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"I think the need has always been there." — Coleen Ellis, consultant for Dulaney Valley Pet Loss Center



Richard Thompson, of Medfield, and Tucker, his beagle, in the Dulaney Valley Memorial Gardens Pet Sanctuary. Thompson has had several beagle family members and lost two of them recently. **KIM HAIRSTON/BALTIMORE SUN PHOTOS**

As the pet industry grows, pet death business booms

Animal memorial parks, cremation alternatives among industry trends

By Ngan Ho

When Richard Thompson's wife of 40 years was nearing the end of her life earlier this year at a Baltimore County hospital, he couldn't fathom living alone, especially after their two beagles recently had died unexpectedly.

So Thompson, 73, of Baltimore's Medfield neighborhood, adopted a new rescue beagle named Tucker from Beagle Rescue of Southern Maryland in May. Tucker was the godsend the retired school teacher needed as his wife died in June.

"This dog was a miracle because he was there. He loved to be with us. He's such a sweet dog," Thompson said. "I put him up on her bed. She met him. She said, 'You made a good choice.'"

For people like Thompson, pet parenting is sacred. Their animals are much-loved family members who provide support across many stages of life — and as the roles of pets evolve, so does demand for their death care.

The heavyset 5-year-old beagle appeared tucked out as he waddled recently into the Dulaney Valley Pet Loss Center — a pet funeral home associated with Dulaney Valley Memorial Gardens that opened in



A Faithful Friends section of Dulaney Valley Memorial Gardens holds the remains of a family of pets. The section allows for people to be interred with their pets.

September in Timonium. The pair came to check out the center because Thompson plans to use it for Tucker one day.

The business of pet death care is growing exponentially, in proportion to what's happening with pet ownership and pet expenditures, said Coleen Ellis, who was hired as a consultant for the pet loss center.

"I think the need has always been there," but people have pushed for it more lately, she said. "This is the one area that was probably lacking for all these years."

Ellis, who lives in Texas, is an expert on pet loss and trends. She opened the first

standalone pet funeral home in the U.S. in Indianapolis in 2004. It offers the experiential parts of a funeral without a cemetery or a crematory, she said.

People who consider themselves pet parents, as opposed to pet owners, often believe that if it's good enough for people, then it's absolutely perfect for pets, Ellis said.

"I think it's gotten to a point where a lot of people have said, 'I did all these things while they were alive. I want to make sure

Turn to Pets, Page 2

New faces to head to capital

Elections spur variety of personnel shake-ups expected at State House

By Hannah Gaskill

Promotions, retirements and voters' decisions will bring shake-ups to the State House in Annapolis in January beyond Maryland's top statewide positions of governor, attorney general and comptroller.

And while Democrats in the General Assembly may find an ally in Gov.-elect Wes Moore, those in the House will need to seek out a new majority leader and majority whip — two key posts in the chamber.

Moore announced last week that he has tapped House Majority Leader Eric Luedtke to serve as the chief legislative officer on his leadership team. Luedtke will resign Jan. 2.

That vacancy and another left by Baltimore Del. Talmadge Branch, the House majority whip, will leave both Democratic House leadership positions up for grabs. Branch announced he would not run for reelection at the end of the 2022 legislative session.

Luedtke, who represents Montgomery County, has served as the majority leader for four years. Branch has been the

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SPORTS



US and Wales tie in World Cup return

Gareth Bale converted a penalty kick in the 82nd minute to offset Tim Weah's first-half goal and give Wales a 1-1 draw. **Page 6**

Suspect in Colo. gay club shooting facing 10 charges

Patron 'went into combat mode' to subdue gunman

By Thomas Peipert and Jesse Bedayn
Associated Press

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — The man suspected of opening fire at a gay nightclub in Colorado Springs was being held on murder and hate crimes charges Monday, two days after the attack that killed five people and left 17 others with gunshot wounds.

Online court records showed that Anderson Lee Aldrich, 22, faced five murder charges and five charges of committing a bias-motivated crime causing bodily injury in Saturday night's attack at Club Q.

He remained hospitalized with unspecified injuries, police said.

The charges were preliminary, and prosecutors had not filed them in court. The hate crime charges would require proving that the gunman was motivated by bias, such as against the victims' actual or perceived

sexual orientation or gender identity.

The attack was halted when a patron grabbed a handgun from Aldrich, hit him with it and pinned him down until police arrived minutes later.

In an account told to The New York Times, Richard Fierro said he was at a table in Club Q with his wife, daughter and friends Saturday, watching a drag show, when the flash of gunfire ripped across the nightclub. He said his instincts from four combat deployments as an Army officer in Iraq and Afghanistan kicked in and that he told himself to fight back.

In an interview at his house, where his wife and daughter were still recovering from injuries, Fierro, 45, who left the Army in 2013 as a major, according to military records, described charging through the chaos at the club, tackling the gunman and beating him bloody with the gunman's own gun.

"I don't know exactly what I did, I just went into combat mode," Fierro said, shaking his head. "I just know I have to kill this guy before he kills us."

Turn to Shooting, Page 4

HOLIDAY SHOPPING AND FOOTBALL

OFFICIAL

POP-UP SHOP

OPEN

NOVEMBER 22 - 26

CLOSED THANKSGIVING

11AM-7PM

FREE PARKING AVAILABLE IN LOT B

FROM PAGE ONE

Assembly

from Page 1

majority whip since 2007. Whips help party leaders count and keep supporters in line ahead of key votes.

Representatives for House Speaker Adrienne A. Jones and the House Democratic Caucus chair declined to comment on potential replacements for both positions.

Luedtke represents District 14, which includes Olney, Laytonsville and Cloverly. He and fellow incumbent Democrats Anne Kaiser and Pam Queen were reelected earlier this month. Upon Luedtke’s resignation, the Montgomery County Democratic Central Committee will nominate his replacement, who will be appointed by outgoing Gov. Larry Hogan, a Republican.

Branch represented Baltimore’s District 45, which encompasses Hamilton, Gardenville, Armistead Gardens and other neighborhoods. That area will now be represented by Caylin Young, Jackie Addison and incumbent Del. Stephanie Smith, all of whom are Democrats.

The House’s minority party also will need a new second-in-command.

While House Minority Leader Jason Buckel ran unopposed in Allegany County, Del. Haven Shoemaker, who was the minority party’s second-in-command, gave up his seat to run successfully for Carroll

County state’s attorney.

Shoemaker represented Carroll County’s District 5, which includes Eldersberg, Marston and Westminster. That area will be represented by Chris Tomlinson, Christopher Eric Bouchat and incumbent Del. April Rose, all of whom are Republicans.

Leadership positions for both parties are open for election at the start of every legislative session.

Retirements among tenured committee chairs also left holes to fill in the 141-person House chamber.

Jones appointed Del. Joseline Peña-Melnyk, who represents Prince George’s and Anne Arundel counties, to chair the House Government and Health Operations Committee, after Howard County Del. Shane Pendergrass’s announcement that she would be retiring after 27 years in the legislature.

Similarly, Jones named Del. Ben Barnes, also of Anne Arundel and Prince George’s counties, as the replacement for House Appropriations Committee Chair Maggie McIntosh, who is resigning from the General Assembly after 30 years.

Pendergrass represents District 13, which encompasses Maple Lawn, Oakland Mills and Savage. That area will be represented by Pam Lanman Guzzone — Senate Finance Committee Chair Guy Guzzone’s ex-wife — House Ways and Means Committee Chair Vanessa Atterbeary and incumbent Del. Jen Terrasa, all of whom are Democrats. McIn-

tosh represents District 43, which includes Baltimore’s Waverly, Kenilworth Park and Ramblewood neighborhoods. That area will be represented by Elizabeth Embry and incumbent Del. Regina Boyce, both Democrats.

The chairs of all other key House committees were reelected.

Another notable change in the House: Del. Brenda Thiam, a representative of Hagerstown and the first Black woman to serve as a member of the chamber’s Republican Party, was defeated by Democrat Brooke Grossman.

Upcoming Senate changes for 2023

The Senate also saw a series of departures at the end of the 2022 legislative session, including two of its most-revered octogenarians and leaders, Delores Kelley, who chaired the Finance Committee, and Ron Young, the chair of the Executive Nominations Committee.

Del. Benjamin Brooks will replace Kelley as the representative of District 10 in Baltimore County, which includes Reisterstown and Randallstown. Kelley served in the General Assembly for 27 years. Young, who served for 11 years, will be replaced by his wife, Del. Karen Lewis-Young, representing Frederick City in the Senate.

Senate President Bill Ferguson has yet to appoint new chairs to replace Kelley and Young.

Sen. George Edwards, a Republican representing District 1, which includes Cumberland, Oakland and other areas in Allegany, Garrett and Washington counties, will be replaced by Republican Del. Mike McKay. Prince George’s County Sen. Obie Patterson, a Democrat who represents Oxon Hill, Fort Washington and other communities in District 26, will be succeeded by C. Anthony Muse.

Both Edwards, who served in the legislature for 39 years, and Patterson, who served 16 nonconsecutive years, chose to retire at the end of the term.

Harford County Sen. Bob Cassilly also chose not to seek a third term in the Senate and secured his new position as county executive in a landslide victory.

Cassilly, a Republican, will be replaced by Democrat Mary-Dulany James as the senator for Havre de Grace, Aberdeen, Edgewood and other areas in District 34.

Frederick County Sen. Mike Hough, a Republican, gave up his seat to pursue an unsuccessful bid for county executive. He lost to Democrat Jessica Fitzwater on a razor-thin margin of 49.5% to 50.4%.

Bill Folden, a Republican, will take Hough’s seat as the Senate’s representative of District 4, which includes Adamstown, Walkersville and New Market.

Pets

from Page 1

their final moments here, their final walk is exactly like they lived — memorable, beautiful, special and unique, just like they were,” she said.

The pet industry exceeded \$123.6 billion in sales nationwide last year, the highest in history, according to the American Pet Products Association — a trade group serving the interests of the pet products industry.

This was the second consecutive record-setting year for the industry, following a banner year in 2020, when it exceeded \$100 billion in sales for the first time, according to the association. There were spending increases in every category including death care and grief supplies.

Purchasing something to memorialize a pet upon its death is something more pet owners say they plan to do, according to the association’s National Pet Owners Survey.

The association reported, for example, that 52% of dog owners in 2018 said they would purchase something upon the death of their pet, while that percentage increased to 61% in 2020. For cat owners, it rose from 42% to 57% for the same years.

The 2020 survey showed that most people would buy an urn for ashes or a memorial stone for the home or yard and caskets. Just under 10% of pet owners say they would purchase memorial jewelry upon the death of their pet.

“Anecdotally, what I’ve watched over the 20 years since I’ve been very focused and dedicated to respectful and dignified pet loss services is the pet parents step up and say, ‘I want more;’” Ellis said.

The percentage of U.S. homes with pets reached an estimated 70% in 2022, according to the pet products association.

Some families got pets during the lockdown days of the pandemic, but Ellis attributes the increase in pet ownership to millennials who have struck out on their own and want company and baby boomers with their “empty nest syndromes.”

“They weren’t ready to be empty — so they got a pet,” she said. “Then you’ve got the millennials, who waited for a while to have children. And so you’ve got both of those, which represent our largest population demographics in our country, you’ve got

Although cremation has become a more popular option for pets in recent decades, there’s now another burial alternative: aquamation.



Stone urns are on display at the Dulaney Valley Pet Loss Center at Dulaney Valley Memorial Gardens. KIM HAIRSTON/BALTIMORE SUN

both of them who embraced it.”

In years, past when a pet died, people would sometimes just bury it in the backyard. Often, they’d leave it to veterinarians to dispose of the body or get the animal cremated, perhaps keeping the ashes or spreading them somewhere.

But people are wanting expanded services for their deceased pets nowadays.

Pet death care options were on full display at the National Funeral Directors Association International Convention & Expo in Baltimore in October.

Although cremation has become a more popular option for pets in recent decades, there’s now another burial alternative: aquamation. Indiana-based Bio-Response Solutions describes its aquamation services as a more eco-friendly alternative that’s less harsh than flame cremation.

Aquamation, or alkaline hydrolysis, uses water, alkaline chemicals, heat and sometimes pressure and agitation to accelerate natural decomposition.

“We thought we’d get the people who are eco-friendly, but we hear personal stories

about pets that died in a house fire,” said Samantha Sieber, Bio-Response Solutions’ vice president of research. “It’s hugely common because they just can’t imagine a fire cremation after their pet suffered that kind of death.”

Other cases include pets who loved spending time in the water, she said.

Some companies at the expo offered to turn cremated pet remains into stones or use them in jewelry.

Dulaney Valley Memorial Gardens, owned by Mitchell-Wiedefeld Funeral Home Inc., opened its first pet memorial garden in 1967, called Pet Haven.

In 2010, it expanded with Pet Sanctuary, another pet burial garden, featuring a bronze statue of a golden retriever and a tabby cat as its centerpiece. That same year, it opened Faithful Friends, an area where owners can be buried with their pets. The animals are buried separately and placed beneath their owners’ feet.

The Dulaney Valley Pet Loss Center is the latest addition to the cemetery’s pet memorial services.

“Over the years, and particularly since the pandemic, we have seen growth exponentially in this area as pets have become more a part of families, and now, their owners want to celebrate their lives,” said Amy S. Shimp, who has been the cemetery’s general manager since 2007.

The cemetery handles about 100 pet burials per year and has buried more than 4,000 pets over the years from all over the state, Shimp said.

Ten of Thompson’s pets are buried at the cemetery, and it also will be Tucker’s final resting place.

“Anybody who has ever had a dog or cat would agree with me that they change your lives,” Thompson said. “There’s a bond between a person and a pet that is very difficult to quantify, but it’s something very special. When I look back at all the animals that I’ve had, each one of them was different, but they were all unique in their own way.”

Baltimore Sun reporter Frederick N. Rasmussen contributed to this article.

Maryland coronavirus cases by the numbers

Confirmed deaths in parentheses

Source: Maryland Health Department

Confirmed cases: 1,282,108
Positivity rate (7 day): 7.07%
Female 694,192 (7,313)
Male 587,916 (8,080)
Confirmed deaths: 15,393
Probable deaths: 274
Currently hospitalized: 369
Acute care: 335
Intensive care : 34
Completed primary series: 4,895,587
Received monovalent booster: 2,756,370
Received bivalent booster: 1,002,817
State population age 18 and over with at least one dose: 95%

CONFIRMED CASES BY COUNTY						BY AGE RANGE						
Allegany	20,658	(377)	Harford	47,068	(629)	0-9	123,016	(8)	50-59	172,399	(1,390)	
Anne Arundel	112,863	(1,189)	Howard	59,771	(412)	10-19	154,301	(18)	60-69	119,351	(2,699)	
Baltimore	161,967	(2,620)	Kent	3,765	(70)	20-29	213,894	(81)	70-79	63,484	(3,849)	
Baltimore City	140,392	(1,857)	Montgomery	229,754	(2,177)	30-39	217,274	(227)	80+	37,315	(6,546)	
Calvert	13,933	(156)	Prince George's	214,249	(2,240)	40-49	181,074	(573)	Data not available			0
Caroline	6,995	(87)	Queen Anne's	8,412	(126)	BY RACE/ETHNICITY						
Carroll	26,403	(435)	St. Mary's	23,136	(234)	African American (NH)	425,030	(5,149)	<i>Note: NH = Non-Hispanic (Updated Monday morning)</i>			
Cecil	19,120	(274)	Somerset	5,932	(77)	Asian (NH)	52,448	(483)				
Charles	36,088	(387)	Talbot	6,827	(102)	White (NH)	511,257	(8,523)				
Dorchester	9,070	(112)	Washington	39,775	(603)	Hispanic	153,663	(1,055)				
Frederick	55,313	(559)	Wicomico	23,536	(347)	Other (NH)	63,169	(165)				
Garrett	6,768	(120)	Worcester	10,313	(175)							

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