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JUNE 2023 UPDATE

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

Salvation Army Potomac Division Opens New Old Town Headquarters

The Salvation Army Potomac Division celebrated the official opening of its new building at 1555 King Street at a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Tuesday, May 9. City of Alexandria leadership, employees, and friends of the organization gathered in Old Town to dedicate its new divisional headquarters.

The Potomac Division, which employs 63 people, provides business and administrative support to local units in Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, and Washington D.C. The organization purchased the building in October 2022 and undertook a six-month renovation. It joins the Salvation Army's national headquarters in Alexandria following the sale of the division's previous headquarters at Foggy Bottom.

"The new location is at a convenient spot to easy transit and transportation for our staff who serve the mission of The Salvation Army," said Potomac Division spokesperson Karen Yoho. "Those local units provide programs targeted to the community in which they serve, such as emergency assistance, youth character building programs, food pantries, Christmas assistance, older adult ministries, and more."

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Il Porto Celebrates 50 Years on King Street



In 1973, the City of Alexandria didn't yet have a Metro station or an Arts Center inside of the Torpedo Factory, but it did have Il Porto Ristorante. The restaurant at 121 King Street opened for business that year, serving classic Italian dishes to Old Town residents.

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YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Uplifting Youth Voices
(Back Page)

On Thursday, May 11, the Alexandria Campaign on Adolescent Pregnancy (ACAP) celebrated Sex Ed for All Month, an annual observance to raise awareness and call for investment in sex education in schools.

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Salvation Army (Cont.)

At the grand opening celebration, Divisional Commander Lieutenant Colonel Allan Hofer said that despite touring several locations, the building at 1555 King “stood out.” He shared that the relocation team “felt an overwhelming sense of peace that this was the place.”

The building also includes a dedication plaque in the lobby, as well as a large Salvation Army logo, known as

the Red Shield, embedded in the concrete floor of the entryway.

“Like many offices in the DMV we have alternative work schedules, such as compressed work weeks, telecommuting, and remote work,” Yoho told the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership. “But, I hear from those who telecommute, that the office is so phenomenally fresh and inviting more remote people want to be here!”

Il Porto 50 year Anniversary (Cont.)

Co-owner Wali Zadrán says good food, good service, and supportive customers are the keys to longevity.

Now, in 2023, the business is celebrating its 50th year of serving home-made pasta and wine near the Old Town waterfront. Co-owner Wali Zadrán, who runs the business with his brother, Akbar, says he is proud to be part of Old Town’s thriving small business community. “Small businesses are the backbone of the City, especially [those in] hospitality,” Zadrán says. “If I’m not mistaken, there are close to 50 restaurants on King Street, from the water to the Masonic Temple...mostly mom and pops run by families.”

Zadrán came to Alexandria to help run the restaurant in 2001 (his brother purchased Il Porto from the original owner in 1990). He attributes the restaurant’s long-term success to three things: quality of food, quality of service, and treating employees and customers like family.

“We keep things simple— simple means treating

people right,” he says. Zadrán says he sees the City’s government and the Old Town business community as partners in the beautification and maintenance of lower King Street. He looks forward to continued investment in signage, traffic management, and infrastructure. “We will support the City in anything they do to improve the waterfront, the 100-block, and the 200-block [of King Street],” he says. “We want to make the 100-block an example for the rest of the City.”

To that end, he says that permanent improvements to the King Street Pedestrian Zone on lower King will “help our business enormously.” In the meantime, he says the City’s attention to general maintenance and beautification, such as making sure public trash cans are always emptied, tree planters are neat and beautiful, and sidewalk bricks are tidy are some of the things that help his customers enjoy Old Town.

Zadrán says despite its overall success, the restaurant has not been without challenges. Il Porto experienced three significant downturns during his tenure: one

after 9/11, another during the 2008 financial crisis, and, most recently during COVID-19. “I still remember the Friday afternoon when everything got shut down, and we had to call employees to tell them,” Zadrán recalls. “Some have been here many years, and they started getting tears in their eyes, there was so much uncertainty. But we kept every single person on payroll.”

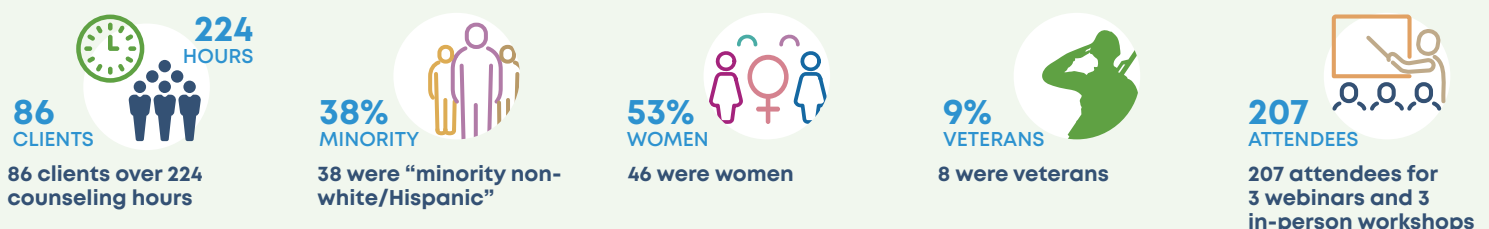
The business rebounded in 2021, Zadrán says, thanks to “very loyal customers” who stuck by Il Porto during the height of COVID-19. “They would order food and send it to shelters— we get so much support from our customers, our regulars. I cannot thank them enough.”

Now that business is back to usual, Zadrán is focused on celebrating the 50-year milestone and serving his customers lasagna with scratch-made ricotta and, his personal favorite, the Pasta alla Veneziana.

“Every business has challenges, but it depends on how you take care of those challenges,” he says. “Good times don’t last forever, and bad times don’t last forever.”

Alexandria Economic Development Partnership

In Q1 of 2023, the (AEDP) small business team met with:



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: Community Cookouts

Nothing brings a community together quite like a cookout—that’s the general philosophy behind Alexandria’s Community Cookout series. These events, cosponsored by a variety of City of Alexandria agencies and community partners, are an opportunity for residents to learn more about area services available to them and talk to representatives from the City about everything from safety concerns to summer programs for kids.

The City held a total of 10 cookouts, all scheduled in April and May in different parts of Alexandria, as a way to engage and interact with residents in a non-traditional setting. In addition to providing attendees with food and an opportunity to have discussions with representatives from the Alexandria Police Department (APD), Alexandria Sheriff’s Office (ASO), and other departments, the cookouts allowed residents to access important safety resources, including medication lockboxes and gun locks.

Sheriff Sean Casey says that the cookouts are a way for the City to interact with residents by meeting them where they are and having authentic conversations. “Community engagement like this helps all of us,” said Sheriff Casey. “We can hear from our neighbors about their needs and concerns, and they can interact with us in a casual and relaxed situation. These moments help build familiarity and trust, increase understanding and positive relationships, and lead to a stronger, safer City.”



“ These moments help build familiarity and trust, increase understanding and positive relationships, and lead to a stronger, safer city. ”

- Sheriff Sean Casey



HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES: AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The Square at 511: Preserving Affordable Housing in the Arlandria-Chirilagua Community

The Square at 511, formerly known as Parkvue Apartments, is a 196-unit rental community located in the Arlandria-Chirilagua neighborhood of Alexandria. In February 2022, nonprofit housing developer, Housing Alexandria (HALX, formerly Alexandria Housing Development Corporation or AHDC) acquired the property and converted it into committed affordable and workforce housing, as part of its ongoing work to provide diverse housing options at a variety of price points to support a thriving, inclusive Alexandria.

The acquisition, made possible by a \$50+ million contribution from the Amazon Housing Equity Fund, is a significant step in ensuring that rents in the area remain affordable. Pursuing strategies to expand housing affordability through innovative public-private-

nonprofit partnerships and financing approaches is the goal of Housing Alexandria, which the City established in 2004.

By assuming the ownership and management of The Square at 511, Housing Alexandria ensures rents remain affordable to households with incomes at 60 percent of the area median income, or AMI, which is equivalent to \$60,000 to \$85,000 for a household of one to four. Half of the units are available to households with incomes up to 80% of the AMI. This approach helps households earning between 61-80% AMI also access this housing resource while freeing up their budgets for other priorities, including education, healthcare, childcare, and savings. Retaining a component of affordability at the workforce level also prevents displacement of existing residents.

Additionally, City Council recently extended the Pilot Rental Subsidy Program to include ten units at The Square, creating deeply affordable housing for households with incomes at 40% AMI.

Recognizing the importance of maintaining the property's quality, as well as its affordability, Housing Alexandria plans to refinance The Square at 511 in mid-2023, which will help pay for critical improvements, including modernizing elevators, and replacing windows to enhance energy efficiency and reduce utility costs. In February 2023, the Alexandria City Council approved a commitment of \$5 million from various federal funding resources, over time, to assist with the property's capital needs.

Recognizing that barriers to housing often go beyond just



“

The culture and diversity of neighborhoods like Arlandria-Chirilagua are what makes Northern Virginia such a wonderful place to live, work, and thrive...

”

- Catherine Buell, Former Director
Amazon Housing Equity Fund



COVID-19 RECOVERY: City's Digital Equity Action Plan

In winter of 2023, the City of Alexandria conducted research on residents' internet access and usage experiences, aiming to enhance digital equity. Led by PRR, a communications and engagement agency, this research is part of the City's Digital Equity Action Plan, addressing disparities in high-speed and broadband internet access. Limited access to high-speed internet hinders residents from accessing a wide range of resources, services, and products.



Affordable Housing *cont.*

financial resources,
Housing
Alexandria also
plans to roll out
its Rent Ready
program in Arlandria-

Chirilagua later this year. The program, created through a grant from Virginia Housing, implements a key recommendation of the Arlandria-Chirilagua Plan to empower renters who historically have not qualified or felt comfortable applying for committed affordable housing due to language barriers, lack of appropriate paperwork to document income, or other challenges, to become prequalified as new housing options are created in the neighborhood.

The acquisition of The Square at 511 is a testament to Housing Alexandria's commitment to preserving housing resources in Alexandria, as outlined in the City's [Housing Master Plan](#). Other recent examples include HALX's purchases of Parkstone Alexandria (formerly Avana Apartments) and Ellsworth Apartments. Additionally, Housing Alexandria's forthcoming mixed-income, mixed-use, and mixed-tenure communities, Sansé and Naja, show the organization's dedication to addressing community needs, promoting housing stability, reducing housing cost burdens, and expanding access to public services and neighborhood amenities in the Arlandria-Chirilagua neighborhood.

PRR conducted a paper and online survey targeting Alexandria residents, specifically those with limited internet access. The survey was available in English, Spanish, Amharic, and Arabic. They received 358 responses, with 19% in Spanish and 80% in English. Additionally, they conducted five focus groups at local public facilities, including two English groups (one for ages 60+), one Spanish group, one Amharic group, and one Arabic group.

Key Findings

- Alexandria residents are accessing the internet through a variety of devices and places, with those who speak Spanish, Amharic, or Arabic more reliant on access via smart phones. In particular, Amharic or Arabic speakers are at greater risk for their current internet access not meeting their needs and being more reliant on other family members to assist them with access and usage.
- There should be improved ease of internet connection and reliability at public settings such as libraries and recreation centers. This includes knowledge of where the public facilities with Wi-Fi are located and how to get to them.
- Across all demographics, residents seek broader access to more affordable and reliable high-speed internet.
- There is a need to increase availability and awareness of training and education programs. Of particular note was the desire for security and safe use of internet trainings. Those who speak Spanish, Amharic, and Arabic emphasized the importance for the City to provide training and educational resources in languages other than English.
- There needs to be increased access to low-cost equipment and devices to access the internet.

Next Steps

The findings of this study provide a roadmap for City agencies and partners to address digital equity needs. Among some of the next steps, [Computer CORE](#), a non-profit organization located in Alexandria, is working with Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities (RPCA), Alexandria Libraries, Office of Housing, and Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) to increase its multi-lingual digital literacy programs in public facilities, including classes on security and internet safety. The Department of Information Technology will soon provide public access Wi-Fi log-in information in multiple languages. Furthermore, the City will use these findings as it continues to work with its fiber and cable providers in improving access, reliability, and speed to all internet users in Alexandria.



JORGE RUIZ

COMPENSATION PHILOSOPHY: City Internship Program

Becoming an employer of choice for jobseekers is a key priority for the City of Alexandria. Doing so with the intention of attracting candidates who not only meet the professional criteria, but with a commitment to community and public service can prove to be a challenge. However, it is a challenge the City's Department of Human Resources (DHR) is enthusiastically working to resolve through its Internship Program.



In its 2019 class, the Program employed 10 interns across the City; the 2023 internship has doubled to 20.

The Program, having started prior to the pandemic, is experiencing rapid growth under the leadership of Chief Human Resources Officer Janet Manuel.

In its 2019 class, the Program employed 10 interns across the City; the 2023 internship has doubled to 20. Currently, the Program is only for the summer season with the plan to offer positions year-round.

The City's Internship Program functions like a traditional program: seeking "college students, recent college graduates, or advanced degree candidates to fill internship positions throughout our various departments...the City (aligns) applicant fields of study and interests with the needs of the respective departments."

What's special about the City's program, however, is that it is currently led by a product of its own making. Jorge Hugitzaelly

Ruiz started his career with the City at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic with the goal of building his professional experience before looking for a position aligned with his major in Criminology.

"I saw it as an opportunity to grow and learn," Ruiz said. "I didn't expect to be here for so long, but I knew I wanted to come in and do the best I could, and it's paid off."

Since starting as an intern in DHR, Ruiz has served the City in a temporary position as the COVID-19 Records Coordinator to now, as the Human Resources Information System Technician. As the Covid-19 Records Coordinator, he provided leadership, HR liaisons, and all departments with statistical reports and data visualizations. A priority for him is the ongoing development of the Internship Program that paved the way for his professional rise in the City.



The Program is a piece of DHR's effort to define the City's compensation philosophy

And, despite his dedication to his work, Ruiz credits his coworkers with much of his success.

“It was really my colleagues in DHR who made a huge impact on my day-to-day and outlook of a career with the City. From day one, everyone has always been substantially supportive, courteous, and inspirational.”

The Program is a piece of DHR's effort to define the City's compensation philosophy- the holistic perspective of why working for this local government is in jobseekers' best interest. While competitive wages, excellent benefits, and working conditions are primary drivers for attracting qualified candidates, working environments and opportunity for growth are significant factors in why employees stay. That is the goal for City leadership, bolstering employee satisfaction by continued efforts to grow a workforce that benefits from collaboration, peer support, and has a commitment to public service.

Sandra Gibbs, DHR's Senior Talent Acquisition Lead, views Ruiz's experience as the epitome of what is possible for young recruits.

“We aim to grow young talent who cherish the work they do and see the value in having an impact in public service,” Gibbs said. “It has been interesting to see him come in as an intern, to temp, to full time— it's one of the biggest rewards of being in recruitment.”

Chief Human Resources Officer Janet Manuel hopes Jorge's path will serve as an example for future cohorts.

“[Jorge's story] resonates with those seeking an internship because he started as an intern and was hired full-time. I believe that is the goal of every intern: to gain full-time employment and their work recognized and valued.”

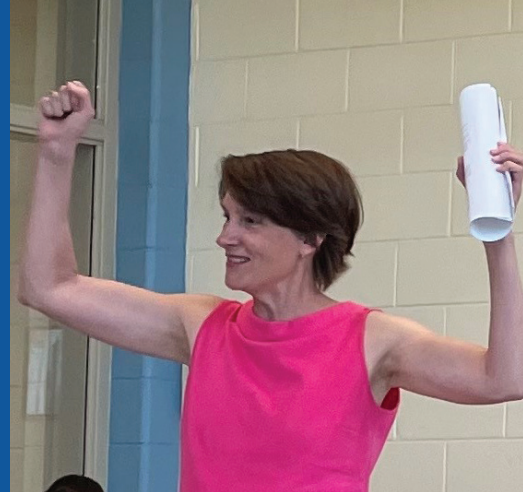
Ruiz is hoping to replicate his experience with countless other young professionals as he continues to build the City's Internship Program. He has a key piece of advice for incoming candidates, “continue to pursue every opportunity because you never know where it may lead you. Even with a major background in Criminology, I fell in love with Human Resources.”

“ I saw it as an opportunity to grow and learn... I didn't expect to be here for so long, but I knew I wanted to come in and do the best I could, and it's paid off. ”

- Jorge Ruiz

YOUTH AND FAMILIES: Uplifting Youth Voices

On Thursday, May 11, the Alexandria Campaign on Adolescent Pregnancy (ACAP) celebrated Sex Ed for All Month, an annual observance to raise awareness and call for investment in sex education in schools and communities across the United States. Sex Ed for All Month is coordinated by Sex Education Collaborative, a national coalition of organizations working to ensure accessible, equitable, sex education for all young people.



ACAP observed the month by hosting a dinner and a panel discussion featuring youth and adult voices from across the City of Alexandria sharing how the Alexandria community can support healthy, positive sexual development for all young people.

The panel discussion featured young people from ACAP's Keep It 360 Peer Advocate program. Part of ACAP's collaboration with Alexandria youth, Keep It 360 is a peer-to-peer education program supported by ACAP, the Alexandria Sexual Assault Center, and the Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition of Alexandria. Keep It 360 peer advocates initiate discussions with Alexandria teens about healthy life choices and inform them about relevant community resources. For the Sex Ed for All Month panel, Keep It 360 peer advocates moderated and participated in the discussion, during which youth in the room shared their unique perspectives on how adults can create safe and inviting environments to talk, teach, and learn about sexuality and sexual health.

Ensuring young people have complete and accurate sexual health information and access to sexual and reproductive health care services is one of the aims of the City of Alexandria's [Children and Youth Master Plan 2025](#), a roadmap for how our community will work together to create the conditions for all young people to thrive in Alexandria.

ACAP, part of the City of Alexandria's Department of Community and

Human Services (DCHS), is working to achieve this by collaborating with Alexandria City Public Schools middle school health and physical education teachers on curriculum, hosting sexual health mini-workshops in after-school settings, and maintaining a [Sex Ed for All web page](#) with resources for parents, youth, and families to support high-quality, inclusive, and medically accurate sex education.

