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Burke History Day: Exploring History and Legend in Depth

Exhibits and presentations introduced a wide range of historical facts about Burke, Fairfax County.



Visitors walk around the room, read the presentations and interact with volunteer members and other guests.
Photo by Arisa Ishita/The Connection

By Arisa Ishita/The Connection

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Photo by Arisa Ishita/The Connection

Jon Vrana, president of the Burke Historical Society, and Cindy Bennett, active member of the society, wear 1860s costumes and greet visitors on the Burke History Day.



Photo by Arisa Ishita/The Connection

In the bunny costume, Andy Bennett, Burke resident and active member of the Burke Historical Society, stands by the 'Bunny Man' presentation table. The Bunny Man has been a legend of the Burke area for more than 30 years.



Photo by Arisa Ishita/The Connection

Dr. Kjell Lindgren speaks to the audience during the black-box video screening. The former Burke resident and Robinson Secondary School graduate is a current NASA astronaut and works at the International Space Station.

Burke — “I think when most people move here, it’s kind of a bedroom community so nobody realizes there is history.”

Andy Bennett is an active member of Burke Historical Society and a Burke resident since 1989. “Burke History Day is one of those times where we do get to dress in 1860s clothes,” he added.

This is what the Burke History Day is all about — to have visitors learn history of Burke and Fairfax County that they might have not yet known about.

The third Annual Burke History Day took place on Oct. 10 featuring a variety of historical presentations as well as short documentary screening and children’s activities.

Cindy Bennett, Andy’s wife and also an active member of BHS, said the area around the Burke Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department in Old Town Burke was one of the possible airport locations selected in 1951.

ACCORDING TO THE TEXTBOOK published by BHS, “Memories of Beautiful Burke Virginia,” the Civil Aeronautics Administration started realizing the second airport would be needed to serve the region even when the Washington National Airport — the first one — was under construction between 1938 and 1941.

All of the possible locations for the second airport were in Fairfax County: Annandale, Fairfax, Springfield, Chantilly, Herndon, Pender and Burke. In fact, the best site recommended was Burke.

However, it became a controversy. The American Society of Planning Officials recommended that airports built for accommodating transports should be located farther away from developed areas. Safety problems also needed to be considered, such as air traffic control related to conflicting airspace use by National Davison Army Airfield at Fort Belvoir, the Quantico Marine Gunnery and Rocket Range, the Dahlgren Naval Space Danger Area and the proposed Burke airport site.

By the time retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Elwood P. Quesada, made a final decision for the second airport site, the possible sites were narrowed down to Burke, Pender and Chantilly. Ultimately, he recommended Chantilly. The Chantilly airport is what is known as the Dulles International Airport today.

This is just one of the exhibitions introduced at the table but imagining the Dulles International Airport could have been around the Burke area may be an interesting story.

Likewise, Burke has a long history of railroad and is still a railroad town. John Marshall was the first postmaster in the U.S. post office in Burke.

“It’s nice to look at outside and know what used to be here,” Cindy said. “It’s got a real, substantial foundation.”



Photo by Arisa Ishita/The Connection

Inside the Burke Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department, presentations on Burke history as well as Fairfax County are displayed.

JUST BY THE ENTRANCE, Andy was standing in a pink bunny costume and introducing the “Bunny Man.” According to the Fairfax County website, this is a story of a man who dressed in a bunny costume haunting the residential neighborhoods in the nation’s capital. Near Fairfax Station, the infamous “Bunny Man Bridge” exists and the Bunny Man has been a legend for more than 30 years.

“It’s funny,” Andy Bennett said. “I always knew about the bridge, I always knew about the story and realized there were actual police reports. So I made it in the Burke History Day.”

What also made the Burke History Day special this year was a short video screening featuring Dr. Kjell Lindgren, former Burke resident and a graduate of Robinson Secondary School who is currently a NASA astronaut. In the video, Lindgren not only mentioned what he is currently working on at the International Space Station but also emphasized how grateful he is to all the individuals who have helped him all along.

“Many of those teachers, mentors, coaches and friends from the Burke area, and from the Robinson Secondary School, the lessons I learned in the classroom and lab were foundational to my success,” Lindgren said. “I’m proud of my Robinson heritage.”

Lindgren had a live chat from space with the current Robinson students last week and the video was recorded specially for the Burke History Day 2015 during the same week.

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