the summer of 1776. By 1778, enslaved men were permitted to serve as substitutes for white soldiers, and after 1780, enslaved men could enlist of their own accord.

The monument serves as a lasting tribute to these Marylanders, whose service and sacrifice helped write the first pages of our nation's history, and ensures their stories are remembered by generations to come.

The Maryland Department of General Services managed this project in collaboration with the Maryland State Arts Council (Maryland Commission on Public Art) and the Maryland State Archives (Commission on Artistic Property).



PHOTOS COURTESY MARYLAND GOVERNOR'S PRESS OFFICE

The Pursuit of Transcendent Liberty, above, and Towards Freedom, below.



More on the artist: Branly Cadet is a classically trained American sculptor and artist. He renders the human form in realist tradition, but considers himself a modernist who enjoys combining figurative sculpture with modernist strategies including text, abstraction, metaphor, and spatial dynamics. He seeks to create works of art that invite aesthetic, civic, and psychic contemplation. Cadet began studying sculpture at Cornell University and continued his studies in figurative art at the New York Academy of Art, and in France at the Vaugel Sculpture Studio and L'Ecole Albert Defois. Soon after, he won the prestigious James Wilbur Johnston National Figure Sculpture Competition.

Student Focus

Nuri Abdus-Salaam Named to 2025–26 Men's Wheelchair Basketball Team at UW-Whitewater

WHITEWATER, Wisc. (Nov. 5, 2026)—**Nuri Abdus-Salaam from Bowie, MD**, who is studying Criminology at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, is part of the men's wheelchair basketball team for the 2026–27 season.

The UW-Whitewater men's wheelchair basketball program is a club sport that competes nationally. The Warhawks have won 14 national championships since 1982, most recently in 2024 and including a three-peat in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

Many of the program's alumni are Paralympic medalists, including five who claimed gold as part of Team USA at the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games. Current UW-Whitewater coach Jake Williams, a former Warhawk student-athlete, was among the alums who competed in Paris.

The new season begins Nov. 14–15 with the Second City Showdown at Broadway Armory Park in Chicago.

UW-Whitewater hosts its annual home tournament Friday-Saturday, Nov. 20–21, at the Williams Center.

Shenandoah University Announces 2027 Global Citizenship Project Participants

WINCHESTER, Va. (Nov. 5, 2026)—Shenandoah University student **Abree Butts, of Upper Marlboro**, is one of 50 individuals who was selected for the university's 2027 Global Citizenship Project (GCP).

These students, faculty and staff members will travel to one of five international destinations during spring break in March 2027. Participants will learn their destinations and trip leaders at Shenandoah University's International Convocation on Nov. 18.

The Global Citizenship Project will celebrate its 22nd year in 2027. Since its inaugural year in 2005, the Global Citizenship Project has sent over 1,450 students, staff, faculty and trustees to over 70 countries and seven U.S. states and territories so that each participant might learn more about the world and themselves. To learn more about GCP, visit su.edu/gcp.

Walton Global Announces $100,000 in Scholarships for 10 Westphalia Students

Each recipient awarded a four-year scholarship of up to $10,000 through the Walton-Westphalia Scholarship Fund

UPPER MARLBORO, Md. (Oct. 30, 2026)—Walton Global announced the 2026 recipients of the Walton-Westphalia Scholarship Fund, recognizing 10 Westphalia students pursuing higher education in fields ranging from engineering and architecture to business administration and real estate.

Each recipient will receive a $10,000 scholarship, distributed in annual installments of $2,500 over four years of post-secondary education. The awards represent a $100,000 investment as part of Walton's broader $400,000 commitment to expanding educational opportunity for residents of the broader Westphalia community.

The 2026 Walton-Westphalia Scholarship recipients are:

- **Darryl Ansah**, University of Pittsburgh
- **Mark Allen-Shorter**, Liberty University
- **Matthew Allen-Shorter**, Virginia State University
- **Morgan Virgil**, Howard University
- **Carroll Fortune**, Howard University
- **Kayla Ambris**, Morgan State University
- **Ronald Williams Jr.**, Wilmington University
- **Morgan Marshall**, Towson University
- **Kennedy Heard**, North Carolina A&T State University
- **Michelle Jefferson**, Morgan State University

"These awardees represent the amazing pool of talent and potential that already exist within the Westphalia community," said Bill Doherty, CEO of Walton Global. "Through the Walton-Westphalia Scholarship Fund, we are proud to invest in their education and support the next generation of professionals who will help shape strong, sustainable communities for years to come."

The recipients were selected through a community-based Scholarship Selection Committee composed of Westphalia residents and a Walton representative. The selection process reflects the scholarship program's emphasis on creating meaningful educational opportunities for residents while supporting areas of study connected to development, sustainability, and community growth.

The program supports studies across business, real estate, engineering, planning, environmental sciences, and related disciplines that contribute to community development, sustainability, and environmental stewardship. Together, their academic paths reflect the many disciplines that contribute to building and sustaining viable communities.

The Walton-Westphalia Scholarship Fund was established as part of Walton's commitment to ensuring that the continued growth of Westphalia creates opportunities for the people who call the community home.

For more information on the Walton-Westphalia Scholarship Fund and the 2026 recipients, visit www.westphalia.com.

Georgia Tech Summer 2026 Graduates Announced

ATLANTA, Ga. (Oct. 30, 2026)—The Georgia Institute of Technology awarded approximately 2,240 degrees to undergraduate and graduate students at the conclusion of summer semester.

Among the graduates were:

Nicholas Brooks of College Park (20740)
Elham Konjkav of Bowie (20721)
Wendy Kelley of College Park (20740)
Tyler Pirovic of Hyattsville (20782)

Community

National History Day Guides Students and Teachers Researching Untold Stories of Local U.S. Navy and Coast Guard Veterans From World War II

Riverdale teacher selected for VA-sponsored program to research World War II Veterans

By MARY WALSH
National History Day

COLLEGE PARK, Md. (Nov. 11, 2026)—In honor of Veteran's Day, National History Day® (NHD) is proud to announce the 56 teachers selected for its newest Silent Heroes® program, Silent Heroes: Untold Stories of the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard in World War II, sponsored by a grant from the Veterans Legacy Program in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. This fall, the selected teachers and more than 800 students will research over 120 Veterans who served during World War II, continued to serve their communities after returning home, and are currently buried or memorialized in a U.S. national or state Veterans cemetery.

Teachers and students will meet monthly with historian Christopher Hamner, Ph.D. of George Mason University, to study the history of the Navy and Coast Guard, World War II, and the experience of Veterans who returned home to their communities. Supported by nine NHD research mentors, the student-teacher teams will use NHD-created materials and other resources such as Ancestry Classroom, Fold3, Newspapers.com, local libraries and historical societies, and Official Military Personnel Files requested from the National Personnel Records Center to guide their research.

"We are excited to continue the work of our Silent Heroes program in partnership with the National Cemetery Administration and tell the individual legacies of those who served in the Navy and Coast Guard during World War II," said National History Day Executive Director, Dr. Cathy Gorn. "Silent Heroes is a unique and rewarding experience for students to learn the history of World War II through the experiences of their Veterans, and in return, tell their untold stories. Not only do students gain historical thinking and research skills, but they also become connected to the personal and local histories that they have contributed to."

The participants will research their chosen Veterans' lives, military service, and community contributions this fall and tell the life and story of their Veterans' service by creating and publishing a profile on the Veterans Legacy Memorial (https://www.vlm.cem.va.gov/) and NHD's Silent Heroes website. See a sample Silent Hero profile here (https://nhdsilentheroes.org/profiles/william-pennington-hornsby/) from NHD's 2025/2026 program, focusing on Marine Corps Veterans. Students will also prepare a eulogy to honor their Veterans at a spring 2027 visit to their local national cemetery. To accompany the digital profiles, NHD will produce video eulogies for the Veterans. See a sample NHD-produced eulogy here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aiurWZduIag&t=233s.

The teachers selected for the 2027 Silent Heroes program represent 32 states and 50 U.S. national or state cemeteries. NHD is proud to celebrate the following Prince George's County teacher and the Veterans they selected to research:

Teacher and School:
Ms. Taila McKenzie
William Wirt Middle School
Riverdale, MD

U.S. Navy and Coast Guard Veterans:
U.S. Navy Sonarman Third Class Dr. Milton Julian Bailey
U.S. Navy Storekeeper (Disbursing) First Class Shirley Louise Vlasak Baltz

Cemetery:
Cheltenham State Veterans Cemetery
Cheltenham, MD

National History Day (NHD) *is a non-profit organization based in College Park, Maryland, that seeks to improve the teaching and learning of history. Established in 1974, NHD currently engages more than half a million students each year in conducting original research on historical topics of interest and supports teachers through professional development opportunities. Students present their research as a documentary, exhibit, paper, performance, or website. Projects compete first at the local and affiliate levels, where the top entries are invited to the annual National Contest at the University of Maryland at College Park. NHD is sponsored in part by the Joyful Noise Charitable Foundation, The Better Angels Society, Bezos Family Foundation, Library of Congress, Dr. Scholl Foundation, Behring Global Educational Foundation, and the National Park Service. For more information, visit https://nhd.org/en/.*

Illnesses from A1

help protect students, staff and visitors.

PGCPS and PGCHD encourage school communities to follow these prevention practices:

- **Stay home when sick.** Employees should follow applicable leave policies and public health guidance. Families should follow school guidance for ill students.
- **Seek medical advice when needed.** Symptoms to watch include fever, persistent cough, sore throat, runny nose, rash, vomiting, diarrhea, unusual fatigue and swollen lymph nodes. Consult a healthcare provider about evaluation, treatment and when it is safe to return.
- **Report suspected illness.** PGCPS employees should notify their school nurse of symptoms and when they begin and report unusual clusters of similar symptoms or increased illness-related absences promptly.
- **Practice hand and respiratory hygiene.** Wash hands with soap and water, cover coughs and sneezes, discard tissues, and avoid sharing cups, utensils and water bottles.
- **Cough and sneeze with a tissue** or your elbow, dispose of tissues properly, and clean your hands afterward.
- **Consider wearing a well-fitting mask** when appropriate, particularly when experiencing respiratory symptoms or when public health guidance recommends it.
- **Clean frequently touched surfaces.** Regularly clean desks, shared equipment, handles and switches using established procedures. Notify custodial staff of areas needing attention; vomiting or diarrhea incidents require appropriate containment and disinfection.
- **Support prevention and vaccination.** Stay current with recommended vaccinations, including influenza and COVID-19 vaccines as appropriate.

Timely reporting of both student and staff illnesses helps school nurses and the Office of School Health identify possible clusters, assess whether additional precautions are needed and coordinate appropriate follow-up.

PGCPS and PGCHD encourage families and employees to remain alert to symptoms and work together to keep school communities healthy.

VDOT

I-495 Southside Express Lanes Study
City of Alexandria and Fairfax County, VA
Prince George's County, MD

Public Information Meetings

Time: 6 – 8 p.m.
Format: In-person with an open house at 6 p.m. and presentation at 6:30 p.m., followed by Q&A

Monday, November 30, 2026
Nannie J. Lee Recreation Center
1108 Jefferson St., Alexandria, VA 22314

Thursday, December 3, 2026
Oxon Hill High School (Auditorium)
6701 Leyte Dr., Oxon Hill, MD 20745

Monday, December 7, 2026
West Potomac High School (Cafeteria)
6500 Quander Rd., Alexandria, VA 22307

Wednesday, December 9, 2026
Thomas A. Edison High School (Cafeteria)
5801 Franconia Rd., Alexandria, VA 22310

Thursday, December 10, 2026
Friendly High School (Auditorium)
10000 Allentown Rd., Fort Washington, MD 20744

Online information and comment form available starting on November 30, 2026, at **www.vdot.virginia.gov/495southside**

Learn about and provide input on the revised design concept for the I-495 Southside Express Lanes Study. The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) is working with Maryland and local partners on a new approach and concept to address public feedback. The new concept includes the preservation of space on the Woodrow Wilson Bridge for future rail transit.

This study is evaluating the potential extension of the express lanes system on the southern section of the Capital Beltway (I-495) by 11 miles from the Springfield Interchange (I-95/I-395/I-495) in Fairfax County, Virginia, across the Woodrow Wilson Memorial Bridge, to the MD 210 Interchange in Prince George's County, Maryland. The study includes an Environmental Assessment, which VDOT is conducting in coordination with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and other federal, state, and local agencies in Virginia and Maryland, and in compliance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and 23 CFR Part 771.

In-person public meetings will be held to share study updates, including the revised design concept to address identified transportation needs within the study area. These needs include providing additional travel choices, reducing congestion and improving travel reliability, improving safety, extending and providing continuity of the express lanes system on I-495, and providing consistency with local and regional plans.

Review information beginning November 30, 2026, on the study webpage, at the in-person meetings, or during business hours at the VDOT Northern Virginia District Office, 4975 Alliance Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030. Please call ahead at 703-691-6044 or TTY/TDD 711 to ensure appropriate personnel are available to answer your questions. Information about potential property impacts, VDOT right of way policies and procedures, and the study schedule will be available at the meetings.

Give your written or oral comments at the meetings or submit them **by December 21, 2026**, via the online comment form at www.vdot.virginia.gov/495southside, by email to 495southsideexpresslanes@vdot.virginia.gov, or by mail to Krishna Potturi, P.E., VDOT Northern Virginia Megaprojects Director, 4975 Alliance Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030.

VDOT ensures nondiscrimination and equal employment in all programs and activities in accordance with Title VI and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended. If you need more information or special assistance for persons with disabilities or limited English proficiency, contact VDOT Civil Rights at 703-259-1775 or TTY/TDD 711.

UPC: 122608

Marietta Historic Site & Museum December Celebrations

By STACEY HAWKINS
Marietta Historic Site & Museum

Marietta Historic Site & Museum presents:
Marietta's Winter Holiday Celebration

Looking for a holiday family event? Well, we have the event for you! Visit Marietta Historic Site & Museum during December for Marietta's Winter Holiday Celebration, **December 3–31, 2026**, Thursdays through Sundays, 11 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. We will be closed on Dec. 25, 2026.

It is free to visit Marietta in December. All ages are welcome. Families are encouraged to attend.

Visitors can explore this year's décor, featuring a new display of lavish Victorian decorations and food in the dining room and open-hearth kitchen. Guides will share stories about enslaved cooks, Maria and Serena, who prepared the annual holiday foods at Marietta. Visitors can also see the fireplace roasting tools and hear how traditional meats were roasted on a spit and how soups were cooked in spider pots. Hear how Jim, the enslaved butler, prepared the house for winter, including chopping the firewood for the many fireplaces, and how Randolph warmed the carriages for winter travel. Walk through the formal parlor to see period-inspired decorations used to decorate the tree while learning more about the enslaved Duckett and Brown families who were enslaved at Marietta, who not only witnessed Duvall's lavish holiday traditions but also made their own family traditions. This year's holiday celebration will also feature a Kwanzaa Room, illustrating a newer holiday tradition. After the tour, visitors can make holiday greeting cards to take home. Visitors may register a specific day and time by visiting www.pgparksdirect.com. Walk-ins are also welcome.

Marietta Historic Site & Museum Celebrates The 50th Anniversary of Alex Haley's Roots: The Saga of an American Family

Please join us on **Thursday, December 10**, 6:30 to 8 p.m. to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of Alex Haley's seminal book, "Roots: The Saga of an American Family". Doubleday & Company published the book in the summer of 1976. Cynthia Guillen, local historian and president of the Kunta Kinte Heritage Festival, will present an insightful talk about the impact and history of an African American family with deep ties to Maryland, and Alex Haley's groundbreaking television miniseries "Roots", which aired in 1977.

This is a hybrid program. Visitors are welcome to hear the talk in person at Marietta Historic Site & Museum or online on TEAMS. Online visitors must register to receive the TEAMS link. To register, visit www.pgparksdirect.com and use ticket code: MHM-SPEC-GA-20261210. Walk-ins are welcome. In-person and online registration is $5/person. Ages 12 and older.

For more information on either program, please call 301-464-5291 or email mariettahouse@pgparks.com. Marietta Historic Site & Museum is located at 5626 Bell Station Road, Glenn Dale, MD, and is a property of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission.

National Parks Offer Veterans Places to Connect, Explore and Continue Serving

By PRESS OFFICER
The Department of the Interior

WASHINGTON (Nov 9, 2026)—This Veterans Day, the National Park Service honors veterans' service and sacrifice by inviting them to explore their national parks, connect with family and friends and discover ways to continue serving the American public.

From a quiet walk to a family camping trip, national parks offer places for recreation, reflection and connection. Veterans can hike, camp, fish or hunt where permitted, explore military history or spend time outdoors with the people who matter to them.

"Veterans have given so much to our country. National parks offer places to find connection, enjoy time with family and friends, and bring their skills to another meaningful chapter of service," said Jessica Bowron, comptroller exercising the delegated authority of the director of the National Park Service.

Eligible veterans can obtain a free Military Lifetime Pass that covers entrance fees at national parks and other participating federal recreation sites. Current service members and their dependents are eligible for a free Military Annual Pass. Camping, reservation, tour and other activity fees may still apply.

Veterans and service members can also share their skills through the National Park Service's Volunteers-In-Parks program. Opportunities range from helping visitors and maintaining trails to supporting research and preserving historic places. Parks offer individual and group assignments, including some that welcome families.

The National Park Service is also exploring opportunities for veterans and service members with relevant skills to assist with wildlife management under NPS supervision. Opportunities would depend on each park's needs, approved plans, staffing and safety requirements. Participation requirements and application information will be shared as opportunities become available.

For those considering their next chapter after military service, National Park Service careers offer another way to serve the country and the American public. Eligible veterans may qualify for federal hiring preference (requirements are included in each job announcement).

To find military pass information, parks near military and Department of Veterans Affairs facilities, volunteer opportunities and career resources, visit nps.gov/subjects/military.

Established in 1916, the National Park Service *preserves America's most treasured natural and cultural places for the enjoyment, education and inspiration of current and future generations. Learn more at nps.gov.*

Environment

Researchers Growing Soft-Shell Clams Encounter Hard Realities

By JEREMY COX
Chesapeake Bay Journal, bayjournal.com

Xuetao Li thrusts a metal cylinder into the creek's squishy bottom and wriggles it until he's satisfied it can go no deeper. A moment later, the doctoral student at Morgan State University in Maryland is yanking the apparatus upward. The sediment packed inside tumbles out onto a waiting metal screen.

It's now the job of his professor, Ming Liu, to sift through the gray mud, like a prospector searching for gold. And in a way, he is.

A few months earlier, Liu and his colleagues had planted dozens of young soft-shell clams in the bottom of St. Leonard's Creek as part of trials to refine their growing methods. If those efforts are successful, he said, they could result in a cleaner Chesapeake Bay and a new source of income for Maryland aquaculture operations.

"Many growers want a second aquaculture [option] to increase or enhance their business resilience," said Liu, who leads the shellfish-growing program at Morgan State's Patuxent Environmental and Aquatic Research Laboratory (PEARL) in Southern Maryland.

For now, the only shellfish species available to the state's growers on a large scale is the Eastern oyster. That iconic bivalve brings in millions of dollars a year. But it's not necessarily a money-maker in years when oyster diseases run rampant or so much rain falls that salinity levels plummet, causing widespread die-offs.

Soft-shell clams, meanwhile, have water-filtering abilities similar to those of oysters and are much more tolerant of the low-salinity environment in the Maryland portion of the Bay. And the Bay's relatively warm waters help clams grow to market size much faster than in Maine, the state that accounts for 60% of the country's soft-shell clam supply.

But that warmth—and the promise of more to come from climate change—could unravel Maryland's "clam-bitions."

Liu's lab has already cleared the first important hurdle for clam aquaculture in Maryland: establishing a large-scale breeding program. The scientists are now able to produce hundreds of thousands of tiny soft-shell clams, or "seeds," at their small hatchery, and they're planning to expand their operations at PEARL so they can produce more in coming years.

Lately, the milestones have started piling up. The researchers have demonstrated they can grow the clams to market size—about 2 inches in length—within about a year. By contrast, oysters can take up to three years to be ready for harvesting.

Through careful experimentation, scientists worked out the "lethal temperature threshold" for Maryland-bred soft-shell clams: 84 degrees. The lab then began using selective breeding to develop clams with genes that make them more tolerant of the Bay's warming waters.

That, too, has produced promising results, with the heat-resistant juvenile clams experiencing an 85% survival rate in hot weather, compared to 70% among those with no special breeding.

Developing a soft-shell clam for Maryland's oyster growers would be a game changer, said Patrick Hudson, owner of True Chesapeake, an oyster farm in St. Mary's County and a restaurant of the same name in Baltimore.

A few years after starting his oyster operation in 2011, he started noticing soft-shell clam shells in the water that he pumped from St. Jerome Creek into tanks used for raising baby oysters. A neighbor told him that clams hadn't been spotted in the waterway since the 1970s. That was before diseases and declining water quality all but wiped out the Bay's commercial wild clam fishery.

Hudson soon began raising clams on his oyster farm. "It was really exciting, and we thought we were off to the races," he recalled.

But the fledgling clams all died when summer heat peaked. So, he approached Liu at PEARL about refining the process in the hope of creating a new industry statewide.



DAVE HARP/CHESAPEAKE BAY JOURNAL

Professor Ming Liu of Morgan State University examines "seed" clams used in experiments on St. Leonard's Creek in Southern Maryland.



DAVE HARP/CHESAPEAKE BAY JOURNAL

Ming Liu, Xuetao Li and Randy Feris of Morgan State University in Maryland check one of the clam-growing mats they placed in St. Leonard's Creek months earlier.



DAVE HARP/CHESAPEAKE BAY JOURNAL

A researcher with Morgan State University in Maryland shows a handful of juvenile soft-shell clams, or "seeds," during an October 2026 visit to St. Leonard's Creek.



DAVE HARP/CHESAPEAKE BAY JOURNAL

A researcher with Morgan State University shows soft-shell clams of various ages that grew in St. Leonard's Creek in Southern Maryland.

The lab, after its initial successes, ran into similar obstacles. When young clams grow into adults, their heat tolerance goes way down, Liu said. In a major trial last year, all 350 adult clams died from a prolonged heat wave that's typical in the Bay region.

"That presents a big challenge," Liu said. "How do we grow them through the summer?"

Wild clams appear to have adapted to the Bay's warmth by plodding into cooler, deeper waters, Liu said. (A clam can move by extending and retracting a fleshy, tongue-like "foot" outside its shell.) They can also burrow several inches into the bottom sediment to protect themselves.

Farm-grown clams wouldn't have that luxury. The oyster operations that would adopt them are typically located in shallow waters where the oysters, with harder shells, can access more warmth and nutrients.

In June and July this year, Liu's team experimented with planting clam seeds beneath specially made nets with oyster shells sewn into their strands. They hoped that the shells would offer shade to protect the vulnerable clams below and provide a hard surface to which oyster larvae floating through the water could attach themselves.

The initial results weren't as successful as Liu had hoped for. He checked the nets located just beyond the lab's pier on a sunny afternoon in early October, but he and his colleagues could only find about 10% of the original clams. And most of them were no longer alive.

Liu suspected that some of the loss was caused by the inhospitable condition of the muck in some locations and by starting with too few seeds. But he wasn't discouraged. Next time—and there will be a next time, he vowed—he plans to deploy 100 seeds per mat, instead of 40.

Perhaps that'll do the trick. And if not, there are sure to be more attempts, Liu said, as long as the project's funding continues.

EarthTalk® Q&A

Besides Giving the View and Letting in Light, Solar Windows Power Buildings

By Serena Goragandhi | November 1, 2026

Dear EarthTalk:

What's up with "solar windows" that generate solar electricity and remain transparent? Can this tech put a dent in our carbon emissions?

—Mark Jackson, Cary, NC

Modern urban skylines are dominated by towering skyscrapers with expansive glass facades that absorb large amounts of solar heat while leaving vast surface areas unused for renewable energy generation. Traditional architectural designs treat windows as passive barriers, but this paradigm is shifting as cities search for new ways to combat climate change. By transforming transparent building skins into active power generators, urban centers can harness millions of square feet of previously wasted vertical space.

Transparent luminescent solar concentrators and transparent photovoltaic glass operate by harvesting invisible wavelengths of light, like ultraviolet and infrared, while letting visible light pass through cleanly. These advanced materials use specialized organic salts or nanoparticles embedded within glass panes to absorb non-visible solar radiation and direct it toward thin photovoltaic strips lining the frame edges.

A major advantage of solar windows over traditional rooftop panels is their ability to scale clean energy generation in densely built environments without requiring additional land. Retrofitting existing commercial towers with power-generating glass multiplies potential exponentially. As Ana Almerini, Marketing & Communications Manager at Solar-Reviews, argues: "Unlike traditional solar panels, solar windows can filter UV and infrared sunlight and use it to generate electricity." This allows entire building skins to function simultaneously as architectural viewing panes and distributed power plants.

Integrating transparent solar technology into building envelopes also holds tremendous potential to cut carbon emissions, reduce reliance on fossil-fuel-powered HVAC systems, and shrink urban footprints. Buildings consume a massive share of global electricity, much of it driven by cooling loads on sunny days. As Martin Deil, Global CEO of ClearVue Technologies, notes regarding market validation: "This is a pivotal moment... This sale of our solar envelope solution confirms our commercial strategy and shows the value the market is starting to place on energy-efficient smart building solutions."



PHOTO COURTESY EARTHTALK

Solar windows could help us reduce our carbon footprints massively if implemented widely.

Achieving widespread viability requires careful balancing of costs, efficiency and total optical clarity. Integrating these systems demands advanced coatings and specialized interlayer films within double- or triple-pane glass units to maintain structural thermal insulation. When modern building-integrated photovoltaics connect directly to a property's local microgrid, they provide localized backup generation that stabilizes energy loads during peak demand hours. While efficiency metrics and production economics are still being optimized, transparent solar windows are a vital frontier for zero-net-energy cities. Harnessing the invisible spectrum of sunlight turns ordinary glass into a global warming weapon.

CONTACTS: Let the sunshine in: Exploring the benefits of solar glass, renewableenergymagazine.com

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Business and Finance

Social Security Matters

Ask Rusty:

How Can I Find out What I've Contributed to 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: I have a simple question (I think). How do I find out how much I have paid into Social Security over the years? ***Signed: Curious Senior Citizen***

Dear Curious Senior: I expect you might rightfully believe you have contributed quite a lot and, fortunately, there are a couple of convenient ways for you to find out how much you have actually paid into Social Security over your lifetime:

1. If you have an online Social Security account (www.ssa.gov/myaccount) you can simply go to your online "my Social Security" account and click on the link for "Social Security Statement." In that online Social Security statement, you will see a listing of your lifetime earnings, and at the bottom of that listing you will see how much you (and your employers on your behalf) have paid in Social Security FICA payroll taxes (or SECA self-employment taxes) over your lifetime.
2. If you do not have your online Social Security account set up, you can also contact the Social Security Administration, either your local SS field office get the local office contact information at www.ssa.gov/locator or call 1.800.772.1213 to ask that a copy of your personal "Social Security Statement" be mailed to you.

Obviously, getting this information online is the most efficient method, so you may wish to create your online account if you don't yet have one. Instructions for doing so can be found at www.ssa.gov/myaccount. Having this online account will open the door for you to access all the information Social Security has for you, including details of your monthly benefit and your lifetime earnings history.

FYI, many who seek this information are looking to understand when (or if) they might get back all their contributions once they start collecting Social Security benefits. Of course, much depends on the age at which you claim your benefits, but as a general guide, it usually takes about 5 years or less for you to get back in SS benefits all that you have personally contributed to Social Security. However, the length of time to "breakeven" is longer for self-employed individuals, who must pay both the employee and employer portion of Social Security payroll taxes.

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, nonpartisan 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 nonprofit 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.*

AMAC | Washington DC | 917-846-8485

Melwood Enterprises Joins ISSA to Pilot First National Registered Apprenticeship for Cleaning Professionals

By PRESS OFFICER
Melwood Enterprises

UPPER MARLBORO, Md. (Nov. 4, 2026)—Melwood Enterprises, a leading employer of people with disabilities, announced today a partnership with ISSA, the worldwide cleaning industry association, as a pilot employer for the industry's first nationally recognized registered apprenticeship program for frontline cleaning workers. The initiative marks the professional cleaning industry's entry into the national registered apprenticeship framework, creating new opportunities for workers to develop their skills, earn recognized credentials and advance their careers.

Melwood Enterprises will sponsor 10 disabled and non-disabled employees through the pilot program, investing in the people whose expertise helps deliver high-quality cleaning and facility services to federal and commercial customers. Participants will work toward nationally recognized credentials, focusing on safety, infection prevention, and professional standards.

"People often see custodial work as an entry-level job without a clear path forward. But there is real skill and expertise involved in doing this work well, and there are opportunities to build on that experience and advance," said Brice Alexander, Executive Director of Melwood Enterprises, who has spent his career in the custodial industry. "This apprenticeship will make those career possibilities more visible, recognizes cleaning professionals for the knowledge they bring to their work, and gives them a stronger foundation for building lasting careers in the industry.

Melwood Enterprises employees who complete the pilot will receive first priority when promotion opportunities arise and will earn the cleaning technician—apprenticeship and ISSA Basic and Advanced Custodial Certifications. Participating in the pilot and future apprenticeship opportunities will allow workers to demonstrate their expertise in the industry and commitment to continuing education.

ISSA selected Melwood Enterprises as a pilot partner in recognition of its longstanding commitment to professional training, operational excellence, and sustainable facilities practices, including its achievements in the ISSA Cleaning Industry Management Standard (CIMS) Green Building program and the CIMS Green Building + Sustainability Program, an extremely rare honor held by only 10 organizations in North America.

"Melwood Enterprises brings the operational experience, training expertise, and commitment to workforce development that are essential to helping ISSA establish this apprenticeship program," said John Nothdurft, Vice President of Government and Public Affairs for ISSA. "Its track record in professional custodial and supervisory training, along with its commitment to sustainable building practices, makes Melwood a valuable partner as we introduce this model and work toward expanding it nationally. We have confidence in Melwood's ability to help demonstrate how a registered apprenticeship can strengthen the cleaning profession and create meaningful career opportunities for workers."

Melwood Enterprises' participation in the pilot reflects its ongoing investment in its employees and its commitment to delivering world-class services to the federal and commercial customers it serves while creating careers for people with disabilities. Through its integrated workforce, Melwood Enterprises cleans more than 25 million square feet of office space annually, supporting federal government operations and the mission-critical services that help keep the nation running.

Melwood Enterprises *delivers top-tier business solutions to public and private sector clients across more than 70 locations in the D.C. region and across the mid-Atlantic, while expanding employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Boasting a team of seasoned performers, industry-respected certifications, unparalleled retention rates, and excellence in long-standing contracts, Melwood Enterprises delivers satisfaction, stability, and exceptional return on investment. https://melwoodenterprises.org/.*

ISSA *is the worldwide cleaning industry association. Through education, certification, standards, advocacy and industry resources, ISSA supports cleaning and facility solutions professionals and organizations around the world. https://www.issa.com/.*

Prince George's County Council Confirms Marcel Emerson as County Auditor Following Legal Review

By PRESS OFFICER
Prince George's County Council Media

LARGO, Md. (Nov. 2, 2026)—Today, Prince George's County Council voted to confirm Marcel Emerson, CPA, as County Auditor, to lead the Office of Audits and Investigations. In a public session, Mr. Emerson was confirmed by a full-majority vote of the County Council.

Prior to the public session today, Mr. Emerson's appointment was advanced in a closed session last month by a vote of 9-0. Subsequently, the minutes of the closed session were approved in an open meeting of the Council.

Prior to final action today, as part of its due diligence, the Council requested a legal memorandum from its Principal Counsel on the legality of appointing Mr. Emerson. Among other things, the legal memorandum from its Principal Counsel determined that nothing under Maryland law, the County Charter, or the County Code, prohibits the Council from appointing Mr. Emerson to serve as the County Auditor.

The legal memorandum considered Mr. Emerson's professional qualifications, prior employment, and auditing experience. The memorandum also confirmed that any prior audit investigation by Mr. Emerson of any entity involved with the County does not, as a matter of law, disqualify him from being appointed to serve as the County Auditor.

Mr. Emerson is an active Certified Public Accountant in Maryland and has more than 20 years of experience in financial management, accounting, internal controls, audit coordination, and regulatory compliance. His background includes more than 15 years of financial management experience at Prince George's Community College, along with leadership roles in corporate accounting and financial oversight.

Furthermore, the legal memorandum outlined existing safeguards under Maryland law, including the Maryland Public Accountancy Act, the County Charter, and the County Code, to address any potential conflicts of interest, which may warrant reassignment or recusal of any future audits should there be an identified conflict of interest, which is the same standard that applies to other professionals subject to certain ethical standards when conducting investigations requiring independence and impartiality.

Mr. Emerson's appointment is aligned with the Council's commitment that every audit investigation will be conducted impartially, without bias, and transparently.

Military Veterans, VA, Medicare & Social Security

By RUSSELL GLOOR
Association of Mature American Citizens

It's hard to find someone who doesn't personally know, or is related to, a veteran of the U.S. Military. By some calculations, there are as many as 18 million living veterans, or about 6% of the U.S. population. And we owe a lot to these heroes, as well as to all those now on active military duty, for the many freedoms we enjoy because of their sacrifice for our country. But many veterans just "do their time" and are not aware of the benefits they have earned. Nearly half of all living veterans are age 65 or older, and it is to those older veterans that this article is directed to help navigate the services and benefits they may have earned by serving our country, and how (or if) their normal Social Security and Medicare benefits are affected by that service.

For Career Military Retirees

Military career veterans and retirees are usually covered by the Dept. of Defense (DOD) "TriCare-for-Life" (TFL) program—a special healthcare program viewed as "Medicare wraparound," providing coverage through the DOD's Defense Health Agency (not through private insurance providers). TFL functions like a traditional "Medicare Supplement" plan. You cannot be in the TriCare-for-Life program unless you are also enrolled in Medicare Part A and Part B. Medicare will act as the primary payor of your healthcare expenses and TFL will act as secondary payor. TFL usually covers all healthcare expenses that Medicare does not. For this reason, regular Veteran Affairs (VA) healthcare services are not often used by veterans enrolled in TFL and Medicare.

For Veterans Who Didn't Make the Military a Career

About 9 million other non-career veterans are enrolled in the U.S Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Healthcare System, about 2/3 of whom (e.g., about 6 million) actively use the VA for healthcare services each year. The VA provides services through about 170 nationwide full service healthcare facilities and nearly 1200 outpatient clinics. However, reviewing the above numbers suggests that many veterans are not enrolled in the VA healthcare program, either because they are ineligible, or because they lack knowledge about their eligibility (see this: https://www.va.gov/healthcare/eligibility/).

Coordinating VA Benefits and Medicare

One of the questions we are frequently asked is "why should I take Medicare if all my healthcare needs are provided by the VA?" An excellent question, and we always ask the veteran to consider this: most of those who use VA healthcare services also receive Social Security benefits, and many are also enrolled in Medicare. So, it's important to understand how these important federal benefit programs interact with the services available through the VA.

Two Separate Healthcare Programs

The VA and Medicare programs are two separate and independent healthcare systems, and they do not interact with each other—that is, one does not act as primary payor with the other acting as secondary payor. Each program provides its own benefits independently (they don't share payment responsibility).

VA and Medicare benefits can co-exist for a veteran who is eligible for both, but the veteran would need to choose which healthcare system they want to use for each healthcare need. For example, a veteran might choose to use the VA for some healthcare needs (e.g., audiology (hearing aids), optometry (eyeglass) services, etc.) but use Medicare for most other healthcare needs. So having both VA healthcare and Medicare becomes a matter of convenience, allowing the veteran to use whichever healthcare program that is best for them personally.

Can a Veteran Decline Medicare?

Some veterans may want to rely wholly on the VA for their healthcare needs. In the end, if the veteran is completely comfortable that the VA can (and will) handle 100% of their healthcare needs, there is no need to enroll in Medicare Part B (coverage for outpatient healthcare) or Medicare Part D (prescription drug coverage). However, VA services are not always geographically convenient, so many veterans choose to participate in both the VA healthcare program and Medicare. Doing so provides the veteran with the option to select a provider or medical specialist who can best serve their individual healthcare needs anywhere they happen to be. Almost all healthcare providers everywhere accept Medicare, while VA services are only available at VA facilities or from specific "community care" providers (to whom the VA has given prior authority to treat the veteran). Thus, if convenience is important and is financially feasible, we usually encourage the veteran to enroll in both programs.

Cost Considerations

Of course, the issue of program cost is always a consideration. VA healthcare is largely either free or very inexpensive for those who are eligible and enrolled, but there is a monthly premium associated with Medicare Part B and Part D. The Medicare Part B premium ($202.90 in 2026) is usually paid monthly from the veteran's Social Security benefit (or quarterly if the veteran is not yet receiving Social Security). Medicare Part D prescription drug plans are offered by private insurers, whereas the VA provides prescription drugs to enrolled veterans at little or no cost. But for those in the VA program, prescription drugs must be ordered by a VA doctor. The VA will not fill prescriptions from outside (e.g., non-VA) providers. So, once again, it is an individual choice the veteran must make.

Do Veterans Get "Special" Social Security Credits?

Veterans also sometimes believe that their military service may provide them with a higher Social Security benefit simply because they have served our country. This belief is often fueled by "internet jockeys" and scammers who troll for unsuspecting older veterans by asking "did you get all your spe-

See **VETERANS** *Page* **A6**

EarthTalk® Q&A

Do "Eco" Settings on Appliances Do Much for the Planet?

By Serena Goragandhi | November 1, 2026

Dear EarthTalk:
Do the "eco" and short cycles on dishwashers and washing machines actually save water and electricity?
—June Lorens, San Francisco, CA

Doing household chores like washing dishes and clothes can feel like a guessing game. When you load up a dishwasher or a washing machine, you might wonder if pressing the "eco" or "short" cycle buttons actually saves energy and water, or if they are just clever marketing gimmicks. To understand how these settings work, it helps to look at traditional wash cycles. Standard settings on older or basic machines often use high-wattage heating elements to blast water at maximum temperatures. Heating that water up takes a massive amount of electrical power, which drives up your monthly energy bill.

On the other hand, modern appliances feature "eco" modes designed to be much smarter about resource usage. According to industry data, lowering the washing temperature is the most effective way to save power, as heating water accounts for the vast majority of the energy a dishwasher or washing machine uses. To compensate for the lower heat, eco cycles extend the cycle time slightly. This gives the detergent more time to chemically break down grease and grime without needing high heat.

Denis Gallagher, of the independent consumer advocacy group CHOICE, explains that using more water and taking more time in a dishwashing cycle means higher costs with your energy and water bill. As a result, many people confuse eco modes with "short" or "express" cycles, assuming that a faster cycle is automatically better for the environment. However, short cycles often use *more* electricity and water. While short cycles seem better, in reality they use more energy to finish the job faster. Trying to force a heavy-duty cleaning job into a fraction of the usual time requires a burst of brute force and rapid rinsing.

Consumer habits also play a big role in how efficient your appliances really are. To wit, many people manually pre-rinse their dishes before loading the dishwasher. But modern dishwashers have sensors that detect how dirty dishes are, meaning pre-rinsing wastes water. Modern appliance design has evolved to make this even easier. Smart dishwashers and washing machines now feature advanced sensors that adjust water usage dynamically based on the exact size of the load, preventing wasted water on smaller loads.

When you weigh the financial and environmental trade-offs, the choice becomes clear. Eco modes might take a little longer to finish running, but the cumulative savings on household electricity and municipal water bills add up significantly over time. Ultimately, choosing the right setting matters. Opting for the "eco" button is a genuinely green choice that cuts energy use, while choosing a "short" cycle purely for speed often drains more resources than expected.



PHOTO CREDIT: UNSPLASH

Every little bit helps so may as well set your appliances to the "eco" setting so you can save water and electricity.

CONTACTS: Should you use the eco mode on your kitchen and laundry appliances? choice.com.au/home-and-living/laundry-and-cleaning/washing-machines/articles/eco-function-buttons

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Veterans from A5

cial extra credit for your military service?" Which causes many veterans to think they may not have gotten all the Social Security they are due, hoping for a raise in their monthly benefit.

Actually, Social Security does provide "special extra credit" for military service, but it does not result in a higher SS benefit simply because the veteran served. Rather, it provides extra earnings credit for military pay during the time spent in the military. That extra military pay credit may, or may not, affect the veteran's Social Security benefit, depending on their post-military lifetime earnings record. Social Security only uses the highest earning 35 years over one's lifetime to calculate SS benefits, and (except for career military retirees) lifetime earnings in the private sector usually eclipse the person's military earnings. And there are also other factors which influence who can receive the "special extra credit for military service:"

No extra credit is provided for those who served after 2001.

For those who served between 1957 and 2001, the veteran can receive up to $1,200 per year added to their military pay record for SS benefit purposes.

Veterans who served before 1957 get $160 earnings credit for each active duty month served added to their military pay record for SS purposes.

Social Security FICA tax has been withheld from military pay since 1957, and Social Security began automatically including military service data from SS applicants since 1968. Any veteran who served after 1967 automatically had the "special extra earnings" applied to their lifetime earnings record if they were eligible. Those who served prior to 1968 would have needed to provide SSA with a copy of their DD-214 (military discharge papers) to receive the extra earnings credit for military service. Additional information about the Social Security "Special Extra Credit for Military Service" can also be found in this previous AMAC Foundation article.

VA Disability vs. Social Security Disability

Finally, a word about VA disability ratings and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits. These are two entirely separate disability programs, and receiving benefits in one program does not automatically entitle you to benefits in the other. The VA has its own criteria for assessing disability and assigning disability ratings, and the Social Security Administration has an entirely different set of criteria for disability benefits. Here at the AMAC Foundation, we often get SSDI questions from those with a VA disability rating between 30% and 100%. While the VA offers partial disability ratings and services, the Social Security Administration does not. To be eligible for Social Security Disability Insurance benefits, you must be unable to perform "substantial gainful activity" (work) and that condition must be predicted to last for at least one year before any disability benefits will be granted.

Finding Out More

If you have any questions about how your VA benefits interact with either Medicare or Social Security, help is just a phone call or an email exchange away. You can contact the AMAC Foundation's Social Security Advisory Service by calling 1.888.750.2622 or ask your question(s) via email to SSadvisor@amacfoundation.org. All our services are free and are without obligation because we are a non-profit corporation.

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