

VOICES OF LAUREL



A JOURNALISTIC COLLECTIVE FOR LAUREL, MARYLAND

SPECIAL COVERAGE

City Council
Election Guide

PAGE 10



Back to the Big T

Owner Charlie Nickell Shares
Photos and Memories

FREE

FALL 2025
VOL. 5, NO. 4

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VOICES OF LAUREL

A JOURNALISTIC COLLECTIVE FOR LAUREL, MARYLAND

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LEAD STORIES

What's New With The Laurel History Boys



LIBRARY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



Our book, *Capital Centre: A Retrospective*, was recently added to the catalog of the U.S. Library of Congress. Former Capital Centre president Jerry Sachs (third from left) poses with authors Jeff Krulik, Kevin Leonard, and Richard Friend. Jerry provided invaluable assistance in the research and production of the book, which is also in the collections of local county libraries including Prince George's and Fairfax.

Grants and Donations

Thank you to Kathie Peterson, Garrett Fitzgerald, and James Bowman for their monetary donations to *Voices of Laurel*. We are grateful.

We also received some interesting items from readers:

- Laurie Blitz has been working with our Pete Lewnes on a future story about her parents' historic NAPA Laurel Automotive business, which will include some amazing photos of Main Street and other locations from the 1950s.
- Cherri Payne Graham sent us some scans from her school days at Laurel Elementary and Laurel High School from the 1950s and 1960s. She sent us these scans not only from her collection but others, most notably Tony West's website about Laurel High School (www.lhs65plus50.org).
- Jean Malivat donated a vintage ashtray from Laurel Park featuring the Laurel International race logo.
- Charlie Nickell shared photos and ephemera from his family's time managing the legendary Big T/Tastee-Freez, as well as Laurel's softball leagues of the 1980s, and Charlie's popular local band, The Whitewalls.

The items from Cherri and Jean were featured on our Saturday photo of the week on our Facebook page. Charlie's extensive cache of photos was compiled on a History Contributor page on our website (laurelhistory.com/big-t), and we couldn't resist making it the cover story for this issue. For a preview, see page 20.

While we are thanking our supporters, we want to give a big shoutout to our *Voices of Laurel* readers who take it upon themselves to see that our newspaper distribution boxes stay supplied. We have recently become aware of several readers who will redistribute papers from boxes to keep the supply steady around town. We are truly thankful for the dedication of our readers, and look forward to increasing circulation in the coming year—which will include additional distribution boxes.

Our Books are Available in Libraries

Publicity from our book tour (see next) has resulted in numerous libraries adding some or all of our books (*Capital Centre: A Retrospective*, *Laurel at 150*, *Lost Laurel*, and *Postmark Laurel*) to their collections. Our books can now be found in the U.S. Library of Congress, the Enoch Pratt Library in Baltimore, and the libraries of Frederick County, Laurel, Hyattsville, Greenbelt, South Bowie, and Fairfax.

And, as we reported in our last issue, copies of *Voices of Laurel* are now part of the permanent collections in the Laurel Historical Society, Howard County Historical Society, and the Enoch Pratt Library in Baltimore.

Capital Centre Book Tour

Our summer book tour for *Capital Centre: A Retrospective* featured appearances at the Kensington Day of the Book Fair; the Laurel Main Street Festival; the Fairfax, Hyattsville, Wheaton, and Bowie Libraries; Art Sound Language Record &

Bookstore in Chevy Chase; and wrapped up at our own Book Fair (see below). We gave presentations at most of the appearances and also offered a variety of special guests, including legendary WHFS DJs Cerphe Colwell and Weasel, *Washington Rock Concert* magazine photographer David Werth, guerilla concert photographer Rudy Childs, ticket concert broker pioneer Glen Melcher, sportscaster and Capital Centre wrestling ring announcer Harvey Smilovitz, Capital Centre President Jerry Sachs, and others. It was a fantastic experience but now we're back to working on our next book: *Merriweather Post Pavilion: The First 50 Years*. If you missed any of the tour stops, video of the presentations will soon be available on our website (laurelhistory.com/video).

Laurel History Boys Book Fair

Our second annual book fair at Oliver's Old Towne Tavern was a resounding success. The invited authors or vendors who participated included Cerphe and Susan Colwell, *Forbes* magazine writer (and *Voices of Laurel* contributor) Jim Clash, local authors Michelle Paris and Murray Siegel, and both the Laurel Historical Society and Prince George's County Historical Society. Jennifer DeLuca also offered an impressive array of children's books. Another popular former WHFS DJ, Weasel, was also on hand to meet fans and sign autographs. We are already making a list of authors to invite next year.

Don't Miss the Christmas Bazaar

The Annual St. Francis of Assisi Christmas Bazaar in Fulton will be held Friday, November 7, (5 pm–9 pm) and Saturday, November 8 (9 am–3 pm). Once again, The Laurel History Boys will be there selling our books. The bazaar features dozens of vendors, crafts, and food, and provides a great opportunity for Christmas shopping.

Our Commitment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

— First Amendment to the United States Constitution

The staff of *Voices of Laurel* takes very seriously the responsibilities that come with being part of a free press. We also uphold and promote the ideals of free speech as guaranteed by the First Amendment.

As historians and journalists, we are committed to preserving the history of Laurel by telling its story through the voices of its people; telling that story honestly, both the good and the bad; giving a voice to the history of minorities and women; and reporting in a non-partisan fashion.

Voices of Laurel is staffed by an incredibly talented and dedicated group of volunteers who make this commitment to our equally dedicated readers. We owe our readers—and ourselves—nothing less.

City Beat

A roundup of local news, events, and announcements



BY DIANE MEZZANOTTE | SOUTHLAURELVOICES@GMAIL.COM

Laurel Hosts Statewide ADA Celebration

Dignitaries from across the state gathered at the Laurel-Beltsville Senior Activity Center in late July to mark the 35th anniversary of the American With Disabilities Act (ADA). Laurel Mayor Keith Sydnor welcomed the group by expressing Laurel's continued commitment to "building an accessible city" by embodying the "spirit of inclusiveness in its policies, for its people, throughout our public spaces." Maryland Attorney General Anthony Brown was the keynote speaker for the event. He began by quoting former President George H.W. Bush's statement made in July 1990 upon the ADA's passage: "This shameful wall of exclusion must come tumbling down." Brown commented that the wall isn't entirely down yet and that it "wasn't knocked down from above, but was fought for from below." He commended those who advocated for disability rights, noting that Maryland—and the city of Laurel—had played a proactive, bipartisan role in codifying equality and accessibility laws that actually benefit everyone, not just the ADA community: curb cutouts, automatic doors at businesses, and real-time closed captioning technology are just a few examples. Brown warned, however, that the fight is not yet over. "Under the current administration, we face unprecedented headwinds from DC," he said, "and we in Maryland must follow our state's leadership motto: 'Proactive leadership when others retreat.'" After all, he concluded, "we all are just one illness or one accident away from joining the disabled community."

Composting Compliance Deadline Extended for Some Residents

The city's composting program is now in full swing, with mandatory participation having begun on July 1. Starting on December 1, 2025, fines can be issued for non-compliance—with the exception of residents at six condominium communities. After learning that logistical challenges delayed the availability of organics collection at those residences, the Laurel City Council voted in July to allow the extension. The proposal was made by Councilmembers James Kole and Adrian Simmons, who also successfully advocated limiting compliance inspections to street-side observations after hearing from residents concerned that Department of Public Works personnel might sort through bins on private property. The council's amendment to the ordinance also states that multiple warnings must be issued prior to fines being imposed.

Mayor Commits to Renewed Code Enforcement Efforts

Following major disruptions to the city's Independence Day celebration by a large youth "TikTok takeover," Mayor Sydnor announced a city-wide 11:00 pm curfew for juveniles through the end of August. The curfew drew much attention on social media, with a majority of commenters praising it. Asked at a City Hall in the Park event on July 24 if he would consider extending the curfew, Sydnor chuckled before noting that the curfew has actually been in place since 1994. "We're just highlighting what is already the law, and we're going to enforce it," he said.

Renewed enforcement efforts were also behind the Mayor's stance on use and occupancy permits for tenants in shared business facilities. Several small-business owners who lease space in a commercial building for their hair, skincare, and nail salons testified before the City Council on July 28, voicing objections to a Fire Marshal's notice that they had to pay \$250 for a Use and Occupancy permit. Some said they had been operating in the same space for as long as 20 years and had never been required to have the permit; others were concerned over a \$6,000 fine mentioned in the notice if the permit was not obtained prior to June 30. Sydnor explained that the city's land development code, which mirrors those of Baltimore City and Prince George's County, requires each individual suite or office to have a Use and Occupancy permit. That requirement, he said, relates to public safety in that it helps first responders know exactly where to respond in an emergency and what type of precautionary measures to take upon arrival. "You as a unit have a locked door, which makes you a subtenant, and the code states that you must have the permit. That's

the code, and my job as Mayor is to enforce our city codes," Sydnor said. He added that only the building's owner, not its tenants, could be fined, and that the city had made some good-faith concessions by reducing the permit fee from \$250 to \$50 and reassessing the owner's potential fine amount based on occupancy. He stressed that city officials would continue to look closely at code enforcement, which he said has not always happened in the way it should have, but "our approach is: first educate, and then issue corrective orders."

City Launches Drone Certification Program

The city's first Drone Certificate program will begin in October for select 16-18-year-old Laurel High School students. The program is offered in partnership with Alpha Drones USA and is part of the city's STEM-centered youth empowerment initiative. Students selected for the program will gain hands-on experience with drones, learn about aviation regulations, and earn an FAA drone pilot certification, according to a press release. Such certifications can lead to careers in aerial photography, surveying, and public safety, among others.

City Seeks Participants for "Adopt a Senior" Initiative

Mayor Sydnor announced in July that he was starting a program called "Adopt a Senior" with the goal of providing senior citizens with toiletry packages. Recruiting efforts began in mid-September to find sponsors to donate bi-monthly care packages valued at \$20–25. The program will initially be limited to helping seniors at Selbourne House and at Laurel Lakes Senior Apartments, with plans to expand in the future. Anyone interested in adopting a senior can email laurelmayor@laurel.md.us.

City Staff Recognitions

The *Maryland Daily Record* selected Laurel City Administrator Christian Pulley as an honoree in its annual Maryland's Top 100 Women event. Pulley was lauded for managing operations and developing policies for all of the city's departments, as well as overseeing Laurel's \$43 million FY2025 operating budget and capital improvement plan. She also has held leadership roles in state-wide organizations, including the Maryland Municipal League and the Maryland Humanities Board. Pulley told the *Daily Record* that she considers her greatest professional accomplishment to be successfully negotiating a Fraternal Order of Police collective bargaining agreement without involving legal representation.

Earlier this year, Deputy City Administrator Joanne Barr retired after serving the city for 36 years. First hired by the Department of Parks and Recreation in 1989, Barr served as both Deputy Director and Director of that department before moving to the City Administrator's office in January 2022. In July, Nekesa Matlock was appointed by the Mayor to succeed Barr in the Deputy Administrator role.

City Clerk Sara Green was elected to the Maryland Municipal League's Board of Directors for its 2025-2026 term. She will serve as the department representative for municipal clerks and was inducted at the 2025 MML Summer Conference held at the Ocean City Convention Center.

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Diane Mezzanotte is a staff writer and member of the Board of Directors for The Laurel History Boys. In addition to covering Laurel city municipal news, she also reports on all things from South Laurel.

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

Oldtown

Local news covering the Oldtown area



BY CAITLIN LEWIS | OLDTOWNVOICES@GMAIL.COM

CAITLIN LEWIS



Examples of the volunteer-painted trash cans at McCullough Field featuring pollinator-themed designs.

The Arts Take Shape in Oldtown

When I was pulling together material for this column, it struck me that the majority of my snippets centered around art—some static pieces, some performance-based. How charming to live in a city that offers opportunities to participate so creatively! If you are yearning for more aesthetic joy in your life, here are some local options.

Readers Theatre of Laurel

As a high school student in Buffalo, New York, Charles Clyburn began a lifelong journey with the performance art known as “readers theater,” in which actors perform dramatic readings without props or sets. Clyburn first performed with a group of other teenagers at a local Jewish community center. While living at Delta Towers in Washington, DC, he revisited his passion for readers theater by forming and directing a group of vocal actors who performed throughout Howard, Montgomery, and Prince George’s counties, as well as in the District. The group entertained at churches and assisted living homes, offering their performances for free.

In his professional career, Clyburn served as a director of youth programs. Now retired and living in Oldtown, Clyburn is again reviving his passion for performing

arts. Under his leadership, a small group of seniors have formed the Readers Theatre of Laurel. Although it has existed only six or seven months, the group already has seven dedicated members. Clyburn hopes to recruit several more individuals so they can perform a specific piece that requires nine readers. Clyburn’s group mainly performs a mix of folklore, short stories, and poetry. A number of Langston Hughes’ poems are in their repertoire. One particularly humorous piece for two voices is titled “The Lord’s Prayer” and includes a back-and-forth discussion between two readers.

The Readers Theatre of Laurel has already performed at the Laurel Mill Playhouse and in Ellicott City. (Notably, Clyburn himself performed in the very first play staged at the Laurel Mill Playhouse.) The group is considering doing a podcast.

If your organization is interested in booking a performance by the Readers Theatre of Laurel, or if you are 55 or over and interested in joining the group as a reader, contact Charles Clyburn at 443-413-679 or clyburncharles@hotmail.com.

Mural on Main and 5th Street

On the corner of Main Street and Fifth Street, a mural featuring renowned ornithologist Dr. Chandler Robbins

was recently completed. The artist, Jeff Huntington, also known as Jahru, is a former professor at Corcoran School of the Arts & Design at George Washington University. He works in layers, starting with a base layer of latex concrete, adding layered colors of spray paint, and finishing with a proactive varnish coat. Huntington began painting with oil-based paints at the age of eight and says he feels like “a kid in a candy store” when painting murals. He began creating murals fulltime in 2016 and has painted almost 200 murals in six countries.

Trash Cans at McCullough Field get a Facelift

The Laurel Arts Council and Volunteer Laurel hosted a number of community art events this summer at McCullough Field and the Sturgis-Moore Recreation Area. Volunteers washed, prepped, and primed trash cans, then painted them a bright blue or green to match the colors used on the already-existing monarch mural. Individuals then painted pollinator-themed designs on the trash cans.

New Art Studio on Main Street

Elizabeth Espinal’s art studio is now hosting events at 515 Main Street.

She offers a multitude of different classes and sip & paint events. For more information on the artist and class offerings, see books.elizabetheespinal.com.

Upcoming Play at Laurel Mill Playhouse

Opening on October 31, the Laurel Mill Playhouse will present Agatha Christie’s *The Hollow*, a whodunit intrigue set in England. The play will run on Fridays and Saturdays for three consecutive weeks. The run will also include two Sunday matinee performances.

Laurel Manor Bed and Breakfast Closes

In the spring column for Oldtown, we covered the story of Dave and Lisa Everett’s purchase and renovation of the old Phelps House, as well as their plans to put the house on the market in preparation for moving to Pennsylvania. After running the Laurel Manor Bed and Breakfast for seven years, the Everetts sold the house on July 22 and the new owners have chosen not to continue running a bed and breakfast on the property. We are saddened to see the Laurel Manor Bed and Breakfast close, but we wish the Everetts well, and we welcome to Laurel the new owners of the Phelps House.

Holiday Parade

Laurel’s annual Holiday Parade and Armory Illumination is scheduled for Saturday, December 6, starting at 3:45 pm. Last year, my family and some friends participated. Most of us wore angel costumes, and we thoroughly enjoyed being a part of the parade. It was much less fatiguing than the 4th of July parade! If you feel like adding some holiday cheer to the event, contact gwade@laurel.md.us, and maybe we’ll see you in the parade.



Caitlin Lewis holds a Master’s Degree in Education from Covenant College. She worked as a high school English teacher both in the U.S. and Greece, but currently works at home raising her four children and writing her column.

North Laurel/Savage

Local news covering the North Laurel, Savage, and Scaggsville areas



BY ANGIE LATHAM KOZLOWSKI | HOCOVOICES@GMAIL.COM



Esen Paradiso's winning design for a new Howard County flag (center) was selected from over 200 entries.

Howard County Unveils New Flag

After a year-long selection process, including a contest that drew over 200 entries, a new Howard County flag was adopted in May. Howard County resident Esen Paradiso created the winning design, which the county's website says "reflects the historically proud and future-oriented central Maryland community and represents an evolving agricultural past blended with an optimistic cultural, environmental, and economic future which is cosmopolitan, vibrant, and thriving."

Ms. Paradiso revealed the meanings behind her design. The arch represents both the county's historical past (the Thomas Viaduct in Elkridge) and its dynamic future (the Chrysalis in downtown Columbia). The stripes represent Howard County's historical and contemporary abundance of agricultural and natural resources. The golden circle represents the boundless energy of the sun empowering a diverse community with a view toward the horizon, a bright and optimistic future—and uses a prominent color from the Maryland flag as a location anchor for Howard County. Blue represents the optimism of endless skies, the hope of a bright future, and the abundance of natural and recreational

resources: lakes, rivers, and waterways. Green represents the planned preservation and utilization of the natural environment, the continuing investment in a thriving agriculture economy, and the promise of growing a culturally appreciative community.

The Howard District of Anne Arundel County became Howard County in 1851. The very first county flag was born from a community contest in 1968. It was designed by Jean O. Hannon. The new flag can be purchased from the Howard County Government website.

Great to Be Green at Savage Park

Savage Park is Maryland's first "Green Zone" certified park, achieving the designation from the American Green Zone Alliance (AGZA) after transitioning to battery-powered hedgers, leaf blowers, and trimmers that will be used and stored on site.

The AGZA Green Zone Certification is conferred when routine landscape maintenance is performed with environmentally friendly tools and equipment that prioritizes clean, quiet, and sustainable landscape maintenance practices.

The new equipment at Savage Park improves working conditions for Howard

County Recreation and Parks staff and reduces the negative impacts of gas-powered landscaping equipment. The battery-powered equipment:

- saves more than \$8,500 on fuel and maintenance during the first five years of service;
- eliminates an estimated 570 pounds of toxic and carcinogenic emissions, including 43 pounds of ozone-forming exhaust;
- removes 1,125 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions—the equivalent of what 23 mature trees absorb in a year; and
- prevents potential spills of gas and oil that could seep into soil and aquifers.

Celebrating America's Semiquincentennial

The HoCo250 Planning Group is hard at work planning events, programs, projects, and activities to commemorate our nation's 250th anniversary that reflect our unique history and contributions to society. Interested in being a part of Howard County's commemorative events? Please consider volunteering with the HoCo250 Planning Group or any of its committees; or if you are a civic organization, school group, or non-profit that is planning an event to mark this historic time and would like to contribute

to the celebration, email HoCo250@howardcountymd.gov. Visit the HoCo250 Planning Group website to learn more.

Fall Activities at the North Laurel 50+ Center

The following programs require registration. If the program is listed as "full" online, contact the 50+ Center front desk at 410-313-0380.

- **Food Waste Prevention & Solutions Activity** (OA-Fall 2025|[#A06677.501](#)) Learn about the food waste crisis and measures we all can take to prevent waste and recycle our food scraps into compost, a valuable soil amendment for lawns and gardens. *Wednesday, November 5, 2025; 11 am–12 pm*
- **History: Gateway to Baltimore—The C&D Canal Activity** (OA-Fall 2025|[#A06614.502](#)) The Chesapeake and Delaware Canal opened a vital shortcut to the sea, giving the Port of Baltimore a competitive edge in shipping. After a century of planning and the work of thousands, this 19th-century waterway carried cargo, passengers, and specially designed ships. This program explores the canal's history, its people, and its lasting impact—then and now—on Baltimore's commerce. *Monday, November 10, 2025; 11 am–12 pm*
- **Holiday Bazaar** (OA-Fall 2025|[#A06778.501](#)) First Annual Holiday Bazaar, a joyful day of holiday spirit, creativity, and community connection! Light holiday shopping, featuring handmade crafts & unique gifts, delicious snacks available for purchase, festive activities for all ages, and more. *Saturday, November 22, 2025; 9 am–3 pm*
- **Bollywood Celebration** (OA-Fall 2025|[#A06630.503](#)) Celebrate the holidays Bollywood style with music, songs, and dances from Hindi movies. Sponsored by South Asian Club. *Tuesday, December 16, 2025; 1:30 pm–3:30 pm*

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Angie Latham Kozlowski is a staff writer and member of the Board of Directors for the Laurel History Boys. In addition to her investigative reporting, her articles frequently spotlight Howard County.

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

South Laurel

Local news covering Laurel Lakes, Victoria Falls, Oakcrest, Montpelier, and the Route 197 corridor



BY DIANE MEZZANOTTE | SOUTHLAURELVOICES@GMAIL.COM



Gude Mansion, now known as The Mansion at Laurel.

It's an exciting time in the Mezzanotte household as we prepare for our son's wedding in October. Back when he and his fiancée were looking for venues, they didn't find what they were looking for in the immediate area, so the wedding will be in Frederick. Since then, two special events venues have opened within walking distance of our house. I often see questions on the NextDoor app or the Laurel MD Connect Facebook group asking about local rental facilities, so here are two options!

The Mansion at Laurel is an 1850s-era farmhouse that sits off by itself just south of Laurel Lakes. You've likely seen it, and you might know it better as the Gude Mansion. The house and surrounding property passed through at least four owners—including William Gude, who lived there for over 50 years and owned 160 acres that eventually became the Laurel Lakes community. The City of Laurel purchased the house in 2018 and, after a few years of restoration and

renovation, the mansion opened in May 2022. The property serves two purposes for the city. First, it is the new home of the Department of Parks and Recreation, which has offices on the third floor. Second, it generates income as a venue for special events, including weddings: a bridal suite, groom suite, two ballrooms, and a catering kitchen are features of the house. Several options are available for indoor/outdoor events of up to 75 people. For more information, email parks@laurel.md.us or call 301-725-7800.

If what you need is just an indoor space for up to 250 guests, look no further than just across Route 1. In a small shopping center off Cypress Street, Knoxora Venue is nestled between Red Wing Shoes and My Kabul restaurant. Knoxora provides furnishings, tableware, and linens if requested and offers three packages (standard, premium, and deluxe). Event managers help to "design your wow" by collaborating with established business partners for catering and decorating.

More information can be found at knoxoravenue.com or by calling 240-755-1666.

Beltsville Fire Station Update

I've been following the saga of the Beltsville Fire Station for almost two years. Longtime readers will recall that former Prince George's County Fire Chief Tiffany Green wanted to remove salaried firefighters who served alongside the volunteers at Station 831, citing building inspection failures and county-wide staffing shortages. After intense, prolonged outcry from the public and local elected officials, Green backed off the plan, opting instead to house staff in temporary buildings until the station could be renovated. (Notably, Green stepped down

in July to become the Prince George's County Assistant Administrative Officer for Public Safety. Shortly thereafter, she was placed on administrative leave while an investigation began into her hiring practices as fire chief.) Temporary facilities were placed at the corner of Sellman and Montgomery Roads, by Chestnut Hills Park. However, as of early September, nearby residents were unhappy that firetrucks were parked close to a playground and had become skeptical of promises to renovate the original station. Rick Bergmann of *The Beltsville News* told me this: "No one believes these buildings are temporary, because they laid down slabs of concrete under them. The corner they chose was already a traffic nightmare and will become an even bigger one. The new county Fire Chief supposedly is reviewing the situation, but as far as I know, no one has reached out to the volunteer firefighters and no work has been scheduled for the current fire station on Prince George's Avenue." I'll continue

to follow this story, which has public safety implications for Laurel—especially the southern neighborhoods, which fall within Beltsville's first-responder area.

Federal Cuts Spell Uncertain Future for Patuxent Research Refuge

For over 90 years, the Patuxent Research Refuge between South Laurel and Bowie has served as the only national wildlife refuge created specifically for research. Its scientists made many crucial discoveries about birds, bees, soil, pesticides, and other topics of importance to farming and other industries. Its wildlife specialists helped save the whooping crane from certain extinction and rehabilitated countless other species. Almost as significantly, it became a popular spot for birdwatching, school field trips, and family outings, drawing up to 300,000 visitors a year. But under the Trump administration's government-reduction plan, the facility could be shut down, according to a July 6 article in the *Baltimore Banner*, which noted that a fourth of the refuge's staff has been cut since January, forcing it to drastically reduce public visiting hours and educational programs; further, it is slated to be totally defunded in 2026. As a government organization, the refuge depends solely on federal funding that, if withdrawn, would halt all research projects. Former Patuxent staffers have warned that this would wipe out decades of advancements and could have a devastating impact on native species. Many fear that the government is eyeing the refuge's 13,000 acres for potential development, threatening the area's wildlife and ecosystem and taking away one of the last remaining green spaces in the area. I have been making an effort to visit this national treasure more often, while it's still here, and hope others will do the same.

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Diane Mezzanotte is a staff writer and member of the Board of Directors for The Laurel History Boys. In addition to covering Laurel city municipal news, she also reports on all things from South Laurel.

West Laurel

Local news covering the West Laurel and Burtonsville areas



BY VIRGINIA MAY GEIS | WESTLAURELVOICES@GMAIL.COM



PHOTOS BY KATHY MAY

Wellness for Life is located at The Gardens Ice House.

West Laurel Recreation Council

The WLRC offers programs for seniors at the West Laurel Community Building at 16501 Supplee Lane. Registration is through Prince Georges County Parks and Recreation. The classes usually are offered in 8-week sessions. For more information about upcoming classes, e-mail Nancy Whipple at njwhip54@verizon.net.

West Laurel Resident Association

The West Laurel Resident Association is sponsoring a craft fair on Saturday, November 15, at the West Laurel Community Building. The time is still to be determined. There will be a variety of craft tables selling unique gifts. For more information about this event, e-mail Cassandra Hostetler at chostetler@sflinc.org.

Wellness for Life—the “Cheers” of Fitness Centers

Tucked away on the second floor of the Gardens Ice House at 13800 Old Gunpowder Road is the Wellness for Life

(WFL) Fitness Center. Veteran-owned and -operated since 2015, WFL is not just another gym.

Paul and Sharon Flaherty founded WFL in 1997 in a small space—about a quarter of its current size—with a family-feeling atmosphere. Although Paul tried opening a second location in Woodbine, he sold it after about two years. According to WFL manager Trish Hayden, who has worked there for 21 years, it only takes one visit to realize that “this is the gym you are looking for.” Trish also shared that, years ago, one gym member called WFL the “Cheers” of fitness, because everyone knows your name; people who discover it wish they had found it sooner and recognize the gym’s desire to partner in health and fitness.

WFL’s membership is very diverse, serving young adults, middle-agers, and seniors. In May 2023, owner Clai Carr marveled at the wonderful group of seniors who were members; he observed that members who joined at a young age look good up into their 90s. WFL now has a program for members who are 80 years

or older and have five years of consistent membership: they receive a lifetime membership free of charge. To date, 21 seniors have received free memberships.

A WFL membership includes use of the sauna and access to all classes, held Monday through Saturday. The gym employs six class instructors and seven certified personal trainers, and has two assistant managers. Personal and team training is available in the forms of strength training, functional fitness, cardio, circuit training, pool access, a sauna, and group fitness and cycling. The facility was remodeled after the COVID pandemic and is known for its cleanliness and attention to hygiene.

Bethany Hosting Annual Fall Fest

Bethany Community Church will hold its annual Fall Fest on Saturday, October 26th, from 2–6 pm on the church property at 15720 Riding Stable Road. This popular event offers carnival games, door prizes, a moon bounce, hayride, pumpkin chunkin’ and more. Food trucks will be available on a pay-as-you-go basis,

and The Petting Farm with Cowboy Barry will visit from 3–5 pm.

Update on Burtonsville Crossing

When I have a chance to visit the new businesses at Burtonsville Crossing, I would like to share my experiences. I went to Allure Nail Bar on Labor Day, partly because other salons were closed. I was not disappointed. The atmosphere was very relaxing, and the salon was spacious and clean. I did not count the number of regular pedicure chairs, but I noticed there were several alcoves for clients to have a more private, specialized experience. Further, Allure does not charge extra to clients who pay with a credit card. Good to know. I will definitely visit again.

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Virginia May Geis is a native of Laurel and a graduate of Laurel High School, class of 1975. After a few decades away, she has been a Laurel resident again, since 2018.

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

Russett/Maryland City

Local news covering the Russett and Maryland City areas



BY BRENDA ZEIGLER-RILEY | RUSSETT.MDCINFO@GMAIL.COM



BRENDA ZEIGLER-RILEY

Donovan Vassell, owner of Catherine's, in front of a mural honoring his mother.

Catherine's Brings Taste of Jamaica to Corridor Marketplace

Donovan Vassell, a Russett resident born in Jamaica, says he saw a need for fine dining in Laurel. This sparked his vision of Catherine's, a restaurant named after his mother, which opened to great acclaim in early September in Corridor Marketplace. Donovan wanted the restaurant to embody island warmth and hospitality. Upon entering, I felt as if I had been transported to an upscale Caribbean Island restaurant. The soothing, rippling water feature and blue lighting, flanked by large, showy palm trees, created the perfect oasis for a true culinary adventure.

Catherine's restaurant pays homage to

its namesake's love of cooking and strong family ties. Donovan describes the cuisine as a fusion of the "bold, tropical flavors of the Caribbean and the rich, comforting transitions of Italian cuisine." He noted that the two cuisines share similarities in the ingredients used, as well as similar values around food, family, and community. Every recipe is a celebration of cultural diversity and culinary artistry, from appetizers like the Yerk Bruschetta to the delicious-sounding Salmon Mediterraneo entree.

I met with Yolande, a family member who, while working on the beautiful table settings, provided a tour. Yolande moved back to Laurel to "pitch in to the support system needed to assure that the restaurant

is successful." She spoke about the live Caribbean music offered Thursday through Sunday, which enhances the restaurant's ambiance and vibe, and added that a happy hour menu is available from 4-6 pm Tuesday through Friday.

Catherine's is receiving rave reviews for its delicious food, good vibes, and live music. I look forward to making reservations in the very near future.

Blue Sunday Opens in Maryland City Plaza

In early September, I joined a group of enthusiastic diners for the soft opening of the long-awaited Blue Sunday Bar and Grill. The Asian American restaurant boasts an exceptionally diverse menu as well as an extensive selection of world-class wines and a special Blue Sunday cocktail menu. A 3-7 pm happy hour menu has several food specials, and alcohol specials will be added; the restaurant was awaiting its liquor license when I visited but expected to obtain it soon.

Although new to Laurel, Blue Sunday is no stranger to the area. Its restaurant in Bowie opened in early 2016 and has gained a loyal following. Laurel diners will benefit from experiences gained in Bowie, according to the restaurant's website: "Throughout the years, Blue Sunday has evolved tremendously, both in food and experience. We have earned our reputation by providing an excellent dining experience with vibrant customer service."

The dinner menu is quite impressive; it ranges from Asian American dishes to salads, soup, rice and noodles, and entrees. My happy hour appetizers, shrimp tempura and tacos, did not disappoint. I will return to savor a few more of their offerings.

The modern, fresh, upscale ambience is a welcome change to the Maryland City area. The hostess and servers were friendly and knowledgeable. The bar and lounge are expansive, with comfortable seating and plush booths to accommodate smaller groups. The manager, Hun Phung, shared that the restaurant seats 350, with a private room that accommodates 50. He said live music will be provided for special occasions.

Maryland City at Russett Library Offers Fun Fall Activities

The library will spotlight two Fall

traditions—Halloween and Native American Month—with fun and educational events for all ages.

Halloween Family Storytime:

Thursday, October 30, 6-7 pm

Preschool (Ages 0 – 5)

Wear your Halloween costume and join in on some Halloween-themed story time and a costume parade through the library! Enjoy some not-so-spooky stories, songs, and treats.

Marble Energy:

Saturday, November 8, 10:30-11:30 am

Ages 6-10

How do you make a marble go faster through a maze? Explore the laws of energy using marble activities and games. Explore a different science topic on the second Saturday of each month.

Teen Art Club:

Tuesday, November 11, 5-6:30 pm

Ages 11+

Hang out, have a snack, and make some art!

Powwow Dance with Miss Chief Rocka:

Wednesday, November 19, 6:30-7:30 pm

All Ages

Step into the world of Native American Dance with Miss Chief Rocka as she performs traditional and storytelling dances steeped in cultural richness and rhythmic exploration. A member of Frog Lake First Nation, Miss Chief Rocka brings a unique blend of tradition and contemporary flair to her shows. Join her for an empowering journey into the heart of powwow culture.

Native American Family Storytime:

Tuesday, November 25, 6-7 pm

Preschool (Ages 0 – 5)

Celebrate Native American culture with stories and a craft!

Visit the library's online newsletter to stay informed about current and future library programs and holdings: aacpl.net/events/happenings-newsletter



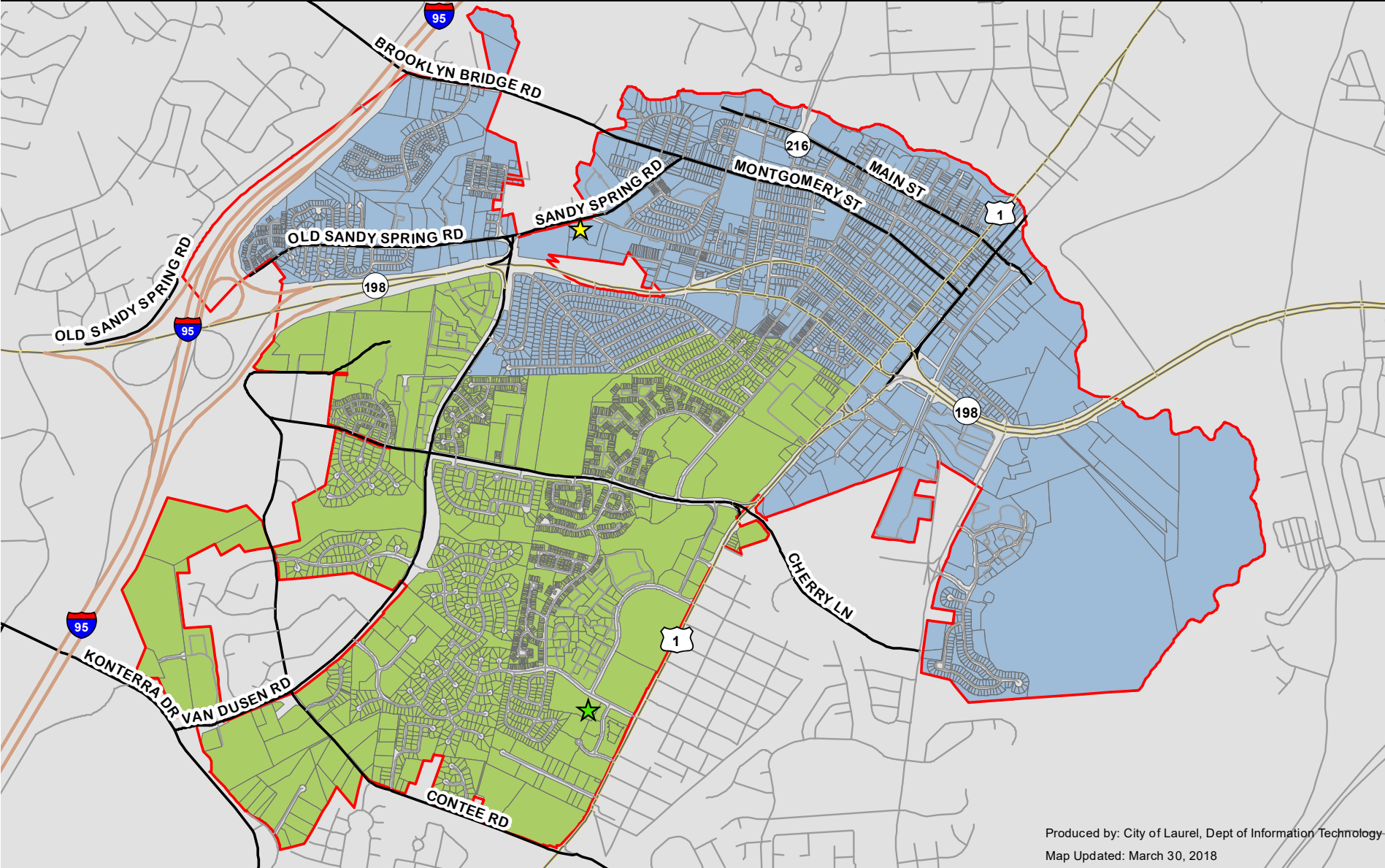
Brenda Zeigler-Riley is a retired educator and entrepreneur with a marketing, public relations, and fundraising background.

VOICES
OF LAUREL

CITY COUNCIL

ELECTION GUIDE

A Nonpartisan Look at the Candidates for the November 4th Election



The City of Laurel General Election will be held on Tuesday, November 4, 2025. This election is for five City Council seats: two Councilmembers will be elected from Ward 1, two from Ward 2, and one At-Large. Each Councilmember will serve a two-year term.

Residents should vote for TWO Councilmembers from their Ward, plus ONE At-Large Councilmember.

WARD 1

WARD 2

★ Laurel Municipal Center
(Early voting location)

★ Robert J. DiPietro
Community Center

Editorial: Why Should I Vote?



RICHARD FRIEND

Laurel residents will once again take to the polls on Tuesday, November 4, to elect their City Council representatives. While *Voices of Laurel* does not endorse candidates, we do heartily endorse and encourage the act of voting. For decades, voter turnout in Laurel's city elections has been notably low, with participation rates as low as four percent. The 2023 elections saw an uptick to 12 percent, which is encouraging but could also be attributed to the fact that a new Mayor was being elected after Craig Moe ended his reign of Laurel's longest-tenured Mayor by not seeking a sixth term. That election also saw a field of 12 candidates vying for six City Council seats.

While the field is narrower this time around and four of the five council incumbents are running unopposed, voting is still important. Residents in the last few years have repeatedly expressed concerns about overdevelopment, crowded roads and schools, and an increase in crime. Finding resident-positive solutions to those concerns, however, has become more challenging in the face of housing shortages, infrastructure challenges, and cuts in municipal funding. In Laurel, just five Councilmembers and one Mayor make these crucial decisions, backed by several departments led by appointees and their staffs—all of whom work for YOU.

Having a voice in how your local government is run comes down to three responsibilities on your part: staying informed on legislative matters, reaching out to your representatives with input and concerns, and voting. In recent years, the city's Board of Elections has made it easier to vote by adding a polling site, extending voting hours on election day, and offering both mail-in ballots and early-voting dates. As one candidate put it, "Voting in the city of Laurel is easy and doesn't take much time." Another candidate urged residents to use their votes to show confidence in and approval of unopposed Councilmembers: "It's like a Google review of our performance(s)."

So get out the vote, Laurel!

Sitting Down with the Candidates

To help with your voting decisions, we spent one hour with each of the seven candidates to learn about their priorities and their vision for Laurel. Staff reporter Diane Mezzanotte asked each candidate the same set of questions, then distilled their responses into a draft of 850–860 words. Each candidate was asked to provide a candid photograph of themselves and review their profile for accuracy. The finalized articles make up the *Voices of Laurel* 2025 Election Guide found in the next few pages.

Questions posted to each candidate:

Why are you running?
What do you bring to the council?
What council achievements are you proudest of?
What do you see as goals for Laurel's future?
Name a hidden gem of Laurel.
Laurel residents should know that...

Candidate profiles from the 2023 elections can be found in our digital archive. Go to voicesoflaurel.com, click "Print Editions," and select the Fall 2023 issue.



IMPORTANT NOTICE

Ward 1 Candidate Withdraws From Council Race

As *Voices of Laurel* was preparing to finalize this issue, Sheila M. Carroll (left) reached out to inform us that she was ending her campaign for a Ward 1 seat on the Laurel City Council. At her request, we removed her candidate profile from the issue and are helping to spread the word that, even though her name will still appear on the ballot, she is no longer a candidate. Interviews with all six of the remaining candidates can be found on the following pages of this issue.

COUNCILMEMBER AT-LARGE



Christine M. Johnson

Age: 48. Laurel resident since 2002.
Profession: Group Administrator, JHU Applied Physics Lab
City experience: City Council At-Large Rep (2023-2025), Administrative assistant in city’s Communications Department (2014-2023)
Campaign website: tinyurl.com/christineforlaurel

Favorites

- Sport and Team**
NFL: Commanders
- Music Genre**
R&B
- Current Top Song**
Little Things (Ella Mai)
- Signature Dish**
Pasta salad
- First Car**
Toyota Corolla Hatchback

Why I’m Running. I first ran for council to help people, to learn more about their concerns and the city as a whole. I still have more to give, a desire to continue learning, and lots of ideas. With a passion for creative writing and anything related to books, I’d love to hold a city-wide book fair and work with non-profits on writing and literacy campaigns. I also want to find a way to provide lunches for school kids experiencing food insecurity, which is a very real problem. I’d like to start something similar to Mayor Sydnor’s new Adopt-a-Senior initiative or the “Weekend Tummy Tamers” supplemental food program run by the Woman’s Club of Laurel.

I want to be honest with people: I wasn’t sure I’d run again. Time management is challenging, with a full-time job and leadership roles at church and in the Woman’s Club. I also struggled with self-doubts, particularly the first year. But I’ve achieved a lot of personal growth and learned a lot in the past two years and, after praying on it and giving it careful thought, I ultimately realized I can and I want to continue making a difference. For my second term, I know who I am, I know what we’ll be working on, and I’m ready to keep at it.

What I Offer. I’m a very good listener, which is crucial to both being informed and achieving group balance. During council discussions, I listen carefully and consider the different perspectives my colleagues offer. It helps me make well-informed decisions. I don’t always speak up—I don’t feel the need to speak, just to speak. But rest assured, I’m always listening.

I’m also a good editor. Policy documents have to be accurate and understandable, so we need a complete set of eyes on everything. My editing tendencies

often kick in when I’m reading documents. Many are hard to understand at first, and I really want to edit them into plain English.

I love to learn new things. I really enjoy classes at the Maryland Municipal League conference. They give a good foundation to understand how local government works, including the budget process. I’m also grateful to Mayor Sydnor and Councilmember Kole, who shared their knowledge and helped new members get comfortable in our roles.

Past Council Achievements. Producing a balanced budget, with no tax increases, was probably our most important achievement as a council. I had some previous department-level budget experience but had never worked with such a large one. It was a first for most of us and it was a lot of work. We did a lot of other great things, too: the first-time homebuyers’ tax credit, the returning citizens grant, and our sustainability program, to name just a few. I also love the youth apprenticeship program we started for high schoolers, who can gain up to 450 hours of experience in a city department, helping prepare them for future careers. Similarly, the first Next Best Seller competition, held in partnership with Quill and Company, inspired local writers to come out and share ideas for their upcoming literary work. A personal achievement was organizing the student-athlete workshop with W.I.S.E., which helped kids develop their basketball skills and also hear advice on planning for college and seeking scholarships.

I’m also proud to have helped Councilmember Simmons revise guidelines for the Citizens Advisory Committee on Disabilities. My piece of it was to include issues related to senior residents 55 or older.

While not all seniors are disabled, there’s a large overlap between those populations, so it made sense to include seniors.

Laurel’s Future. We want the city to grow, but it’s challenging in a concentrated area. I’m concerned to see businesses closing in and around the city. Being surrounded by four counties means a lot of competition, so it’s not easy to attract new businesses. One incentive is the grant program for businesses new to Laurel. We need to publicize that more to people outside of Laurel. We also could expand some zoning specifications to offer more business sites.

Laurel’s Hidden Gems. I wish everyone would come see the Craig A. Moe Multiservice Center to discover all that it offers. We’ve hosted job fairs, immunizations, medical screenings, and presentations on choosing health care plans. The center has its own website and Facebook page that people should follow so they know what’s happening.

Laurel residents should know that.... We really do care! We can’t do everything people want help with, usually because of confusion over jurisdiction: a lot of people with Laurel addresses and zip codes aren’t in the city limits. What we can do, though, is advocate for them and help point them where to find answers.

I also want people to know that voting in city elections is easy and doesn’t take long. So please vote, and remember that as the at-large candidate, I represent everyone, from both wards. So come to me with your comments and suggestions!

COUNCILMEMBER AT-LARGE



Brencis Smith

Age: 36. Originally from Hartford, CT. Maryland resident since 2012; Laurel resident since 2015.

Profession: Financial analyst

City experience: Co-chair, Homelessness Task Force (2018), City Council Ward 2 (2019–2023), City Council President (2021–2023), Mayoral candidate (2023)

Campaign website:
Facebook.com/BrencisForMaryland

Favorites

Sport and Team
NFL: Cowboys and Commanders

Music Genre
Gospel and Motown, lots of Marvin Gaye

Current Top Song
He's Been Faithful (Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir)

Signature Dish
Jamaican brown stew chicken

First Car
2004 Jeep Grand Cherokee

Why I'm Running. I'm running because Laurel deserves leadership that delivers with substance and a proven track record. I joined the council in 2019 and served as Council President from 2021 to 2023. I stepped up to run for Mayor in 2023 because leadership starts at the top. While some asked me to run for Mayor, there were some in our community that urged me to remain on the council and continue working to move Laurel forward with the new Mayor. Now is the chance!

As the most senior candidate, I've seen the challenges our families face. I know how to bring people together to solve challenges. I've done it before, and I'll do it again. I'm committed to moving Laurel forward by keeping our neighborhoods safe, revitalizing Main Street and our shopping plazas, uplifting small businesses, and expanding opportunities for youth and seniors. This campaign is about building a stronger, safer, and more connected Laurel, and I'm asking everyone to stand with me on November 4th to make it happen!

What I Offer. With my previous council experience, I bring leadership that delivers real results with an independent voice. I've built trusted relationships at the county, state, and federal levels, giving Laurel a stronger voice in shaping legislation, securing funding, and addressing the issues that matter most, like crime prevention, economic growth, and community development. I am a solutions-based guy! From creating the multi-service center to balancing city budgets and investing in public safety, I have a proven track record of turning ideas into action. Since I've been out of office (2023), crime has gotten out of hand, and I am committed to turning that around.

Past Council Achievements. Playing a leading role in creating the Craig A. Moe Laurel Multi-Service Center is the accomplishment I'm proudest of. Appointed to the city's Homelessness Task Force by Mayor Moe, I helped design the center's vision, voted to fund it, and stood proudly at the ribbon-cutting ceremony. That center is more than a building—it's a lifeline that will serve Laurel families for decades. If I left this world tomorrow, I'd be proud to know that was part of my legacy.

But my work didn't stop there. I've led during crisis and change, helping residents and organizations like LARS secure emergency relief funding during COVID to keep families in homes, all while keeping the city services running. I've backed forward-thinking environmental efforts like composting and No Mow April. I organized Laurel's largest expungement clinic in 2021 with Aisha Braveboy, helping over 70 people get a second chance. That same year, I launched the city's first outdoor Juneteenth celebration, now the model for our annual event. In 2022, I personally planned Carifesta, an Afro-Caribbean festival, and brought it to Laurel, drawing more than 5,000 people. Watching all the families and individuals on the field at Granville Gude Park was a joy. I've also led senior gift drives, toy drives, and food drives, just to name a few.

Having served on the council for four years, and serving as its president for two years, I've learned what it takes to lead and to listen. I know how to bring people together to solve problems, and I care deeply about making Laurel stronger, safer, and more connected. My leadership strives for results, but it's also rooted in heart. At the end of the day, leadership is not about titles: it's about people, and building a Laurel where every resident feels seen, supported, and valued.

Laurel's Future. My vision is a stronger, safer, more connected Laurel where public safety and vibrant community life go hand-in-hand. People want thriving businesses and gathering spaces, but safety is essential. I've felt the impact of crime personally, and I know how unsettling it can be. We cannot attract new businesses or homeowners without promising safety. Residents deserve to know their quality of life is protected.

I want Laurel to be a city that people speak of with pride, like Alexandria or Annapolis. That means making sure it's safe, revitalizing Main Street, uplifting small businesses, expanding concerts, creating programs for youth and seniors, and hosting events that bring residents and leadership closer together. With proven results and genuine care for this city, I'm ready to keep leading Laurel forward with bold, actionable solutions.

Laurel's Hidden Gems. The Laurel Armory, Robert DiPietro Center, Multi-Service Center, and Gude Mansion are incredible assets, yet many residents don't realize the wide variety of programs and rentals available. As a city, we must promote these resources so everyone can enjoy the opportunities Laurel offers.

Laurel residents should know that.... Change can happen quickly on the local level. We just must communicate and work together. Whether it's a street repair, grant, or beautification project, we want to hear what's needed and make it happen. Together, we can create a Laurel that excites people about the future and inspires us every day.

COUNCILMEMBER WARD 1



James Kole

Age: 36. Originally from State College, PA. Maryland resident since 2012; Laurel resident since 2012.

Profession: Branch manager for a commercial landscaping company

City experience: Ethics Commission (2018–2021), City Council Ward 1 (2021–2025), Council President (2023–2024)

Campaign website:
koleforcouncil.com

Favorites

Sport and Team
NCAA football: Penn State

Music Genre
Pop, showtunes, electronic dance music

Current Top Song
Smile (Benjamin Ingrosso)

Signature Dish
Grilled burgers with Aldi’s seasoning

First Car
Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme

Why I’m Running. I want to keep working for the people of Laurel. I enjoy helping residents and making sure they get answers. If I don’t know the answer myself, I’ll still respond and do what I can to make changes where they’re needed. I’ve helped with alley improvements and pushed to update the weed ordinance so neighbors can plant native gardens and take part in No Mow April. Being on council takes 20 to 30 hours a week. It really is like a second job, but I love doing it.

What I Offer. I bring strong communication and team-building skills, and I like being the bridge between residents and city government. I get along well with people of all ages. My grandparents helped raise me, and that gave me a real appreciation for different generations. I have a wide range of interests, which helps me connect with people on many issues. Over the years, I’ve also become very familiar with Laurel’s codes and ordinances, something that can be a big hurdle for new Councilmembers. In the last two years, I’ve focused on putting all our council rules in one place and worked to review and improve the appointment process.

At the end of the day, my goal is simple: to make sure Laurel works for everyone. That means listening, responding, and doing the hard work behind the scenes to keep our city thriving. Whether it’s helping a neighbor with a code question, working on new legislation, or meeting with community groups, I try to bring people together and make city government easier to navigate.

Past Council Achievements. Passing a balanced budget was our biggest achievement. It was especially challenging this year because the State of Maryland and Prince George’s County budgets both faced a deficit, plus there is a lot of uncertainty for the future. We had to cut back on spending, but do it in a responsible way, looking out for the needs of both the city and its people. We’ve done a good job of maintaining services, but that will be more challenging as the city continues to grow. Departments like Public Works or Parks and Recreation will need bigger staffs, but how will we fund that? We’ll have to try different approaches in the future.

This year we also updated Laurel’s Sustainability Plan with direct input from residents. The plan helps guide how we balance growth, protect our environment, and improve quality of life. What I value most is that neighbors helped shape it. That shows how much stronger our city can be when government and residents work together.

Laurel’s Future. Balancing growth with responsible fiscal management will be both a goal and a challenge. We have to grow. The area’s housing shortage is a very real issue and we likely will continue to lose federal and state funding. People don’t want to see more development, but they also don’t want their taxes to go up. If we stop developing, we may have to raise taxes. Houses are appraised when they’re built, and Homestead Tax Credit limits taxable assessment value increases. We can annex more land into the city, but that can take years to generate tax revenue. Also, as an advocate for saving our trees, I’m sensitive to the loss of green spaces,

like so many other residents. The good news is, a state law goes into effect in 2026 that will prohibit forests from being cleared, so razing a forest in Laurel will no longer be possible. With all this in mind, I think the overall goal has to be to continue to grow and develop, but to do it *responsibly*. That’s a challenging task and will take a lot of planning, but I think it’s the only way forward.

Laurel’s Hidden Gems. Riverfront Park is one of my absolute favorite places in the city. I’d love for everyone to see the improvements we’ve made to it. It has a one-mile path that’s paved and shaded, and the historic dam ruins at the beginning of the park will be stabilized and improved using state and federal funding. Our city exists because of that dam and mill, so it’s an important part of our history.

Laurel residents should know that.... Your city government is here to serve and support you. We will always stand for freedom and equality, but we must follow the law. That’s not to say laws can’t be changed—in fact, we have some old, weird laws that are no longer relevant. Laurel residents should work with elected officials to change things when change is needed. Often, some of the issues people run into come down to code enforcement. We all have to do the job we’re elected or appointed to do, and enforcing codes is one of them. But we’re more than willing to look into issues and consider suggestions when issues are raised that might require changes.

ELECTION GUIDE

COUNCILMEMBER WARD 1



Adrian Simmons

Age: 46. Born and raised in Laurel.

Profession: Certified Public Accountant at my own business on Main Street

City experience: City Council Ward 1 Rep (2024-2025)

Campaign website:
VoteAdrianForLaurel.org

Favorites

Sport and Team
MLB: Orioles

Music Genre
Singer/songwriter

Current Top Song
Living My Best Life (Ben Rector)

Signature Dish
Sweet and salty cereal mix

First Car
1987 Ford Tempo

Why I'm Running. I want to promote a vision for the City of Laurel that sees its residents as our biggest asset and helps them to flourish in our town. I first ran for council inspired by the belief that for a community to work, it needs people to step forward in service of others. I saw this modeled in many ways growing up, including in my volunteer activities like Boy Scouts of America. And it's an honor for me to apply my effort and experience towards creating and maintaining a great place to live, work, and play here in Laurel.

What I Offer. I'm a strategic thinker, but also very comfortable with detail, things that have served me well in my work on council. My work as a CPA business coach has trained me in thinking big picture, brainstorming alternatives, and identifying paths forward. And my work as a tax professional serving small businesses has made me comfortable with the sometimes-boring nuances of the legislative process, because I can see how it impacts real people and their everyday lives. Not to mention my familiarity with numbers, which is helpful to both the budget and bid processes.

Over my 46 years of living here, 25 of which working in Laurel and helping people, I've also gained insights into people's pain points. I empathize with their struggles, and I want to help find solutions. And as a Dad raising four romping boys age 8 and below with my wife, I'm invested in building community and thinking towards the future.

Lastly, I work very hard to listen and to communicate. I believe a Councilmember should always begin with questions and seek to understand. And I've worked consistently through my council blog to keep residents informed of important changes and solicit their input.

Past Council Achievements. One of the items I'm proud of from this past term was authoring legislation to update our city's Elderly & Veterans Property Tax Credit so that it didn't expire after five years. This enables retired residents to continue to age in place and remain important parts of our communities.

I was also able to co-author two other pieces of legislation: one where I expanded qualified members to serve on the city's advisory committee for persons with disabilities, and the other to harmonize code enforcement to ensure that residents always receive a notice first before any penalties are applied.

We also accomplished a lot as a council, including a complete re-write of our city's election laws. There, I advocated for an even playing field by guaranteeing a minimum candidate application window and a 60-day yard sign timeframe so that incumbents would not hold an unfair advantage. I've also helped frame key considerations to a new elected official social media policy to be adopted by council. These things aren't always that apparent to the public, but having clear policies relevant to today's world makes a difference.

One challenge that I think is important on council is maintaining strong ongoing communication with colleagues and residents throughout the legislative process. It can be too easy to lock into a position without having first listened to others. And it's important to hold your initial thoughts loosely until you've had a chance to hear other's perspectives and ideas. More than once, I had a thought about which way to move on a topic, but hearing the perspective of another Councilmember or getting more details from residents on an issue helped flesh out my thinking and even shift tack. It's extra work to take that extra effort, but to me, that is what the legislative process is all about.

Laurel's Future. We must be proactive toward economic development and do everything possible so people want to live and do business here. This could take the form of proactive plans for retail and business redevelopment along Route 1, further simplification of licensing and permitting processes, and continuing to evolve our incentives and support programs. With the 2026 Preakness coming to Laurel, we have a great opportunity to jumpstart initiatives. And following my recent tour of the revitalization efforts in historic Snow Hill on the Eastern Shore, I think there's a number of things Laurel can add to its playbook to continue advancing our attractiveness as a small town.

Laurel's Hidden Gems. Riverfront Park is a hidden gem to check out if you haven't visited. And I'm also impressed by our deep offerings from Parks & Recreation—be sure to flip through their seasonal pamphlet.

Laurel residents should know that.... City officials are very approachable, and we're residents just like you! People have told me how great it is to call a Councilmember and actually get an answer; it often just takes a simple reaching-out. That's why we're here: to build a bridge, to translate.

So, reach out anytime! Visit my blog for the latest. And I'll keep putting my best foot forward to help people.

COUNCILMEMBER WARD 2



Kyla Clark

Age: 46. Laurel resident since 2015.
Profession: Small-business owner; consultant in marketing, communications
City experience: City Council Ward 2 Rep (2023-2025), City Council President (2024-2025)
Campaign website: KylaClark.com

Favorites

- Sport and Team**
First love is basketball, but roots for the Ravens
- Music Genre**
Jazz
- Current Top Song**
Can't Get Out of This Mood (Tamara Joy)
- Signature Dish**
Buffalo chicken wing dip
- First Car**
1997 VW Jetta

Why I'm Running. I approach everything with a service mindset. I want to lead in a way that I'd be proud to vote for myself. I ask myself daily, "How would I want someone to respond to me?" and I try to live by that. It's not about the title. It's about helping people and building community; however, the title does give me access to more information, which helps me make connections and find solutions.

Even though I'm running to represent Ward 2 again, I don't put up boundaries. I'm here to help anyone—whether you live in Ward 2, elsewhere in Laurel, or even outside the city. For the past two years, it's been an honor to be part of Laurel's support system, and I'd be grateful to continue serving in that role.

What I Offer. For years, I've worked with corporations and non-profits on marketing and communications. I believe communication is the foundation of everything we do. As Council President, my top priority has been realigning and strengthening that communication. I've also been helping organizations transition more into digital spaces—reaching a wider audience, cutting costs and waste, and supporting sustainability.

I do what I say I will; I back up my words with action. Some residents call me "The Connector." They trust me with their challenges, and I work to find solutions with genuine care—as a neighbor, not just a Councilmember. I do a lot of networking, to help me help others. I'm unafraid of tackling tough issues, and residents can always count on me to speak up on their behalf.

Past Council Achievements. Sponsoring Resolution 5-2025, to formally recognize Emancipation Day, was my most important achievement. As a city, we already recognized Emancipation Day verbally,

but that isn't enough in today's climate. We must enshrine more of our history. With this ordinance, Laurel acknowledges its history and commits to ensuring that diversity, equality, and inclusion remain part of our present and our future. Laurel is sending a clear message: celebrate diversity, respect everyone, and stand on equality for all.

Adopting the budget was another big achievement, because communities stall without the right one. As a council, we focused on balancing residents' needs with those of the city, which became more challenging with recent federal cuts. We avoided the political gridlocks that can stall progress by communicating "if/then" scenarios, offering grant opportunities, and seeking new funding sources to ensure essential services continue. I'm inspired by seeing how collaboration and dedication can turn challenges into opportunities to strengthen our community.

Laurel's Future. Affordable housing must be the top concern. As a non-voting member of the City of Laurel's Planning Commission, I always speak up and include residents' concerns. I want to ensure that anyone with the ability and desire to own a home has that opportunity. Owning a home is a proud moment, and everyone deserves that chance. But townhouses starting at \$750,000 are simply out of reach for many families. I understand developers need to recoup costs, but affordability shouldn't be out of the equation. I was encouraged to see solid, affordable housing details included in Pulte Homes' plan for the Corridor Center community, and I hope many people apply to live there.

Laurel's Hidden Gems. My favorite place in Laurel is Granville Gude Park. It's where neighbors meet while walking or exploring nature, where kids play, and

where we gather for concerts and festivals. Some of our city's highest and happiest moments happen there.

I also love supporting our small businesses on Main Street. It's the heart of our community, and even though many business owners don't live here, they bring new energy, ideas, and opportunities. I treat them like neighbors because their contributions make our city stronger and more vibrant.

Laurel residents should know that.... Your Councilmembers love to dance! We're residents, too. I'm your neighbor. I love to help build a sense of unity and joy in our community so we can be strong together for a better city.

I also want to stress the importance of being involved—especially through voting. Laurel offers plenty of volunteer opportunities, even at the polls, which help neighbors connect and stay informed. Remember, local decisions often affect your daily life more than those made at the state or national level. Take the time to meet the people you're voting for and make your voice count.

Last, I want to explain why you won't see as much signage or fundraising this time. Many in our community, including laid-off federal workers, are facing real struggles; I can't in good conscience ask them to donate. Donations do cover signage, mailers, and more, and I want to be a good steward of every dollar, so I want to be transparent. Even though I'm running unopposed, your vote still matters. Remember, you can vote for two people in Ward 2, and I hope to be your number one choice. Your vote is a vote of confidence in me, in diverse perspectives, and in the future of our city.

COUNCILMEMBER WARD 2



Jeff Mills

Age: 53. Lifelong Prince George’s County resident. Laurel resident since 2010.
Profession: Business owner, author
City experience: City Council Ward 2 Rep (2023–2025), City Council President Pro Tempore (2024–2025)
Campaign website: TeamJeffMills.com

Favorites

- Sport and Team**
NFL: Ravens
- Music Genre**
Go-go, D.C.-style
- Current Top Song**
Listens to motivational speakers, not music
- Signature Dish**
Steamed crabs; family recipe
- First Car**
1979 VW Rabbit

Why I’m Running. I ran the first time to follow in my father’s footsteps. Now that I’ve gained experience and knowledge, I want to help more people, particularly the youth. That’s what I’ll focus on in my second term: What are their ideas and concerns? How can we help them from city hall? The Mayor’s initiatives like Safe Summer Nights and the Drone Certification Program are a good start, but we have to do more.

One challenge has been getting others off the fence to act or to take a stand. Adults shouldn’t be afraid to speak honestly. My motto is, “Whatever I fear, I must challenge it.” For example, I challenged my fear of heights in Las Vegas. My wife and I saw people doing the Sky Jump, where you bungee jump off a skyscraper. And I said, “I need to challenge my fear of heights.” The next morning, at sunrise, I jumped. This second run for council is like taking another Sky Jump.

What I Offer. I will fight for the city. We sometimes need someone to stand up and say no. If we let developers make decisions that determine Laurel’s future, then whose city is it? It should be our city, and I’ll fight aggressively for it. I owe that motto to former Mayor Moe, who said in the last election that I was too aggressive to serve. I went all in on being aggressive for the city. I chose to look past his statements; after all, Moe helped my family, even though he didn’t know it, because he achieved many things for Laurel.

One of my biggest strengths is knowing who I am. Years ago, while seeking investors for a fashion business, I had a sudden revelation: I am my own greatest investor. Once I realized that, I took action and set out on a path to success. But it isn’t about

me: it’s about me helping others. I started the CDL Bookclub to help others on a path to success. It has over 21,000 members, and my goal is one million. If others want to know who I am, just look at my name: **Motivation Intelligence Loyalty Love Service**

Past Council Achievements. The budget was our biggest accomplishment. It was a huge process, and really important, because it’s not really about the money—it’s about the people and programs that the money funds. That’s what matters. We need to invest in people, particularly our youth, so they will invest in us in the future. I’ve learned a lot from my colleagues. Sometimes we hash things out, but we are never arguing with each other—we are arguing the point.

As for personal achievements, I organized a Father’s Day breakfast that I hope will become an annual event. The idea came to me at the Main Street Festival. I was going around on my scooter, saying “Happy Mother’s Day” to so many people, when it struck me that the city doesn’t do anything for fathers. I actually heard my father’s voice saying, “You must solve this. It’s up to you.” That’s when the idea formed to hold a breakfast for fathers. We used the Multiservice Center, and Congressman Glenn Ivey spoke. I want to see it grow bigger every year.

Laurel’s Future. Our top focus has to be the youth. It has to be. We all see what’s been going on. I want to be proactive, like a chess player, thinking several steps ahead. What do we do to get a checkmate? I get angry when people post on social media that kids have nothing to do here. Are you kidding me? There are programs, jobs, and other opportunities. Let’s teach them work ethics: how to rake leaves, mow the

grass, shovel snow. Show them that earning their own money is an investment in themselves and then help them think strategically to plan their futures. How do you build the respect of being a man or woman without the ability to invest in yourself?

Laurel’s Hidden Gems. I have two words to describe a hidden gem of Laurel: Sheila Carroll. I’m so proud of my sister. She’s a tough cookie! She has leadership skills, finance skills, and her ideas will help Laurel win. God put it on her heart to run for council. Vote for her: win, before you lose!*

Laurel residents should know that.... With more people, we can get the work done. People should be asking, “How can I help?” Don’t sit at home and complain if you don’t help. On social media, if people complain about the city, I correct them. I’m The Corrector. I won’t stand for bullying. We are all neighbors, and we need to practice good neighborhood.

I also want people to know about the city’s Carreen Koubek. I brag about her to people; they need to know how hard she works. She has the touch and makes magic happen for the city and the people. I see who she is.

***Editor’s note:** Mr. Mills’ interview was conducted before Ms. Carroll announced her withdrawal from the Ward 1 race.

A Summary of Laurel's Election Law Changes



BY COUNCILMAN ADRIAN G. SIMMONS

Following the 2023 election, the city recognized a need to update its election laws, in part for simple clarifying edits, and in part for significant updates to how the law works.

To me, the goal was threefold: to see our resident's voting rights respected, to provide an even playing field for candidates, and to have an easy-to-understand set of rules that supports the best possible outcome for our city each election cycle.

Although there's 42 pages of edits, I've summarized here the key changes to save you time wading through the documents:

- "Absentee Ballots" are now rolled up into the category of "Vote by Mail" Ballots. The gist here is that vote by mail procedures have evolved in recent years and covers what used to be called absentee ballots. (TIP: To vote by mail for this year's election, you'll need to submit a completed application no later than noon on Tuesday, October 28.)
- "Provisional Ballots" and "Same Day Registration" procedures were further clarified to allow an individual who doesn't appear on the voter register to supply qualifying information and have their vote count.
- Election Judges were provided explicit authority to request and direct the assistance of the Laurel Police Department and other law enforcement in maintaining the peaceful conduct of election days.
- The Board of Elections also now has explicit authority to identify parking areas for voters to provide unimpeded access to and from the polls.
- The protocols around the recall of elected officials were further refined. Essentially, various types of gross misconduct in office can lead to a petition to recall, which, if satisfactorily submitted, will trigger a yes/no vote by residents.
- The suspension and removal procedures for elected officials due to criminal conviction or excessive absences was also further refined. The thrust here is that criminal conviction related to official duties results in immediate removal, and greater than 50% absences from meetings can also lead to removal.
- The due date for candidate applications was changed from "the last Friday in September" to "a date set by the Board of Elections no later than the first Friday in August." And a provision I advocated for: inserting a guarantee of at least a 45-day application window.
- Something considered, but not enough consensus was reached by the time of voting: whether the city's Board of Appeals should handle any appeals of decisions made by the Board of Elections, or whether those appeals should instead go straight to the Prince George's County Circuit Court. This is an infrequent occurrence but can happen.
- Campaign yard signs can now appear no more than 60 days prior to the election. The goal here was to avoid prolonged periods of signs dotted around town, but also to ensure newcomers had adequate time to get their name known. (TIP: This is why you didn't see any yard signs until September 6 this year.)
- Another item considered but which did not reach adequate consensus for voting: whether a candidate may serve as their own Treasurer. As it currently stands, each campaign must appoint a Treasurer, but there is no requirement that they be someone other than the candidate themselves.
- However, a change that was passed: A campaign must set up its own separate bank account and all income (including loans) must run through the account. This is to avoid the potential use of personal bank accounts and for greater transparency of campaign finances.
- The question of what to do with leftover campaign funds was also further clarified: the funds can be either contributed to the city, returned prorata to the donors, contributed to a qualifying charitable organization, or retained by a candidate to use in the future.
- One last basic change: Adding an explicit prohibition against paying for political endorsements.

As you can see, there's a lot here, and that's leaving out the typographical and text re-organization amendments made. Many thanks to all who had a hand in drafting, editing, debating, amending, and passing these changes which I hope serve the city well in the years to come. Additional changes may be considered after this year's election cycle.

I hope you've found this summary helpful, and please don't hesitate to reach out to your elected officials anytime with questions or something you'd like to see considered—that's what we're here for!



Adrian Simmons, a life-long Laurel resident, represents Ward 1 on the Laurel City Council.

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COMMUNITY

Louise Donaldson Celebrates Centennial Birthday

Most Laurel residents associate the surname Donaldson with funerals, but a very different kind of gathering will soon occur at the Donaldson Funeral Home on Talbott Avenue. In early November, four generations of Donaldsons will celebrate the 100th birthday of matriarch Louise V. Donaldson.

Born and raised in Berwyn Heights, Maryland, Louise was living in Laurel when she met DeWitt Donaldson, who had owned and operated his own funeral business in Laurel since the early 1930s. The two actually met at a funeral he had arranged for one of Louise's relatives. They married in 1959 and raised two children, Diane and Jay, in the second-floor residence above the funeral home.

Louise obtained her own mortician's license and the two successfully ran the business as a team, with Louise deftly handling many roles as a parent, homemaker, and businesswoman. "She was always there to support me and my sister with anything we got involved in," Jay says. Louise also stayed active in the Laurel community and served as President of the Soroptimist International's Laurel branch.

When DeWitt's health declined and he moved to assisted living in the mid-1980s, Louise took on full operating responsibility for the business, with some

assistance from Diane and Jay. Both had earned degrees in Mortuary Science at Catonsville Community College (now the Community College of Baltimore County). Later, Diane opted for a slight career change, becoming a professor of Mortuary Science at CCBC, while Jay eventually took over ownership of the business following his father's death in 1989. He gives full credit to his mother, though, for the funeral home's longevity.

"She is a smart businesswoman," Jay says. "She saved the family business. In about 1995, we came close to shutting down, but she turned it around and built us back up to where we are today." The Donaldson family now operates three funeral homes—in Laurel, Clarksville, and Odenton—as well as a pet cremation service based in Odenton. The business officially became a three-generational one when Jay's son, Cullen, followed in his footsteps. They both serve as morticians and owner/operators in a business that has served Laurel and its surrounding communities for over 94 years, largely because of Louise's dedication and leadership.

Although Louise retired about 20 years ago, she retains an active mortician's license. But most of her time is now focused on family, which grew over the years to include 6 grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren, all of whom live close by. In some ways, though, she still oversees the family business, as she still lives in the second-floor apartment overtop the funeral home on Talbott Avenue.

From all of us here at *Voices of Laurel*: Happy Birthday, Louise!



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Back to the Big T

Charlie Nickell Shares Photos and Memories From the Beloved Restaurant That His Family Owned for 32 Years



BY RICHARD FRIEND

To see the full Big T History Contributors collection of photos, ephemera, and videos, visit laurelhistory.com/big-t

When the popular Big T closed its doors in February 2007, the *Laurel Leader* tried to get an interview with owner Charlie Nickell. There'd been no final farewell announcement or big countdown to closing day; the restaurant simply didn't reopen one morning, and then sat vacant for another two years before being razed in 2009 to make way for the Pollo Campero restaurant that occupies the site today. Charlie was understandably too emotional to talk to the *Leader* about having to close the business that his family had run for 32 years.

The restaurant may be gone, but it most certainly has never been forgotten—especially by those like me who grew up on its hamburgers, fried chicken, roast beef, and dipped ice cream cones. And so it was a particularly special treat for me when Charlie reached out to The

Laurel History Boys and was willing to share his photos and scrap books documenting that wonderful time in our hometown's history. As thrilled as we are to be able to now host a History Contributors album with over 400 images on our website, we were equally elated to finally connect with Charlie, who shared many stories and anecdotes about the restaurant that still means so much to so many.

For starters, he clarified an important point about the name itself. Was it the Big T? Was it Tastee-Freez? The names were pretty much interchangeable as far as I'd known. "The official name was Big T Family Restaurant featuring Tastee-Freez," Charlie explains. It had started as just a Tastee-Freez ice cream shop when Mr. and Mrs. James DeLorenzo started it in April 1970. Prior to that, the small building had been Laurel's very

first McDonald's. With no room for indoor seating, McDonald's had opened a new, larger location further south on Washington Boulevard in 1969.

Charlie's father, James Nickell, took over the franchise in November 1974 after the DeLorenzo's lease expired and expanded it to include the wider menu options that Big T offered. That meant literally expanding the restaurant, as well, to add a seating area and customer restrooms.

Speaking of which, Charlie has a unique story about those restrooms.

In the early years of the business, customers had to walk behind the counter and through the kitchen to access the single restroom that was primarily for

CONTINUED ON PAGE 34



The Big T Family Restaurant at 833 Washington Boulevard started out as Laurel's first McDonald's in the mid-1960s (top left). When McDonald's moved to a larger location in 1969, the old building became a Tastee-Freez operated by the DeLorenzo family (top right). James Nickell (center right) took over the franchise in 1974, expanding to include the Big T menu and indoor seating.



Laurel Elementary School (its earlier building shown at left in the 1960s) has occupied the site at Montgomery Street between Fifth and Sixth Streets for a century.

Laurel Elementary Marks 100 Years With Renovation and Renewal



BY SHANE WALKER

One hundred years of school may sound overwhelming to some, but in Laurel, it's a reason to celebrate. August 26 marked the first day back for students at Laurel Elementary, and this year, we've reached a major milestone: a full century of educating our community.

One exciting change this fall is a long-awaited renovation of the school library. For the first time since ... well, since I attended LES back in 1996 ... the space is getting a full refresh. The renovation will include new tile flooring, updated furniture, painted quotes on the tapered ceiling, and hundreds of new books. Construction begins September 23 and is expected to finish by October 4. The school will remain open during that time, as work will be completed in sections to ensure student safety.

While the library space is under construction, I will be visiting classrooms to teach library skills, with an emphasis on digital literacy and computer use. Regular book checkouts are on a brief pause, but media classes will continue without interruption.

People often ask, "What do kids learn in the school library these days?" It's a great question. In PreK

and Kindergarten, we focus on story elements like character, setting, and events. First and second grade students learn basic technology skills such as typing and emailing, along with social lessons about respect and honesty. Third grade students explore the Dewey Decimal System through hands-on activities: 001.9 covers cryptids, 641.5 is cookbooks, and so on. Fourth graders study genre through print, music, and film, while fifth graders combine research skills with social-emotional learning, helping them build emotional awareness and healthy relationships.

More than anything, we want our students to feel safe and to love learning. That's the foundation of everything we do. This summer, Dr. Rhea Bush, Ms. Martina Avery, Ms. Savannah Jackson, Mrs. Nicole Parks, Ms. Alexis Robertson, and I all participated in professional development focused on creating calm, supportive environments for students navigating academic stress. Laurel's children deserve our full attention, both caring and firm, and Laurel Elementary is up to the task.

Now in his third year as principal, Mr. Tyrone Harris summed up our mission best: "Through rigorous

instruction and targeted support, 100% of our students will reach proficiency in math and reading." It's a lofty goal, but a necessary one. Schools are built by people, and our people remain committed to every student, every day.

Allow me to close with the words from our legendary school song. If you know the tune, sing along:

We're the Laurel Leopards. We're the best we can be.

Like the Laurel Leopards, you be you; I'll be me.

Join the celebration of the Laurel education.

Yessiree, feeling free in harmony

Happy 100 years, Laurel Elementary. And here's to many more.

Shane Walker is the Media Specialist at Laurel Elementary School. More than a lifetime resident in Laurel, he is a lifetime member of its greater community. As a writer, he focuses on inspiring harmony through diversity of thought.

COMMUNITY

The Unsettling Loss of Friendships as We Age



BY JIM CLASH

I recently posted something on Facebook to the effect that, as we age, the number of friends we have seems to dwindle, and for a number of reasons. The online response was overwhelming surprising, with many from my baby-boomer generation weighing in.

First off, while I think social media is one of the reasons for this—texting, e-mailing, and the like instead of talking or meeting up in person—I will say that Facebook generally is a positive. I have come across many friends from grade school, high school, and college there, as well as folks from various jobs I’ve held over the years. It’s interesting to see the paths in life they have chosen, or, in some cases, have chosen them.

Part of what precipitated my post was the death this year of some of my classmates, in particular Kevin Wagner, class of 1973. Kevin and I had been good friends all through eight years of Catholic school together at St. Mary’s, then for one year at Laurel Junior High School (we had worked together on a prize-winning laser science project), and three years at Laurel High School. I hadn’t seen Kevin since our 50-year LHS reunion in 2023. I did hear that he had cancer then, but to me he looked okay.

Other deaths that have rocked me include three more ‘73 classmates: Bob Goodwin, Steve Garrison, and Scott Grooman. In fact, 55 of my ‘73 graduating class were not present at our reunion due to death.

Another contributing factor to lost friendships is the deep divide politically in this country now, as wide a gap as I’ve seen in my lifetime. The current situation has destroyed relationships in families and with co-workers and friends. The Covid-19 pandemic didn’t help, either, with its two years of isolation.

Something I’m particularly sensitive to—and maybe it’s just me—is the sudden disappearance (they call it “ghosting”) of old friends. Here today, gone tomorrow. The acquaintances I don’t mind so much; it’s the close friends I don’t understand.

Perhaps it’s that they are busy with their kids or grandkids, or are traveling in retirement, but with some I have the unsettled feeling that they can’t get anything more from me. It’s as if, in my later years, I have nothing more to give (I’m a journalist and I’m not rich), or perhaps they sense that I might need something from them, God forbid. Or perhaps I’m just paranoid.

In any case, I guess this is all a sobering part of getting older, but I don’t have to like it. I’m sure I’m guilty of some of this impersonality, too. And, much as I detest birthdays these days, I’ve come to welcome them. I mean, what’s the alternative?



Jim Clash immerses himself in extreme adventures for Forbes magazine. He graduated from Laurel High School in 1973. His latest book is Amplified: Interviews With Icons of Rock ‘n’ Roll.

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Authority: Supporters of Adrian G. Simmons, Treasurer Michael Sciscenzi

ADRIAN G. SIMMONS

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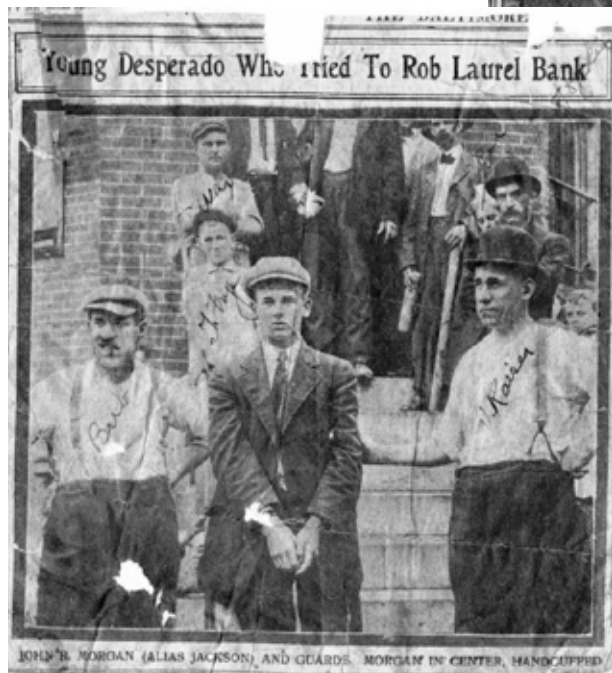
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A Posse in Laurel



BY KEVIN LEONARD

The idea of townspeople forming a posse conjures up images of cowboys in the old west on horseback going after desperadoes who robbed a bank or the stagecoach. But in a small town like Laurel, it was still commonplace in the early 1900s. Here are three examples of a posse of Laurel citizens pursuing criminals.



1911: Posse Captures the Boy Bandit

In 1911, the Citizens' National Bank of Laurel was a tiny brick building on the corner of Main and Fourth Streets. The original structure is still there, totally absorbed into the current building. Downtown Laurel was a sparse collection of houses and small farms, separated by vacant lots. Many homeowners had chickens, a cow, or a horse, so small barns were also commonplace.

On Sept. 8, 1911, a young-looking teenager nervously walked across the street toward the bank and donned a mask. As he bounded up the steps, he drew a handgun from his coat pocket. The *Baltimore Sun* published a detailed account of what happened next.

At the teller's window, Laurel resident Harry A. Block was making a deposit to



teller A. Leroy Bevans. The Kid yelled "Hands up!" and passed a bag through the window to Bevans, ordering him to "put all the money you've got in the drawer into that bag, and do it quick!" Suddenly, a door from the other side of the bank opened, and cashier George W. Waters stepped out with a pistol in his hand

and fired a shot into the air.

With gun in hand, the Kid took off. Waters shot again, this time aiming for the robber, but missed. As the Kid ran down the steps outside the bank, his mask fell off.

The Kid ran between the houses and farms that backed up to each other from Main Street and Prince George Street. An alley ran through the middle of the block between the homes to allow trucks to empty the outhouses.

Waters' gunshots immediately drew a crowd. Residents and police rushed to the bank to find out what happened. As described in the *Sun*, "Then searching parties were organized and the hunt for the fugitive began." The posse sprang into action.

A few minutes later, some children playing near Della Cooper's barn behind Prince George Street saw a coat covering the opening of the barn's loft. Mrs. Cooper went into the barn with a hatchet to investigate. As she started up the ladder, a voice above said, "Don't come up, lady, I'm here!" Mrs. Cooper ran to get help.

As soon as she was out of the barn, the Kid took off running, leaving his coat and gun in the loft. According to the *Sun*, as he was running from Cooper's barn, "he was seen by Howard Smith, Jr., a strapping youngster of 18 years, who at once gave pursuit." Smith, a member of the posse, eventually found him locked in an outhouse in the cemetery behind St. Philips Episcopal Church. The Kid meekly gave himself up to Smith.

Newspapers across the country reported on the attempted robbery. The Indianapolis *Star* ran the headline: "Posse Captures Youth Who Attempted to Hold Up Bank."

After hours of interrogation, the Kid came clean with the true story. "His eyes were swimming with tears" as he told the officials that his name was John R. Morgan. He was 17, but he was from a town in Virginia near Roanoke. He ran

away from his father and ended up in Laurel. As the *Sun* dramatically concluded its description of the interrogation: "Again the head dropped and the body twitched. Morgan said no more."

At his trial, Morgan was found guilty and was given five years in the state penitentiary. Chief Judge Bristow, "gave Morgan to understand emphatically that the court was letting him off very easily."

The attempted robbery was the talk of the town of months. Bank employees became instant celebrities. The Executive Board of the bank, meeting a month after the attempted robbery, voted to confiscate Mr. Waters' pistol for shooting a hole in the ceiling.

1919: Posse Pursues Mass Murderer

On April 20, three people were shot in the Oakcrest area, which in 1919 was almost all farms. A housewife, the owner of a boardinghouse, and one of the boardinghouse tenants were shot and killed.

Joseph Englehart lived in the boardinghouse, which was owned by his sister, one of the victims. Englehart was well-known to the Laurel community as a crazy drunkard. According to the *Washington Times*, "Englehart was a staunch believer in the occult. He also labored under the delusion that his divorced wife had cast a 'spell' over him." Englehart had traveled to Baltimore that morning, "had a séance with a Baltimore medium," and drank whiskey all day. According to the *Times*, "So strangely did Englehart act on the train that his brother ventured to tell him that he believed his mind was unbalanced. 'Joe,' said the brother, 'I believe you are going insane.'"

While in Baltimore, Englehart also bought a revolver.

When the police were informed of the shootings, a posse led by Laurel Chief of Police R. Lee Nichols was quickly formed. As described in *The Washington Post*, "All during the night a search was conducted by county officials and neighbors. About 5 o'clock Sunday morning they heard the report

of a pistol in the dense woods, and after an investigation of four hours found Englehart lying on the top of a hill in a thicket of the woods in an unconscious condition with a bullet wound in his right temple." The *Post* surmised that Englehart had "sent a bullet crashing through his brain."

Englehart was taken to a Baltimore hospital, where he died several hours later without regaining consciousness. Exactly what happened will never be known, but Englehart was considered the main suspect. As the *Times* put it, "Just what happened after Englehart returned to his home probably never will be unfolded as the lips of all his victims are sealed in death."

Coroner Thomas Baldwin told the *Times* that "There is no doubt that Joe Englehart killed his sister" and the others.

TRIPLE MURDER FOLLOWED BY MAN'S SUICIDE

Laurel Tragedy Disclosed
Easter Morning With
Discovery of Bodies.

MOTIVE IS MYSTERY

Joseph Englehart Believed
By Coroner to Have
Slain Victims.

FOUR DIE IN SHOOTING

Joseph Englehart Slays a Man
and Two Women at Laurel.

FATALLY WOUNDS SELF LATER

1922: Posse Captures Fort Meade Soldiers

The headline in the Sept. 8, 1922, *Laurel Leader* read: "PLOT TO ROB BANK, Five Camp Meade Soldiers Captured By Posse."

On Sept. 5, 1921, Private Charles Jones, a cook for the tank corps at Camp Meade, reluctantly drove five other soldiers in his car to Laurel. Jones later told police that he "suspected trouble" from the soldiers and carried his own gun.

While en route to Laurel, the soldiers talked of robbing the Citizens' National Bank on Main Street. When Jones protested, "one of the men shoved a gun toward my stomach," according to the *Baltimore Sun*.

Their plan was to have one soldier enter the bank and ask for change "to ascertain the 'lay of the land,'" according to the *Leader*. Three other soldiers waited outside for a signal to run in and rob the tellers. Since Jones wasn't willing to participate, a fifth soldier stayed with him in the car as a guard.

But the soldier guarding Jones fell asleep, allowing Jones to "get the drop on him" with his own gun. Jones kicked the soldier to the curb and drove to the State Police substation on A Street to notify police.

Jones hurriedly told his story to

State Policeman Link, according to the *Chambersburg (PA) Public Opinion* newspaper. "Link, unable to take the trail himself because of having recently been crippled, notified Judge Roberts, who seized the State policeman's gun and dashed from the substation calling for help. From almost every house men and boys came forth armed with shotguns, revolvers, and rifles."

The *Leader* said it was "a posse composed of Chief Bailiff James A. Scaggs, of Laurel, Deputy Sheriff R. Lee Nichols, Justice of the Peace Thomas B. Roberts, and dozens of private citizens of Laurel." The *Public Opinion* said it was "an armed posse of more than a hundred men."

But while the posse was being formed, State Policeman Link called C.E. Little, Mayor of Laurel and cashier of the bank, and alerted him to the soldiers' plan. The soldiers, who were huddled on the sidewalk outside the bank plotting their next move, had no idea the whole town now knew what was going on. Little, assistant cashier Viola Clough, and clerk Patrick Murphy quietly closed and locked the banks' doors.

The *Washington Evening Star* reported what happened next: "Not far from the bank the crowd discovered the soldiers.

The men fled and the crowd gave chase. The pursuit led to the outskirts of the town and through a cornfield on the property of DeWilton H. Donaldson, a Laurel merchant, where the soldiers were captured. During the chase a number of shots were fired by the pursuers and they were returned by the soldiers."

The *Evening Star* also reported that "all of the men, with the exception of Jones, were ordered committed to jail pending grand jury action, under bond of \$2,500 each. Jones is being held under a \$1,000 bond as a witness."

The *Leader* summed up the event with "The Citizens' Bank is well protected from such attacks and it would take experts to accomplish much there. The community is naturally elated at the failure of the men to accomplish their purpose, and is proud of the prompt capture of the would-be robbers by its local officers, aided by many private citizens."

Kevin Leonard is a founding member of the Laurel History Boys and a two-time winner of the Maryland Delaware District of Columbia Press Association Journalism Award.





PHOTOS COURTESY OF CITY OF LAUREL

60 YEARS OF FUN: Laurel Parks and Recreation Celebrates Its History



BY DIANE MEZZANOTTE

If you've ever navigated a paddleboat on Laurel Lake, played at Discovery Park, or struck a yoga pose at the Armory, you're one of countless people who have benefited from the dedicated efforts of Laurel's Department of Parks and Recreation (LPR). The department probably has touched the lives of all Laurel families, in ways big and small, by maintaining the city's parks, playgrounds, and community centers. LPR also runs hundreds of year-round recreational activities and community services, earning the nickname "department of fun."

This is a year of extra fun, as LPR marks the 60-year anniversary of its founding. This past spring, Director Bill Bailey announced a year-long celebration filled with special events, kicked off by a party at Granville Gude Park in June which featured games, food, and a 60th-birthday cake. Celebrations went on throughout the summer with free outdoor movies and concerts and will continue at seasonal events such as the Harvest Hayride and multiple winter offerings.

Model of Excellence from the Start

LPR has a state-wide reputation as an innovator in parks and recreation. Its origins began in January 1965, before any city-level recreation departments even existed in Maryland, when Judith Nigh was hired to assess the city's recreational needs. The Maryland General Assembly passed legislation in May of that same year allowing municipalities to create parks and recreation departments, and Laurel was ahead of the curve. Having already been briefed on Nigh's recommendations, the Laurel City Council passed an ordinance just one month later, June 1965, establishing LPR and appointing Nigh its first director.

The department started with just a handful of employees and a few activities. A children's day camp, a children's theater program, and teen dances were the main services in the first few years, all held at Avondale Mill. In 1969, the department took over operations of Laurel Municipal Pool—which had been a private, whites-only swim

club—and began offering swim classes and open swim times for all Laurel residents.

By the mid-1970s, the department had expanded by a few people and established its offices in the Laurel Armory on Montgomery Street. A voluntary recycling program launched in 1977 initially was run by LPR. Two years later, LPR expanded its generational reach by opening a senior citizen’s center at the old high school on Montgomery Street and starting a senior van transportation service. That service remains in operation, and the Phelps Senior Center was a hub of activities for decades, prior to the 2011 opening of the Greater Laurel-Beltsville Senior Center on Contee Road.

The 1980s saw additional growth under new Director Jan Chavrid, who faced the challenge of serving a quickly growing city. Laurel had annexed over 250 acres of land around Laurel Lakes in 1981 and another 275 acres at Patuxent Greens in 1983, with areas earmarked for recreation and nature preservation. Within a few years, Greenview Drive Park was opened, offering hiking and biking trails and a public pool. Then, in 1984, LPR opened perhaps its crown jewel of achievement: Granville Gude Park, a 26-acre recreation area featuring exercise paths around Laurel Lake. The Lakehouse opened in 1986, offering paddleboat rentals and indoor events space; McCullough Field and its performing arts stage also debuted that year. For over 40 years, Gude Park has hosted hundreds of community events, from the annual Lakefest to recurring festivals celebrating Independence Day, Juneteenth, Pride, and more.

Renovating and Reimagining

Following the 1980s growth spurt, LPR next focused largely on upgrading existing facilities under its new director, John Marshall. Around the city, playground equipment was replaced and basketball and tennis courts were resurfaced; Riverfront Park was updated to include a paved walking path, playground, and a picnic pavilion. The 90s did bring a major addition to the city’s recreation facilities with the construction of a community center on Cypress Street—the first one built specifically for that purpose. It opened in 1992 and is known today as the Robert J. DiPietro Center.

LPR’s next director, Mike Lhotsky, took over in 2002 and oversaw the creation of a skate park and a dog park, as well as the purchase of Greenview Pool, which had been privately owned by the Patuxent Green Homeowners Association. LPR renovated the pool and clubhouse and added tennis courts. Lhotsky also helped negotiate a win-win agreement with Prince George’s County: a portion of Emancipation Park’s acreage was transferred to the county to accommodate expansion of its Laurel Branch Library; in turn, the county built new basketball courts and paved paths, an amphitheater, and a playground with an interactive water feature. The 31,000-square-foot library and new play area opened in 2016.

Lhotsky’s successor, Joanne Barr, took on LPR’s next big project: a 3-year, \$500,000 renovation of Laurel Armory, which was built in 1927 and needed extensive work. The gymnasium floor was resurfaced, a workout area was furnished with modern fitness equipment, and a dance room and game room were added. While this was a huge undertaking, Barr says her biggest challenge actually came a few years later: navigating the Covid-19 pandemic. Barr reflects that, “as bad as the pandemic was overall, it was good for the parks and recreation profession in that it allowed us to shine. The only way people could socialize was by using outdoor spaces, and our staff worked hard to provide safe activities. We opened our pool when so many others didn’t; we held our traditional Halloween and Christmas activities, but we were creative in how to run them safely.”

Discovery Park became a major gathering place during Covid, especially for the city’s youths. Realizing the park’s importance to the community, LPR used some of the city’s federal relief funds to upgrade the turf field, add bathrooms and a little free library, and enclose the park with fencing for safety. And, while it had always been accessible, the park became even more inclusive with the addition of zero-gravity swings, non-verbal and Braille communication boards, and more. “Our idea was to create a space for everybody to participate together, regardless of abilities,” says Barr. “That was the one thing I really wanted to do before leaving LPR.”

Barr spent the last few years of her LPR tenure working with then-Assistant Director Bill Bailey on the multiservice center, which came about after a city task force on homelessness identified the need for a social services facility. “We visited a lot of sites, we learned a lot, and we worked hard to come up with something that would work in Laurel,” Barr says. The Craig A. Moe Multiservice Center opened in September 2024, two years after Barr passed the directorship baton to Bailey.

Secrets to Success

Bailey and his staff now operate from a newly renovated 1850s-era house locally known as Gude Mansion. Reopened in 2022 and christened “The Mansion at Laurel,” the picturesque house and grounds can be rented for special events. Interviewed there recently by Laurel TV for a promotional video, both Barr and Bailey reflected on the department where they’ve spent most of their careers. “I’ve worked in every division and done it all,” says Bailey, who joined LPR as a part-time groundskeeper in 1983. “People stay because they like it and they have a passion for the job.”

Barr told *Voices of Laurel* that the low LPR turnover rate—including among its directors, of which there have only been six—reflects a family-like atmosphere among the staff and also “is a testament to community members, all the great people we’ve met.” She also cites LPR’s good relationship with Laurel’s Mayor and City Councilmembers. “Throughout each decade, they have been cooperative and really supportive. They allowed us to be creative and provided funding for our ideas.”

Already looking to the future, Bailey notes that the 60-year celebration will continue, but so will the work: “Our population is growing, so we have to keep moving.”



Diane Mezzanotte is a staff writer and member of the Board of Directors for The Laurel History Boys. In addition to covering Laurel city municipal news, she also reports on all things from South Laurel.

A Timeline of Laurel Parks and Recreation

- January 1965: Judith Nigh is hired to assess community’s recreational needs
- May 1965: New state legislation allows for municipality-level DPRs
- June 1965: Laurel City Council passes Ordinance 449 establishing DPR
- 1969: City’s DPR begins operating pool and swimming program
- 1975: Armory is established as the department’s offices
- 1976: Citizens’ advisory committee to Parks and Recreation is formed
- 1977: Recycling program begins
- 1979: Senior citizen van operations start
- 1981: Laurel Lakes is annexed (267 acres)
- 1982: Phelps Center re-opens for senior activities
- 1983: Greens of Patuxent is annexed (275 acres)
- 1984: Granville Gude Park opens
- 1985: Parks and Rec purchases 1840s mill worker house, renovations begin
- 1986: McCullough Field and its stage are dedicated
- 1986: Lakehouse opens, boat rentals begin
- 1991: Avondale Mill burns down and is razed
- 1994: Riverfront Park’s paved trails and playground open
- 1996: Laurel Historical Society opens its museum in renovated mill house
- 2016: Emancipation Park re-opens with modern equipment and splash pad
- 2022: Discovery Park is upgraded to be all-inclusive
- 2022: The Mansion at Laurel opens, becomes the department’s headquarters
- 2025: Parks and Recreation celebrates 60 years

Parks and Recreation by the Numbers

Today, the department has 29 full-time employees, assisted by additional summer staff. It maintains:

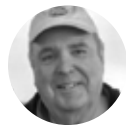
- 280 acres of land
- 2 outdoor pools
- 15 parks
- 2 community centers
- 10 playgrounds
- 1 dog park
- 3 gymnasiums

Parks and Recreation Directors

1965-1979	Judith Nigh	2002-2016	Mike Lhotsky
1979-1990	Janet Chavrid	2016-2022	Joanne Barr
1990-2002	John Marshall	2022-now	Bill Bailey

A Conversation With Jim Cross: Laurel's Mr. Do-Everything

Raised in Laurel since 1953, Jim Cross was a member of the last graduating class (1965) from the old Laurel High School on Montgomery Street. Since then, he has worn a variety of hats in community service: Laurel City Councilman, Board of Trade chairman, Ivy Hill cemetery board member, and many more. We started by talking about his childhood.



BY KEVIN LEONARD

Jim Cross: I lived beside the fire department on Montgomery Street. That's where I grew up. 911 Montgomery Street where the old fire department is now the HVAC. There was actually a school that was on that corner. And my great Aunt Edith taught at that school.

Kevin Leonard: I've never seen a photo of that.

JC: I'd love to find one. Apparently, she taught there like her sister. My great Aunt Hattie would take a train from Baltimore to the sanitarium, where she worked as a secretary from about 1912 to '17 or so. I can't find any records of anything there. That's all gone, basically. My great-grandfather was the manager of the Ober farm, which was on 197 where Greenview, all the Greenview businesses and the golf course and all that stuff was. Well, that was the Augustus Ober farm. My grandfather was born there in 1881. But I have lots of roots here in the city. We moved here in 1953. My dad worked for C&P Telephone Company, which was Chesapeake and Potomac. Well, if you worked there it was called "cheap in particular." [laughs] I actually worked with them for a year or two. Anyway, we moved here in '53 and I started first grade at OW Phair Elementary School. That opened in '53.

KL: Its first year?

JC: Yeah. So, I went there and then I went to junior high. And then I was in the last graduating class out of Laurel Senior High.

KL: In '65? So, you were the last class to graduate from Montgomery Street?

JC: Yep. We just had our 60th high school reunion, and I was in charge of that, sort of.

KL: What was it like going to school there? What I mean is, at that point, it was a pretty old school.

JC: It was built in 1899. And then it had been added on for the gymnasium and the auditorium. When I was there, all of that was there. I was in the band, I played trumpet. I occasionally do stuff at church, with the choir or something, and "Taps." I play "Taps." Not a lot. It's the 24 hardest notes ever written. Not that it's that hard to play, except that when you play it, you're usually playing it for a friend or family member or something like that.

KL: Hard to get through?

JC: Yeah. We had a guy named Bill Snyder I'd known for years since we moved here, and he asked that I play "Taps" for him when he passed. I said, "Sure."



Jim Cross (center, with scissors) poses with Mayor Keith Sydnor (right) and City Council Members Adrian Simmons, James Kole, Kyla Clark, and Jeff Mills at the opening of the Laurel Board of Trade's new office on C Street.

He was up in Carroll Lutheran home in Westminster. He moved in there with his wife and all. So, he passed away and I went up, and I was standing in the back of the chapel and they're getting ready to do it. And the chaplain says, "Would any of the veterans like to come up?" So, like 15 old guys hobble up. They're all standing up there. I'm afraid I can't make a mistake.

KL: Also, this was indoors?

JC: Yeah, it was in the chapel. And so, the military guys went over, picked up the flag, and I stood back there and played "Taps," and my legs were shaking, and I got through it. When I did my dad's in 2001 at the cemetery, I said to the people, "I just had read that Winston Churchill said, 'When you bury me, I don't want you to play "Taps," I want you to play "Reveille" as a new beginning." I said, "I think that's pretty cool." So, I played "Taps" and I played "Reveille." That's the only time I've done that. Anyway, so where were we? Oh, class of '65. It was really great to see our classmates.

KL: How many were in your class?

JC: We had 158. Forty have passed away. We had about 38 or something like that showed up. Tony Woodward lives out in Wyoming, and he makes car parts and stuff. He didn't remember this, but I distinctly remember this was in Miss Stanton's English class. We had to do book reports every two weeks, and every third one was an oral book report. So, she says, "Okay, Tony, come up, do your oral book report." And he was like [makes a scared face]. So, he goes up and he says, "The name of the book is the Bible. The main character is God." Miss Stanton said, "Sit down Tony." [laughs]

KL: Did you have a sense that you were in this old school that—

JC: Yeah. Because the teachers were all—basically most of them were getting up there.

KL: Doc Weagly was there.

JC: Yep. He was. He was our science teacher.

KL: What about Miss Fisher?

JC: Yeah. Miss Fisher. I played football, so I didn't have to be in a marching band.

KL: They used the 8th street field for all the athletics, right?

JC: Yeah. I was quarterback for 11th and 12th grade. I worked at the Valencia Motel when I was going to college. I started college after I graduated and I tutored the son of Ida Fisher, who owned the motel, in math. So, she asked if I'd like to have a job. I said, "Sure." I worked three shifts on the weekend and went to school during the week. Then I met my wife at the motel. She, her mom and dad, and her friend Judy had come down to help her sister and brother-in-law move from one apartment to another apartment here in Laurel. Next morning, they are in the car heading back to Rochester, New York, so she can go back to nursing school. But eventually she was coming down to visit her sister during a break in November. She came down and we got together and went down to DC because you could drink a beer at 18 back then. And went to a place called Basin's. I drank a few beers and threw up. She wouldn't kiss me that night. [laughs]

KL: Fill me in on all the different roles that you play within the city and all the different organizations.

JC: Where do I start? Okay, first of all, I'm chairman of the Board of Trade. I've been chairman for five or six years now. Marilyn [Johnson, who passed away this past June] was president. I'm chairman. Right now,

we're working on trying to get through all of the stuff that Marilyn was doing.

KL: I really want to talk to you about the Main Street Festival. We've been in it for three or four years now and it's always been such a calm, friendly, nice day.

JC: Forty-four years of no problems until this one.

KL: Did they ever figure out why that tank exploded? What happened?

JC: Apparently, there's a hose that went to the grill or something, and the hose came loose or something, and I think he turned the thing the wrong way to try to turn it off. I think he'd already started his grill, too. So somehow the fire got going. I was just down the street and it was like, "Oh my God." I ran into the Woman's Club and grabbed a fire extinguisher. Everybody's going, "What are you going to do with that?" Fortunately, the fire department got up there and hosed it down real good and got it stopped, and the McCeney house was sitting back far enough.

KL: But I understand it burned one of the trees in the yard, right?

JC: Yeah. It's a pine tree right there in front where he was set up. It's still okay. But there's some stuff burned up. I mean, it just went crazy.

KL: He was the owner, right?

JC: He was the owner. And they had to take him off to the burn unit at Johns Hopkins. He got checked out, and apparently he really got a lot of burn problems. Anyway, the city came in and they had to close off the street there. And then you had to get BG&E to come in and fix the wires and all that gas, and Verizon. So, I met with the Mayor and Police Chief and several officers. We had a little talk about, "What are we going to do?" We obviously had to cancel the parade because they couldn't get past Fourth Street. We did that, but then said, "everything seems to be going okay, maybe we can keep it up." The police said, okay, we'll just have people go up the street and down Prince George, come down Fourth and then they can go down the other side. Well, this is a private property. They can't be walking through there and all that. So, we got through all of that, and people were on the street. There was a lot. And this was about 7:15 when we were just starting to set up.

KL: We didn't know what was going on. We were too far up, but the word traveled very fast.

JC: Then you had the lady that decided she wanted to drive.

KL: That's another whole thing that happened right in front of us.

JC: That was right in front of you? You all saw that?

KL: Oh, yeah. I'll tell you, we've always been admirers of the Laurel Police Department, and their response was just amazing. It could have been so much worse. Although, clearly, she wasn't trying to hurt anybody, but that's not the point.

JC: You're driving down the street, there's a lady pushing her little kid in a walker, and—

KL: —and here come the cheerleaders, who were in kind of an impromptu parade. We can't say enough about the LPD. They were fantastic. Beforehand, you probably sat down and went over contingencies. You never thought about something like that, did you?

JC: What I did do was after it was over, I looked at

our vendor list because one of the things that I do is—because I'm lucky to be able to do it—is set up. All of the vendors get their spots and that kind of stuff. And you got to think about stuff like, I don't want to put the lady selling the dresses next to the barbecue guy.

KL: So, you've got to spread out the food vendors and stuff like that.

JC: Yeah. I have a routine that I do when I set it all up. I went back and looked at the food vendor list and of the 35 food vendors we had, 15 of them had propane tanks. And now I've talked with Chrissy up at city hall. We're going to get together and meet with a fire marshal and all these folks to sit down and say, "All right, what do we want to do about propane tanks?" Because fortunately, where I had parked the guy where he was, it worked out okay. Had he been down the street and in front of some old buildings—

KL: I never thought about that. Yeah, like the old playhouse—that would have gone up.

JC: Yes, it could have been a real issue there. So, I want to think about what to do. I've been thinking, well, we can put them right there in front of the entrance to the parking lot to the apartments. No, you can't do that because if the Rescue Squad has to get in there, you can't have them sitting in front of it. You've got to leave that open, all that kind of stuff.

KL: As a vendor who doesn't do food, I remember when we saw—I guess it was two years ago—when all the canopies had to be fire retardant. And we were thinking, what's this all about?

JC: That's what it's all about. People that were set up there, stuff was coming off of the tree hitting their tent. Burning through the tent but not setting the tent on fire. That's why we do that. That's a good idea from the city.

KL: So, back to the woman. Did you do a what-if-something-like-that-happened? Did that ever come up?

JC: Not yet, but we'll be talking about that. Obviously, they need something. We've got city trucks, police cars, everything blocking Fourth Street coming in Fifth Street. All that stuff is done. But now this was a parking lot, right? With a piece of yellow paper. But we don't want to really block it. But we may have to, I don't know.

KL: Well, they can't leave, so why not?

JC: But you also have to make sure you can get somebody in the car in case an ambulance has to go in and get somebody, because they're no other way in there.

KL: Let's move on. Ivy Hill.

JC: I'm on the board of directors of the Ivy Hill Cemetery. I'm the historian, which means I basically got a bunch of boxes of stuff out of Maurice Harding's attic. He was on the cemetery board. I've gotten all his boxes of that stuff to try to go through and sort out what's relevant to make sure we keep digitizing whatever.

KL: And this all pertains to the cemetery?

JC: This is all cemetery stuff. At the last meeting I said, "You know, I can't be buried here. And they said, well, why not? I said, I'm not dead yet." [laughs] A lot of bad jokes.

KL: What's in the boxes?

JC: Some letters going back and forth with people and

that kind of stuff. That's my thing. I like to digitize stuff and get it.

KL: Who owns the cemetery?

JC: There's a company, I guess. It's Laurel Ivy Hill cemetery. And then there's a board of directors that manages this.

KL: So, it must be incorporated.

JC: It's incorporated. And it started around 1850 and then I guess the corporation kind of got in there somewhere. I got to have to go back and really look at that stuff. But, it was it was about 1850 because that's where—see, there was a church on Ninth Street, and those were transferred over there.

KL: The graves?

JC: Yeah. There was a cemetery behind it. It was a Methodist church or something. And then it moved over to Main Street. Speaking of—this is apropos of nothing in particular. Years and years ago I worked for the county for Winnie Kelly as the County Executive, and I would take calls from people that had problems, and then I'd see if I could solve the problem somehow. So, this lady called in and said, "I live in an apartment and my neighbor has got cancer and he really needs some help." I said, "Okay, we'll see what we can do." So, I called Social Services, and they sent somebody out to interview him, do all that stuff, and then they called back. I said, "How'd it go? Did you get him some medication?" But the problem was it couldn't get him something because he owned property. He has to sell the property. I said, "He lives in an apartment. What's he got?" "Oh, he bought a burial plot a couple months ago. That gives you the property. And he has to sell it." I said, "He's going to use it in six months. What are you talking about?" So, I called the department head and I explained it to him. He said, "I'll take care of it."

KL: What else?

JC: I'm on the board of the Laurel Amateur Radio Club. I've been a member of that since 1990. I guess I've been past president and editor of the newsletter and blah, blah, blah and all that stuff. I'm very active with that Laurel Radio Club. Because of that, I also have a badge that I can swipe in any of the city buildings and get into because we have a radio station there set up beside the emergency operations center.

KL: Where is that?

JC: In city hall. And if you look back there—I haven't put it up lately—but we have a 71-foot tower with a bunch of antennas on it and all that in the back between the two buildings. Lately I've had it down because every time I think about putting it up, oh, we're going to have a wind up to 60 miles an hour, and it only works up to 45 miles an hour. I originally got an amateur radio license in 10th grade back in 1963 and had to have my mom drive me down to the FCC to take my general class license test. I'm very active in that. We just did our National Night Out over here.

KL: That was with the city, right?

JC: Gude Lake, yeah. The city has a number of different groups that will set up in a little area down there by the Lakehouse. I was on the City Council for—back when I was a little kid—for ten years. Five terms.

KL: What years were that?

CONTINUED ON PAGE 36

Elections of City Councils Past



BY PETE LEWNES

This being election season for the Laurel City Council, I thought it a great time to share some local campaign materials that my wife, Martha, and I have found over the years.

Occasionally, political memorabilia from the distant and not-so-distant past turns up at yard sales, or are mixed in with photos, newspapers, and other ephemera. They provide a printed record of the candidates who both ran for office and were elected by the citizens of Laurel, and for that reason remain an important part of any local historical collection.

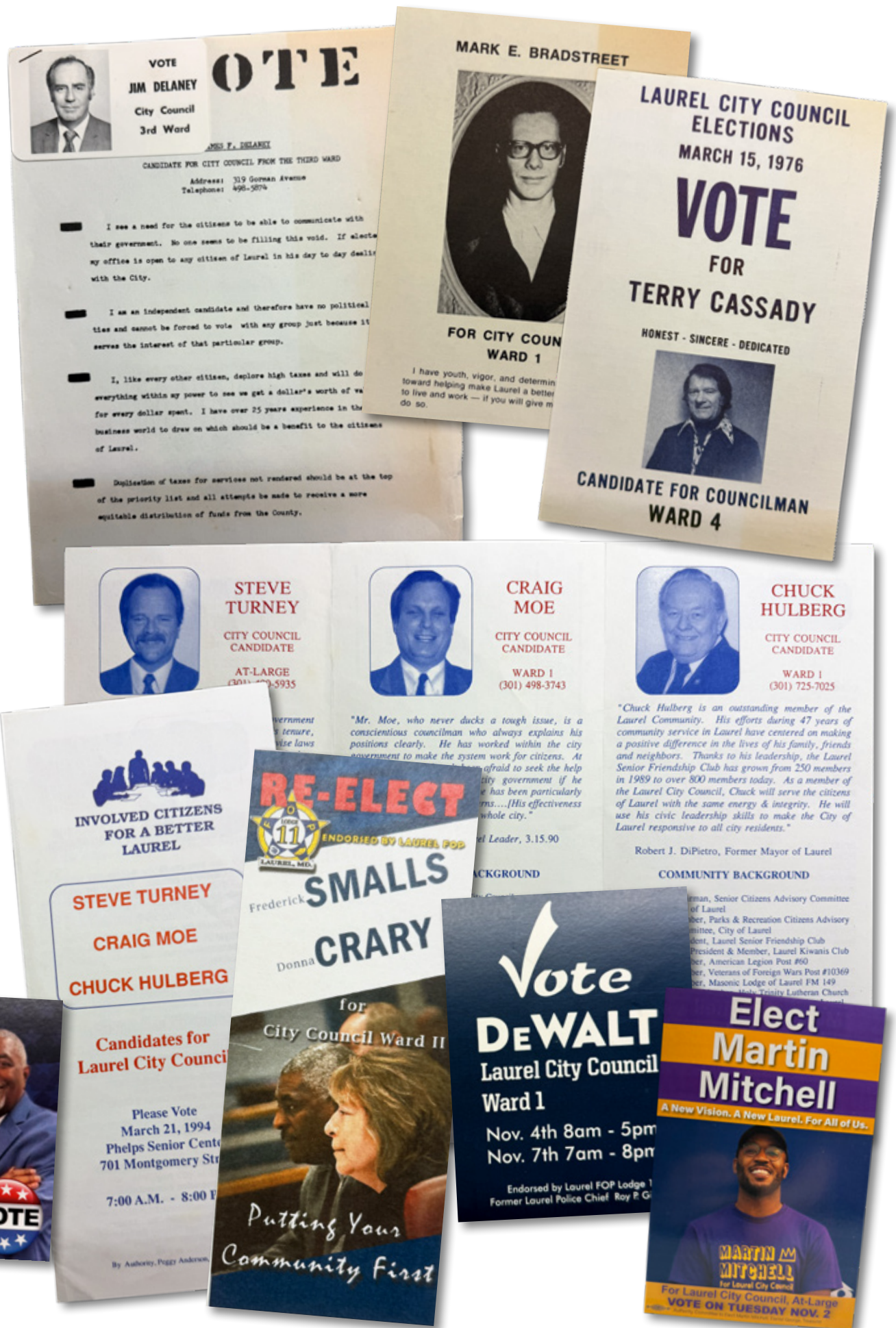
In reviewing some of the pieces I've discovered from decades ago, I noticed an interesting detail—there were more than the two wards that we currently have. In fact, there were *twice* as many.

To run for City Council, candidates needed only to live in one of the four wards. However, they were all elected to be Councilmembers *At-Large*, meaning that they would represent the entire city, as opposed to only the ward in which they were elected.

Likewise, residents were expected to cast votes for candidates in all four wards—not just their own, as we do today. The rationale seemed to be that no single ward would be deemed underserved or stacked with political talent, and that every resident truly had a voice in electing the representatives of our city.

Today, we're fortunate to have a diverse group of city leaders who both care about Laurel and work well together, setting a good example for us all. Here's wishing each of the candidates the best of luck, and if you're a resident within the city limits, please be sure to get out and vote!

Pete Lewnes is a founding member of The Laurel History Boys, and a prolific collector of Laurel historical memorabilia from all eras.





Mayor Robert J. DiPietro (left) and the City Council at the 1980 election results: Jim Cross, President, Lynn Roehrich, Dani Duniho, H. Edward Ricks, and Hal Ammann.





Hot Stuff From the Laurel Volunteer Fire Department



BY MIKE SELLNER

Fire Prevention Week

This year's Fire Prevention Week theme was: "Charge into Fire Safety: Lithium-Ion Batteries in Your Home!"

From phones to power tools, the LVFD urges residents to know the risks of lithium-ion batteries in your home. The LVFD is teaming up with the National Fire Prevention Association to highlight how important it is to buy, charge, and recycle these types of batteries properly:

- Buy only listed products—When buying lithium-ion products, read the label and look for nationally recognized testing labs on the package and product.
- Charge devices safely—Use the charging cords that come with the product and if you need a new charger or battery, buy from the original manufacturer. Charge your device on a hard surface, NOT on any type of cloth or your bed so as to avoid catching fire.
- Recycle batteries responsibly—DO NOT throw any lithium-ion batteries in regular trash. They could cause a fire. Always recycle at a safe recycling location.

The Laurel Volunteer Fire Department will hold its annual Fire Awareness and Safety Day on Saturday, October 18 from noon to 3:00 pm. For further information, contact the station at www.Laurelvfd.org or (301) 776-3600.

LVFD Recognized by American Legion Post 60

The LVFD was honored by American Legion Post 60 at their department meeting on

July 21, 2025. LVFD Life Members Vic Whipple, Mike Kirk, Rickey Turney, Michael Sellner, and Robert "Pop" Grant all received Memorial Bricks that will be placed in the Memorial Walkway outside of the American Legion, from the Sons of American Legion (SAL) for their service to the citizens of Laurel. In addition, Michael Sellner received his Memorial Brick for his Military Service in the United States Navy.

The members of the LVFD were also honored to have received donations of \$2,000 each from the SAL and the American Legion Post 60, totaling \$4,000. President Whipple thanked the Legion members for their generosity and spoke of the outstanding relationship we have shared with the American Legion, located at 2 Main Street, over these many decades.

The members of the LVFD thank American Legion Post 60 Commander Josie Lohman and all their members for their support and look forward to a continuing relationship in the years to come.

STAY FIRE SAFE

Smoke Alarms save lives. Don't live without one (or 2).



Michael Sellner is a member of the Laurel Volunteer Fire Department and a life-long Laurelite.



Laurel Volunteer Fire Department Life Members were recently honored by American Legion Post 60. LVFD President Vic Whipple (above right, center) displays the memorial brick for the late Robert "Pop" Grant. Bricks honoring Pop, Vic, Mike Kirk, Rickey Turney, and Michael Sellner are being added to the Memorial Walkway by the Sons of the American Legion in recognition of their service to Laurel.

COUNTDOWN TO PREAKNESS AT LAUREL PARK

A Look Into Maryland's Horseracing Lasting Legacies—Billy Barton



BY ANGIE LATHAM KOZLOWSKI

The storied career of a horse that lived and retired in Howard County is forever linked to Maryland horseracing's past. The famous track runner-turned-steeplechase jumper Billy Barton is tied to Belmont Manor and Historic Park in ElkrIDGE, thanks to the penultimate heir that owned the estate from 1917 to 1961. The famous horse lived on the property from 1923 to his death in his stable in 1951.

Historic Laurel Park racetrack, doomed to demolition and redevelopment following the 2026 running of the Preakness Stakes, is also linked to the famous Billy Barton despite an early rocky relationship with the star horse.

A Kentucky thoroughbred, Billy Barton began his career on flat tracks in Lexington at age two, where he won three races. Then, he was sent to Cuba, where he won the 2-year-old championship. In the 1920s, if you wanted your horse to race over the winter, you sent it to New Orleans, Tijuana, or Havana, according to 85-year-old George Mohr in 2000, who had spent 60 years of his life track-side at Pimlico.

As a 3-year-old in 1921, Billy Barton remained in Havana, winning two notable races and earning \$17,000. As a 4-year-old, "he swept everything before him," including a muddy Grand National worth nearly \$10,000, according to newspaper reports.

The next owner, Samuel Louis, brought the 5-year-old Billy Barton to Maryland. However, Billy Barton's demeanor had turned, well, meaner. Called a ruffian and bully, the horse often refused to start races and would kick, bite, and chew his groom's clothing—while he was wearing them. He was called a terror to all who encountered him. This behavior led stewards at Pimlico to rule Billy Barton off flat tracks for exceedingly bad behavior.

Louis became fed up with the once-winning horse and sold him to Howard Bruce, owner of Belmont Manor, for \$2,000. Bruce wanted the horse for his fox hunting pursuits. During those pursuits, Bruce identified the quality of Billy Barton as a jumper and thus began the second act of Billy Barton as a steeplechase champion.

Bruce was said to nurture the easy jumper's natural ability, and the once unruly track star became an international sensation in cross-country steeplechase races. He seemed to float effortlessly over fences, hedges, walls, and other obstacles. And he was fast.

He won his first steeplechase race, the Grand National Point to Point at Brooklandwood in Green Spring Valley, Maryland, in 1926 by 20 lengths. Newspapers reported, "Maryland's period of discontent was ended." The very next week, Billy Barton won the Maryland Hunt Cup on

what was described as the most difficult course in the country—4 miles long with 22 jumps, followed by the Virginia Gold Cup—the three great trophies of cross-country steeplechase competitions.

The International Steeplechase Sensation

In 1928, Bruce shipped Billy Barton to England to compete in the most prestigious steeplechase event in the world, The Grand National at Aintree (Liverpool, England). Billy Barton won his first race in England in preparation for the Grand National. London race writers said he won handsomely and even brilliantly. He had a less stellar outing at another warm-up event.

Meanwhile, 75 Baltimoreans set sail to England to cheer on Billy Barton. Back in Maryland, on race day, hundreds gathered outside of the *Baltimore Sun* building to listen to "probably the foremost of all radio announcers relay the telephonic report into the square and over the radio through local station WBAL."

"Sunpapers, the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company, the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, and the British Postoffice's telephone service cooperated to create the first ever transatlantic account of the world's greatest steeplechase." It was called an unprecedented achievement in reporting and communication that allowed thousands in America to hear the race as it happened.

There were 42 horses in the race. The ground was muddied by heavy rain and hail that morning. During the chaotic race, the top contenders fell and were out of the event. Billy Barton was in the lead through the first four fences and most of the race. The American horse was loudly cheered on by the Americans in the crowd as he reached his final jump.

The crowd roared, "Billy Barton!" and "America, Maryland wins!" only to watch in horror as Billy Barton "slipped in the treacherous footing and fell after taking the last jump." His Irish jockey, T.B. Cullinan, standing in for Billy Barton's usual jockey, remounted and brought the horse home, finishing in second place.

The winner, Tipperary Tim, the 100-1 long shot, "came plodding up" to the last fence, jumped it, landed cleanly, and galloped on to win. Tipperary Tim and Billy Barton were the only horses to finish the race that day.

Bruce and horseracing fans lauded the second-place finish for the American horse. Billy Barton was shipped back to America but was back in England to contest the Grand National the next year. Due to two falls and what was called a general mix-up that blocked the track, Billy



A statue of Billy Barton has graced Laurel Park since 1952, the first such statue at a Maryland race track.

Barton, in a field of 66 horses, did not place in his second attempt at Aintree.

In late December 1929, Billy Barton again was shipped home to Maryland and into retirement. He had been injured earlier that month, and the injuries were not responding to treatment. Bruce declared that Billy Barton had run his last race and deserved a long-earned rest in his future.

Billy Barton died in his stall on the grounds of the Bruce family home—Belmont Manor—in March 1951 at 33 years old. He was buried at Belmont. Confirmed in social media posts by relatives of Bruce to be buried standing and in full tack, Billy Barton's gravesite is discreetly located near the barns of the stately manor. The inscription on the small headstone reads: *Billy Barton 1918–1951*. Another horse, Jay Jay, is buried next to Billy Barton.

The following year, Laurel Park president John Schapiro paid tribute to Billy Barton by unveiling a statue in the champion's likeness outside the clubhouse at the racetrack. The life-like bronze statue was made by Maryland-born sculptor Henri Brenner, who worked on the statue in a makeshift studio on the second floor of the clubhouse at Laurel. The finished plaster statue was then shipped to New Jersey for casting. The stunning likeness of Billy Barton was completed in time for Laurel's Spring meeting.

Despite being ruled off race tracks due to his unruly behavior as a young champion, Laurel Park chose to honor the jumper with a life-sized statue, the first such statue at a Maryland track. The move was called ironic by the press at the time, which noted that Laurel would offer no steeplechases on its daily programs that year.

Angie Latham Kozlowski is a staff writer and member of the Board of Directors for the Laurel History Boys. In addition to her investigative reporting, her articles frequently spotlight Howard County.

Big T

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21



employees. On January 18, 1983, James was still chipping excess concrete off the floor tiles of the new men's room when a customer walked in. Without looking up, James said, "Hey, buddy, we're still finishing work in here—you can use the women's room, though." And as he did just that, John Riggins—the future Hall of Fame running back for the Washington Redskins—became the very first customer to use the brand new women's restroom at the Big T. Charlie watched as he returned to a pickup truck bearing Kansas license plates while a companion waited at the counter for their ham sandwiches. Charlie's wife, Lisa, went outside discreetly and got Riggo's autograph on a receipt check. Four days later, the Redskins defeated the 49ers in the NFC Championship Game en route to their Super Bowl XVII victory over the Dolphins—a game in which Riggins was the MVP.

Charlie spoke at length about the long hours that he and his family put into the business, especially in the early days. He recalled working 12 hours a day for the first three years, with the restaurant typically only drawing about \$100 a day. But the customers kept coming, and by the 1980s, Big T was booming.

The idea to host vintage car shows in the ample parking lot behind the restaurant came from two different car clubs, and the shows were always well attended. Big T hosted five or six of the shows each year all the way up to its final summer in 2006. With the parking lot filled, attendees could be seen walking along Marshall Avenue from Fourth Street and beyond.

It was in 1987 that Charlie formed The Whitewalls, a band specializing in 1950s and 60s hits. The car shows at the Big T provided a perfect outdoor venue for their music, and brought countless hungry customers into the restaurant. The events were so popular, in fact, that an ice cream truck would occasionally try to encroach upon

the business—at a Tastee-Freez, of all places!

The restaurant would get so busy during the car shows that Charlie would often have to leave the stage to help out in the kitchen.

The Whitewalls didn't just play at the Big T, though—they were frequently booked at other popular Laurel spots, including the Irish Pizza Pub, Town Tavern, Sam & Elsie's, El Torito, Sullivan's, the American Legion, Elks and Moose Lodges, Montpelier Festival, Laurel Fourth of July, and the Main Street Festival. They also traveled for out-of-town gigs, playing at Ocean City and even during a hockey game at the Capital Centre. Their final show was New Year's Eve 1995 at the American Legion, but many of their videotaped performances can still be enjoyed on Charlie's YouTube channel: youtube.com/@ECNProduction.

The Big T was also known for its sponsorship and participation in Laurel's softball leagues through the years, and routinely fielded competitive teams. In an era when games were covered by the *Laurel Leader* and featured a veritable who's who of local businesses of the 1980s, both the Big T and Tastee-Freez had teams that made it into the *Leader's* weekly Top Ten Softball Poll on multiple occasions.

The photo albums and scrap books that Charlie has shared for his History Contributors page at LaurelHistory.com are a time capsule highlighting all three of these pivotal aspects of his life: the Big T restaurant, the Whitewalls band, and the softball games. Viewing the photos, videos, and news clippings will undoubtedly take you back to that special time in Laurel, and you may very well spot some folks you know (or even yourself) in some of them.

For Charlie, time has thankfully healed some of the wounds that came with closing the restaurant in 2007

after nearly 33 years. But as you'd imagine, he still gets a bit emotional when recalling it.

Business hadn't been what it once was, especially with so many new restaurants beginning to saturate the city in the new millennium. But one new competitor in particular hit the hardest—Popeyes. For some 15 years, the Big T had been the only fried chicken in town. The arrival of Popeyes directly across the street from them proved to be too much.

Charlie, whose father had passed away only a few months earlier, explains that he and Lisa "needed to get out" that February of 2007. With kids in college and the stress of having to work multiple jobs to make ends meet, they "just weren't happy there anymore" and needed a change. So when he locked the doors at 833 Washington Boulevard that final time, Charlie was more than ready to move on.

There are a handful of businesses from Laurel's past that resonate with us more than others, and the Big T Family Restaurant featuring Tastee-Freez is consistently cited by residents as one of their sentimental favorites. We fondly recall not just the comfort food, but the comfort of *family* and the times spent in and around that building that was such a big part of Laurel for over three decades. Thank you, Charlie, for sharing it with us—both then and now.

To view the full collection of Big T photos, visit Charlie's History Contributors page at www.laurelhistory.com/big-t

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Richard Friend is a founding member of The Laurel History Boys, and creator of *LostLaurel.com*.



Charlie Nickell (top left) shows one of the many pages from his photo albums and scrapbooks which document (clockwise from top right) his 32 years managing the Big T Family Restaurant, participating in Laurel's softball leagues of the 1980s, and performing in the popular local classic rock band, The Whitewalls. His collection can be seen at www.laurelhistory.com/big-t.

Jim Cross

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29

JC: 1974 to '84. That was kind of interesting.

KL: Who was Mayor then?

JC: When I went on, it was Leo Wilson. And then Bob DiPietro came on. One of the things that I was very happy to have done, I went to—trying to remember. It was Winnie Kelly, maybe Parris Glendening. I don't know. Whoever the County Executive was at the time, I said, "I think because we're in the city and the city provides police, fixes the roads, does all this stuff that the county does in the county. I think we should get a lower county tax rate to the people in the city to recognize the fact that we're doing all that work."

KL: And you're not getting services.

JC: Yeah. So he says, "Oh, well, we can't do that because there's no law that says we can do it." I said, "Well, if there's not a law that says you can't do it, you can do it." "Oh, no, we have to have a law." So, I was working with the Municipal League on this, and then we got it set up. We got a bill. And the Judiciary Committee was doing the hearings on the bill. So, what I did was set up a little play, basically. When you go testify for the state, "Hi, I'm Jim Cross and I'm for this bill because blah blah blah. Thank you. Goodbye." Well, what we did was we had somebody playing the role of County Executive, County Council, city Mayor, City Council. We sat there, we had script, and we went through the whole thing and they passed the bill. And now we have a drop [in taxes]. Well, they've nibbled away at it over the years, but there is a differential.

KL: Enabled the Laurel residents to pay lower county tax?

JC: Yes. And residents of any other city and county that provides their own services. So that was kind of fun.

KL: Tell me more about this play. So, that was your time at the microphone basically?

JC: We had several of us sitting around doing our little talk. The County Executive said, "blah, blah, blah," but no, the City Council said "blah, blah, blah, blah." We went around and did all that and they passed it. They passed it out to the Judiciary Committee and then it got passed in. When I ran for City Council, I was knocking on doors across the city. This one lady says, "My dad was the Mayor of Laurel and all they did was name an alley after him."

KL: Tolson?

JC: Yeah. She was pissed. Well, at least he got an alley. [laughs] And Dani Duniho. I ran her campaign for her in '84, I think. She was really great. Her son and my son were in high school together, and we got to know each other. Mickey [her husband] ran for County Council or City Council back when I was running. And he lost by a short amount of votes to Peggy Anderson. I was President of the Council and then I was doing the budget hearing. This one always stands out in my head. A guy gets up and says, "Hey, my taxes are too high. You got to lower my property taxes." I said, "What do you mean? Your property taxes are too high?" "I got a friend that's got a house the same value as mine, and he's in Virginia, and his property taxes are like 15% less than mine." I said, "Okay, you have a personal property tax here or what? Personal property tax. They have that in

Virginia. That's how they make up that 15% difference." Because when you got to fix the roads and you got the pothole, I know you'll call me. That's how you do it. I said, "We had budget hearings. The public was invited. We've spent 50 hours meeting with department heads down to how much the bullets cost for the target range. Nobody was there." Just us. So, if you want to come out and yell at us, fine. But, you know, but we gotta fix your potholes.

KL: Did you enjoy campaigning?

JC: Yeah. Because we'd get out and knock on doors.

KL: Laurel was a very different place in '74. So, I assume knocking on doors was enjoyable because you got to talk to all these people. Did you get the door slammed in your face?

JC: No, just the Tolson lady. She didn't slam it, but she was pissed.

KL: If you had to point to one or two things in that ten-year period when you were on the council, what changes really caught your eye?

JC: It was growing a little bit, taking on a little bit more, getting more people in there, annexing.

KL: What's with Laurel's city borders? It's crazy. I'd like to know, why was this parcel annexed and why was that one? I'm sure it was all about the taxes, but when did all this happen? And because Westgate isn't in the city limits—that's crazy.

JC: That's called a boot up Laurel's ass. If you look at what it looks like. Check the map. See, here's the thing. The city can't just annex anything. It has to be requested by the property owner to be annexed. I didn't realize that the city cannot reach out and say, "Oh, let's just put this in the city." Boom! Can't do that. It's the property manager. Whoever owns the property wants to have it annexed. Basically, the reason a lot of these places want to get annexed is it's much easier to work with the city on zoning and building permits and all the rest of that stuff, than trying to deal with the county. County is a whole 'nother thing.

KL: All right. Last question then about the City Council. Why did you not run again? What made you stop?

JC: Well, you know, I was sitting at home and I looked up and I saw these two young guys, tall guys. Oh, my God, that's my kids. I've got to spend some time with them.

KL: Good reason.

JC: My church is a member of a group called PLAN, which is Prince George's Leadership Action Network or something. Anyway, it's a bunch of churches that got together trying to come up with some way to get some affordable housing in PG County. So we've gotten involved in that. I'm on the property committee and stuff like that. Just painted a couple of rooms up there. Oh, and then I got called by Amy Knox [of Laurel Resist] about a group called We Are America. They're going to have probably about 60 people marching from Philadelphia to the Congress to give them the constitution.

KL: When is that going to happen?

JC: They will be in Laurel on September 17th and they're trying to find someplace to stay. So Amy called me.

KL: For the marchers?

JC: Yeah. I said I'm working on our church right now. I think we'll be able to say okay. They've got air mattresses and compressors to fill them in. And I think they've got a truck carrying all that stuff. So anyway, the point was they were going to stop in North Laurel at the senior center for dinner but that's been booked or something. We'll just have them come to our church, maybe have dinner there, sleep there. Maybe we'll give them breakfast there, and then they can go march the next day down to Colesville where they're going, and then to DC. I'm working on that right now. Anyway, the website will tell you all about it and what they're doing. They've reached out to kids all around the country. I'm not sure what they did, but anyway, they're taking it down to Congress.

KL: What are their numbers?

JC: Well, they're going to have about 60 people doing the march. That's the plan. But that's another little logistics that I'm dealing with. I'm good with ten years for stuff, generally. So, I'm going to back off. The Board of Trade stuff in ten years is kind of up now. With the amateur radio stuff, we have a national organization called the ARRL, which is the American Radio Relay League. I have been the emergency coordinator for Prince George's County. I was the section manager for ten years for Maryland and DC. I did that from 2006 to 2016 and it was like ten years.

KL: When do you sleep?

JC: I usually turn the light off about 3:00. And then this morning I woke up at 8:30 and ate breakfast and gave myself plenty of time.

KL: I always like to end with this. What would you like people to know about Laurel that you don't think they already know?

JC: It's grown from a very small mill town to a rather vibrant, large city. I mean, we've got 30,000 people here now, basically. Back then, it was not much. Over the course of years, they've done a lot of very good things for the city with Parks and Rec. So, there's been a lot of things that have gone on in the city that are very good for the people of the city that a lot of people don't realize. Most people don't realize all of this stuff that goes on and gets done. I mean, with the Board of Trade, our major event is the Laurel Main Street Festival. That's how we make enough money to pay the rent and pay a coordinator and all that stuff. But if it wasn't for the city, we probably would spend as much money as we make on overtime for the police and fire. It's amazing what they do. It's a really great city. I'm going to stay here. I'm not going anywhere.

[This interview was edited for clarity and space.]

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Kevin Leonard is a founding member of the Laurel History Boys and a two-time winner of the Maryland Delaware District of Columbia Press Association Journalism Award.

Visit Local Historical & Cultural Resources



Montpelier House Museum, 9650 Muirkirk Road, Laurel

Montpelier House Museum in Laurel was built in the 1780s and was home to Major Thomas Snowden, his wife Anne Ridgely and the 169 people they enslaved. Now a historic landmark, visitors can explore the lives of all who lived and labored on the grounds through tours, exhibits, and educational programs.

From November 6th to December 22nd, the museum will host two exhibits: the Regional Textile Showcase, featuring fabric art, and the Artist Boutique, showcasing handmade items. Both exhibits will be open during regular hours: Thursday to Monday from 10 AM to 4 PM. The museum will be closed on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.



Council Member Tom Dernoga, District 1, Representing: Laurel, Beltsville, North Adelphi, & North College Park

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OBITUARIES

Because *Voices of Laurel* is a quarterly publication, obituaries are compiled over the course of each issue every three months. We do our best to include as many published notices as possible, and there is no charge for inclusion. Send obituaries with a photo to laurelhistoryboys@gmail.com.

Gerald A. Ahnert, 70

Gerald Achim Ahnert, 70, passed away in Silver Spring, MD on July 14, 2025.

Gerry was born on September 9, 1954, at Leland Memorial Hospital

in Riverdale, MD. He spent his childhood in Mt. Ranier, Cheverly, and Laurel, where he graduated from high school in 1972. He is also a graduate of the University of Maryland.

A highlight of Gerry's high school senior year was that he and two of his classmates won the local TV game show "It's Academic," twice. The prize to the school was \$800, which was passed on to the winning contestants.

His hobbies were softball, baseball, golf, tennis, and bowling, which resulted in many trophies. He started his professional career as an accountant at Leland Memorial Hospital. He then went on to become Director of Information Systems at Columbia Hospital for Women and later, *USA Today*. During a long time of illnesses, Gerry moved back into his mother's home. He then retired after 10 years of working for Walmart. He passed away after a long illness, having spent 11 months in hospitals and rehabilitation centers.

Gerry is survived by his mother Christa Ahnert (nee Rath), daughters Stephanie Dunker (with Jeremy Dunker) and Taryn Harris (with Martin Harris), brothers Peter Rath Ahnert (with Giselle Ahnert), Stephan Manfred Ahnert (with Mary Menard), and grandsons Zachary Dunker and Eli Dunker. He was preceded in death by his father, Frank Ahnert.

Daisy Belle Cruz, 86

Daisy Belle (Harding) Cruz, 86, of Chambersburg, PA, passed away Saturday, July 26, 2025, in Mercy House of Chambersburg. Born in Howard County,

Maryland, she was the daughter of the late John W. and Geneva Harding.

She was a graduate of Laurel High School with the Class of 1957. Daisy was employed as a secretary for the National Security Agency in Maryland throughout her career.

She is survived by two sisters, Irma Harding and Joan Harding, both of New Oxford, PA; three step-children, Virginia Puaokalami Hostetler, Charles P. Cruz (Laurie), and Jona P. Cruz (Rose); and a number of grandchildren, great-grandchildren, great-great-grandchildren, and nieces and nephews. In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by her husband, Charles Placido Cruz, who passed away January 23, 2016, and two step-children, JoAnna Puanani DeFreitas and Jonathan P. Cruz; two brothers; and two sisters.

Graveside services will be held at a later date in Miliani Memorial Park, Waipahu, HI. Arrangements are entrusted to the Thomas L. Geisel Funeral Home, Chambersburg.

In lieu of flowers memorial contributions may be made to Calvary United Methodist Church, 150 Norlo Drive, Fayetteville, PA 17222.

Online condolences may be expressed at geiselfuneralhome.com.

Dora Jo Long, 94

Dora Jo Long, 94, passed away in Laurel, Maryland.

She was born on April 18, 1931, in Chattanooga, Tennessee, daughter of Rodgers and Mary Tidwell. She lived in

many cities including Fort Hood, Texas, Fort Belvoir, Virginia, Panama Canal Zone, and Fort Meade, Maryland. Mrs. Long worked as a childcare provider in her home for many years before retiring. Dora was a member of The Community United Methodist Church, The Laurel Senior Friendship Club, The Red Hats and The Ladies Auxiliary at Maryland City Volunteer Fire Department. She enjoyed bowling in leagues and traveled to many states to participate in tournaments. Dora traveled on many bus trips all over the states and Canada. Her interests were playing bingo and playing cards with her friends. She had a great love of animals and always had 4 or 5 pets at a time.

Dora Long is survived by her daughter Linda Susan Jeffries (Michael), grandchildren Rebecca Barth, (Joseph Barth), Sarah Jeffries, and Kirstin Sharp (Andrew). She is also survived by great-grandsons Timothy Barth, Kyle Barth, Leagan Sharp and Ellis Sharp, a niece Raye Brooks (Mike), and great-nieces Virginia Stoneback (Jason) and Angela McPeak (Greg) and great-great nephew Miles. Dora was preceded in death by her husband Thomas E. Long and son Edward K. Long.

Paul G. McCarthy, 82

Paul Gregory McCarthy, 82, of Severna Park, Maryland, passed away July 1st peacefully at home. Paul was born on February 6, 1943.

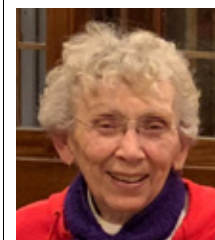
Paul grew up in

Silver Spring and went to Catholic school. He attended Sherwood High School and joined the Army in 1962. He graduated from University of Maine with a Masters degree in history and psychology.

He met his loving wife June Francis McCarthy in 1972 and they were married six months later. They were married 52 wonderful years. They moved to Severna Park together in 1984. His legacy is lived through his son, Shane Patrick Paul McCarthy (37).

Paul taught history at Laurel High school for grades 9th-11th, where he was also the baseball coach. He was a member of Maryland Ski Club and belonged to the American Legion. Paul was a huge Elvis fan; he would always sing when Elvis came on the radio. He was an avid Orioles, Ravens, and Notre Dame fan.

As Paul would always say... Blue and Gold Go Irish!

Clara Joan Pomerantz, 92

Clara Joan Pomerantz, affectionately known as Joan, died on August 6, 2025, at 92 years old. Joan was born on February 5, 1933, in Portland, Maine;

she was the loving daughter of Bert and Gertrude Goddard. She later moved to Lebanon, Ohio, where she was a 1951 graduate of Lebanon High School. She met her husband, Albert Pomerantz, while serving in the Army at Ft. Meade. They were married for 55 years before his death in 2009. The couple settled in Maryland City (located in Laurel) with their family, where Joan worked as a teacher's aide in a multitude of departments such as the library, social studies, science, and driver's ed. She retired from Meade High School after many years of dedicated service to the students and school.

In addition to her family and career, Joan enjoyed counter cross stitch (where she won many blue ribbons for her pictures), calligraphy, quilting, sewing,

knitting, and crocheting. There wasn't a craft project that came her way that she could not do. She also loved doing yard work and took great pride in her immaculately kept hedges that lined the front yard of her home.

Joan was predeceased by her husband, Albert Pomerantz; parents Bert and Gertrude Goddard; and her beloved son, Michael Pomerantz. She is survived by her children, Daniel Pomerantz (Karen), Stephen Pomerantz, David Pomerantz (Dana), and Laurie (Pomerantz) Nicholls; grandchildren Tara, Tracy, Jacob, Anna, Colin, Jonathan, Justin, Zachary, Matthew, Morgan, Allison, Sarah, Kyle, and Maeghan; Great-grandchildren Aliya, Kacie, Jackson, Aria, Cassian, Jayce, Sebastian, and 1 girl one the way; as well as two sisters, Delores Gans of Vernon, British Columbia, and Mitchell Landreth of West Chester, Ohio.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that charitable donations be made in Joan's name to The American Cancer Society or the American Heart Association.

Nancy Marie Smith, 83



Nancy Marie Smith, a ray of light and kindness, passed away peacefully on July 14, 2025, at her home, surrounded by her loved ones, at the age of 83. Born on July 5, 1942, in

the rolling hills of Virginia, Nancy's life was a tapestry of love, dedication, and service that touched many hearts.

Nancy's journey through life was one marked by devotion to her family, her faith, and her career. She shared a loving marriage with her late husband, Theodore Smith Jr., with whom she built a foundation of warmth and affection that extended to all who knew them. Nancy's legacy of love is carried on by her son, Ted Smith, and his wife, Donna Smith; her cherished granddaughter, Brittany Smith; her adoring grandson, Travis Smith and his wife, Ashleigh Smith; and her youngest grandson, Zachary Smith. The light of her life shone brightest when she was with her great-grandchildren, Quinn and Tate Smith, whose adventures and milestones brought her immense joy.

For over four decades, Nancy served as an account executive at NASA Goddard Space Center, where her commitment and expertise contributed to the advancement of space exploration. Her colleagues revered her as a pillar of professionalism

and a friend who brought warmth and compassion to the workplace. Nancy's Christian faith was the cornerstone of her existence, guiding her actions and inspiring those around her to live with grace and love.

Nancy's passion for life was evident in her many interests. An avid crafter, she could often be found creating beautiful works of art that she generously shared with friends and family. Thrifting was more than a hobby for Nancy; it was a treasure hunt that brought her excitement and joy. Halloween held a special place in her heart, a time when she delighted in the whimsy and fun of the season, creating magical experiences for her grandkids.

Above all, Nancy's love for her grandkids was boundless. She invested her time, affection, and wisdom in their lives, leaving an indelible mark on their hearts. Her gentle spirit, loving nature, and kind demeanor were the words that best described her, and these qualities resonated in every interaction and relationship she nurtured throughout her life.

Nancy's life was a testament to the power of love, the beauty of faith, and the impact of a kind heart. She will be deeply missed by her family, friends, and all who were fortunate enough to know her. Nancy's memory will continue to inspire and guide us, like a lighthouse of love that never ceases to shine.

Kevin Wagner, 69



Kevin James Wagner, 69, of Laurel passed away peacefully surrounded by his family on July 13, 2025.

Kevin was born on October 24, 1955, to

James and Margaret Wagner.

He was an avid bowler and fisherman. He loved to golf and play Keno. He was a lifelong fan of the Washington Redskins and the Washington Nationals. One of his favorite pastimes was watching his grandson and namesake (Little Kev) play baseball.

He was a lifelong resident of Laurel and a graduate of Laurel High School.

Kevin has survived by his wife of 49 years, Carla Wagner (Pelletier); his children Jimmy (Becky), J.R. and Jessica (Bobby); three grandchildren, Brittany (Miguel), Ally (Brendan) and Kevin James; three great-grandsons; his brother Mike (Erika), and his sister Etta (Tom).

He was preceded in death by his parents and his grandson Jeffrey.

Donna Wilner, 67



Donna Parks-Wilner, born on April 15th, 1958, in Baltimore, passed away Sunday evening, August 31st, 2025, after a hard-fought battle against cancer. She left this

world peacefully, surrounded by those she loved, and those that loved her.

Donna was stalwart in her friendships and loyalty, exceptional in her hospitality to all who crossed her doorstep, and unrivaled in her ability to face complex challenges with grace and ease. It's these qualities she passed to her children, Cory, and Jennifer, and shared with the 44-year love of her life, Hal. She shared her warmth and joy openly and often with her grandchildren, who she loved being Mimi to in every way.

She was an avid and skilled equestrian throughout her life, passing that love of horses on to her daughter, becoming an equally-skilled and avid horse show mom. Her love of animals went further, as shown by her volunteer work at a potcake dog rescue center in the Bahamas.

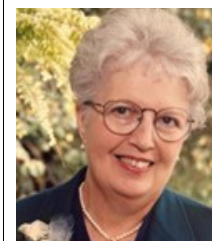
Donna was Savage Mill's long-time CFO, tireless advocate, and friend. Beginning with the Mill's early transformation from a former cotton mill to the vibrant community it is today, she poured her energy and vision into shaping the place, knowing its historic buildings inside and out and guiding them through decades of change and growth. For 38 years, she was at the heart of Savage Mill, helping to build and strengthen its community with her expertise, dedication, and unwavering commitment. Known for her sharp insight, creative problem-solving, and ability to get things done with efficiency and wit, she was deeply respected by colleagues, tenants, and the broader community alike.

Her legacy is woven into the very fabric of the Mill. The community of small businesses, creativity, and connection that thrives there today stands as a testament to her vision and determination.

She is survived by Hal, her husband; Cory (Heather) and Jennifer (Ryan), her children; Emslee and Hunter, her grandchildren; Joseph, her godson; Cinda, her sister; and Julie and Matthew, her niece and nephew.

To best remember Donna, please go to a beach with a drink in your hand, put your feet into the sand, and look out over the ocean.

Kathryn Claire Wilson, 89



Kathryn (Kay) Wilson of Laurel passed away, at the age of 89, on Thursday, August 7, 2025. She was born on July 28th, 1936, in Philadelphia, PA, to G. (Gerard)

Walter Koob and Gladys Claire (Shultz) Koob. Kay graduated from Notre Dame High School (Moylan, PA) in 1954. She started her professional career as an Administrative Assistant at the Lynch and Jerome law firm in Upper Darby, PA. After moving to Maryland in 1964, she dedicated the remainder of her working career to the Laurel Branch of the Prince George's County's Memorial Library system. In 2001, after 30 years, Kay retired as the library's Circulation Supervisor. After retirement, she obtained an Associate of Arts degree from Prince George's Community College.

Kay was a parishioner at St. Mary of the Mills Catholic Church. She was an active member of the Laurel Women's Club and the Laurel-Beltsville Senior Activity Center, and a long-time volunteer at Elizabeth House and the Laurel Historical Society. She spent her retirement years traveling, having visited all 50 states and many countries of the world. She was also an avid reader, gardener, and painter.

She is survived by her sons John Martin (Shari) Wilson III, Stephen Michael (Allyson) Wilson, and Lawrence Andrew (Pam) Wilson; her grandchildren Keri Jones, Nathaniel (Jessica) Wilson, Colin Wilson, Cameron Wilson, Andrew Wilson, Kaela Wilson, Kirsten Wilson, and Liam Wilson; sister Claire (Koob) Marshall and brother G. Patrick (Patricia) Koob.

Kay was preceded in death by her parents, her ex-husband John Martin Wilson Jr., brother Raymond Koob, and brother-in-law John Marshall.

Donations remembering Kay may be made to the American Heart Association.



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