

# COMMUNITY

## Blossom from A1

event of the National Cherry Blossom Festival, will be held on Sunday, March 29 from noon to 5 p.m. The free, family-friendly celebration will feature cultural performances, culinary delights, a Sakura Spirits Garden, a Water Lantern Festival, a Japanese artisanal market and more. A curated market includes a wide array of Asian foods as well as anime art, Japanese kimonos, Japanese skin care, home decor, Japanese inspired wood art, and more.

Due to its popularity, the Water Lantern Festival has expanded to three nights from March 27–29. The ticketed event brings families, friends, couples and individuals together for a meaningful evening experience that illuminates the waterfront with messages of hope, unity, and remembrance. Participants decorate lighted lanterns, which are released into an enclosed area, creating a peaceful and visually striking nighttime display.

Throughout the month, National Harbor restaurants will also join in the celebration with a wide array of food and drink specials from a seasonal cherry blossom milkshake to Sakura cheesecake and matcha mousse to a cherry blossom princess cake and cherry pie a la mode, and more! Drink specials include a cherry blossom margarita, a blooming margarita and a hibiscus margarita; cherry vanilla ale, cherry blossom punch, cherry blossom spritz, Sakura Ume, and strawberry lemonade. A full listing is on the National Harbor website.

"We're excited to expand the cherry blossom celebration at National Harbor this year. After such a harsh winter, our bright pink cherry trees are a welcome and cheerful sign that spring has finally arrived! It's a special time across the region, and we celebrate by turning the Harbor pink — from The Capital Wheel and waterfront trail to our beautifully illuminated buildings," said Deborah Topcik, senior director of marketing at National Harbor. "We're also delighted to once again be part of the National Cherry Blossom Festival with our annual Sakura Sunday event on March 29."

Both MGM National Harbor and Gaylord National will have special spa offerings. The Westin Washington National Harbor and Gaylord National have a special Cherry Blossom Package. MGM will change out its famous conservatory at the end of the month/beginning of April to celebrate the country's 250th birthday. The exciting new display will also have some cherry blossoms.

For more information on National Harbor and cherry blossom activities and offerings, go to [www.nationalharbor.com/cherryblossom/](http://www.nationalharbor.com/cherryblossom/). Events and activities will be added to the schedule as confirmed.

*Situated on the banks of the historic Potomac River and just minutes from the nation's capital, National Harbor is a waterfront resort destination unlike any other. National Harbor is home to two of Maryland's Four Diamond rated hotels—Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center, the East Coast's largest non-gaming hotel and convention center and has almost 2,000 hotel rooms and 660,000 sq. ft. of meeting space and MGM National Harbor, an integrated luxury casino resort with renowned chef-driven restaurants, a 3,000-seat state-of-the-art theater and one of the largest gaming floors outside of Las Vegas. The vibrant Waterfront District features boutique shops, restaurants and entertainment options along picturesque promenades. The iconic Capital Wheel, a 180-ft observation wheel, Tanger Outlets' 85 designer brands, and a robust calendar of events round out this destination that welcomes more than 15.2 million visitors a year. For more information, visit [www.NationalHarbor.com](http://www.NationalHarbor.com).*

## Bowie Resident and Filmmaker Dee Penn Announces DMV Debut of New Indie Romance "Still US"

By DEE PENN

BOWIE, Md. (March 10, 2026)—Dee Penn, filmmaker and longtime resident of Bowie, MD, is proud to announce the upcoming release of "Still US", a poignant new independent romance film. After spending more than two decades immersed in the culture of Prince George's County, Penn is returning to the area to share a project deeply influenced by the spirit and vibrancy of the DMV.

"Still US" explores the complex journey of love, focusing on the raw challenges couples face in maintaining happiness and connection as life evolves.

"Bowie was more than just a place I lived; it's where I became the man I am today," says Dee Penn. "The DMV has an energy you can't find anywhere else, and I'm honored to bring this film back



IMAGE COURTESY DEE PENN

"Still US" is a poignant new independent romance film scheduled for release in June 2026.

to the community that helped shape my vision."

The official trailer for "Still US" is scheduled for release in June 2026.

## Surrattsville High School Team Wins Local Junior Achievement's 2026 3DE Competition for 9th Graders

By PRESS OFFICER  
JA of Greater Washington

On Wednesday, March 11, Junior Achievement of Greater Washington (JA of Greater Washington) hosted the Arby's Regional Case Competition, a culminating event for 9th grade students participating in JA of Greater Washington's 2026 3DE program.

Thirty students from high schools in Washington, D.C. and Prince George's County, Maryland, competed in the competition, designed to bring real-world problem solving into the classroom. Five teams of 9th graders presented bold, research-driven strategies aimed at helping Arby's better connect with 13- to 17-year-old customers.

The winning team, from Clinton, Maryland's Surrattsville High School, recommended a new mascot to help

Arby's attract teens by increasing interest on social media and at in-person gather-

ings. They even suggested a possible mascot.



PHOTO COURTESY JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT OF GREATER WASHINGTON

Surrattsville High School winning team with teachers and judges

## Healing and Connection This Spring at Chesapeake Life Center

By ELYZABETH MARCUSSEN  
Hospice of the Chesapeake

PASADENA, Md. (March 11, 2026)—Spring can be a season of renewal, but for those who are grieving, it can also bring tender reminders of loss. Chesapeake Life Center offers a variety of workshops and support groups designed to provide connection, comfort and hope during this time of healing.

From creative art experiences and nature-inspired programs to skill-building workshops and supportive community groups, these offerings create gentle spaces to honor loved ones, share experiences and reflect on the many emotions that come with grief. And a few of them, like Hope After Hours, are even a bit playful.

With options available both in person and virtually, the grief experts at Hospice of the Chesapeake are committed to supporting individuals in the community as they navigate loss with compassion and opportunities for healing.

### WORKSHOPS AND SPECIAL PROGRAMS

- **Sprouting Hope:** A Springtime Workshop for Remembrance and Release— Welcome spring with this nature-based activity to honor your grief. Write a letter in honor of loved ones lost or something you wish to let go of in your life and bury it with symbolic seeds to release any difficult feelings into the earth. Finish with a garden-walking meditation and burial ceremony for centering and connecting to healing. This workshop will take place from 5 to 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, April 7, on the John & Cathy Belcher Campus, 90 Ritchie Highway, Pasadena. The cost is free.
- **Creating Hope: Therapeutic Art Exercises in Griefwork for Teens and Adults**—Creating can help us express things we have no words for, discover more about ourselves and glean beauty through our sorrow. In

this workshop, people can participate in a therapeutic art project to help with personal grief work and connect. This workshop is open to teens, as well as adults. Supplies are provided. No art skills are required. It will be held from 1 to 2:30 p.m. Saturday, April 11, at the Burnett Center for Hope and Healing, 4559 Sixes Road, Prince Frederick, Maryland. The cost is \$10 per session, which pays for supplies.

- **Heart & Soul Grief Support Group**—Join a Chesapeake Life Center grief counselor for this grief support group that allows adults to reflect on loss, explore self-care and find meaning in their grief. Each monthly session includes guided conversation, a meaningful activity and a discussion exploring community resources and support. The group will meet from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Tuesdays, April 14, May 12 and June 9, on the John & Cathy Belcher Campus, 90 Ritchie Highway, Pasadena. The cost is free.
- **Pet Loss Workshop**—The loss of a beloved companion animal brings a deep grief that is often only minimally acknowledged by others. Join Chesapeake Life Center grief counselors for a workshop where you are invited to share and reflect on your loss, as well as find meaningful ways to honor your pet and cope with your grief. Adult grievers experiencing the loss of any kind of pet are welcome. The event will take place from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, April 18, at Perfect Pet Resort, 840 West Bay Front Rd., Lothian, Maryland. The cost is free.
- **Hope After Hours**—This workshop offers a relaxed, welcoming space for people navigating loss together. Come as you are, raise a glass to the ones you love, and find connection and understanding in community space. Both wine and non-alcoholic drinks will be available. Though individuals ages 18 and older are wel-

come, those wishing to consume alcohol must be age 21 or older and provide a valid ID. This will take place from 4:30 to 6 p.m., Thursday, April 30, in the Hope & Healing Center on the John & Cathy Belcher Campus, 90 Ritchie Highway, Pasadena. The cost is \$10.

- **Nature's Healing Power: A Grief Support Group Series**—This free, nature-informed program that will include immersive walks in nature, time spent focusing on the cycle of the seasons and working with natural objects to contain and express the grief experience. It will be held from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Thursdays, May 21 and 28, and June 11 and 18, at Greenbelt Park, 6565 Greenbelt Road, Greenbelt, Maryland.
- **One Day Grief Retreat**—Save Saturday, June 13, for a day of healing and self-care at our lovely Burnett Center for Hope & Healing at the Burnett Center for Hope and Healing, 4559 Sixes Road, Prince Frederick. Connect with other adults who are grieving or caregiving as we explore how to honor our loved ones, practice caring for ourselves and lean forward into the journey. Sessions will include mindfulness, self-care, eating for health, flower pressing, music therapy and others. Time and further details will be announced.

### VIRTUAL GRIEF SUPPORT

- **'The Pilot's Wife'—A Virtual Book Club Series**—Join other grievers led by a grief expert via Zoom to explore grief through literature. In this four-session group, you will read "The Pilot's Wife" by Anita Shreve and explore the many layers and aspects of grief through the experiences of the novel's characters. Using storytelling and discussion, you can reflect on how the experiences of fictional characters can mirror our own journeys through loss. The book will be discussed in manageable sections to al-

low plenty of time for meaningful conversations. Participants should read four chapters before each session to help prepare for open discussion. You can attend any or all of the sessions. It will meet on Wednesdays from noon to 1 p.m. April 1 and 22 and May 6 and 20 via Zoom. The cost is free.

- **SoulCollage Virtual Support Group for Loss and Transition**—This is a free group with participants creating collages to commemorate lost loved ones and visually journal the grief process. It is a time to virtually share and process unique collages reflecting and expressing the journey through life. The group will meet from 6 to 8 p.m. Monday, April 6, via Zoom.
- **Loss of Life Partner/Spouse Virtual Group**—This is a free group for individuals grieving the death of a spouse or life partner. It will meet from 10:30 a.m. to noon, Tuesdays, April 14, May 12 and June 9, via Zoom.

### MONTHLY GRIEF SUPPORT GROUPS:

- **Drop-In Grief Support Groups** are open to anyone grieving. Groups offer participants an opportunity to share their feelings and obtain support from others who are experiencing loss. There is no fee. These groups will meet in Calvert County as follows:
  - *North Beach Senior Center*, 9010 Chesapeake Ave., North Beach, Maryland, from 1 to 2 p.m. Wednesdays, April 1, May 6 and June 3.
  - *Southern Pines Senior Center*, 20 Appeal Lane, Lusby, Maryland, from 2 to 3 p.m. Tuesdays, April 14, May 12 and June 9.
  - *Calvert Pines Senior Center*, 450 W. Dares Beach Road, Prince Frederick, from 1 to 2 p.m. Tuesdays, April 21, May 19 and June 16.
- **SoulCollage Studio**—Join others for a time to create unique collages reflecting and expressing loss and the journey through life. The group will

meet from 2 to 5 p.m. on Mondays, May 4 and June 1, at 9500 Medical Center Drive, Suite 250, Largo, Maryland. The supply fee is \$10.

- **Loss of Parent or Parental Figure Support Group**—This group provides space for adults ages 18 and older grieving the loss of a parent or parental figure to come together to feel supported in their grief. The group will meet from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Thursdays, April 9, and 6 to 7:30 p.m. May 7, on the John & Cathy Belcher Campus, 90 Ritchie Highway, Pasadena. The cost is free.
- **Loss of Life Partner Evening Group**—This support group is for individuals grieving the loss of a spouse or life partner that happened more than 13 months ago. It offers a safe space for individuals to connect with others experiencing a similar loss. It will meet from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Tuesdays, April 14, May 12 and June 9, on the John & Cathy Belcher Campus, 90 Ritchie Highway, Pasadena. The cost is free.
- **Child Loss Support Group**—This group is for parents grieving the death of a child, regardless of age or circumstance. It will meet at 5:30 p.m. on Mondays, April 27 and May 18, in the Center for Hope & Healing on the John & Cathy Belcher Campus, 90 Ritchie Highway, Pasadena. The cost is free.

Unless noted, groups and workshops are intended for adults ages 18 and older. Except for drop-in groups, registration is required and can be completed by calling 888-501-7077 or emailing [griefinfo@chesapeakehospicecenter.org](mailto:griefinfo@chesapeakehospicecenter.org). Visit [www.hospicechesapeake.org/events](http://www.hospicechesapeake.org/events) for a complete listing of in-person and virtual groups and workshops for adults and children.

*Chesapeake Life Center, a program service of Hospice of the Chesapeake, serves hospice family members and the community with bereavement services and activities aimed at enhancing the quality of life for those grieving the loss of a loved one. Visit [www.chesapeakehospicecenter.org](http://www.chesapeakehospicecenter.org).*