

# COMMUNITY NEWS

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## Activist returns with good thoughts of Afghanis, worry over government

**Peace Action  
Montgomery coordinator  
wanted to see what life  
is like in Afghanistan**

BY TERRI HOGAN  
STAFF WRITER

A Brookeville peace activist recently traveled to Afghanistan in order to get a better understanding of the war, but returned discouraged.

Jean Athey, who serves as the coordinator for Peace Action Montgomery, a grassroots organization that advocates for getting U.S. troops out of

Afghanistan, said she is worried that the United States is supporting a country whose government has so little legitimacy.

"We need to reduce the U.S. footprint by getting troops out," she said. "It has to be done, and it would be nice if it could be done in a way that does

She became active in Peace Action Montgomery in 2005 after becoming distressed about the United States getting involved with the war in Iraq. She said she was encouraged to get out and do something about it.

"Activism is the antidote to despair," she said. "I feel as a citizen and a grandmother, I needed to do something."

Athey now considers herself a full-time peace activist.

Although her peace efforts have taken her to Palestine, Jordan and Syria, this was her first trip to Afghanistan.

"I wanted to see the issues, because for me it is harder to visualize," she said. "By going there, I was able to get a better understanding of the war."

She left for her trip in mid-April and spent two weeks mainly in Kabul. She traveled alone and said she never felt frightened.

She interviewed people to learn different perspectives on the war and visited projects run by the Afghan Women's Fund, which provides women's educa-

tion, health care and other critical needs.

She also documented her experiences by writing blog entries to convey what she was learning, which were read by thousands of people, she said.

"What I learned is that these are real people, just like us," she said. "I met many people who were just wonderful and who were very kind to me."

"These are people who have the same feelings and needs as I do, and visiting made the place come alive for me," she added.

Paul Kawika Martin, policy and political director of Peace Action, the national organization based in Silver Spring, said his organization and others

similar to it began sending people to Russia for "citizen to citizen diplomacy" during the Cold War.

The organization, which has about 100 chapters including the one in Montgomery County, has continued to do this in Iran, Afghanistan and other countries.

It allows those who visit other countries to share what they learned with churches, service groups and other organizations.

He said Peace Action had no part in Athey's trip, other than to supply her with a list of contacts of people to meet with there.

Martin said that not a lot of people travel to Afghanistan

because it is a risky place and an expensive trip.

He said it was perfect for her to go, since President Barack Obama is supposed to make a decision in July on the number of troops there.

Through her efforts, Peace Action Montgomery helped start the Virginia Area Religious Coalition Against Torture and the National Fund Our Communities. Bring the War Dollars Home.

To read blog entries from Athey's trip, visit [www.peaceactionmontgomery.com](http://www.peaceactionmontgomery.com).

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## Remembering those who served



Above: Boy Scout Troop 264 member Luke Renshaw, 11, of Olney plays "Taps" on the trumpet during American Legion Post 68's annual Memorial Day Cemetery Pilgrimage at Mount Carmel Patuxent Cemetery near Sunshine on Saturday.

About 25 people, including legion members, scouts and leaders from Troop 264 participated in the commemoration ceremony. The group visited six area cemeteries and conducted brief ceremonies at each. Participants also stopped at Sherwood High School, where a plaque honors graduates who fought in World War II. Right: Members of American Legion Post 68 and Boy Scout Troop 264 participate in the legion's annual Memorial Day Cemetery Pilgrimage.

PHOTOS BY ANTHONY CASTELLANO/THE GAZETTE



## Funding restored for two suspended student programs

**Namesake site gets no county dollars for 2012**

BY DANIELLE E. GAINES  
STAFF WRITER

The Montgomery County Council voted Thursday to restore funding to two programs for suspended students, but not for one at the programs' namesake church in Sandy Spring.

The council had voted a week earlier not to include any funding for the SHARP programs in a \$24.8 million budget reconciliation package.

In the county's final budget plan Thursday, funding was added for SHARP programs in Burtonsville and Gaithersburg, but not for the program at Sharp Street United Methodist Church in Sandy Spring.

"My question is why not?" said Dorothy Mitchell, chairwoman of the Sandy Spring program's board of directors. "Had it not been for SHARP at Sharp Street in Sandy Spring, there would not have been the other two."

Burtonsville and Gaithersburg are funded at \$38,000 each in fiscal 2012, the same amount they received this fiscal year.

County Executive Isiah Leggett (D) had recommended \$114,000 in flat funding to keep all three programs running in his budget proposal.

SHARP helps suspended students and those facing expulsion to keep up with classwork and provides tutors while the students are barred from school campuses.

The program was created in 1998 by the Rev. George Hackey

Jr., pastor of the Sharp Street United Methodist Church. Leo McDonald, a former principal at Sherwood School. At its peak, SHARP had seven locations around the county. Montgomery County suspended funding the program in 2009, restructured it to eliminate sites in fiscal 2010, because of declining attendance.

Burtonsville has the largest program in fiscal 2011, with 100 students. Gaithersburg has 27. Attendance in Sandy Spring ranges from a monthly high of 16, according to information prepared for the meeting.

By early May, 234 students had been referred to the programs after suspension during the school year and 140 were completed the program.

Mitchell said raw numbers do not reflect the success or failure of the program because students are entered for up to 180 days at a time.

"If we can help on students stay out of trouble while suspended, then I see it as a success," Mitchell said.

She met with program directors Tuesday to develop a plan for moving forward. The funding represented nearly 10 percent of the Sandy Spring program's budget.

"We have to make our voices heard. To do nothing, to do nothing," Mitchell said. "If you step down and get stepped on, you are stepped over. It is not a good situation to be in. We need to step forward."

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