

# The Prince George's Post



A COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER FOR PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY SINCE 1932

Vol. 94, No. 23 June 4 — June 10, 2026

Prince George's County, Maryland

Newspaper of Record

Phone: 301-627-0900

25 cents

## Upper Marlboro Student Awarded the 2026 Students of History Scholarship

By LUKE ROSA  
Students of History

UPPER MARLBORO, Md. (May 22, 2026)—McKenzie Poole of Dr. Henry A. Wise Jr. High School in Upper Marlboro has been selected as one of three recipients nationwide of the 2026 Students of History Scholarship, an annual award recognizing students who demonstrate a passion for history and a commitment to creating a better future through what they learn.

Now in its ninth year, the scholarship honors students nominated by social studies teachers for their academic curiosity, critical thinking, and leadership.

McKenzie earned the scholarship for a video essay reflecting on a research project completed in her AP African American Studies class about the role of women in the Black Panther Party—a project that reshaped how she thinks about history and whose stories get remembered.

“What really changed my perspective was realizing how much information can shift the way you see something,” McKenzie said in her scholarship essay. “It made



COURTESY PHOTO

2026 Students of History Scholarship recipient McKenzie Poole

me start questioning what else I might be missing in other historical narratives.”

McKenzie's World History teacher, Ana Kometa, described her as a student unafraid to wrestle with difficult ideas in the classroom.

“She asks thoughtful, sometimes bold questions that push our discussions deeper, and she isn't afraid to explore complex ideas or offer her own interpretations,” Kometa said. “This confidence, paired with her intellectual maturity, makes her a true leader in class conversations.”

Her AP African American Studies teacher, Krystal Brown, praised both McKenzie's intellectual curiosity and character.

“McKenzie has always had a great passion for history,” Brown said. “She is inquisitive in the classroom, always took initiative to help other students, and is a true critical thinker.”

McKenzie plans to attend Spelman College this fall.

*The Students of History Scholarship has been awarded annually since 2017. Founded by former classroom teacher Luke Rosa, Students of History provides history and social studies curriculum resources used by thousands of teachers and students worldwide. Visit [www.studentsofhistory.com](http://www.studentsofhistory.com) or contact Luke Rosa at [Luke@studentsofhistory.com](mailto:Luke@studentsofhistory.com).*



PHOTO COURTESY LAUREL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Laurel Historical Society Hosts Garden Tour June 13

By SYDNEY YOUNGE  
Laurel Historical Society

The Laurel Historical Society (LHS) is proud to present our 2026 Laurel Garden Tour on **Saturday, June 13** from 10 a.m.–2 p.m. Join us for a stroll through stunning private gardens in both Old Town and West Laurel and enjoy late spring gardens filled with native and pollinator-friendly plants, vegetable gardens, bird meadows, and Bay-Wise and Wildlife-certified gardens.

The LHS Garden Tour will feature nine Laurel area gardens with select sites including games and giveaways for visitor enjoyment. In addition to these gardens, there will be a tenth member-only “Secret Garden” on the tour. Members of the Laurel Historical Society—including those who join and purchase tickets by June 12—will be given the opportunity to stop by and visit this “Secret Garden” and

enjoy refreshments. The tour also features the City of Laurel Community Garden, which works to educate Laurel residents on sustainable gardening.

Attendees will have the opportunity to learn more about how local Laurel gardeners have approached setting up and maintaining their own gardens, including tips on fertilizing, weed management, and yard debris, while also supporting the Laurel Historical Society's work to preserve and share Laurel, Maryland's heritage through exhibits, educational programs, and community events.

According to Garden Tour Chair, Michelle Keating, “Laurel's gardeners never fail to impress with their creativity and imagination. Each garden is its own spe-

See TOUR Page A3

## Summer Adventures Await at Elks Camp Barrett

By DEWAYNE WILCHER  
Camp Springs Elks Lodge

As summer approaches, Camp Springs Elks Lodge is proud to help promote the outstanding opportunities available for youth ages 8–11 at Elks Camp Barrett. Nestled in the beautiful Maryland countryside, Elks Camp Barrett has long served as a place where young people can experience friendship, personal growth, outdoor adventure, and unforgettable memories.

This summer, campers may attend one of two exciting camp sessions: **July 12–17** or **July 19–23**. These sessions are designed to provide youth with a safe, enriching, and fun-filled environment where

they can learn, grow, and create lifelong memories.

Campers have the opportunity to participate in activities such as swimming, hiking, sports, arts and crafts, nature exploration, team-building exercises, campfires, and so much more. Beyond recreation, Camp Barrett helps foster confidence, leadership skills, independence, and lifelong friendships.

One of the greatest strengths of Elks Camp Barrett is its focus on creating a welcoming atmosphere where youth from diverse backgrounds can come together, learn new skills, and enjoy positive mentorship from dedicated counselors and volunteers.

The Camp Springs Elks Lodge encourages families within our community to explore the opportunities available through Camp Barrett and consider giving their children the chance to experience a summer filled with growth, excitement, and lasting memories.

The Elks organization remains deeply committed to supporting youth programs that help shape the next generation of leaders while reinforcing the values of community service, respect, citizenship, and fellowship.

For additional information about registration, camp schedules, and available programs, members and community residents are encouraged to contact the Lodge or visit the camp's information resources at [www.elkscampbarrett.org](http://www.elkscampbarrett.org).

A summer at Elks Camp Barrett is more than just camp—it is an experience that can last a lifetime.

## Pull Up Fund Draws Nearly 1,000 to Second Annual “Pull Up & Play” Youth Sports Clinic in Prince George's County

By JAMISHIA SMITH  
Pull Up Fund

LANDOVER, Md. (May 28, 2026)—Pull Up Fund welcomed nearly 1,000 attendees, including almost 700 youth and 300 adults, to its second annual Pull Up & Play on Saturday, May 9, 2026, at the Prince George's Sports and Learning Complex. The free event offered hands-on athletic clinics across seven sports, designed to ignite a passion for play and expand access to sports.

Nearly 50 volunteer coaches and student-athletes from the University of Maryland, Bowie State University, and other area schools brought energy and expertise to every corner of the event floor. The afternoon reached another level when two-time NBA Champion Quinn Cook and Washington Wizards forward Julian “JuJu” Reese joined the action, playing alongside youth, taking photos, and cheering them on throughout the day. And they weren't alone—mascots Major Tuddy, Testudo, Butch, and G-WIZ kept the crowd entertained with friendly competition of their own.

### From the Founder of Pull Up Fund

“The turnout and energy we saw today was inspiring. Pull Up Fund is proud to support Prince George's County youth, bring them new opportunities, and have fun doing it.”

—Sam Brin, Founder, Pull Up Fund and Prince George's County native

### Event Highlights

• **Sports Clinics:** Youth of all skill levels took the floor for basketball, track and field, volleyball, cheerleading, golf, tennis, and football combine drills.



PHOTO SAN ON THE SHOT/PULL UP FUND

Left to right: Sam Brin of Pull Up Fund, mascots G-WIZ and Major Tuddy, Washington Wizards forward Julian “JuJu” Reese, mascots Butch and Testudo.

• **Mascots:** The fun extended beyond the clinics as Major Tuddy (Washington Commanders), Testudo (University of Maryland), Butch (Bowie State University), and G-WIZ (Washington Wizards) got in on the action, engaging in some friendly competition of their own.

• **Partner Pavilion:** 18 local organizations brought energy and expertise to the Partner Pavilion, connecting families with resources and support, while offering hands-on activities like art, fitness challenges, health screenings, and more.

• **Atmosphere:** DJ Chris Styles, sponsored by DTLR, kept the energy high throughout the day, while DTLR also donated gift cards to help youth gear up after the event. Emcee duties were



PHOTO SAN ON THE SHOT/PULL UP FUND

Nearly 1,000 youth and adults attended the second annual Pull Up & Play on Saturday, May 9, 2026 at the Prince George's Sports and Learning Complex.

handled by Trey Rainey of 93.9 WKYS.

Pull Up & Play was held in partnership with M-NCPPC, Prince George's County Department of Parks and Recreation.

Given the overwhelming response, Pull Up Fund plans to return next year with an expanded lineup, including new sports and dedicated activities for adults.

Pull Up Fund believes that a young person's potential shouldn't be limited by their access to opportunities. We proudly support Prince George's County by investing in initiatives that foster youth development, health, and community impact. For more information, visit [pullupfund.org](http://pullupfund.org).

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# TOWNS *and* NEIGHBORS

## Brandywine-Aquasco by Audrey Johnson 301-922-5384

### PRE-WOMEN'S DAY BOOTCAMP

Join us for our Pre-Women's Day BOOTCAMP June 13, 2026, Nottingham Myers UMC 15601 Brooks Church Road, Upper Marlboro, Maryland 20772. Join us for a low impact, full body group workout designed to push you mentally and physically. Modifications/Alternate Exercises available. Make sure you eat something light an hour before the bootcamp. BP Checks Available. To register: nmc1867.org-upcomingevents. Sponsored by Nottingham Myers/Christ United Women in Faith. Rev. Shemaiah Strickland, Pastor.

Itinerary: 8:30 a.m. Check In, 9 a.m. Boot Camp Workout, 10:15 a.m. Fitness Q & A with Mathew Montgomery Personal Trainer & Certified Nutritionist Instagram @a.r.cfitness. Sponsored by Nottingham Myers /Christ United Women in Faith. Rev. Shemaiah Strickland, Pastor.

Following the Bootcamp, Sweet & Savory Mobile Bistro will be on site. Breakfast sandwiches and seven other items will be available for purchase. Karen Lewis, Owner Instagram: @sosweet\_sosavory.

### 2026 DECISION DAY

Welcome Class of 2030! Bowie State University has awarded more than 600 scholarships to Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) seniors for fall 2026. President Breaux announced the new BSU and PGCPS memorandum of understanding to a crowd of nearly 3,000 students who attended 2026 Decision Day.

### BOWIE STATE UNIVERSITY

Bowie State University Department of Athletics celebrated the graduation of 22 student-athletes during the university's spring commencement ceremony on Friday, May 22, inside A.C. Jordan Arena. The group of student-athletes was among nearly 900 graduates earning bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees.

### NO CHILD SHOULD GO WITHOUT PROTECTION

If your child is eligible, we've got you covered. They may qualify for free vaccines through the vaccines for children (VFC) program if: has Medicaid, is uninsured, is American Indian or Alaskan Native, is underinsured (has health insurance that doesn't cover vaccines).

Vaccines protect your child from serious illness and help keep our schools and community healthy. Required for school and childcare enrollment. Safe, tested and recommended by medical experts. Protect your family and those around you. Prevent measles, mumps, whooping cough and more. Are your child's vaccinations up to date? Beat the Rush. Make sure your child is covered for the year ahead.

Recommended Childhood Vaccines: DTaP, MMR, Tdap Booster, HPV (teens), Polio, Varicella (Chickenpox), Hepatitis A & B, Meningococcal, Flu (annually). Not sure what your child needs? We can help review their records. Charles County Department of Health 301-609-6900 Ext. 6018 charlescountyhealth.org, 4545 Crain Highway, White Plains, Maryland.

### ST. PHILIP'S CHURCH BADEN

St. Philip's Church Baden, 13801 Baden Westwood Road, Annual Dinner will be held Saturday, July 18 at 12 p.m. until SOLD OUT. Dinners are Fried Chicken (Dark Meat \$20, White Meat \$22, Fried Fish \$22, BBQ Ribs \$22. All dinners come with potato salad, baked beans, sweet potatoes, green beans, and bread. Sandwiches are Fried Chicken (Dark Meat \$12, White Meat \$14), Fried Fish \$14, BBQ Ribs \$14, Hot Dogs \$3. Ribs, chicken & Fish PRE-ORDER & must be paid for no later than July 12. Dinner Pre-Orders: Vivian Rich 804-301-9530, Trena Hall 703-201-3863, Michele Chase 240-882-3369, Doretha Savoy 301-233-3136. We will have a Bake Sale. Celebrate Local Vendors. Art, Crafts, and Resale. Fun & games.

### HANDS ACROSS AMERICA

Hands Across America was a public fundraising event held on Sunday, May 25, 1986, Memorial Day Weekend, which attempted to create a continuous human chain of people holding hands across the contiguous United States.

### BRIDGE TO RECOVERY

Bridge to recovery faith-based recovery program. There is hope for you. Are you looking for a way out? Are you looking for weekly support? The Bridge to Recovery offers a place of love, hope, and healing for you to overcome your battles and gain victory in your life. We have been helping people find God and rebuild their lives for over 20 years. Visit us for a new look at support and recovery.

One-On-One Support. During our second Connect you will be given a moderator and a peer to help you on your journey. 52-Week Curriculum. Easy to use, simple curriculum built to help you draw closer to God and overcome your battles. 12 Core Truths. We have 12 foundational truths based on the Word of God to help you grow and live sober each day. Connect: First, we connect with God. Second, we connect with others. Third, we connect with self. The Bridge to recovery (301) 856-1616, www.ibcministries.org Independent Baptist Church, 9255 Piscataway Road, Clinton, Maryland 20735. Meeting Times: Friday 7 p.m.

### BRICKS! BRICKS! BRICKS!

Have you purchased yours yet? There is still time to support our brick fundraiser to restore the interior of the Pomonkey High School Building. Work will begin with the preparation of the sidewalk sections that will house the memorial or honorary bricks as soon as the weather permits. Plans are being completed. Supplies have begun to be ordered. We are on our way. All we need is you. Contact President Jackie Baker at jacobak@comcast.net for additional information.

*"CONGRATULATIONS to all the 2026 graduates"  
"GOOD LUCK in all your future endeavors"*

## Calendar of Events

### Marlboro Day Parade & Festival

Date and time: Saturday, June 6, 2026, 10 a.m.–2 p.m.  
Description: The M-NCPPC Prince George's County Planning Department will join the Town of Upper Marlboro for the annual celebration. The free, family-friendly festival includes a parade through town, entertainment, performances, food vendors, and more.  
Location: Governor Oden Bowie Drive, Upper Marlboro, MD 20772  
Contact: info@UpperMarlboroMD.gov.



PHOTO COURTESY UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND MEMORIAL CHAPEL

### University of Maryland Memorial Chapel All-Event

#### Open Houses

Date and time: Saturday, June 13, 2026 from 4–6 p.m.; Saturday, July 18, 2026 from 12–2 p.m.

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

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

Location: 1101 Memorial Chapel, College Park, MD 20742  
Contact: chapel@umd.edu, 301-314-9866, chapel.umd.edu

### Fifth Annual Juneteenth Celebration, "Celebrating Culture. Elevating Community"

Date and time: Friday, June 19, 2026, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.  
Description: The event, "Celebrating Culture. Elevating Community," honors Juneteenth's legacy commemorating the ending of slavery when the emancipation proclamation was finally enforced in Texas on June 19, 1865. Black-owned marketplace in the Capital Canopy (151 National Plaza) will be open until 5 p.m. The Rhythm & Roots Stage, presented by MGM National Harbor, will serve as a centerpiece of the celebration, featuring headlining performances by Too Much Talent Band and Black Alley.

Cost: Free and open to the public  
Location: 150 National Plaza, National Harbor, Maryland  
Contact: www.nationalharbor.com/events, search "Juneteenth."

### Paint & Sip at Belair Mansion

Date and time: Friday, June 26, 2026, 6:30 p.m.  
Description: Set your artistic side free and paint a wine bottle with fireworks lights. The door opens at 6 p.m. The program begins promptly at 6:30 p.m. Guests are encouraged to bring their beverage of choice. Light snacks will be provided.  
Cost: The fee is \$35 per person.  
Register at: <https://bit.ly/FairyLightsWine>  
Location: Belair Mansion, 12207 Tulip Grove Dr., Bowie, MD 20715  
Contact: (301) 809-3089

### Needles and Narratives: Stitching Resistance

Date and time: Saturday, June 27, 2026, 10 a.m.–12 p.m.  
Description: Join the Riversdale Historic Site & Museum and the African American Quilters of Baltimore (AAQB) for a hands on embroidery workshop, and learn about needlework as a form of resistance across U.S. History! Activities include: Kid-friendly, interactive lesson and museum tour! Storytime & snacks. Storyquitting Workshop, led by AAQB! Learn a new skill in stitchwork and take home your craft!  
Cost: \$10. Register on ParksDirect. For payments at the door please arrive 10 minutes early.  
Ages: Best for ages 6–12. All ages welcome!  
Location: Riversdale Historic Site & Museum, 4811 Riverdale Road, Riverdale Park, MD 20737

### River & Roots Festival

Date and time: Sunday, June 28, 2026, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
Description: For centuries, the Potomac River has been at the heart of the stories of this land. The Accokeek Foundation invites you to Piscataway Park for River and Roots, a vibrant celebration of local history, culture, and community. Enjoy live music, cultural demonstrations, storytelling, fishing activities, local food, a pop-up museum, and hands-on fun for all ages. River & Roots is free and open to all!  
Location: Piscataway Park/National Colonial Farm, 3400 Bryan Point Road, Accokeek, MD 20607  
Contact: (301) 283-2113

### Annual Father's Day Celebration Honoring All Fathers

Date and time: Sunday, June 28, 2026, 12 noon onwards  
Description: Oxon Hill Lodge No. 231 presents its annual Father's Day Celebration with outdoor BBQ, live music, food, drinks, raffle, fun for the family!  
Cost: \$20 each (benefit of building maintenance and charity)  
Location: Oxon Hill Lodge No. 231, 5730 Fisher Rd, Temple Hills, MD 20748  
Contact: @OxonHillLodge231

## In and Around Morningside-Skyline

With Mary McHale, will return soon!

## Chair Krystal Oriadha and County Executive Aisha Braveboy Deliver 'Quality of Life Budget' Without Raising Taxes or Expanding Government Spending

*Historic FY 2027 budget closes \$155 million deficit while expanding services for families, seniors, youth, small businesses, and neighborhoods*

By PRESS OFFICER  
Prince George's County Council  
Media

Despite inheriting a nearly \$155 million structural deficit, Prince George's County leaders on Wednesday adopted a balanced \$6 billion fiscal year (FY) 2027 budget that expands critical services and invests heavily in residents' quality of life without increasing the overall size of government spending.

Developed through close collaboration between County Executive Aisha Braveboy and Council Chair Krystal Oriadha, the FY 2027 budget focuses on the issues residents see and feel every day: cleaner neighborhoods, safer streets, stronger infrastructure, support for working families, expanded recreation opportunities, and investments in youth and seniors.

Chair Oriadha described the spending plan as a "Quality of Life Budget" centered on delivering visible improvements across Prince George's County.

"This budget is about improving everyday life for the people of Prince George's County," said Chair Oriadha. "We were able to close a massive deficit while still expanding services and making meaningful investments into our communities without growing the size of the budget. That required discipline, partnership, and a commitment to putting residents first."

Among the budget's major investments:

- \$2 million for child care grants for working families
- Increased funding for senior meal delivery programs
- More than \$1 million for rental assistance
- More than \$1 million to support small businesses and economic opportunity initiatives
- Increased autism support funding for the Early Connections Program
- Full funding for Providers Council organizations serving residents with disabilities
- Increased library funding to expand Sunday hours and launch new speech and language support programming for children
- Funding to establish a new Missing Black Girls Campaign
- \$250,000 for the Family Justice Center
- The budget also emphasizes investing in neighborhood revitalization and infrastructure, including:
  - More than \$30 million for roads and infrastructure improvements
  - More than \$1 million for sidewalks and pedestrian safety enhancements
  - More than \$3 million in additional beautification, litter reduction, and cleanup funding
  - \$3.6 million for Strike Force 311, the countywide cleanup initiative launched

by County Executive Braveboy

Additionally, the spending plan increases access to recreation and community programming through:

- Expanded free summer camps countywide
- Free swimming lessons at Parks and Recreation facilities
- \$1 million for autism-inclusive recreation programming
- \$1 million to expand senior programming

"We wanted residents to actually feel this budget in their daily lives," Oriadha said. "That means cleaner communities, safer roads, stronger programs for children, support for seniors, and more opportunities for families to thrive. This budget reflects a government that is focused on results people can see."

The FY 2027 operating budget also fully funds core county services, including education, public safety, libraries, and emergency response.

The adopted budget reflects a shared commitment to fiscal responsibility while continuing to move Prince George's County forward.

"This is a budget built around people," Oriadha added. "It is about creating a county where residents feel supported, neighborhoods feel cared for, and families believe their government is investing in their future."

# COMMUNITY

## Tour from A1

cial gem, full of personality and care. As you move from one stop to the next, there's always something new to notice and appreciate. It's an experience that not only showcases beauty but leaves you feeling inspired to try something new at home."

Tickets are \$25 for members and \$30 for nonmembers until June 12, children 12 and under can attend for free. Day-of tickets are \$35 for all adult guests. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit <https://www.laurelhistoricalsociety.org/laurel-garden-tour.html>. Day-of tickets and tour information can be picked up at the Laurel Museum at 817 Main Street, Laurel, MD 20707 starting at 9:45 a.m. The rain date is set for Sunday, June 14. Contact LHS at [info@laurelhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@laurelhistoricalsociety.org) or 301-725-7975 with questions.

This event is made possible in part through funding provided by our sponsors, James and Joshua Kole, the Maryland Humanities SHINE Grant, and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Department of Parks and Recreation, Prince George's County.

*For over 50 years, Laurel Historical Society (LHS) has shared Laurel's rich history, creating exhibits and programs that feature the city's architectural treasures and cultural heritage. We're hosting a Garden Tour that supports our mission of preserving and sharing Laurel with the community and raises critical funding for our organization. The Laurel Museum is open from 12 to 4 p.m. on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, and admission is always free. To learn more, visit [laurelhistoricalsociety.org](http://laurelhistoricalsociety.org).*

## Upper Marlboro's Funmi Agbebi Wins Scholarship at Global Down Syndrome Foundation Event



PHOTO CREDIT © TONY POWELL

On May 20, 2026, the Global Down Syndrome Foundation (GLOBAL) held its eighth annual AcceptAbility Gala, Washington DC's largest fundraiser for people with Down syndrome, raising \$430,000 to support important research and medical care benefiting people with Down syndrome. To recognize the transformative leadership of a key Congressional Champion, Representative Rosa DeLauro, **The Rosa DeLauro GLOBAL Advancement Award with a post-secondary scholarship was provided to Funmi Agbebi from Upper Marlboro.** Caitlin Peruccio, Legislative Counsel and Senior Policy Advisor to Representative Rosa DeLauro, was on-hand to personally present the Advancement Award. Attendees included many celebrities and many bipartisan Congressional supporters of the Down syndrome community. "GLOBAL is proud to be leading a historic era of Down syndrome research and medical breakthroughs that has already contributed to an extra ten years of life expectancy. Bringing together our congressional and NIH champions, inspirational self-advocates, families, scientists, clinicians, celebrities and supporters all under one roof is absolutely amazing. Watching the world rally around our mission to elongate life and dramatically improve health outcomes for our loved ones is truly remarkable and deeply rewarding," said GLOBAL President & CEO Michelle Sie Whitten. Visit [www.globaldownsyndrome.org](http://www.globaldownsyndrome.org).

## Local Nurses Honored During Nurses Week



COURTESY PHOTO

Recently, Wellpoint Maryland honored local nurses by delivering snacks and wellness items to more than 40 medical providers across the state, including Prince George's County. Recognizing the critical role nurses play in strengthening and protecting their communities, Wellpoint is proud to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of nurses and healthcare workers.

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PHOTO COURTESY ANDREWS FEDERAL CREDIT UNION

Andrews Federal Credit Union team members pose with County Executive Aisha Braveboy at the 330th anniversary celebration of Prince George's County.

## Andrews Federal Credit Union Celebrates, Sponsors Prince George's County 330th Anniversary

By PRESS OFFICER  
Andrews Federal Credit Union

SUITLAND, Md. (May 27, 2026)—Andrews Federal Credit Union proudly served as a presenting sponsor of the 330th anniversary celebration of Prince George's County.

The milestone celebration brought together residents, families, and local organizations for an afternoon of community engagement at Northwest Stadium. The event featured live music, food trucks, games, wellness activities, and family-friendly programming, all in an effort to create stronger connections and enhance the pride of businesses and residents of Prince George's County.

As a presenting sponsor, Andrews Federal Credit Union played

a key role in supporting the event's success and community reach. Local leaders publicly recognized the credit union's contribution, noting its partnership as instrumental in helping bring the celebration to life.

"For 78 years, Andrews Federal has called the Prince George's County area home," said Damita Robinson, Chief Operating Officer for Andrews Federal Credit Union. "We have helped thousands of members in the area establish their homes and achieve their financial goals. Our team is honored to stand alongside our members in celebrating the County and the strength and resilience of our community."

John Masterson, Andrews Federal Vice President of Retail Operations, was included as a speaker at the event and shared the credit

union's appreciation for the ongoing support from local residents and community members. In addition to sponsoring the event, Andrews Federal team members volunteered their time onsite, connecting with attendees and further emphasizing the commitment to building relationships in Prince George's County.

*Founded in 1948, Andrews Federal Credit Union has grown to serve more than 155,000 members in the District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia, New Jersey, and military installations in central Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Dedicated to empowering its members and strengthening communities, Andrews Federal offers a full range of financial products and services. Visit [andrewsfcu.org](http://andrewsfcu.org).*

## Summer Arts in the Parks Announced by M-NCPPC, Department of Parks and Recreation, Prince George's County

Free outdoor concerts, movies, and performances all summer long

By PRESS OFFICER  
M-NCPPC

RIVERDALE, Md. (May 26, 2026)—M-NCPPC, Department of Parks and Recreation in Prince George's County is kicking off Arts in the Parks, an exciting series of free outdoor concerts, movies, and performances happening all summer. These family-friendly events bring music, culture, and community fun to M-NCPPC parks and facilities across Prince George's County, inviting residents to go outside and enjoy the season.

### Upcoming Events

**Voices of Fairwood**  
June 7, June 28, July 19, 4–6 p.m. & August 16, 1–6 p.m.  
Fairwood Community Park  
12390 Fairwood Parkway, Bowie, MD 20720

This summer's performances—with R&B, soul, jazz, funk, blues, and more—embrace the multicultural nature of Prince George's. Each concert highlights and celebrates the cultural impact of African American music on our community. June's concert celebrates Caribbean American Heritage Month.

### Concerts at Cosca

June 18, July 9, July 23, August 13, & August 27, 6–8 p.m.  
Cosca Regional Park  
11000 Thrift Road, Clinton, MD 20735

The summer concert series at Cosca Regional Park offers free outdoor music to the community all summer long. Bring a lawn chair or blanket and spend time in the park with family, friends, and neighbors. Food vendors will be on-site, and all ages are welcome.

### Juneteenth Festival

Saturday, June 13, 12–5 p.m.  
Watkins Regional Park  
301 Watkins Park Drive, Upper Marlboro, MD 20774

Bring the whole family for live music, local artists and vendors, history exhibits, kids' activities, food trucks, and much more! Celebrate freedom, heritage, and community through music, culture, and fun. Feature performances from Rare Essence, Proverbs Reggae Band, Soul in Motion, and Got My Own Sound Band.

### Shakespeare in the Parks

June 14–July 5  
Throughout parks in Prince George's & Montgomery County

Enjoy the magic of live theatre in the beauty of the outdoors. This summer's featured production is *As You Like It*, one of William Shakespeare's most delightful comedies. Charming, humorous, and full of heart, *As You Like It* offers a whimsical celebration of love and laughter perfect for the whole family.

### Riversdale Summer Concert Series

May 27, June 10 & June 24, 7 p.m.  
Riversdale Historic Site and House Museum  
4811 Riverdale Road, Riverdale, MD 20737

Relax on the lawn of the historic Riversdale and enjoy live entertainment. Families are encouraged to bring lawn chairs, blankets, and a picnic dinner.

### Gather on the Green

June 18, July 16, August 20, 5–8 p.m.  
Concord Historic Site & Museum  
8000 Walker Mill Road, Capitol Heights, MD 20743

Gather on the Green is a free summer concert series at Concord Historic Site that takes place on the third Thursday of each month. In June, celebrate Black Music Month with headlining band Black History. You're invited to the cookout in July for black joy, celebration, and gathering set to the tune of classic cook-out songs and line dances. And close out the summer with Go-go on the green, in partnership with the Go-Go Museum & Café, turn up the volume in honor of go-go music.

### Drive-in Movies at Prince George's Stadium

June 18, July 10, August 28, and October 16, gates open at 7 p.m.  
Prince George's Stadium  
4101 Crain Highway, Bowie, MD 20716

Enjoy free drive-in movies at Prince George's Stadium all summer long. Plus, enjoy free snacks, food trucks, games, and more. This year's lineup brings your favorite movies, including *Black Panther*, *Hoopers*, *Respect*, and *Coco*.

For a full schedule of dates, times, and locations, visit [pgparks.com](http://pgparks.com). Performances are subject to cancellation due to weather emergencies. Be prepared for storms and other emergencies this summer. Stay updated and prepared through PGParks Alert, M-NCPPC's free weather and emergency notification services.

*With over 29,000 acres of parkland, trails, athletic fields, playgrounds, and more, the M-NCPPC, Department of Parks and Recreation in Prince George's County provides an award-winning park system through progressive, quality, innovative leadership and a commitment to its community and environment. Visit [www.pgparks.com](http://www.pgparks.com).*

# BUSINESS AND FINANCE

## FedChoice Federal Credit Union Helps to Empower the Next Generation

By PRESS OFFICER  
FedChoice Federal Credit Union

LANHAM, Md. (May 27, 2026)—Financial literacy took center stage recently as six volunteers from FedChoice Federal Credit Union joined forces with Junior Achievement to mentor nearly 60 local seventh-grade students from Imagine Leeland Public Charter School during an immersive, hands-on learning experience at the Junior Achievement Finance Park Prince George's County.

The interactive program allowed students to step into the shoes of adults for a day to create budgets, balance real-world expenses, and navigate the modern economy. The FedChoice team brought a diverse mix of career expertise—including internal audit, human resources, lending, and retail operations—giving students unique, firsthand insight into how to manage finances and stick to a budget when real life happens.

"Building a resilient community starts with investing directly in our youth," said Sandra Park, Chief People & Strategy Officer at FedChoice. "Our team didn't just show up to volunteer; we rolled up our sleeves to share real-world insights from our own life experiences. Seeing their creativity—like a student budgeting only a

dollar for transit because they plan to walk—and watching those 'lightbulb moments' happen is exactly why we wanted to partner with Junior Achievement."

For more information about FedChoice and its community initiatives, please visit [fedchoice.org](http://fedchoice.org)

FedChoice Federal Credit Union was originally chartered in 1935 when a group of Bureau of Internal Revenue (aka IRS) employees decided to establish a credit union to meet their financial needs. Since then, FedChoice has grown stronger each year by serving all federal employees, retirees, and their immediate family and household members in the Washington DC, Baltimore and Philadelphia metro areas. With access to over 60,000 surcharge-free ATMs, over 5,000 CO-OP Shared Branches, plus online and mobile banking, members may access their accounts 24/7/365. FedChoice serves over 25,000 members and has \$489 million in assets.

**Six volunteers from FedChoice Federal Credit Union joined forces with Junior Achievement to mentor nearly 60 local seventh-grade students from Imagine Leeland Public Charter School.**

PHOTO COURTESY FEDCHOICE FEDERAL CREDIT UNION



## PART 2—A REGION RESHAPED: FEDERAL LAYOFFS IN MARYLAND A YEAR LATER

### Federal Worker Layoffs Threaten Cornerstone Industry for Maryland

Maryland draws billions of dollars from the federal government each year, but with federal cuts and mass layoffs, state officials and others worry about the lasting impact on the state's economy.

By SAM GAUNTT  
Capital News Service

Maryland, home to federal agencies, military installations and tens of thousands of contractors, has long relied on employment and a steady flow of money from the U.S. government.

In a given year, Maryland draws about \$150 billion in federal contracts, grants, salaries and other sources of funding, according to a recent report on federal layoffs from the University of Maryland's business school and the state comptroller's office. More than almost any other state, Maryland depended on the economic boon that came from its proximity to the nation's capital.

But since President Donald Trump returned to office early last year and vowed to reshape the federal government, Maryland has lost more than 31,000 federal jobs—about a 15% reduction.

Maryland's Secretary of Commerce Harry Coker Jr. called the federal layoffs "tragic" and said they have had a ripple effect across the state's economy.

"No state has been impacted to the degree that Maryland has with regards to the number of federal jobs lost," he said. "That is tragic for those individuals and their families and their loved ones."

Christopher Meyer, a research analyst at the Maryland Center on Economic Policy, said that over the past few years, the state's economy was strong in many areas but has grown more slowly than the U.S. overall.

The federal cuts aren't helping.

"Fewer good jobs—federal jobs—available in the state does mean that we're going to be a less attractive place for families to locate," he said. "That also makes us less attractive for businesses because of less demand from those relatively well-paid federal workers."

Fewer federal jobs mean families lose income, Meyer said, which leads to less spending at the local level, putting strain not only on state and local governments but also on private businesses.

Meyer noted that despite the cuts, Maryland still has a sizable federal workforce. But he said, they have had a "pretty serious impact."



PHOTO JESS DANINHRSCH/CAPITAL NEWS SERVICE

**Bill Bimber claps for federal workers who have lost their jobs at the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C. on March 28, 2025.**

#### What are the numbers?

Nearly 230,000 Marylanders are employed by the federal government in both defense and non-defense positions, according to the layoffs report. Those jobs account for about \$26.9 billion in wages.

Residents across the state have and will continue to feel the impact of the cuts, officials said. The federally funded Beltsville Agricultural Research Center is slated for closure. The U.S. Agency for International Development was dismantled and the staff of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services was reduced.

Cuts to federal jobs and layoffs of federal workers in Maryland have resulted in billions in lost revenue for the state, according to the report.

"What's happening in Washington is not only unfair, it's just un-

conscionable," said Del. Denise Roberts, D-Prince George's. "These [layoffs] affect real people, real lives, people who have mortgages, people who have to pay the rent, people who have children. What are they supposed to do now?"

The cuts have also been felt in the state's finances.

Amid an already difficult budget environment, Gov. Wes Moore and the Maryland General Assembly once again had to close a projected spending shortfall of more than \$1 billion this past legislative session.

#### What's the reaction?

Coker, the state commerce secretary, said beyond the people directly affected, the mass layoffs have impacted Maryland's economy.

"There's also consultants, engineering firms, logistics firms, that support some of those federal departments and agencies that have been cut back," he said. "That has also increased the amount of jobs that we've lost in Maryland as a direct result of some of the policies coming out of Washington."

He also said the layoffs have reduced spending, which affects the state's economy as a whole.

"There's a ripple effect when we don't have money in our pockets," Coker said. "When we lose our jobs, we don't do as much grocery shopping, we don't take vacations."

State lawmakers have worked to support federal workers who've lost their jobs.

The General Assembly passed the Protect Our Federal Workers Act last April, which pulled money from the rainy day fund to create a no-interest loan program for laid-off federal workers in Maryland.

It also expanded the power of Maryland's attorney general to try and protect residents from federal decisions and created a fast-track hiring program for former federal workers aiming to transition to state jobs.

Last year, Moore also launched a support system for laid-off federal employees, which includes legal assistance, housing resources, emergency relief funds and career transition help.

"Marylanders are paying the highest price," Moore said in an October statement. "These are dedicated public servants who devote their careers to keeping our food safe, maintaining public health and ensuring our seniors, veterans and children receive the support they need. Our citizens' lives and livelihoods are being pushed even further into jeopardy."

Capital News Service reporters Ian Ferris, Andrew Mollenauer, Nolan Rogalski and Irit Skulnik contributed to this story.

## PART 3—A REGION RESHAPED: FEDERAL LAYOFFS IN MARYLAND A YEAR LATER

### State Officials Troubled Over Upcoming Closure of Federal Agricultural Research Center in Maryland

The Trump administration's plan to close the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center could decimate Maryland's agriculture industry and stunt critical research, experts and lawmakers warn.

By RHIANNON EVANS  
Capital News Service

BELTSVILLE, Md. (May 21, 2026)—The closure of a federal agricultural research facility in Maryland could lead to a loss of scientific breakthroughs and hundreds of jobs, state lawmakers, officials and experts said.

"It's such an important part of the rural economy," said Charlotte Davis, executive director of the Rural Maryland Council. "We want to make sure that our Maryland farmers are thriving and getting the support they need to remain profitable."

The shutdown of the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, known as BARC, could disrupt Maryland's largest commercial industry and add to the more than 31,000 federal jobs the state lost over the last year, state officials said.

The research center explores new farming practices and technologies and helps find solutions to climate and pest issues, said Wendy Powers, dean of the University of Maryland's College of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Powers said moving current experiments to other locations in places like Washington state and Florida could interfere with research results because of differences in climate, soil and water.

"Removing the research observations from this part of the country and placing it in other parts of the country makes it a little bit difficult to ensure that the findings are applicable," Powers said.

Democrats in Maryland's congressional delegation called the planned closure of the facility unlawful, pointing to a clause in the 2026 U.S. Department of Agriculture budget bill that requires approval



PHOTO RHIANNON EVANS/CAPITAL NEWS SERVICE

**The U.S. Department of Agriculture headquarters has a banner hanging out front celebrating the nation's 250th birthday.**

from Congress to shutter the Beltsville facility.

"It is extremely troubling that, instead of working with Congress on a sensible plan to modernize BARC, the Department is pursuing an abrupt, politically-motivated, and short-sighted effort to shutter a facility

See CLOSURE Page A6

### The Prince George's Post

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Contents © 2026, The Prince George's Post

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Prince George's County, Md. Member National Newspaper Publishers Association, and the Maryland, Delaware, District of Columbia Press Association. The Prince George's Post (ISSN 10532226) is published every Thursday by the New Prince George's Post Inc., 15209 Marlboro Pike, Suite 209, Upper Marlboro, Md. 20772-3151. Subscription rate: 25 cents per single copy; \$15 per year; \$7.50 senior citizens and students; out of county add \$1; out of state add \$2. Periodical postage paid at Southern Md. 20790. Postmaster, send address changes to Prince George's Post, P.O. Box 1001, Upper Marlboro, Md. 20773.

# BUSINESS AND FINANCE

## Social Security Matters

Ask Rusty:

### I'm Being Released From Incarceration. What Are My Social Security Options?

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

**Dear Rusty:** In a previous column, you wrote about people who filed for Social Security late in life. I am currently incarcerated and will be filing for Social Security in the fall of 2029. I will be 74 years old in the first week of January 2029. Unless I read it wrong, could I be eligible to collect the previous 6 months? If this is so, how would that work? Would I get that all at once or incrementally? According to the chart we once got in the mail, I should be collecting the maximum amount. I've worked all of my life and never collected Social Security before. Also, my ex-wife remarried and has since passed away. Do I qualify for part of her Social Security? **Signed, "D" in Danbury**

**Dear "D" in Danbury:** I'm afraid you cannot receive Social Security benefits while you are incarcerated, even if you are eligible for them prior to your release. Thus, you cannot get retroactive Social Security benefits for any period you were still incarcerated. For clarity, although most who apply at a later age (e.g., in their 70s) do have the option to claim retroactive benefits, you cannot get any SS benefits for any month you were still incarcerated. Further, you will not get credit for delaying your application for SS benefits while you are incarcerated (you won't earn Delayed Retirement Credits (DRCs) during your incarceration).

Assuming (from what you shared) that you expect to be released from incarceration in the fall of 2029, you can apply for your SS benefits to start upon your release. Be aware, however, that it usually takes several months for your application for SS benefits to be processed, and you can specify the month you wish your benefits start. Your benefit amount will be based upon your average monthly earnings for the 35 highest earning years over your lifetime. But you cannot get retroactive SS benefits for time prior to your release from incarceration. Since Social Security does not pay benefits for partial months, you can file for your SS benefits to start effective with the month following the month in which your incarceration ends. Be sure you have your official prison release documentation (parole or discharge papers) in hand when you apply for your Social Security benefits.

FYI, some correctional facilities have a "Pre-release Agreement" with Social Security, which may enable you to file for your SS benefits three to four months prior to your release from incarceration. Be sure to check with your facility to see if they have such an agreement with Social Security and, if so, use it to apply for your benefits in advance of your release. This will facilitate your SS benefits starting more quickly upon your release.

You did not ask about healthcare coverage, but since you will be eligible for Social Security, you will also be eligible for Medicare upon your release. When you apply for your Social Security benefits, you can also apply for Medicare Part B (coverage for outpatient medical services), the premium for which will be deducted from your Social Security payment. FYI, Medicare Part A (coverage for inpatient hospitalization services) is free and automatic because you are also eligible for Social Security.

Finally, regarding survivor benefits from your ex-wife, you can only get a surviving ex-spouse benefit if you were married for more than 10 years and your own SS retirement amount is less than your ex-wife was receiving at her death. In other words, you can only get one SS benefit—either your own or your deceased ex-wife's amount, whichever is higher.

*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](https://amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory)) or email us at [ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org](mailto:ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org).*

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

## Maryland Small Business Development Center

### How Do I Get Leads?

June 12, 2026 • 10-11 a.m. • Online • No Fee Register:  
<https://mdsbdc.eccenterdirect.com/events/18568>

Stop guessing where your next job will come from. Learn how to generate consistent, high-quality leads and keep your schedule full. Why are some service businesses fully booked while others are stuck chasing the next job every week? AsrorJon Shukurov, SBA Maryland Minority Owned Small Business of the Year, is an award-winning entrepreneur, author, and SaaS builder who built a seven-figure service business from the ground up and is now building KLEENUP, a platform designed to bring demand directly to service providers. In this virtual training, Jon will show how to stop relying on referrals, stop guessing where the next job will come from, and start building a steady flow of high-quality leads that actually convert. Whether you are running a service company or still trying to land your first consistent clients, this session will give you a clear path to getting booked without the constant chase. Presenter, Jon Shukurov AsrorJon Shukurov | Entrepreneur | Author | Speaker

## MGM National Harbor Names Padou Kabchi Vice President of Hospitality

By PRESS OFFICER  
MGM National Harbor

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. (May 26, 2026)—MGM National Harbor is proud to announce Padou Kabchi as its new Vice President of Hospitality. Starting from a front desk agent at Gold Strike in Mississippi in 2009 to taking over a leading executive role at the Maryland-based entertainment destination, Kabchi's rise through MGM Resorts International brings a strategic and operational mindset that will support continued excellence across hospitality operations.

Kabchi brings more than 15 years of hospitality leadership experience. Most recently, he spent two years in Dubai, United Arab Emirates serving as Executive Director of Hotel Operations at Atlantis The Royal. He previously served as Director of Hotel Operations at MGM National Harbor in 2022 before transitioning to The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas where he held the same role.

"I am thrilled and honored to return to MGM National Harbor, a unique hospitality destination in the heart of the



COURTESY PHOTO

Padou Kabchi

Capital Region," said Kabchi. "We have a lot of passion and pride here, and I look forward to continue elevating our guest experience."

Kabchi also proudly served in the United States Army Reserve from 2015 to 2025, demonstrating a decade-long

commitment to leadership, service, and discipline that continues to inform his professional approach.

*Located in an unrivaled setting, MGM National Harbor offers stunning panoramic views of the Eastern shore of the Potomac River in Maryland. The \$1.4 billion LEED® Gold Certified resort sits a short distance from Washington, D.C. to the north and historic sites, including George Washington's Mount Vernon estate across the river in Virginia. The 24-story, 308-room resort features premier amenities and experiences for locals as well as visitors from around the world including a dynamic two-level casino with over 160,000 square feet of space that includes slots, table games, and poker; a world-class spa and salon; an entertainment theater with flexible seating for up to 3,000; high-end branded retail; 50,000 square feet of meeting space; and restaurants from renowned local, national, and international chefs. MGM National Harbor is owned by MGM Resorts International. Visit [mgmnationalharbor.com](http://mgmnationalharbor.com) or follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.*

## The High Cost of Housing: Hitting Marylanders Hard

By DANNY CHUNG-A-FUNG  
Capital News Service

On a warm Sunday afternoon in Olney, Maryland, would-be homeowners perused a three-bedroom townhouse overlooking a lake.

This particular home was up for sale for nearly a quarter of a million dollars — which was enough to make prospective first-time homebuyers like Vincent Kiatta think twice.

"The market is tough", Kiatta, 27, said after touring that townhome.

Plenty of Marylanders agree. According to a poll conducted in January by Greater Greater Washington, a local advocacy group, over 90% of Maryland residents polled think the cost of buying or renting a house is a problem.

Dan Reed, the Maryland policy director of Greater Greater Washington, said housing affordability is a key issue in the state.

"People need access to homes they can afford to have," Reed said.

But that's not necessarily what many residents of Maryland get.

According to data released by the Maryland Association of Realtors, the median sales price in the state was \$430,000 in March 2026. This is a 70% increase over the past 10 years, when it was just over \$250,000.

And in Montgomery County, one of the more affluent counties in the state, the median sales price was around \$650,000 this March—also about a 70% increase from 2016.

### A housing shortage

For Reed, who grew up in Montgomery County, the issue of affordable housing hits home.

"I watched my parents struggle to find homes they could afford growing up," Reed said. "I lived in a variety of not so great housing situations as a young adult... so this is deeply personal to me as well."

Kelly Virbickas is a real estate agent with Compass Real Estate, mainly working in the Chevy Chase region—where, she said the average home price is around \$1.2 million.

"It's all in the location and the land," Virbickas said. "People want those locations because of the schooling, the proximity to work, the prestige."

But an October 2025 report from Maryland Comptroller Brooke Lierman highlighted a big problem: There is not enough housing available to meet the demand.

So why can the state simply just build more homes?

Experts say it's because the process of building a home, from permitting to construction, is extremely complex. Reed said that while there is enough land to build housing, zoning restrictions can slow down or even stop the process.

Many communities limit what kinds

of homes can be built depending on the lot, and some zoning restrictions bar the construction of multi-family housing.

To address that issue, Maryland Gov. Wes Moore introduced the Starter and Silver Homes Act, which would allow for smaller single-family homes on smaller lots and townhouses in residential areas across the state.

However, this bill was never voted out of committee before the end of the General Assembly's annual three-month session in April.

Moore also has testified in favor of the Maryland Transit and Opportunity Act, which aims to encourage development near transit stations. That bill passed the General Assembly.

"Our ability to be able to create a more vibrant and a more affordable market is going to be a key determination about how we're going to think about the larger growth of our economy," Moore said in the testimony.

### 'Not even close'

The comptroller's report said Maryland will need about 590,000 more housing units than it has to meet growth projections through 2045. That's a number of housing units nearly equal to the entire current population of Wyoming.

So are there enough homes being built to keep Marylanders in the state?

"Not even close," said Jake Day, secretary of the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development.

According to the comptroller's report, Maryland municipalities typically approve between 16,000-19,000 housing permits annually. In order to meet the state's projected housing goals, the state would have to double the amount of permits approved.

But going from permitting to building can be painfully slow. Kiatta knows this firsthand.

Kiatta works at Erickson Senior Living, a retirement community with multiple locations in the area. He said the company's latest construction project in Clarksville has just now gotten under way because of the complicated approval process from the state.

"We've owned the land for five years, and we just broke ground this month on the land," Kiatta said. "That's how much time it takes."

Kiatta was touring the townhome in Olney with his girlfriend and parents. He has lived at home his whole life despite being out of college for nearly four years, in large part because of the high cost of housing.

"But... we have to leave Mom and Dad at some point," he noted.

### Interest rates

Another major concern among prospective homebuyers is interest rates, which have increased even faster than housing prices in recent years.

According to data from Freddie Mac,

**Prince George's County:**  
The median home price has increased 87.29% between March 2016 and March 2026.

a government backed buyer of mortgages on the secondary market, the average fixed-rate 30-year mortgage currently comes with an interest rate of just over 6%, nearly double what rates were 10 years ago.

Average 30-year mortgage rates fell below 4% during the Covid-19 pandemic, but all that changed once product shortages stemming from the crisis prompted prices of many products to skyrocket.

"By 2022, the Federal Reserve began raising its benchmark interest rate to cool pandemic-spurred inflation, and mortgage rates followed suit," Andrew Dehan, senior writer for home lending at Bankrate, wrote recently in a history of U.S. mortgage rates. "Fast-forward to October 2023, and the 30-year mortgage rate broke through 8%—an average not seen since 2000."

Rates then fell as the Fed cut its benchmark rate, but have inched up again lately as the Iran War has fueled a new round of inflation, Dehan added.

Jackie Bennett, the president-elect of the Greater Capital Area Realtors Association, said interest rates have been a factor in the increasing cost of homeownership.

"Interest rate has been sustained at a higher level, but... home sellers really have not had the confidence to jump into the market," Bennett said.

Virbickas explained how when most people buy a home, they consider how high the monthly mortgage payment will be—which escalates as interest rates rise.

"Interest rates, when they fluctuate, it brings down [the] ability to purchase a higher-priced home," Virbickas said.

### The benefits of homeownership

While the cost of home ownership is skyrocketing, home ownership can provide great benefits that go beyond the walls of a home.

According to research from Habitat for Humanity, there is a correlation between homeownership and increased wealth.

Every year of homeownership yet tends to add nearly \$10,000 in net wealth, that study said.

Elliot Eisenberg of the Housing Affordability Institute noted that homeownership provides a safeguard against inflation when people lock in a fixed-rate mortgage at a decent rate.

And these benefits trickle down to the next generation, too. According to Habitat, children of low-income homeowners are 11% more likely to graduate from high school than children of low-income renters.

So for all of those reasons, Virbickas said people who can afford to buy a home should definitely do so.

"I do believe everybody should try and own a home," Virbickas said.

"It's a big expense, but it's usually very rewarding."

