

## Green makeover a win for student

The James River Association (JRA) is proud to announce Ruhan Farsin of Midlothian Middle School as the winner of its Green Homes essay contest. The contest asked area middle schoolers why their family needed a green home makeover. As a prize, JRA staff, along with the help of Ruhan's family, installed a rain garden at the Farsin's home to reduce rain water runoff into the James River watershed.

The overall greening of the Farsin's home included the rain garden as well as a patio made of permeable pavers. The makeover also included several small gardens located at the base of downspouts and re-seeding the yard with a grass mixture that will require less water and fertilizer.

"Rain runoff from homes and local businesses is the fastest growing source of pollution in the James River," said Bill Street, executive director at the James River Association. "Rain gardens are a simple solution for homeowners to reduce pollution in our river."

Runoff was one of the topics that piqued Farsin's interest in writing the essay. "Runoff is such an insignificant topic to people, but it makes such a difference to the world," he said. "All this runoff keeps going into the watershed, which could easily contaminate the Chesapeake Bay area and, eventually, the ocean."

The essay contest was part of the JRA's Green Homes program, an initiative created to educate residents on methods to reduce stormwater pollution from their homes to help clean the river. According to the

State of the James River report, released in 2009, the James received a score of 59 percent, indicating that the James River is half way to full health.

A rain garden is a planted depression in the ground that allows rainwater from hard surfaces (roofs, sidewalks, streets and compacted lawns) to be absorbed. The gardens reduce rain runoff by allowing the water to soak into the ground as opposed to flowing into storm drains, streams and, ultimately, the James River. Rain gardens help reduce flooding and erosion in streams, keep sewers from backing up into basements and reduce combined sewer overflows (CSOs), while also providing a habitat for birds, butterflies and beneficial insects, such as honey bees.

To calculate a home's impact on the James River, JRA has partnered with the Timmons Group to create a pollution and runoff calculator for homeowners. By entering some basic information about the property and yard maintenance practices, homeowners can quickly generate a report that details how much runoff leaves their property annually and the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus in the runoff. The calculator, found on JRA's website, also provides tips for reducing pollution and runoff.

Farsin's mom Parvis Akter, a professor at John Tyler Community College, was impressed with the available information. "Ruhan used the runoff calculator to find out how much concentration of nitrogen,



Ruhan Farsin won JRA contest's grand prize for his essay about the use of rain barrels in reducing rain runoff.

PHOTO BY ELIZABETH FARINA

which is blooming the algae growth that affects the oxygen supply that affects the aquatic ecosystem. I was surprised with all these numbers," she said. "I think it's a wonderful tool that they're using to teach how each of these numbers can lead to a big number and make a huge difference to the

environment."

For more information and to learn more about rain gardens and their benefits, visit the James River Association website at [www.jamesriverassociation.org](http://www.jamesriverassociation.org) or call the JRA at (804) 788-8811.

courtesy of James River Association

## Schools to teach about abusive relationships

BY MEREDITH RIGSBY  
Capital News Service

All public schools in Virginia must follow the state's Standards of Learning for core courses like math, science and history. Beginning next year, they'll also have to ensure that students learn about abusive relationships, too.

A bill passed by the General Assembly requires that the SOL objectives on dating violence and abusive relationships be taught at least once during middle school and twice during high school.

Senate Bill 906, sponsored Sen. R. Creigh Deeds of Charlottesville, received unanimous approval from the House and Senate. It now needs Gov. Bob McDonnell's signature to become law.

The measure builds on a law passed by the assembly in 2007. That year, legislators required the Virginia Board of Education to include "dating violence and the characteristics of abusive relationships" in the state's family life education curriculum.

SB 906 will ensure that secondary school students are exposed to the material. A 2009 study found that schools already are meeting the intent of the bill.

The legislation grew out of a final project students presented in June for the College Leaders Program at the Sorenson Institute for Political Leadership at the University of Virginia. Deeds was one of the judges of the projects.

In their project, Hassan Abdelhalim, Emily Bowles, Christopher Diming, Katherine Hunter, Lena Morrill and Sarah Ulmer presented an outline for what later became SB 906, Deeds said. Then the students asked Deeds to sponsor the measure in the 2011 legislative session.

"They not only pestered me and

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## Ballroom dancing competition keeps the feet moving

Simply Ballroom student Roo Hiremath and professional dancer Lee Nugent perform the Waltz during their solo exhibition at the River City Ballroom Dance Competition held on Saturday, March 19 at the Greater Richmond Convention Center.

Hiremath is student at Clover Hill High School and has been studying ballroom for over a year at the Midlothian-based dance studio.

Simply Ballroom, located at the corner of Hull Street and Courthouse roads, was one of eight participating studios during the competition.

Dancers were professionally judged throughout the day while performing the Tango, Foxtrot, Viennese Waltz, Swing, Cha Cha, Rumba, and many more ballroom style dances.

Photo Gallery **ONLINE**  
[midlothianexchange.com](http://midlothianexchange.com)



## Housing market at a 'Dangerous Point'

BY TRACY KENNEDY  
Capital News Service

While fewer home loans are going into default, a combination of a backlog of foreclosures and a slump in home purchases could threaten the recovery in Virginia's housing market.

"We are at a dangerous point at the beginning of another negative cycle that pulls the market somewhat down from where it is," Barry Merchant, a senior analyst for the Virginia Housing Development Authority, told the Virginia Foreclosure Task Force on Tuesday.

Since the end of the 2010 tax credits for new homeowners, Merchant said, fewer houses on the market are being sold. This combined with other factors means that that task force "could look at a much longer recovery for the state."

"I think at the moment I'm a little pessimistic only because we're seeing a weakening

again of the whole purchase market," Merchant said.

Despite this pessimism, Merchant said he expects the housing market to return to normal by the end of 2012.

A recent task force report found a spike in the number of Virginia homes entering foreclosure during the third quarter of 2010. During that quarter, there were active foreclosures in Virginia — about 4,100 more than in the corresponding period of 2008.

### About the Task Force

The Virginia Foreclosure Task Force was created by Gov. Bob McDonnell in 2010 by an executive order. Its goal is to propose a housing policy for Virginia. The advisory group's recommendations are due in November.

The task force has 22 members. It is chaired by Terrie Suit, the assistant to the governor for commonwealth preparedness.

The task force has scheduled monthly meetings until June. It then will take a break to

collect data and consult experts.

The group's timetable calls for meetings to resume in September for more focused discussions on key issues, perhaps with help of an economist. The task force is expected to wrap up its work in November.

The task force is not the only organization helping Virginians avoid foreclosure. Another organization is the Capital Area Foreclosure Network [[www.cafn.org](http://www.cafn.org)].

This past week, the network and the Housing Initiative Partnership announced they are launching a Spanish and English foreclosure prevention hotline for Virginia, Maryland and Washington, D.C. The toll-free number is 888-794-8830.

"Too many of our region's residents are paying thousands of dollars to scam artists who can do nothing to help them. By calling the hotline, residents can get connected to nonprofit housing counselors near their home or work," said Paul Desjardin, co-chairman of the foreclosure network.

## Virginia pushes for more farm exports

BY ALICE KEMP  
Capital News Service

Despite facing a recession and drought in 2010, Virginia's farmers exported \$2.24 billion in crops, meat and other products last year, making the state No. 9 in the nation for agriculture export value.

Though the numbers are promising, Gov. Bob McDonnell wants to push for more. He hopes the commonwealth this year will eclipse its 2009 record of \$2.3 billion in exports.

"We have an aggressive marketing agenda in 2011 and beyond to promote Virginia products globally," McDonnell said in a press release issued during the third annual International Virginia Agricultural Trade Conference held last week in Norfolk.

The governor's plan includes keeping strong markets in countries such as Canada, China and Japan as well as aggressively pursuing opportunities in India, Turkey and Mexico. Virginia also will continue developing export business in unconventional markets like Cuba and Venezuela.

Todd Haymore, the state's secretary of agriculture and forestry, and the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services will lead the marketing efforts.

"Working with our growers, agribusinesses, exporters and partners in state government, the governor, VDACS staff and I are committed to growing our exports of agricultural and forestry products because they are so vital to Virginia's economic vitality," said Haymore, who was the keynote speaker for the trade conference.

So far this year, Virginia's farm exports are running 2 percent above 2010 figures.

"In 2011, we forecast that Virginia is on course to exceed 2010 export levels and hopefully better our 2009 numbers if Mother Nature, the global economy and geo-political events cooperate," Haymore said.

State officials say Virginia is able

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